'The ageless': Age-disputed unaccompanied minor asylum seekers – caught between constructions of childhood and adulthood.

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Abstract

Age-disputed unaccompanied minor asylum seekers (UMAs) are a group of undocumented young people who have received increased attention both in the media and by scholars during the last decade. Due to heightening numbers of UMAs seeking asylum throughout Europe, governments have increased their use of age assessments to establish UMAs unknown age so that they receive accurate treatment, rights, and care. Norway makes use of medical and non-medical age assessments, often based on x-rays of the carpus, teeth, and visual assessments conducted by professionals, to find UMAs' approximate age. This thesis explores how relevant actors connected to the Norwegian asylum field understand and construct UMAs and their unknown age. It considers how hegemonic understandings of age becomes determining in situating UMAs within or outside childhood. Moreover, the thesis scrutinizes how prevalent discourses connected to UMAs becomes relevant regarding UMAs access to legal rights. As age assessment is a particularly contested practice, gaining knowledge about the rationale behind how and why UMAs are perceived as they are, become pertinent. Drawing on the findings from this study, UMAs are constructed on the basis of constructed knowledge stemming from the global North. Moreover, UMAs voices are rarely taken into consideration when their age is disputed. Thus, their opportunity to participate in matters concerning themselves becomes absent.

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Abbreviations

BFE	Children's Unit
Bufetat	Office for Children, Youth and Family Affairs
CRC	United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child
PU	National Police Immigration Service
UDI	Norwegian Directorate of Immigration
UNE	Immigration Appeal Board
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UM	Unaccompanied minor
UMA	Unaccompanied minor asylum seeker

1. Introduction

Age-disputed unaccompanied minor asylum seekers (hereafter UMAs) have received increased attention through the mass media as well as within the research literature during the last decade. As a result of heightening numbers of UMAs seeking protection in Norway, and in other European countries, there has been a significant change in policies and practices aimed at this group. These policy changes have been disputed as being rigid, making it harder for this particular group to gain protection. This chapter will introduce the background for this research project which relates to UMAs and age assessment. It will then make a reckoning of my interest in UMAs and age assessment. After this, I will describe the research projects' aims and objectives. This will be followed by a presentation of the project's research questions. Finally, the thesis outline will be elaborated on.

1.1 Background

A child is by definition anyone below the age of 18 if not otherwise stated in the laws of a country (CRC, 1989). This legally binding definition of a child is incorporated into Norwegian law, and thus current to all children within the national boarders of Norway. This clear-cut definition of who is defined as a child may have implications when dealing with a group of people who often lack documentation to vouch for their identity.

As the influx of UMAs has increased to Norway, the immigration authorities have more frequently used medical and non-medical age assessments to find UMAs' approximate age. Asylum seekers have a responsibility to verify their identity through documentation which states name, age, and country of origin (UDI, 2018a). Despite this, many UMAs who seek asylum in Norway often lack or have invalid documentation because they might come from countries where it is not common to register births. Consequently, the use age assessment is seen as a requirement to establish who is a child and who is an adult. The need to classify asylum seekers as children or adults relates to receiving the correct rights and services. Like all other children, UMAs in a Norwegian context, have the right to be protected through the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (hereafter CRC) and Norwegian law (OHCRC, 2017). Nevertheless, having an unknown age makes the access to these rights and services troublesome, because, as will be argued throughout this thesis, professionals' accounts and understandings of UMAs' age can become more decisive than their own.

The topic of age assessment and UMAs is a politicized and sensitive field. It has generated noteworthy engagement in the public debate and from scholars and politicians. During the fall of 2017, the Norwegian parliament stopped the transportation of a group of Afghan UMAs, referred to as *Oktoberbarna*. This was a group of male Afghan UMAs who sought asylum in Norway during the fall of 2015[1] and got their age assessed to approximately 16 years. They received a temporary resident permit[2] and therefore they would only have protection until they turned 18 (Tjernshaugen and Olsen, 2017). Furthermore, a group of UMAs sued the Norwegian immigration authorities in 2017 claiming that their age was incorrectly assessed. Their lawsuit was successful, and the court concluded that the assessments were based on wrong information and an incorrect use of evidence (Stokke, 2017). These cases illustrate how the use of age assessments can have severe consequences for the people who are subjected to them. UMAs might risk being sent back to their country of origin because they are considered to be over the majority limit although this might not be the case.

The medical age assessment has been subjected to criticism from scholars, practitioners, the media, and organizations working for children, on the basis of ethical dilemmas, safeguarding children's rights, and the consequences it might entail not being believed (Gower, 2011; Annexstad, 2010; Sommerseth, 2016). The non-medical age assessments often constitute evaluations based on behavior and perceived maturity, which are connected to a Western chronological understanding of age (NOAS, 2016). It can be argued that this way of understanding age might not apply to people who have grown up in another geographical and cultural context:

> Although in contemporary western societies age is commonly regarded as a fundamental aspect of a person's identity and is calculated numerically in terms of the passage of years since birth, this reckoning of time passing is not universal (James and James, 2012, p. 2).

Moreover, the emphasis on physical appearance is by Valentine, Skelton and Chambers (1998, p. 5, drawing on James, 1986) argued to be connected to how the "age of our physical bodies is used to define us and give meaning to our identity and actions" (p. 157). Accordingly, how

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[1] During the fall of 2015, Norway experienced a record in asylum applications, both in general and from UMAs (Sønsterudbråten, Tyldum and Raundalen 2018).
[2] Temporary resident permits will be elaborated on in chapter two.

other peoples' bodies are perceived can become decisive in the ways in which one categorize people as a child or an adult. Concerning age assessments, the weight which is put upon UMAs' physical appearance has been disputed. Although children share the same age and have grown up in the same circumstances, physical appearance can vary a great deal (NOAS, 2016).

UMAs are a group which is described as especially vulnerable on the basis of being categorized as both children and refugees (UNHCR, 2008). Simultaneously, there have been tendencies to depict youth migrants, especially males, as possible threats where their motives for seeking asylum are questioned (Bryan and Denov, 2011). As such, UMAs may have multiple identities constructed by others, and they can be perceived as an ambiguous group. Throughout this thesis, the analysis will exemplify how these constructed identities are connected to UMAs' characteristics and become visible in how UMAs are treated and looked upon when their age is disputed.

1.2 Personal interest

My interest in the topic derives from the awareness I got during the fall of 2015 where the media frequently told stories about UMAs who were seeking protection in Norway. Moreover, debates regarding medical age assessments have been a 'hot topic' which made me curious about the rationale behind the use of age assessment. Besides, by becoming familiarized with ideas regarding children and childhood, through studying childhood studies, which moves away from stereotypical Western understandings of these phenomena, I became more interested in exploring how Westernized ideas unfold when age is assessed. Accordingly, I wanted to explore the process of age assessment from professionals' point of view as their perspectives are crucial to understand why some UMAs are assessed to be above 18 years while others are not.

1.3 Topic

The topic of this thesis corresponds with the difficulties that might occur when age-disputed UMAs have their age assessed. The thesis explores how and why age-disputed UMAs are constructed differently by various actors on the basis of their understanding of children and childhood. Moreover, it examines how UMAs unique backgrounds partake in constructions regarding them. As the core of age assessment is connected to whether or not a person is below or above 18, being assessed to either or thus has great significance in terms of rights, services, and protection. There are not many studies from the Norwegian context where one explores

how different actors who interact with UMAs understand age. This understanding can be argued to be crucial. Scrutinizing age assessment practices and how perceptions of age become visible through these practices are pertinent as they can become decisive in matters concerning UMAs future. Moreover, exploring rationales behind perceptions of age can shed light upon culture-specific understandings related to age and how they unfold.

I also see it as valuable to connect the phenomenon of age assessment to Norwegian asylum policies aimed at reducing the influx of asylum seekers to the situate the phenomenon within a broader perspective. As age assessment is of great significance regarding rights and protection, this also relates to receiving temporary resident permits. Those who receive temporary resident permits have to leave Norway when they turn 18 years because they are not seen to have valid asylum grounds. Thus, if age is misjudged, one risks sending children, who actually have legitimate claims to protection, out of the country. I would argue that this is unfortunate because by making assessments on 'weak' grounds, one may, in fact, refuse children their inherent rights based on measures to reduce asylum influx (see Hagen and Skybak, 2009).

The data in this project builds upon 11 in-depth interviews with 12 participants. Some of the participants work within the Norwegian asylum system[3] and have hands-on experience with age assessment or have worked with questions regarding age assessment and UMAs. The other participants who do not work within the asylum system have experience with UMAs and age assessment through research, work at reception centers, settlement, as guardians and organizational work. The data has been analyzed on the basis of theoretical perspectives from childhood studies and intersectional theory.

1.4. Aims and objectives

1.4.1 Aims

The main aim of this thesis is to explore how Western constructions of age unfolds concerning age-disputed UMAs. This relates to constructions of physical bodies, bodily practices, and maturity. Moreover, the thesis seeks to scrutinize how characteristics such as gender, socio-economic background, and ethnicity becomes decisive regarding trust and distrust towards

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[3] When I refer to the asylum system in this thesis, this encompasses the National Police Immigration Service, the Norwegian Directorate of Immigration, and the Immigration Appeal Board. Sometimes, I will instead use the Norwegian immigration authorities or the Norwegian immigration administration depending on the context.

