Refugees' Vocational Behavior in the Receiving Country:

Identity Threats, Career-Related Coping, and Adversarial Growth

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CHAPTER 1:

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

Worldwide, millions of people cross international borders and transition into new labor markets for a better life and better work opportunities (Harrison et al., 2019). While, for many, this relocation happens on a planned and voluntary basis (Zikic et al., 2010), a large and growing number of people face involuntary and unprepared transitions that often include transitioning to new countries and unknown labor markets (Newman et al., 2018). Among these people are the around 27.1 million refugees and 4.6 million asylum seekers that have come to live and work as refugees[1] (UNHCR, 2022). Fleeing their countries of origin due to a fear of war, violence, persecution, and/or terror, often connecting to questions of nationality, religion, political opinion, race, or social membership, refugees have to cross national borders and resettle into a new and foreign country. Yet, besides the hardships experienced at home and during the migration journey, refugees' adversities do not cease once they have arrived in the supposedly safe receiving country. In addition to the painful losses that escort their forced career and life disruptions, such as losing a steady income, daily routines, and social networks (Jahoda, 1982; Wanberg et al., 2012), refugees face many additional, and also unexpected, hurdles upon resettlement such as unfamiliar labor market rules, a devaluation of their career-related capital, and a loss of status (Eggenhofer-Rehart et al., 2018).

For their successful resettlement and integration into the receiving country, gaining employment is critical for refugees. Engaging in meaningful careers offers refugees a sense of identity, productivity, and peace of mind and it enhances their feelings of normalcy, self-sufficiency, as well as emotional and economic security (Hess et al., 2019; Lintner & Elsen, 2018). Yet, entering work in the new country is an arduous and frustrating process (Ager &

[1] I will use the term 'refugee' referring to both registered refugees and asylum seekers whose official cases are still undecided (see UNHCR, 1951).

Strang, 2008; Yakushko et al., 2008). Refugees face many work challenges and constraints, especially in terms of receiving work access and opportunities (Baranik et al., 2018), finding properly paid work (e.g., Knappert et al., 2020), or being able to continue their former career paths. Many refugees struggle with or do not have the means to tackle the lacking knowledge of the local language, unrecognized credentials, and cultural clashes (Newman et al., 2018), or to make sense of the local cultural, institutional, and organizational norms, structures, and expectations (Gioia & Poole, 1984). As a result, many refugees end un- or underemployed (Ivlevs & Veliziotis, 2018). When employed, refugees often hold weak labor market positions (Ortlieb & Weiss, 2020) and jobs of a poor quality (Bakker et al., 2017; Colic-Peisker & Tilbury, 2006). All of this confronts refugees with mismatches between their career aspirations and opportunities. Also, research has identified social support and belongingness as key nutrients for refugees' positive integration into the receiving country (Raanaas et al., 2019). Yet, these nutrients are often missing in refugees' lives. Many refugees lack access to professional networks (Dunwoodie et al., 2020; Gericke et al., 2018), experience social isolation (Burchett & Matheson, 2010), and/or face discrimination on the part of employers (Cheung et al., 2022; Colic-Peisker & Tilbury, 2006, 2007). In addition to these work-related challenges, refugees struggle with non-work related issues such as prolonged asylum application processes, torn apart families, and/or having to find ways to support the immediate needs of their families (Ager & Strang, 2008; O'Neill, 2001). All of these instances can further aggravate refugees' often already limited and/or depleted material and psychological resources and, together, refugees' circumstances can threaten some of the last resources that they have left in the new country: Their sense of self as a worker and person and their personal agency – aspects that are critical for refugees' successful career navigation and progression as well as general integration (Newman et al., 2018). Nonetheless,

refugees need to re-establish themselves and their careers abroad; a challenge that may exacerbate the other adversities experienced prior, during, and post resettlement.

Whilst acknowledging the insights offered by existent refugee research (e.g., Baranik et al., 2018; Knappert et al., 2020; Ortlieb et al., 2020), vocational research on refugees is still in its infancy and holds many un(der)studied topics. In general, current career research has largely focused on insiders acting within familiar labor market contexts (e.g., Duberley et al., 2006) and the studies addressing structural outsiders have mainly examined voluntary outsiders who had entered another country as expatriates or highly skilled migrants and thus prepared and with resources (Zikic & Klehe, 2021). Yet, insights on these more fortunate groups do not necessarily translate to refugees (Szkudlarek et al., 2021) and the incidence of refugees losing their work, having to re-establish their careers abroad, and facing the dire consequences of having to involuntarily resettle to a new country make the effects of job loss, unemployment, and the search for re-employment on refugees' identities and vocational behavior a relevant research area and brought about calls for more research (Lee et al., 2020; Newman et al., 2018; Richardson et al., 2020).

In this dissertation, I respond to these research calls, as I study refugees' vocational behavior and careers in, and their adaptation to, the receiving country. To re-establish their careers and lives abroad, refugees need to self-manage their careers and to navigate the new labor market (Pajic et al., 2018). In addition to their own efforts, however, also other stakeholders play key roles in securing refugees' positive resettlement and integration into the new country, as they, for instance, establish work access, assist refugees in the job search, and offer general support (Knappert et al., 2020). Yet, other stakeholders can also impair refugees' careers, for instance, via discriminatory practices (Cheung et al., 2022; Colic-Peisker & Tilbury, 2007). To offer a fuller picture into refugees' vocational behavior and

careers in the new country, it is thus crucial to include multiple refugee integration-relevant stakeholders' perspectives into the study (see research call by Lee et al., 2020).

Building upon this, this dissertation will illuminate the matters surrounding refugees' work-related identities, coping, and adversarial growth amidst the forced career and life disruption. Via qualitative explorations into different stakeholders' lived experiences (Heidegger, 1927/1981; Sandberg, 2005; Van Manen, 2016), this research will identify the challenges and constraints that refugees face as they live into the new country and search for a job there, explore how these challenges and constraints can threaten refugees' identities, agency, and general career development, and reveal how refugees still manage to re-establish their identities and careers abroad. I will also trace how the people supporting or hiring refugees perceive and possibly affect refugees' integration efforts. These endeavors are of critical importance in an economy where many refugees, but also other worker groups, seek to enter new labor markets and/or struggle to take active part in the workplace and in society.

In the remaining section of the introduction, I offer an overview of the current literatures on identity threats during forced career transitions, coping responses, and adversarial growth in the context of unemployment and job search. I will contextualize these literature strands to the refugee context, with which I refer to the social, cultural, institutionalized and thus structural aspects of the German labor market, integration system, and workplaces, in which refugee labor integration happens, and I will explain how this contextualization helps to inform present career scholarship. The introduction will end with a brief summary of the empirical studies and a description of the research methodology.

Identity Threats During Forced Career Transitions

Having a job and being able to develop and pursue one's desired career is critical to people in numerous ways, particularly as it constitutes a fundamental resource for how they think of and understand themselves (McKee-Ryan et al., 2005; Paul & Moser, 2009). While

career changes are a common part of working life (Tams & Arthur, 2010), these transitions can be difficult (Bridges, 2020) and particularly painful when the choice to transition lies outside of a person's own control (Brammer, 1992; Maitlis, 2022), as people desire to make their own decisions (Gecas, 1991; Stets & Burke, 2003). In general, people are concerned about who they are, who they can become, and how they fit into their environment, and their self-definitions are influenced by the degree to which their current circumstances match their past, present, and future aspirations (Baumeister, 1998; Oyserman et al., 2012). Forced career transitions and their consequences such as job loss, unemployment, and job search, however, produce mismatches between people's circumstances and aspirations, which can turn into traumatic experiences (Gabriel et al., 2010), as they throw "the most basic, underlying existential assumptions that people hold about themselves … into disarray" (Crossley, 2000, p. 539). This raises the question of "Who am I?" after people cease to be parts of a certain organization and occupational group. Eliciting deeply emotional experiences (Kiefer, 2002), such experiences challenge how people understand, define, express, and value themselves and their environments (Dutton et al., 2010; Ibarra & Barbulescu, 2010; Sadeh & Karniol, 2012), disrupting and/or invalidating their identities (Kira & Klehe, 2016; McFadyen, 1995).

People's *identities* are the self-referential cognitive and meaning structures that base on people's distinctive traits and idiosyncratic features (i.e., personal identity) and their group memberships and roles (referred to here as social identities; Gecas, 1982; Tajfel & Turner, 1986), shaping people' self-concepts (Burke, 1991; Gecas, 1982). Identities form and develop over time through experiences and feedback, and they offer insights into people's "central and enduring preferences, talents, and values" (Ibarra, 1999, p. 765; see also Schein, 1978). As such, people's identities constitute a compass and tool for their career navigation (Fugate et al., 2004; Van Vianen & Klehe, 2018). People hold multiple contextualized, positively or negatively connoted, and interrelated identities that define who one is and how one acts in a

particular context, relation, or role (Ashforth et al., 2008; Ramarajan, 2014). For instance, at work, people hold diverse identities associated with their work roles (Ashforth, 2001), memberships (Ashforth & Mael, 1989), and relationships (Sluss & Ashforth, 2007). The identities that are more psychological central to a person are also more directive and regulatory (Stryker & Burke, 2000).

People value their identities, and so they seek to fulfill certain *identity needs* that form these identities (e.g., Ashforth & Mael, 1998). While different scholars understand these needs either as basic self-related needs or motivations (Eilam & Shamir, 2005), or as identity motives (Ashforth & Schinoff, 2016), the research taxonomies differ especially in terms of their breadth and focus. In this dissertation, I will focus on the four key self-related needs or motivations shown by Eilam and Shamir (2005), that is, people's desire to experience *self-worth* (i.e., a sense of positive self and social regard), *-distinctiveness* (i.e., a sense of uniqueness), *-control* (i.e., a sense of control over one's life and career), and *-continuity* (i.e., a sense of consistency of the self). These four needs have been stated as the central facets of people's self-concepts comprising the principles of self-definition and self-maintenance, and they have been applied to the study of identity threats (see Eilam & Shamir, 2005; Kira & Klehe, 2016). Also, they cover people's temporal identity experiences. Given the particular relevance of social contacts for people's careers at large (Nye et al., 2018) and for refugees' career development and workplace integration in specific (Gericke et al., 2018; Newman et al., 2018), I will also include the need for *social belongingness* (i.e., the desire to form and maintain social relationships; Baumeister & Leary, 1995) into the study.

In times of hardship, people's identities and the fulfillment of their identity needs can become threatened. *Identity threats* describe factors and experiences that are appraised as indicating potential harm to the value, meanings, and enactment of workers' identities (Petriglieri, 2011). When threatened, an "identity can no longer be expressed as freely or

consistently as it used to be" (p. 642). While there are many reasons for identity threats to occur, Kira and Klehe (2016) highlighted two overarching types: First, existing valued and distinctive *identities* can become *threatened* (Petriglieri, 2011), for instance, when potential employers disregard job seekers' skills and experiences. Second, finding oneself in certain circumstances can inflict provisional stigmatized and *threatening identities* onto people. These threatening identities emanate from other people and denote negative (self-)attributions that people may not perceive as fitting to their person (Goffman, 1963; Kira & Klehe, 2016). Both threat types can challenge people's habitual self-definitions (Gabriel et al., 2010; Mendenhall et al., 2008; Riach & Loretto, 2009).

Yet, despite an increase in the number of studies that have either explicitly or, mainly, implicitly observed the influence that forced career transitions and the succeeding unemployment and job search can have on people's identities, we know little on how people experience identity threats (for exceptions, see Brown & Coupland, 2015; Kira & Klehe, 2016). Related research strands have tapped into dirty work (Ashforth & Kreiner, 1999), social stigma (Goffman, 1963), and precarious, insecure, and uncertain selves (Collinson, 2003) that result in workers experiencing jeopardized and fragile identities. Yet, research has not explicitly targeted how people's identities are threatened when they not only lose their jobs and struggle to find work, but are also forced to navigate a new work context. Identity threats may thus be particularly severe for refugees, as many refugees are forced to re-establish their careers and lives in a foreign country where they do not share the same norms, experiences, and expectations as the organizations or institutions (Barley & Tolbert, 1997). Also, in the new country, refugees are often robbed of their social and material resources, which may further jeopardize their well-being and integration success (Li et al., 2016). In this research, I seek to offer a nuanced understanding of the identity threats that refugees face.

Coping Responses

When encountering a traumatic event that challenges people's identities (Conroy & O'Leary-Kelly, 2014) and/or elicits a disruption to their careers, people do not simply give up, but seek to cope (Joseph & Linley, 2005). Research has shown several ways for such coping to take place, namely via *identity threat coping* (Petriglieri, 2011) and via *career-related actions* (Klehe et al., 2021), the latter covering workers' self-regulation (Carver & Scheier, 1998) and career adaptive responding (Savickas, 2013).

Identity Threat Coping

Research has illustrated that coping with identity threats involves the cognitive basis of reconstructing one's self-narratives (McAdams & McLean, 2013; Pals & McAdams, 2004) that culminate into *protecting* (i.e., preserving) and/or *restructuring* (i.e., changing) identities so that these can, again, provide grounds for adaptive functioning (Crossley, 2000; Petriglieri, 2011). More precisely, and highlighting the agency involved in identity threat coping, scholars have shown how people engage in "forming, repairing, maintaining, strengthening, or revising the constructions that are productive of a sense of coherence and distinctiveness" (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003, p. 1165) when facing adverse experiences that can threaten and thus alter their identities (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002; Brown, 2015; Snow & Anderson, 1987). As refugees resettle into the new country, they may refuse to let go of their threatened identities (despite a potential inability to enact these identities; Garrett-Peters, 2009) and/or may reject to accept the alternative threatening identities imposed upon them (Kira & Klehe, 2016). Alternatively and/or in addition, they may restructure their identities as they, for instance, create identities relating to new work fields (Kira & Klehe, 2016). While conceptual work offers generic models on and integrative reviews carve out identity coping with job loss (Gowan & Gatewood, 1997; Kira & Klehe, 2016; Leana & Feldman, 1988; Petriglieri, 2011), empirical research in this regard is scarce (for an exception, see Zikic & Richardson, 2016).

Career-Related Actions

When facing forced career transitions and/or work-related challenges and traumas, that is, “when the occupational plot is lost, ruptured, halted, stalled, or silenced” (Savickas, 2013, p. 155), workers must find ways to adapt. For this, they benefit from career-related actions, including career-related self-regulation (Carver & Scheier, 1998; Karoly, 1993; Van Hooft et al., 2013) and career adaptive responding (Savickas, 2005, 2013). While self-regulation generally enables people to exert and to adjust their actions and attitudes to reach an intended goal (Lord et al., 2010), career adaptive responding relates, more specifically, to people’s adaptive coping in response to career challenges (Campion, 2018; Maggiori et al., 2013), that is, to the responses that people show amidst difficult career circumstances in which they need to, in some form, adapt (Savickas, 2013). Just recently, research has stressed these two research strands to intertwine (Klehe et al., 2021), particularly as they both center on people’s agency and career ownership (Akkermans & Kubasch, 2017). Also, focusing specifically on the job-search context, latest research has firstly conceptualized people’s job-search self-regulation from a career adaptation perspective, describing workers’ coping behaviors during adaptation as self-regulatory strategies and actions (Xu & Savickas, 2022).

Self-Regulation. *Self-regulation* describes “those processes, internal and/or transactional, that enable an individual to guide his/her goal-directed activities over time and across changing circumstances (contexts)” (Karoly, 1993, p. 25) including “self-generated thoughts, feelings, and actions that are planned and cyclically adapted to the attainment of personal goals” (Zimmerman, 2000, p. 14). As such, self-regulation is a self-managed, dynamic, and goal-oriented process that grounds in a feedback loop moving through four sequential phases (Kanfer et al., 2001; Van Hooft et al., 2013) that differ in their volitional focus and needed mindset (Zikic & Klehe, 2021). First, people have to clarify what it is that they seek to achieve, and they need to set the respective goals. They do so by exploring, envisioning, and reflecting on their career options and possible career paths (Heckhausen &

Gollwitzer, 1987). Second, they need to plan how to implement and realize the set goals by formulating a strategy for goal attainment and by planning the actions needed. Third, people have to show and sustain the behaviors that enable them to reach their goals, for which they need to control their thoughts, attention, emotions, and actions and to shield and sustain their goals, despite obstacles and distractions (Carver, 2004; Karoly, 1993). Fourth, people have to monitor their goal attainment, as they reflect on and assess their actions' effectiveness and career progress (Heckhausen & Gollwitzer, 1987). Consequently, they have to infer what can be learned from the reflections and to adjust their goals, if needed (Achtziger & Gollwitzer, 2007). This then informs people's future goal setting, planning, and pursuit. Therefore, in sum, self-regulation comprises people's regulation of their emotions, thoughts, and behavior, before, during, and after showing a behavior (Van Hooft et al., 2013).

Self-regulation is generally important – as people regulate their behaviors and remind themselves of the value of attaining an intended outcome, they can persist and perform via goal-directed efforts. Yet, self-regulation has been shown to be particularly critical (1) when situations lack direct calls for specific actions so that people need a strong inner force to still engage in goal-directed actions (e.g., uncertain means for goal attainment or unclear associations between goal attainment and rewards; e.g., Griffin et al., 2007; Klehe et al., 2021; Parker et al., 2010) and (2) when people face tasks or situations that are tedious difficult, unpleasant, and taxing, yet important, such as job search (Van Hooft et al., 2013). Yet, in general and in difficult circumstances in specific, self-regulation may fail. Scholars have stated various reasons for such failures to occur, ranging from motivational (Inzlicht & Schmeichel, 2012) to exhausted resource perspectives (Baumeister & Vohs, 2016), and have described three types of self-regulation failure. That is, people may *underregulate*, as they fail to exert enough self-control and the needed self-regulatory behaviors (Carver & Scheier, 1981; Friese et al., 2019), they may *misregulate,* as they act based on false assumptions about

themselves and their environment and show ineffective behaviors (Baumeister & Heatherton, 1996; Carver & Scheier, 1981), or they may *overregulate*, as they excessively control and regulate themselves (Janoff-Bulman & Sheikh, 2011; Roberton et al., 2012).

Career Adaptability. A literature strand that focuses more explicitly on how people cope with challenges and traumas in relation to their work and careers and, specifically, to how people manage to navigate difficult career transitions, adapt, and make progress, is that of career adaptability. *Career adaptability*, “a self-regulation ‘capacity’ or ‘ability’” (Xu & Savickas, 2022, p. 603), arguably enables people to behave flexibly and, ultimately, to adjust (Baumeister & Vohs, 2007). It denotes people’s resources for and readiness to cope with unfamiliar, complex, unpredictable, and/or unclear current or expected work and/or career-related tasks, transitions, and traumas (Savickas, 2005, 2013). As such, career adaptive people are well-equipped to navigate career problems, to adjust their career expectations, and to exert self-control in the need of adaptation (Savickas & Porfeli, 2011; Campion, 2018).

Career adaptability entails four dimensions (Savickas, 2013). The first dimension, *concern*, denotes a future orientation and people’s beliefs that they should prepare for the future including attitudes of planfulness and competencies related to planning. The second dimension, *control*, signifies that people assume control over their careers, feel responsible to make career decisions, and have the competencies related to decision making. *Curiosity* is the third dimension and relates to people’s exploration of themselves and the world of work via inquisitive attitudes and beliefs about their career and person. It includes people’s exploratory competencies that aim to find the best possible fit between themselves and the environment. The fourth dimension, *confidence*, describes people’s self-efficacy to succeed in showing behaviors needed to realize set goals, as people solve problems, bridge hurdles, learn the necessary skills, and perform efficiently. Each of the four dimensions then fosters *adapting behaviors*. That is, people engage in career *planning* (i.e., concern), *make* career *decisions*

and choose the goals they seek to pursue (i.e., control), *explore* the self and the environment including their skills, desires, and career options (i.e., curiosity), and *persist* (i.e., confidence).

In refugee research, we have witnessed a growing attention on and recognition of the factors influencing refugees' career development. Here, a special emphasis has been placed on refugees' career adaptive coping (e.g., Campion, 2018; Obschonka et al., 2018; Pajic et al., 2018), especially given these workers' increased risk to suffer from work-related traumas. Several studies have shown refugees to face significant career barriers in the receiving country (Baranik et al., 2018) and have stressed the role of refugees' agency for their careers, as they explore local career paths, build professional networks, and seek to re-enter work (Dunwoodie et al., 2020; Eggenhofer-Rehart et al., 2018). Yet, refugees often miss the opportunities for personal agency and/or choice in their careers (Newman et al., 2018) and we lack knowledge of how they still manage to exert the needed career actions.

Seeking to offer thorough insights into how workers cope with forced career transitions and the challenges that arise as they live in a new country and search for work in an unknown labor market, I will explore refugees' coping responses. For this, I will take a self-regulatory perspective on refugees' job search to identify the self-regulation challenges that refugees face during job search and how these challenges can break down refugees' self-regulation, fostering so-called self-regulation failures (see, e.g., Baumeister & Heatherton, 1996). Also, I will explore how the local context can both hinder and enable refugees' career adaptation and how, despite facing barriers to their career re-establishment, refugees manage to direct and actively shape and restore their work trajectories. This offers insights into how people actively cope with identity threats, self-regulation challenges, and career barriers to restore their sense of self and careers (see research call by Nelson & Irwin, 2014).

Adversarial Growth

Forced career transitions, job loss, and unemployment are deeply unsettling life events that have an extensive impact on people's career and life trajectories, and on their identities. These events often include strong negative emotions such as feelings of loss, sorrow, and fear (Kiefer, 2002; Vince & Broussine, 1996), as people may "hit rock bottom" (Shepherd & Williams, 2018, p. 28), and they bring about a decline in people's well-being, social isolation, and/or family disruptions (Brand, 2015). Also, the search for re-employment can be a taxing and arduous experience that calls into question people's sense of self as a person and worker (Kira & Klehe, 2016; Wanberg et al., 2020). Yet, without belittling the adverse consequences that forced career transitions, job loss, unemployment, and a difficult job search undoubtedly entail (Paul & Moser, 2009), such disruptions and struggles, and the act of coping with them, may trigger psychological growth (Janoff-Bulman, 2004; Pals & McAdams, 2004). While this form of growth does not necessarily coincide with, for instance, the attainment of adequate (re-)employment, it shows in advanced ways of understanding the self and the world that enables an adaptive functioning in the future. While earlier work has recognized several domains of adversarial growth (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004), so far, only a few qualitative studies include observations that indicate job-loss victims' experiences to hold potential for growth, and these glimpses are seldom recognized as such (for exceptions, see Blustein et al., 2013; Kira & Klehe, 2016; Zikic & Richardson, 2007, 2016). Most research on job loss and career disruptions has taken a largely negative view (Paul & Moser, 2009; Paul et al., 2018), leaving avenues of hope and resilience unused (Maitlis, 2012; for an exception, see Maitlis, 2009).

Drawing on theories of adversarial growth (Janoff-Bulman, 2004; Joseph & Linley, 2005; Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004) and identity growth (Dutton et al., 2010; Kreiner & Sheep, 2009), I will work towards a richer conceptualization of growth by considering conceptual, integrative, and qualitative work with a specific focus on identity growth as an aspect of

adversarial growth (Kira & Klehe, 2016; Zikic & Richardson, 2016). This offers a deeper understanding of psychological growth amidst difficult career and life transitions and reveals how adversity can turn into growth experiences (Mangelsdorf et al., 2019). For refugees, coping with their adverse career and life disruptions may, in itself, offer paths for identity growth (Kreiner & Sheep, 2009), as it enables them to develop richer self-definitions (Janoff-Bulman, 2004; Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004), to generate new self-meanings, and to foster stronger, more authentic, and more independent selves (Kira & Klehe, 2016).

The Relevance of Contextualizing Research

In sum, this dissertation thus focuses on refugees' identity threat experiences, vocational behavior, and careers upon resettlement to Germany, thereby capturing the lived experiences of workers who face forced career transitions including severe career and life disruptions. By addressing these topics, I respond to current developments in career scholarship (Akkermans & Kubasch, 2017; De Vos et al., 2019). To be precise, ever more workers are subjected to uncertain and discontinuous careers (George et al., 2016; Haynie & Shepherd, 2011) and face non-routine, complex, and taxing career transitions (Newman et al., 2018) that force them into new contexts with unknown career routines and customs and bleak career prospects (Campion, 2018). Yet, scholars lack insights into how workers manage to navigate their careers in times and situations in which possibilities to do so barely flicker through (De Vos et al., 2019). And, while scholars have pointed to the context and workers' circumstances to shape the workers' labor market entry, vocational behavior, and career progression (Zikic & Klehe, 2021), we need to gain a deeper understanding of how these factors play out among and affect different job-seeker and worker groups, especially refugees (see research calls by Van Hooft et al., 2021; Wanberg et al., 2020).

Focusing on the current developments in career scholarship, scholars have highlighted that career research centers strongly on workers' career self-management and, with it, on the

role of people's agency and ownership in regards to their career development (Akkermans et al., 2018). For instance, career construction theory (Savickas, 2005) premises on the idea that people, who have the ability to do so, can muster the resources needed to prepare for their decision-making and act upon this via goal-directed actions, if they so want – a thought that similarly underlies self-regulation models (Heckhausen & Gollwitzer, 1987; Van Hooft et al., 2013). Yet, scholars have begun to criticize modern theories in omitting the context in which people act and the role of, for instance, chance events and career and life disruptions on people's repertoire and possibilities for career action (Akkermans et al., 2018). Neglecting how contexts and events situated outside of people's control interact with their volition to shape their career behaviors fails to offer a realistic account of how careers truly unfold (Forrier et al., 2009) and it limits our knowledge of how people manage to develop their careers when lacking the grounds and resources for, for instance, foresight, planning, or control (Akkermans et al., 2018). Having recognized this issue, career scholars increasingly call for research to include more diverse contexts and populations into the study (De Vos et al., 2020; Van Hooft et al., 2021) and to identify how modern theories unfold in different contexts where the distinct informal and formal social, organizational, cultural, and institutionalized practices and policies can shape people's careers (Duffy et al. 2016; see also Akkermans & Kubasch, 2017; De Vos et al., 2019; Van Hooft et al., 2021; Wanberg et al., 2020). Building on this, I will apply theories relevant to workers' job search and career adaptation to the refugee context in Germany, thus exploring how the theories translate to refugees and how the context shapes refugees' vocational behavior and careers in Germany. Given the idiosyncrasies of the German labor market and its resettlement and integration system, I will, in the following, contextualize the research of this dissertation.

Germany as a Refugee Receiving Country

Germany is one of the primary refugee receiving countries in Europe (UNHCR, 2022)

and considered a best practice example in refugees' integration (Szkudlarek et al., 2021) with state-organized and -funded integration practices (e.g., job-related language support and work access during the asylum process; European Commission, 2016). Germany holds a large network of multi-partied institutions and organizations that assist refugees' integration, including state organizations that incentivize employers to hire refugees and educational institutions that assess refugees' skills and knowledge via credential recognition. Employment and support agencies, social-welfare and non-profit organizations, language schools, and the public sector enable refugee employment, besides the strong volunteer base involved (Hesse et al., 2019).

Labor Market System. The German labor market is characterized by principles of high regulation, vocational specificity, and education (Hillmert, 2006). Much value is placed on workers holding formal credentials and qualifications and good local language skills. While this offers a competitive benefit for the German economy and rewards workers who navigate the system well (Weihrich, 1999), it can handicap refugees in finding adequate employment (European Commission, 2016). While the German economy faces severe staff shortages – for which refugees are discussed as a potential remedy – few employers, however, seem willing to hire refugees (Garaev, 2016; Mergener & Maier, 2019).

Residency and Accreditation Processes. When requesting asylum in Germany, refugees obtain social welfare as long as needed and a work permit ideally after three months (European Commission, 2016). Asylum applications result in permanent residencies (i.e., full asylum)[2], temporary residence permits (e.g., a subsidiary protection before cases will be re-decided), or rejections. When rejected, applicants are 'tolerated' until transported back to either their country of origin or a third country, during which time they are lawfully permitted

[2] Refugees receive a permanent residency permit earliest after three years under specific circumstances (e.g., being able to largely make a secure living and proficiently commanding the German language). Such a permit may also be issued after five years if the person is largely able to make a secure living and has adequate German language skills (Federal Office for Migration and Refugees, 2022).

to appeal against negative migration decisions. There are several work permit types, spanning from individually decided cases ('permits to engage') to full admissions. The wait for the residency decision creates much uncertainty for refugees and often hinders their local career development (Phillimore, 2011). While policy makers have identified the need to aid refugees in obtaining fast, stable, and adequate employment to reduce their dependency on social welfare and to foster positive outcomes (Khoo, 1994; Pernice & Brook, 1996), receiving countries lack knowledge on how to integrate refugees in the long run (Nardon et al., 2021).

Overview and Methodology of This Dissertation

This dissertation includes three empirical qualitative studies that focus on refugees' vocational behavior and careers in Germany.[3] The studies will unravel the threats, challenges, and constraints that refugees face in regards to their identities, vocational behavior, and careers, as they resettle into Germany and seek to enter the local labor market, and they will illustrate how refugees cope with these threats, challenges, and constraints to restore their identities and careers, possibly even experiencing growth and/or weaving together personally meaningful careers.

The first empirical chapter (i.e., chapter 2) offers a study exploring refugees' identity threats, coping, and growth upon resettlement to Germany. Building on 31 semi-structured interviews with refugees, the study offers nuanced insights into how refugees experience identity threats upon resettlement to the new country and illustrates the double jeopardy of co-existing threatened and threatening identities. The study will also show how refugees cope with such threats and how the experiences may enable them to grow as workers and persons.

The second empirical chapter (i.e., chapter 3) presents a study that integrates three datasets of 38 refugees, 27 refugee support workers, and 37 German employers to address

[3] Please note that all empirical chapters (chapter 2-4) are written as independent manuscripts and may be read as such. Thus, there is some overlap in the studies' introductions and discussions.

refugees' self-regulation during their job search in Germany. When they resettle into the new country and search for a job there, refugees' often face meager or exhausted resources and need to navigate a work context that is innately foreign to them including unknown requirements, power structures, and professional scripts (Barley & Tolbert, 1997). This may influence refugees' self-regulation and also locals' – i.e., those supporting or hiring refugees – interpretation of refugees' self-regulation. That is, behaviors that were acceptable in refugees' countries of origin may not fit into the new context and appear inappropriate to local stakeholders. Therefore, this research will decipher refugees' self-regulation challenges and failures and trace how these challenges and failures may affect refugees' job search.

When facing involuntary career transitions and/or work-related traumas, research shows workers to benefit from career adaptive behaviors (Savickas, 2013). The third empirical chapter (i.e., chapter 4) will seek to understand workers' career adaptive responses in times of uncertainty and career disruption by studying 36 refugees in Germany. The research will decipher the contextual complexity that refugees face in their careers and the influence that uncertain and transitional career contexts have on people's typical career-related self-management behaviors, as related to control, planning, exploration, and deciding (Savickas, 2013). It will also unpack how refugees cope with their forced career transitions.

The final chapter of this dissertation (i.e., chapter 5) will integrate and discuss the key findings from the three empirical studies, carve out this dissertation's theoretical and practical implications, state the studies' limitations and strengths, and show future research directions.

Research Methodology

In this dissertation, I chose a qualitative approach, as qualitative research allows for a deep exploration of topics, processes, and relationships that are relatively understudied and as it encourages the researcher to focus on a primary population of interest to gain thorough insights into the phenomenon of interest (e.g., Lee, 1999). In general, vocational research on

refugees is still in its infancy (Newman et al., 2018; Richardson et al., 2020) and we lack knowledge on how different career phenomena unfold among refugees (see calls by Van Hooft et al., 2021; Wanberg et al., 2020). Also, given the complexity of refugees' job search and career development and the recent calls for studies to integrate multiple perspectives into refugee research (see Lee et al., 2020), this research approach allows me to honor the voices and to capture the lived experiences of multiple relevant perspectives (Sandberg, 2005).

In specific, I will draw upon narrative semi-structured interviews with refugees and other key integration-relevant stakeholders (i.e., refugee support workers and employers) via an interpretive methodology to capture and describe participants' lived experiences in specific contexts (Merriam, 2009; Sandberg, 2005). It is my aim to test and to elaborate on theories (Fisher & Aguinis, 2017; Lee et al., 1999) in the fields of identity threat (Eilam & Shamir, 2005; Petriglieri, 2011), identity threat coping (Petriglieri, 2011), self-regulation (Carver & Scheier, 1998), career adaptation (Savickas, 2013), and adversarial growth (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 1996) and, by this, to understand how context shapes refugees' career development (De Vos et al., 2019). By accounting for context-specific factors that influence refugees' vocational behavior and careers, I will explore whether career-related theoretical assumptions apply as postulated to the refugee context and whether the study of certain phenomena in specific contexts enriches career-related theories by revealing new constructs, meanings in constructs, and/or relations between constructs (Fisher & Aguinis, 2017).

Positioning the Researcher. As qualitative research focuses on humans' experiences, actions, and social processes within specific contexts, it is relevant to highlight the contexts in which the research, the participants, and the researcher are positioned (Levitt et al., 2018). Having contextualized this research and the studied participants above (see pp. 2-4 and pp. 16-18), I now turn to position myself as a researcher. While I do not have personal experience as a refugee myself, I hold several years of experiences working in the care of

unaccompanied refugee minors and in the areas of migrant education and employment in Germany. Combined with the insights that I receive through my research and engagement with refugees, I recognize the challenges and constraints faced by refugees upon resettlement and during job search and workplace integration. As a German citizen with work experience in the (forced) migration sector, I am also aware of the uniqueness of the German resettlement and job-search system – knowledge that enabled me to understand participants' narratives. Further, I hold experiences of living in countries and cultures different to my own.

Throughout this research, I sought to establish interpretative awareness (Sandberg, 2005) by being aware of my subjectivity as a researcher, that is, my disciplinary, theoretical, and methodological perspectives and my privileged positions in the society and by being attentive to how this may guide my interpretations. In this regard, even though I may not share many of refugees' social identities, that is, the social identities of the group that I am studying, my work with refugees and my interactions with them in this role have enabled me to craft and to develop a role identity that supports my understanding of them (see Stets & Burke, 2000). While refugees have already been studied in other fields such as sociology or cross-cultural psychology regarding topics such as assimilation pressures or racial and ethnic discrimination (Nawyn, 2010), it is critical to include the work and organizational lens into refugee research (see Newman et al., 2018) – refugees' work-related identities are vital resources to them (Lintner & Elsen, 2018) and employment a main engine for their successful integration (Ager & Strang, 2008). As refugees face many work-related challenges and constraints (Baranik et al., 2018), scholars and practitioners need to understand refugees' career- and integration-related issues and what happens to these workers as they resettle into a new country and search for work there. By gaining such an understanding, scholars and practitioners could identify ways to foster refugees' successful integration.

CHAPTER 2:

CAN I COME AS I AM?

REFUGEES' VOCATIONAL IDENTITY THREATS, COPING, AND GROWTH

This chapter is based on

Wehrle, K.[a], Klehe, U.-C.[a], Kira, M.[b], & Zikic, J.[c] (2018). Can I come as I am? Refugees' vocational identity threats, coping, and growth. *Journal of Vocational Behavior, 105*, 83–101.

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Abstract

Trying to re-establish their lives in a host country, refugees face multiple integration barriers in relation to work and society. This study, derived from 31 semi-structured interviews with refugees residing in Germany, explores how these barriers also threaten refugees' fundamental identity needs for worth, distinctiveness, continuity, and control. Faced with such threats, refugees tried both to protect their previous identities and/or to restructure them to adjust to their new situation. Findings also highlight identity threat jujitsu to both support refugees' identity-protection and create better connections between themselves and their environments. Further, we point to resourcing as a form of buffering potential future hardships. Finally, both refugees' resourcing and coping with adversity were related to the potential for psychological growth. This study offers new insights into how transition experiences impact refugees' personal and career-related growth in the new country.

Keywords: coping, identity threat, identity threat jujitsu, psychological growth, refugee, resourcing

Introduction

The unprecedented number of people fleeing war and terror has caused millions of refugees from countries such as Afghanistan and Syria to seek shelter in Europe (Holmes & Castaneda, 2016). This situation requires insights on the quality of and conditions for refugees' positive vocational and societal integration. Literature on refugees' experiences describes the challenges that they face in host countries (e.g., Constant et al., 2009; Yakushko et al., 2008), yet does not fully explain what such barriers imply for some of the last resources that refugees have left, namely their fundamental understanding of themselves.

The current study addresses this topic and offers the following three contributions. First, the study contributes to research on refugee integration into work and society by targeting how refugees' obstacles towards integration can represent actual threats to their identities, thus throwing "the most basic, underlying existential assumptions that people hold about themselves ... into disarray" (Crossley, 2000, p. 539). More precisely, while past research has stressed the influence of various barriers on refugees' vocational integration (Smyth & Kum, 2010), and of identity threats in particular on skilled migrants' career transitions (Zikic & Richardson, 2016), we still know little about how these barriers may be experienced as identity threats among refugees. Thus, the present study starts with a premise that refugees' fundamental identity needs (for the worth, distinctiveness, continuity, and control over their identities; Eilam & Shamir, 2005) may be affected during this transition. Further, we explore the impact of various integration barriers on the satisfaction of these needs. Here, we consider both the threats to existing identities and the imposition of new and threatening identities (cf. Kira & Klehe, 2016) in the refugee context. Second, we unravel refugees' coping responses to these identity threats in the face of the meager resources that refugees tend to have left. As the findings show, this will lead to an extension and refinement of current conceptualizations of coping with identity threats (e.g., Petriglieri, 2011). Third,

without wanting to belittle the difficulties associated with their situation, we reply to the call for research that provides a broader understanding of refugees' resettlement experiences on their adversarial psychological growth[4], i.e., their ability to understand and define themselves in new or more complex ways, enabling an enriched functioning (Chan et al., 2016). By examining whether and how coping with identity threats can potentially result in refugees' psychological growth, we extend past research, which found indications of potential growth in the context of re-entering former professional identities (e.g., Zikic & Richardson, 2016).

