Positive Anomie: Paradigm Shifts and Unintended Benefits Caused by Normlessness, a Case of Syrian Refugees in Canada

Jennifer Stewart

Independent Researcher, Canada

E-mail: jsphd20@gmail.com

Abstract

The present paper expands on Emile Durkheim's original theory of anomie. Durkheim's anomie is incomplete in its analysis, as it narrowly focuses on the negative outcomes of social breakdown and does not present the entire spectrum of possible favourable results for individuals faced with social upheaval. In contrast, positive anomie presents the hypothesis that de-regulation or a breakdown of social norms has the potential to create a new, more positive worldview. To interpret positive anomie, this study uses research on Syrians women with a refugee background to show how social norms in Canada contradict with and disrupt previously held norms and values of Syria. It specifically delineates financial norms, norms of movement, and relationship norms to demonstrate how Syrian women experience an internal revolution and paradigm shift regarding gender and expectations. After Syrian women arrive in Canada and begin experiencing Canadian culture and society, they discover that compared with their lives in Syria they have greater financial power and independence, limited restrictions in physical movement, and more freedom in their intimate relationships. The loss of previously held restrictive norms shifts into a reconstructed paradigm of greater rights, freedoms, equality, and hope for their future.

Keywords: *Anomie;Positive Anomie; Gender Norms; Gender Paradigms; Refugees; Refugee Worldviews*

Introduction

Resettled refugees can clearly be demarcated within Emile Durkheim's theory of anomie. They have experienced traumatic events and upheaval from their homeland and now find themselves in a foreign land where the language, culture, customs, food, and more hugely contrast with their own. They subsequently experience a breakdown or loss of social norms and values as they find themselves in-between two worldviews. However, despite ambiguity between cultures, this liminal space has the potential to inspire an internal revolution and transformation of worldview. This article highlights a case of Syrian women in Canada with a refugee background and reveals how the loss of social norms invites space for novel ways of discerning gender in a positive way.

Women Refugee's Struggles of Integration

Refugees face physical and emotional obstacles to integration that are exacerbated for women who often suffer additional distress and their own set of unique challenges. For instance, general challenges may include living in low-income housing and housing instability (Carter & Osborne, 2009; Oudschoorn, Benbow, & Meyer, 2019); language barriers (Stewart et al., 2015); physical health problems (Hansen, Maidment, & Ahmad, 2016); and status loss and downward employment due to not having academic and professional qualifications recognised (Tilbury & Colic-Peisker, 2007). Problems are often intensified for women, who frequently report feelings such as sadness, lack of purpose, and social isolation, which may adversely affect their overall well-being (Casimiro, Hancock, & Northcote, 2007; Owino & Weber, 2020). Women's distress in a foreign country is often in addition to their distinct vulnerability and disempowerment through violence and brutality they may have experienced in conflict and during stays in refugee camps (Moussa, 1991; McLellan, 1996). More research on refugees must represent women, their unique manners of integration, and how their experiences of being positioned in a new social environment influence their life moving forward.

Cultural Incompatibility

Dissimilarities in language, religion, and gender norms have been found to contribute to poor cultural adaptation (Berry, 1997). Cultural compatibility is perhaps one of the most influential factors in the satisfactory resettlement of refugees (Kunz, 1981), and identification with others from a similar ethnic community contributes to a greater ability to endure challenges (Alfadhli and Drury, 2018). There are few cultural similarities between Canada and Syria; and one of the last established relationships of support for refugees is usually between neighbours, co-workers, and community members (Lamba & Krahn, 2003). In situations where is there a great degree of cultural dissimilarity, refugees often rely on members of their own ethnic community as a coping strategy during adjustment (Schweitzer et al., 2007); and a lack of interpersonal relationships results in lower personal happiness and decreased well-being (Baumeister et al., 2013; Cacioppo & Patrick, 2008). For instance, language is a significant barrier to successful integration and people are left feeling powerless when they cannot adequately express themselves in the host language (Hutchinson & Dorsett, 2012; Shakespeare-Finch & Wickham, 2009). Similarly, while gender equality varies across cultures, Lokot (2018) warns researchers that stereotyping men's and women's experiences may create conflicting ideas about gender.

Strength-Based Approach

A product of the above-mentioned challenges experienced during integration is that refugee studies may employ a needs-based approach to resettlement and well-being, yet this is not without its limitations. A needs-based approach is bottom-up and identifies what a refugee population is lacking or deficient in, such as general orientation, community, housing, employment, language, and availability of integration services, and then provides for this need (George, U. 2002; Lapping, et al., 2002). A needs-based approach is crucial in the early stages of displacement by providing basic needs, such as food, water, and shelter (UNHCR, 2021) and has been shown to be effective in reducing factors that contribute to women's feelings of isolation (Thompson, & Nasimi, 2020). In contrast, a strength-based approach to refugee integration focuses on leveraging what communities already have rather than what they lack. For instance, Dyer and McGuinness (1996) posit that misfortune can generate positive outcomes; and Stewart (2020) shows that Syrian refugees in Canada can develop collective resilience through various informal social support networks, including the wider Arab community, established immigrants from other countries, and Canada-born neighbours. Addressing a community's needs is critical. Thus, a strength-based approach to refugee studies suggests that solutions to some problems may already exist.