UMAs. By gaining knowledge about this, one can increase awareness of the processes and mechanisms which contribute to making protection, and thus rights, accessible to UMAs.

1.4.2 objectives

To achieve the aims of this thesis, the following objectives were formulated:

- o To explore how characteristics such as UMAs' physical bodies, bodily practices, and maturity, which often are perceived to be age-specific, unfold when UMAs' age is understood.
- o To explore how UMAs' gender, socio-economic background, and ethnicity can determine if they are seen as credible asylum seekers with a legitimate reason for protection.
- o To explore differing views actors within the asylum field[4] might have towards UMAs.

1.5 Research questions

- o In what ways is age understood amongst actors who engage with UMAs?
    - o What are main factors which contribute in understanding UMAs' age?
    - o To what degree does hegemonic understandings of children and childhood contribute in situating UMAs within childhood or adulthood?
- o In what ways are UMAs constructed as credible or uncredible based on their backgrounds?
    - o How does gender, socio-economic background, and ethnicity contribute in UMAs' access to protection and rights?
- o How does differing views on UMAs unfold amongst actors within the asylum field?

1.6 Thesis outline

This thesis consists of eight chapters which urge to explain the topic's background, introduce the theoretical framework which has been used to analyze the data material, make an account of methods and methodologies, and mainly answer the thesis' objectives and research questions.

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[4] In this thesis, the asylum field is perceived as consisting of actors who work on topics related to asylum and refugees.

Chapter 2 This chapter presents the background of this thesis. It gives insight into aspects which I see as significant when exploring age-disputed UMAs and age assessment practices. By providing an account of who unaccompanied minor asylum seekers are, their reasons for seeking asylum, their background, practices related to age assessment in Norway, policies and practices pertaining to UMAs, as well as an overview of the Norwegian immigration administration, the chapter illustrates the complexity which surrounds age-disputed UMAs.

Chapter 3 The third chapter of this thesis focus on the theoretical frameworks which have been used to analyze the data material. The theories and concepts that have been used consist of theoretical perspectives from childhood studies and intersectionality that are seen as relevant to analyze the data based on the thesis' objectives and research questions.

Chapter 4 In this chapter, I give an account of the methodology and method which was used during this project. Moreover, it exemplifies and discusses issues connected to the project's participants such as sensitivity, recruitment, interviews, creating trusting relationships and power structures. My role as a researcher will also be addressed. The chapter ends with a description of how the data material was treated after it was retrieved.

Chapter 5 This is the first of three analysis chapters. The primary intention of this chapter is to analyze and explore how characteristics such as physical appearance, bodily practices, and maturity situate age-disputed UMAs within childhood or adulthood on the basis of the participants' accounts. Besides, it examines how these characteristics are connected to understandings of age. The data is related to theoretical perspectives on bodies and maturity as well as previous research.

Chapter 6 The second analysis chapter examines how characteristics such as age, nationality, ethnicity, class, and gender become evident concerning UMAs' creditability. By using intersectionality as a theoretical base, the chapter explores how the mentioned characteristics interact with one another and thus makes UMAs as more or less credible based on their dispositions and backgrounds.

Chapter 7 This last analysis chapter describes two discourses which the project's participants' statements can be situated within. By relating to the data, I illustrate how the participants position themselves differently towards UMAs and practices relevant for UMAs.

Chapter 8 The final chapter of this thesis makes a concluding discussion based on the findings of the analysis. The chapter also contributes with policy recommendations and advice for further research.

2. Background chapter

The practice of age assessment is part of a big tapestry which is connected to asylum policies and practices, national law, children's rights and human rights, and various constructions and discourses related to age. Age assessment is complex in terms of being woven into the above-mentioned dimensions, affecting and being affected by many circumstances which influence the lives of UMAs. This phenomenon which is situated within the Norwegian asylum system is highly contested. The use of medical age assessments has been criticized because the methods are said to be unsafe and not scientifically proven in terms of being erroneous which can have severe consequences for UMAs (Annexstad, 2010; Bøe, 2017). Moreover, the Norwegian age assessment practice has received criticism for violating the Norwegian Immigration Act as well as several of United Nations guidelines (e.g., Guidelines on International Protection and Guidelines on Policies and Procedures in dealing with Unaccompanied Children) (NOAS, 2016). To situate the practice of age assessment in Norway, I will throughout this chapter present aspects which become pertinent when exploring and understanding age assessment. The chapter outlines an overview of circumstances which surround the phenomenon of age assessment of UMAs.

2.1 Child migrants and unaccompanied minor asylum seekers [5]

In 2015, some 5500 UMAs sought asylum Norway. Due to causality problems that escalated in the same year, several million people were forced to flee their home countries, which lead to an increase of refugee and migration streams to Europe (UNHCR, 2015). The war in Syria, which has taken place since 2011, intensified in 2015 and is described as the worst humanitarian disaster in modern history (UN, 2017a). At the same time, Afghanistan experienced a heightening in conflict zones due to the increased presence of the Taliban, leading to the displacement, deaths, and injuries of thousands of civilians (Gossman, 2015). These events also resulted in children migrating on their own without parents or other caretakers. Although child migration is not something that is relatively new[6], this has become a topic of inquiry, analysis, and debate during the last decade. Child migrants and child refugees seeking asylum without the company of parents or other caretakers are often described as unaccompanied minors

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[5] In this thesis, I use the term unaccompanied minor asylum seeker (UMA) when referring to people who have had their age disputed, because this is the group which was mainly discussed in the interviews with the participants. This group encompasses people who have applied for asylum and are thus treated as minors until proven otherwise. Although they are referred to as UMAs in this thesis, this might not be the case.

[6] See Eide, 2005 on child migration in a historical comparative perspective.

(hereafter UMs) or UMAs. Following the Norwegian Immigration Act §98a, UMAs are defined as:

> persons under 18 years of age (minors) who are applying for protection and who are in a country without parents with parental responsibility. The same applies when those who have parental responsibilities are no longer able to exercise that responsibility for the minor" (Regjeringen, 2014).

UMAs often have in common that they lack parental care, guidance, and protection; they mainly originate from countries that have armed conflicts or other types of organized violence; and they have experienced traumas such as loss, grief, sorrow, persecution, emergencies, and abuse (Michelsen and Berg, 2015). Moreover, it is a necessity to take into consideration that UMAs also come from different social, religious, geographical, ethnic and cultural backgrounds. As will be discussed in several parts of the thesis, UMAs are a group which is surrounded by considerable uncertainty because of their unresolved identity, often in terms of an unestablished age (NOAS, 2016).

Figure 1: Number of UMAs seeking asylum in Norway 1996-2016
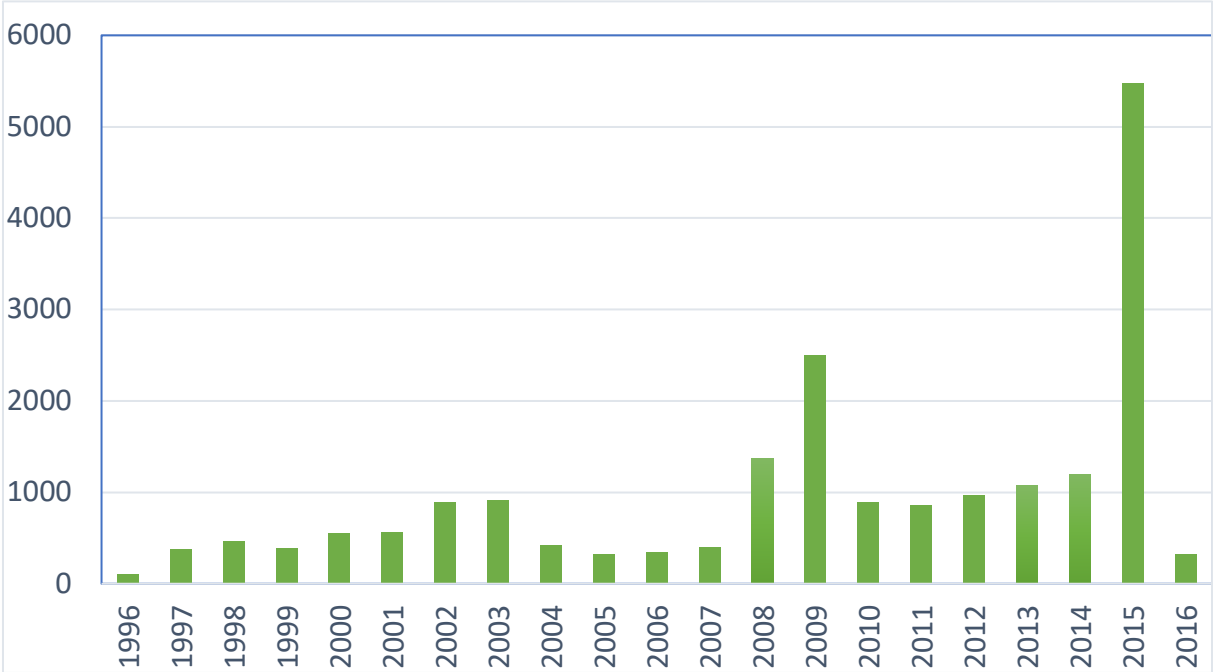
Source: SSB/UDI

In a Norwegian context, UMAs are often classified into different groups on the basis of age and identity. This categorization is seen in relation to the rights that the minors are entitled to, regarding living arrangement and residence permits. UMAs under the age of 15 is to be placed in care-centers which is under the Norwegian Directorate of Children, Youth and Family Affairs (hereafter Bufdir). The centers are part of the Norwegian child welfare system, and the UMAs who live in these centers are required to have the same rights as other children within the child welfare system. UMAs between the age of 15 and 18 years are placed in reception-centers administered by the Norwegian Directorate of Immigration (hereafter UDI). These centers are not statutory or regulatory as care-centers are regarding norms regulating what is sufficient in terms of staff, competency, accommodation standard, and resources for environmental work (Bufdir, 2017; NHRI, 2016). The different practices between those above and below 15 years have been contested by scholars arguing that it facilitates age discrimination. Hagen and Skybak (2009) demonstrate in their article how minors below the age of 16 have greater access to care in their living arrangement than those above 16. Moreover, they argue that those under 16 are more likely to have permanent resident permits than those above 16, although they have the same grounds for seeking asylum.