Defining the Study Concepts and its Context

Like migrants in general, refugees often encounter major career barriers in the host countries' labor markets, impairing their (local) employability and leading to unemployment, underemployment, and a poor integration into the host country's work and society (e.g., Smyth & Kum, 2010; Zikic et al., 2010). Our study takes place in Germany where the dual system of vocational education and training is defined by a high degree of vocational specificity (Hillmert, 2006). Designed to upskill its labor force, the system pursues high levels of education and academization (Baethge & Wolter, 2015), and fosters workers' sense of professional pride, strong vocational identities, and the relatively high social status of their occupations. Yet, while offering a competitive advantage for the German national economy and rewarding workers who navigate the system successfully (Weihrich, 1999), the system can also disadvantage people who enter it from the outside and/or do not possess the required credentials (Hillmert, 2006), as deviations from the stipulated educational and career paths can result in poor chances for work or career success.

The first aim of this study is to understand the effects of central threat sources on refugees' vocational identities in the host country. A person's self-concept comprises of a

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[4] Literature on psychological growth comprises both adversarial (Joseph & Linley, 2005) and post-traumatic psychological growth (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004). For uniformity reasons, we will consistently use the term 'adversarial psychological growth', including both concepts.

personal identity (an individual's self-definitional traits and idiosyncratic features) and social identities (i.e., an individual's context-dependent social self-definitions; Gecas, 1982; Tajfel & Turner, 1986). Each identity has its relevance in the overall self-concept and has, in various degrees, positive or negative affective connotations. People give meaning to their identities by attaching values, beliefs, and other attributes to them, which in turn, define who one is in a specific context, relation, or role (Ashforth et al., 2008). They color our expectations, e.g., on economic, psychological, or social aspects of life, and the way we approach and perceive our environments (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004).

An inability to re-establish their earlier career trajectories can *threaten* refugees' previous identities (e.g., as a professional, contributing member of society, or breadwinner; cf. Petriglieri, 2011). Additionally, refugees are often seen and treated in the host country in ways that not only threaten and invalidate their previous identities (i.e., Smyth & Kum, 2010), but that impose new, stigmatized, and threatening identities upon them (e.g., being unemployed, foreign, and a potential threat to the host country's real and/or symbolic resources; e.g., Esses et al., 2013; Stephan & Stephan, 2000). Research on other stigmatized populations suggests that such inflicted *threatening* self-definitions disrupt individuals' sense of self and increase stigma experiences (e.g., Kira & Klehe, 2016). The refugee status then entails the double jeopardy of co-existing threatened and threatening identities adding to the more commonly recognized traumas of, for instance, physical hardship and violence.

Threatened and threatening identities can endanger the satisfaction of fundamental identity needs. More precisely, Eilam and Shamir (2005) distinguished between four such essential needs, i.e., the needs for self-worth, self-distinctiveness, self-continuity, and self-control. Threats that challenge refugees' *self-worth* target aspirations for a positive self and social regard (e.g., Ashforth & Mael, 1998; Giuntoli et al., 2015). Threats to their *self-distinctiveness* inhibit their sense of uniqueness (Dutton et al., 1994). Also, refugees' loss of

valued identities or imposition of unwanted identities may further endanger their sense of *self-continuity*, i.e., the enduring essence and coherence of their self-concept (Eilam & Shamir, 2005). While research has extended this taxonomy of possible identity needs (e.g., including the need to belong; Ashforth & Schinoff, 2016), we focus on threats to the identity needs identified by Eilam and Shamir (2005). These cover both the present identity experiences (i.e., self-worth and -distinctiveness) and also address the identity experiences over time (self-continuity). Finally, we also analyze threats to their *self-control* (cf. Ashforth & Mael, 1998; Ryan & Deci, 2000), as refugees are in a uniquely vulnerable position when it comes to the fundamental human need for being able to control one's life and who one is (cf. Yakushko et al., 2008).

The second aim of our study is to unravel how refugees cope with actual and potential threats to their identities. When facing such threats, individuals use different coping responses (Carver & Scheier, 1992; Zikic & Richardson, 2016). Petriglieri (2011) theorized that in such cases, people either protect their identity or seek to change and restructure it. Thus, *protection* means maintaining one's threatened identity and refusing to let go of it by, e.g., emphasizing its positive distinctiveness, or derogating the source of the identity threat, thus invalidating the threat. *Restructuring*, on the other hand, changes the meaning of an identity, renders it less important, or results in exiting it altogether.

When analyzing the identity-protection responses in our data, we realized that many refugees used what Kreiner and Sheep (2009) called 'identity threat jujitsu'. *Identity threat jujitsu* describes certain behaviors that aim to turn negative threats into positive movement to both retain one's threatened identities and to establish improved relations between oneself and one's environments by either reframing the threat as an opportunity and/or, rather than derogate those posing the threat, seeking to build improved relationships to them.

In addition to coping with identity threats, our analysis also indicated that some

refugees aimed at preventing identity threats by *resourcing*, i.e., by turning mundane assets or objects into resources (Feldman & Worline, 2012). A study of this response appears particularly promising in the refugee context, as refugees usually have scarce material and social resources left to target challenges.

The third aim of this research is to find out whether coping with identity threats can potentially lead refugees to forming new identities or to further developing their existing ones towards enriched functioning. While previous research finds that migrant professionals managed to achieve enriched identities and perceive some personal growth, it was mostly in relation to coming closer to their desired professional status (Zikic & Richardson, 2016). We thus seek to extend this work by further looking into coping with extreme adversity, as refugees face adversities both before and post migration to a new country, but not all end in despair. While empirical research on the matter is still scant (Chan et al., 2016), theories on adversarial psychological growth suggest that the confrontation and struggle with even the most adverse events can spark psychological growth (Joseph & Linley, 2005; Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004), i.e., when people relinquish their habitual mental models of the world and themselves, and may seek to develop new ones that accommodate their current, adversarial experiences.

Method

Sample and Research Design

We interviewed refugees across Germany who held a work permit and tried to integrate into the German labor market, working in full- or part-time jobs, as freelancers, in internships, or state-subsidized 'One-Euro' jobs[5]. Participants were recruited via various organizations working with refugees and via snowballing. To gain a representative picture, we did not restrict our sample in terms of home country, education, marital status, age, time

[5] State-subsidized employment relationship without an employment contract, nor social security rights.

in Germany, local work experience, or legal status. Two participants had entered Germany as visa holders to avoid the issues associated with the refugee status, but their prime motives for coming to Germany were comparable to official refugees.

We conducted 31 semi-structured interviews (see Table 1 for demographic details), until we reached theoretical saturation and the same findings started to repeat in the data (cf. Strauss & Corbin, 1990). The 24 men and 7 women represent a typical gender distribution for a refugee workforce (Bloch et al., 2000; Boyd & Grieco, 2003) and also reflect the fact that many young men flee their home countries so as not to be forced into military service and war by their government or competing rebel groups. Participants' average age was 28 years, 15 were single, and the participants originated from six different countries, mostly Syria (23). They resided in Germany on average for two years and four months, their entry dates varying from 2005 to 2016. The residence permits which allowed the stays in Germany varied from permits ending in 2016 to one participant possessing a German citizenship. The average time span of being allowed to reside in Germany was two years and eleven months. The sample had been allowed to work in Germany on average for one year and nine months. For each interview, the participants received a compensation of 10€/h.

[Please insert Table 1 about here]

Interviews were conducted in German or English by two interviewers and lasted on average 72 minutes. The interviewers transcribed the resulting audio-recordings verbatim, allowing an in-depth understanding of the material. The semi-structured interview approach enabled us to scan the impacts of specific life events on the refugees' self-definitions as well as on their careers, and vocational and societal integration. The interview guide encompassed a core set of questions focusing on the following areas: (1) Vocational and societal integration experiences in the participants' life and career transitions; (2) their perceptions of local labor market barriers and opportunities; (3) their coping with the presence or absence of

vocational opportunities, and its impact on the participant's vocational identities; and (4) their recognition of any positive change and growth in themselves as the result of these experiences.

Data Analysis

We used NVIVO11 to code the data according to the thematic analysis approach (cf. Braun & Clarke, 2006). Some codes were predetermined and informed by the literature on identity threats (e.g., Kira & Klehe, 2016), coping (e.g., Petriglieri, 2011), and adversarial psychological growth (e.g., Joseph & Linley, 2005), yet we were sensitive to gaining new insights from the data beyond these predetermined codes and formed further codes to capture them.

To ensure internal validity, the data were first coded independently by each of the two interviewers, who then compared their analyses to further develop and to unify their codes. Minor differences in rater judgements were discussed and resolved by closely examining the codes. Codes connecting with each other were combined into sub-themes focusing on concrete topics and phenomena (e.g., legislation and local vocational/residence regulations). Subsequently, sub-themes were organized into main themes on a more abstract and conceptual level (e.g., threatened identities; Braun & Clarke, 2006). The findings section is organized to present separately each main theme along with its constituting sub-themes (see also Table 2 for the structure of the data and for further representative quotes). The other members of the research group joined the interviewers in building the themes and in recognizing the connections between them. Therefore, the final thematic structure of the data was reached in the in-depth discussions on codes, their meaning and significance, and their connections in the whole research team. By this, we ensured that no relevant information of our data was overlooked, verifying the two main-coder's approach and analysis. Finally, those illustrative quotes that had been recorded in German were translated into English by the

team's bilingual researchers.

Findings

Below, we present our findings on refugees' perspectives on vocational identity threats, coping responses, threat prevention, and indications of psychological growth (see also Table 2). Figure 1 outlines the barriers faced by refugees and their implications for the satisfaction of basic identity needs as well as refugees' coping responses, threat prevention, and indications of psychological growth.

[Please insert Figure 1 approximately here]

Vocational Identity Threats

Participants consistently addressed work as relevant for their self-definition. Having lost all their possessions but needing to re-establish their lives in a new country, work was important not only for financial reasons, but also to define themselves, as illustrated by Banu: "Work is important. My life without work wouldn't be the same. ... I don't just work for money, to work defines my character, my person. I don't always want to rely on help."

Yet, most participants reported contextual issues that challenged their vocational and societal integration, such as their insecure statuses in Germany, language issues, and social exclusion. These issues threatened refugees' identities in two ways: First, they challenged participants' existing identities, and, second, imposed threatening identities upon them. The devastating effects of threats on refugees' identities were expressed by Dakhil. Strikingly, even though stressing that Germany offered him much, he reported feeling extremely disoriented, losing his sense for the values and meanings attached to his former identities, finding himself in a crisis with a threatened sense of his existing self:

> I've never wanted to leave my country. ... I feel as though I'm impaired. ... Who am I and why am I here? ... Yes, I've lost myself. ... Even though, I'm here ... and I'm older now, ... I can't take me. ... Here in Germany, I have everything, but no feeling.

(Dakhil)

Threatened Identities

Refugees named distinct issues challenging their accustomed vocational identities in Germany. These affected all types of identity needs, thus their self-worth, self-distinctiveness, self-continuity, and self-control.

Legislation and Local Vocational/Residence Regulations. All participants mentioned bureaucracy to impede their selves and hinder their integration. It challenged refugees' *self-distinctiveness* and *control* over their lives, leaving them feeling helpless. Many noted problems understanding the German system, while Nabil also highlighted authorities' lacking understanding for refugees' circumstances:

> The bureaucracy, that's the problem in Germany. You think when you've got your papers, everything will be easy, but it's not. It's so complicated. When you ask the authorities for anything, they respond: 'We want this and this, and this'. ... The authorities, they're like computers. They don't understand when something isn't there. Or when you explain something or justify it. There's no compassion. (Nabil)

This issue also pertained to the German rules and regulations somehow determining the kinds of jobs the refugees were able to take up in the local work context and the paths they were required to follow in their job search. At times failing to understand the reasons behind these rules and sometimes failing to see that they target German job-seekers as well, some refugees experienced hopelessness and a lack of *control* over their identities. As Tahir put it:

> I don't know why. I've suffered enough, and I'm no child. Why does the job center say that? 'No, you must!' Okay, but I don't want to work as an electrician. Is carpenter no adequate work? ... Yes, yes, I must. ... I don't like it. ... Really, it makes me mad ... But my foreman says: 'I'm sorry, but you must. If you leave, I have to call

the job center and without the job center, you don't receive money'. (Tahir)

Insecure Future. In addition, refugees reported a lack of *control* over their own future, especially over their resident statuses and futures in Germany. For instance, many participants feared being forced to leave Germany, hindering them from rebuilding their lives. Rasin described the impact of such insecurities on his life and career: "We're here as Syrians, as refugees. We're unsafe. ... Maybe someday the state says: 'Refugees are to go back to their home country'. And what should I do there? I've lost everything there. Really, my work and everything."

Social Segregation and Language Barriers. Further, many participants commented on social groupings among refugees in Germany. They described the accumulation of refugees as an integration barrier that hindered them from getting into contact with locals. Qabel noted that "especially here [in a city in Germany], there are many foreigners. It‘s not good. We only speak Arabic with each other. We have little contact to Germans."

Many refugees reported problems learning German and that this barrier also separated them from the locals. Hamit explained feeling insecure, afraid of how to approach Germans:

> [The first hurdle] was my speech. ... The language is ... very hard to learn. ... One cannot come into contact with locals without the language. When I came here, I wasn't able to speak German and now, I also can't speak ideal German. When I go somewhere, I often try it in English, ... but I shouldn't do that. (Hamit)

From a vocational standpoint, language issues impacted refugees' *self-worth*. Memnun, a skilled IT engineer, had to re-adjust his professional practice to the local language. While possessing the needed expertise, his professional value still got diminished:

> German integration is difficult, because the German language is tough. Firms, however, need the language, because English here is of less value. ... So, if you want to work in a German firm, you must command the German language. ... All the programs run in

German as well. (Memnun)

Further, Baqer's [who works as a pediatrician in Germany] *self-worth* was undermined by colleagues disregarding his professional expertise solely because of language difficulties:

> It was during a telephone call with a colleague. ... It was my first nightshift and I was responsible for three different hospital wards. During the call, I asked her to talk slower, but she replied: 'That's not possible. I have too much to tell. Excuse me, but perhaps you could get someone else on the phone'. ... I'm a doctor, too! I may not know the German language that well, but I'm a doctor. (Baqer)

Lacking Evidence of Formal Qualifications. From the refugees' perspective, the German labor market strictly demands formal qualifications, refusing to accept any informal evidence of practical work experiences instead. Many participants reported how the German system did not recognize their skills and experience as they could not provide formal verifications, thus threatening both their *self-worth* and their *self-distinctiveness*:

> I think the employers here in Germany first and foremost doubt our Syrian qualifications. … I think that employers will have doubts or are afraid to take my life experiences into account. … Every employer receives so many applications for a vacant position. If I can't fill my resume with such additives, I have little chance that they'll recognize [my experience]. (Said)

Sami reported how he had lost all his documents during his voyage to Germany leaving him with no evidence of his identity or qualifications. This critically deteriorated his sense of *self-control* and future outlook in Germany:

> I lost it [papers and passport] in the water, … when I saved the child [from drowning in the Aegean Sea]. … I was scared …. [Losing the documents] is a problem for me … in the [Federal Office for Migration and Refugees'] interviews. … I know that if I'd still have them, I'd get asylum here. (Sami)

Lack of Credential Recognition. Yet, even having such credentials in hand did not necessarily suffice, i.e., the *worth* of the expertise assured in these credentials was often undervalued. As an example, Aman, an educated IT worker, was asked to undertake three more years of training, disregarding his entire professional experiences:

> I have good expertise in my job and now I don't want, I don't need another training. I just want to work, because for over six months now, I'm looking for work. I'm not searching for training, as my expertise is strong as it is, why do I have to do three more years of training? … And my certificates, they're completely international and not just foreign. … I'm a system engineer, but I can't find work here. (Aman)

Unemployment and Occupational Downgrading. Many participants observed a discrepancy between refugees wanting to work, yet experiencing few opportunities to realize their potentials. At the same time, the refugees were acutely aware of the labor shortages on the German labor market, and this mismatch diminished their *self-worth*. As Said put it:

> I find it sad that one doesn't get a chance to show what one's got. Employers seem very strict. I don't know why they, as long as they have so many vacant positions and as long as these aren't filled, … they don't give us the chance to prove ourselves. … I'm really afraid. … I have the feeling that employers are strict and afraid to try. Isn't it true that during probation a contract can be terminated immediately? Maybe … the Germans are generally very cautious. Maybe that's it. I don't know. (Said)

Due to these barriers, many refugees were unemployed or accepted menial employment just to get by, facing threats to the *continuity* of former identities as well as threats to their *self-worth.* Experiencing a lack of appreciation by employers, Aman noted:

> When I heard 2€/h or 5€/h - I was a manager, a chief in Afghanistan! ... I told him I wouldn't work for 2€/h. So, I worked at another pizza place, but they said that they don't need me. ... I have more than ten certificates in IT! I have good expertise.

> Working in a pizza place for 5€/h is not enough[6]. (Aman)

Overall, the inability to enter jobs matching their former ones affected refugees' sense of *self-continuity.* Nasir mentioned that "at home, my career aspiration as a dental technician was really fulfilled ..., but the local labor market is not as I expected it to be. ... It's very different", explaining how his expectations to re-enter his former profession were disrupted by the local labor market needs. Further, Nabil, a former business economist, stressed how local employers seemed to prefer German expertise, challenging his *self-distinctiveness*:

> Yes, it's different here. There are large differences between the work environments, or the labor markets in Libya and here in Germany. Here, the competition is so strong that employers in Germany choose workers according to their standards and preferences, so quality and experiences. ... Here in Germany, even though one is qualified, it's difficult. It's not easy. (Nabil)

Impacts on Non-Work-Related Identities. Lacking vocational opportunities hindered many refugees from earning enough money to support their families, either in Germany or in the home country. This, and the inability to do anything about the dangers and insecurities their families were facing, further threatened the participants' *self-worth*. As Hamit, who worked in a 'One-Euro' job, illustrated, this inhibited his identity as a family provider:

> My parents need my help, but I can't help them. I don't have good work. ... They always say: 'It's okay, we don't need money from you. ... Stay in Germany'. But ..., I want to help them, I just can't. (Hamit)

Social Loneliness and Lacking Social Affiliation. Being forced to leave their accustomed social groups behind while being uncertain of the strength of their new social ties in Germany endangered the refugees' sense of belongingness, i.e., their sense of being

[6] At that time, the official minimum wage in Germany was €8,50/h.

interpersonally connected, appreciated, and approved by others. One example is Tahir, who wished to reunite with his family and friends from home: "My family and all friends are in Syria. I'm here. ... I want to live with my family." Moreover, Zarif not only suffered from losing his former social group, but also experienced difficulties to form new social ties, feeling a lack of acceptance and connection to locals. This jeopardized his *self-worth*, while simultaneously impeding his belief to successfully integrate into Germany:

> To build contacts in a new country, especially with different people, a different culture, it isn't easy. ... They [Germans] aren't aggressive, but they don't like you to be there. ... It has influenced my thoughts ... about building up a life here. I think it to be more difficult to receive acceptance from the people. ... That's my biggest problem. What's really hindering me are my thoughts on how it was in Syria; how I was in Syria. ... I had a lot of friends. ... I feel that for me it's important to have people around me; my capital is that people are around me. ... I felt really strong about them. ... Now, I have to accept that I'm living with fewer contacts. (Zarif)

Perceiving to be labelled as a 'foreigner' and a 'refugee' added to the loneliness and isolation, while also menacing the refugees' *self-distinctiveness*. For instance, Qabel stated:

> [Back in Syria] I had people that I could talk with just like that, every time of the day. Here, it's difficult. Germans don't have the patience to talk to the foreigners. ... I don't want to just live alone. ... I want to live with the people. ... What interests me are the people ... Maybe, the Germans don't know why foreigners or the Syrians are in Germany. ... Not all refugees are the same. (Qabel)

Threatening Identities

Besides highlighting how valued identities come under threat, our data also illustrated the refugees finding themselves subjected to unwanted and threatening identities being imposed upon them. These threatening identities augmented their overall experiences of

stigma in the host country. Besides reporting general stigma of being a refugee, the participants additionally mentioned two distinct sources of threat, i.e., stigmatization when out of work and stigmatization when being employed.

General Stigmatization. Being seen and treated as a foreigner and outsider challenged refugees' sense of *self-worth* and *self-distinctiveness*. In relation to career opportunities, Aman mentioned how Germans in charge of career decisions stigmatized refugees in general, imposing a pejorative and generalizing threatening identity (e.g., 'untrustworthy liar'):

> When I talked to an IT firm, ... the person in charge told me: 'No, what is this? What does it count if you have experience in Afghanistan? ... The people from Afghanistan don't bring valid certificates. They all lie!' This chief told me: 'Please, go. Go and work in a restaurant, you can't work in a firm'. (Aman)

Relatedly, while several refugees highlighted how they had been helped by Germans, others reported being the target of negative attitudes. They were being seen, categorized, and treated as 'refugees' or 'foreigners', not belonging and unwanted, rather than as individuals. As the following quote by Said shows, such stigmatization both undermined refugees' *self-distinctiveness* and also hindered their ability to rebuild a new life in Germany:

> I had difficulties searching for an apartment. I saw plenty of offers ..., but when I contacted the owners, they rejected me. Some say they don't want to cooperate with the job center. Others state it clearly: 'No foreigners. No refugees'. ... That was frustrating and annoying. This prejudice is just bad. (Said)

Noteworthy is that the reported stigmatization was repeatedly attributed to the influence of the German media. Issam tried to explain locals' attitudes, stating that "you don‘t trust a stranger. The media doesn‘t help with this, as foreigners are portrayed in a bad light."

If You Do not Work: 'Benefit Scrounger'. The refugee status was often associated

with a stigma of being a 'benefit scrounger', a stereotype among some of the Germans to which the refugees reported feeling exposed, which harmed their *self-worth*. Mentioning a reluctance to take money from the state, and instead, wanting to work and finance himself, Zarif said:

> Now, I get all the money from the city. And really, I don´t like it. In Syria, I was studying and I used to have two jobs. It weren't like fixed jobs, but I was working in two jobs and not sitting at home. ... I couldn't sit without doing anything. Like somehow that's [the thing about] me. ... I don't like to just sit here and take money from the city. ... I don't feel good about it, I don't feel good about myself. I'm not used to it. (Zarif)

Relatedly, Zarif highlighted the importance of work for his sense of *control*: "I want to manage my life. To live on my own." Further, this stigma also threatened some refugees' *self-distinctiveness*. Stating how refugees' circumstances were neglected by locals, Baqer noted:

> If someone [a German tax payer] says 'you receive my money' and things like that, it's sad. These people receive your money, because they've lost everything, they've come here at a risk. It's not that easy. At the end, refugees also work. Many refugees work and pay taxes. There are also Germans who are unemployed and receive money. It's not fair to single out the refugees. That's not fair. (Baqer)

If You Do Work: Cheap Workforce and Professional Interchangeability. Refugees often received offers only for menial jobs, which signaled to them that they were being seen as cheap, interchangeable labor unworthy of respect, harming their *self-worth*. Aman stated:

> It was difficult, because I had no experience working in a pizza place. ... My supervisor always said: 'Come on, clean that up, do this, why are you just standing

> there? Come here, do this, cut that'. I didn't say anything in return. Then, he told me he'd pay me 2€/h. He said: 'If you want work, here you have work. If not, you can go home'. (Aman)

Coping Responses to Identity Threats

To cope with these identity threats, the refugees in our sample both protected and restructured their identities. These two coping reactions did not exclude one another, but frequently happened simultaneously.

Identity-Protection Response

To cope with the identity threats, the refugees *derogated* a typical threat source - the locals who actively and even violently demonstrated their disapproval of refugees. Salim, an Iraqi refugee, had experienced inhuman atrocities in Iraq and lost everything. When the locals in Germany harassed him and other refugees, he belittled the influence of their actions by comparing those to what he had experienced in Iraq:

> No one could have opened a snack stand or anything else. Many have tried, the next day, it was burned down. We [refugees] couldn't take the bus to get into the city. We had to take detours, find new ways. This city was horrible. ... I never tried to do anything against the locals. ... Inwardly, everything was already destroyed anyways. In any case, I experienced worse in Iraq. I was already broken and destroyed. It couldn't get worse. ... I lost my land. I lost my school. I lost my future. (Salim)

Our participants seldom resorted to *concealing* their identities under threat. The only instance related to Zarif hiding his religious identity as a Shia Muslim from the Sunni Muslims around him to be accepted and included by the other refugees:

> I belong to a minority group in Syria. I'm a Shia. ... Most of the Arabs are Sunnis. Both religious groups have problems with the other. ... These even result in killing another ... But when you go out in Germany, nobody knows that I'm a Shia. They all

> think that I'm a Sunni. ... I don't want to get into arguments or problems about it with anyone. ... So, I don't even mention it. ... I'm really sure that if they [people in his house] knew that I'm a Shia, ... there'd be grouping and I wouldn't be in one of these groups. ... Some people dislike you or don´t want to deal with you, because you're Shiite. (Zarif)

Indicating an opposite to concealment, we in turn recognized how some refugees felt that living in Germany granted them opportunities to be more openly themselves. Due to freer social customs in Germany, Sami felt able to be more open as a person: "In Afghanistan, it was very difficult ... I wasn't as open as a person there as I'm here in Germany. ... You cannot talk with women, nor work with women. ... In Germany, everything is less restricted."

Further, our data suggest that the participants could highlight the *positive distinctiveness* of their vocational identities, threatened by having employment in jobs below their professional competence levels. Said, a network engineer, for instance, recognized that he was underemployed, but accepted and reframed his present vocational identity positively:

> The tasks and activities are similar but easier. ... I've worked on networks nationwide. ... Basically, it's too easy for me from my professional point of view. But in general, I find it good to start working in a small company, where I can step by step understand the work process and environment. (Said)

Recognizing that the refugees not only faced threats to their existing identities made it possible to recognize a further identity-protection response. Our data indicate that refugees could refuse to *don* the *threatening*, stigmatized *identities*, such as 'unemployed', 'refugee', and 'benefit scrounger'. They simply rejected these identities and did not integrate them into their self-concepts. For example, two of the participants entered Germany with study and work visas, explicitly rejecting the label and implications of being viewed as refugees. Aware

of the negative associations with the status of a refugee, they consciously decided to avoid that identity and ensure their independence of the welfare system, as Gulalai reported:

> Financial support through the city wasn't essential for us. We always wanted to be able to do whatever we wanted, to make everything possible, without being labeled as a refugee. We didn't want to be dependent on anyone. ... For example, the job center. I'd always have to ask for everything. ... I came to Germany a year ago and am doing C1 [proficient language level] right now. As a refugee, I'd probably be in A2 [basic language level] by now. (Gulalai)

Identity Threat Jujitsu

To protect their threatened identities, the refugees turned the negative power of many threats into positive movement. First, they actively sought to build better relationships with their in- and out-groups to gain acceptance for their identities, and to protect them. Second, they reframed their views of the German employment system to highlight those system elements that could be supportive of their vocational identities.

When it comes to building improved relationships, the participants recognized both their in-group (refugees) and their out-group (locals) posing identity threats. Zarif's religious identity as a Shia was implicitly threatened by the Sunni refugees around him, and he concealed his identity to protect it, but also to build good relationships to the other refugees. Thereby, he engaged in building bridges to them as to not exclude himself or stir others up.

When the identity threat originated from the out-group, some refugees also made the jujitsu move of building improved relationships. Believing that mutual understanding is key to settling hostile attitudes and seeking to spread positivity towards refugees, Bassam did not merely pursue to reduce the threat, but actively explained himself to locals to form a link between himself and his social environment: "I talked in front of a school class about my past. The teacher and students asked me questions. I wanted to do it, because Germans don't

know us, which doesn't stop them from being afraid of us." In both cases, identity threat jujitsu was an active behavioral protection response moving beyond mere cognitive coping.

When the identity threat related to having to work below one's competency level, the refugees did the jujitsu by reframing the situation. For instance, many participants reframed barriers as opportunities by valuing the associated learning experiences of how the German system functions. As Said stated above (see identity-protection response), he was aware of working beneath his competences. Even so, he understood that local work implied a solid knowledge base matching local practices, accepting the need to first get accustomed to these.

Identity-Restructuring Response

People can also cope with identity threats by changing and restructuring their identities and self-structures. When these change, the threat doesn't have a target anymore. As one example of *changing the relative importance of the* threatened *identity*, Aman decreased the importance of his former vocational identity, accepting that his foreign expertise and his earlier vocational identity were not acknowledged in Germany. Thus, he understood that he had to start over and emphasized that merely being able to work in some field was of greater importance than sticking to his former profession:

> This isn't our country and when one wants to work in a foreign country, it doesn't matter where, as anything is better than to be unemployed. I can't say: 'No, I have to work as I did in Afghanistan'. In our country it was easy, we spoke the language and it was our home. Here, I have to start all over. ... I just want a good work. It's not like, if I can't be an IT manager, I won't work. That's not how it is. (Aman)

Changing the meaning of an identity means defining it in a new way and giving new substance to it. The refugees changed the meanings attached to those identities that they related to and with which they defined the identity of a refugee. Even though people around them attached many negative stereotypes to being a refugee, some participants embraced that

identity and felt belongingness with other refugees, e.g., Xhamil, who accepted his refugee status and the attached consequences. He did this even though, by now, he was integrated into German work and had local social contacts: "Yes, I felt like the other refugees. ... I feel like the others, because I belong to them. That I'm a refugee as well. We're all ... equal."

As another meaning change, Memnun agreed to train again in Germany for his former profession to fulfill the local education requirements. By indicating the enduring importance of his profession as an IT engineer, but understanding differences in the education systems, he restructured his vocational identity to also include the present student identity:

> I want to study IT engineering. ... I prefer to start from the beginning. ... The first year of theory is really important to capture. ... You don't want a job that's okay, you want to love your job. ... If I'd begin working in another field, it wouldn't be logical. ... Still, I have to finance myself, so if you don't find work in your field, you must somewhere else. ... But for me, it has to be related to informatics. (Memnun)

Finally, participants often described *identity exit*, or opting out from previous identities and defining themselves in a new manner, especially in the context of threats to vocational identities. As an example, Karim disengaged from his vocational identity as a lawyer (i.e., referring to local vocational regulations as a reason for his identity exit) and explained:

> I've thought so much about it. ... I think I've got to do a training, even though I've studied four years to become a lawyer. However, that isn't valid here in Germany, because of the laws and regulations. ... I have to find new work. ... That's best for me. ... Maybe, I'll work in the social services. ... I like social work. I like to help people. ... I can't just begin working here as a lawyer. (Karim)

Karim further reflected on his personal reasons for exiting his identity as a lawyer. He combined both personal and contextual considerations:

> Even when wanting to, I'd have to further educate myself and study again for three to four years. And now I'm 30 years old and I have a family. I have a daughter. I need to work. ... If I were 22 years old, I could say that I want to study legal studies again, because I'd have the time and I'd still have the future in front of me. But when one marries and has a family, one thinks differently of it. Before, I lived in another culture and now I live in the German culture, and I continually try to get accustomed to it. ... I'm here in Germany, it's not the Germans who are in Syria. That's important. When I live in Germany, I've got to accept it all. I have to understand it all. Today, I build my future. (Karim)

Combination of Identity-Protection and -Restructuring Responses

The refugees also coped by combining identity-protection and -restructuring responses. While participants struggled to maintain their old identities, they also accepted necessary adaptations and thus restructured, and molded the meaning of their vocational identities. Many reported that it was not possible to build on the education and professional experience from their home countries; their competences and credentials were not recognized in Germany. Zarif was willing to change the meaning of his vocational identity from an early career engineer to an engineering student to protect the personally valuable engineer identity:

> To continue my studies as an electronics and telecommunication engineer; ... I'm really open for the seven-semester thing. ... It's in my mind to do the whole thing again. ... Maximum, if I can't match any material, three and a half years. ... What I really fear here is the time factor. ... I'm 26 years old ... Somehow, I'm not starting from zero, but I'm starting from a low level. I can't say from zero like, I can't throw away all the things I've learned, even when I start with university from the beginning. ... But that's another three or four years for me. I'm 30 then. If I were in Syria, I could be graduated right now and start working. ... But, I'll be in the university, reaching,

> approaching my goal. And if it does bother me, I'll say: 'Stay calm, man!' ... After I'm finished, I'll definitely start working. (Zarif)

Also, Nabil strove to re-enter his former profession, yet acknowledged local difficulties. He recognized the necessity to work in mini-jobs and to restructure the meaning of his vocational identity, but aspired to retain "my profession" and his professional self:

> They say they need workers, but ... you've got to work in a different field if you don't want to be unemployed. So, you don't work in your profession. ... People search for something to survive. ... It's not easy. ... At the moment, I work in mini-jobs. ... Because, as I said, you have to be prepared for such 'setbacks'. ... I'll find work in my profession. (Nabil)

In addition to the refugees protecting and/or restructuring their identities, we noticed how some rejected contingencies beyond their control to influence their life courses. They were willing to invest into their futures in Germany, irrespective of how insecure these might be. Said rejected uncertainties by consciously handling challenges as they emerged:

> I'm realistic. I handle the reality here as it comes. ... I won't let my life here be influenced by this [missing family and friends in Syria]. So, I deal with everyday life here, as though I'd continuously stay in Germany. Because one doesn't know if one returns to Syria and when. Thus, one has to realistically establish a future here, or a life here. And when it happens differently, then one can change plans. (Said)

Resourcing

When resourcing, the refugees did not seem to engage in coping by responding to identity threats, but instead prepared themselves for threats that might lie ahead. We recognized three tactics: The refugees proactively created opportunities, turned chance social encounters into social resources, and circumvented barriers hindering their integration.

First, the refugees identified and *proactively created opportunities* for themselves.

Zarif, for instance, made an unsolicited job application. Even though his application was eventually turned down for administrative reasons, it created professional prospects for him:

> I should have a training in a company. It's really important to get references. ... I've already had a very successful interview. ... I asked for it and they agreed. ... It was really positive and they made me a really good offer. ... They told me: 'You can work with us for one year [as a part-time and] we will pay for your C1-costs [costs for the proficient language level]'. ... I'll apply to this company after I finished my language course. (Zarif)

Combining both resourcing and identity threat jujitsu, Rasin, who was too ill to go out to work and support this family, reframed his situation into an opportunity to earn money and help other people by realizing that he had information and experience to share with others:

> Because personally, I'm sick. I can't work too hard. My illness; my muscles are too weak. ... But, ... I needed the money. ... Then I had the idea to help international students ... on Facebook. I opened a page and that was pretty easy actually. The people came to me ... and that was great for me. I earned over 1.000€ a month like that. And it was ... easy for me, my life. For the rent and my wife. (Rasin)

The second way of resourcing was to *turn chance social encounters into social resources*. Gulalai noted how the support of a German family aided in making her feel at home:

> We know a German family, which really helps us mentally. ... We were really lucky to meet them; it was all by chance. ... They gave us something beautiful, a feeling of safety. ... Great things aren't about money, or luxury. No, they're about safety, familiarity. ... I have a second family here in Germany, that's so valuable. ... For me, 'Vitamin B' [German slang for favoritism] stands for interpersonal relationships. For me, it encompasses my German family, as they give me a great feeling. (Gulalai)

Finally, the participants created resources by *circumventing* the bureaucratic *barriers* hindering their integration. Salim was told that he would have to wait for the decision of his resident status before being allowed to attend a language school, or to have a job. Undaunted by this, he took the situation into his own hands, proactively developing his abilities:

> Many nights I've cried to myself. Because I wanted to learn, believe me. I really enjoyed school. I just wanted to learn much. And I couldn't. ... I directly went to the professional school, without a language course. I took an interpreter with me, an Iraqi boy. ... I went there completely from my part, as there was still the thought 'school'. ... I wanted to try. ... It was better for me to directly go to a professional school with Germans, to sit with them in class, and only speak German. If I wouldn't make it, then I'd have to repeat a year, nevertheless, I'd learn the language better than in a language school. (Salim)

Indications of Psychological Growth

Adversities not merely resulted in the refugees despairing, but they also carried seeds for positive change. Some of that change took place naturally as the refugees' understanding of the local customs, and thus their sense of comfort, grew. For instance, Rasin reported how refugees' difficulties after resettling to a foreign country declined over their time spend in Germany:

> Work is important for me. I actually build so many relationships at work and I got to know the German culture and laws better. ... The refugees, who haven't learned German yet ... are like children; kind of like children in first class. ... They don't understand matters yet. They want to learn ..., but it's difficult, as the culture is different, ... the laws, [and] the bureaucracy. ... When I learned German, ... I learned so much about ... how life works here in Germany. Also, while working with my colleagues ... I gathered experience on how Germans think; on how to deal with

> Germans. When can I ask questions and when can I answer. (Rasin)

The participants, however, also showed signs of psychological growth going beyond such gradual adjustment to new circumstances and, instead, reflected more adaptive ways to define themselves, and connect to their environment. Even though the participants rarely mentioned adversarial psychological growth per se, their stories included both personal and career-related growth, and growth independent of returning to former vocational identities.