The points mentioned above—general and gender-specific challenges faced by female refugees, cultural dissimilarity, and the demand for a strength-based approach to integration—emphasise the need to

identify whether Syrian women with a refugee background experience positive adjustments regarding gender norms and social values during integration in Canada. Emile Durkheim (1997 [1951]) describes "anomie" as a state of de-regulation caused by abrupt social transitions. Refugees experience this type of de-regulation; however, it is conceivable for refugees to develop new social capital in spite of this (Almohamed, Vyas, & Zhang, 2017). Therefore, this research considers the concept of positive anomie as an annex of Durkheim's original theory of anomie, as new paradigms emerge for Syrian women with a refugee background following resettlement in Canada. While traditional anomie presents a negative breakdown and deregulation of social norms, the present study investigates whether Syrian women with a refugee background experience positive changes to their worldview during integration.

Theoretical Framework

In *Suicide,* Durkheim (1997 [1951]) depicts anomie (also anomy) as a state of de-regulation that occurs when traditional social rules have suddenly lost their authority. As the title of this text suggests, anomie is largely negative. Individuals find themselves abruptly cast into a new social state and forced to relearn how to make sense and meaning of their life. Regardless of whether the source of the crisis is painful or pain-free, for a time guideline are absent; and there is confusion about what is possible and what is impossible for the individual in the culture. In *The Division of Labor in Society,* Durkheim (1997) [1933]) further summarises that as societies evolve from traditional to modern, there results a disequilibrium of beliefs and social norms which may also produce anomie among individuals. It has been shown that individuals living in nations undergoing sociopolitical transition experience anomie in inverse relation to their economic status (Zhao & Cao, 2010). In post-communist social transitions, women more frequently reported psychological anomie and feelings of normlessness (Adnanes 2007). Durkheim's original *Suicide* was published in 1897, and in it he asserts that women are not highly socialized like men and thus are not active participants in social life (1997 [1951]). In contrast, the present study acknowledges that women are active in social life. Canada is a modern society that values individuals' contributions, and Syrian women with a refugee background find themselves in a state of flux as they transition away from a more traditional society to one in which women are active members in the public sphere.

In further breaking down Durkheim's notion of anomie, TenHouten (2016) presents two theoretical models of normless anomie. The first is an intentional and active violation of norms, and the second is an unintentional and passive violation of norms. It is this second model of normlessness that is of significance for the present study. Passive, unintentional anomie arises when individuals experience uncertainty of how to act in society, which may cause them to feel "perplexed, suffer ambiguity and instability in the moral order" (p. 469). Put another way, passive anomie disrupts one's paradigm, i.e., their model or set of patterns that makes up their worldview (Kuhn, 1996 [1962]). TenHouten (2016) further explains that the causes of this uncertainty may be, among other factors, (1) incompatible cultural or ethnic membership or (2) domestic life that undermines established value systems. Kuhn (1996 [1962]) describes how when an original paradigm breaks down it is succeeded by a revolution in which perceptions are challenged and a new paradigm is established. The emergence of a new paradigm results in a changed worldview, wherein one's reactions, expectations, and beliefs shift (Kuhn, 1996 [1962]). Syrian refugee share ethnic membership that is quite far removed from the majority of Canadians. Refugees may also hold certain beliefs about domestic life that do not align with social norms in Canada. Thus, the present study pursues understanding of possible cultural incompatibility and changing gender paradigms through the ambiguous experiences of Syrian women with a refugee background during resettlement in Canada.

Distinction from Positive Deviance

Positive deviance, or positive deviance theory, is associated with traditional anomie. However, positive anomie should not be confused with positive deviance. Positive deviance is an individual's

intentional departure from social norms and is characterised by being both honourable and voluntary (Spreitzer, G. M, & Sonenshein, S., 2004). For example, looting is a deviant behaviour; but looting in order to feed and medicate people after a natural disaster can be considered positive deviance. Weatherby (2016) uses the term positive anomie to describe instances, such as the previous, when the loss of social norms results in actions that would normally be considered deviant are viewed positively. Positive anomie in the present paper differs from this description in one key way. Rather than focusing on the behaviours and actions of a group of people experiencing anomie, positive anomie in the current context specifically looks at peoples' perceptions and positive changes to their worldview. Weatherby (2016) describes positive anomie as positive deviations from social norms in an *active* way, i.e., the ways that individuals act. In contrast, positive anomie in this paper is *recreative* of an individual's worldview in that it defines positive shifts in paradigms as new social norms and values take over in place of those that have been disrupted. This is allied with TenHouten's (2016) analysis of passive anomie and Kuhn's (1996 [1962]) description of paradigm revolutions, where rather than examining individual's actions, positive anomie examines changes to their worldview. Thus, positive deviance and the idea of positive anomie in other places in the literature highlight the *actions and behaviours* of people as a result of their experience of anomie, while positive anomie in the current context categorises it as the *evolution of new and beneficial paradigms* that come about through anomie. In the case of refugees, these new paradigms then play a critical role in their well-being and overall resilience during resettlement.

Significance of the Study

Of the millions of Syrians who became refugees between 2011 and 2018, around 5,200 resettled in Canada, 4,400 of whom have resettled in British Columbia (ISS of BC, 2018). They are recognised as in need and nominated for resettlement as determined through the UNHCR, private sponsors, and their need for humanitarian protection (Yu et al., 2007). Through either government sponsorship, private sponsorship, or a combination of both, refugees are greeted at the airport, assisted in finding temporary and permanent housing, afforded access to health care, referred to integration services and programs, and provided income support for a period of time. Refugee movements are often absent and refugee voices are silenced from national histories (Marfleet, 2018). Despite the many challenges of integration, new legal rights and social forces can positively contribute to well-being (Rizkalla & Segal, 2018). Although British Columbia accepts refugees from around the world, the present study focuses on Syria refugees, as they share the same language, culture, and have many experiences in common with each other.