Being a child in Norway lead to specific rights which grant a person under the age of 18 more protection and safeguarding than adults. The CRC became part of the Human Rights Act in Norwegian Law in 2003 (Hoelseth, 2003), as a means to further ensure the rights of children. Seen in relation to asylum-seeking children, Lidén and Rusten (2007) emphasize the importance of article 2 (the principle of non-discrimination), article 6 (a child's inherent right to life), article 12 (the right to express own views and be heard), and article 3.1 (the child's best interest should be a primary consideration). These articles reflect the importance of children having their unique rights preserved within the international, but also the Norwegian legal system. As of 2008, new policies were introduced by the Norwegian government. These have been argued to weaken UMAs' rights and living condition (see Igesund, 2015).

2.1.1 Afghanistan – a brief introduction

I have chosen to devote a section in this thesis for a contextual background on Afghanistan. I will present characteristic about Afghanistan which I see as relevant when exploring the topic of age assessment. This is because the majority of UMAs that seek asylum in Norway are Afghans. In 2015, there were registered 3537 UMAs from Afghanistan (SSB, 2017). Moreover, the participants often referred to Afghans when they made examples during the interviews.

Afghanistan is a country that has been affected by war, turmoil, and political unrest for decades since the revolution in the 1970s. This has resulted in Afghanistan being one of the poorest countries in the world (FN-sambandet, 2015; Landinfo, 2014), and a continuum of conflicts has embellished the country. In June 2017, 2 870 404 had fled from Afghanistan while 1 553 000 were internally displaced (Flykninghjelpen, 2017).

Childhood in Afghanistan can be described as different than childhood in a Norwegian context. Brodsky (2014) emphasizes how childhood in Afghanistan is characterized by "social and political upheaval, war and loss" (p. 64). Moreover, children (mainly boys) are often recruited as soldiers for various armed groups and contribute a great deal in the labor force (Boutin, 2015; Sim, 2015). Thus, growing up in a conflicted environment with steady hazards can contribute to people fleeing the country seeking more safe environments to live in.

The understanding of age also differs from an Afghan to a Norwegian context. Age is a phenomenon that to some are a tangible concept with clear distinctions, while it may to others appear as more abstract where the dividing line between different ages and life stages are more blurred. How we understand age is often influenced by our culture, history, psychological, and biological understandings. The perception of age changes according to where one may be located in this world. In a western context, age is often connected with competencies one is expected to have at a certain age and age is "calculated in terms of years passed in one's life and as rudimentary source of identity" (Norozi and Moen, 2016, p. 76). Childhood and the perception of age in Afghanistan should be understood within the specific Afghan context. For instance, in Afghanistan, one does not necessarily see a child or an adolescence in connection with a particular chronological age. A person's age is often connected to historical events, both national, local and familial, and farming related cycles. An Afghan man can have his birth referred to in relation to being born after the rice harvest the year that general Daoud cooped his cousin King Zahir Shah (Landinfo, 2014). Furthermore, a girl is perceived as an adult regardless of her biological age when she marries, while a young man can continue to uphold the status as child or youth even though he marries and have children (de Berry, 2008). Childhood in Afghanistan can be seen in relation to children's economic and domestic responsibilities due to war and poverty where a family has lost the male head of the family or elder boys. This entails that children, especially boys, have to contribute to the family economy (de Berry, 2008).

The Afghan society is traditionally not a society with requirements for birth certificates and passports. Their main identity paper is the *tazkera* which usually is a prerequisite to access public services such as education, owning property, and to get issued documents (e.g., passport). A person receives a *tazkera* by applying for it. If a person does not have a birth certificate, it is a necessity that a male family member from the father's side put forward their *tazkera*. The *tazkera* has low notoriety in Norway and is not considered to be valid identity papers. This is because it is easy to forge and that it can be erroneous as a result of inconclusive information (Landinfo, 2017). The determination of identity, therefore, become somewhat challenging for Norwegian authorities. The lack of identity papers, or only being able to put forward the *tazkera*, has underpinned the necessity for the Norwegian age assessment practice. The next section will make an account of the different factors which contributes to the age assessment practice in Norway.

2.2 Assessing age in Norway

The practice of age assessment varies between standardized medical age assessment means which include x-rays of skeleton and teeth, to non-medical assessments that consist of interviewing those subjected to age disputes, analyzing documentation, and evaluations of the individual's physical appearance which may indicate their age (Aynsley-Green et al., 2012).

As age assessments have become more applied in Norway and used as a tool by immigration authorities, international statutory guidelines have become applicable. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (hereafter UNHCR) (1997) guidelines on age assessment say that:

    a) Such an assessment should take into account not only the physical appearance of the child but also his/her psychological maturity.

    b) When scientific procedures are used in order to determine the age of the child, margins of error should be allowed. Such methods must be safe and respect human dignity.

    c) The child should be given the benefit of the doubt if the exact age is uncertain (p. 8).

Furthermore, the UNHCR (1997) states that:

> Where possible, the legal consequences or significance of the age criteria should be reduced or downplayed. It is not desirable that too many legal advantages and disadvantages are known to flow from the criteria because this may be an incentive for misrepresentation. The guiding

principle is whether an individual demonstrates an "immaturity" and vulnerability that may require more sensitive treatment (p.8).

As such, international statutory guidelines should be applied when age is assessed and thus safeguard those subjected to assessment so that they are not at any risk of harm.

Asylum seekers have a responsibility to document their identity in terms of name, age, and country of origin (UDI, 2018a). However, many of those who seek asylum in Norway report to not know their date of birth. Therefore, the assessment of age has become a necessity for the Norwegian immigration authorities as a means to determine an UMA's identity when identity papers are invalid or lacking. Norway, as many countries in the global North, is a society where the emphasis on chronological age is decidedly connected to where one ought to be placed within society. This categorization relates to school, competency and capability, rights, and so forth. Since one started to implement child labor laws (internationally) more than a century ago, the emphasis on chronological age has been increasingly momentous for children due to the connection between social value and law (Smith and Brownless, 2011). Accordingly, this manifests a need to have an age or category to place the minor within so that they are to receive proper care and the rights that they are entitled to. However, it is recognized that no means of assessing age will be able to provide a person's correct biological age[7], and thus, the outcome will always be an age that the minor is most likely to have (Oslo Universitetssykehus, 2017).

2.2.1 Medical age assessment

In Norway, the medical age assessment has been used as a tool to estimate a person's chronological age. From a child perspective, and from a juridical and socio-political view, it is essential to separate children from adults. The establishment of a correct age is in the interest of the immigration authorities, other public institutions in Norway, as well as for the applicants themselves (UDI, 2017a). The medical age assessments were introduced in Norway in 2003 due to suspicions that some asylum seekers were older than the age they put forward (NOAS and Redd Barna, 2006). Up until 2016, the medical age assessment was carried out by the private company Unilabs AS (x-ray of the carpus) and the Faculty of Dentistry at the University in Oslo (x-ray and clinical examination of teeth). The two examinations were compiled by pediatrician Jens Grøgaard in BarneSak AS, by categorizing the one subjected to assessment

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[7] In literature upon this topic, biological age and chronological age is used interchangeable.

within a specific age category, ranging from A-J. Category A-E suggests that the applicant is above or below 18 years, while category F-J indicates that the applicant is above or below 16 years, based on the medical results (UDI, 2017a). The results of the medical age assessment were sent to UDI where a caseworker made a final decision regarding a person's age. During the first 11 months of 2016, 1615 people had their age assessed, whereas 374 of these were determined to be minors based on the x-ray pictures (Lidén, 2017).

The medical age assessment is ordered by the Children's Unit[8] (BFE) in UDI. The common procedure is that all children between the age of 14 to 18 are to be medically assessed (UDI, 2018b). After an UMA's registration at the National Police Immigration Service (PU), they usually have an arrival interview with UDI/BFE. The purpose of this interview is to obtain informed consent for the medical age assessment and information about dental health. Moreover, during the interview, one also seeks information about the applicant's reasons for seeking protection, as well as mapping physical and mental health (UDI, 2018b). The arrival interview occurs after the registration at PU and before the main asylum interview with BFE. When a person claims to be an UMA during the registration, he or she is appointed a representative, also known as a guardian, which is responsible for ensuring that the rights of the UMA are maintained throughout the asylum process (Lidén, 2017). Although the medical age assessment is voluntary, refusing to go through with it can have implications on the UMA's creditability and case, in accordance with §88 in the Immigration Act (UDI, 2017a). The practice regarding valid consent from the UMA has been criticized on the basis of whether it is possible to achieve a valid consent when in fact denying going through with the medical age assessment can have negative impact on the asylum application (Aarseth and Tønsaker, 2018). During the main asylum interview with BFE, the applicant is told about the result from the medical age assessment and have the possibility to comment upon this. In addition, the applicant can contribute with more information which can shed light upon the question of age. Sometimes, the medical age assessment is conducted after the asylum interview. In these cases, the results are sent to a lawyer and the guardian which communicates the results to the UMA[9].