The participants often mentioned having to deal with severe issues unaided. Our data suggest that needing to depend on themselves and their abilities to overcome threats to their identities, and even their very existence, holds potential to foster *personal growth*, i.e., the development of more positive and richer personal self-definitions enabling better functioning in many areas of life. Especially when reporting having overcome challenges in the past, the refugees indicated having grown through the experiences on the way. For instance, coming to Germany alone as a teenager, having experienced menaces on his voyage, Bassam expressed how he developed an increased confidence in his own abilities, growing mentally stronger and more self-efficient:

> I've been here all by myself. I've traveled from Syria to Germany all alone without family. ... I've had so powerful threats and fears ..., but afterwards, I felt strong here in Germany. I made it through seven different countries. I'm able to manage everything here. (Bassam)

Further, Gulalai noted how her war experiences in Syria have made her more resilient and confident to actively pursue her aspirations in Germany. She reflected on her future aims:

> With everything that I've experienced in Syria during the war, I believe that I can achieve everything I strive for. ... Because if you're motivated, you can achieve everything. ... We [she and her husband] want to be professionally successful, build a good life, a safe future. For us, our son, our parents. (Gulalai)

Issam also highlighted the impact of past struggles on his self-awareness and -efficacy, and reported how learning moments were key for growing more resilient and independent:

> I was still a child then. Then, you don't have that many experiences yet. And it's the experiences that constitute who you are. I mean, you probably think a bit differently today than tomorrow. ... One learns with time. Time is decisive. ... I've experienced so many things, ... also challenges for myself. ... The path wasn't easy, it was dangerous. ... You're startled, ... but afterwards, you know why you've done it ... and that you've made it. And that's exactly the experience I mean. (Issam)

Sometimes, personal growth was associated with experiences of *career-related growth*, i.e., the development of more positive and richer work-related self-definitions enabling better functioning in one's career and at work. For example, Xhamil, who resourced via social chance encounters when obtaining his apprenticeship as a baker, reported how his employment made him grow more confident in his own abilities and internally motivated to strive for more. Forced to stand on his own feet, he noticed an enrichment in his functioning:

> Now I have a job and I don't want to lose it. ... I've become a different person since I've been here. ... I've achieved so much in so little time. ... If possible, I want to take my master craftman's diploma after my training of bakers. ... If I pass my journeyman's examination, I'm the happiest person alive. ... Yes, I've learned something new about myself. That I can be more diligent than I was before. That I'm not as stupid as I thought I were. Not that I'm dumb, but I had no clue about life. Here, I learned that I can do something. That I can achieve something. (Xhamil)

Besides the refugees showing signs of growth when overcoming challenges of their past, growth also occurred through present struggles. For instance, Baqer noted how, even when being fundamentally called into question by a family member, he believed in himself

and resisted to be daunted, following his aspirations to find re-employment in Germany:

> Everyone said I wouldn't find work in one year. My wife cried so much. A relative told us that we'd have no chance here without an asylum application ... He told my wife that her wish to study, have a baby, and not apply for asylum is just a dream. ... I told her that I'll find work in a few months, she shouldn't worry. ... I had to be optimistic. ... I found work seven months after my arrival. ... I couldn't dare to give up. ... I was confident to make it; ... that when you try, you can achieve it all. (Baqer)

In addition to personal and career-related growth, the refugees also experienced growth as they learned to appreciate and savor the basic life freedoms at a deeper level than before, returning to fundamentals often out of a reflection of the harsh consequences of war. Thus, psychological *growth* seems to also occur *independently from returning to former identities*. For instance, being aware of what mattered most in life, Aman's priorities shifted from his dependence on his former vocational identity to the safety and future of his children:

> I hope to find work to support my family, my children. ... In our home country, ... they weren't allowed to go to school. ... Our country was always in revolt. I always worried that if my children can't go to school, what will happen then? They can't achieve much if they don't go to school or study. They couldn't build a good life. Now, my children all go to school without stress. My oldest daughter visits the tenth grade and told me that she thinks about starting a training to become a doctor's assistant. I think that's great! Seeing my children go to school and build themselves a good life without worries. (Aman)

In doing so, Aman infused his vocational identity with dignity and purpose by seeing value in being employed, earning money, and being able to support his family, irrespective of what he did before resettling. He noted: "It's good when one works and earns money ..., and is not unemployed. ... It's important for me, that my children have a good life here."

The appreciation of fundamental freedoms also related to our findings of the participants' non-concealing their identities in Germany, being provided with opportunities to be openly themselves. For Bassam, even while working in a subsidized 'One-Euro' job, the comparison between his life in Syria and the safety he felt in Germany influenced his growth. Gaining strength through the perceived freedom, he grew confident in his own abilities:

> The last five years in Aleppo, I couldn't go out, as I was always afraid of being taken by soldiers. Coming here, I was able to breathe again. Even right now without real work, I have a good life. ... Here, ... I've found myself. I've thought: 'Okay, I can do it!' In Syria, I didn't feel like that. (Bassam)

[Please insert Table 2 about here]

Discussion

Fleeing one's home country, becoming a refugee, and entering an unknown host country exposes people to both physical dangers and psychological traumas, and thus being a refugee often entails stories of traumatic loss - losing one's home, belongings, social surroundings, and basic certainties on how the world functions. Yet, as the interviews of the present study showed, these losses do not cease once refugees have arrived at a supposedly safe host country. Rather, the various integration barriers to work and society, a number of which have also been identified by prior research (e.g., Smyth & Kum, 2010; Zikic & Richardson, 2016), may come to threaten some of the last resources these people bring with them: Their identities, and with that, their fundamental human needs for a sense of worth, distinctiveness, continuity, and control over who they are in general and in their vocation in particular. As Figure 1 outlines, refugees' sense of worth was threatened by disregarded professional expertise, as was their sense of distinctiveness when missing formal skill verifications, among other barriers. Self-continuity was undermined by inabilities to enter jobs matching their original professions. Also consistent across the participants were threats

to their self-control, and not being able to self-determine their own life and career paths. In addition, being a refugee entails not only a story of loss, but also one of stigma, i.e., of facing new and undesirable identities imposed on oneself (e.g., 'foreigner', 'benefit scrounger', 'untrustworthy liar'), again threatening one's sense of worth and distinctiveness.

As Ashforth and Schinoff (2016, p. 116) put it, there is "a dizzying number of potential motives guiding identity construction". We focused on a selection of core identity needs (Eilam & Shamir, 2005) relating to the present identity status (i.e., self-worth and -distinctiveness), temporal identity status (i.e., self-continuity), and control over one's self and life. These identity needs appeared as especially relevant in our data. As described in the findings, the participants were facing a constant struggle of not feeling valued as unique beings, having to deal with fundamental disruptions of their selves and lives, which impaired their self-control. In our analysis, also other identity motives appeared, for instance, the need for belongingness (cf. Baumeister & Leary, 1995). However, we approached belongingness (in terms of social loneliness and lacking social affiliation) as a contextual factor for threats to both self-worth and -distinctiveness, as threats to various identity needs are intertwined; one identity threat may be the context for others to emerge.

Besides merely uncovering specific sources of identity threats, we have also reported on how refugees respond to such threats. Petriglieri (2011) proposed that individuals choose to either protect or to restructure their identities under threat. Seeking to understand refugees' identity re-construction via coping with threats, we have offered empirical evidence for the refugees indeed utilizing both coping responses, however, not exclusively. Noting that both protection as well as restructuring responses, or even a combination of both, are taken up to manage adversity (cf. Kira & Klehe, 2016; Zikic & Richardson, 2016), we extend on current literature, offering insights and empirical evidence into persons simultaneously employing multiple coping responses. We also provide empirical examples on how individuals' identity-

protection can also mean refusing to don an imposed identity; a coping response suggested by Kira & Klehe (2016).

The refugees also engaged in identity-threat jujitsu (Kreiner & Sheep, 2009), i.e., building improved relationships to the people posing identity threats and reframing threats as opportunities. Such coping responses protected the participants' identities and also aided their adaptation by creating and building improved relations between themselves and their social and institutional contexts (i.e., the German educational and labor market system). Through jujitsu actions, the refugees modified their contexts: They reacted to threats either by building bridges and seeking to build relationships to other people, or by reframing their situations to accept their surroundings. With this, they enhanced their means to buffer identity threats.

Further, the refugees' coping occurred in the context of meager material and social resources, evoking the question of how refugees manage to cope with so little. We identified the refugees creating vocational opportunities and thus navigating their careers by crafting their own resources, taking action against difficulties, and proactively transforming situations that may pose threats. Extending Petriglieri's (2011) conceptual work that highlights only identity re-construction by directly targeting threats, our participants instead also generated and utilized resources by turning mundane objects and chances into resources to buffer against eventually upcoming adversity, supporting their coping efforts, and furthering their occupational integration (i.e., Feldman & Worline, 2012; Sonenshein, 2014). Framing resourcing as actions taken despite actively present identity threats, we postulate it rather as a manner of resource generation than threat source response (cf. Hobfoll, 1989), thus as a proactive form of threat prevention.

Moreover, both resourcing and the jujitsu movements to build improved relationships to those posing identity threats were action-, rather than only cognition-oriented coping responses. Hobfoll et al. (2007, p. 361) stated that "cognitive reframing [of a trauma] without

consequent action may be hollow and even negative", and proposed that a positive adaptation happens when adversarial growth cognitions are accompanied by corresponding 'growth actions'. Therefore, our study suggests that taking action and actively addressing the negative force of identity threats may advance refugees' psychological growth.

As a result, some of the refugees also reported a sense of psychological growth arising from their struggle with these overwhelming and often negative circumstances, providing indications of Tedeschi and Calhoun's (2004) postulated growth domains. Their personal and career-related growth implied that the refugees had to define themselves in new and/or more beneficial ways, gaining an increased sense of personal strength, resilience, and belief to overcome potential future adversity. By growing independent and savoring life's basic freedoms (e.g., appreciating everyday things in life, or adapting one's priorities to the here and now), the refugees learned to understand and build better connections to their social environment. Also, we noticed growth-actions to both foster closer and more intimate relationships with others as well as enable personal developments when the refugees were confronted with existential matters. In turn, they explored and used present opportunities, even when limited, to integrate into Germany. Further, learning to understand the host country better enabled the participants to recognize new options and paths in their lives and careers.

While Petriglieri (2011) proposed that growth could only result from identity restructuring, not protection, the findings from our interviews suggest differently. That is, we found indications for adversarial growth irrespective of how the participants reported having coped, or resourced. Particularly identity threat jujitsu and resourcing appeared promising in this regard, as both hold behavioral components aiding to overcome hardships. Further, we have recognized growth to also occur independently from re-entering one's accustomed profession, as restoring earlier identities is often not possible for refugees. While previous

research has highlighted growth in connection with taking up matters of former professions (e.g., Zikic & Richardson, 2016), the findings from our study suggest growth irrespective of such alignments. Rather, it also happened when the refugees transitioned into new work or into realms outside of work. Thus, we assume that the sheer variety of adversarial life events that have impacted the refugees have caused them to build resources, develop relevant coping mechanisms, and to engage in making sense of their circumstances, thereby, facilitating growth experiences in various life contexts.

In spite of the German vocational system exerting barriers to integration and posing threats to refugees' identities, our study highlights an interaction between the local structure and the refugees' agency (cf. Barley & Tolbert, 1997) in how refugees come to understand and deal with these local structural barriers, or local career scripts (Zikic & Richardson, 2016). The participants mentioned the value and meaning that their learning experiences had for them to adapt to the existing barriers in Germany. Many embraced and proactively sought out educational opportunities, having their adaptation align with the identification and appreciation of the possibilities that the new setting offered. Even though not all participants mentioned fully understanding these local career scripts, or the local demand for further education and training that implied them to formally relearn their professions (i.e., indicating both threats to their acquired identities and individual differences responding to barriers), several refugees valued the advantages of the system to rebuild or strengthen their vocational identities. Noteworthy in turn, while demanding specific qualifications to enter professions (Baethge & Wolter, 2015), the German state also invests into the education and training of refugees to aid them in fulfilling integration requirements (Degler & Liebig, 2017).

Practical Implications

The findings allow us to contextualize refugees' experiences and strengthen research on how to build bridges between refugees and host-countries' institutions. The present study

has shown how multiple threat sources can destabilize refugees in various realms of life, pointing to refugees' identities being in transition after their arrival in Germany. Thus, we first call attention to a potential counter-productiveness of certain legal practices. For example, residence interviews demand refugees to tell coherent narratives of their (often less than coherent) past and present to be judged as credible. As much depends on these interviews, they constitute stressful situations, challenging refugees' capability to present their stories as consistently and accurately as then required. The threats imposed on their identities may well undermine the value of interviews in generating appropriate information needed by the officials for the residence decisions. Second, while refugees might need career counseling to (re-)create their careers in the new context with regulations so different from the ones they faced at home, such counseling may face challenges due to its cross-cultural nature. Refugees' career aspirations and expectations are rooted in their habitual identities crafted in their 'past lives' in the home country (Ibrahim, 1985). These may, however, have little relevance in the new country. It is vital for career counselors to kindle their clients' awareness of the need to rebuild their aspirations to better connect with local opportunities. In this context, it may be especially helpful for local settlement and job search agencies to implement mentoring programs, and in this way enhance refugees' ability to acquire local 'know-how'. Also, rather than simply trying to figure things out, clients might develop behavioral coping responses that increase their adjustment in times of change (cf. Seibert et al., 2016).

Additionally, the findings highlight the necessity to reduce stigmas that hinder refugee recruitment and integration, calling for the development of stigma reducing interventions in the workplace that establish equal treatment and opportunity (Bauder, 2003; e.g., through foreign credential recognition; Reitz, 2007). Further implications may be to identify low-threshold opportunities for social contacts and resourcing. As our interviews showed, it often

took no more than chance encounters with locals to build relationships that strengthened refugees' sense of a new and/or stronger identity, and fostered their integration and positive outlook in Germany. Our findings also show how seemingly unmovable institutional barriers could be circumvented to allow refugees to integrate into work faster. Therefore, both refugees and people helping them can approach institutional barriers critically and seek alternative paths to fulfil some institutional requirements.

Limitations and Directions for Future Research

This study set few exclusion criteria, given the fact that we pursued collecting rich data of various refugee experiences, thus engaging a diverse sample. By this, the data provide multiple self-related threats and integration barriers, but impede a greater comparability. In addition, in regards to the sample, two potential biases include a possible over-representation of male participants as well as possibly participants, who may be more proactive or at least open to talk about their experiences, compared to the refugee population overall.

While participants reported about their past, present, and future aspirations, the interviews themselves were cross-sectional in nature, allowing no true inference of causal links between identity threats, coping, and adversarial psychological growth. Thus, while results suggest some temporal and causal links between specific types of identity threats, refugees' coping and threat prevention responses, and potentially emerging growth phenomena, it would be good for future research to address these links in more detail, following up on them both temporally and ideally on a quantitative basis to establish causal relationships.

Additionally, we could only find little proof for refugees re-constructing their identities in terms of concealment. Rather, participants even explicitly highlighted the freedom of speech and of being whom they wanted to be in Germany. In the end, we cannot say for certain whether this impression of little concealment is representative or whether it

may possibly be a methodological artefact. Both interviewers were German, after all, thus representing the population that refugees may be afraid of presenting such concealed parts of their selves to. Given the openness that most participants showed in reporting on their (also negative) experiences, we do not believe this to be a serious concern.

Also, future research should, first, also explore the interplay between various identity motives to unravel how a threat to one motive offers the 'ground' for other identity threats to 'figure' (e.g., how being seen only as a refugee or a foreigner threatened the self-distinctiveness which, in turn, also threatened the sense of belongingness) and, second, how the satisfaction of motives may conflict among refugees (e.g., does securing one's worth also mean sacrificing one's distinctiveness when refugees are seen more positively when succeeded in 'fitting in'?). Moreover, research should explore tensions in more externally-oriented motives (e.g., self-presentation and -verification; cf. Ashforth & Schinoff, 2016).

Also, the present study marks identity threat jujitsu as an influential coping response for identity-protection and as an aid for refugees' adaptation to new environments. However, this response has yet only been scarcely studied, thus calling for further investigation. Additionally, resourcing appears, in line with literature on resourcing in organizational contexts (e.g., Sonenshein, 2014) and identity-work (e.g., Kreiner & Sheep, 2009), as a powerful buffer against future adversities. Thus, both concepts appear to be critical for future considerations of positive identity re-construction, integration, and growth.

Conclusion

By addressing various barriers to refugees' vocational and societal integration, this study provides insights into the complexity and vast influences of identity threats on refugees' career transitions. Further, we highlight the effects of such threats on refugees' identity re-construction. The findings not only present a generalization of existent theories (e.g., Eilam & Shamir, 2005) to the refugee context, but also extend the current scope of the

identity threat theory (Petriglieri, 2011) and adversarial growth theories (e.g., Chan et al., 2016). Unraveling refugees' coping and threat prevention responses to identity threats, we highlight identity threat jujitsu and resourcing as critical, marking both as potentially essential for refugees to rebuild their lives and careers in Germany. Further, we provide insights into how the refugees overcome adversities awaiting them in their host countries, especially by actively identifying their options as well as turning obstacles into opportunities. Given refugees' unique situation, growth also occurred from savoring the small things in life, even when the refugees were unable to re-enter their former professions. With its implications, this line of research is relevant for refugees' working lives, educators supporting refugee integration, career counselors, potential employers, policy makers, and host country societies overall.

Table 1

Demographics of Study Participants According to Order of Interview Dates (N = 31)

#	Participant[+]	Age	Country of origin	Gender	Time spent in Germany[a]	Time since work permit receipt[a]	Remaining permitted residence in Germany[a]
1	Aman	40	Afghanistan	Male	3Y 11M	2Y 7M[d]	Unlimited
2	Hamit	29	Syria	Male	0Y 10M	N/A[e]	N/A[e]
3	Banu	39	Syria	Female	0Y 8M	0Y 4M	N/A[e]
4	Bassam	18	Syria	Male	0Y 11M	0Y 5M	N/A[e]
5	Nabil	38	Libya	Male	1Y 7M	N/A[e]	0Y 2M[f]
6	Rasin	33	Syria	Male	3Y 9M	2Y 6M	0Y 7M
7	Issam	23	Afghanistan	Male	7Y 3M	6Y 2M	German passport
8	Dakhil	25	Syria	Male	1Y 9M[c]	0Y 4M	2Y 3M[g]
9	Xhamil	19	Kosovo	Male	1Y 9M	N/A[e]	0Y 3M[g]
10	Tahir	24	Syria	Male	1Y 3M	0Y 6M	1Y 6M
11	Qabel	28	Syria	Male	1Y 11M	1Y 5M	1Y 6M
12	Karim	30	Syria	Male	2Y 1M	N/A[e]	1Y 1M[g]
13	Said	36	Syria	Male	2Y 2M	1Y 11M	1Y 0M[g]
14	Zahra	33	Syria	Female	1Y 7M	1Y 6M	0Y 0,4M[g]
15	Zarif	26	Syria	Male	1Y 4M	0Y 2M	1Y 0M[g]
16	Yaver	32	Syria	Male	1Y 5M	N/A[e]	1Y 0M[g]
17	Sami	23	Afghanistan	Male	1Y 6M	0Y 5M	0Y 1M
18	Djamila	28	Syria	Female	1Y 4M	0Y 3M	2Y 9M
19	Sharif	31	Syria	Male	1Y 3M	0Y 3M	2Y 9M
20	Memnun	28	Syria	Male	1Y 6M	1Y 4M	1Y 8M
21	Sabri	25	Syria	Male	1Y 8M	1Y 8M	1Y 4M
22	Zafer	24	Syria	Male	1Y 4M	1Y 2M	1Y 10M
23	Nasir	25	Syria	Male	1Y 5M	1Y 1M	0Y 4M
24	Burhan	26	Syria	Male	1Y 5M	1Y 1M	1Y 11M
25	Hilal	22	Syria	Male	1Y 9M	1Y 6M	1Y 6M
26	Salim	29	Iraq	Male	11Y 5M	9Y 3M	Unlimited
27	Jannah	27	Iraq	Female	7Y 6M	7Y 1M	Unlimited
28	Majana	35	Ghana	Female	2Y 4M	1Y 0M	1Y 8M
29	Rakia	22	Syria	Female	1Y 6M	1Y 1M	1Y 11M
30	Baqer[b]	31	Syria	Male	1Y 0M	0Y 3M	0Y 5M
31	Gulalai[b]	27	Syria	Female	1Y 0M	0Y 11M	0Y 0,1M

Note. [+] Actual names have been replaced by pseudonyms to protect the participants' anonymity. [a] At time of interview. [b] Visa holder. [c] Estimated maximum time spent in Germany at the time of interview. [d] Estimated maximum time since work permit receipt at the time of interview. [e] No data available. [f] Time of residence permit receipt; no data available on date of residence permit expiry. [g] Maximum foreseeable residence at the time of interview.

Table 2

Codes and Representative Quotes of Identified Themes

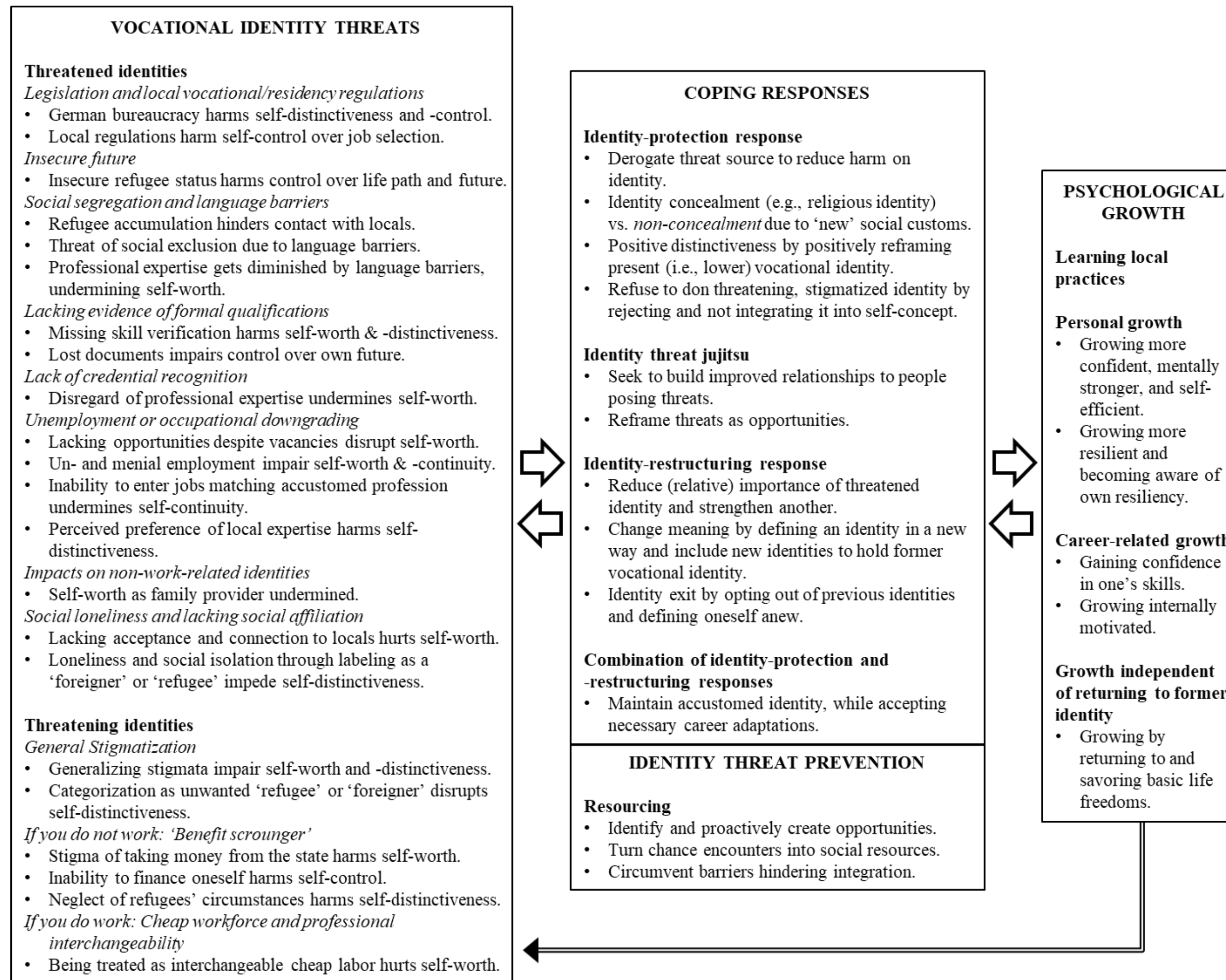
Main themes	Sub-themes	Codes and representative quotes
Vocational Identity Threats Threatened identities	Legislation and local vocational/ residence regulations	**Self-distinctiveness under threat:** For example, in the [personal] interview. ... I'm not a liar! ... If they won't accept this [my case], ... it'd be so bad. ... It's totally crazy. **(Sami, 23)**. **Self-control under threat:** [I want to do] dentistry, ... but it's more difficult here ... with the bureaucracy ... I think, ... we're just not used to it. ... I think, it's more relaxed [in Syria], everything's a little bit structured, but not as structured as here. **(Nasir, 25)**. **Self-control under threat:** It's so bad, when thinking about potentially having to go back to Afghanistan. ... Why should I go back? I don't want to go! I don't want to see my country where ... my little brother died, where my father died. I'm not going back. **(Sami, 23)**. **Self-control under threat:** The clerk responsible for me at the immigration office told me: 'No, you can't go to school. Maybe you'll be deported [back to the Iraq]. My request [to go to school and learn German] was directly rejected. **(Salim, 29)**.
	Insecure future	**Self-control under threat:** [The insecurities here in Germany] are why ... I want to work as much as I can, finish my studies, and save money. **(Rasin, 33)**. **Self-control under threat:** Back then, I had many thoughts running through my head, sometimes fears, sometimes worries about my family; about ... what will happen to my family. ... I was afraid that it [family reunion] wouldn't work and that I would have to live separated from my family. I was afraid, because I didn't have any concrete information on how [matters] work. **(Said, 36)**.
	Social segregation and language barriers	**Self-worth under threat:** In the last year, I was very afraid. I was afraid because of my language and of how to deal with others [Germans]. ... [Learning German] is very important. The most important thing to my mind. First comes the language [..., it's] the key. The earlier, the better. **(Said, 36)**. **Self-continuity under threat:** In Afghanistan, we did everything [computer programming] in English, but here, it's in German. All the installations are in German. It's difficult to understand ... To start working, I ... need to know how to name everything in German ... If you want to work in IT [in Germany], you have to know both English and German. **(Aman, 40)**. **Self-control under threat:** We don't have any real contact with Germans. The problem is that where we live, many other foreigners do as well. ... You don't really find Germans here. ... There aren't many opportunities to speak with them. **(Said, 36)**.
	Lacking evidence of formal qualifications	**Self-distinctiveness under threat:** There was a new law [in Syria] that when students were done with their study they had to go to the army. Only then would they receive the certificates of their study or work. I didn't receive mine, as I didn't have the confirmation of the army. ... So, I came here without any. I can't work without certificates. I have to start all over. **(Dakhil, 25)**.
	Lack of credential recognition	**Self-control under threat:** I worked in a telecommunication company. ... I have a Higher National Diploma in Computing and Business Application. ... I'm thinking of continuing in IT. ... That's what I'm looking for here in Germany [..., but] I have to see if my degree is accepted or not. ... The system here in Germany is different to our system in Syria. **(Yaver, 32)**.
	Unemployment and occupational downgrading	**Self-worth under threat:** In Afghanistan, I've worked in two firms. Here, for two years already, I'm unemployed. That's really boring. ... If you've worked your entire life, not to work for two years is really boring. **(Aman, 40)**.
	Impacts of non-work related identities	**Self-worth under threat:** I think that life is, will not be easy. It will be hard. ... I have to work, I have to [support] my family. I must work as soon as possible, find work, but I have to wait, because first I have to visit a language course [before being able to work]. After the language course, I want to work immediately, look for work [immediately]. **(Karim, 30)**. **Self-continuity under threat:** My friends in Syria will be finished with their studies, [when I restart in Germany]. I feel really bad about it. If I were in Syria now, ... I'd be finished next year. And in Germany? What do I do? Nothing. I'm learning the language. ... Next year, I'm 23 years old. When I think about what I've done in these years, it's just irrelevant things. I studied informatics for one year, went to school, learned violin for a year. **(Rakia, 22)**.
	Social loneliness and lacking social affiliation	**Self-distinctiveness under threat:** I have my family in Syria, and I write to them all the time. But sometimes, I can't reach them by phone. And I get afraid, and I can't get over the fear. [And when I fear for them] I just can't stay at school. Really, I can't stay there.

		[But they tell me at school:] 'You must [go to school, no matter what]! That's not how it works in Germany'. **(Tahir, 24)**. **<u>Self-worth and -distinctiveness under threat:</u>** In the past, she [my wife] had great fear. She thought that she wouldn't get along with the people [local Germans]. Especially, she was afraid because of wearing a headscarf. You hear stories and the people exaggerate a bit. So, she thought that when she goes onto the street, the people will look at her in fear. **(Said, 36)**.
Vocational Identity Threats **Threatening identities**	General stigmatization	**<u>Self-worth and -distinctiveness under threat</u>:** Once in the bus, a man said to me: 'Don't touch me!' even though I didn't do anything. He kept on saying: 'Don't touch me, if you dare to do so, I'll punch you!', but I didn't do anything. ... I think he was afraid of refugees. ... It's sad. ... Why? I'm a human being and ... no terrorist. **(Qabel, 28)**. **<u>Self-distinctiveness under threat</u>:** Many people say that refugees don't want to integrate themselves, but when we try to integrate ourselves, we're given a hard time. **(Said, 36)**. **<u>Self- distinctiveness under threat:</u>** It's too difficult to find an apartment ... I found many apartments, but when I applied and went to an appointment, and the owners saw me, the first sentence [was: 'Are] you [from the] job center?' ... He said: 'I'm sorry, I can't take you'. **(Yaver, 32)**.
	'Benefit scrounger'	**<u>Self-distinctiveness under threat</u>:** Many people want to work. I've seen many people, who have a work permit, but cannot ... work. ... I've talked to many refugees and 90% don't have any work, they're here without any employment. And when many people have a work permit, but no job, it's difficult. ... Many people have to work as a cleaner, or in a restaurant, and that is tough. ... If I work, I can earn 800€ or 1.000€ [a month]. Why shouldn't I work? Why should I sit at home and wait for 350€ a month? **(Aman, 40)**.
	Cheap workforce and professional interchangeability	**<u>Self-distinctiveness under threat</u>:** The work qualifications that foreigners have are just as good as those of Germans. Some Germans underestimate what we can do. There are many people who are highly qualified and don't resemble what Germans think of foreigners. **(Nabil, 38)**.
Coping Responses to Identity Threats	Identity-protection response	**<u>Identity derogation</u>:** Yes, really. For me personally, I find the difficulties here in Germany to be worthless in contrast to what I've experienced in Syria. Really. **(Gulalai, 27)**. **<u>Identity concealment</u>:** - **<u>Positive distinctiveness</u>:** I love to be a carpenter. I love this work. Why? I don't know, my father has been working as a carpenter and so do I. You can calculate and do so much more. **(Tahir, 24)**. **<u>Refuse to don threatening stigmatized identity</u>:** When people come from Afghanistan or another country to Germany, they don't know the culture. ... Germans have a European culture, but I have lived ... in England. That's also Europe. I know the culture, I can live here. **(Sami, 23)**.
	Identity threat jujitsu	**<u>Seeking to build improved relationships to people posing threats</u>:** While the Arabic culture is very important to me, the German culture appeals to me. When having German friends, I'd [get used to this culture and] live according to it. When I'm around Arabs, I stick to my own culture. There's no pressure here ..., one has many contacts of different cultures. ... You can choose which to respond to depending on whom you're around. **(Karim, 30)**; Everyone [here] knows me, because I'm working for the [city as a translator and in social work] for nearly six to eight months now. ... Germans, Arabs, Afghanis, ... everybody knows me. ... It's important to me that others understand me, ... that all people in the city know me; that I'm a good guy. ... I help [them], this is so important to me. ... They also trust me. **(Sami, 23)**. **<u>Reframing threats as opportunities</u>:** One shouldn't be afraid of the future. ... You don't know what will happen tomorrow. ... It's better to continue doing what you're doing. So, keep on doing it like that, don't be afraid. ... I've never imagined to be here in Germany or anywhere else, to study, do this and that. You just do it like that right now. Because you never know where you find yourself in a year. Maybe you're somewhere totally else doing something that you can't imagine right now. **(Issam, 23)**.
	Identity-restructuring response	**<u>Changing (relative) importance</u>:** And I'm already a medical specialist, however, my certificates aren't being recognized. ... I've got to do it all from the beginning. Now, I work as an assistant. ... I don't care though. ... I have work, ... I don't care what I earn. It doesn't matter. ... I'm a foreigner and I'm in Germany for eleven months. Everything will happen at its proper time. People who work will achieve everything. That's how it is. **(Baqer, 31)**. **<u>Changing meaning</u>:** I've felt like 'I'm good'. It makes me feel good having the chance to help others. At first, [refugees] wanted to give me a reward for my translation service, but I didn't want that. I told them that I won't take money from them as I'm a refugee as well and I've learned the language well, but in case that I hadn't had that skill, I'd need this kind of help myself. Because this could happen to me, or my brother, or my sister as well. **(Bassam, 18)**.

		Identity exit: It's a bit, or maybe too late to change my work. Still, I'm searching for an education as a mechatronics engineer or industry mechanics. ... I think that's the future in Germany (**Nasir, 25**); I'm thinking about becoming a banker. ... I've heard from many, who've already stayed in Germany for some time that it's a good job here. (**Yaver, 32**).
	Combination of identity-protection and -restructuring responses	It wouldn't have been a problem for me to work in another field. The main thing was to find work ... and then decide in peace. ... I would've worked at a supermarket, I told my wife that I'm willing to do any kind of job. ... I looked for work, no matter what kind. ... With time, I was sure to find work as a pediatrician. ... I wouldn't have had a problem working as a baker. ... I've thought about working right now, earning money, and to decide about whatever happens later. (**Baqer, 31**).
Resourcing	Identifying and proactively creating opportunities	I'll do professional B2 [independent user language level]. It takes four months, but it's better. ... It's B2, but with work-related vocabulary. ... It's more difficult than the normal B2 language course, but it's better for an education. ... I have to learn the words either way, ... so why not directly from the start? (**Burhan, 26**); I work in part-time so that I have enough time to do training courses for further education and to demonstrate my skills. ... I just started taking exams. (**Said, 36**).
	Turning chance social encounters into social resources	One day, [Sarah] called me for a translation. Since then, we've been in contact. ... I got to know about her project [non-profit association]. ... I really liked to be part of it. ... I can speak more German, get to know people. (**Zarif, 26**).
	Circumventing barriers hindering integration	I don't learn German to receive language certificates ..., but for myself. I want to be able to talk to Germans and have contacts. (**Zafer, 24**).
Indications of Psychological Growth	Personal growth	One experiences something new every day. ... You've got to do it all by yourself. ... I had to begin planning. When will I do this, how do I proceed in life? ... You slowly get accustomed to it. You have to manage everything that happens. ... That's ... how life is, a process, you know? In regards to what you want, it depends on what you want to achieve. ... You want to have a reward, a solution, right? ... That's what I've learned. ... If you really want something, you can achieve it. ... You've got to give it your best. ... Even if it doesn't work sometimes, ... continue! ... Then you can manage it tomorrow, or the next time. Every time you fall, you have to get back up. (**Issam, 23**).
	Career-related growth	[Because of my work,] I can say that I'm capable of doing something. When I'd have much time, but no work and no studies, then that wouldn't be good for me. [… It's important that] the people [Germans] see that the refugees are able to work and do something good for others. ... My life here and my work give me hope for being in this new country. ... Work for me means to start over new. ... It completes my life. (**Hamit, 29**); I have the feeling that I can do it to a 100 percent! The experiences that I've gathered have and are now helping me, [….] both at my current work with refugees and while searching for work. ... It weren't just the certificates, but my practical experiences that played a major role. ... I've learned so much about ... how life works here in Germany. Also at work, I've learned so much from my colleagues. (**Rasin, 33**).
	Growth independent of returning to former identity	In Afghanistan, one cannot be free-spoken. ... It's a different country. ... It's not allowed to see women outside. ... For me, that's totally crazy. ... In Germany, everybody sits down [outside] and drinks coffee. I think this is really good! [I want to] start a new life. (**Sami, 23**).

Figure 1

Sources of Vocational Identity Threats, Coping Responses, Identity Threat Prevention, and Indications of Psychological Growth



CHAPTER 3:
"WHEN YOU TRY, AND TRY, AND TRY AND DON'T PROGRESS": STAKEHOLDERS' PERSPECTIVES ON REFUGEES' SELF-REGULATION DURING JOB SEARCH

This chapter is based on

Wehrle, K.[a], Klehe, U.-C.[a], Kira, M.[b], & Häusser, J. A.[a] (under review). "When you try, and try, and try and don't progress": Stakeholders' perspectives on refugees' self-regulation during job search.

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Abstract

A successful job search requires self-regulation – the setting, planning, sustained pursuit, and reflection of clear, attainable, and relevant job-search goals. And yet, self-regulation may fail. Past research has identified cases of underregulation during job search, where job seekers fail to show sufficient self-regulatory actions. Instances of mis- and overregulation are less studied, as are contextual factors that may foster all three types of self-regulation failures. This qualitative study with 38 refugees, 27 refugee support workers, and 37 employers in Germany addresses refugees' self-regulation during job search. We decipher different self-regulation failure types in refugees' job search and stakeholders' (differing) interpretations of these failures, and we highlight how the specifics of self-regulation during job search depend on the context. We reveal how refugees' lack of awareness of the local institutionalized social scripts particularly fostered misregulation, how the resulting lack of job-search progress inhibited refugees' self-regulation even further, and how self-regulation failures in one self-regulation phase influenced failures in other phases. Different stakeholders could struggle to recognize the reasons for, or attributed different reasons to, refugees' self-regulation failures. Particularly, refugees' misregulation and forced career inaction could appear as underregulation to others, while refugees' actual underregulation often developed as learned behavior across time. Finally, some refugees overregulated in response to insecurities about high expectations and the foreign cultural context. We suggest that future research could address the full breadth of self-regulation failures and their interrelations and we discuss means for organizational and institutional stakeholders to promote refugees' self-regulation upon resettlement.