Numerous studies have highlighted the stresses, challenges, and the loss of social norms of refugees following resettlement as well as positive outcomes that may occur. However, the present study differs in that it describes how anomie itself, typically viewed as negative, can be a catalyst for new social norms to replace old social norms and result in the evolution of new paradigms or ways of seeing the world.

Methods

The study was phenomenological and used qualitative research methodology to present the idea of positive anomie among Syrian women with a refugee background. A phenomenological approach was appropriate for this study because it interprets the meaning of individual's lived experiences (Creswell, 1998). Interpretivism is a key paradigm of modern research. The concept of a research paradigm is what shapes researchers' worldviews and influences what they consider to be important and how to carry out the research (Kuhn, 1996 [1962]). Within an interpretivist paradigm, knowledge is subjective. Interpretivism values the influence of culture (Weaver & Olson, 2006); and emphasis is on the emic perspectives of lived experiences (Kelly, Dowling, & Millar, 2017). Subjectivity is thus a primary goal of an interpretive study (Willis, 2007). An interpretive lens has been used to carry out this study with the understanding that complete subjectivity is

not possible. The value of this study comes from the comprehensive portrayal of multiple perspectives of the research subjects.

Thematic qualitative analysis requires the researcher to sit with the data, work with it, reflect on it, break it into manageable pieces, and locate patterns (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003). This type of analysis is fluid, progressive, and flexible (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). It develops over time. Thematic qualitative analysis codes for, identifies, analyses, organises, describes, and reports applicable themes that emerge from the data; the result is a rich, detailed, and multifaceted depiction of the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This type of analysis is thus well-suited to a phenomenological, interpretive study, and the phases of analysis for this study included creating codes, evaluating potential themes, and defining final themes. Thematic analysis was used for the present qualitative study, as it is flexible and allows for a rich representation of the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The raw data was coded for possible themes which were then identified as important for the research topic. Codes were then analysed, maintained or discarded, and organised into themes. Finalized themes are those that are described in the discussion. Such an analysis is fitting since the participants' perceptions are ever-changing, and the present study signifies a period in time of experiences that are fluid, progressive, and dynamic (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). The narratives sampled in the following sections illustrate Syrian women with a refugee background's experiences of resettlement and integration in Canada. This paper ultimately endeavors to answer the questions, (1) In what ways do Syrian women in Canada experience a breakdown of social norms, and (2) How does this breakdown of social norms influence their worldview?

Data collection

Semi-structured, open-ended interviews were used for this study as well as a general information profile questionnaire. General profile questions included participants' age, marital status, highest level of education, previous occupation in Syria, etc. Examples of open-ended questions include, What is your experience being a woman in Canada? How has been your experience finding work in Canada? How do you handle change in your life? What are your goals for the next five years? How has your personality changed since coming to Canada?

Analysis

This paper is based on qualitative research on Syrian refugees in southern British Columbia, Canada, from 2018. The analysed cases of Syrian women were drawn from previous research on Syrian refugee resilience and well-being (Stewart, 2020), and informal support networks (Stewart, 2020). Accordingly, although this paper is based on empirical evidence that was not collected with the original intent of studying women's changing gender paradigms, the items that will be discussed stood out as remarkable and in need of further isolation and investigation.

Interviews took place in 2018, in southern British Columbia, in Vancouver including the area referred to as Metro Vancouver and the Fraser Valley. Participants were recruited through religious organizations, non-profit resettlement services, prior contacts, and snowball sampling. Criteria for analysis within the present study included Syrian women aged 18 years and above who had come to Canada through the Syrian refugee resettlement program. Participation was voluntary, and participants were informed about the nature of the research both verbally and in writing in both English and Arabic before beginning the interview. Interviews were conducted face-to-face either in the families' home, their friends' home, or in public places, such as food courts. Participants were free to answer or skip any questions if they didn't feel comfortable. They were free to terminate the interview at any time, but this was never done. In the case where participants had a self-reported low level of English, interpreters were employed to assist in the interview process. Several women were interviewed with their husbands and children; and key informants, such as government workers and resettlement workers were also interviewed.

Interviews lasted between 60 and 90 minutes, and occasionally clarification was sought afterward via email or text messaging. Interviews were digitally voice recorded with consent. Minimal note-taking was done during the interview so that participants would feel that they had the full attention of the researcher. Detailed note-taking was done privately after each interview. Recordings were transcribed and were not made accessible to anyone other than the researcher. Pseudonyms have been given for the remainder of this paper. Corrections to participants' grammar has been minimal and only made to make clear sentences that are ambiguous outside of context.

Participants

The women in this study come from diverse backgrounds and represent various life stages, which emphasises the variety of experiences and life courses of Syrian women with refugee backgrounds in Canada. The present study uses the responses from 15 women (n=15) who were all of Syrian nationality coming from Dara'a, Homs, Damascus, Aleppo, Latakia, and Idlib. The median age was 35 years old. Eleven women were married, three were single, and one was a widow from before the war in Syria. At the time of the interview, the shortest time in Canada was 14 months, and the longest time in Canada was two years and 9 months. The lowest level of education was grade 5, and the highest level of education was a university degree. Occupations in Syria varied and included housewife, teacher, office administration, and student; currently seven women were unemployed, four were students, and the others were office administrator, cleaner, translator, and volunteer. Eleven women self-identified as Sunni Muslim, and four self-identified as Christian. Five women could speak fluent English, and as such, the interviews were conducted in English; the remaining 10 women were interviewed in Arabic with the help of interpreters. Table 1 shows selected characteristics of the participants in this study.