The medical age assessment practice has been debated and challenged on the grounds of being unscientific and ethically wrong. The Greulich and Pyle atlas, which has been used as a reference for the x-rays of the carpus, was developed in the 1930s on Causation middle-class

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[8] My own translation as I was not able to find the English translation.
[9] Email from contact person in BFE 14.02.2018.

children in the USA (NOAS, 2016). It is argued that this source of reference does not take into account factors on development such as inter-racial or socio-economic differences (Crawley, 2007); malnutrition (Sauer, Nicholson and Neubauer, 2015); and that it reflects bone development some 70 years ago (Aynsley-Green, 2011). The tooth examination has been criticized because one cannot precisely find a person's age above 14 years as teeth at this time usually are fully developed (NOAS, 2016). Moreover, the ethical considerations also play a vital role in the debates surrounding the medical age assessment. It has been suggested that such measures put children at the risk of losing their inherent rights enshrined in the CRC. Feltz (2015) argues that medical personnel should "refuse the use of medical examinations which have no therapeutic benefit and are purely requested for migration control purposes". Furthermore, she states that "the only foreseeable outcome of such unreliable methodologies is the wrongful exclusion of minors on a regular basis" (p. 17).

On commission from the Norwegian Ministry of Health and Care Services, the Department of Forensic Medicine at Oslo University Hospital has developed a temporary tool – *BioAlder* (Bio Age) – to assess age medically, as of 2017:

> The tool has been constructed as a statistical calculation model on the basis of studies of the development of the hand skeleton and lower wisdom tooth in more than 14000 young persons of known chronological age (Oslo Universitetssykehus, 2017, p. 4).

Although this tool builds on more recent data than the Greulich and Pyle atlas, it still has limitations. The data which is used as a frame of reference does to a minimal degree include populations from countries which UMAs often originate from. It estimates probable ages and thus does not calculate a definite age for every UMA. Furthermore, the data builds on healthy people and does not, therefore, include malnutrition, disease, and medical treatment which can affect development (Universitetssykehus, 2017). According to UDI (2017a), UMAs above the age of 15 are offered a medical age assessment of hand and hand root. Based on the results of this assessment, one evaluates if there is a necessity to conduct a tooth assessment.

2.2.2 Non-medical age assessment

When assessing age, one also make use of non-medical measures. During the interviews in this project, the focus on non-medical assessment was discussed several times with the participants. Within the debate regarding age assessment, many have stressed the importance of focusing on

the more psychosocial and social aspects that affect development and how this plays out regarding a person's age. NOAS (2016) have argued that there is a need for a more holistically assessment of age which is in accordance with the UN guidelines on age assessment. This involves also taking into account various aspects that contribute to a person's development, such as previous experiences and development context, and thus, not make physical appearance and the medical age assessment the decisive factors when age is assessed. However, there has been a tendency to rely on the medical age assessment because this is argued to be the most objective tool regarding determining a person's most likely age (UDI, 2017a). The call for more psychosocial assessments has been introduced in the UK, where social workers contribute in assessing age. It is argued that the "nature of their education, experience and specialist skills in working with and interviewing vulnerable children and young people, are uniquely positioned to undertake assessments" (ADCS, 2015, p. 3). However, this is not a means used in Norway due to the pitfalls that can occur concerning subjectivity. When professionals within the Norwegian asylum system make their assessment of age, they often rely on a person's physical appearance which is connected to chronological and biological age, and not social (NOAS, 2016).

2.3 Policies and practices related to asylum seekers and UMAs

To contextualize the need for assessing age amongst UMAs – not only in terms of establishing which rights an individual is entitled to – it is relevant to emphasize the political climate that can be identified in contemporary Europe. Laws, regulations, and policies which governments have imposed on asylum seekers have increased the polarization in many societies throughout Europe. The tightening of asylum politics is often favored by the radical right and disputed by the left and their civil society associates (Bernhard and Kaufmann, 2018). However;

> In the face of the 'refugee crisis', many European governments, even in traditionally liberal states, unilaterally introduced a number of restrictive and, often, controversial migration, asylum, and border control politics (Skleparis, 2017, p. 276).

Moreover, one has witnessed through the mass media and political debates that rhetoric's regarding immigrants and asylum seekers tend to label them as a problem and a societal threat (NOAS, 2013).

What is described as rigid asylum policies have also been implemented in Norway, often referred to as strict but just politics (Regjeringen, 2016). The increased asylum influx that Norway has experienced, especially during the fall of 2015, resulted in new legislative amendments which was to secure a more continuous asylum and immigration policy and to have stricter border control (IMO, 2016). These included amongst other things:

- An opportunity to refuse entry to asylum seekers at the borders with other Nordic countries during a crisis with extraordinarily high numbers of arrivals;
- Abolishing the provision that it must be 'not unreasonable' to direct a foreign national to seek protection in another part of his or her country;
- An opportunity to expel foreigners in cases where an asylum application has been denied consideration on its merits and represents a misuse of the asylum system (IMO, 2016, p. 10).

The recent immigration and integration minister, Sylvi Listhaug, stressed that by having stricter policies, one sends a clear message to those not in need of protection, and thus reduce the influx of asylum seekers (Nystad, 2016). Moreover, they had the intention of increasing the number of returns and reduce permissions given to asylum seekers (Lidén, 2017).

The new asylum policies also affected UMAs. § 38[10] in the Immigration Act opens up for giving temporary residence permits to those between 16 and 18 years on the basis of humanitarian grounds. In 2015, 15 unaccompanied minors were granted a temporary resident permit, while this number increased to 320 in 2016 (Bufdir, 2017)[11]. The temporary permits entailed that those without sufficient care or network within their own country would be able to stay in Norway until their eighteenth birthday. The increase in temporary permits is seen in relation to new safety evaluations in 2016 regarding Afghanistan, which considered most provinces in the country to be a safe place to return to and thus UMAs receives permits on humanitarian grounds (see NOAS, 2017). The UNHCR have in their guidelines on temporary protection stressed that this should not be a means to hinder people from seeking asylum within a country, which follows the 1951 Refugee Convention (UNHCR, 2014).

Furthermore, the stricter legislations have especially affected UMAs perceived to between 16 and 18 years. In 2016, the Norwegian government removed the so-called *rimelighetsvilkår*

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[10] C.f., the Immigration Act á 2008.
[11] These numbers need to be seen in relation to the heightening number of UMAs seeking protection in 2015.

(reasonable terms), which states that returning an UMA to internal displacement should be done in terms of assuring that the minor has a safe environment and a network to return to. The removal of the reasonable terms meant in practice that there is no longer a need for an UMA to have a network to return to when they can be internally displaced within their home country (UDI, 2016; Liden, 2017). As the situation in Afghanistan has changed during the last years, the removal of the reasonableness terms has been disputed. In the fall of 2017, the parliament in Norway decided that a group of Afghans, referred to as *Oktoberbarna* who had received temporary permits and were to be escorted out of the country should be able to get their cases reevaluated (UNE, 2018a).

2.4 The Norwegian immigration administration

The Norwegian immigration administration shall administer the Immigration Act, that among other things shall preserve people that are in need of protection after universal international law or agreements which Norway is committed to (Vevstad, 2010). Children seeking asylum, whether it be alone or with parents, are independent legal entities which entail the right to be heard; being enlighten about their rights; the right to information about their personal case; the right to access their own case documents; the right to complain upon the decision regarding their own case; and the right to guidance and aid in relation to their complaint (Lidén, 2017). The administration is completed through several administrative units. UMAs move within these administrative units of the Norwegian immigration administration when their cases are being treated. These units can be defined as bureaucratic. Within a Weberian tradition, a bureaucracy is understood as a well-functioning hieratical machinery where there is a high degree of rationality (Ritzer, 2011; 2003)[12]. Eggebø (2012) has suggested that "immigration administration is a context where bureaucrats are challenged as ethical beings, perhaps more so than in other bureaucratic organizations" (p. 302). As such, notions that bureaucrats are inhuman, rational humans are being challenged. Furthermore, the Norwegian immigration administration is obliged to follow the Norwegian law which has implications for their practice.

The remaining part of this chapter will present the three units within the Norwegian immigration administration, namely the National Police Immigration Service (PU); the Norwegian Directorate of Immigration (UDI); and the Immigration Appeal Board (UNE). The two latter units have decisive power in terms of refusing or granting resident permits to

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[12] This is a very simplified and general account of Weber's bureaucracy.

unaccompanied minors. There are also other actors involved with the UMAs in this period, such as reception centers, health professionals, teachers, guardians, and so forth. However, bearing in mind the topic in this thesis, I will only account for the three units mentioned above due to their relevance to the age assessment process.