Keywords: job search, misregulation, refugees, self-regulation failures, underregulation

Introduction

> When you come to Germany [as a refugee], is it even possible to enter highly qualified work? … It's frustrating how [refugees'] hopes … clash with reality. (Beth, job coach)

Searching for a job is an arduous process filled with setbacks and no guarantees for success (Wanberg et al., 2020). To increase their likelihood of success, job seekers need to set goals, plan how to reach them, sustain and adapt their job-search actions, monitor the overall process, and possibly adjust their goals. In short, they need to self-regulate (Carver & Scheier, 1981; Van Hooft et al., 2013). But self-regulation may fail; the self-regulation and job-search literatures have identified underregulation as a central cause for job-search problems, as people fail to show sufficient self-regulatory actions (Carver & Scheier, 1981; Friese et al., 2019). In addition, job seekers may misregulate, as they misdirect their efforts based on false assumptions about themselves and the environment (Baumeister & Heatherton, 1996; Carver & Scheier, 1981) or they may overregulate, as they excessively regulate themselves (Janoff-Bulman & Sheikh, 2011; Roberton et al., 2012).

Self-regulation and its outcomes depend on both the person and the context in which they act (Porath & Bateman, 2006; Wanberg et al., 2012). Yet, empirical insights on how job-search context influences job seekers' self-regulation and actual behavior is elusive (Bernheim et al., 2015; Van Hooft et al., 2021; Wanberg et al., 2020). For instance, how does context influence job seekers' self-regulatory goals, strategies, and outcomes? And, how do job seekers engage in the job-search process when lacking crucial context-specific resources (e.g., social networks) for its success (Wanberg et al., 2020)? Finally, how do stakeholders involved in the job search perceive and attribute different types of self-regulation failures?

We seek to address these questions by contextualizing job search in the refugee[7] experience. Given the influence that the context can have on refugees' labor market

[7] We will use the term 'refugee' referring to both registered refugees and to asylum seekers whose cases are still undecided (UNHCR, 1951).

integration and career progression (Wehrle et al., 2019), targeting job-seekers' self-regulation in this extreme situation offers an illuminating vantage point to study how present and past contexts may shape, resource, and inhibit self-regulation during job search (Van Hooft et al., 2021). This is especially the case as, after their forced displacement, refugees meet unknown cultural, institutional, and organizational scripts of the new country (i.e., implicit embedded norms, structures, and expectations for understanding work contexts, roles, and behaviors; Gioia & Poole, 1984) with little or no choice or preparation. Refugees may, thus, face extra challenges and constraints during job search, as the local scripts may substantially differ from the scripts that refugees learned at home and that have molded their expectations and behaviors – a mismatch that may affect refugees' self-regulation and future employment (Van Hooft et al., 2021). Our first research question is: *How does the job-search context in general and refugees' unfamiliarity with it in particular influence refugees' self-regulation?*

Besides shaping refugees' self-regulation, differences in the job-related behavioral scripts of refugees' countries of origin and the receiving country may also shape locals' interpretations of refugees' actions, which may, in turn, impact refugees' job-search success. In other words, behaviors that may have been adequate at home may appear as 'off the mark' in the new country. Yet, research is scarce on different stakeholders' interpretations of job seekers' self-regulation efforts and failures. Therefore, our second research question is: *How do different stakeholders interpret refugees' self-regulated job search and, particularly, their self-regulation failures?* As we explore this question, we trace some of the consequences that the interpretations of those supporting or hiring refugees have for refugees' integration.

To arrive at a fuller picture of how context influences self-regulation, we integrate individual, organizational, and institutional perspectives by interviewing refugees, support

workers[8], and employers[9]. At the outset, our aim was to understand refugees' self-regulation demands and efforts during job search and how different stakeholders interpreted these. Soon, we noticed refugees' (actual, but also perceived) self-regulation failures as a core theme and decided to explore this topic further. To target our research questions, we follow the calls for more qualitative self-regulation and job-search research (e.g., Pernice, 1996; Wanberg et al., 2012), particularly among the unique job-seeker sample of refugees (Wanberg et al., 2020). We draw upon narrative interviews and use an interpretive methodology well suited to capture and describe participants' lived experiences in a specific context (Sandberg, 2005).

We offer four contributions. First, we enrich self-regulation research, as we offer new insights into self-regulation failures. Despite decades of research, understanding why people fail to self-regulate is still elusive (see Friese et al., 2019), and we trace the reasons for self-regulation failures beyond insufficient willpower. To date, underregulation has dominated self-regulation research (Carver & Scheier, 1981; Friese et al., 2019). Little research has, however, addressed misregulation (Baumeister & Heatherton, 1996) or overregulation (Roberton et al., 2012). Examining under-, mis-, and overregulation, we reveal a breadth of self-regulation 'failure' types and their reasons. Analyzing refugees' self-regulation failures in the self-regulation phases of job search (Van Hooft et al., 2013), we present the challenges and dynamics specific to each phase and show how these challenges and dynamics give rise to (actual or perceived) self-regulation failures.

In doing so, we, second, bridge research on self-regulation and institutional scripts of expected behaviors and normalized social structures (Barley & Tolbert, 1997); we show how context-specific institutionalized social scripts shape people's self-regulation failure ascriptions. We explore what diverse job search-relevant stakeholders 'see' and 'do not see'

[8] Support workers work in support agencies that offer frontline services to refugees, mediate between the government, communities, employers, and refugees, and provide employers with information and referrals.
[9] We will use the term 'employer' to refer to employers and employer representatives.

regarding refugees' self-regulation efforts during job search, revealing how their individual perspectives allow each stakeholder to understand only a part of why refugees succeed or fail to enter the workforce and integrate.

Third, we enrich job-search research, as we respond to recent calls (Van Hooft et al., 2021; Wanberg et al., 2020) for job-search insights on refugees. Most job-search research has focused on insiders acting in a familiar context (Duberley et al., 2006) and the few studies addressing structural outsiders have focused on voluntary outsiders who enter the new context prepared and with resources (Zikic & Klehe, 2021). So far, refugees' self-regulation process during job search and how it links to their career outcomes (e.g., un- or menial employment; De Jong, 2019) have been largely unexplored. While many people face challenges and frustrations during job search, refugees' distinct situations may aggravate these challenges and frustrations and limit their re-employment prospects. Thus, to the best of our knowledge, we offer the first study exploring involuntary outsiders' (i.e., refugees') job search through the lens of a self-regulation framework. By this, we reveal refugees' experiences and the context-specific dynamics unfolding in the job-search phases (Van Hooft et al, 2013).

Fourth, our study has implications for research-informed practice on refugees' labor market integration. We unpack systemic challenges that impair refugees' integratory efforts (Lee et al., 2020), showing, amongst others, how integration policies and practices designed to empower refugees can, at times, harm their self-regulation and job search. In addition, this study points out how misconceptions about refugees' integration efforts may come about.

Theoretical Framing

Searching for (re-)employment requires people to *self-regulate*, that is, to engage in a largely self-managed, dynamic, and goal-oriented process (Kanfer et al., 2001). This process unfolds in four sequential phases that differ in their volitional focus and the mindset needed (Van Hooft et al., 2013). First, job seekers need to clarify which feasible and motivating goals they seek to strive for and to set the goals, respectively (Achtziger & Gollwitzer, 2007; Van

Hooft et al., 2013). Second, they need to plan how to implement these goals by formulating a strategy for goal attainment and planning the actions needed. Third, they have to initiate and sustain goal-directed behaviors by controlling their attention, thoughts, emotions, motivation, and actions, and by shielding and sustaining their goals amidst obstacles and distractions. Fourth, when pursuing their goals, they need to evaluate their behaviors' effectiveness and career progress (Heckhausen & Gollwitzer, 1987); they need to reflect on their efforts, assess their successfulness, and conclude what can be learned from this realization. This informs future goal setting, strategy formulation, and goal pursuit (Achtziger & Gollwitzer, 2007).

Importantly, the self-regulation process is fragile and can fall prey to failures in each phase (Baumeister & Heatherton, 1996). *Underregulation* happens when people fail to exert sufficient self-control (Friese et al., 2019). Job seekers may not set clear goals, fail to plan or exert enough effort to achieve goals or to reflect on actions and their consequences. Yet, job seekers may also *misregulate* by acting on false assumptions about themselves and the world. They may misinterpret the content and/or relevance of information, misdirect their efforts or reflection, or adopt suboptimal priorities (Baumeister & Heatherton, 1996). Finally, job seekers may *overregulate*, that is, excessively regulate themselves or focus too much on what they should not do (Janoff-Bulman & Sheikh, 2011; Roberton et al., 2012). That said, research on mis- and overregulation is scarce in career- and work settings (for conceptual exceptions, see Côté et al., 2006; Grandey, 2000). Notably, some scholars have questioned the existence of overregulation, rather seeing its claimed cases as misregulation (Heatherton & Baumeister, 1996), and the few studies addressing overregulation have focused exclusively on overregulation in terms of emotional (Roberton et al., 2012) or moral regulation (Janoff-Bulman & Sheikh, 2011).

To self-regulate, people derive information from the context on possible barriers, affordances, and resources needed for goal attainment (Porath & Bateman, 2006). While most job-search research has studied workers operating in familiar labor markets (Duberley et al.,

2006), scholars have begun targeting job seekers entering labor markets different from those they are used to (Zikic & Klehe, 2021). Needing to understand and find ways to navigate the implicit rules, expected behaviors, and normalized structures that govern the context (Barley & Tolbert, 1997) increases self-regulatory demands (Chiswick et al., 2003). This may hamper job seekers' self-regulation and jeopardize self-regulation's benefits (Zikic & Klehe, 2021).

For refugees, self-regulation is particularly challenging yet critical for labor market integration (Wehrle et al., 2019). Refugees' self-regulation not only fosters their employment and integration success, but also links to how people behave towards them, as recognizing refugees' integration efforts increases locals' willingness to support them (Böhm et al., 2018). Yet, scholars have illustrated that refugees suffer from career inaction (Wehrle et al., 2019) and from interpersonal difficulties at work (Khan-Gökkaya & Mösko, 2021), all of which may induce negative stereotypes about refugees that may then color locals' interpretations of refugees' behaviors (Stephan & Stephan, 2000). During their job search, refugees may possibly exert too little effort to integrate (underregulating), or they may lack local knowledge and misregulate when exerting effort. They may also overregulate in an attempt to make no mistakes. Refugees' efforts may not suffice, may not be visible to and noticed by local stakeholders, or may seem misplaced or irrelevant. All of this may impact refugees' job search and labor market integration (see Ohbuchi et al., 2004; Wagner & Heatherton, 2015).

Methods

Study Context

Germany is one of the primary refugee receiving countries in Europe (UNHCR, 2022). Asylum applicants may be allowed to stay via various residence permits (e.g., full asylum or temporary subsidiary protection until a case is re-decided), and receive a permanent residency after having been in Germany for five years, or, if well integrated linguistically and economically, possibly after three years (Federal Office for Migration and Refugees, 2022). If an asylum application is rejected, the applicant is permitted a tolerated stay until they are

forced to leave Germany to either their country of origin or a country passed during their flight. Legal objections often cause temporary suspensions of deportation, or a status revision. When registered as asylum applicants, refugees obtain social welfare and a work permit ideally after three months (European Commission, 2016). The government offers organized and funded integration practices (e.g., language support and work access during the asylum process) and incentivizes employers to hire refugees. A large network of multi-partied institutions and organizations enables refugee integration, including employment and support agencies, social-welfare and non-profit organizations, language schools, the public sector, and volunteers (Hesse et al., 2019). Yet, the labor market is characterized by bureaucratic regulations, a high vocational specificity, and high demands for education (Hillmert, 2006) and requires formal qualifications and good language skills, which, for refugees, can become formidable integration hurdles (Trines, 2017).

Sample, Research Design, and Data Analysis

In terms of research philosophy, we adopted an interpretive qualitative approach (Sandberg, 2005). To ensure study rigor via a valid and reliable representation of participants' lived experiences, we followed Sandberg's (2005) guidelines to fulfill criteria of truth constellations in interpretive research. We adhered to ethical standards of the German Psychological Society to prevent participant distress and to protect anonymity.

Our data originate from semi-structured interviews conducted between 2019 and 2021[10] with 38 refugees, 27 refugee support workers, and 37 employers. To reinforce communicative validity and refugees' trust in our research, we established contact with refugees via support workers and people whom they trusted (Sandberg, 2005). We recruited support worker and employer participants via social service organizations, cold calling, and snowballing.

[10] The interview protocols can be obtained from the first author upon request.

To gain a comprehensive picture of and reveal factors influencing refugees' job search in Germany, we did not restrict our samples, but included a diverse set of refugees (in terms of, e.g., country of origin, education, age, time in Germany, or legal status; see Table 3), support workers (in terms of, e.g., work experiences in the refugee sector; see Table 4), and employers (in terms of, e.g., number of or desire to hire refugees; see Table 5) across both former West and East Germany. All refugees but one[11] held a valid work permit and sought to enter or had entered the labor market. Their country of origin, gender, age, education, and residence status were typical for refugees in Germany (Stoewe, 2017; Trines, 2017). We interviewed support workers from governmental and non-governmental agencies, and employers of businesses and public-sector organizations.

At the start of each interview, we received participants' informed consent and emphasized their participation as voluntary with the explicit opportunity to withdraw anytime during the interview or after. We notified them that they did not have to answer any questions if they felt uncomfortable or did not want to share experiences, yet none voiced such worries. To strengthen communicative validity, we openly shared with every participant our intention to understand different stakeholders' perspectives in refugee integration, and we captured participants' stories through dialogical interviews. To foster pragmatic validity, we asked follow-up questions in the interviews, thus embedding participants' statements in concrete situations (see Sandberg, 2005). The interviews were conducted in German, with one English exception, and were recorded and transcribed verbatim. All transcripts were anonymized. Descriptive quotes were translated into English, and we made sure to protect their inherent meaning. The mean interview duration was 61 min. for refugees, 89 min. for support workers, and 67 min. for employers. We offered compensation of 10€/h for each interview.

[Please insert Tables 3-5 about here]

[11] One refugee, Abadi, had his work permit confiscated after three years due to an impending deportation.

We conducted the data analysis with NVIVO11 and relied on the thematic analysis approach (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2022). We employed both theory-informed (i.e., deductive) and open (i.e., inductive) coding and proceeded through five iterative steps. We (1) familiarized ourselves with our data by transcribing all interviews, reading and re-reading the data, and taking memos. While our initial aim was to study refugees' self-regulation in context, participants offered rich insights into refugees' self-regulation challenges and failures. We soon recognized refugees' (actual and perceived) self-regulation failures as a core theme. Deciding to explore this topic further, we (2) adopted a theory-informed coding frame thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2022) to organize the data under the themes of under-, mis-, and overregulation (Baumeister & Heatherton, 1996; Roberton et al., 2012). In these three main themes, we then (3) coded data openly relating to our research questions and generated initial codes that closely reflected participants' language (e.g., 'not setting career goals'). Here, we identified and coded contextual demands as reasons for self-regulation failures and stakeholders' interpretations of self-regulation failures. While this step was data-driven, we noticed that the initial codes closely related to the self-regulation phases in job search (Van Hooft et al., 2013), and we (4) organized them accordingly. In other words, we organized the initial codes within each main theme (i.e., under-, mis-, and overregulation) according to the four self-regulation phases. These phases constituted our internally coherent, consistent, and distinctive sub-themes (e.g., 'in goal setting'). We finally (5) checked that the data extracts fitted the theoretically informed main themes. To present our analysis results, we joined the data into a thematic structure (Table 6) and depicted them as a model (Figure 2).

Throughout the analysis, we established communicative validity and transgressive validity (Sandberg, 2005), as we strove for coherence in our interpretation of participants' experiences by considering how their statements aligned with or departed from the overall patterns and themes in the data. We were attentive to tensions, ambiguities, and contradictions

in participants' experiences (e.g., different views on reasons for failures) and open to discoveries. We revisited coding and refined the analysis when new patterns emerged.

To secure study credibility (Pratt et al., 2020), the first author analyzed and coded all interviews, with the team being involved in all analysis steps to develop and unify the coding (see Braun & Clarke, 2022). Disagreements (e.g., the richness of a quote for, and/or its fit to, a sub- or main theme) were debated and resolved, and the final data model (see Figure 2) was reached through discussions within the research team. To achieve an intersubjective judgement on our knowledge claims, we discussed our findings with scholars inside and outside of the team and, to ensure transferability, we offer a "thick" data presentation below.

[Please insert Table 6 and Figure 2 about here]

Research Team

The team consists of three researchers living in Germany and one in the U.S., all with years of experiences living in countries and cultures different to their own. While we do not hold actual experiences as refugees, one team member's family history was shaped by internal displacement. All researchers have experience in the refugee resettlement sector and/or engage in the refugee research field. We thus understand the challenges faced by refugees during job search and particularly the uniqueness of the German resettlement and job-search system; knowledge that enabled us to understand the stakeholders' narratives. To attain an interpretative awareness (see Sandberg, 2005), we were aware of our subjectivity as researchers (i.e., our disciplinary, theoretical, and methodological perspectives; our privileged positions in the society), and we were attentive to how this may guide our interpretations.

Findings

> They [refugees] initially think they come here, have studied [at home], have to go through the mills of bureaucracy, and then can get off to a normal start in Germany. ...

That doesn't work. I don't think they imagined it being so arduous. (Judi[emp, 12])

All three stakeholder groups stressed the importance of refugees having a goal and motivation to work, and agreed that "what's very important ... [is] that they [refugees] are able to stand on their own two feet, to get away from state assistance" (Carolin[emp]). Yet, the data showed refugees failing to self-regulate; their job search was challenged in several ways, increasing the risk of inadequate self-regulation. We identified that refugees' self-regulation failures unfold in the four phases of self-regulated job search (Van Hooft et al., 2013), that is, in refugees' (1) career-related goal setting, (2) planning to attain these goals, (3) ongoing goal pursuit, and (4) reflections (see Figure 2). In each phase, we decipher how refugees failed to self-regulate, how the stakeholder groups' interpretations of these failures aligned or differed, and we put the failures into context by unraveling how contextual self-regulatory demands in each phase contributed to their emergence. Across our analysis, recurring negative job-search experiences and refugees' conclusions from these experiences undercut their self-regulation.

Importantly, while we focus on self-regulation failures, many refugees did manage to self-regulate, and all stakeholders recounted success stories. In general, besides sharing experiences, each refugee has a unique story:

> There is not 'the refugee'. We have someone who lived in Afghanistan in the village, maybe tilled a few fields. We have highly educated people who have a university degree, … real high-flyers. … There are very different prospects [for each]. (Dina[sup])

Refugees' Underregulation

Refugees' underregulation stemmed from various, sometimes counterintuitive, sources in the four self-regulation phases. Also, stakeholders' perceptions of the degree of refugees' underregulation could differ.

In Goal Setting

[12] The following references will indicate each participant as a ref = refugee, sup = support worker, emp = employer.

Some refugees *did not set career goals*. As Emilia[sup] said: "They aren't motivated [to work]." Unemployed refugees received financial assistance[13]. While, for many, this dependency was hard to bear: "In our culture, it's seen as a great shame to take money from someone without working" (Ayden[ref]), some relied on social benefits and stopped looking for work: "Many people with big families say: 'I get enough money [from the state]. … Child benefits plus unemployment benefits.' … Why should he work?" (Serbast[ref]). Seeing others getting money without working eroded some refugees' motivation to pursue a job, as Gill[emp] said: "He [refugee] told me: 'Why should I work at all when I see my friend not working and still getting money?'" This, though, opposed the local work norms: "I told him: 'But it's not the right way. An education is the right thing to do.' ... He [didn't] see that" (Gill[emp]).

Also, the fact that available salaries often hardly surpassed social welfare eroded refugees' motivation to work and fostered underregulation. Ruth[sup] said: "I'd wish for work to pay off again, also for people in the low-wage sector. … That it still would make a difference whether I [they] work or not."

In addition, many refugees *failed to set specific goals* for their vocational training[14]:

> Often, people only develop a goal for a general professional activity: … 'I want to work, … earn money now.' … But to say: 'I want to qualify myself in this direction and have inquired about the requisites of certain professions', so very specific goals, rarely happen. (Peter[sup])

Thus, rather than making choices that would – in the long run – advance their careers, refugees could get stuck in menial jobs. Such instances could also arise as refugees

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[13] Like all unemployed, unemployed refugees in Germany receive basic social welfare for as long as needed (European Commission, 2016). Yet, German authorities can, and usually do, demand these refugees to take part in free-of-charge language, integration, and job-search training and/or interventions aimed at enhancing their employability, and could, at the time of the study, also temporarily reduce benefits if their clients did not oblige.
[14] Training in a profession with allowance via a dual system of school and on-site work, resulting in accreditation.

compromised on distal goals in favor of more accessible but less attractive alternatives up "to the point where they drop out of vocational training" (Dina[sup]). Dina[sup] explained:

> [It's a question of] how much drive they show when they're here in a factory fairly fast and get 1200€/1400€ net a month with a few shifts. They ... don't see the value of vocational training, where they suddenly have to get by with 400€/500€ a month and perhaps still have to work [in another job]. Many don't see the long term. (Dina[sup])

This was exacerbated through the fact that vocational training was often not propagated as an attractive path in refugee communities. Emilia[sup] said: "They see their friends [work in unskilled work] and [how much] they earn. Why [do] vocational training?"

Thus, many refugees traded distal goals of a desired profession for proximal goals – which clashed with the German labor market's premium placed on vocational specificity and formal education. While this may appear like a lack of aspirations and thus a sign of underregulation to locals, it often denoted goal conflicts between refugees' desires and more fundamental needs such as having to support their family:

> [For them], to earn money is what it's all about. … 'I want to realize myself in my job' comes second. [They think:] 'I have to earn much money so I can pay off my debts to human smugglers. I have to quickly earn money to bring the family here.' (Edith[sup])

Many thus gave up on their aspirations, as any job was better than none: "At first, they accept all [jobs] to survive" (Marcus[sup]). Yet, this motivation was not always visible to locals, and became difficult when it, for instance, fostered illicit work and, with it, misregulation:

> When you're frustrated, you ... look for alternatives. I know many who work illicitly ... saying: 'I'll take the easy way out, I need money, and I can't cope with the job center benefits. I'm now looking for my own way.' (Hanna[sup])

For Georg[emp], such behaviors violated his work ethics and resulted in terminated job contracts: "Illegal work came quickly. But not with me."

Another reason to compromise on distal career goals for quickly available work was

actually a side effect of a legal regulation designed to foster refugees' integration efforts, namely the opportunity to enhance one's residency prospects via gainful employment. Tom[sup] noted: "It's the existential fear of deportation that relates to it [entering work]. … It's not only the financial nature, but also the fear of having to go back." Jaron[ref] said: "If he works, [he] gets a residency, and that's his motivation: ... 'It's not my dream job, but for my residency, I'm motivated to do the job.'"

Finally, *issues beyond their control impeded* refugees *from setting goals*, leading them to trade personal goals with goals dictated by immigration and integration officers and job agencies. Heva[ref] wanted to study, but "the woman [immigration officer] told me: 'We don't need students, we need [people] who work for us manually.'" Also Hanna[sup] noted refugees being "forced into a [job] reorientation" to prepare for jobs beneath their skill level:

> I know many police officers. ... It's suggested [by the job center]: 'With your language level, you must work manually.' ... It's a pity. ... Are these realistic portrayals, or isn't it possible that a police officer can, again, become a police officer?" (Hanna[sup])

Such instances made Serbast[ref] feel distrusted in his abilities: "A [job] counselor isn't supposed to say: 'Stop, no, I don't trust your abilities. You'll fail, don't choose this path."

However, there were also opposite cases where refugees were expected to acquire an education, even when settling for an unskilled job would have been wise. Hanna[sup] explained:

> [Some] just really want to work. They don't fit into the school system. To me it makes sense that they simply work in temporary jobs, trying to get a permanent position. ... [They]'re illiterate. ... I can't get them to B2-[language] level. These are then the job center's expectations where I think he won't make it. ... And why should this be his thing? Why can't he just try to get a permanent job as an unskilled worker? (Hanna[sup])

Relatedly, also refugees' age and age norms played a role. Theo[sup] explained: "Telling someone who is 30-35, or 40 years old [to reorient], it's tough; [to have] that readiness to start all over again", and also many refugees considered themselves too old for training and thus

did not factor training into their goals. Local age norms could also deter refugees' goal setting. Jaron[ref] was ready to change paths, but was deemed too old: "I want to do vocational training and they told me: 'No, you're 30 years old, you can't do it.'"

In Planning

Even when having established a goal, many refugees *did not approach their goal pursuit with a clear plan*. Kalil[ref] noted: "They're being asked in a job interview: 'What is your plan?' and say: 'I don't know.'" Theo[sup] also recognized this:

> Given our [local] ideas: 'I have a goal, I want to achieve something here, I have to do something for it – few have that. … At times, we cattily say: 'When I go on vacation, I prepare more intensively than some who come here and want to spend the rest of their lives here. ... These people haven't only been here for weeks, but years. ... They should know how it works. (Theo[sup])

Kalil[ref] noticed how many refugees *planned their job search haphazardly*: "Many [refugees] just applied. ... Their chances won't be good."

Some refugees *failed to organize* their *goals hierarchically*: "They have many claims and ideas of what they can achieve, yet are less willing to take intermediate steps" (Edith[sup]). Hanna[sup] said: "The motivation to set proximal goals [is lacking]. ... They may set themselves the major goal: Employment or vocational training. But when you ask them how they're going to get there, or what the subgoals are, they falter", and continued: "[They fail to] link the [vocational training] directly to employment, [which would make them] more aware of the goal. ... I don't think everyone is aware that this [training] can be a gateway to work."

In Goal Pursuit

Some refugees *were unmotivated to exert effort* in their job search. For Kalil[ref], refugees who lack motivation could jeopardize success in a job interview: "He [refugee] said: 'If they'll accept me that'd be nice. If not, then that's how it is.' I told him: 'Employers notice that [attitude] and I'm sorry, but I don't think you'll get the job.'" Theo[sup] reported:

> A larger company said: 'Send them down to us, and we'll show them the company, what they can do, to get to know it.' ... It failed greatly. ... Three of the four who were supposed to go slept through it. ... The fourth didn't find the way. (Theo[sup])

Besides this, refugees *underestimated the effort needed* during job search. Marcus[sup] stated: "They apply too little. When they applied at two to three employers, they think: 'Why doesn't he take me?' Well, you have to just apply more. It's not different for the locals."

Some refugees *could not sustain their motivation during job search, or beyond*. Their motivation faltered after having found a job: "They have a hard time to keep an appointment or to be somewhere at 8am. Then, it happens fast: You lose your internship, your introductory traineeship[15], and that was it" (Emilia[sup]). Tom[sup] said: "They really wasted chances, ... lost the motivation once they had reached their goals. ... Keeping the job was the next task."

However, many refugees also, at some point, recognized that they were *not able to shield their original career goals* any longer:

> If I [as a refugee] had goals before, I have to grasp they can't be realized in such a short time anymore, as I have totally different issues: Managing my daily life, not having stress with the others [living in close accommodations]. … Thus, many other goals are put back. (Karl[sup])

Also, factors usually conducive for a fruitful job search could inhibit refugees' self-regulation. Several refugees *relied too much on social support*. Rana[ref] explained refugees' point of view: "It [job search] is tough. The issue is you have to search too much. It's good when someone from an office comes. They find it [job] faster." In various cases, refugees, however, fully handed over the responsibility for their job search to well-meaning volunteers and thus disengaged from their job search: "I have some experience with volunteers offering an all-round carefree package to refugees. Refugees like to use this. They pass on every issue

[15] A preparatory measure that is subject to social insurance contributions and seeks to prepare people who have already decided on a specific occupation for the respective vocational training (see Degler et al., 2017).

to the volunteer" (Alex[sup]). Refugees could also expect job agencies to take over their job search. Nora[sup] said: "They [refugees] assume the job agency takes them by the hand and escorts them to employers. That you call for them, write applications. ... They want to stay here, but others are supposed to do it."

Handing over the job search to others could, however, be detrimental to refugees' job search. Ruth[sup] explained: "I can't just write them [applications], as it'd become clear in the job interview he didn't write them himself." Yet, the authenticity of applications was vital to Florian[emp]: "They [applications] can have mistakes, it's nothing to worry about." Thus, while social support was key, too much reliance on support workers and volunteers came at a cost; it made refugees dependent and could unintentionally undermine their self-regulation. Thea[emp] said: "It's not always to an employee's advantage; ... often, this wrongly understood protective attitude triggers a taker attitude in the refugee" by which "they don't learn" (Emilia[sup]), "give up searching by themselves" (Ruth[sup]), and "feel that they can't manage things" (Nancy[emp]). Serbast[ref] stated: "I know many people who've been here for ten years. They can't read a mail. ... They never want to do anything by themselves. ... They've never been independent." For Serbast[ref], refugees "don't grow self-confident" by overly relying on external help. Carolin[emp] finished: "They [need to] learn to take their lives into their own hands. ... Over-support and over-mothering is wrong and a hindrance to integration."

Also in goal pursuit, *issues beyond their control impeded* refugees *from pursing their goals*. Many were held back by legal regulations and long processing times for residency decisions and work permits: "When someone has found work, you … have to wait a long time [for a permit]. … The manager can't wait. Then, the job goes to someone else" (Ayden[ref]). Dina[sup] said: "At the [winter] season start, there was snow, so someone could have worked at the ski lift. When the permit was issued, the snow was gone." The reasons for this inactivity often remained hidden to outsiders, and refugees had to justify their 'forced' unemployment:

> I had the case of a refugee who would have been apt to do a very qualified job with us.

> … He had his work permit revoked … and was allowed to stay [in Germany] without working. We tried repeatedly [and] he tried with his lawyer to be allowed to work for us. … He wasn't allowed to work for three years and would have had a job with us for a long time. … How can this be? … He'd have been a specialist. ... And he's being asked: 'What have you done for the three years?' … It's crazy. (Elke[emp])

Relatedly, refugees' CVs often indicated gaps in their careers that could be interpreted as showing career underregulation. Halim[ref] said: "If there's a gap, Germans ask you so much about it: 'Why do you have this gap? What did you do there?'" Refugees' potential could be rendered invisible; they could argue for their educational and vocational backgrounds, yet had no credentials to verify them. Hanna[sup] called Esat[ref] "the crane operator who already has 1000 degrees or years of work experience." Esat[ref], however, could not use his training or skill, as his credentials were not recognized:

> We're in Germany for four years now. They [Germans] haven't utilized us and we didn't utilize Germany; [much] unexploited [potential]. … I'm hanging in limbo. I'm a refugee. … I can't change it. … So far, I haven't been able to offer anything. (Esat[ref])

This reduced refugees' competitive position; offering verifiable and gapless records was difficult, yet key to succeeding in a system rewarding consistent career progression. Beth[sup] said: "Refugees rarely have credentials they can send with their applications. So, what they can offer is somehow low compared to what others searching for work in Germany can."

Also, mandatory integration and job-search programs originally designed to foster integration could prevent refugees' goal pursuit. While Alex[sup] "found this [kind of program] very effective, as learning the daily structure is relevant to navigate themselves professionally", several refugees judged the programs to be unhelpful by not fitting to their situations and impairing their job search. Banu[ref] said: "I, repeatedly, go to classes. ... I learn nothing, I get no certificate", a view shared by Emilia[sup]: "They're sent from one to the next. ... It gets boring." Linda[sup] even said: "They're being parked." Serbast[ref] concluded: "The

programs are designed to help us, but they don't. ... They not only block you, but they make you dumb. That's the mistake."

These various instances forced refugees into career inaction and undercut their feelings of efficiency and progress; circumstances that could appear like underregulation to others:

> They [authorities] are delaying. … People have to wait. … We want to settle here in Germany. ... We accepted this country as our country, but the country still hasn't accepted us. … You have nothing to do. Your life is destroyed. (Asif[ref])

In general, refugees' *lives* were severely *uncertain*, and this *impaired the efforts that many could place into the goal pursuit*. Judi[emp] said: "Refugees are terribly afraid in the asylum application process. It takes up an insane amount of their time and energy; time and energy that isn't available to learn German and deal with German labor market requirements." Thus, Sophie[emp] voiced: "You can't even count how many breakdowns we had. ... It puts an extreme strain on people, never knowing whether they'll be allowed to stay." Yet, employers could fail to spot these fears and intervene too late: "It's difficult for us to notice them having a problem outside of work. ... We had one who developed massive mental issues and had to abort his training" (Carolin[emp]). Carolin[emp] said: "Uncertainty hinders development. ... [Their] capacity isn't high, there are more sick days. People are less open, they're worried. These things inhibit you from doing good work. They just struggle, are depressed, frustrated."

Amidst uncertain and recurrent negative situations (e.g., feeling discriminated against, having one's applications rejected without feedback, or being impeded to pursue one's goals), refugees could *underregulate over time*. As Karl[sup] said: "Set goals are no longer pursued if you have too many negative experiences." Nora[sup] described: "When the dissatisfaction rises, you get into a [mental] vicious circle, from which you can no longer get out", as did Serbast[ref]: "When you try, and try, and try and don't progress, you become weak and small." Tahir[ref] explained: "It perhaps manifests itself in their psyche, as they give up on their goal."

In the end, several refugees *gave up their job search*. Having a financial safety net,

they stopped investing in their job search. Asif[ref] said: "People are hopeless and don't want to struggle anymore. … They get money from social [services] and live well. They have [it] settled [in their] minds that they don't want anymore.... When you don't see any hope, you [pause]." Serbast[ref] concluded: "[They] stay jobless. … You're inhibited … When you're so passive, you get mentally ill. When you always run in a circle and can't escape by yourself."

In Reflecting

Several support workers were skeptical about refugees' job-search reflections. Nora[sup] said: "The issue is many *don't reflect*", *or did so too late*: "If I, after two and a half years, realize: 'My language level isn't sufficient', then it's really too late. Then, I've lost two and a half years and that's a real pity" (Nora[sup]).

Some refugees also *failed to learn from feedback*. Trying to get into work fast, they did not react to feedback addressing their skills: "They already got the internship's feedback to have learned too little German. … I say: 'But you've been in the company. You've seen for yourself there's much you don't understand.' … Some don't see this" (Ursula[sup]).

Also, support workers and refugees noted how refugees' *negative self-evaluations* in response to their struggles prevented their progress and fostered underregulation:

> They say: 'I cannot do this'... or express it a bit more bluntly: 'I'm not intelligent enough to do this.' ... What should be triggered is: 'I have to look for something that corresponds to it [my skills]' and to then move forward. I think that happens relatively rarely. It's more of a retreat, a resignation." (Edith[sup])

Also in their reflections, some refugees, again, *relied too much on social support*: "They get officials responsible to [aid] them [in finding] work, to reflect [for them]. They [refugees] call them again when in work and having an issue, noting the person has helped them [before]. … It's not really reflected" (Benno[sup]). Yet, Ronja[sup] said: "A reflection may happen, if they're in good contact with the career counselor. ... Otherwise, there's surely not the time to do it systematically."

Refugees' Misregulation

Refugees have to navigate their careers amidst foreign formal and informal scripts on bureaucracy, credential requirements, and work behaviors, and Faris[ref] soon realized: "It [job search] is different in Germany." Edith[sup] said: "What they know from home: 'I want to work, I have two hands, one head, and I can [work]', doesn't really work here." Refugees' misregulation usually became apparent during goal pursuit. Yet, its sources often lay in the misregulation of goal setting, planning, and reflection. Stakeholders' views on refugees' misregulation differed, and misregulation could, over time, develop into underregulation.

In Goal Setting

Refugees could *set unfeasible goals*. Some targeted jobs for which they did not have the matching education: "Many have this ideal picture of the perfect job in their head … so they reject everything feasible. But they actually ... don't have the matching education" (Ruth[sup]). Others considered only career options that related to their pre-migration career. Yet, especially higher-skilled refugees' education was often not accepted: "I know doctors and computer scientists. … We, as a country, just don't necessarily have the framework conditions for accepting their training" (Elke[emp]). Marcus[sup] explained: "Refugees believe their [skills] mostly suffice, but there are totally different standards [here] than there [at home]." This led to clashes between refugees' expectations and the reality of their work:

> In part, … they have excessively exaggerated expectations to what they can earn with their home qualifications: … 'I was an engineer, had a high social status, earned much money.' … It's difficult if someone … [is] a trainee in the entry phase, but … wants to earn money matching the [home] qualification. It doesn't always end well. (Edith[sup])

Indeed, Serbast[ref] found the call to enter a new career naïve: "They tell you: 'Your profession, diploma, or degree isn't recognized. … [You should become] a hairdresser.' It doesn't work, working 20 years as a lawyer to now become a hairdresser."

Several reasons were stated for these misguided and often exaggerated expectations.

First, refugees could simply lack knowledge of the local educational and vocational system:

> There often is no experience on what we understand as a school education path, or why we attach such importance to it for the professional life. … In many countries, vocational training is … ultimately a kind of [on the job] learning. … You just want to start on the job market, have a job, earn money. (Finn[sup])

These different educational and vocational systems distorted refugees' expectations:

> They don't really have this clear idea of ... what the expectations towards trainees are. ... I think they can't fathom that when one works in gastronomy … there's a three year vocational training behind it. … [They] think they just bring out plates. ... [Many don't manage] our system's expectations for those wanting to join [this society]." (Ronja[sup])

Second, many refugees were unaware of what specific types or features of local jobs meant. Starting from what they knew from home, many refugees' goal was to become self-employed, but the meaning and risks of self-employment are different in Germany:

> Many desire a self-determined life. … In Arabic areas, self-employment has a fully different value than here in Germany. To be your own boss is often related with risks in Germany. … Many small traders don't exist in this form in Germany. (Karl[sup])

Also, some wanted to work "as daily laborers, ... where you don't sign an unlimited contract, but one [a contract] for weeks, days" (Karl[sup]). This job type, though, "doesn't exist like this in Germany" (Tom[sup]). Others entered jobs they did not know: "Shift work is quite unknown. ... Standards need to be adhered to that can be tough. A three-shift system is difficult for the body." Not being used to the work intensity fostered job loss: "I know someone who was a self-employed truck driver. ... Here, he didn't last for three weeks driving a forklift truck, as the pace of work seemed too fast for him" (Dina[sup]).