Table 1
Profile of participants.

Participant	Age	Marital Status	Highest level education	Job in Syria	Job in Canada
Participant 2	Early 30s	Married	University	Teacher	Student
Participant 3	Late 30s	Single	University	Admin.	Admin.
Participant 4	Mid 20s	Married	Some college	Student	Unemployed
Participant 8	Late 20s	Married	Some university	Student	Unemployed
Participant 9	Mid 40s	Married	Grade 7	Housewife	Cleaner
Participant 10	Early 20s	Married	Grade 8	Student	Student
Participant 12	Mid 30s	Married	Grade 5	Housewife	Unemployed
Participant 13	Mid 40s	Widowed	Grade 9	Unemployed	Unemployed
Participant 14	Late teens	Single	Grade 12	Student	Student
Participant 16	Mid 30s	Married	College	Housewife	Translator
Participant 17	Mid 50s	Married	Grade 10	Housewife	Unemployed
Participant 19	Late 30s	Married	Grade 7	Hairdresser	Unemployed
Participant 21	Mid 40s	Married	Grade 7	Housewife	Student
Participant 22	Late 20s	Single	Some university	Tutor	Volunteer
Participant 23	Late 30s	Married	Grade 6	Housewife	Unemployed

Findings

This study describes the concept of positive anomie as an extension of Durkheim's original theory of anomie. Durkheim (1997 [1951]) depicted anomie with a negative connotation, as a state of personal de-regulation caused by abrupt social transition, for example, as societies evolve from traditional to modern (Durkheim, 1997 [1933]). For refugees, resettlement presents not only adverse outcomes of transition but possible venues for favourably rebuilding norms and values (Almohamed, Vyas, and Zhang, 2017). Thus, while a breakdown of social norms may produce negative results within the individual, the present study argues that there may also be positive paradigm changes and outcomes. The following analysis discusses the concept of positive anomie, defined as follows: *the emergence of a positive paradigm shift resulting from the disruption or dissolution of previously held norms or values*. When considering positive anomie, three realms of social norms will be discussed: financial norms, norms of movement, and relationship norms. These three areas are all areas where Syrian women experienced a breakdown of previously held values and expectations and were able to reconstruct a new paradigm with positive outcomes.

Kuhn (1996 [1962]) discusses that a paradigm—the set of patterns that make up a person's worldview—may be influenced by culture, society, religion, etc. In the case of refugees, migration causes a kind of passive anomie as the set of patterns that make up one's worldview is disrupted, and previously held value systems are undermined (TenHouten, 2016). Kuhn presented the revolution of paradigm shifts in the context of the physical sciences; however, his theory is philosophical in nature, and therefore can be applied in a sociological setting (Bird, 2012). Thus, positive anomie keeps in mind Kuhn's model of how new paradigms, or worldviews, are created within TenHouten's (2016) framework of passive anomie. Kuhn (1996 [1962]) presents the notion that paradigms are created in stages, wherein there is a crisis or turning point that disrupts an individual's paradigm; individuals begin noticing inconsistencies between the previous paradigm and newly presented information; and finally, revolution, wherein old ideas are replaced or new ideas are established. The present study will focus on the transition from inconsistent social norms to the resulting shift to a new paradigm.

Financial Norms

Refugees face barriers to employment in Canada including inability to find work, low language levels, lack of social networks, and non-recognized foreign credentials (Wilkinson, 2017). Syrian women experienced a distinctive series of breakdowns of social norms regarding work and finances. This theme centres around the foundation that in Canada women should be treated equally with men. A breakdown in financial norms was initially exposed in the expectation of the provincial government that in order for married women to be eligible for government-provided income assistance, they were required to be looking for paid work along with their husband. Eleven participants were married, and it was stated that it is normal in Syria for a man to be the exclusive financial provider for the family while the woman stayed home and took care of domestic responsibilities: "It's like our culture. Most of the work, the main job for woman just take care house and kids" (Participant 4). This move from a single- to a double-provider family represents a disruption of previously held family values for many women. This is critical because the right to work is fundamental in helping refugees rebuild self-reliant lives (Zetter & Ruaudel, 2018). While some women preferred to do domestic work and did not want to work outside the home, there was largely approval in this new level of equality between men and women. For instance, Participant 3 was not thinking about finding work and instead desired to stay home and take care of her children and husband who had a heart condition because this was the type of life she was used to, while Participant 8 said, "I have goal and dream to finish studying and get a good job." Another participant said,

> "I want to get a good job and work…If we got a good job and got a good income, we can help other family, our family in Syria. [That makes] our family safe and happy, we will be more happy." (Participant 2)

The women in this study also understood that their options to work were not limited by their sex, and they expressed their surprise at the manner of jobs accessible to women in Canada. In Syria, they could have been anticipated being teachers, office workers, to work in home-based professions or handicrafts, or in women-only roles; however, participants remarked that in Canada they were welcome to work in jobs that they considered traditionally men's jobs, including construction, manufacturing, or other professions where men dominate. This represents a further breakdown of preconceived roles for men and women regarding work and finances. For instance:

> "It's good thing to work anything you want, but in our country, no. For example, if you want to work like bus driver or taxi, you feel very shy, and the other people look at you different. But here, it's good. Everything allowed, and it's good thing…In Syria, there's limited things woman can do. But here in Canada, everything allowed, it's okay." (Participant 4)

> "Like here I've done tree planting. In Syria this is more of a guys thing to do, but here they're like, 'yeah we have lots of girls on our team, so you can join.' I mean we don't have tree planting as a job in Syria, but any labour thing is more for guys… So, if I want to work a labour job, then yes I would have more opportunities to work here." (Participant 22).