Figure 1: Illustration of the trajectory of age-disputed UMAs within the Norwegian immigration administration
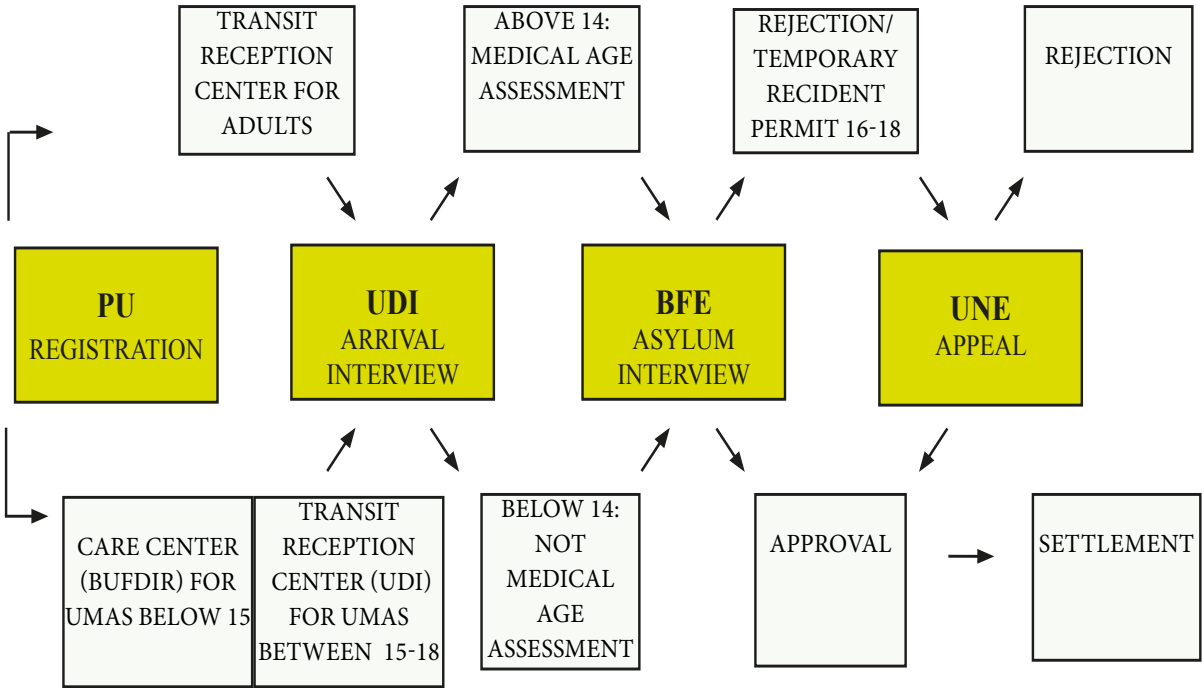
2.4.1 PU

The National Police Immigration Service (PU) is a unit within the Norwegian police which is part of the Norwegian immigration authorities. They are responsible for registering asylum seekers, investigating and determining identity, escorting people without legal permits out of Norway, as well as running the immigration detention center at Trandum[13] (Politiets Utlendingsenhet, 2017). When PU investigates and determines identity, age is a relevant factor. When there is doubt about a person's age, often as a result of the lacking identity papers, the professionals in PU assess age. PU started assessing age in May 2014 as part of the registration of UMAs. They can register those who are clearly over-aged[14] to be adults although the

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[13] Trandum detention center is a facility which usually is used to detain asylum seekers who have received rejections on their applications and is to be transported out of Norway.

[14] This term is used by professionals when referring to people who are obviously above 18.

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applicant claims to be an UMA. PU is to make an age assessment in all cases regarding UMAs[15]. The age assessment conducted by PU is decisive regarding what type of reception center the UMAs shall be placed in. The assessment they do is temporary. Their evaluation of age is solely based on own experience and notions. One of my participants in PU explained the registration phase in this way:

Often, the minor comes…in during the morning and is registered in the afternoon. They are usually alone or two and two together. In the police reception area, they ask a bit about age…[they] *try to figure out their language and what country they come from. They are then taken to the waiting room. We order a representative…who is to be present…and we request an interpreter on the language he* [the UMA] *states. What we do here is that we shall identify* [the person's] *identity,* [as well as making] *safety evaluations, but identifying identity is our primary task. Often, they don't have ID-documents, so then it's about filling in name forms, where they are born, and we also have this form of informed consent which they shall fill out,* [so that we can] *examine the case in relation to other countries authorities. We start by reading rights and obligations of course, and then the representative* [guardian] *gets 20 minutes alone* [with the minor] *where they explain their role and that they shall follow up this minor, and when we have done this we start. We perhaps go for a fingerprint and a picture. Then we go back to the office, and then we ask a lot. For instance, we can start with school, if they went to school or not, where the school is, then ask about the village or city if they can tell a bit about their neighborhood,* [to] *try to see if they know something about the place they say they come from, if they have worked, we ask about health…what* [their] *parents do.* [With] *Afghans it is important to find out about network. Usually, they say that their parents are dead, or* the *mother is dead, the mother is remarried, the father is dead. So, it is* [finding out] *if there are uncles, we map the extended family, and of course the nearest relations, if they have family in Europe. We also ask about* [their] *travel route, where they have traveled. This is something that we are obliged to do.*

2.4.2 UDI

The Norwegian Directorate of Immigration (UDI) is a decisive organ within the Norwegian immigration administration whose task is to manage asylum applications, grant or refuse residence permits, treat process permits (UDI, 2017c) and conduct interviews with asylum

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[15] Email from contact person in PU 06.11.2017.

seekers. Concerning UMAs, it is BFE, which is a part of UDI that is responsible for conducting the asylum interview. They also make evaluations regarding age when valid identity papers are lacking. UDI is also the owner of the medical age assessment. Although the assessment is just a minor part of this interview, it can be decisive in the applicant's case. The asylum interview intends to map out and gather enough reliable information so that UDI can determine whether there is a need for protection or if one can give a person a resident permit on humanitarian grounds. During the interview, the applicant has the responsibility to substantiate their basis for applying for asylum as well as presenting valid documentation (UDI, 2017d). In interviews with UMAs, those present are the applicant, a caseworker, an interpreter and the applicant's guardian. The asylum interview is a forum where the applicant's right to state his or her case is safeguarded, which is manifested through article 12.2 in the CRC[16]. Based on the information which arises from the interview, the caseworker decides whether the applicant has the right to a permit or not, and also what type of permit the applicant is entitled to (Lidén, 2017). These permits have been accounted for earlier in the chapter. The different types of permits are often connected to the outcome of the age assessment.

The age assessment which is conducted by the caseworkers in BFE can be seen as both formal and informal evaluations that the caseworker does within the formal framework of the asylum interview. The formal measures which are done during the interview entail asking the applicant probing questions in terms of chronology. Because the applicant does not necessarily have an understanding of their age and time aspects, the caseworker asks probing questions about upbringing, significant events, when the applicant started to travel, when the applicant arrived in Norway, and how these are connected to for instance religious feasts, crops and seasons. By doing this, the caseworker attempts to bring forward a chronology in the applicant's story which can help shed light upon aspects that can make the age of the applicant clearer. The caseworkers receive training regarding a country's (e.g., Afghanistan or Eritrea) cultural and social profile so that they can better understand the conditions that the applicants come from when scrutinizing their stories. The more informal evaluation take place in terms of the caseworkers evaluating the applicant's physical appearance with an emphasis on a heavy beard growth, wrinkles, and hand size. This evaluation is also shared with the applicant and the representative during the asylum interview, as well as the result from the medical age assessment if this has

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[16] For this purpose, the child shall in particular be provided the opportunity to be heard in any judicial and administrative proceedings affecting the child, either directly, through a representative or an appropriative body, in a manner consistent with the procedural rights of national law (CRC, 1989).

been conducted[17]. There is no standardized template on how caseworkers should assess age, and they do not do psychosocial age assessments (NOAS, 2016).

2.4.3 UNE

The Immigration Appeals Board (hereafter UNE) is the unit within the asylum system which manage appeals on decisions made by UDI in immigration and citizenship cases. UNE makes their decisions in several ways. A decision can be made in a board meeting where the complainant meets the board[18]; in a board meeting where the complainant is absent; by a board member; or in the secretariat[19] (UNE, 2017a). In 2017, UNE treated 2274 complaining cases. Out of these, 9 percent were treated in board meetings (UNE, 2018b). In cases involving UMAs and age assessment, one of my informants in UNE explained that a typical case is often characterized by suspicion towards a person putting forward an age that is too low. When treating these cases, the caseworkers use the outcomes of the medical age assessment, the assessment made by UDI, sometimes the evolution done by the complainant's representative, and in some cases, statements from staff in reception centers. Moreover, information from the complainant him or herself, in addition to other details, are also used to evaluate the case (UNE, 2017b).

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[17] The information presented above in this section is based on information from one of the interviews done with a caseworker in the Children's Unit in UDI.

[18] This is normally the practice in cases where there is significant doubt, where the question of doubt can have decisive meaning for the result of the case

[19] The secretariat consists of two departments, one residence department and one asylum department

3. Theory chapter

In this chapter, I will elaborate on the theoretical concepts and frameworks that have been used to analyze the empirical data which emerged from the interviews. I see all of the forthcoming concepts and theoretical frameworks to be relevant for the analysis based on how they can be helpful in explaining the constructions of UMAs which became evident through inquiry with the data material. The chapter begins with an introduction to childhood studies where I include perspectives on how children and youth, as well as understandings on how their age and their bodies can be constructed. Then, the chapter gives an overview of intersectionality which also encompasses some characteristics that can contribute to the construction and differential treatment of UMAs. Finally, the chapter ends with presenting a selection of research on age assessment and UMAs based on a literature review.