Third, unfeasible goals could be nurtured by misinformation. Employers and support workers suspected that refugees had wrong expectations of German work conditions: "5000€ maximum income, with the least possible time investment. ... We'd like to know of the beliefs

that exist about Germany in the country of origin; whether [smugglers] scatter rumors of what awaits them" (Theo[sup]). Refugees failed to gather and consider information for feasible goals:

> They did fairly little market analysis. ... It was very by chance. … They also listened to others. If they said: 'It's good', it was good and if someone said: 'It's bad', then it was bad. Taking up information and selecting it for yourself often didn't work. (Alex[sup])

Relatedly, participants referred to well-meaning, but not always well-informed volunteers. Nora[sup] said: "Volunteers guiding refugees push them in a wrong direction. ... They're misinformed." Alex[sup] clarified: "All volunteers wanted their advised refugee to take up vocational training." Yet, some were over-optimistic of refugees' abilities to finish such training, conveying unrealistic expectations. Alex[sup] said: "So, there were many refugees in vocational training who didn't have a chance to finish it." Several employers, like Marie[emp], had seen refugee trainees struggling with vocational schools:

> We hired two [trainees] without a school-leaving certificate and were screwed by it. They couldn't deal with the vocational school's topics. ... They need one or two years of socialization in a German school system ... for it to work. (Marie[emp])

Many refugees did *set goals.* Yet, being unaccustomed to the local labor regulations, these goals often *clashed with local labor regulations* and resulted in 'forced' unemployment. Esat[ref] quit his job without realizing that he should have secured a written job offer for a new job before doing so: "When I annulled the contract I thought I could get a job in [the city]. It didn't work out." When unemployed, he was taken by surprise by not getting unemployment benefits for three months after quitting his job. Hanna[sup] knew Esat[ref] and explained his case:

> It's stated in the application for the unemployment benefit 1: … If you quit [a job], there's a waiting time. ... We tried to explain [to the job center] there was a [job] offer. … The job center said: 'Here, verbal promises aren't the same as at your [home where] … you shake on it, done. … There never was a document, never a written confirmation [of the offer].' … The appeal was rejected. (Hanna[sup])

However, Esat[ref] explained how lacking knowledge of the local labor laws and regulations caused this situation, despite him initially striving to self-regulate efficiently:

> As refugees, we can't understand it. What is a waiting time? He's new here, doesn't know these laws or regulations. He didn't ask. … I made the mistake as I didn't know German. ... I always wanted to be active here, not someone making a mistake. (Esat[ref])

In Planning

Several refugees failed to plan their job search according to the local standards, as they *pursued their goals via strategies learned back home*. Anton[emp] stated: "Refugees often hand in their documents in person" rather than by mail, as is the local custom. Linda[sup] said: "Much is done via contacts and … the initiative of: 'I show myself to employers.'" Many also targeted employers who had recently hired refugees: "We hired one and had three people here at our door: 'Oh, you have work. I want to work with him'" (Silke[emp]), or they expected German companies to hire daily laborers as usual in their country of origin: "If you don't know it any other way, you might go to an employer three times. If you go there once, he will also say 'no' the next day" (Karl[sup]). They could also "go to a construction site and ask: 'Do you need someone?'" (Tom[sup]), yet Karl[sup] stated: "People who auditioned in person with employers, simply as they didn't know it otherwise, noticed: 'It just doesn't work that way.'"

Misregulation in planning one's job search often resulted from refugees' *struggles in accessing relevant information*. Edith[sup] explained: "To independently inform myself is very difficult"; a situation aggravated by lacking language skills: "How can they [refugees] search for work when all is written in German? They don't stand a chance" (Halim[ref]). Specific and correct information was needed in planning one's job search, yet refugees struggled to find it:

> In the [job] application there [is] … the new system of writing cover letters. First, [you need to know] how to formulate them. What comes second? What does one write? The CV. Is it correct or does it appear unprofessional to the firm? One has to either depend on Google and what the people write there, or to search for helpers. (Tahir[ref])

In Reflecting

Refugees could *fail to attribute their job-search difficulties to specific factors*:

> I thought about why [I was rejected]. … Many say as I'm a foreigner. … You think: 'If I were German, it'd be [easier]. … Perhaps I made a mistake in the interview. How do you have to go there? What do you have to say? … Why did I make a mistake?' … Perhaps it relates to what you say or the language. … I can do it better than him, but he gets it [job]. … I don't understand it; does it have to do with me? (Taio[ref])

Many refugees reflected intensely, yet they lacked opportunities to learn from failures. Asif[ref] expressed: "I applied in many companies. All rejected me. … No one [said why]. ... Perhaps [as] I had no German qualifications. … Perhaps German companies prefer German qualifications." While Taio[ref] said: "They'll have to explain not taking me", Heva[ref] noted: "When I asked something [about my rejected application], they [employers] didn't want to answer." Finn[sup] stated: "People felt discriminated against. They felt they didn't get a chance here because of their origin. ... A refugee who is fairly new here looking for work cannot grasp: 'Why am I now experiencing this rejection?'" Karl[sup] noted how refugees struggled to make sense of failures: "You're not the only applicant. ... To deal with failures, rejections, has to be learned first."

The Road From Misregulation to Underregulation

In the analysis, we recognized that refugees could misregulate their efforts and, consequently, fail to make progress in their job search. This eroded refugees' motivation, and so, sometimes, instances of misregulation gave way to underregulation:

> Refugees are motivated to find a job and to work. … [But] they don't have a clue where to go and what do to. … Alone, refugees can't find [the way]. Due to the difficult system, people stay at home. (Iras[ref])

Also, when refugees recognized that their initial expectations were unrealistic, they could (partially) resign, engaging in underregulation:

> When they come here their [expectations] are very high and it naturally decreases with the first experiences. Many came here and said: 'Now, we can choose the work and will earn incredible money.' And they notice, it doesn't work like that. … One day, they realize … there's no point in getting their hopes up outside of the minimum wage sector. … It gets more realistic up until a partial resignation. (Alex[sup])

Refugees' Overregulation

Besides under- and misregulation, we recognized that refugees also overregulated; some refugees were overly attentive and inhibited (effective) behaviors. Overregulation occurred in goal setting, goal pursuit, and reflection.

In Goal Setting

Speaking of his job entry in Germany, Tahir[ref] had *pressured himself to prove himself as a perfect employee*, ending up excessively regulating his behaviors. He[ref] noted: "At the start at work, I spoke much less than today", and said: "I didn't dare to. … I'm a perfectionist. I, first, need a bit of time to warm up. I wasn't as confident in my language as I am now." Comparing himself to other job applicants or colleagues, he[ref] refrained from asking for help:

> I felt [overstrained] as I think every human does searching for work. Just because of the problems I mentioned: The language barriers. This thought that, at work, [I have to be able to do everything]. … It was wrong. It was my fault. I wanted to convince my employer or supervisor of my skills, while I couldn't do it [yet]. … [I thought:] 'I have to manage it myself.' ... One shouldn't waste more than 30 hours with one issue, … [but] I thought: 'The other guy, who was, for instance, with me in the interview, he'd probably know it and be capable of doing it. So, I need to be able to, too. (Tahir[ref])

Also employers noticed overregulation happening. Thea[emp] said: "Out of the[ir] cultural understanding or cultural imprint, habitus, ... I [they] can't express it if I [they] haven't understood something, ... if I [they] have problems. ... Out of this pride, ... I [they] always have to present myself [themselves] at my [their] best." Such instances could appear

like underregulation, as refugees did not show actions conducive of a sustainable integration:

> Thus, I can't learn by making mistakes. ... The language barrier is the most complex [one]; ... misunderstandings ... develop into conflicts. ... There's much avoidance behavior. ... They don't want to show their weakness or poor language understanding and avoid communication, so it's not so noticeable. This causes problems. (Thea[emp])

In Goal Pursuit

When searching for a job, Kalil[ref] recalled his worries and how these made him *ruminate about his job search* when facing a job interview:

> In job interviews, I felt I would collapse. … I was very, very nervous. And I think all refugees feel like that in job interviews. … Refugees have applied many times, have gone to job interviews many times. But it has led to nothing. And in that time, in this situation, one thinks and always ponders that maybe it'll also not work this time. Just that negative energy. … One thinks: 'I now have a job interview, I don't know, for maybe ten to 15 minutes. … In these 15 minutes, the decision will be made, whether I can continue or not. … [Whether] I can stay where I am now [in Germany].' (Kalil[ref])

In Reflecting

Reasons for overregulation also emerged in refugees' reflection phase. Adel[ref] was deeply uncertain and thus *immersed himself in his insecurities about how he should behave*:

> I feel somewhat overstrained, as all the jobs are foreign to me. ... I'm afraid when I get a job, how should I start? ... I have to do it well to get accepted. You think about how you have to behave with strangers, with the employer. You don't know. (Adel[ref])

Discussion

> It's always about putting the personal situation of refugees into context and being able to understand why they do or don't do certain things. So, either these are cultural issues they've learned simply because of their nationality or from the earlier career. ... It was just done differently. ... And just because we do things the way we do, doesn't

make them better or worse. ... [We must] put [their] actions into context. (Adam^{emp})

Including the perspectives of refugees, support workers, and employers, we offer a comprehensive analysis of refugees' self-regulation challenges and failures during job search. While job search is generally a tiring process, refugees faced further context-specific challenges that impaired their self-regulation. These related particularly to refugees' unfamiliarity with the local formal and informal scripts and the unyielding integration system. Failures in terms of under- and misregulation happened in all self-regulation phases[16], and overregulation in goal setting, pursuit, and reflection. The failures affected refugees' self-regulation in later job search; in several cases, refugees' experiences in job search discouraged their future self-regulation efforts, and refugees learned to underregulate.

Many refugees struggled in setting attractive yet feasible long-term goals, as their expectations and qualifications did not fit with local expectations and requirements. While too challenging goals – often aspired by refugees and, at times, supported by volunteers – were prone to set refugees up for 'failure', the German system's call for refugees to lower their aspirations implied less attractive and thus less motivating prospects, and a threat to their self-esteem. Planning their job search was challenging as refugees' work-related scripts often did not match the local ones, ill-advised career guidance was given, or there were systemic hurdles. When pursuing their goals, some refugees grew hopeless and resigned, whereas others relied too much on external support. Also, reflection could happen too little, too late, or be fraught with self-doubt. In line with studies showing that rejections and absent feedback impair self-regulation (Chawla et al., 2019), refugees lacked opportunities to learn from failures (e.g., from rejected applications). Lacking insights into local structures, they were also at risk of attributing setbacks to stable and uncontrollable factors (e.g., being foreign)

[16] As stated on p. 88, we did not address misregulation in goal pursuit separately in the findings. While the actual actions are shown and interpreted in this phase, the failures rooted in refugees' goal setting, planning, and reflection, which is where we presented them.

instead of variable, controllable ones (Van Hooft et al., 2013). Once refugees had found work, challenges remained and caused some to lose their jobs again.

While refugees, support workers, and employers agreed on various topics, such as refugees' recurrent exposure to rejections draining their motivation and energy to sustain effort, stakeholders' interpretations of refugees' efforts and failures also diverged. Refugees set proximal goals and compromised on distal goals for available work chances. While, in refugees' view, this strengthened their financial and residency security, support workers felt that others might interpret this as underregulation, and employers voiced that it condemned refugees to menial and, at times, illicit work. Also, refugees' self-regulation efforts could go unnoticed by locals, and so refugees could seem to underregulate. For instance, refugees' career inaction or unemployment could result from structural issues impeding refugees' goal setting and pursuit, rather than from an underregulation due to missing willpower. Concerning misregulation, stakeholders differed in terms of how practical they found the idea of refugees reorienting their careers, or of how much refugees should rely on others in their job search.

Theoretical Implications

Self-Regulation

We contribute to self-regulation research in two ways. First, self-regulation research has largely focused on underregulation (Friese et al., 2019), attributing failures either to motivational processes (Inzlicht & Schmeichel, 2012) or to an exhaustion of limited resources (Baumeister & Vohs, 2016). In our data, underregulation occurred as refugees did not exhibit the steps needed for developing their career. Also, findings showed that what may look like underregulation from the outside may actually be the only (non-)action legally available to refugees, as structural issues bound them into career inaction. The findings also go beyond underregulation, as they reveal cases of mis- and overregulation, thus capturing a fuller breadth of failures happening in the self-regulatory process. Refugees misregulated, as they were not familiar with local scripts structuring job-search processes in Germany, and drew on

the strategic repertoires shaped by their home scripts – a finding that may generalize to other cases of self-regulation efforts in unknown (cultural) settings. While overregulation has hardly been addressed in work or career research (for conceptual exceptions, see Côté et al., 2006; Grandey, 2000) and has been conceptualized in such terms as emotional avoidance and excessive emotional suppression (Roberton et al., 2012), we also show overregulation as a person's attempts to inhibit (actually effective) actions due to insecurity and anxiety arising from facing a new cultural context. The analysis points to overregulation in our context being a distinct self-regulation failure type rather than a category of misregulation (cf. Heatherton & Baumeister, 1996 for a discussion). Overregulation surfaced as a unique self-regulation failure that comprised people's over-attentiveness and excessive self-regulation due to severe uncertainties about the adequacy of their behaviors. Even though these might be construed as misregulation (cf. Heatherton & Baumeister, 1996), for instance, refugees being in a wrong mindset or setting unfitting goals (due to, e.g., a misplaced perfectionism), we identified these as cases of overregulation, where refugees tried so hard to meet the expectations that they eventually found it difficult to function at all. The data also reveal that overregulation may be misread as underregulation by observers. Hence, though a distinct failure type, overregulation is likely to be perceived as mis- or underregulation, warranting further research attention.

Second, we extend self-regulation research by identifying interrelations between the three self-regulation failures types. Refugees gave up on their job-search efforts and underregulated as adverse outcomes and negative experiences from misregulated efforts accumulated. Unable to fulfill unrealistic expectations or to succeed with the job-search strategy chosen, refugees lost confidence and stopped investing further. Underregulation was also learned, and came about when refugees faced longer periods of hardship (see Seligman, 1975) or when the safest bet in job search seemed to be to hand it over to others. This supports studies showing how too optimistic predictions of work opportunities result in frustrations (Chung et al., 1999) and increase the risks of discouraging job seekers (Heslin et

al., 2012). In turn, underregulation (e.g., compromising on distal goals for available options) could also foster misregulation (e.g., illicit work), and overregulation arose from the fear of being perceived to underregulate (e.g., not showing enough effort) or to misregulate (e.g., not adhering to local customs), and so refugees did not dare to make mistakes or to ask for help.

Social Scripts and Perceptions of Self-Regulation

We also bridge research on self-regulation and institutionalized social scripts (Barley & Tolbert, 1997), as we stress the role of context-embedded scripts for a person's actual and perceived self-regulation (see Bernheim et al., 2015). Differences in social, cultural, and institutionalized scripts not only shaped refugees' self-regulation failures, but also influenced employers' and support workers' perceptions and interpretations of those. Each stakeholder had a unique – not always visible to the others – vantage point to refugees' behaviors and situations originating from and expressing the scripts they had adopted. In general, people's perceptions and interpretations are contextually bound, as people make sense of others' self-regulation (efforts and failures) according to their own habitual roles, cultures, and societal discourses (Swidler, 1986). In refugees' case, this led to diverging interpretations of refugees' activities, which alludes to the risk of fundamental errors in attribution (Harman, 1999), that is, to others attributing failures to refugees' dispositional factors, rather than recognizing how the context could deprive them of key resources and hinder adaptive behaviors. This is a critical observation, especially as refugees' self-regulation failures often rooted in refugees' difficulties in overcoming contextual barriers that may not even be visible to locals. Refugees' mis- and overregulation could be difficult to spot for others, seem 'off the mark', or be mistaken as underregulation. While difficult for refugees to fathom, they had to lower their ambitions according to career models and educational requirements normal for locals. Thus, refugees' self-regulation struggles often deviated from current understandings of failed self-regulation (e.g., what might be construed as underregulation revealed itself as unnoticed efforts), and we point to so-called self-regulation 'failures' often depicting context-inadequate

behaviors. These insights may extend to other cross-cultural contexts in terms of job search and employment, but also beyond, where unspoken and new rules and customs prevail.

Job Search Among Refugees

To the best of our knowledge, we offer the first study exploring refugees' job search through the lens of a self-regulation framework. We show shared issues with other job seeker groups (e.g., underestimating the number of applications needed to find a job; Wanberg et al., 2020), yet reveal issues unique to refugees. Facing disrupted careers, refugees could find themselves in a career phase different than expected (e.g., having to go back to school) or they could be unable to continue their earlier career paths (e.g., being unable to return to their prior profession), which complicated their self-regulated job search.

In terms of setting goals, refugees' goals were unique to their situation, often relating to securing their residency, carrying family responsibilities, and satisfying basic needs. Such goals could foster fast employment, but they also resulted in menial work or getting stuck in temporary work, and did little to nourish refugees' self-efficacy. Thus, refugees' goals could be proximal and excluded setting distal goals that felt out of reach or were hard to understand for refugees with less formal education. Yet, other refugees envisioned distal career goals and committed to them – aspects usually supportive of a high-quality job search (Van Hooft et al., 2013). Based on their unrealistic expectations, these goals could, though, be unfeasible. Some refugees were instructed to follow external demands and felt unable to set self-directed goals.

In terms of planning, many refugees faced difficulties and failed to prepare their job search. They misdirected their activities, failed to form meaningful goal hierarchies, and used strategies unfit for the local context. Many saw no other choice than to rely on others; they were dependent, even when trying to be resourceful.

In terms of pursuing goals, some refugees self-monitored too little (underregulation) or too much (overregulation), and lacked feedback for adjusting their goal pursuit. Over time, they lost confidence and disengaged (underregulated). This supports studies showing that

people reduce their job-search efforts when seeing no or little progress (Wanberg et al., 2010). Also, their uncertain lives impaired the efforts that refugees could place into the goal pursuit and many recognized that they were not able to shield their goals due to the interference of more basic needs. Some unintentionally did too little, while others relied too much on external help (underregulating). Yet, even when showing active attempts, refugees' efforts did not always result in progress, nor were they always visible to locals, as refugees faced legal regulations that condemned them to inaction.

In terms of reflecting, job-search reflections usually support job seekers in adjusting their actions and finding ways to handle future challenges. Some refugees, though, tended to ascribe failures to internal causes and drew negative conclusions about themselves and their chances for job-search success (Van Hooft et al., 2013), or they immersed themselves in their insecurities. Several refugees failed to reflect on their own and/or grew dependent on others.

Lastly, we recognized how despite usually being conducive to refugees' job search (Wehrle et al., 2019), relying on others' advice could foster negative outcomes (e.g., aborted training, menial work, and a lack of independence). This raises the question of when social support turns dysfunctional during job search (Floyd & Ray, 2017; Williamson et al., 2019).

Practical Implications

For Human Resource Management (HRM)

HRM can foster refugees' work access to help them gain local insights, experiences, and 'know-how', and the social and cultural capital needed to pursue local careers (Wehrle et al., 2019). Low threshold approaches such as trial work measures aim at this goal. HRM could enable refugees to further educate themselves via on-the-job training whilst working (thus securing their financial needs) and to develop plans to strive for their desired career goals and progress, both within and outside of the organization. Such development opportunities would assist HRM to avoid benevolent discrimination practices and reduce refugees' dependency on a specific organization (Romani et al., 2019). To help refugees set realistic goals and avoid

misregulation, HRM could communicate the job requirements and possible career paths and prospects in a culturally customized way, and foster refugees' understanding of the new work reality by managing their expectations via realistic, culturally sensitive job previews and feedback. By giving feedback to rejected applicants, HRM can also increase the transparency of hiring practices. Applicants could thus learn from the experiences and search for jobs more effectively (countering misregulation) without forming negative self-evaluations (countering underregulation). Diversity and cross-cultural training can counter coworkers forming negative attitudes in response to refugees' (perceived) self-regulation failures, nurturing mutual respect. To foster refugees' understanding of the local scripts, HRM could also implement mentoring practices. Yet, in doing so, HRM needs to be aware of not depicting the local values as superior to those in refugees' countries of origins, but to explain them and their local relevance (Ponzoni et al., 2017). To avoid over- or misregulation, HRM can implement a culture of error tolerance via error management (see, e.g., Keith & Frese, 2005) enabling workers to spot and own their failures, to learn from them, and to ask for help.

Moreover, employers often discounted refugees' knowledge and experiences, and a lack of local education and/or credentials rendered refugees' employability invisible. This issue befell especially higher-skilled workers, constituting a loss of potential for HRM. Thus, recognizing diversity's value to the benefit of all (Homan et al., 2007), HRM could collaborate with authorities to create paths for refugees to have their foreign credentials accredited.

For Job Agencies, Policy Makers, and Other Institutional Stakeholders

Often, refugees in Germany were dependent on state support and policies. While stakeholders genuinely desired to assist refugees, some state programs or support offers could block refugees from becoming independent, impairing their self-regulation and ending up increasing, rather than decreasing refugees' reliance on external help and/or social benefits. Many programs were too generic and lacked support specific to refugees' educational and professional backgrounds and aspirations. This, and the excessive and confusing bureaucracy,

hindered refugees' self-regulation and (re-)employment. Thus, agencies could offer more specialized programs and reduce the long processing times when granting work permits.

To counter refugees' self-regulation failures and to shield them from becoming discouraged, agencies, counselors, and integration educators could educate refugees early-on of the local opportunities but also challenges, managing their expectations and making them aware of potential hurdles. Agencies and counselors could design interventions targeting refugees' self-regulation to (1) aid refugees' goal setting, (2) train context-suitable actions (e.g., raising sensitivity towards customs and chances; Yanar et al., 2009), (3) help them spot their dependence and ask for help without having someone taking over, (4) build resilience, action-oriented coping, and self-efficacy to counter setbacks (Seibert et al., 2016), and (5) aid refugees in becoming better self-regulators by teaching them how to also monitor small successes, set implementation intentions, and reflect fruitfully (Wagner & Heatherton, 2015).

Limitations and Directions for Future Research

While the study builds on cross-sectional data, we integrated three data sets and established study rigor (see Pratt et al., 2020; Sandberg, 2005). The three perspectives show several commonalities about refugees' self-regulation and we cannot rule out a sample bias in terms of an over-inclusion of persons more motivated, considerate, and empathetic towards refugees' situations – possibly reducing a clash in perspectives. Yet, we consider participants' replies as genuine given our non-invasive and openly framed questions, participants' sincerity to share positive and negative experiences, and their willingness to answer in depth. For a deeper dive into different stakeholders' interpretations of refugees' self-regulation, future research could add further perspectives such as those of employees or volunteers.

We extend the view on job search as a self-regulation process by identifying how self-regulation 'failures' can depict context-inadequate behaviors or arise from systemic issues. Present research in the field centers on the person (Van Hooft et al., 2021), and research could benefit from integrating the context in which the person acts. Scholars need to recognize how

contextual factors affect people's (job-search) self-regulation, also cross-culturally to identify how different life contexts shape vocational actions (Duffy et al., 2016) and to offer a realistic account of the self-regulation process for different job-seeker groups (Wanberg et al., 2020).

In addition, future research could build on our study to examine the development and causal inferences between refugees' self-regulation challenges, actions, and outcomes over time in quantitative designs and to test for the findings' generalizability in other groups such as regular labor market newcomers or job seekers facing unforeseen obstacles (e.g., following illness or disability). As refugees face a lengthy job-search process and distinct barriers, it is critical to understand how they sustain self-regulation across time. Future research could explore individual differences in self-regulation patterns, study refugees' self-regulation during the overall integration process (i.e., also upon employment), and identify how other stakeholders can assist refugees' self-regulation. Future studies could also delve into the impact of different self-regulation interpretations on workers' employment and career success.

Self-regulation research could also focus on the different types of and interrelations between self-regulation failures. Research could address (the distinction of) misregulation and overregulation (cf. Heatherton & Baumeister, 1996) – both failures have hardly been studied in career and management contexts, yet seem critical among structural outsiders who seek to integrate into a new work context. Scholars could study misregulation and its effects over time, and identify which factors support people in understanding and navigating new scripts.

Conclusion

We shed light on refugees' self-regulation struggles during their job search in Germany. We integrated three stakeholder perspectives to study refugees' self-regulation in the four phases of a self-regulated job search (Van Hooft et al., 2013). In doing so, we showed different self-regulation failures (i.e., under-, mis-, and overregulation), their various reasons, in different self-regulation process phases, and how they interrelate with one another. Whilst stakeholders could differ in their interpretations of reasons for failed self-regulation, it were

refugees' unfamiliarity with the new country's scripts and the unyielding integration system that particularly impaired their self-regulation. Revealing context-specific self-regulation phenomena, we offer avenues for future research and practice.

Table 3

Demographics of the Refugees According to the Interview Date (N = 38)

#	Participant[+]	Age	Country of origin	Gender	Time spent in Germany[a]	Time since work permit receipt in Germany[a]	Residence status[a]	Highest educational level in country of origin according to German standards	Earlier line of work	Line of work in Germany[a]
1	Nael	33	Syria	Male	4Y4M	N/A[g]	Residence permit	University degree	Dentist	Job seeker
2	Serbast	26	Syria	Male	5Y0M[e]	4Y0M	Unlimited	High school diploma	Economist[i]	Clerk in public administration[k]
3	Rodi	34	Syria	Male	3Y3M	2Y1M	Residence permit	High school diploma	English teacher	Interpreter
4	Fasal[b]	21	Afghanistan	Male	3Y7M	0Y3M	Tolerated stay	Secondary school certificate	School student	Nursing auxiliary[k]
5	Valid	28	Afghanistan	Male	3Y2M	0Y3M	Running asylum procedure	Secondary school certificate	Employee in wholesale	Nursing auxiliary
6	Maysaa	17	Eritrea	Female	3Y2M	0Y4M	Tolerated stay	School-leaving qualification	School student, farmer	Nursing auxiliary
7	Faris	22	Syria	Male	3Y2M	0Y7M	Tolerated stay	Secondary school certificate	School student	Electronics engineer[k]
8	Adel	27	Syria	Male	5Y2M[e]	4Y5M[h]	Unlimited	High school diploma	Lawyer	Owner of alteration and dry cleaning shop[l]
9	Kamal	34	Syria	Male	3Y0M	1Y0M	Residence permit	University degree	Pharmacist	Pharmacist
10	Halim	23	Syria	Male	3Y6M	2Y9M	Residence permit	High school diploma	Civil engineer[i]	Computer scientist[i]
11	Samir	23	Syria	Male	3Y0M	N/A[g]	N/A[g]	Elementary level education	Floor tiler	Floor tiler[k]
12	Iras	31	Ethiopia	Male	2Y2M[e]	2Y2M[h]	Residence permit	University degree	Lawyer	Job seeker
13	Badgat	24	Syria	Male	3Y6M	2Y1M	Residence permit	High school diploma	Lawyer[i], waiter[j]	Roofer[k]
14	Hava[b]	22	Turkey	Female	2Y8M	N/A[g]	Tolerated stay	High school diploma	Pharmacist[i]	Hairdresser[k]
15	Ayden	27	Afghanistan	Male	4Y0M	1Y10M[h]	Residence permit	Secondary school certificate	Police clerk	Temporary worker
16	Karim	28	Afghanistan	Male	4Y0M	3Y0M	Residence permit	Elementary level education	Police clerk	Temporary worker, printing company
17	Baran	25	Afghanistan	Male	4Y0M	3Y0M	Residence permit	Elementary level education	Army clerk	Temporary worker
18	Firas	32	Syria	Male	4Y10M[e]	3Y10M[h]	Residence permit	University degree	Teacher in English literature	Teacher at vocational school
19	Banu	34	Syria	Female	4Y10M[e]	3Y10M[h]	Unlimited	University degree	Bank clerk	Business education[i], Business clerk[m]
20	Adil	40	Syria	Male	3Y10M[e]	N/A[g]	Residence permit	Elementary level education	Various jobs (e.g., welder, cook)	Job seeker
21	Ammar[b]	27	Iraq	Male	4Y10M[e]	3Y0M	Running asylum procedure	Elementary level education	Software application developer	Job seeker
22	Ruhi[b]	27	Palestine	Male	4Y10M[e]	3Y10M[h]	Tolerated stay	University degree	Solar technologist	Warehouse worker
23	Yara[c]	48	Syria	Female	4Y0M	3Y0M	Subsidiary protection	Elementary level education	Stylist	Worker in hotel, catering
24	Esat[c]	56	Syria	Male	4Y10M[e]	3Y10M[h]	Subsidiary protection	School-leaving qualification	Crane operator/team leader crane and pipeline work	Job seeker
25	Taio	18	Guinea	Male	2Y11M[e]	N/A[g]	Tolerated stay	Elementary level education	N/A[g]	Vocational preparation scheme

26	Zoja	35	Russia	Female	4Y2M[f]	N/A[g]	Running asylum procedure	University degree	Salon manager	Intern in children's home
27	Jaron[b]	30	Afghanistan	Male	4Y0M	4Y0M	Residence permit	Secondary school certificate	Police clerk	Temporary worker, Restaurant specialist
28	Aman[b]	31	Afghanistan	Male	5Y2M[e]	3Y2M[h]	Running asylum procedure	High school diploma	Supplier	Car grinder
29	Navid[b]	26	Afghanistan	Male	5Y2M[e]	3Y2M[h]	Running asylum procedure	Elementary level education	School student	Temporary worker
30	Tamim	24	Afghanistan	Male	4Y4M	1Y8M	Residence permit	Elementary level education	N/A[g]	Forklift driver and sorter at a concrete factory
31	Rana	26	Syria	Female	5Y0M	5Y0M[h]	Residence permit	High school diploma	Hairdresser[j]	Federal voluntary service
32	Janic[b]	24	Afghanistan	Male	4Y3M	2Y9M	Tolerated stay	N/A[g] (attended 12 years of school)	Carpenter, Restaurant worker	Job seeker
33	Abadi[b,d]	25	Lebanon	Male	5Y11M[e]	Confiscated work permit	Tolerated stay	N/A[g] (attended 12 years of school)	Floor tiler	Job seeker
34	Asif[b]	28	Pakistan	Male	2Y7M	2Y4M	Residence permit	University degree	Software engineer	Pizza delivery[j], assembling of car parts[n], Software engineering automotive[i ,m]
35	Belal	22	Afghanistan	Male	4Y3M	0Y11M	Residence permit	Secondary school certificate	Mason	Security service, plant mechanic[k,m]
36	Saad	21	Syria	Male	4Y4M	3Y0M	Residence permit	School-leaving qualification	Carpenter	Carpenter[k, m]
37	Kalil[*]	24	Syria	Male	4Y4M	2Y9M	Subsidiary protection	Secondary school certificate	Paramedic	Paramedic
38	Tahir[*, b]	32	Syria	Male	4Y5M	3Y1M	Subsidiary protection	University degree	Various jobs (e.g., IT-support, assistant manager)	IT scientist in system integration

Note. [+] Actual names have been replaced by pseudonyms to protect the participants' anonymity. [*] Interview via telephone. [a] At time of interview. [b] In appeal procedure at the time of interview. [c] Interview translated by a translator. [d] Work permit confiscated. [e] Estimated maximum time spent in Germany. [f] Minimum time spent in Germany. [g] No data available. [h] Estimated maximum time since work permit receipt. [i] University student. [j] Part-time job. [k] Education and training student. [l] Self-employed. [m] Secured upcoming employment/education. [n] Temporary work.

Table 4

Demographics of the Support Workers According to the Interview Date (N = 27)

#	Participant[+]	Age	Gender	Occupation	Time in occupation or work field[a]	Highest educational level
1	Alex	50	Male	Worker at a federal employment agency	35Y0M	University degree
2	Ursula	53	Female	Job agent	12Y0M	University degree
3	Marcus	52	Male	Job agent	28Y0M	University degree
4	Benno	43	Male	Job coach	3Y0M	Vocational training
5	Karl	30	Male	Job agent	4Y1M[b]	High school degree
6	Nora	39	Female	Job agent, Career counselor	12Y0M[c]	University degree
7	Peter	58	Male	Job coach, Education and career counselor	1Y8M	University degree
8	Dina	55	Female	Social worker	8Y0M	University degree
9	Ronja	60	Female	Coordinator of a network of support organizations	5Y3M[b]	University degree
10	Anke	56	Female	Counselor of education	8Y3M[b]	Vocational training
11	Emilia	33	Female	Project designer in handicraft (master school joinery)	2Y0M	University degree
12	Tom	36	Male	Social worker (currently searching for work)	3Y0M	University degree
13	Beth	28	Female	Job coach	0Y3M	University degree
14	Linda	29	Female	Job coach/Educational staff	0Y11M	University degree
15	Helene	61	Female	Educational staff	15Y0M[c]	University degree
16	Ingo	65	Male	Coach	2Y0M	Secondary school certificate
17	Julie	26	Female	Educational staff	0Y2M	University degree
18	Edith	63	Female	Regional training center manager	10Y0M	Specialist subject teacher
19	Ruth	38	Female	Educational staff	0Y5M	University degree
20	Theodor	54	Male	Institutional director	5Y2M[b]	University degree
21	Michael	54	Male	Almoner	5Y0M	Specialist for social work
22	Hanna*	30	Female	Social worker	5Y0M	University degree
23	Fritz*	49	Male	Social counselor	5Y0M	Experience and environment educator
24	Irene*	55	Female	Social worker	18Y4M[b]	University degrees
25	Finn*	37	Male	Coordinator for social integration and participation	4Y0M	University degree
26	Sophie*	26	Female	Educational staff	2Y10M	University entrance diploma
27	Luise*	31	Female	Social worker, Representative head of office	5Y7M[b]	University degree

Note. [+] Actual names have been replaced by pseudonyms to protect the participants' anonymity. * Interview via telephone. [a] At time of interview. [b] Maximum time spent in occupation. [c] Minimum time spent in occupation.

Table 5

Demographics of the Employers According to the Interview Date (N = 37)

#	Participant[+]	Age	Gender	Work field	Occupation	Time in occupation[a]	Refugees in workforce[a]	Business location	Highest educational level
1	Erik[*]	51	Male	Catering and event management	Event manager	17Y0M	2 employed, 6-7 temporary/N/A[e]	Urban	Steel constructor education
2	Marie[*]	38	Female	Textile industry	Training officer	2Y0M	11 trainees/N/A[e]	Urban	University degree
3	Anton[*]	43	Male	Web agency	Web agency manager	19Y4M[d]	3/N/A[e]	Urban	University degree
4	Roman[*]	42	Male	Rescue service	Division manager	4Y0M	1/N/A[e]	Urban	Vocational training
5	Georg[*]	70	Male	Roofing company	Master roofer/Civil engineer/Owner	> 40Y0M	1/N/A[e]	Urban	Master craftsman training
6	Elke[*]	60	Female	Waste disposal	Personnel development manager	20Y0M	~30/N/A[e]	Urban	University degree
7	Nils[*]	38	Male	Mechanical engineering	Training manager	14Y0M	3 trainees, N/A[e] employed/N/A[e]	Urban	Technical business economist
8	Emil[*]	24	Male	Food industry	Managing owner	2Y0M	1/N/A[e]	Municipality/ Urban	University degree
9	Silke[*]	23	Female	Temporary employment agency	Staffing service	2Y0M	N/A[e]	Urban	High school degree
10	Florian[*]	74	Male	Hairdresser	Hairdresser	> 50Y0M	1/N/A[e]	Urban	Master craftsman training
11	Gregor[*]	58	Male	Catering	Self-employed caterer	28Y0M	4/N/A[e]	Municipality/ Urban	N/A[e]
12	Abigail[*]	57	Female	Handcraft	Office administrator	23Y0M	2/10	Urban	High school degree
13	Oliver[*]	33	Male	Metal industry	Economist	3Y0M	4/120	Rural	Economist
14	Nancy[*]	45	Female	Small business	Entrepreneur	10Y0M	1/5	Urban	Graduate engineer
15	Paul[*]	53	Male	Electronic industry	Technical training manager	23Y0M	3/1000	Rural	Master certificate
16	Max[*, b]	40	Male	Energy service provider	Training manager	24Y0M	5-10/780	Urban	Master certificate
17	Adam[*]	28	Male	Information technology	HR manager	4Y0M	2/130	Urban	University degree
18	Mark[*]	60	Male	Electronic industry	Training manager	28Y0M	100/12800	Rural	Vocational baccalaureate
19	Sophie[*]	50	Female	Sustainable food industry	Managing executive	15Y0M	5/150	Urban	University degree
20	Ava[*]	25	Female	Education sector	Strategy and development consultant	0Y3M	1/30	Rural	University degree
21	Joseph[*]	64	Male	Gastronomy	Innkeeper	17Y11M[d]	10/85	Urban	Chef
22	Martha[*, b]	62	Female	Energy service provider	Training manager	43Y0M	3/780	Urban	High school degree
23	Thomas[*]	65	Male	Pharmaceutics	Manager	12Y0M	3/43	Rural	Ph.D.
24	Carolin[*]	51	Female	Car dealership	Commercial management	22Y0M	4/40	Rural	University degree
25	Thea[*]	49	Female	Handcraft	Personnel manager	10Y0M	2/35	Rural	College diploma
26	Ella[*]	54	Female	Waste management	Head coordinator of social measures	25Y0M	N/A[e]/5600	Urban	Business MBA
27	Oscar[*]	48	Male	Handcraft	Master baker	25Y11M	10/60	Rural	Master certificate
28	Zoe[*]	47	Female	Health sector	Personnel manager	6Y0M	N/A[e]/2300	Urban	University degree
29	Richard[*]	61	Male	Consulting	Manager	20Y0M	0/1	Rural	University degree
30	Christin[*]	37	Female	Transportation company	Personnel manager	6Y0M	>45/900	Urban	Certified business economist
31	Gill[*]	36	Female	Hotel industry	Hotel manager	9Y1M[d]	3/35	Urban	University degree
32	Judi[*]	57	Female	Publisher	General manager	10Y0M	1/65	Urban	University degree
33	Tara[*, c]	27	Female	Nursing sector	Social education worker	3Y5M	90-100/2000	Urban	University degree
34	Pia[*, c]	29	Female	Nursing sector	Social education worker	4Y0M	90-100/2000	Urban	University degree
35	Dan[*]	58	Male	Transportation company	General manager	10Y0M	~200/450	Urban	High school degree

36	Lin*	57	Female	Ventilation technology	Personnel and finance manager	10Y0M	2/~80	Rural	Training/High school degree
37	Kate*	43	Female	Handcraft	Personnel manager	8Y0M	12/80	Rural	Business school graduate

Note. [+] Actual names have been replaced by pseudonyms to protect the participants' anonymity. * Interview via telephone. [a] At time of interview. [b, c] Participants working within same business. [d] Maximum time spent in occupation. [e] No data available.