> "The work opportunities for women, specifically the fact that age doesn't always matter. In Syria, if you don't have a license or a certificate and you're old, you can't work in any job. But here, there are so many opportunities, and you can live through that." (Participant 19)

Along with the freedom to work at any job comes the right to manage and be responsible for one's own finances. Women in this study communicated appreciation of their right to have their own bank account, credit card, and debit card and how this positively impacted their lives. Having a bank account and control over their own finances means that women have a new awareness of independence and self-determination over their life. For instance, Participant 9 said that she has changed since coming to Canada through having her own bank account: "I feel like a person, and I have my personality. I have my banking account. I know my rights, and I become more stronger. [Women having a bank account] is not really common in our country." There is a learning curve, however, as women discard previous notions about money management and learn a new system. One participant said, "We didn't know anything about the banking, about the cards…We struggled...Our whole life we are cash. We are not using card or debit. We don't have the credit card—all new for us. Then we learned." (Participant 16). Added freedom and financial empowerment further disrupts previous paradigms regarding money and independence. An unmarried participant in her late 30s illustrated the expectation for women to be reliant on their parents or husband in Syria and how living in Canada has unsettled this value,

> "Here I have to live alone to be independent. There in Syria, if you are not married you stay with your parents till you die. Your family responsible for you, your bills…I become more confident and become more courageous, how to live alone without anyone from my family to be there" (Participant 3).

The disruption of norms surrounding work and the new expectation that women should share in providing income for their families or for themselves creates a new hope for women to feel happy, independent, and equal with men. A provincial government employee said, "I can see more ladies coming to our [resettlement] sessions…They are more present in the moment than their husbands…They realize they have a voice, and they can do a lot of things to support their own families." Most women interviewed were appreciative that they were allowed to work and were pleased to see that all jobs available to men were also available to women; and having control of their own money produced a sense of empowerment and individuality. This illustrates that women refugees are creative agents of their own lives and are able to draw on resources around them to find opportunities in negative experiences (Scullion 2008). Thus, we can see how

this breakdown in norms and values regarding finances and control can produce positive paradigm shifts for Syrian women in Canada as they begin to understand their rights and see more opportunities available to them.

Norms of Movement

The second area where women refugees experienced a breakdown of social norms was regarding movement. For this section, norms of movement refers to the acts of leaving the house, going to shops or appointments, meeting friends, and walking outside alone. Part of this breakdown was related to language, and part of it was related to cultural incompatibility. Five interviews were conducted in English, which means 10 women were unable to communicate at a level suitable to participate in in-depth question and answer sessions in English. For these women, language was a major source of feeling lost or inadequate in Canada. Other research confirms that lacking ability in a native language prevents social interaction, decreases independence, and bars community engagement (Qutranji et al., 2020). Participant 19 said she "felt like a baby again" because she couldn't express herself, and another woman demonstrated how her lack of English negatively affected her self-esteem and inability to establish a network of non-Syrian friends:

"When I came here, I thought I was stupid because I didn't know the language….My problem—language. I may prefer to have Syrian friends so I can communicate and understand." (Participant 13)

Language problems make it challenging to complete everyday tasks, such as banking, filling out government forms, taking public transportation, finding housing, and taking care of medical concerns with doctors and nurses. As a result, women feel as if they have lost their authority and may have trepidations about going out in public. Interestingly, feeling lost did not seem to be positively correlated with English ability. For instance, one participant who needed an interpreter during the interview because her English level was low said, in Canada she has "a new life. Freedom… Driving car…Here we have opportunity to go outside easily moving from area to another area," (Participant 4).

Regarding cultural differences, women expressed that they were not restricted from going outside in Canada without a male chaperone and were free to do activities that they associated as being more masculine, as a dialogue between mother and her daughter revealed:

Participant 14 (Daughter). In middle east or places that we lived at, there's no gender equality.

Participant 13 (Mother). Always the man first…I'm not safe there [middle east].
Participant 14. We have the power, we have the rights to do what we want to do [in Canada].
And they respect women, they value women. My mom feel more safe, and I feel more safe, and she feel really happy for me that if I'm in Jordan [after leaving Syria] I cannot be a police officer. They allow women to be police officers, but public does not respect them, and if you give someone orders they won't listen to you. But here you actually feel empowered and can be leader here. (Participant 13 and 14)

In Muslim cultures, it is common for women to have a male family member accompany them when they leave the house, which we can clearly see from the previous section: if married women are expected to work outside the home, it would be quite difficult to require them to have a male chaperone every time they went to their jobs. Thus, there is a rift in this cultural norm for both women and men as they learn how to navigate these inconsistencies. Two participants demonstrate this paradigm shift and how it had an uplifting effect:

"In Syria they [men] can't leave us alone to go. They have to be with us to be safe. It's not thinking that they doesn't want you to work, but he doesn't trust people around you…Because it's Muslim country, so all the women have to cover with black thing they are wearing" (Participant 16).