3.1 Childhood studies

Childhood studies[20] is an interdisciplinary field consisting of various sub-disciplines where childhood is recognized as a social category and children are seen as active social agents (Wells, 2018). This way of understanding children and childhood, often referred to as the 'new' sociology of children and childhood, derived from a critique of how children and childhood historically, and in contemporary societies and in research, were portrayed. The perspective originated in the 1990s with Prout and Jenks' book *Reconstructing Childhood* from 1997 (Wells, 2018), and contributed to a paradigm shift within childhood research. Earlier, studies of children tended to take place within a developmental psychological discourse. The dominating school of thought within the developmental discourse[21] emphasized rationality, naturalness, and universality. Rationality is something achieved through adulthood; naturalness of childhood unfolds in terms of biological determinism which constitutes play, language and interaction; and universality is connected to the naturalness of children (Prout and James, 1997). This somewhat narrow view of perceiving children and childhood has been debated and confronted by scholars within childhood studies. For instance, a key finding within this relatively new tradition is that:

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[20] The disciplines which often are prominent within childhood studies are sociology, history, geography, and anthropology.
[21] This way of thought has also reached beyond the developmental psychological discourse and practice, influencing "the socio-political context of childhood itself" (Prout and James, 1997, p. 10).

the idea of "the child" as representative for a whole category of younger people has been shown to be untenable, and age, gender, birth order and ethnicity all have impact on the ways that children [or others] experience childhood within a culture (Montgomery, 2009, p. 50).

The call for more nuanced perspectives on children's everyday lives, experiences, and development has led to more in-depth inquiry with children themselves when exploring phenomena regarding them. Thus, childhood studies aim at recognizing children as active agents and not as passive objects which are socialized into society as children are very much involved in the making of society as society is in making them. Children and their childhoods are understood as a social construction that varies across time and space (Jenks, 2009; James, Jenks and Prout, 1998; Wells, 2018). A significant pillar of childhood studies is acknowledging children as beings rather than becomings. The question of beings rather than becomings moves the focus away from the idea that the child is solely in the process of becoming the adult (see Prout and James, 1997). As childhood studies have developed into being an established discipline, different constructions of children have been recognized.

3.1.1 The social construction of children and childhood

This part of the chapter will provide an account of the ways in which children and childhood is seen as a social construction within childhood studies. Within childhood studies, social constructionism is useful in identifying discourses related to childhood (Montgomery, 2003). James and James (2012) discuss how 'child' as a category is modern phenomenon. Drawing on Aries, they note how "the term 'child' was traditionally not an age-related term; instead, it was more often used to describe a person's social dependency upon another" (James and James, 2012, p.1). James, Jenks and Prout, (1998) suggest four ways children and childhood is constituted within childhood studies. These are namely *the socially constructed child*; *the tribal child*; *the minority group child*; and *the social structural child*. All of these perspectives have in common that children are seen as beings rather than becomings (Punch, 2003). However, although children are acknowledged as social beings within these four categories, it does not necessarily mean that children are taken seriously (James, Jenks and Prout, 1998).

Through a social constructionist view, childhood and children are not seen as something final and fixed. On the contrary, it unfolds differently in terms of social, historical, cultural and geographical context. As such, children cannot be viewed as an ideal type in terms of biological determinism (James, Jenks and Prout, 1998). The tribal child is situated within a perspective

that identify children's social worlds as real and meaningful. It grasps the notion that children's worlds encompass own rules and rituals, and normative constraints. The minority group child perspective urges to challenge the power relations that occur between adults and children. Minority is used as a moral, instead of a demographic, categorization of children due to notions of victimization and powerlessness. The perspective is appropriate in term of seeing children as active subjects and that it attempts to dedicate to children's interests and purposes. The last way of constituting children and childhood is through the perception of the social structural child. Children are not seen as becomings, rather they are beings which form their own groups, are social actors and citizens having own needs and rights (James, Jenks and Prout, 1998). In her article *Childhoods in the Majority World: Miniature Adults or Tribal Children?* Punch (2003) explores how children in a context of the majority world are constructed. She argues that the boundaries between children and adults tend to be somewhat blurred in the majority[22] world. Therefore, some children should be perceived as moving between the two rather being "perceived as either similar to or different from adults" (Punch, 2003, p. 290). As UMAs often originate from contexts where the blurredness, when seen in relation to the global North, can create confusion regarding age, I see it as advantageous to include this perspective. In an Afghan context, notions on childhood and how one relates to individuals as children are not necessarily connected to a defined age span. Rather, one relates to a person's biological and physical development in terms of the ability to perform specific work and responsibilities (Landinfo, 2014). The next section will turn its attention to youth[23] and present a dichotomy which is recognized when youth are constructed. I include this because I see it as highly relevant for the analysis concerning the construction of UMAs.

3.1.1.1 The construction of youth as 'at risk' or as 'a risk'

To situate the hegemonic ideas which tend to be present when describing youth, this section will make an account of discourses related to youth which can be described as being 'at risk' or being 'a risk'.

Montgomery (2009) proposes that youth is a transitional phase which has to be understood as a cultural concept with ascribed social meaning. Furthermore, there is substantial ethnographic

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[22] Majority world can be seen as another term used of the global South.
[23] Youth, adolescence, and teenager is in the academic literature used interchangeably to describe young people in a certain life-stage. I have chosen to use the term youth although the term adolescence or teenager has been used in the literature referred to.

evidence that youth is identified in many societies, unfolding differently in terms of expectations and what type of roles young people occupies (Montgomery, 2009). As such, the category of youth can be seen as reaching beyond the chronological child-adult dichotomy in the West. Moreover, youth, as opposed to childhood, is less connected to physical distinctiveness (Ansell, 2005).

Ideas regarding children and youth have tended to be contrasting through stereotypes which situate them within various constructions. For instance, young people, especially young men, have been displayed as problematic for society (Valentine, Skelton and Chambers, 1998). However, youth are also recognized as 'innocent' and vulnerable. Their vulnerable state is especially prominent when seen in relation to circumstances that call for protection (Ennew et al., 2009).

Notions of innocence and vulnerability can be connected to Jean-Jacques Rousseau. The perception of the child as vulnerable has been seen in relation to a romantic discourse on childhood which emphasize that children are born as pure and innocent (Montgomery 2003), and thus also vulnerable. However, how a child's vulnerability is understood is rooted in cultural traditions and historical eras (Schües and Rehmann-Sutter, 2013). The idea of children as vulnerable has by various scholars been a topic of inquiry. Christensen (2000) has argued that within perspectives stemming from the global North, children's vulnerability is connected to psychological perspectives with notions that children are dependent on others. Moreover, Western discourse on vulnerability is "acting almost as a master identity of children" (p. 40).

One can argue that ideas regarding vulnerability have been institutionalized in practices and policies in the global North directed at children and young people. Moreover, notions of vulnerability can be recognized in the CRC. Through her work on analyzing the CRC in connection to vulnerability, Sandberg (2015) suggests that although vulnerability is present in children's lives, depicting them as solely vulnerable and being in need of protection may result in the wrong connotations. Concerning UMAs, Western discourses that enclose children and their childhood(s) may contribute in ignoring the fact that they are active agents, capable of making own decisions and act based on individual needs and aspirations. Drawing on Pastoor (2012), Aandenes and Pastoor (2013) emphasize that research suggests that UM(A)s are resourceful. As such, children and youth, and thus UMAs, are complex human beings in possession of various qualities which does not exclude either one or the other.

Vulnerability can also be seen to have a gender aspect. What can be identified as gendered vulnerability has been discussed by several scholars. For example, the marginalization of females is by Taefi (2009) seen as being reinforced through the category of being a child, hence being a girl child. She stresses that the marginalization of girls[24] becomes reinforced through adult and male dominance which are intensified through norms which exist in cultures and as such compounds the denial of their rights. Women's a and children's particular vulnerabilities stem from how children can be affected by trauma and how women have been victims of gender-based violence and discrimination (Lønning, 2018).

Perceptions of young people being a risk do especially concern males. The combination of factors such as race, age, and style can contribute in the construction of some youth groups as having a problematic type of masculinity, especially groups that tend to use public spaces to dwell (Tilton, 2010). Furthermore, Olivius (2016) suggests three ways that refugee men are constructed. Firstly, they are represented as criminals performing violence and discrimination towards women, and thus making women vulnerable and suppressed. Secondly, they are also seen as gatekeepers holding power in their families and communities, and as such creating a gap to gender equality. Thirdly, they are depicted as emasculated troublemakers, which through "aid agencies' efforts to empower women, is said to leave men disempowered, emasculated, frustrated and bored" (p. 57). This is also recognized in terms of younger males, such as UMAs. Bryan and Denov (2011) have identified a discourse where migrating youth are perceived to be possible threats based on fears that their motives for coming to a reception country are economic gains. This discourse is by Gower (2011) connected to notions of adults posing as minors to exploit welfare systems. As such, young minority men as 'risks' to societies can, therefore, become a matter of being gendered and raced.