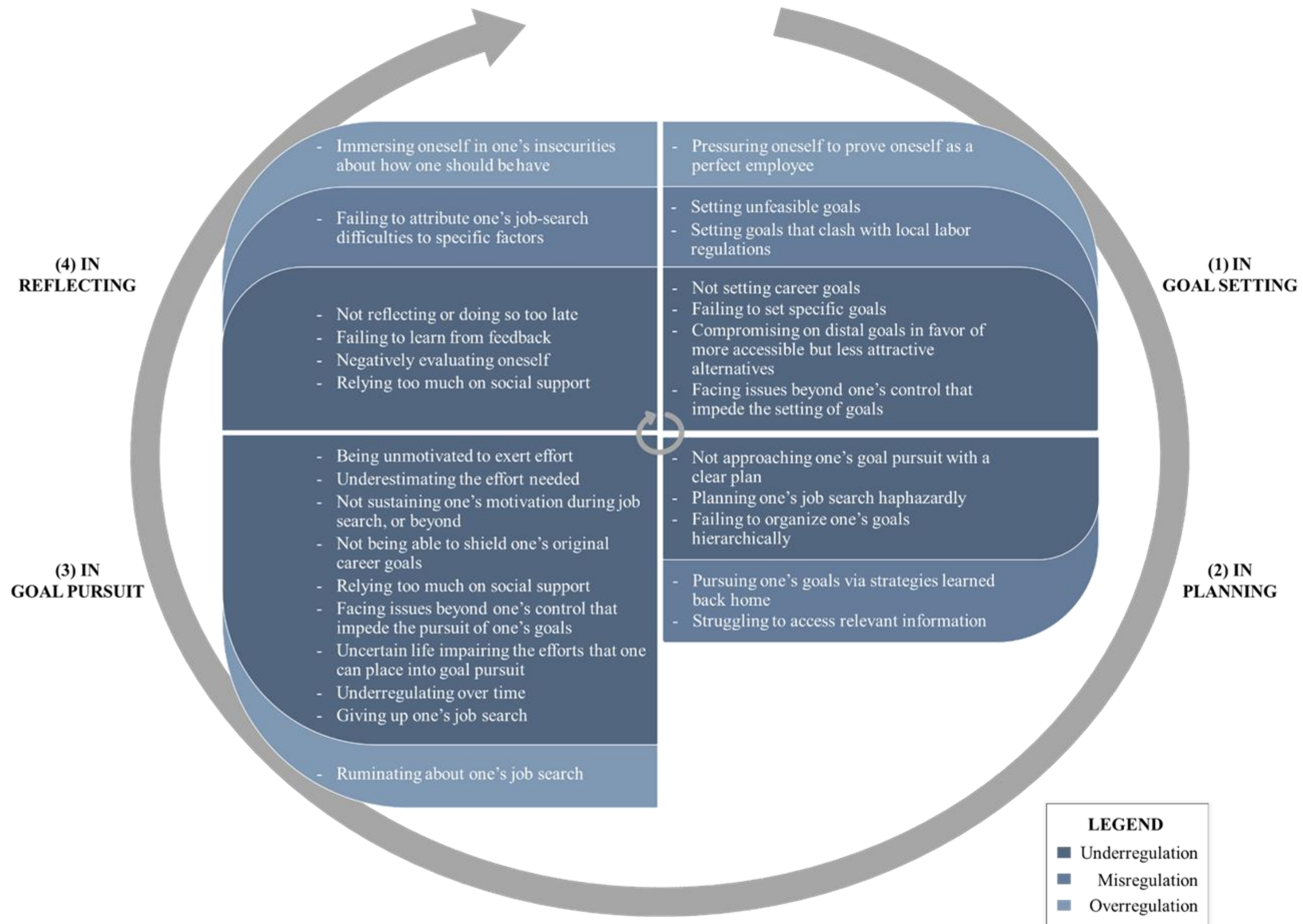
Table 6

Thematic Data Structure

Main Theme	Sub-theme	Codes
Underregulation	In Goal Setting	Not setting career goals
		Failing to set specific goals
		Compromising on distal goals in favor of more accessible but less attractive alternatives
		Facing issues beyond one's control that impede the setting of goals
	In Planning	Not approaching one's goal pursuit with a clear plan
		Planning one's job search haphazardly
		Failing to organize one's goals hierarchically
	In Goal Pursuit	Being unmotivated to exert effort
		Underestimating the effort needed
		Not sustaining one's motivation during job search, or beyond
		Not being able to shield one's original career goals
		Relying too much on social support
		Facing issues beyond one's control that impede the pursuit of one's goals
		Uncertain life impairing the efforts that one can place into goal pursuit
		Underregulating over time
		Giving up one's job search
	In Reflecting	Not reflecting or doing so too late
		Failing to learn from feedback
		Negatively evaluating oneself
		Relying too much on social support
Misregulation	In Goal Setting	Setting unfeasible goals
		Setting goals that clash with local labor regulations
	In Planning	Pursuing one's goals via strategies learned back home
		Struggling to access relevant information
	In Reflecting	Failing to attribute one's job-search difficulties to specific factors
Overregulation	In Goal Setting	Pressuring oneself to prove oneself as a perfect employee
	In Goal Pursuit	Ruminating about one's job search
	In Reflecting	Immersing oneself in one's insecurities about how one should behave

Figure 2

Refugees' Self-Regulation Failures in the Self-Regulated Job-Search Phases



CHAPTER 4:
PUTTING CAREER CONSTRUCTION INTO CONTEXT:
CAREER ADAPTABILITY AMONG REFUGEES

This chapter is based on

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Abstract

This qualitative study, derived from 36 interviews with refugees in Germany, contributes to the literature on career construction theory by exploring career adaptation in the context of forced migration. We focus on the complexity of refugees' adaptive coping responses and study how refugees resort to and develop these adaptive responses in the host country. Our findings highlight the strong influence of context on refugees' ability to adapt their careers, suggesting that problems in career construction are also contextually conditioned. Fundamental uncertainties, lacking personal resources, and having lost and losing time were overarching barriers. Restricted by the context's unfamiliarity and these barriers, refugees' coping was characterized by strong self-regulation. Many of them expressed concern and took control by disregarding uncertainties and set clear career goals and kept moving on regardless of the obstacles faced. They chose positive, appreciative mindsets to take control and strengthen their confidence, and shaped and explored their career dreams, thus exhibiting curiosity. Context not only impaired, but also facilitated refugees' ability to adapt their careers through social connections and the richness of local work opportunities. The present study offers new insights into research on career construction by highlighting how context can impede individuals' use of their adaptability resources and competences, and how despite difficulties, individuals can direct and actively shape their careers to re-build their work trajectories after the resettlement.

Keywords: careers, career adaptability, career construction, coping, refugees

Introduction

Today's ever-changing nature of work and careers have motivated scholars to re-think the patterns and processes that underlie individuals' career construction. Besides traditional careers made up of work experiences orchestrated more or less agentically (Arthur & Rousseau, 1996; Super, 1957), millions of people face far more uncertain careers. Among these are over 22.5 million refugees[17]; people who have been forced to leave their countries because of persecution, war, or violence often connecting to questions of race, religion, nationality, political opinion, or social membership (UNHCR, 2018a). As refugees lose their homes and safety, they also lose their jobs and face disrupted career paths (e.g., Ivlevs & Veliziotis, 2018). Yet, little is known about their career construction. Refugees experience language barriers, unrecognized credentials, stigmatization, and low local social capital (Wehrle et al., 2018) and, consequently, their career opportunities often fall starkly short from their aspirations (Pierce & Gibbons, 2012). This impairs job search and re-employment (Yakushko et al., 2008), and results in a poor adaptation to the host countries. Nevertheless, refugees must – and do – construct their careers in host countries, and the aim of our qualitative study is to explore how they do that. Using career construction theory (Savickas, 2005, 2013) as an organizing framework, we aim at unraveling refugees' attitudinal, cognitive, emotional, and behavioral adaptive coping responses after resettlement, and study how refugees resort to and develop their adapting behaviors when confronted with foreign and potentially restrictive contexts.

In doing so, our research contributes to career construction theory (Savickas, 2005, 2013) by applying it to the context of discontinuous and involuntary career transitions (e.g., Haynie & Shepherd, 2011). Even though Savickas (2013, p. 157) has drawn attention to

[17] For simplicity reasons, we will consistently use the term 'refugee', including both asylum seekers and refugees.

"destandardized [career] trajectories consisting of more frequent and less predictable occupational transitions", empirical research on the construction of such careers is scant. Career construction theory builds on assumptions about volition and thus on individual differences in people's willingness and capabilities to adapt, yet also postulates people's career adaptation to be "conditioned by historical era, dependent on local situations, and variable across social roles" (Savickas, 2005, p. 51). It therefore is relevant to capture individuals' career adaptation context-specifically. By applying the theory to the extreme case of forced migration, we identify both conceptual areas of strength and contextual boundary conditions to this theory.

Also, we add to the literature on refugee integration by offering insights into refugees' career adaptation to the host country's labor market. We unveil how such adaptive coping is shaped by the legal and social contexts enabling or hindering refugees' career adaptive responding. While research has identified barriers to refugees' positive resettlement experiences (e.g., Baranik et al., 2018), we still know little about the effects of such contextual barriers on refugees' career-related adaptation. Thus, this study responds to calls for further research on the experiences of unemployed job seekers in general (Manroop, 2017) and of migrants seeking work in specific (e.g., Zikic & Richardson, 2016), offering helpful insights for the practice of refugee career counseling.

Theoretical Framework and Study Aims

Career construction theory (Savickas, 2005, 2013) illustrates the dynamic nature of individuals' vocational behaviors across their careers. It posits career adaptation as a logical sequence from peoples' adaptivity (i.e., their broad adaptive readiness and willingness), via adaptability resources and competences, to adaptive coping responses, and eventually career adaptation (i.e., career success). In the present paper, we focus on refugees' *career adaptability* and *adaptive coping responses*, that is, their competences, attitudes, beliefs, and

actions in coping with vocational tasks, transitions, and traumas (i.e., unexpected and traumatic changes related to work due to incontrollable external events; Savickas, 2013).

Career construction theory proposes four dimensions of career adaptability and related adaptive responses, which are vital for a successful career construction, while their deficits evoke 'career problems' hindering career construction (Savickas, 2005, 2013). First, people need to feel *concerned* about their future careers to not endure the career problem of being indifferent to the future, but to be aware of the need to prepare for and plan a career. Second, people need to feel in *control* over their careers, that is, they should feel decisive and assertive in translating their intentions into corresponding career decisions, rather than suffer from the career problem of indecision. Third, they need to be *curious* and explore information about the career environment and the self to prevent the career problem of unrealism (Flum & Blustein, 2000). Fourth, a successful career adaptation requires *confidence*, which helps people to face the obstacles in their way and to actively engage in problem solving, rather than to suffer from the career problem of inhibition (Savickas, 2013).

In the present qualitative research, we explore the content, meaning, and enactment of these four adaptability dimensions to describe refugees' adaptation to the host country's labor market. Such focus, we believe, is promising both for the study of refugee integration into the local labor market (cf. Newman et al., 2018) and also, as an extreme case, a litmus test for the power of current conceptions of career-adaptive responses in the context of dramatic discontinuous career transitions (e.g., Haynie & Shepherd, 2011). Further, while past research has addressed career adaptation primarily from a person-centric standpoint (Savickas, 2005, 2013), we aim to study the role of context. Among refugees, this context can exert an extreme influence (e.g., Baranik et al., 2018). What we do not know, however, is how contextual factors relate to refugees' attitudes, beliefs, and cognitions in their career adaptation in the new country (i.e., which factors may impair, which stimulate an adaptive response).

Relatedly, we add to career construction theory's dominant focus on intrapersonal processes by addressing the role of interpersonal relations when adapting to the novel context (cf. Savickas, 2013). We pay attention to how social contacts and resources may impede or facilitate refugees' adaptation process. The context may thus, overall, both call for higher levels of adaptive responses, but may equally impede such responses.

Methods

Study Context

This study takes place in Germany; a new home for about 1.27 million refugees (UNHCR, 2018b). Refugees in Germany receive basic social welfare as long as needed and a work permit ideally three months after registration, although that process usually takes longer (Informationsverbund Asyl & Migration, 2018). Asylum applications vary in length and may result in applicants being allowed to stay in Germany for good or receiving a one to three year subsidiary protection before cases will be re-decided. Other applicants are turned down and deported to their home country or a 'safe' country passed during their flight, although many of these negative decisions are followed by prolonged legal actions, and possibly, revisions.

On the labor market, Germany is characterized by high academization (Baethge & Wolter, 2015) and vocational specificity (Hillmert, 2006). Built on a dual system of vocational education and training, the German labor market sets out specific educational pathways to ensure a highly skilled workforce. The system relies on apt qualifications and credentials for its workers, thus potentially disadvantaging people who enter from the outside or shift in their careers, reducing these people's re-employment chances and career success.

Sample and Research Design

In winter 2017/2018, we conducted semi-structured interviews with 36 refugees who held a work permit and who sought to gain or had secured employment. We knew 21 from an

earlier study (Wehrle et al., 2018). To secure theoretical saturation (cf. Strauss & Corbin, 1990), we further recruited 15 additional participants via snowballing or via social service organizations working with refugees. Two reasons made us re-interview former study participants: First, to build trust and to secure open answers, we relied on longer-term contacts and already established relations. Second, the present study was inspired by the interview data collected for the earlier study (Wehrle et al., 2018), which provided some insights into how refugees adapt their careers in the host country, even though that had not been the focus of the interviews. We thus decided to explore this topic with partly the same participants.

Characteristic for a refugee workforce (World Education News & Reviews, 2017), the sample was mostly male (30 men), young (mean age = 32 years), and single (23; see Table 7). The refugees originated from seven countries, mostly Syria (19), had entered Germany between 2005 and 2016, and resided in Germany on average for three years and seven months, holding work permits on average for three years. Their residence statuses varied from tolerated stays (i.e., temporary suspension of deportation) to German citizenships. One refugee had an elementary level education, four a high school diploma, three had finished a vocational training in the home country, ten had not yet fully completed their university studies at home, and 18 held a university degree, roughly reflecting the general educational level of refugees in Germany at the time of the study (e.g., Stoewe, 2017).

[Please insert Table 7 approximately here]

We adopted an interpretive qualitative approach (Merriam, 2009; Sandberg, 2005). The interviews were conducted in German or English, depending on the participant's preference, and lasted on average for 63 min. We highlighted the anonymous and voluntary nature of the interviews to the participants, received their informed consent, and, for each interview, compensated the participants with 10€/h. The interview questions were focused on

refugees' work-related experiences, thus not requesting information relating to traumatic war and flight experiences. The interview protocol was designed on the basis of career construction theory, targeting the refugees' career-related adaptation in the host country, and was consistently applied in every interview. The protocol and its semi-structured nature allowed us to adapt each interview to the participant and to flexibly enable each refugee's unique story to surface. Further, it aided us to recognize the impacts of specific contextual events on the refugees' adaptive coping behaviors and to identify how they adapted their careers in the host country. The protocol included a core set of questions on the following topics[18]: (1) The participant's demographics; (2) their past and current vocational experiences; (3) their career adaptability and their adaptive coping responses during the transition into the German labor market; (4) contextual barriers and enablers; and (5) their future career perspectives. All interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. Illustrative quotes in German were translated into English.

Data Analysis[19]

We coded the data with NVIVO11 according to the theory-informed coding frame thematic analysis approach of Braun and Clarke (2006), capturing the data structure (see Figure 3) via in-depth analyses of the interviews. We employed both theory-informed (i.e., deductive) and open (i.e., inductive) coding. For a clear presentation of our data structure, we drew on the coding structure template by Gioia and colleagues (2013)[20]. We organized the data under the themes of the four dimensions of career construction theory (Savickas, 2005, 2013). In these main themes, we did open coding, adhering closely to the participants'

[18] The full interview protocol can be obtained from the first author upon request.
[19] Please note that this study's data analysis section deviates slightly from the published article to account for a more precise depiction of the methodology. This revision does not influence the findings of this research or the study in any way.
[20] While commonly used for inductive qualitative research and grounded theory articulation, we drew on the template by Gioia et al. (2013) to present our data comprehensibly to the readers and to ensure data transparency.

language, resulting in first order codes (e.g., 'taking responsibility'), which were then combined into second order categories (e.g., 'continuously moving on') that constituted concrete phenomena of the refugees' coping responses on a theory-centric level. Lastly, we clustered second order categories to the four dimensions of career construction theory (Savickas, 2005, 2013) to form the abstract and conceptual level of the aggregated theoretical dimensions (e.g., 'taking control and making decisions'). Throughout the analysis, we were sensitive to new and context-specific insights that we recognized in the data. When such themes emerged in one interview and seemed to relate to the overall refugee population, we backtracked to prior participants and re-analyzed their interviews to check for these themes. To ensure internal validity in the data, the interviews were first coded by the first author before the other authors independently went over the quotes and codes. The resulting analyses were compared to further develop and unify the codes, form the second order categories, and the aggregated dimensions. Minor disagreements were resolved through discussion after examining the codes collectively.

[Please insert Figure 3 approximately here]

Findings

In this section, we focus on the refugees' efforts to take control over their careers, their concern and attempts to re-plan their careers in the new context, their curiosity in exploring future job opportunities, and their confidence to solve problems during career construction.

Control in Involuntary Career Transitions

While career construction theory proposes being concerned about one's career as the foundation of career adaptability (Savickas, 2013), our findings point to the critical role of refugees' (lost) sense of control after resettlement. All participants reported a loss of control over their lives and careers, a loss that strongly impaired the other adaptability dimensions.

Nabil voiced:

> My work [in Libya] was really good. ... I could've become a manager. ... I had to re-start here [in Germany] from minus. ... Not from zero, but from minus. ... The system ... is very different. Even with ... work experience, it takes its time. It's not easy, ... although my CV is very good. ... You're new ... and that plays a role. (Nabil)

Contextual Factors for Losing and Taking Control

The refugees ***lost*** control by facing uncertainties, lacking necessary skills and credentials, and by losing time and waiting.

Fundamental uncertainties were constant companions for the refugees, not only in home countries devastated by war and civil unrest, but also in Germany. Critical life and career decisions were often beyond their control, as Zahra noted: "We can't decide ... by ourselves, we can only react", even though most refugees longed to have control over their lives. Zarif reflected: "Most of the times, I want to have full control over my life, but that won't work. ... Not at all. That's not possible." This uncertainty, in turn, had devastating consequences, as portrayed by Sami: "[When my residence decision] was negative, ... I went crazy. ... I was in so much stress. I cannot go back to Afghanistan. [… It] is so bad."

Missing language and/or credentials bereft all participants of control. Sharif outlined the double bind situation of missing language skills and not having a job: "Work helps ... to learn German. [… Yet,] without German, you cannot work here, ... you aren't allowed to."

Many refugees also lacked job and education credentials, which impaired their ability to actively build their careers. Tahir said:

> I'm searching for a full-time job, but it's difficult in Germany ... because you don't have credentials. I told them to let me do an internship, see whether I'm good or not. ... They declined. ... I worked five years in Syria. [Still,] they said: 'Alright, but let me see your credentials'. ... I send out my applications, ... but no answers. ... They

> [employers] say they need my credentials from Syria, but how am I supposed to get those? ... Inside [the job center], they talk to me, sit with me, look at me, and tell me that I need the papers. Alright, I don't have the papers. My problem. (Tahir).

Many refugees lost time without being able to re-build their lives and careers. As stated by Zafer: "I already lost seven years now ... or more. ... I've done nothing, nothing at all in those seven years. ... I wanted more than this." Sometimes, this confined them to an inactive 'waiting position', as in the case of Sharif:

> The war came and I didn't have an option [but to flee]. […Now,] I don't have another option, so I must wait. ... We live in Germany for two years. ... Officially, we're in Germany for six months now. ... Before that, we didn't have an official residence permit. ... I didn't have any possibilities [language course or work], so I had to wait. (Sharif)

The feeling of having to wait also led to new barriers. Nabil stated how refugees could miss job opportunities while waiting for their residence and work permits: "Employers search for people ... who work. If it takes too long [to be legally allowed to work], it's over."

In the face of such difficulties, context also countered above challenges. The refugees felt ***enabled*** to take control once they experienced a sense of security and social connections.

A sense of security often came from comparing one's present life with the instabilities faced before. Salim recounted: "In Iraq, ... there are no rights, there's no strong, stable government. ... What surprised me here were, honestly, the laws. ... I work and I have my rights."

Relatedly, a sense of control also arose from securing German professional credentials that would be recognized and respected both in Germany and internationally. Nasir reflected:

> In Syria, I didn't have a stable occupation. ... I'm thrilled to have ... an education and training [in Germany]. [… This] means for me, first, stability, and second, to have one

> foot firm in the job market. ... To build a real career ... in my line of work. (Nasir).

Choosing to redo all his studies from scratch to re-enter his profession, Dakhil noted:

> I want a certificate so that if I go to another country, it's not like ... when I left Syria. ... Maybe I lost time [by studying anew], but the best thing is to have a German certificate and then, when I go someplace else, there will be no disputes. (Dakhil).

Social connections bolstered refugees' sense of control. Sami noted how people's advice and encouragement re-enforced his optimism in his unresolved residence status:

> 10 to 15 people told me that when [I] have the next interview at the court [for the residence status], they will come with me. ... Everybody told me: 'You're such a strong man' that I [feel as though I] can control the situation. (Sami)

Taking Control and Making Decisions

Most refugees wanted to overcome the uncertainties and re-establish normality into their lives. Zafer said: "The life I live at the moment, I'm not used to it. I want more and I try to go back to normal. Almost normal. Yes and I [still] have much to work towards that." He sought to take control by, for instance, learning the local language and making experiences in how to navigate the society:

> I don't want to rely on the job center any longer. ... My life, this is not how it is. ... In the past, I couldn't speak German. ... I wasn't allowed to do many things. I couldn't do many things. I didn't have any experience. ... Now, I understand almost everything. Now, I can continue. In the past, I needed help. Now, I don't. (Zafer)

Continuously moving on served as an antidote against being overwhelmed by the various barriers and it helped the refugees to regain a sense of control. First, the refugees' aspiration to take responsibility for their lives and decide for themselves was a driving force to move on. Especially not feeling victimized constituted a critical part, as stressed by Zarif:

> [When I'm feeling down, what helps me is] just the feeling to keep on going. ... Yes, I

> don't like the feeling of being a victim. ... Not at all. I always try to be active ... and be an [agent]. ... I always try to see it this way, ... even if it's difficult. (Zarif)

Also, Issam took responsibility for his actions within his field of control:

> My parents didn't know I would be leaving the next day. ... I decided on that, on what I'd do, that I'd do it by myself. ... You've wanted it like this and now you're here. ... You have to accept it. ... It's a motivator, ... it calms you. ... You ask yourself: 'What can you do?' and whether it went right or wrong, you did it yourself. (Issam)

Second, many refugees decidedly disregarded uncertainties to keep on actively shaping their careers, such as Nasir:

> I was stopped by the police in Hungary and ... had to give my fingerprints. ... Because of this, at first, I was declined as an asylum applicant, […, but] right now, it's being decided for how long I'll be allowed to stay in Germany. ... Actually, I'm doing very much at the moment, even though I don't have a residence permit. ... I've integrated myself pretty well and I'm doing many things. ... I distract myself from it [my unresolved case by] educating myself as a dental technician. (Nasir)

Thus, despite factors that could not be influenced in their lives after resettlement, they held on to what they were confident to be in control of: Their own abilities and actions. Nasir said: "I don't really have control except over my abilities." As many others, Nadim strove to become self-employed to make his own decisions: "Becoming self-employed, ... means you're free. You're independent. You don't need anyone. You're not dependent on anyone."

Consciously prioritizing helpful emotions and thoughts was another method used to regain control. As Zarif said: "I try to not worry too much about everything. That restricts one's ability to think." Refugees achieved this by distracting themselves (see Nasir's quote in 'continuously moving on') or by consciously controlling their emotions, as outlined by Issam:

> It has a lot to do with one's emotions. ... I'm all alone in Germany, without my parents or my siblings. ... Sometimes, you think much about it, about the family, ... and when this emotion comes up ... you neglect another part [of life], such as your studies, work, or so. So, I always try to control my emotions ... to not influence my work, or my studies. ... It bears me down, but not too often, as I try to not think about it too much. ... To solve the issue, I think one has to think differently. (Issam)

Some participants also consciously accepted their lack of control over their situation, trying to keep it from overshadowing their personal lives. As Burhan stated: "I always say that I have to accept it here. ... Just accept it. ... I don't think too much about things."

Further, many refugees maintained their control by appreciating their life experiences associated with overcoming challenges prior to and after resettling. Rakia observed: "[Now,] I value more what I have [in life]. [….] I've experienced many things that I'd never imagined to ever experience. ... And everything you experience in life gives you new knowledge." Also, some refugees voiced their gratitude for basic things which enabled a new sense of what control meant to them. Salim said: "I have to say, we [I and my family] are content. We really thank [the Germans …] for accepting us, the Yazidis, and for giving us [back] our rights."

Finally, some refugees explicitly framed their resettlement to Germany as a chance to start over. Zafer appreciated the new opportunities and described how they aided him to be in charge: "It's a new life. I don't have to think about what I did before. New life, new start. ... I feel at ease knowing that I got another chance ... to do something."

Contributing to local society was another means to regain control. When working, some refugees not only wanted to do good work, but also to have their work recognized, giving them purpose and motivation. Zarif said: "I always want to do good work ... and ... achieve good results. ... It's not only the higher position, [… but also] the recognition of

one's work." He also explained how this recognition related to contributing to something significant. Having knowledge in his own work enabled him to feel valuable and assertive:

> It was always [important] to me that I have good work or relevant work. ... Relevant doesn't imply that I have good knowledge on all science matters, but ... on what I do, the field I work in. ... That now, I'm able to do something ... that counts. ... That what I've done was important, ... has changed something; ... I was important. (Zarif)

In addition, several refugees noted that it was important for them to give something back to the people who helped them surpass difficulties and integrate. Nasir said:

> What really motivates me [to voluntarily work in a clothing store] is, first, to be able to give something back ... and second, to help the people the same way that I've received support ... by just being able to share my experiences. (Nasir)

Concern in Involuntary Career Transitions

A deep concern for their futures, including their future careers, was prevalent in many of the refugees' minds – and yet, uncertainties undermined their active career planning. Nasir noted: "You can't really anticipate ... anything about your future in Germany."

Contextual Factors for Career Planning

When ***restricted*** by uncertainties about their residences and thus also their work statuses along with disrupted career paths, many refugees' felt unable to pursue original plans or to make new plans in the host country.

An uncertain residence status and thus uncertain future not only eroded refugees' control, but also disrupted their ability to plan ahead, as they did not know where their futures would lie: In Germany, at home, or in a third country passed along the way. Dakhil stressed:

> One doesn't know [what will happen]. We're just refugees. When the war in Syria ends ..., maybe we'll go back. ... I have three years [permit to stay in Germany] as a refugee. But I don't know what I should do after that. Either I receive my unlimited

> [German residence permit] or I'll be deported back [to Syria]. ... If I stay here, then I want to finish my education and studies. Without that, you can't do anything in Germany. ... But I don't know, ... what do they want to do with me? (Dakhil)

Disrupted career paths made it difficult for many refugees to plan. Salim had to find a job in Germany and could not take the time to re-enter and continue his prior education:

> [My prospects in Iraq] went into a totally different direction than now in Germany. ... I had very good grades [and] my teachers were very pleased with me. ... I had very different ideas on ... work fields than now. ... But it all got destroyed. (Salim)

Many occupations also required different skills and knowledge in the home country than in Germany. These differences rendered one's occupational competence invalid and complicated planning one's future in that occupation. Dakhil said: "I didn't think about other [work prospects] yet. In Syria, I was a chemist and worked much in the rescue service. Here, everything works with technology. ... I have to find another idea here, one that works."

Yet, other contextual factors ***enabled*** career planning. Once refugees learned that they could stay for some time or even for good (e.g., receipt of residence permit), they felt more able to plan their futures. Liana compared her own ability to plan to that of her sister:

> Many doors have opened since she [her sister] received the [residence permit]. ... Much has changed. Suddenly, she has work prospects. If I find a job, I have to ask the immigration authorities whether I'm allowed to work there or not. ... My sister doesn't have to ask anyone. ... When she finds work, she can apply, and work. (Liana)

Making and Adjusting Career Plans

Even before receiving residence, many participants set future goals and prepared accordingly. Some explicitly monitored the progress of their plans. Burhan said: "Right now I have a plan from the beginning [of my stay in Germany] and [up until now] it worked out well. ... I hope it'll stay like this until the end."

Revealing the relevance of ***setting goals***, Rakia noted: "I think that every person should have a goal to be able to keep on going in life." The types of goals, however, differed. In response to their earlier experiences or current uncertainties, several refugees only set present or proximal goals. Djamila was accustomed to unanticipated life and career developments: "I only think what I'll do tomorrow [and] the day after. ... Maybe something will happen ... that I haven't planned." Sami, who had just filed a case of legal action against a negative asylum decision, noted how his uncertain future shortened his planning horizon: "Everything is [at a] stop. [… Now,] I go step by step." Setting only proximal goals also occurred when refugees needed to find a job quickly, thus giving up their original plans. Sharif said:

> [Now,] I don't plan for an education and training. ... I just want to find work and think about translation services ... in two or three years. ... It would take long, so now, I search for normal work. ... Maybe in a hotel ... or a café, just simply work. (Sharif)

Even though setting proximal goals was often due to having to trade long-term career dreams to immediate job opportunities, several refugees noted how it enabled them to move forward. Zarif experienced his former plans being shattered and had to re-maneuver in life:

> Maybe it has to do with my asylum, with my experiences of the situation in Syria and that now I'm here, that I fled to Germany. ... I had, for instance, plans in Syria, but they were [then gone]. That sapped my energies. ... I make myself plans, of course, but not long-termed. For instance, I believe that I can study my masters soon, but right now, that's not on my plan list. ... I always have thoughts in my mind about my future, but that's different than planning it, I think. (Zarif)

Other refugees set major goals. Issam established his goals hierarchically to have small goals pave the way to plan the future and to motivate him to reach for his major goal of becoming a self-employed civil engineer:

> One has to have a major goal to succeed in achieving the small goals. ... The major goals are what actually motivate me. ... Small goals are rather a way of planning, for example, which exams will I write this semester? ... But my major goal is that, well, where do I see myself in ten years? (Issam)

Yet, sometimes concern also showed in refugees ***preparing for their futures*** in Germany as if they could stay. While Nasir's uncertain residence status reduced his control over his situation, he still was concerned about his future in Germany and made plans: "I prepare myself as though I'm staying here. [… I don't know] for how long I can work. ... I haven't received the final decision yet and I'm waiting on whether I'll be accepted or not."

For Said, disregarding uncertainties meant to follow his planned path and prepare for his career, although he was told that he would be unlikely to return to his former profession:

> At the beginning, I met a person [employee] at the job center. He tried to disappoint me. ... He told me that he knows I'm an engineer and I've studied, but that the labor market [in Germany] is different and I should know that I'll probably work in a warehouse or so. ... The work standards are different. ... Those were very difficult moments, really. I was new and didn't know anything about the labor market. Would my vocational future be destroyed? ... I worried a lot. Then, I thought worries won't help me. My path is clear. I have to learn the language as well as possible. If I don't make it, I did [all I could]. But for now, I can't change it [the situation]. The first step is the language, ... no question. I was sure that after my ... language class I could use the time to get to know the land and the labor market better. And then assess whether it was true what the man had told me. (Said)

Also, some refugees proactively anticipated formal requirements for specific jobs and invested time, effort, and money to meet them. They secured skill credentials that would help them re-enter work. Salim reported how this helped him obtain his job as a school bus driver:

> I applied for some jobs, also in patient transport. ... One firm ... invited me. ... Before that, I, of course, had already prepared myself. I already did the passenger transport certificate. ... Without it, you can't work as a driver. ... I had to do tests [and …] it cost me 200€. ... I prepared myself ... for the time when someone would say: 'Do you have it already?' ... And that was how it happened. (Salim)

Also, anticipating the high competence and credential requirements in Germany, many refugees prepared themselves for potential jobs by continuing their education and securing their credibility. Especially gaining local work experience was seen as relevant. Issam noted:

> After having finished my education, I plan to work two or three years in Germany to gain some experience. The German experience [… is recognized] everywhere you work around the world; when they [employers] see that you've worked in Germany. (Issam)

Many participants reported the value of internships not only as a filler task, but also as a valuable addition for understanding the labor market and employers' standards. Aman said:

> I think it's better to do an internship before working ... and then be ready for the job, and ... work well. ... The work [one does] is better than as ... when one starts directly. ... When one receives a bit of help or explanations on ... what to do. (Aman)

That said, not all participants showed such planfulness. A few did not feel able to plan and prepare. As Sharif stated: "I don't have another option, so I must wait."

Curiosity in Involuntary Career Transitions

Being new to the country and customs, a certain curiosity and willingness to explore were of pivotal importance for refugees' successful integration into the German labor market.

Contextual Factors for Exploring

All refugees were curious about the local labor market and its opportunities, yet often

lacked necessary knowledge. Particularly cultural and institutional norms differed greatly between the refugees' homes and Germany. Many found it difficult to understand the German norms, expectations, and customs, as Dakhil said:

> In our country, it's easier, more flexible than here. If you want to work here, you first need your CV, then all the other documents. What did I do from first grade to my studies, my work permit, many papers, and I don't know why employers need them. ... Why is it so complicated? It's a mini-job for 400 €/month. ... If I want to start a career and I have the competences and skills, but no credentials, I can't work. (Dakhil)

Despite having heard about the German educational system, some refugees did not master its basic features. Rakia said: "There are so many possibilities I don't understand. ... Someday, I should understand what happens in the German labor market, but not yet." It also prevented many from realizing the educational and work opportunities available, resulting in missed chances. Stressing the helplessness of refugees in the alien setting, Nasir suggested:

> It'd be amazing if the people [refugees] would have more insights into the labor market. ... It's, first, difficult for us to enter the labor market and then, to proceed in it. ... To just get in is the issue. ... The strict laws and everything, I think people just have to be more informed. ... Many want to do something, ... they're ... interested, [… but] the language, ... all the paper work. ... People need much help. (Nasir)

Some contextual factors could also ***facilitate*** exploration. These were rich educational and work opportunities and being offered a chance.

The rich educational and work opportunities of the German labor market were often valued when refugees tried to identify careers to explore. Zarif illustrated: "I think that ... I have greater and more open prospects. ... I see more opportunities in Germany than in Syria", and he used these new opportunities in Germany to shape his career (see also Zarif's quote in

'knowing what to explore'): "I'm really happy to have changed my fields of study."

Often, a successful exploration of career options depended on the supportive attitudes of employers. As many refugees struggled with the language or their credibility as workers (see, for instance, Aman in 'finding and establishing ways to explore'), being offered a chance aided finding work. Said noted:

> What really helped me were the people with whom I worked. They were helpful and had the courage to give me a chance, and were open-minded about me. ... I also met people who ... preferred not to take risks [… as …] language [issues] might [harm] the work climate. But what helped me was that ... the firm's management had the courage to ... try something new. ... I absolutely needed this chance. (Said)

Exploring the Self and the Environment

Re-establishing their careers after resettlement required all refugees to consider what they wanted to do with their futures. This implied having ideas on what they wanted to explore and on how to go about exploring.

Knowing what to explore was the first step for refugees towards new career possibilities. First, many participants held on to their former careers, feeling that they should use their job-specific knowledge and past education and not disregard it. Gulalai said: "The main thing is that I get to work in my ... field of specialty. ... If you work in a different field, you have to do it all over. ... I wouldn't be successful ... in other fields."

Issam described how the new setting allowed him to explore his childhood dream:

> When you see engineers and architects at constructions sites as a small boy, ... you think how cool they are. ... Working way up high in a building ..., looking all the way down. It's fun. ... Then you ... came to Germany and had no prospects. ... But somehow it all happened and now, [I'm] almost a civil engineer [myself]. (Issam)

Others formulated new career dreams. Zarif changed his field of study: "I have an

[education and training] contract in ... mechatronic automation. ... It's very interesting. ... There were no studies in this field in Syria. ... The work field wasn't as developed." Several refugees were willing to experiment and take risks. As Zafer said: "If my education and training works, then everything will be great! If not, I have to try something else."