"You're more independent. Like for me, I always wanted to ride my bike in Syria, and culturally it was not a good thing. So, I really enjoy that I can finally bike anywhere I want here and without so many eyes watching. It's like, 'so what? You're riding a bike.' And even playing soccer. I always wanted to play soccer when I was a kid, and my parents tried to register me in one of the soccer teams when I was in Syria, and the coach was like, 'we have no girls playing on our team.' They didn't let me register so they had to send me to the basketball team. But culturally, basketball is for girls. We do have a girls soccer team, but it's not very familiar. Here I played lots of soccer. I know these are like simple details, weird details, but I enjoy that. (Participant 22)

Driving a car has already been touched on above, and this was a common subject that women expressed regarding personal freedom and norms of movement. Having a driver's license contributes to women realizing their unique capacities by supporting their agency and rights (Kale & Kindon, 2020). A key informant said that she sees women "happily driving" when they come in for resettlement services (provincial government worker). Participant 12 said that it was good to be a woman in Canada because,

"Nobody call me a refugee…And drive. In Syria, not. Sometimes I see woman drive in Syria. Here everybody [women] drive. It's very good…I want to work, and I want to learn driving. I want to. Now is learner driver1. I learn now, but it's expensive. One hour, $60. I want it, but it's expensive."

Participants 16 confirmed the significance of driving: "I don't have to drive in Syria, but here is very important to drive." Other research notes the significance of having a driver's license for refugees to access places in town and feel welcomed, especially in rural towns (Kaugen, 2019). The excerpts above reveal the breakdown of norms of movement and how women are able to take advantage of them to achieve more in their lives. In Syria, freedom of movement was dependent on male family members, and it was not common for women to drive. However, in Canada, women find that they are legally free to go anywhere they want. Unfortunately, language ability may restrict some movement, and women still have to learn to feel relaxed being alone in public. Nevertheless, it is clear that a new paradigm regarding norms of movement is being formed as women more fully understand gender equality and freedom in Canada.

Relationship Norms

The third area of norm deregulation and the emergence of new paradigms concerns relationships, specifically intimacies between a man and a woman. Breakdown of norms in this space relates to some of the issues mentioned in previous sections, such as women's freedom of movement, freedom to work, more equality between men and women, and women's rights. As women gain more rights outside the home, the responsibilities for domestic duties shifts from solely women to include men, which may put pressure on married couples as they struggle to hold on to previous values while trying to incorporate new ideals. One woman with several children said, "I have my rights," (Participant 23); and sometimes, "[her husband] sits with them [the kids] and then she hangs out with her friends" (Participant 23's son). A key informant also noticed this disruption of social norms and shift in ways of thinking when men responded with disbelieving laugher at the expectation that their wife needs to be looking for work as well.

Revolution and the emergence of a new paradigm regarding marriage relationships comes in the form of women recognising that, as equal partners in the relationship, they have specific power over the future of the relationships that they didn't have in Syria. Participant 19 said, "I really like the equality between men and women, and this is missing back home."

---

[1] "Learner driver," often referred to as "learner" or "L" can be obtained if someone is at least 16 years old and has gotten 40 out of 50 questions right on a multiple-choice knowledge test. They have a red magnetic "L" symbol to put on their car and can now drive with a supervisor for 12 months before being eligible to take the "New driver" test.

Additionally,

Participant 16: Everything, the first thing is man. That is hard as a woman, but here the woman is very powerful. They can start to study again, they can drive, they can go to work, they can do anything that they are hoping in all their life to be there.

Participant 17: Very good for Syrian woman here. Big changes here.
Participant 16: You are feeling very powerful. (Participant 16 and 17)

Tied in with the collection of rights mentioned above—right to work, have a bank account, drive, go outside alone, etc.—participants noted that, in Canada, it was now possible for Syrian women to divorce their husbands. This is a significant topic, since many refugee women who are exposed to domestic violence divorce their husbands after resettling in a country that allows it (Nasser-Eddin, 2017). Women are also able to remarry or not marry without fear of the social stigma of being a divorced woman or an unmarried woman in Canada. One participant, who has never married, stated that, "To be a single mom [in Canada] is okay. [In Syria] it's totally bad. If you have a son without a man, that means you are a prostitute, or a bad girl. This is so bad." (Participant 3)

An aspect of marriage in Islam that is wholly disrupted in Canada is the right for men to have more than one wife. In Islam, it is possible for a man to have up to four wives, although this is usually reserved for exceptionally wealthy men who can afford to provide for up to four women and their children. One woman was grateful for this restriction in Canada and said,

"I'm not afraid now my husband will marry another woman, because in Syria they can marry four, as a Muslim. Any Muslim in Arab country, not only Syria—in Arab country the Muslim man can marry four…In Canada, no, just one. I like Canada." (Participant 21).

Such prohibition of polygamy amplifies women's self-determination and role as an equal partner in marriage (Liversage, 2019). Related to this newfound assurance and confidence is the breakdown of attitudes toward intimate relations between men and women before marriage. Participants in the present study had diverse relationship statuses and dissimilar religiosity, but had the same feeling of surprise at learning that men and women can live together and have intimate relations before they are married. For instance, two participants, one who was married and one who was single, said,

"In our country, you can't do relation before you married, but here it's okay. We were surprised…It's not common, it's not allowed in our culture. We just like, oh, shocked, because I didn't know that before we came here…But then it became okay for us." (Participant 2)

"[In Canada] it's okay to live with boyfriend/girlfriend, but there it's not. It's family thing…I was surprised that some churches accept that boyfriend/girlfriend live together before marriage. That's strange for me." (Participant 3)

The above points address several areas in which relationship norms are disrupted in Canada. Previous paradigms surrounding romantic relationships include the man being more powerful than the woman in a marriage, a woman's lack of freedom to divorce her husband, dislike of men's rights to marry more than one wife, and forbidding men and women to live together and engage in sexual relations before marriage. After Syrian women learn about Canadian society, they learn that women can be equal with men regarding marriage, they can divorce their husbands, men are only allowed to have one wife at a time, and sexual relations before marriage are less restricted The breakdown of these norms all have in common the fact that women have gained more rights and autonomy in Canada than they had in Syria. New rights give women more options, opportunities, and power in their relationships, so although previous relationship norms have been disrupted, women actually have hopeful futures as they shift into a new paradigm of gender norms.