Moreover, besides being a risk to the system of immigration control, UMAs also somehow threaten ideas and ideals on what it means to be a child. This is because they challenge the (Western) notions of childhood having a beginning and an end (Crawley, 2011). The latter author suggests that the Western childhood is separated and distinct from adulthood in terms of possessing particular qualities and experiences. This is also recognized by Øien (2010) who states that this particular group of migrants challenge the perception of children and young

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[24] Although being marginalized and being vulnerable are not synonyms, I identify how they often tend to be used in the same context.

people's place in society in the countries that they migrate to. They also challenge ideas of the family and which role its network plays in society. Many UMAs originate from societies where the distinction between childhood and adulthood is more blurred and contextualized differently.

3.1.2 Age

Since age is a key concept in this thesis, this section will provide an account of age and how age tends to be conceptualized, both in general and within childhood studies. The idea of what age is and how it is understood varies in terms being culturally, geographically, socially, historically, and biologically situated. Age also encompass various dimensions that play out differently throughout a person's life. In many societies, the registration of a child's birth is either inadequate or non-existing. In Afghanistan, it is suggested that only 6 percent of children under the age of 5 have a birth certificate and amongst children above the age of 5, only 4 percent have a birth certificate (Landinfo, 2014). As described in chapter two, the exact chronological age of a person is much less emphasized in several countries throughout the world. Therefore, in order to explore age and how it unfolds when age is assessed, I have chosen to present some key perspectives on age that I see as appropriate when discussing the participants understanding regarding age and UMAs. Seeing as the participants all move within a western context and that the group of children and young adults discussed, UMAs, originates from cultures where chronological and biological age is much less taken into account, it is advantageous to introduce perspectives that can help scrutinize the phenomenon of age. In the forthcoming sections, I will first introduce how chronological age is used as a way of understanding age in a Western context. Thereafter, perspectives on social age will be presented before I make an account of how maturity tends to be seen as a way of categorizing people into age categories.

3.1.2.1 Chronological age

In western cultures, age is regularly connected to chronology which determines the number of years passed since an individual was born (Smith and Brownless, 2011; James and James, 2012). On the basis of a person's chronological age, one is often ascribed certain competencies. Moreover, expectations that one may have towards a person is also connected to chronology. This chronological way of understanding age is by Laz (2003) linked to a naturalistic view where it is assumed that age is essentially a biological phenomenon. Age as such becomes something linear which is treated as an objective fact due to constructions regarding maturity

and competencies, as well as biological and physical factors that indicate how old a person is. The need for knowledge about a person's accurate age in western countries is often connected to societal structures and legislation. This might be access to the educational system, being entitled specific rights and services, and how one should be treated within the legal system and in institutions. Thus, the need to establish a correct chronological age for UMAs is imperative regarding the implications it might have if a person is assessed wrongly[25] as chronology is manifested in our legal system.

3.1.2.2 Social age

Several scholars have argued that it is expedient to include the dimensions of social age when exploring the phenomena of age (Clark-Kazak, 2009). Clark-Kazak (2009) argues that "conceptions of childhood and young, and perceptions of socially appropriate roles for children and young people, vary across space, time and culture" (p. 1309). As such, the attributes ascribed specific age groups may differ according to the context that they are situated within, and thus a social meaning becomes attached to the concept of age.

In using frameworks from gender studies, where gender and race now are recognized as social constructions that moves beyond biology, Laz (1998) propose that also age can be viewed in these terms. By drawing a link to ideas of gender as something that one *does* instead of just something that one merely *is*, she suggests that age can be perceived in similar ways. This is also recognized by Wells (2018) who argues that childhood is also something practiced differently in time and places. Based on the idea of age as something which is performed, Laz (1998) introduces the concept of *age-as-accomplished*. This perspective is rooted in symbolic interactionism where three main factors are present:

> 1) human beings act towards things on the basis of the meaning that the things have for them,
> 2) the meaning of such things – objects, people, categories of persons, institutions, activities – is derived from, or arises out of, social interaction,
> 3) those meanings are handled in, and modified through, an interpretive process used by the person in dealing with the things he or she encounters (Blumer, 1969, p. 2 in Laz, 1998, p. 87).

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[25] The necessity of establishing a correct chronological age within the Norwegian asylum system is elaborated on in chapter two.

Laz (1998) argues that accomplished should in this context not be seen as something being finished, but rather as an ongoing action which is social and public. Moreover, she states that:

> Conceptualizing age-as-accomplished does not ignore the 'fact' of chronology. Rather, it enables sociologists to examine the process by which chronology is *made* "factual" and to view the consequences of our acting *as if* chronology were natural (p. 101).

The perspective encompasses how people internalize cultural norms and expectations regarding age and make use of these norms and expectations (Wohlmann, 2014). The accomplishment of age is also connected to the body and how age norms rub off on bodily practices with reference to how people view themselves, and thus, the perception of self is made visible through how people use their bodies (Wohlmann, 2014; Laz, 1998). I see this perspective as advantageous to use because it shows how social age can be beneficial as an analytical category because of the interactionist dimensions underlying the construction of age. This perspective can exemplify how the participants make use of cultural notions attached to age when evaluating and discussing UMAs' age.

3.1.2.3 Maturity

Maturity can be situated within ideas on age and childhood. Maturity has tended to be connected to biological and psychological development (see James and Prout, 1997). As such, "'maturity' describes the extent to which a child appears to behave or think more as an adult does" (James and James, 2012, p. 1). This can be understood as adulthood being a point of reference where maturity is 'completed' when reaching the adult stage of life. However, maturity is something that tends to differ according to specific contexts and circumstances. Therefore, it is useful to look at maturity as a social construction which is culture relative (James and James, 2012).

The construction of maturity, and its connection to age, has especially been scrutinized by anthropologists (James and Prout, 1997). Ideas related to maturity and age is something that varies through time and cultural-specific contexts (James and Prout, 1997). Furthermore, how maturity tend to be described as age-specific, especially visible through school systems, risks stigmatizing children:

> This emphasis on an age class system (…) creates problems, particularly in relations to ideas of social and educational maturity. For an individual child, the relationship is potentially

stigmatizing: it risks being interpreted in terms of immaturity or precocity, backwardness or giftedness (James and Prout, 1997, p. 234).

How maturity is perceived thus becomes a matter of fitting within a constructed framework which predetermines children's maturity levels. If children do not apt to an expected maturity level and culture-specific ideas about maturity, one might situate some children outside the norm of 'normal' maturity and therefore not acknowledge that maturity is a dynamic process affected by many circumstances. It is not uncommon that a child can be described as being mature for their age, which indicates that a particular type of behavior or competence is expected from a child at a certain age (James and James, 2012)

3.1.3 Constructing bodies – entities with multiple social dimensions

This next section will contribute with an overview of how the body can be situated within a social constructionist perspective. I will first refer to how the social body in general has been a topic of scrutiny, before establishing the social and socially constructed body within childhood studies.

Traditionally, when we think about bodies, we often relate to its physical dimensions and characteristics. In a medical and biological sense, bodies are seen as an object which develops through time. However, the investigation of the body and how it is conceptualized, perceived, and understood has received more attention within social sciences the last couple of decades. Within contemporary sociology, there has been developed new ways of understanding the body in terms of perspectives and frameworks where the body is recognized as a social and cultural construct, referred to as the *sociology of the body* (Adelman and Ruggi, 2016). This paradigm was mainly developed within British sociology in the 1980s, where the development of medical sociology became prominent (Turner, 2008). The body has been advocated as an essential analytical category which is expedient to explore as an independent unit, but also how it intersects with other aspects of social inquiry such as sexuality, disability, obesity, gender, race, ethnicity, and aging (Coffey, Budgeon, Cahill, 2016; Waskul and Vannini, 2006).

Turner (2008) identifies four theoretical traditions within the paradigm of the sociology of the body. These are namely the body as a social construct; the body being a "representations of the social relations of power"; situating the body within a phenomenological perspective which scrutinizes how embodiment unfolds in the everyday world; and a sociology which explores

"bodily performance of acquired practices and techniques" (Turner, 2008, p. 517). In this thesis, I find it expedient to include a social constructivist perspective on bodies. This perspective will be elaborated on in the next section.

3.1.3.1 The social and socially constructed body

Just as age has been acknowledged to include social dimensions (c.f., Clark-Kazak, 2009; Laz, 1998), the body has also received this attention. In this section, I will introduce how the social body has been recognized within social sciences, before moving onto situating the socially constructed body within childhood studies. Douglas (1975) understands the social body in this way:

> The body communicates information for and from the social system in which it is a part. It should be seen as mediating the social situation in at least three ways. It is itself the field in which a feedback interaction takes place. It is itself available to be given as the proper tender for some of the exchanges which constitute the social situation. And further, it mediates the social structure by itself becoming its image (p. 83, sited in Burroughs and Ehrenreich, 1993, p. 4).

Douglas' conceptualization of the social body contributes with a perspective that shows how the body is being shaped and constructed by interacting with its surroundings, and thus, being social. In this thesis, the social dimensions of the body are seen in relation to how it is socially constructed. I see this theoretical concept as advantageous to use when discussing how UMAs are perceived in terms of age because it can show how their bodies are used to evaluate their age. The constructionist perspective points to how bodies are not just natural *per se*, but are entangled in complex social interaction. The constructions made around bodies include gendered practices, objectification, appearance, age, and so forth. Many scholars have contributed to the theorization of the human body. In her work, *The Second Sex* (1949), Simone de Beauvoir argued that womens' bodies are objectified while mens' bodies are seen as subjects, which affected the relationship between the sexes in terms of being asymmetrical (Tiukalo, 2012). In the book *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"* (1993) Judith Butler explores and discusses, amongst other things, the ways in which norms attached to a person's sex contributes in creating the body as material. Within the sociological tradition, Michel Foucault has explored the body in relation to power and sexuality through various volumes of *The History of Sexuality* (1973; 1984; 1984).