Lastly, a few refugees even identified an advantage in the hardship of being displaced: Having the chance for a fresh start. Said decided to revive his old career dream:

> I looked for work in network technology, but that was unsuccessful. I didn't get a good job offer. Then, when searching, I got the idea to change my work field and start with automation technology. I always dreamed of working in that field. And I thought if I have to start new anyways, why not change to my favorite field? (Said)

Finding and establishing ways to explore was the second step after knowing what to explore. Especially connecting by building social contacts was vital to gaining insights into the German regulations and cultural practices. As Sami noted: "You need to meet the people if you want to understand the culture. If ... I meet here with you, [I] will understand something. [I] will find some advice here. ... I have learned so many things from [people]."

Sometimes, initial social encounters developed into friendships that offered not only support to the refugees in life and career matters, but also access to resources and knowledge. Zarif noted how locals and relations to his employers aided his perspectives:

> I know [a German family] as they helped us [refugees] at [a social institution]. ... Their daughter also helped me with my enrolment [education and training]. ... It was a bit difficult for me ... so we did it together, ... and that made me feel more comfortable. [… Further,] we [my former employer and I] became friends. ... She was also the first person to tell me about the education and training [in Germany]. ... She said that I did so much in Syria and want to quickly get back into work life, and have a job, so [this form of work] would really suit me. (Zarif)

Social connections also facilitated finding new job openings. Repeatedly when searching for work, the refugees faced rejections. Yet, social connections could unlock (unexpected) opportunities, especially when locals used their networks to help the refugees find jobs. Aman noted how locals aided to gain credibility in the eyes of German employers:

> I can't find work alone. ... We have good contacts [to Germans]. ... My friend helped me find work. ... He's German ... and the company [believed in me]. When I search ... for work myself, ... maybe they don't believe me. (Aman)

Yet, sometimes it was difficult to approach locals due to language barriers or cultural differences. So, the participants also relied on people with similar past experiences from their home countries or who share the same ethnicity to gain local insights. Tahir described:

> I always also ask other Arabs, as sometimes, it's different for Germans. I can't always understand it all. ... Many questions, I can't ask them in German or I have no idea how it works. I ask Arabs who've already been here for some time and they help me. (Tahir)

In addition to relying on social connections, many participants used present opportunities to broaden their views on potential future career paths. Thinking ahead, Nasir knew that he might one day specialize in a certain area of dental technology. Thus, he used the practical training of his dual education program to explore his alternatives in the field:

> Right now, I do way too much at the laboratory. ... I mean, as much as I can possibly do. ... In dental technology, you first learn about everything and then you get specialized. ... There are three or four paths you could take. ... So, I look into all fields ... to have all possible knowledge that I can get. ... It's not being asked of me, but I ... gather as much experience as I can ... in all fields. (Nasir)

Besides relying on resources such as the internet, cell phones, books, local classes, and organizations, some refugees actively visited job fairs and other such events that

showcased possible work prospects. Meticulously informing himself, Zarif found a job this way:

> The main reason [for staying in a city] is that many firms ... for my line of work are located in this region. ... I've really informed myself. ... I asked people and I went to many ... job fairs ... to get to know the firms. ... In the newspaper, I saw an advertisement for an information event ... about education and training. ... I went there twice and [….] there were lists of all the firms that offered education and training. I looked them up, ... chose ... four [firms], and wrote four applications. ... And it worked. (Zarif)

Many participants also used the opportunities in their workplaces to prepare and initiate future career aspirations. Chakib, who worked as a bar keeper and waiter, used his job to acquire knowledge that would, later on, help him to realize his goal of opening a restaurant:

> I don't just see it as work, it's rather like an education and training, or a new way of gaining experience. ... I always try to find ways in my current job to learn something for my future. My goal is to open my own restaurant. ... I always try to learn more. (Chakib)

Confidence in Involuntary Career Transitions

Successful career construction requires confident actions, but the refugees often felt their confidence wavering. Rakia stated:

> Every evening ... I think about what will happen and whether I'll really succeed at the university. ... Or whether I'll be able to finish my studies. ... I'm afraid of everything. ... Fear is a feeling that constantly follows me. (Rakia)

As a consequence, many refugees re-adjusted their aspirations to something that appeared more realistic to them in the new setting. Nabil described:

> What was 15 years ago is something I can't bring back. ... It will take its time, but I don't think it'll be what I had hoped for. ... When I achieve 65 percent of what I had hoped for in the past, that's good! ... Because the atmosphere is different, the environment is new. ... And it's different and you can't change everything from today to tomorrow. ... But you have to live with it. (Nabil)

Contextual Factors for Losing and Bolstering Confidence

Many refugees' confidence was ***undermined*** by feelings of wasted time and lost opportunities when they compared where they could have been at home and where they found themselves now. Tahir (see also 'missing language and/or credentials') felt that he was not achieving anything:

> I don't need money from the job center. I can work myself ... It's better than to sit at home. ... Now, I work as a janitor, but it's a mini-job, 11 hours per week. ... I have more than 100 other hours a week. What do I do with these 100 hours? Only sit around. I wanted to do something, not just to support my family, but also for myself. ... Time flies by so fast. Then, when I'm 40, I'll look back and ... what did I do until then? Nothing. ... When I'll have children and they'll ask me what I've done, I can only say: 'Nothing.' ... That's not how I want it! I want to tell my children I was in Germany, I worked, I did something, ... their father was strong. (Tahir)

Also, most refugees fell behind the usual timeline of their career trajectories. Drawing the contrast between where in her career trajectory she would have been in Syria by now versus her present status in Germany, Rakia, who sought to re-enter university, said:

> When I ... think about my friends in Syria being in their last years at the university and I haven't even begun with my studies [in Germany], it makes me sad. ... What am I doing here now in Germany? I mean, where [in life] am I? (Rakia)

A lack of belonging in the sense of feeling lonely and sensing negative attitudes from

others eroded many refugees' confidence. Kain noted:

> We're all alone here. ... I'm afraid as ..., at times, just one information [ethnicity or nationality] changes if people want to give you work. ... When somebody says we're alone here and can't change that, ... it ruins my day [… and] my motivation. (Kain)

Also Dakhil was afraid of locals not understanding or valuing him as a person:

> When people would look at me and [perceive me as] worthless, you know? ... I don't want to force others to respect me, to accept me. ... I want to show others that I'm a normal human being. I always try to command the language. ... I can't do it in a short time. I'm not a magician or something like that. [It takes] time. (Dakhil)

The refugees were also worried of how to approach and engage with locals at work. Due to different cultural customs, Zarif felt unsure of starting his new work: "How should I deal with my colleagues? ... How does it work in Germany in a firm? How do the people behave?" This lack of confidence also stemmed from fearing unequal treatment. Zarif added:

> I'm afraid and don't want to receive smaller, less, or easier tasks, ... because I'm Syrian ... or because of the language. ... I just want to be treated on the same level as Germans. [… To be valued] the same, treated the same. (Zarif)

Yet, context was also able to ***bolster*** the refugees' confidence. Often, they grew confident by gaining insights into the advantages of the labor market and feeling to belong.

An awareness of the advantages of the local labor market strengthened the refugees' confidence. Sami reported how the emphasis on qualifications in Germany made him confident about his future possibilities: "In Germany, if you do something [work], it must be [an education] for three years [before starting to work]. After that, I think it will be easy [to find a] job." Many refugees also highlighted how the local demand for workers in certain fields ensured future careers. Said stated: "I think that I have a good future in this work field [automation technology]. ... There's a great [labor] demand and that's important. The work

perspectives are good for the future, especially in Germany, where the industry is strong."

Social belonging bolstered confidence. Noting social relations as vital, Issam voiced:

> A human needs other humans. ... To have someone by your side, that's very important. ... To know that someone stands behind me motivates me a lot and then I don't think too much about everything, because I know that someone supports me and no matter what happens, that person is by my side. (Issam)

Protecting and Bolstering Confidence

To protect and strengthen their confidence, the refugees reflected positively on their accomplishments and kept persisting.

Reflecting on their accomplishments both to themselves and to others helped many refugees bolster their confidence. Nasir gave meaning to his past actions, directing his career:

> Somehow, we [refugees] have this ... ability to survive. ... That comforts us. ... In Syria, I thought that I could move forward, but now that I'm here, I noticed that I've moved even further than I thought at first. (Nasir)

Also, Zarif noted: "When I wrote my ... application, I thought more about what I've done. ... What I've achieved in Germany. ... I hadn't recognized many things." Some refugees even recognized having achieved more than they ever thought possible. Zafer said: "I didn't know that I could make it here [in Germany]. ... I didn't know that and I'm very proud of myself. ... And I want more."

Sometimes this awareness also translated into conveying their accomplishments to others. By capitalizing on past adversities, Zarif proved his value to German employers:

> [They hired me, as] I introduced myself as someone who has already had experience abroad. ... I come from Syria ... and I've already lived in Germany for two years now and yes, I‘ve made use of my situation. ... I've learned the [German] language and succeeded in it. ... I've lived with two other people in the same room. ... I‘ve used [my

possibilities] and I make every effort that I can, ... despite the high strains. ... And the company looked for someone with the experience that I have. ... I studied four years ... at the university [in Syria in a related line of work]. (Zarif)

Simply persisting also when facing setbacks helped many refugees to maintain their confidence. Nasir clarified: "I'll keep on continuing, ... no matter what happens." Also, Salim actively targeted obstacles, remaining confident to find new work and not give up:

> There were problems and surprises, ... rejections when [I] was new, didn't have experience. ... But when you always continue to try and knock on every door, one of those doors will open, and that's what happened. I knocked on all doors and one opened, invited me in. ... Other people said they were really afraid [to] be rejected [for jobs]. ... I didn't have any experience, ... I just came to Germany. I was like blindfolded. ... I always told myself to stay calm, even when the next [employer] rejects me and the one after that, [I'd] continue forward. ... It worked. (Salim)

Also, some participants built confidence by keeping on learning. As Said put it: "To do something ordinary isn't my thing. I enjoy continuously learning new skills and facing new challenges. Work then is fun." Re-building one's career entailed finding innovative ways to overcome obstacles, such as the language barriers, as also reported by, for instance, Said:

> I wanted to learn German as fast as possible, but ... it wasn't easy, as I had no contact to Germans. I tried to learn it in ... German classes ... and with the help of the radio or the television. ... I also trained my speaking abilities, [but] I didn't have many options. I ... invented situations and just talked to myself in the mirror. (Said)

Burhan focused similarly on learning the language, but also on staying active and reminding himself of how much he was able to do:

> Currently after work, I visit the C1 German class [effective operational proficiency] ... three times a week for two hours. ... Weekends, ... I play soccer [… and work as a]

gardener, ... as Saturdays I don't have anything else to do. ... I wanted to try how it works. If I can do [it all], I'll continue, if not, ... I can still quit [gardening]. (Burhan)

Discussion

Career construction theory posits career adaptation to happen along four dimensions grounded in individual differences in adaptability resources and competences (Savickas, 2013). Even though the resources and competences naturally vary among people, our findings show that a study of the adaptation process is incomplete without considering contextual factors. Being a refugee implies an abrupt break in one's career, followed by many contextual barriers to shaping one's career after the resettlement. Of particular relevance were three overarching barriers for a successful career adaptation in Germany (i.e., barriers intersecting various adaptability dimensions; see also Figure 3). First, the participants faced fundamental *uncertainties* in regards to their residence decisions, both leaving them without control and with difficulties to make or adjust their career plans. Second, *lacking personal resources* (i.e., language skills and work credentials and knowledge of cultural and institutional norms) inhibited their control and restricted their exploration, resulting in missed opportunities. Third, the refugees felt that they had wasted much *time* when they could not build on their earlier training and work experiences (and these effectively became useless). The time needed for learning the language and sorting out legal matters in order to begin looking for work, and also the hurdles in finding work, impaired both their sense of control and confidence. The way these barriers strongly impeded the refugees' career adaptive responding also showed in the barriers' resolution: For instance, receiving a positive residence decision assisted all refugees in overcoming their fundamental uncertainties and solved many context-related problems, allowing participants to take control and make future plans in Germany.

Apart from barrier resolution over time, other events also facilitated adaptation. The

findings highlight two overarching enablers cutting across at least two adaptability dimensions. First, *social connections* enriched the refugees' control and bolstered their confidence by aiding them to feel understood, supported, and to belong. Second, the *richness of opportunities* of the local educational and vocational system and being given a chance by employers assisted to exhibit their curiosity and gain confidence.

Our study also illustrates how the refugees managed to cope and actively construct their careers. In line with career construction theory (Savickas, 2013), their coping was characterized by self-regulation, that is, goal-directed cognitions, emotions, and behaviors that help individuals follow a line of action across various contexts and over time (Karoly, 1993). As Figure 3 indicates, many refugees regulated their emotions and actively framed their thoughts in a positive manner to take control, make decisions, and to build their confidence. Behaviorally, many kept 'moving on' and consciously disregarded objective realities and uncertainties in their career construction, rather holding on to their intents and dreams. The self-regulative nature of their coping also showed in goal-setting (cf. Heckhausen et al., 2010) and in both self- and environmental exploration (cf. Stumpf et al., 1983). They used their time and innate resources, relied on institutional and social resources to explore career prospects, and constantly worked towards creating a new career.

In line with quantitative findings (Hirschi et al., 2015), our data also indicate interrelations between the career adaptability dimensions. First, refugees disregarded uncertainties both to be in control and to turn their career concern into actual plans. Second, they actively regulated thoughts and emotions and reflected positively on their achievements. This helped them to take control and make decisions, and it bolstered their confidence. Third, refugees continuously moved on, enabling them to attain control, demonstrate concern, and gain confidence. To be in control, they took responsibility for their actions and, to exhibit career concern, actively planned and prepared for future jobs. They sustained their confidence

by being persistent. Lastly, refugees built their potential (e.g., by keeping on learning) and resources (e.g., by securing credentials) to prepare for their careers and to be confident.

Further, we recognized two mindsets that strengthened refugees' career adaptability: A 'can do'-attitude and positive, appreciative mindsets. First, and in line with previous research on qualified migrants (Zikic et al., 2010), many refugees had a distinctive 'can do'-attitude. They were goal oriented in adjusting to the new setting, stayed cognitively and emotionally positive, and disregarded uncertainties and barriers. Thus, possibly, discontinuous career transitions and related adverse experiences of, for example, the loss of control, spark individuals to become more independent career constructors. When noticing that they would not be able to realize their former expectations after resettlement, some refugees took control and showed concern for their futures by considering self-employment or thinking beyond both Germany and their home country. Such boundaryless mindsets (cf. Arthur & Rousseau, 1996) surfaced in both refugees with temporary residence statuses and thus insecure futures and refugees with German citizenships. Second, many refugees nurtured optimistic, appreciative mindsets that fostered their successful career adaptation, possibly even enriching their career adaptability (cf. Rudolph et al., 2017). By framing their situations in a hopeful and positive way, these refugees took control by appreciating their experiences and opportunities in the host country. Their confidence was bolstered when they recognized and shared their past achievements. Also, turning objectively 'negative' factors (e.g., refugee background) into something positive (e.g., international work experience) protected some refugees' confidence.

Repeatedly, participants highlighted social connections as relevant (cf. Gericke et al., 2018). Facing career disruptions, the refugees relied on connecting to other people to take control and make decisions, to explore, and be confident. Connections to both the home and the host community made them feel safer and increased positive transition experiences. The

value of social connections differed among the adaptive response: When taking control and making decisions, connections directed refugees' careers and gave meaning to their actions. Social connections were also instrumental for career exploration; they mobilized resources to follow up on one's curiosity. Finally, connections strengthened refugees' confidence by increasing their sense of social belongingness (cf. Baumeister & Leary, 1995) and counteracting a loss of confidence in the face of obstacles.

Finally, career construction theory proposes that the process of career construction shapes both self and career, and in a successful case, weaves both together into a personally meaningful career path (Savickas, 2013). As the findings show, refugees directed their behaviors not only to adapt their careers, but also to build meaningful careers. They did this by adapting to the altered circumstances of the new context and by re-entering work. For example, they continuously moved on and thought positively, strove to be of value, acted on the new work environment's inherent chances, and reminded themselves of their past achievements, re-infusing meaning and purpose into their newly adapted careers.

Theoretical Implications

The findings highlight several implications for career construction theory (Savickas, 2013). First, deficits in persons' career adaptation showed not only as career problems (i.e., attitudinal career adaptability deficiencies) where a deficit in control is about indecisiveness, a deficit in concern about indifference, one in curiosity about unrealism, and lacking confidence about inhibition. Rather, we postulate career problems also to originate from contextual barriers impeding individuals' agency. Most refugees had to sacrifice their previous lives and careers to ensure their basic physical safety and survival and, in doing so, had to let go off their earlier career paths. Basic life uncertainties (e.g., where to reside in the future) robbed them of control. Rather than being indecisive, they were fundamentally uncertain. Also, despite being concerned about their careers, planning was difficult. Although

many refugees sensed what was required of them, the unfamiliarity of their environment hindered making plans and actively preparing for their futures. Consequently, they worried about their future careers, yet were helpless to shape them. Further, even though refugees were curious and open to explore, being unrealistic and thus missing to follow up on one's curiosity stemmed from lacking basic insights into existing local possibilities. Also, losing confidence often resulted from refugees knowing that they could not live up to their aspirations. Thus, the refugees faced context-specific issues that, rather than their attitudes, hindered career construction, indicating career problems to not only originate from deficits in career adaptability.

Second, career construction theory postulates individuals who show career problems to not exert the behaviors of the corresponding career adaptability dimensions (cf. Savickas, 2013). Our findings, however, show otherwise. A few participants surrendered to the inhibiting context undermining their adaptive responding (e.g., waiting until resolved legal issues would solve context-specific problems), yet most refugees actively managed their situation by moving ahead despite the difficulties. Thus, they exerted adaptive behaviors regardless of the context interfering with their career adaptive resources. Such behaviors were not, however, equally possible for each career adaptability dimension. Contextual factors had a stifling impact on control (leaving the refugees to feel helpless) and confidence (leaving them to doubt themselves and their ability to overcome obstacles), and on adaptive behaviors as a result. In terms of their concern and curiosity, the context only restricted their behaviors (i.e., inhibiting them in making plans or exploring their selves and surroundings), but not necessarily their innate adaptability. Thus, although being concerned and curious, they could not display behaviors that translated their adaptability into reality.

Our data also suggest an alternative view to the dimension of concern (cf. Savickas, 2013). While career construction theory suggests that setting only present and proximal goals

speaks of a lack of concern, our findings suggest that when facing uncertainties and feeling pressured to quickly find a job, many refugees oriented their planning to the short-term, just to get their feet on the ground. Actual planning was often difficult, yet they still showed intense concern about their futures. Thus, we point to career concern not only revolving around optimistic planning, but to also include being troubled about the future and making choices driven by one's needs and the context's immediate opportunities.

Our findings also emphasize the positive influence of contacts on refugees' resettlement (cf. Gericke et al., 2018; Wehrle et al., 2018). Career construction, in the light of these results, is not a process done alone. As interpersonal relations are vital, they introduce the question 'with whom do I build my future?' as a crucial aspect of career adaptability (cf. Savickas, 2005). Lastly, we propose career construction theory to incorporate emotional adaptive responses into career adaptation (cf. Savickas, 2013), given that several refugees regulated their emotions to adapt successfully.

Practical Implications

Our study has shown how a strongly bounded context challenges refugees' career adaptation, highlighting the need for host countries' organizations to support refugees' self-regulation, foster their adaptive coping, and thus empower them to successfully transition (cf. Pajic et al., 2018). Enabling them (e.g., in terms of language courses) and granting them admission to the local labor market and thus simply giving them access and (local) work experience, enhanced refugees' self-regulation. Local organizations and job-search agencies may supply work opportunities to increase refugees' local credibility via, for example, internships and mentoring programs. While a lack of cultural or institutional knowledge restricted refugees' exploration and thus decreased their re-employment chances (especially as those short on some adaptability resources are likely to be short on others as well; Hirschi & Valero, 2015), being offered a chance often resulted in job opportunities. The mandatory

integration classes should also more clearly outline local educational and work requirements and opportunities to enable refugees to navigate local work and society more successfully (Federal Office for Migration and Refugees, 2018).

In addition, the findings speak for the role of social connections in refugees' career adaptation. Holding the potential to spark refugees' agency and thus direct their careers, we believe it crucial to institutionalize quality relations in job-search and re-employment processes (cf. Stephens et al., 2011). Further, the findings indicate the importance of low-threshold opportunities for refugees to connect with locals; a concept worth including into career counseling practices. While research recognizes (social) context for career counseling (e.g., Lent, 2005), the current career construction practice may stronger acknowledge such influences (cf. Savickas, 2013).

Limitations and Directions for Future Research

This study specified few exclusion criteria to generate a rich picture of how refugees adapt their careers in Germany. Yet, the sample may be biased in two ways: In terms of, first, the dominance of male participants (which, however, resembles a characteristic gender distribution of a refugee labor force; cf. World Education News & Reviews, 2017) and, second, the over-inclusion of persons more self-regulated, motivated, and open to share their insights than the general refugee population. By re-engaging participants of a former study (see 'sample and research design'), and given their sincerity to also report negative experiences, we do not believe this potential bias to be worrisome. Also, the 21 participants from the former study who agreed to a second interview did not differ perceptively from those who did not on age, gender, or on any conceivable indicator of integration success such as residence status or current work situation. We therefore see no reason to believe our sample to suffer from a form of survival bias. Further, the residences of our participants ranged from one year to twelve years and three months (see Table 7), thus providing

comprehensive insights into the refugees' experiences directly after resettlement and emerging over time.

In addition, this study's interview data were cross-sectional. Therefore, they do not allow precise inferences of causality. Future research may follow up both temporally and quantitatively to unravel possible causal links between, for instance, individual differences in adaptive responses. Also, it may identify the nature of the interrelations within career adaptability dimensions and coping responses. In line with prior research (e.g., Hirschi et al., 2015), we found several indications of both being intertwined.

Conclusion

This study addressed refugees' career-related adaptation in their host country. By unraveling the constraining and enabling influences of the context on refugees' career adaptability and adaptive coping after resettlement, we also provide insights into contextual effects on refugees' agency. Our findings validate the power of current conceptions of career-adaptive responses in discontinuous career transitions (e.g., Haynie & Shepherd, 2011) and generalize career construction theory (Savickas, 2013) to the refugee context. We also extend the current career construction theory: Career problems in career construction are also contextually conditioned and not only attitudinal by nature. By presenting the complexity of refugees' adaptive coping when transitioning involuntarily, we show how they manage to shape their careers despite the vast constraints. Their coping is characterized by strong self- and emotion regulation (cf. Savickas, 2013). Further, we note positive mindsets to help persons to adapt (cf. Rudolph et al., 2017) and social connections as vital for refugees' career adaptability.

Table 7

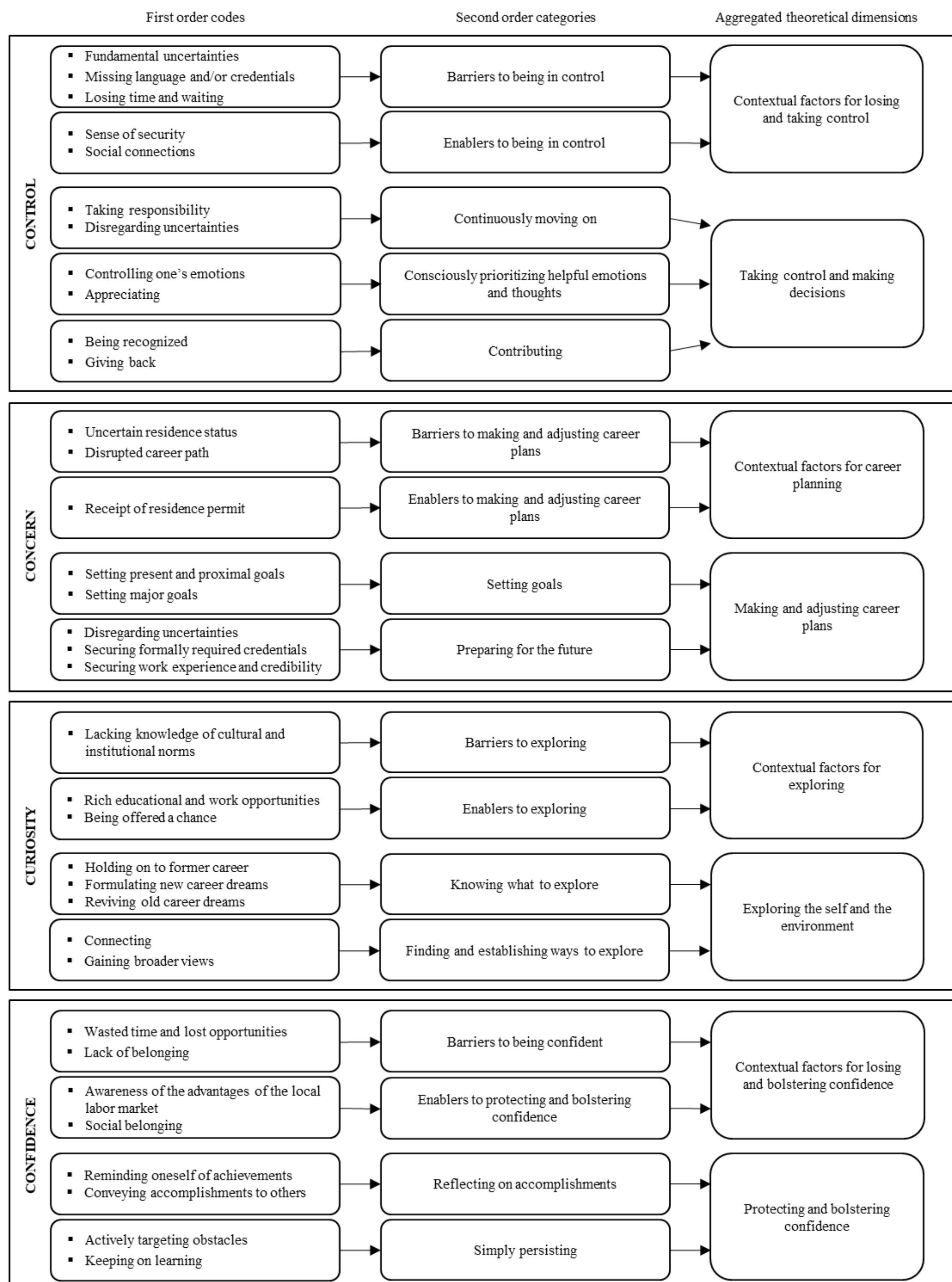
Demographics of Study Participants According to Order of Interview Dates (N = 36)

#	Participant[+]	Age	Country of origin	Gender	Time spent in Germany[a]	Time since work permit receipt in Germany[a]	Residence status[a]	Earlier line of work	Line of work in Germany[a]
1	Issam[b]	24	Afghanistan	Male	8Y4M	7Y4M	German citizenship	Various jobs	Civil engineer[h]
2	Sami[b]	23	Afghanistan	Male	2Y4M	1Y3M	Tolerated stay	N/A[f]	Gastronomist, baker
3	Zarif[b]	27	Syria	Male	2Y2M	1Y0M	Residence permit	Electronics and telecommunication engineer[h]	Mechatronic automation engineer[i]
4	Yaver[b]	34	Syria	Male	2Y3M	N/A[f]	Residence permit	Personnel officer	Warehouser[j]
5	Rakia[b]	22	Syria	Female	2Y3M	1Y10M	Residence permit	Computer scientist[h]	C1 language class
6	Kain	32	Iran	Male	2Y 10M	2Y9M	Residence permit	Chemical engineer[h]	IT specialist[i]
7	Said[b]	37	Syria	Male	3Y0M	2Y9M	Residence permit	Network technician	Automation technician
8	Zahra[b, c]	34	Syria	Female	2Y5M	2Y4M	Residence permit	Office assistant	Homemaker
9	Dakhil[b]	26	Syria	Male	2Y10M[d]	1Y5M	Residence permit	Biochemist[h] , male nurse	Medical technician[h]
10	Burhan[b]	26	Syria	Male	2Y2M	1Y10M	Residence permit	Electrical engineer[h]	Electrical and building technician[i], gardener[k]
11	Nasir[b]	26	Syria	Male	2Y2M	1Y10M	Tolerated stay	Dental technician[h]	Dental technician[i]
12	Salim[b]	30	Iraq	Male	12Y3M	10Y1M	Unlimited	School student	School bus driver
13	Jannah[b]	28	Iraq	Female	8Y3M	7Y10M	Unlimited	School student	Homemaker
14	Tahir[b]	24	Syria	Male	2Y3M	1Y6M	Residence permit	Carpenter	Janitor[j], job seeker
15	Zafer[b]	25	Syria	Male	2Y2M	2Y0M	Residence permit	Computer administrator[h]	Sports trainer[j], job seeker
16	Sharif[b]	31	Syria	Male	2Y1M	1Y1M	Residence permit	Teacher, literature translator	Job seeker
17	Djamila[b]	29	Syria	Female	2Y2M	1Y1M	Residence permit	Quality controller	Job seeker
18	Gulalai[b]	28	Syria	Female	1Y10M	1Y9M	Residence permit	Civil engineer[h]	Civil engineer[h]
19	Baqer[b]	31	Syria	Male	1Y10M	1Y1M	Residence permit	Pediatrician	Pediatrician
20	Bahram	48	Iran	Male	3Y 0M	2Y5M	Temporary residence permit	Electrical engineer[h]	Electronic technician
21	Nabil[b]	39	Libya	Male	2Y10M	N/A[f]	Residence permit	Statistician[h]	Specialist for flight administration
22	Ramin	27	Syria	Male	2Y 3M[d]	1Y10M	Residence permit	Computer scientist[h]	Computer scientist[h, k]
23	Liana	41	Georgia	Female	2Y 3M	1Y10M	Temporary residence permit	University lecturer in literature and arts	Assistant of language teacher[l]
24	Chakib	26	Iran	Male	3Y 0M	2Y9M	Residence permit	Industrial engineer[h]	Bar keeper, waiter
25	Xhamil[b]	20	Kosovo	Male	2Y11M	N/A[f]	Residence permit	Various jobs	Baker[i]
26	Aman[b]	41	Afghanistan	Male	5Y3M	3Y11M[g]	Unlimited	IT engineer	Job seeker
27	Resmi	28	Iraq	Male	1Y 0M	N/A[f]	Temporary residence permit	Food engineer[h]	Job seeker
28	Kadir	35	Iran	Male	8Y 3M	6Y4M	German citizenship	Music composer[h]	Music therapist, music lecturer
29	Nias	32	Iran	Male	6Y 0M[e]	5Y1M	German citizenship	N/A[f]	Music therapist in psychosocial service[m]
30	Awin	33	Iran	Male	8Y 0M	5Y4M	German citizenship	Architect[h]	Architect
31	Taryll	48	Iran	Male	6Y 0M[d]	5Y4M	Unlimited	Monumental sculptor[h]	Temporary work in arts, job seeker
32	Hasim	42	Syria	Male	2Y 8M	2Y6M	Residence permit	IT engineer[h]	Job seeker
33	Kamil	35	Syria	Male	3Y 0M	2Y5M	Residence permit	Aircraft engineer[h]	Job seeker
34	Nadim	42	Syria	Male	2Y 9M	2Y4M	Residence permit	Arabic language[h]	Job seeker
35	Ruhi	52	Syria	Male	2Y 7M[d]	N/A[f]	Residence permit	Pharmacist[h]	Pharmacist[k]
36	Harun	27	Iraq	Male	2Y 1M	1Y0M	Temporary residence permit	Civil engineer[h]	Job seeker

Note. [+] Actual names have been replaced by pseudonyms to protect the participants' anonymity. [a] At time of interview. [b] Participants of former study (Wehrle et al., 2018). [c] Parts of interview were translated by other participant. [d] Estimated maximum time spent in Germany. [e] Minimum time spent in Germany. [f] No data available. [g] Estimated maximum time since work permit receipt. [h] University student. [i] Education and training student. [j] Mini-job. [k] Part-time job. [l] Intern. [m] Voluntary worker.

Figure 3

Data Structure of the Refugees' Career Adaptability Dimensions in Involuntary Career Transitions



CHAPTER 5:

GENERAL DISCUSSION

Managing one's career amidst adversity is challenging and taxing (Wanberg et al., 2020), and this dissertation illustrates this to be the case particularly for refugees. Drawing on the perspectives of refugees, refugee support workers, and local employers, I analyzed the challenges and constraints that refugees face upon their resettlement to and during their job search in Germany and I explored their career adaptation. The findings showed how refugees, as they sought to set foot into the new country with little preparation time and/or choice, not only lost taken-for-granted resources, but also faced many contextual barriers such as fundamental uncertainties (e.g., residence decisions) and a labor market with unfamiliar cultural and institutionalized demands, power structures, and professional scripts (Barley & Tolbert, 1997). All of this threatened some of refugees' most fundamental resources left: Their sense of self, that is, their sense of self-worth, -distinctiveness, -continuity, -control, and belongingness and their personal agency. The barriers could bind refugees into career inaction and made typical self-regulated career behaviors related to planning, exploration, deciding, and problem solving more complex, requiring refugees to take extra steps in developing their careers. Even once in work, challenges did not necessarily cease, as clashing expectations or misunderstandings impaired refugees' self-regulation and integration.

Nevertheless, despite circumstances conducive of distress and career inaction, refugees coped, and the studies show how they benefitted from reflectively reconstructing their sense of self and from exerting self-regulated career actions. For example, study 1 revealed how refugees actively addressed the negative forces of threats (Kreiner & Sheep, 2009) and proactively took action to circumvent barriers or to seek new opportunities. In study 3, many exerted career adaptive responses characterized by a high self-regulation, as they regulated their thoughts and emotions and set adaptive goals. Together with drawing on

the context's resources of social connections and rich opportunities, many refugees managed to create work opportunities and to adapt.

In sum, this dissertation shows refugees as no mere victims of their circumstances. These workers' agency, resilience, and positive beliefs (e.g., hope, optimism) and feelings (e.g., appreciation, gratitude) about their new lives acted as internal resources for their sense of control, concern, curiosity, and confidence. This fostered their self-regulation, adaptation, and growth experiences. The findings may translate to other workers who face forced career transitions and disruptions or to (structural) outsiders who seek to enter foreign labor markets.

Main Findings and Theoretical Implications

This dissertation integrates vocational refugee research (Newman et al. 2018) with the literatures on identity threat (Eilam & Shamir, 2005; Petriglieri, 2011), identity threat coping (Petriglieri, 2011), self-regulation (Carver & Scheier, 1998), career adaptation (Savickas, 2013), and adversarial growth (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004). By this, I strengthen emerging research on refugees' potentials, resourcefulness, and agency (Newman et al., 2021).

In the following, I will present this dissertation's contributions to each research field, before I then show how the findings highlight the need to include the study context into research (see Duffy et al., 2016)

Identity Threats During Forced Career Transitions

This dissertation illustrates the threats and uncertainties that come with career and life disruptions and shows how disruptions related to forced migration can threaten people's identities to be "at risk or even lost" (Florian et al., 2019, p. 591). By exploring how refugees' identities were under threat and which resources refugees needed to cope, I contribute to identity and identity threat research in two ways (Petriglieri, 2011).

First, study 1 showed how refugees were confronted with a double jeopardy of co-existing threatened and threatening identities (i.e., imposed identities that they did not

identify with); many threat sources endangered the satisfaction of their needs for self-worth, -distinctiveness, -continuity, -control, and belongingness (Eilam & Shamir, 2005; Baumeister & Leary, 1995). Thus, and in support of Kira and Klehe's (2016) integrative review insights on mature-aged job loss victims' identity threats, I offer initial empirical insights into the double jeopardy of identity threat. Together, the studies portray the issues that worker groups who are devalued and marginalized face during job search and (re-)employment, and they show how various features linked to stigma (e.g., being foreign and/or unemployed) can co-exist and come with challenges that can turn into additional employment hurdles (Kreiner & Mihelcic, 2020). Along with skill misrecognition or social exclusion, such cases can intensify people's dire situations and impair their ability to enact their careers (Slay & Smith, 2011).

Second, I enrich research on people's identity needs (Brown, 2015; Eilam & Shamir, 2005) by studying these needs as under threat among refugees. One key finding across all studies was refugees' uniquely vulnerable position when it comes to the fundamental human need to feel in control of oneself and one's career (Ashforth & Mael, 1998). Losing their sense of control and facing uncertain lives threatened refugees' identities (study 1), fostered their underregulation and disengagement from job search (study 2), and impaired their career adaptive responding (study 3). Study 3 even indicated control as the root of refugees' career adaptability (and not concern as postulated in career construction theory; Savickas, 2013) and refugees' (lost) sense of control as a basis for many of their 'career problems' (cf. Savickas, 2013). The findings suggest vulnerabilities of certain worker groups in regards to specific identity needs and the particular relevance that specific needs may hold as depending on people's career and life situations. Yet, study 3 also showed how refugees managed to restore a sense of control by continuously moving on and prioritizing helpful emotions and thoughts.

Coping Responses

The included studies enrich research on refugees' coping by offering insights into identity threat coping (Petriglieri, 2011) and into career-related actions, that is, workers' self-regulation (Carver & Scheier, 1998) and career adaptive responding (Savickas, 2013).

Identity Threat Coping. Scholars have called for studies to explore how people make sense of the incongruities and threats that befall their identities (Brown, 2015) and how they cope in return (Nelson & Irwin, 2014). Study 1 offers the – to the best of my knowledge – first empirical insights into how refugees coped with identity threats amidst their forced transition. The study revealed refugees' identity threat management, including identity threat-reactive coping, comprising reflective and behavioral elements, and proactive identity threat prevention, which enriches identity threat coping research (Petriglieri, 2011).