Positive Anomie

Positive anomie is the evolution of positive paradigms resulting from the disruption or dissolution of previously held norms or values. The examples and excerpts above illustrate three key areas in which Syrian women with a refugee background experience a disruption to their previously held financial norms, norms of movement, and relationship norms. These three spaces are all areas where Syrian women experienced a breakdown of previously held values and were able to reconstruct a new paradigm with positive outcomes. Durkheim's (1997 [1951]) original concept of anomie is initiated when there is a dramatic emotional or circumstantial upheaval in a person's life and which leads to negative emotions and outcomes. Refugees have been forced to make the difficult decision to flee their home country, faced dramatic departure from their homeland, and find themselves precariously in a foreign country with an unknown future and traumatic past. This creates a crisis, turning point, or condition of instability that is necessary to induce change. However, the breakdown of social norms Syrian women with a refugee background experience in Canada results in several surprising and unintended benefits to their worldview as women. Women find that they have far more rights, freedoms, power, and equality than they did in Syria or a transit country in the middle east, which leaves them feeling empowered and hopeful. For example, one participant said,

"In Syria, I had many dreams and many hopes, but they were destroyed when the war started. So then when I moved to Lebanon, I felt for a period and then I felt hopeful again, but then the reality was stronger and I felt disappointed. But then coming here to Canada, I feel that hope is real. My dreams can actually come true… Like I said before there are more opportunities for women." (Participant 19)

A paradigm is the set of patterns that make up a person's worldview (Kuhn, 1996 [1962]). The result of the preceding breakdown of norms is the emergence of a new paradigm, i.e., a new worldview. This new paradigm emerging in the participants of this study includes more freedom for women to work and take control of their finances; the ability to go out alone and drive a car; and the equality in marriage to file for divorce and not feel stigmatised due to relationship status. Women are cognisant of these new rights and freedoms that arise from various difficulties and the de-regulation of previous worldviews as they come into contact with new social norms. During this period of de-regulation, attitudes change, women experience transition, they try new experience, and express their content over new ideas. Thus, women's nature of being changes as they experience an internal revolution of ideas and the emergence of a new paradigm.

Conclusion

This study illustrate the multi-sided and contradictory experiences of resettlement of Syrian women with a refugee background in British Columbia, Canada. It illustrates positive anomie through the ways in which social norms are disrupted in Canada and previous norms regarding gender fall apart and women find themselves in an "in between" space of ambiguous social expectations. The women in this "in between" space must navigate two paradigms, or worldviews, regarding gender norms regarding finances, physical movement, and relationships. Eventually, it is possible to experience a reconciliation and acceptance of new norms, embrace new rights and freedoms, gain a sense empowerment, and learn how to use these new opportunities for one's benefit. Indeed, it is clear that Durkheim's original concept of anomie is both negative and incomplete and does not fully cover the realm of possible outcomes when individuals find themselves in a situation of social change and internal conflict. The above analysis shows that it is entirely possible for traditional social norms to break down in a state of internal anomie and a new worldview to emerge wherein expectations and beliefs are positively changed to reflect updated worldviews. Positive anomie in this framework represents a more complete explanation and analysis of outcomes for Syrian women with a refugee background as well as a more comprehensive interpretation of Durkheim's anomie. Unlike Durkheim's original concept of anomie, which observes that social dysregulation leads to negative outcomes, mood disorders, or suicide, positive anomie as discussed in this paper discerns that refugees have agency over

their situation and are able to see the advantages of new opportunities presented to them, produce positive outcomes for their life, and even create change in the collection of assumptions and beliefs shared within the refugee community.

References

Abohalaka, R., and Yeşil, S. T. (2021). "Determination of perceived language barriers according to Syrian refugees visiting two hospitals in Ankara," *Turkish Journal of Publish Health*, 19(2), 92-105. DOI: 10.20518/tjph.796038

Adnanes, M. (2007). "Social transitions and anomie among post-communist Bulgarian youth," *Young*, 15(49), 49-69. DOI: 10.1177/1103308807072684

Alma, E., Memon, A., Ochoa, B., Bata, S. Cunningham, D., and Gill, H. (n.d.) "Re-thinking an asset-based support for new immigrants: A case study,"

Almohamed, A., Vyas, D., & Zhang, J. (2017). "Rebuilding social capital: engaging newly arrived refugees in participatory design," *Proceedings of the 29th Australian Computer-Human Interaction Conference.*

Bird, A. (2012). "*The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* and its Significance: An Essay Review of the Fiftieth Anniversary Edition," *British Society for the Philosophy of Science*, 63 (2012), 859-883.

Casimiro, S., Hancock, P., & Northcote, J. (2007). "Isolation and insecurity: Resettlement issues among muslim refugee women in Perth, Western Australia," *Australian Journal of Social Issues*, 42(1), 55-69.

Choummanaivong, C., Poole, G. E., and Cooper, E. (2014). "Refugee family reunification and mental health in resettlement," *Koutuitui: New Zealand Journal of Social Sciences Online*, 9(2), 89-100, DOI: 10/1080/117783X2014.944917

Durkheim, E. (1997) [1933]. *The Division of Labor in Society*. Free Press.

Durkheim, E. (1997) [1951]. *Suicide*. Free Press.

George, U. (2002). "A needs-based model for settlement service delivery for newcomers to Canada." *International Social Work*, 45(4), 465-480.