First, refugees coped with threats reactively in various both cognition- and action-oriented ways. The data offered empirical insights into up to then primarily postulated (Petriglieri, 2011) and scarcely systematically empirically validated (Kira & Klehe, 2016) coping responses to identity threats. For instance, study 1 offered concrete examples of how identity protection can also mean to refuse to don an imposed identity (see Kira and Klehe, 2016). Study 1 also revealed how people can employ multiple coping responses simultaneously, as several refugees, first, restructured their identities to, later on, return to their earlier profession. With this, they protected their cherished work-related identity in the long run. Also, identity threat jujitsu (Kreiner & Sheep, 2009) emerged as an identity threat coping response with special relevance for refugees' identity protection. To cope, refugees actively targeted the negativity innate to the threats by seeking to improve the relationships to those posing the threat and they reframed negative situations positively.

Second, many refugees showed proactive identity threat prevention behaviors that countered identity threats from taking shape, which supports research showing proactivity as key for workers' career development and work experiences (Klehe et al., 2021; Parker et al.,

2010). That is, refugees resourced (Feldman & Worline, 2012), as they crafted social resources and new opportunities and as they circumvented barriers. By taking action and modifying their context in a way supportive of their goals, many refugees made career progress despite substantial career barriers. Such proactive behaviors seem especially relevant given refugees' often meager resources upon resettlement to the receiving country.

Career-Related Actions. Subsumed as career-related actions, this dissertation focused on refugees' self-regulation (study 2; Carver & Scheier, 1998) and career adaptive responding (study 3; Savickas, 2005, 2013) in the context of their job search and career adaptation and development in Germany – two literature strands that have just recently been intersected (Klehe et al., 2021; Xu & Savickas, 2022). I contribute threefold to these strands.

First, study 2 offers novel insights into refugees' self-regulation during job search, which advances the theory of self-regulation at large and among refugees in particular (Van Hooft et al., 2021; Wanberg et al., 2020). The study deciphered different self-regulation failure types and their interrelations, which moves current research beyond its main focus on underregulation (Friese et al., 2019) and introduces mis- and overregulation to career research (for conceptual exceptions, see Côté et al., 2006; Grandey, 2000). In specific, many refugees failed to self-regulate in terms of too little (underregulation), misdirected (misregulation), and, at points, too much (overregulation) goal setting, planning, pursuit, and reflection. Self-regulation failures in one phase (e.g., goal setting) could affect the challenges and failures in subsequent phases (e.g., planning and pursuit). The study also revealed new insights into mis- and overregulation, showing misregulation to often root in people's lacking awareness of the local job-search scripts, and overregulation to not only denote an emotional avoidance and excessive emotional suppression (Roberton et al., 2012), but also people's attempts to inhibit (effective) actions due to their insecurities and anxiety originating from facing a new cultural context. In general, the analysis illustrated emergent self-regulation failures to often ground

not only in people's lack of prior success, but also in contextual factors. These findings show how the context can shape a self-regulated job search, and I will discuss them in detail below in the section 'The Relevance of Contextualizing Research' (see pp. 158-164).

Second, as demonstrated in study 3 and also study 1, this dissertation highlights two distinct mindsets that were key for refugees to exert self-regulated career behaviors despite facing severe career challenges. These mindsets included a pronounced 'can do'-attitude (see Zikic et al., 2010) and optimistic, appreciative mindsets (see Rudolph et al., 2017). This supports research that has alluded to a 'migrant personality' (Boneva & Frieze, 2001; Frieze et al., 2006; Zikic & Klehe, 2021). Specifically, (1) many refugees possessed 'can do'-attitudes as characterized by a strong agency, proactivity, and goal orientation in adjusting to the local circumstances. Regardless of the context impeding their access to resources or their typical career behaviors, refugees showed adaptive behaviors that enabled them to make progress in their careers – they were active career agents who sought a profound engagement with their careers instead of merely adjusting to the local conditions (De Vos et al., 2019; Zikic et al., 2010). Here, studies 2 and 3 also illustrated how – contrary to career construction theory claiming that people who do not set long-term goals lack career concern (Savickas, 2013) – many refugees set present and proximal goals to cope with the uncertainties faced. Setting proximal goals was an adaptive method for refugees that reduced their goal conflicts (e.g., needing to find work fast to support the family's needs while wanting to return to one's profession) and allowed them to make and adjust their plans despite facing uncertain futures – they could progress in their careers despite being unable to plan for the long run or to think of distal goals usually conducive for a successful self-regulation (Van Hooft et al., 2013). In addition, many refugees consciously disregarded uncertainties, circumvented barriers, and strove to move forward in their careers. When (feeling) lost or stuck, many self-initiatively crafted (social) resources out of mundane situations, considered alternative career options,

and/or showed boundaryless mindsets (Arthur & Rousseau, 1996). Based on their adversity and existential losses, many refugees strongly oriented themselves towards the future and thought beyond both their country of origin and Germany as their current place of residence. They sought to secure globally recognized German credentials to counter future uncertainties. Also, (2) many refugees nurtured optimistic, appreciative mindsets that assisted them to adapt their careers (Rudolph et al., 2017). Many consciously prioritized helpful emotions and thoughts, framed their situations in a hopeful and positive way, and turned objectively 'negative' factors into something positive. This also enabled some to adjust their career dreams in line with their new work reality. Revealing the relevance of emotion and thought regulation for refugees' career adaptation, these findings call for further research attention.

Third, a central theme that emerged across the studies for refugees' careers at large and their career-related actions in specific was the role of time. Many refugees experienced time as wasted or lost and felt that their present working self diverged from who they used to be – many could not tap into their past achievements, felt too old to start new, or were stuck in their careers, as they were forced into career inaction. Yet, time also emerged as a vital resource for refugees as they recognized that time could solve issues and as they regained their sense of capability, noticed their career progress, and aspired towards a better future. Here, time could assist refugees in actively resolving tensions between their aspirations and the local opportunities and in developing themselves accordingly (De Boeck et al., 2019). Time thus enabled several refugees not to be overwhelmed by setbacks, but instead approach their situations and the (present) career boundaries more calmly (Bailey & Madden, 2017).

Adversarial Growth

Scholars have highlighted that facing and dealing with adverse situations can enable people to experience psychological growth (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004), and, particularly, that recognizing and engaging with career and identity conflicts can trigger identity work that

is conducive of growth (McLean & Thorne, 2003). In other words, people's adaptive coping and the processing of career and life disruptions seems relevant for growth, especially in relation to factors such as supportive relationships and positive emotions (Mangelsdorf & Eid, 2015). Yet, the opportunity for adversarial growth has hardly been recognized in job loss research, and studies that focus on growth after career and life disruptions are still limited (Maitlis, 2012). Addressing this topic, this research offers indications of adversarial growth among refugees and contributes twofold to this research field (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004).

First, study 1 unpacks how adversarial growth unfolds among refugees, that is, a group of workers who others may stigmatize, devalue, and marginalize. By this, I respond to calls that aim to broaden the contexts and populations in which growth is studied (e.g., Hefferon et al., 2009). The data showed how refugees suffered from their threatened sense of self and struggled to integrate into the new country, and how such experiences can foster the development of new self-meanings, strengthening people's confidence, resilience, and appreciation of life freedoms. Many refugees could not restore their former work-related self in Germany and noticed boundaries to their career aspirations. For them, growth related to noticing having grown as a person and holding changed priorities, as they drew temporal links to their past and weighed specific needs (e.g., human rights or the family's safety) more critical than others (e.g., reentering the former profession), savoring a more family-focused self. This suggests that people can experience growth by detecting limits to the fulfillment of their needs and goals and by making sense of the inherent tensions (De Boeck et al., 2019). Notably, many refugees did not simply 'make do' or settle for something smaller in the new country, but, instead, appreciated, for instance, having regained basic freedoms. This aligns with Janoff-Bulman (2004), who noted that people recognize life's precariousness by having faced adversity and how realizing that life cannot be taken for granted can trigger questions of significance and worth that enable people to rebuild their fundamental life assumptions.

Second, study 1 extends adversarial growth research by offering empirical insights that diverge from existing assumptions on psychological growth following identity threat (cf. Petriglieri, 2011; Zikic & Richardson, 2016). Specifically, (1) while scholars have assumed that identity restructuring results in identity growth (cf. Petriglieri, 2011), study 1 suggests that adversarial growth can also arise when people protect their identities or combine both protection and restructuring coping responses. In addition, (2) whereas earlier research has noted growth to occur when people manage to reenter their former professions (Zikic & Richardson, 2016), study 1 indicated that adversarial growth can also emerge independent of returning to one's former identity – that is, many refugees shifted their focus towards non-work related life realms, valued life's freedoms, or capitalized opportunities (studies 1 and 3).

The Relevance of Contextualizing Research

Studying identity threat, coping responses, and adversarial growth among refugees in Germany revealed distinct ways in which the social, cultural, institutionalized and structural aspects of the receiving country's context shaped refugees' vocational behavior and careers. Together, the studies respond to calls for deeper insights into how context and workers' circumstances shape the unfolding of people's careers (De Vos et al., 2020).

In specific, I applied several theories in the fields of identity threat (Eilam & Shamir, 2005; Petriglieri, 2011), identity threat coping (Petriglieri, 2011), self-regulation (Carver & Scheier, 1998), career adaptation (Savickas, 2013), and adversarial growth (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 1996; Zikic & Richardson, 2016) to the scarcely studied refugee context (see calls by Van Hooft et al., 2021; Wanberg et al., 2020). The findings support other scholars' views (Akkermans et al., 2018; Duffy et al., 2016) that current theories hold a too narrow lens and that the present understandings of career phenomena fall short of capturing the experiences of workers who are in a position where institutional and social rules delimit their personal control and who are often devalued and marginalized, such as refugees (Duffy et al., 2016).

In the following, I will, first, describe how the present focus on the refugee context presented the need to re-define constructs under study. That is, while refugees' job-search and career experiences, to some extent, overlapped with the experiences of other job seeker and worker groups (e.g., mature-aged job-loss victims or generally discouraged workers; Heslin et al., 2012; Kira & Klehe, 2016), the distinct economic, social, cultural, and institutionalized factors surrounding refugees impacted their career behaviors. Several findings deviated from existing theoretical assumptions and showed the context to shape the meanings and dynamics inherent to the theories (Fisher & Aguinis, 2017). Second, refugees faced career barriers and enablers in the receiving country that were distinct given their circumstances. Third, the data showed that the social context influenced refugees' vocational behavior and careers, and it did so in both supportive and also potentially harmful ways.

Re-Defining Constructs Under Study. This dissertation shows how applying specific theories to diverse study contexts can reveal new theoretical meanings and dynamics within the theories, thus calling for a re-defining of constructs under study (Fisher & Aguinis, 2017). Study 2 and 3 showed refugees' coping responses, by which they revealed how the assumptions underlying self-regulation models (Baumeister & Heatherton, 1996) – as translated to job search (Van Hooft et al., 2013) – and career construction theory (Savickas, 2013) unfold somewhat different among refugees. First, the theories postulate that people who do not (noticeably) exert self-regulated actions that match specific (job-search) phases or (career adaptability) dimensions suffer from so-called 'self-regulation failures' (Baumeister & Heatherton, 1996) or 'career problems' (Savickas, 2013). Yet, these conceptualizations did not adequately capture the complexity of refugees' self-regulated career actions. That is, in study 2, refugees' self-regulated job-search often included context-inadequate actions or adaptive coping strategies that still went unnoticed by others. In study 3, refugees' career adaptive responses were often contextually conditioned. Thus, not exerting self-regulated

career actions did not necessarily result from deficits in attitudinal or motivational components of refugees' self-regulation or career adaptability, but could ground in the context's barriers (e.g., fundamental uncertainties due to residency issues) and the local foreign scripts (Barley & Tolbert, 1997). Struggling to understand these scripts and how to navigate their careers impaired many refugees' career-related actions. These insights may generalize to other job seeker and worker groups, and they seem especially important for other structural outsiders who seek to enter a foreign work context (Zikic & Klehe, 2021). Also, given that national context can regulate career adaptive responding, as countries vary in their demands and opportunities for people to develop and show their adaptability (Savickas & Porfeli, 2011), it is critical to address the context for workers' self-regulated career actions.

Second, while career adaptation grounds in individual differences in workers' resources and competences (Savickas, 2013), study 3 revealed how the context distinctly shaped refugees' career adaptability dimensions and thus how a study of career adaptation is incomplete without considering the context in which people act (De Vos et al., 2019). The context's barriers impaired refugees' adaptive behaviors as relating to their sense of control and confidence, which is a critical observation given that existing career-related theories lack to consider people who are in a position where institutional and social rules delimit their degree of control over their lives and decisions. As discussed by Akkermans et al. (2018), this deters our understanding of how adversity can shape people's career adaptation. In turn, contextual barriers only restrained refugees' concern and curiosity, without impeding their inherent adaptability. Thus, while many were concerned about their futures and curious to explore, they could not convert this into reality and had to adapt their career goals and plans.

Context-Specific Barriers and Enablers. All studies depicted various context-specific barriers and enablers that influenced refugees' vocational behavior and careers. In this vein, study 3 highlighted that a study of career adaptation is incomplete without

considering the context in which people act.

When it comes to contextual barriers, all studies deciphered distinct barriers that made refugees' lives uncertain, threatening their identities and impeding their self-regulated career behaviors. Overarching, the distinct barriers included fundamental uncertainties (e.g., uncertain residence decisions), lacking or lost (taken-for-granted) personal and social resources (e.g., recognized credentials, language skills, and/or social networks), feelings of having lost or wasted time, and having to navigate one's job search in a foreign labor market with different, often unknown, cultural and institutionalized demands, power structures, and scripts (Barley & Tolbert, 1997). A mismatch of such scripts often led to formerly adequate behaviors seem 'off the mark' in the new country. Finding it difficult to understand the local scripts, many refugees failed to self-regulate. On a more general level, refugees faced discontinuous careers, as they found themselves in the 'wrong phase' of their expected career path (e.g., having to go back to school) or unable to continue a career path they were on (e.g., not being able to return to their original profession), and many struggled to self-regulate across the disruptions. Facing constant negative, uncontrollable situations during job search impaired refugees' career-related actions and, ultimately, some gave up on their job search and plans. The barriers' limiting nature also became apparent as they dissolved – a positive residency decision offered refugees the security of being allowed to stay, which countered many uncertainties. Also, while studies 2 and 3 showed that lacking insights into local scripts impaired refugees' coping, learning the local customs and adapting to the local values and practices made refugees feel more comfortable and fostered a positive self-change (study 1).

When it comes to the contextual enablers, studies 1 and 3 revealed how career and life contexts provide refugees with resources to re-establish their careers in Germany. Prevalent enablers were the richness of educational and vocational opportunities, as refugees could, for instance, explore and enter new work fields. In this regard, the studies showed how unwanted

career transitions can offer hidden advantages, as refugees noticed benefits in capitalizing on local career opportunities. Moreover, all studies depicted the key role of social connections for refugees' career development; insights that I will integrate in the following section.

The Social Context. Much research has stressed other people's key role for workers' career construction and career adaptive coping at large (Klehe et al., 2021; Ng et al., 2005) and for refugees' careers in particular (Dunwoodie et al., 2020; Gericke et al., 2018; Xiong et al., 2021). And, also for people's identities, social interactions are vital (Ashforth & Schinoff, 2016). While the studies support the insights on the benefits of social contacts, they also revealed potential downsides of the engagements of other people in refugees' vocational behavior and careers.

Study 1 highlighted refugees' need for social belongingness in the receiving country (Baumeister & Leary, 1995), and all studies showed how restoring one's career after a forced career transition is no process done alone. Holding supportive social connections unfolded their power in various ways. First, other people were key in assisting refugees to navigate the unfamiliar context and to learn the local customs; others helped to counter the impairments caused by refugees' lack of insights into the local context. Being able to rely on others also enabled refugees to explore and to discover the new context's opportunities (study 3). Second, social connections opened avenues for refugees to access work and to enter new career paths (studies 1 and 3). Third, social relations acted as resources that offered refugees a sense of stability and safety, when this sense was threatened otherwise (studies 1 and 3). Importantly, in study 1, refugees proactively built social connections to buffer identity threats via social resourcing (Feldman, 2004) and they sought contact to others to combat stereotypes that would continue standing in the way of their integration. These findings on how refugees to turn chance social encounters into social resources also expands the current focus of job-search research from how workers draw on other people to network (Van Hoye et al., 2009;

Wanberg et al., 2000) to how people can proactively craft a new social context and stable support system. In itself, given their possible lack of and limited access to social networks (Dunwoodie et al., 2020), the act of social resourcing seems critical for refugees, especially as it countered identity threats and nurtured refugees' feelings of safety and belonging.

In general, on page 145 in this dissertation, I introduced the question of "with whom do I build my future?" as a critical component for career construction theory (cf. Savickas, 2005, 2013). In line with other scholars, study 3 shows that the career adaptability model would be more complete when including an interpersonal dimension, as well (Nye et al., 2018). More precisely, the present findings support the calls for career construction theory to acknowledge and integrate a fifth 'C' (Klehe et al., 2021), that is, a social dimension that has been referred to as 'career cooperation' (Nye et al., 2018).[21] While this dimension is described as "one's ability to successfully interact with and work alongside others" (p. 552), the present studies enrich the understanding of this social dimension by highlighting the relevance of emotional and instrumental social support and, from refugees' point of view, particularly the need for the ability to mobilize and receive social support.

However, the studies also revealed potential downsides when it comes to the role that other people have for refugees' identities and career. Despite its relevance, all studies showed how refugees could feel isolated (Burchett & Matheson, 2010), lack networks (Dunwoodie et al., 2020), and miss a social support system in Germany, and study 1 illustrated refugees to often lack a sense of belongingness. Such a lack surfaced in the form of social loneliness and lacking social affiliation, which threatened refugees' self-worth and -distinctiveness. How threats to various identity needs interlace or how one threat may be the platform for others to

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[21] Please note that while career construction scholars argue that the current four factor model covers those individualistic dimensions that people can manage themselves (Savickas, 2005), a social dimension is missing from career construction theory for seemingly methodological and not conceptual reasons (Klehe et al., 2021; Nye et al., 2018). Career cooperation did indeed emerge as a distinct factor, yet the five-factor model including career cooperation did not adequately fit all of the selected countries during its validation (Nye et al., 2018).

emerge warrants further research.

Notably, though, study 2 showed that there can also be too much social support – the study includes a cautionary note on the influence of social support on refugees' self-regulated job search. Whilst social support is central for refugees' successful job search and career development (see all studies; Gericke et al., 2018), study 2 showed inherent risks in too much and/or misaligned support. The receipt of too much help could impair refugees' job-search self-efficacy, autonomy, and learning motivation, as it encouraged some to hand off the responsibility of searching for a job to others and to possibly grow dependent. Others could also misinform refugees, which, at times, resulted in aborted vocational training or menial work. Study 2 also revealed a third issue arising from the social context, namely that people's perceptions – which shape their attitudes and actions towards others – are embedded in their habitual context (Barley & Tolbert, 1997; Swidler, 1986). Locals' perceptions of refugees' actions could deviate from refugees' actual intentions, and locals could misread or overlook refugees' efforts, motivation, and willingness to integrate. While research has shown that actions that violate locally embedded social scripts can impair social relations (Wagner & Heatherton, 2015) and lead to exclusion (Ohbuchi et al., 2004), study 2 indicates how others' perceptions of refugees' attitudes and actions may harm refugees' integration and careers. In this vein, study 1 also alluded to various stigmas that were attached to being a refugee – that is, refugees were stigmatized irrespective of working (i.e., being viewed as cheap and interchangeable workers) or not (i.e., being seen as 'benefit scroungers').

Limitations and Strengths of This Research

While I consider the research in this dissertation to be carefully designed and carried out, the studies are not without limitations. Despite securing designs and implementing this research as fitting to the research aims, all studies ground on qualitative data and base on a constant use of methods. As such, the limitations of the dissertation as a whole correspond to

the limitations of the single studies; there was no triangulation across different methods that could compensate for the respective limitations. Also, the data were cross-sectional. The data thus do not provide causal inferences or insights into the findings' generalizability. Still, they reveal deep insights into the experiences of diverse refugee integration-relevant stakeholders. Seeking to gain a comprehensive picture of the topics of interest, I set few exclusion criteria and, in study 2, included multiple stakeholder perspectives and thus diverse samples into the study (see call by Lee et al., 2020). I cannot, however, rule out some sample biases. When it comes to the refugee samples, all studies over-include male participants (which, however, represents a typical gender distribution of a refugee labor force; World Education News & Reviews, 2017) and possibly persons more self-regulated, proactive, motivated, and open to share their experiences than the general refugee population. When it comes to the support workers and employers, the participants may be more considerate and empathetic towards refugees' situations. Yet, in general, given the non-invasive and openly framed interview questions, participants' sincerity to share both positive and negative experiences and to voice personal biases, and participants' willingness to respond in depth, I consider their replies as genuine. I also established study rigor by following established qualitative research principles. I adhered to Sandberg's (2005) guidelines to fulfill criteria of truth constellations in interpretive research, Pratt et al.'s (2020) recommendations for credibility and trustworthiness in qualitative work, and Levitt et al.'s (2018) qualitative reporting standards.

Thus, despite the limitations, the research in this dissertation has its strengths. I led in-depth qualitative research as fitting to the studies' aims – the newness of the research area and the thus yet understudied nature of the topics were well suited for qualitative work (Lee, 1999). This approach enabled me to offer new insights into refugees' vocational behavior and careers (Newman et al. 2018; see calls by Van Hooft et al., 2021; Wanberg et al., 2020) and to theoretically advance the literatures of identity threat (Eilam & Shamir, 2005; Petriglieri,

2011), identity threat coping (Petriglieri, 2011), career-related action (Savickas, 2013; Van Hooft et al., 2013), and adversarial growth (Kreiner & Sheep, 2009; Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004; see 'theoretical implications' above). Notably, despite drawing on different samples and addressing different topics in each study, certain topics resurfaced across the studies (e.g., the importance of the social context, the presence and impact of context-specific barriers and enablers, and the relevance of specific mindsets), illustrating the consistency and trustworthiness of the meanings in the topics. Via this research, I was also able to identify applicable practical implications for refugees' careers (see 'practical implications' below).

Future Research Directions

The findings of the three studies offer several avenues for research. First, building on the findings of study 1 and the leading identity threat theory in career and management research (Petriglieri, 2011; see, e.g., Ashford et al., 2018; Ramarajan, 2014), future research could develop and validate scales (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018) that capture the diverse forms of identity threat, identity threat coping, and also growth (Zikic & Richardson, 2016). To date, identity research finds itself in a theory testing gap and the establishment of such measures would allow for deeper insights into the identity-specific implications that follow identity threat exposure (Caza et al., 2018). Whereas a few existing scales tap into identity threat, such as the Primary Appraisal of Identity Threat Scale (Berjot et al., 2012), the Racial Identity Invalidation Scale (Franco & O'Brien, 2018), or the Multiple Threat and Prejudice Questionnaire (Bigazzi et al., 2019), the scales do not distinguish between the different identity threat types identified in study 1 (see also Kira & Klehe, 2016) nor do they suitably assess the distinct threats that job seekers who are devalued and marginalized face during job search (e.g., the stigma originating from job seekers' contact with potential employers). Also in terms of identity threat coping, the few existing measures do not capture the breadth of responses shown in study 1 (see also Kira & Klehe, 2016). Various coping responses such as

identity protection seem absent in current measures, and the existing operationalization of identity restructuring differ from those in study 1 (cf. Tobin et al., 1984; Jaspal et al., 2020).

When having established such measures, scholars could quantitatively test the present findings (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018; see also Kira & Klehe, 2016; Petriglieri, 2011) and seek to generalize them via larger samples and ideally across different samples, contexts, and time. Also, scholars could study the relationships, development, and causal links of identity threats, coping, and growth and thus the constructs' prevalence, antecedents, mechanisms and outcomes. This could imply to longitudinally test whether and how different types of identity threat connect to certain coping responses (e.g., do certain threat types more likely activate specific responses and does the exposure to either threatened or threatening identities differentially influence specific outcomes?), or how identity threats and coping change over time and whether such changes entail (spill-over) effects. For instance, changes in identity threats and coping may reduce refugees' uncertainties of belonging to the new social context, which may, in turn, decrease their threat experiences. Research could also study the combination of responses and how a combination overlaps or differs in regards to its effects on outcomes as compared to people showing, and pertaining to, isolated responses. Interlacing the studies, research could examine the influence of identity threats on people's self-regulated job search and career adaptive behaviors. For example, how do identity threats affect the self-regulated job-search phases and how do they embed themselves into the processes' dynamics? Scholars could also address how identity threat coping relates to self-regulation or career adaptive responding, and to identify which responses, ultimately, nurture adversarial identity growth. Lastly, research has shown intergenerational effects of traumatic experiences in various populations, also refugees (Flanagan et al., 2020; Sangalang & Vang, 2017). Here, future research could shift perspective and study the individual and collective consequences of adversarial growth and, with it, the potential for intergenerational

strengthening and growth and collective healing processes (Maitlis, 2020).

Second, this dissertation stresses the role of refugees' agency and self-regulation for their job search and career adaptation. Based on the findings, future research could target the antecedents, mechanisms, and outcomes of refugees' self-regulation efforts and failures during job search and adaptation over time. In other words, research could adopt a process-perspective and track refugees' career development across their career journey in the new country as ranging from their entry into the country or the organization up to their integration and organizational socialization, thus also upon employment. This would show how refugees sustain their self-regulation despite facing career barriers, losing connections to themselves, or being imposed with stigmatized identities due to certain group affiliations (e.g., foreigner or social welfare recipient). Also, in study 2, refugees learned to underregulate as they faced constant negative, uncontrollable situations and noticed their efforts to not suffice for career progress, and scholars could thus focus on the structural and interpersonal features of refugee integration that, inadvertently, promote learning processes, ending in underregulation. In addition, while reflecting one's actions, successes, and/or failures fosters self-knowledge, personal growth (Parker & Bindl, 2016), and meaningfulness (Newman & Nezlek, 2019), study 2 suggests that reflecting on adversity can intensify negative emotions (Cova et al., 2019) and drain the resources needed to engage in career actions. This makes the study of when reflections assist career actions and when they are harmful an interesting area of inquiry (Kluger & DeNisi, 1996). In this vein, research could target the role of emotions for workers' career adaptation. Study 3 revealed how positive and appreciate mindsets and, especially, hope and optimism assisted refugees' career adaptation. Thus, while research has focused on activated positive affect promoting career-related actions (Parker et al., 2010), studies could illuminate the role of discrete emotions such as joy, hope, gratitude, or pride, or compassion (Lindebaum & Jordan, 2012) for career adaptation, also as discrete emotions can help link

situational experiences to behavioral tendencies (Kreemers et al., 2018). Here, scholars could also study whether negative emotions such as anxiety or anger can have positive effects (Burmeister et al., 2019), and vice versa. Given that time perceptions impacted refugees' self-regulated career actions, research could identify how refugees' occupational future time perspective in the new country and their intentions to stay or return to their country of origin might affect their job-search and integration efforts. For instance, identity threats may limit refugees' occupational outlook, which may reduce their job-search motivation and coping. At work, a limited outlook may deter refugees' information and social exchange, voice behavior, or learning motivation, which may, in turn, hinder their organizational socialization (Ortlieb & Ressi, 2022). Based on study 2, studies could classify the conditions under which refugees' self-regulation does or does not help them attain quality employment and, based on study 1, identify factors that reduce identity threats such as career alternatives (e.g., self-employment).

Finally, studies 2 and 3 indicated how so-called behavioral 'problems' or 'failures' can influence the perceptions and behaviors that other stakeholders might have towards refugees. This showed that what stakeholders are able to 'see' due to their social roles, positions, and customs may affect their reactions towards and their interactions with refugees, possibly resulting in self-fulfilling prophecies. Thus, scholars could examine the role and processes of attributions for, and their effects on, refugees' integration. For instance, perceived self-regulation failures may result in interpersonal conflicts and workplace tensions and may cause refugees to develop meta-perceptions that could constitute threats to their identities, self-regulatory motivation, and integration attitudes. Also, as social contacts are key for refugees' integration and career development, studies could target whether and how others' interpretations of refugees' (lacking) self-regulatory efforts influence the support offers made, especially as research has shown that locals' willingness to support refugees relies on their recognition of refugees' integration efforts (Böhm et al., 2018). Based on study

2, it would also be valuable to address the functionality of social support in job search. That is, when and how can support lead refugees to suffer from career inaction (Verbruggen & De Vos, 2020)? When are offers of social support perceived as wanted versus unwanted and/or burdensome by recipients, and how does this influence job seekers' self-efficacy, agency, self-regulation, and learning (Floyd & Ray, 2017; Williamson et al., 2019)? While providers mostly offer support intended to be helpful, not all recipients may interpret the offers as such. Thus, studies could examine recipients' needs when getting support or the outcomes when support is given or received unwantedly. Shifting perspective, scholars could also target the motives of those offering support and their reactions to having support offers declined.

Practical Implications

This research informs practice on how to establish a sustainable refugee integration. The studies highlight the relevance of refugees' agency and the role that the organizational and institutional contexts hold for refugees' careers and labor market integration.

For Human Resource Management (HRM)

The studies stress the central role of HRM in establishing a successful refugee integration. Although refugees are discussed as a remedy for current workforce shortages, many employers seem to hesitate to hire refugees (Garaev, 2016). Besides harming refugees' careers and integration, this skill underutilization, though, also leaves the receiving country's economies without a benefit. Therefore, HRM needs to recognize refugee integration as a shared responsibility and to offer concrete ways that foster refugee employment.

Specifically, HRM could lower the thresholds for refugees to enter the labor market. The data showed that simply being given a chance to work assists a successful resettlement, and, for this, HRM could offer paid internships, trial work opportunities, introductory training schemes, and/or apprenticeships. This would offer refugees valuable opportunities to receive the cultural knowledge and experiences needed to best utilize their potential, to meet local

employers' expectations, and to build their social support system by working alongside more or similarly experienced workers whom they can learn from and with (Ortlieb et al., 2021). Such opportunities are vital, as re-entering one's career in a new labor market is more likely when having self-efficacy and cultural knowledge specific to the profession (Smith, 2010).

Also, HRM could promote organizational inclusion, which sets out to value people from all backgrounds for who they are (Nishii, 2013) and enables them to be "authentically themselves" (Shore et al., 2018, p. 177). HRM could cultivate quality workplace relationships (Stephens et al., 2011) and employ mentoring programs (Bagnoli & Estache, 2021; De Cuyper et al., 2019) to foster mutual support and respect and to aid refugees in understanding the local labor market scripts. Stigma reducing interventions and diversity or cross-cultural trainings could create a workplace climate that promotes refugees' belongingness and sense of safety. This could build trust and reassure refugees to voice concerns and to ask for help, thus also improving the organization's effectiveness (see Morrison, 2014).

Yet, in doing so, HRM needs to be aware of and to manage the ambivalences that can underlie organizational inclusion (see Ortlieb et al., 2021). The process of inclusion involves various stakeholders and practices and thus comprises power asymmetries that can shape refugees' identities. As shown in study 2, despite wanting to help refugees, other stakeholders might see them in need of help and may expect them to only passively receive their advice. In the case of mentoring, mentors might depict the local values as superior to those in refugees' country of origin (Dykstra-DeVette & Canary, 2019; Ponzoni et al., 2017) – all of which can threaten refugees' identities. HRM thus needs to avoid benevolent discrimination practices (Ortlieb et al, 2021; Romani et al., 2019) and, instead, implement practices that reduce refugees' dependency on a specific organization and that boost refugees' employability and credibility, both nationally and globally (see study 3). To do so, HRM could, for instance, offer refugees the development and training opportunities that they uniquely need. Language

and up-skilling trainings could enable refugees to show and develop their skills and potential, cultivate the social capital needed to best utilize this potential, and enhance their professional credibility and employability. HRM could also show flexibility when employees take part in professional training. By enabling refugees to educate themselves while working, refugees could develop their careers whilst simultaneously securing their financial needs. HRM could also exemplify refugees' development opportunities in and their contributions to the organization without reciprocally setting expectations that could increase refugees' dependency (Emmons & McCullough, 2004; Ortlieb et al., 2021). HRM would thus focus on the temporal nature of refugees' careers, which can assist refugees in dealing with their not ideal present circumstances. Moreover, HRM could create settings for mutual learning by implementing practices for cultural exchange and one-on-one learning opportunities via co-mentoring, thus enabling refugees to also contribute to other's learning and treating refugees as valued insiders whose experiences, skills, and identities are appreciated and validated (see Goodkind, 2006). All of this could foster refugees' growth, restore their autonomy, and increase their sense of security in the new country. By offering realistic job previews, clearly communicating the job requirements, and giving regular feedback, HRM can aid refugees to understand and frame their new work situations and negotiate their expectations. Also, rejected applicants should be offered feedback. This would foster refugees' insights into the local labor market scripts and prevent them from disengaging from their job search.

For Institutional Stakeholders

Both the existence and absence of certain legal regulations in refugees' integration hampered refugees' successful employment, and the studies call for a more refugee-friendly legislative landscape. For this, German authorities could facilitate and streamline refugees' residence and accreditation processes, especially as many refugees faced barriers relating to their uncertain residency decisions and lacking foreign credential recognition. The barriers

destabilized refugees' identities and handicapped them in making career progress. Instituting a faster recognition system would enable refugees to enter the workforce faster, become self-reliant, and feel safer. Also, from a policy perspective, authorities could allow refugees to take up gainful employment already when issuing the residence permits. This would bypass any additionally needed approvals from the Federal Employment Agency and thus reduce the long processing times that can foster refugees' career inaction or the losing of jobs (study 2). Additionally, authorities could reduce the confusing bureaucracy and the required time and efforts that refugees need to muster to attend mandatory official meetings in person. This also relates to the mandatory integration classes that refugees have to attend when unemployed. Study 2 showed that the classes offered largely generic information and were designed without regards to refugees' educational and vocational backgrounds or individual needs. The needed time investments prevented some refugees from pursuing more meaningful career opportunities. Authorities could generally implement more individualized assistance that aligns with refugees' needs, situations, and opportunities and also educate support workers and volunteers on a regular basis about the legal issues, integration structures, and career options relating to refugees' specific educational and vocational backgrounds (see study 2). This would enable refugees to receive the social support that is key to a successful job search and integration, whilst preserving their autonomy and reducing the frustrations related to unrealistic and unfulfilled expectations. Relatedly, given the growing prevalence of migration patterns and uncertain careers (George et al., 2016), authorities could adapt more flexibly to the new developments and offer more career entry and development opportunities to workers at all career stages. Authorities could institute a stronger policy framework that assists job seekers already specialized in a field, yet lacking the needed local credentials or skills to transition into a new career (Brown et al., 2012) and to offer forms of learning-while-working instead of insisting on formal credentials specific to an occupation.

Moreover, the studies provide insights into how authorities could devise interventions that enable refugees to develop effective coping responses against the threats attached to their unemployment, job search, and integration. While many people struggle with finding work and working, career-related behaviors conducive to a successful employment, like planning and exploration, have been shown to be trainable without much effort spend (Bode et al., 2007; Koen et al., 2012; Van der Horst & Klehe, 2019). Based on the central role that agency has for refugees' careers and integration, authorities could (1) inform refugees on the local job-search customs and strategies, (2) train them to become better self-regulators and to develop context-suitable behaviors (Yanar et al., 2009), and (3) build their career adaptive responses, self-efficacy, and resilience (Seibert et al., 2016). Given the relevance of social capital for refugees' employment, job quality, qualification match, and integration (studies 1 and 3; Dunwoodie et al., 2020; Lamba, 2003), authorities could inform refugees of the threat-preventive and employment-fostering potential of engaging in professional networks and in forming social support systems and, for this, train refugees' confidence and social skills.

In terms of support agencies including job agents, career counselors, and integration educators, the stakeholders could kindle refugees' awareness of the cross-cultural differences and challenges involved in transitioning into a new country and, by this, prepare them for threat sources that may lie ahead. By informing refugees early on about the local barriers, career opportunities and alternatives, and available resources, stakeholders could aid refugees to reassess their aspirations and expectations, to better connect with the local context and its opportunities, and to shield themselves from becoming discouraged. As temporal references helped refugees to restore their careers, counselors could integrate refugees' life narratives into career assessment and development. This could help them reflect on what work means to them, what they need from work, what they wish for, and how they could contribute.

Conclusion

This dissertation includes three qualitative studies on refugees' vocational behavior and careers as they live in and search for work in Germany. While study 1 explored refugees' identity threats, coping, and adversarial growth, study 2 addressed refugees' self-regulation failures during job search, and study 3 targeted refugees' career adaptive behaviors. Together, the studies reveal how the social, cultural, and institutionalized context can shape refugees' identities and self-regulated career actions. Multiple challenges and constraints arose from the context that jeopardized refugees' identities and career-related actions such as the restrictive resettlement and integration system, the foreign scripts, and/or cases of discrimination. The studies thus illustrate the relevance of focusing on the context when studying the unfolding of people's careers (De Vos et al., 2019). By applying diverse theories on identity threat (Eilam & Shamir, 2005; Kira & Klehe, 2016; Petriglieri, 2011), coping (Carver & Scheier, 1998; Petriglieri, 2011; Savickas, 2013), and adversarial growth (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004) to the refugee context and by integrating multiple stakeholder perspectives, this dissertation informs refugee research and practice (Newman et al., 2018; Lee et al., 2020). Building on the three studies, the remainder of the dissertation discussed the research in terms of its implications for theory and practice, its limitations and strengths, and the future research directions.

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