ISS of BC [Immigrant Services Society of BC] (2018, May). "Syrian refugee operation: Taking stock two years after arrival," Immigrant Services Society of BC. https://issbc.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/ISSofBC-Report-Operation-Syrian-Refugees-to-BC-Taking-Stock-Two-Years-After-Arrival.pdf.

Jamil, H., Farrag, M., Hakim-Larson, J., Kafaji, T., Abdulkhaleq, H., and Hammad, A. (2007). "Mental Health Symptoms in Iraqi Refugees: Posttraumatic Stress Disorder, Anxiety, and Depression," *Journal of Cultural Diversity*, 14(1), 19-25.

Kale, A., and Kindon, S. (2020). "Gender, (im)mobility and citizenship in a refugee women's driving programme: exploring emotional citizenry in Aotearoa New Zealand," *Gender, Place & Culture*, 28(10), 1472-1492. DOI: 10.1080/0966369X.2020.1846499

Kaugen, S. (2019). ""We Feel Like We're Home": The Resettlement and Integration of Syrian Refugees in Smaller and Rural Canadian Communities," *Refuge*, 35(2), 53-63. DOI: 10.7202/1064819ar

Khawaja, N. G., Hebbani, A., Gallois, C., and Mackinnon, M. (2019). "Predictors of employment status: A study of former refugee communities in Australia," *Australian Psychologist*, 54(5), 427-437. DOI: 10/1111/ap.12388

Krahn, H., Derwing, T., Mulder, M., and Wilkinson, L. (2000). "Educated and Underemployed: Refugee Integration into the Canadian Labour Market," *Journal of International Migration and Integration*, 1(1) (Winter 2000), 59-84.

Lapping, K. Marsh, D. R., Rosenbaum, J., Swedberg, E., Sternin, J., Sternin, M., & Shroeder, D. G. (2002). "The positive deviance approach: challenges and opportunities for the future," *Food and Nutrition Bulletin*, 23(4), 128-135.

Lipson, J. G., and Miller, S. (1994). "Changing roles of Afghan refugee women in the United States," *Health Care for Women International*, 15(3), 171-180 DOI: 10.1080/07399339409516110

Liversage, A. (2019). "Polygamy, wellbeing, and ill-being amongst ethnic Muslim minorities," in Tiilikainen, M., Al-Sharmiani, M., and Mustasaari, S. (Eds.), *Wellbeing of Transnational Muslim Families: Marriage, Law and Gender* (59-93). Routledge.

Lokot, M. (2018). "Syrian refugees: thinking beyond gender stereotypes," *Forced Migration Review*, 57, 33-35.

Nasser-Eddin, N. (2017). "Gender performativity in diaspora: Syrian refugee women in the UK," *A Gendered Approach to the Syrian Refugee Crisis*, 142-154.

Owino, J. & Weber, C. (2020). *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 74, 69-79. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijintrel.2019.10.011

Thompson, N. & Nasimi, R. (2020). "'This place means freedom to me': needs-based engagement with marginalized migrant Muslim women in London," *Oxford University Press and Development Journal*, 00(00), 1-21.

Porter, M., and Haslam, N. (2005). "Predisplacement and Postdisplacement Factors Associated With Mental Health of Refugees and Internally Displaced Persons: A Meta-analysis," *The Journal of the American Medical* Association, 295(5), 602- 612.

Qutranji, L., Silahlı N. Y., Baris, H. E., and Boran, P. (2020). "Refugee women's well-being, needs and challenges: implications for health policymakers," *Journal of Public Health*, 42(4), e506-e512. DOI: 10.1093/pubmed/fdaa163

Sandra, T., and Ravinder, S. (2012). "Supporting Refugee Students in Schools: What Constitutes Inclusive Education?" *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, 16(1), 39-56. DOI: 10.1080/13603110903560085

Scullion, L. C. (2008). "Women asylum seekers and refugees: Opportunities, constraints and the role of agency," *Social Policy and Society*, 7(3) (2008), 281-292. DOI: 10.1017/S1474746408004260

Spreitzer, G. M., & Sonenshein, S. (20040. "Toward the Construct Definition of Positive Deviance," *American Behavioral Scientist, 47*(6). DOI: 10.1177/0002764203260212

UNHCR [The United Nations Refugee Agency] (2021). "Basic needs approach in the refugee response," https://www.unhcr.org/protection/operations/590aefc77/basic-needs-approach-refugee-response.html. Accessed on August 22, 2021.

Verwiebe, R., Kittel, B., Dellinger, F., Liebhard, C., Schiestl, D., Haindorfer, R., and Liedl, B. (2018). "Finding your way into employment against all odds? Successful job search of refugees in Austria," *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 45(9), 1401-1418. DOI: 10/10801369183X.2018.1552826

Weatherby, G. A. (2016). "Daring To Be Different: The Impact of Positive Deviance on the Global Stage," *Voyages Journal of Contemporary Humanism,* (2016). http://voyagesjournal.org/daring-to-be-different-the-impact-of-positive-deviance-on-the-global-stage/ Accessed on Sep. 19, 2024.

Wilkinson, L. (2017). "The Labour Market Experience of Refugees in Canada," *Structural Context of Refugee Integration in Canada and Germany*, (2017), 93-98.

Zetter, R., & Ruaudel, H. (2018). "Refugees' right to work and access to labour markets: constraints, challenges and ways forward," *Forced Migration Review*, 58 (2018), 4-7.

Zhao, R. & Cao, L. (2010). "Social change and anomie: a cross-national study," *Social Forces*, 88(3), 1209-1229. DOI: 10.1353/sof.0.0312

Copyrights