In Childhood Studies, the body has been recognized as something belonging to a social dimension, and not just being a matter of biological determinism. Although the biological factors are indeed present, how they are interpreted and made meaningful vary (Prout and James, 1997). Prout (2000) argues that children's bodies

> appear in a variety of roles: in the construction of social relations, meanings and experiences between children themselves and with adults; as a product of and resources for agency, action and interaction; and as sites for socialization through embodiment (p. 11).

Thus, children's bodies are constantly in complex interactions with themselves and their surroundings which construct, reconstruct, produce, and create meaning to these bodies. An example of how bodies and physical appearance is constructed is how beard, in an Afghan context, is an expression of manhood and what separates femininity from masculinity as well as adult males from boys and children (Landinfo, 2014).

In the same manner that children have been categorized as becomings rather than beings, the bodies of young people are also often depicted as being in transitional phase towards a fully-grown body which implies adulthood. According to Coleman (2009), conceiving bodies as being in a process acknowledge that they are living entities, rather than discrete, autonomous entities. Focusing on process does not define the body as 'just' becomings. I would argue that this is an important point to keep in mind. By acknowledging that bodies interact with its surroundings and that its development is a result of internal and external mechanisms, the body as such is a vibrant entity which continually is a part of a process. Nevertheless, the risk of focusing too much on process, concerning development, socialization, and internalization, is that one might have a frame of reference (e.g., adulthood) and therefore perhaps ignore individual differences that occur.

What Aitken (2001) refers to as 'other bodies', can be seen to be especially relevant in this thesis. Aitken (2001) suggests that "the body is central to how hegemonic discourses designate certain groups as 'other' and how children are placed in each of these categories (e.g., female, obese, bespectacled, disabled, minority)" (p. 66). Thus, how we construct other people's bodies can be seen as a reproduction of norms regarding bodies which simplifies the ways that bodies

are unique. Therefore, by 'imprisoning' people in their bodies, privileged groups have the power to create understandings of 'other' bodies (Aitken, 2001).

The ways bodies are categorized and understood can stem from own bodily experiences as well as societal ideas and meanings connected to one's own body and other bodies. As such, it is important to note that the way the body and bodily practices are conceptualized in the analysis is based on the participants own reflections on physical appearance and characteristics (e.g., UMAs' bodies and bodily practices) and not UMAs' own understandings of themselves.

3.2 An intersectional perspective

The intersectional perspective has received considerable attention and gained sustainable space within the academic literature. Davis (2008) has referred to intersectionality as a 'buzzword', having had a remarkable success within contemporary feminist theory. In this thesis, intersectionality will be used as the main theoretical framework in the second analysis chapter. Through my data, I have identified how UMAs may have different characteristics which intersect with one another in the practice of age assessment. Building on the participants' reflections, aspects such as age, gender, ethnicity, and class have been recognized as contributors to how UMAs' age is understood, but also how these aspects can influence UMAs' creditability. In the following, I will present intersectionality in general terms before moving on to elaborating on different elements which characterize UMAs and thus becomes visible in their journeys throughout the asylum system. I will also make an account of how intersectionality has been included in some analysis within childhood studies.

3.2.1 Intersectional theory[26]

 With her article *Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: Black Feminist Critique and Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics*, Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989) introduced a critique towards feminism, using the metaphor of intersectionality[27]. She described how feminist studies had focused on women and men as heterogeneous categories. However, when race was a topic of scrutiny, gender was treated as a uniform category which

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[26] Intersectionality derived from a perspective of black feminism which is deeply rooted in historical aspects. The perspective has been scrutinized and debated by scholars in terms of skepticism or favoring it (Carastathis, 2016). However, due to the theses scope and relevance, I will not move deeply into the debates surrounding the origin of intersectionality. Nor will I engage in the multiple debates regarding this theoretical perspective.

[27] Intersectionality is not a new phenomenon, although it was Crenshaw who coined the term. The intersection between multiple categories has been recognized within the anti-slavery movement and black feminism throughout the nineteenth century (Hearn, 2011).

focused on a white and western race (Aamotsbakken and Knudsen, 2011). Crenshaw stressed that factors such as race and gender could not be treated as exclusive categories, which they usually were, instead, they should be perceived as intersecting with one another. Crenshaw continued to elaborate on the concept in 1991 where it was further developed and theorized. She argued how:

> Race, gender, and other identity categories are most treated in mainstream liberal discourse as vestiges of bias or domination – that is, as intrinsically negative frameworks in which social powers works to exclude or marginalize those who are different (Crenshaw, 1991, p.1242).

The ways in which categories such as race, gender, and other categories had not been recognized as interacting with one another, was by Crenshaw made evident through identifying the complex interplay between these categories, based on analyses of black women's lives. Intersectionality is by Davis (2008) defined as "the interaction between gender, race and other categories of difference in individual lives, social practices, institutional arrangements, and cultural ideologies and the outcomes of these in terms of power" (p. 68). With this as a point of departure, intersectionality can be understood as the ways in which different aspects work together in shaping a person's conditions. Segal and Chow (2011) identifies how intersectionality can be seen as operating at various levels in terms of individuals occupying intersections within social structures. For instance, people's positions may grant them agency, opportunity and privilege, but also lead to disadvantage.

Intersectionality has been utterly developed as a theoretical tradition moving beyond the scope of feminist studies. It has been diligently used as a theoretical perspective within sociology, literature, history, philosophy, anthropology, ethnic studies, queer studies and legal studies (Cho, Crenshaw and McCall, 2013). Within childhood studies, intersectionality has only been moderately used. Although, it is suggested by Alanen (2016) that childhood studies and intersectionality share some commonalities. For instance, a child is not just a just child. A child carries several categorizations, such as boy, girl (or something in-between); children are also described on the basis of race, ethnicity, class, and as being dis/abled (Alanen, 2016). Furthermore, Konstantino and Emejulu (2016) argue that the intersectional perspective can be applicable to childhood studies in several ways. By seeing childhood as intersectional, one can frame age as embodied and relational. In this way one can identify how other social categories such as race, gender, class, sexuality, and so forth interact and molds children's experiences.

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By seeing age in relation to other social categories, one can utterly challenge the somewhat hegemonic ideas on what a child is in specific contexts.

The next four sections will provide an overview of the aspects of age, gender, ethnicity, and class. It might seem that these are treated as exclusive categories when presented; however, I intend to provide an overview of some of the categories which are prominent in regard to UMAs. These will be seen in relation to one another in the analysis chapters and how they tend to intersect.

3.2.1.1 Age in intersectional theory

The majority of this thesis revolves around of age. As mentioned several times, age is a complex phenomenon which is constructed, conceptualized, naturalized, and interpreted differently. It can also be argued to be relevant in terms of intersectionality. However, the utmost attention in intersectional theory has been devoted to gender, ethnicity, and class (Krekula, Närvänen and Näsman, 2005). Krekula, Närvänen and Näsman (2005) argue that age has tended to be ignored within this perspective. It is stressed that the reason why age has not been a prominent category within intersectionality is that age and what age entails is taken for granted in everyday life but also within science. Taefi (2009) has included children in the analysis of intersectionality and age. Drawing on women's marginalization and that this is context specific, she argues that this is also the case for children. Because the experiences of childhood cannot be seen as separate from categories such as race, gender, class, place and time, age is very much partaking in the shaping of conditions. Furthermore, Krekula, Närvänen and Näsman (2005) suggest that the reason why children have not been included in the general analysis of age[28] is related to the power symmetry in a society based on age. Seen in relation to the previous account of vulnerability, they argue that because hegemonic discourses surrounding childhood are rooted in pervasive developmental perspectives, children as such are vulnerable in need of protection. Thus, children as a social category become subordinate to adults. However, as age very much is connected to categories such as child, adult, youth, and elderly, seeing a child as an overarching category can become inadequate. The next sections will elaborate on categories such as gender, ethnicity, and class which intersect with the age category and thus partake in shaping the circumstances of people's lives.

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[28] The age category in social inquiry is often scrutinized in terms of ageism, which does not include children, but often elderly (Krekula, Närvänen and Näsman, 2005).

3.2.1.2 Gender in intersectional theory

As mentioned above, intersectionality derived as a feminist perspective which emphasized the marginalization of black women. Within the feminist tradition, it is fair to say that men have been somewhat excluded from the analysis where women have gained most attention. Women have been, and is still slightly, seen, as second-degree citizens who have been a victim of men's power and violence (van der Gaag, 2014). How men traditionally have been included in the feminist analysis is through constructions of their masculinity, their patriarchy and their dominance. However, Murray (2015) argues that men are also a victim of patriarchy. It is suggested that men in the same ways as women are met with stereotypes in terms of how their gender is being shaped, which in consequence creates notions targeting them. Within intersectionality, the male category, and how this intersects with other categories, has also been somewhat absent. According to Bowleg (2013) studies of intersectionality and men are rare. As a means to increase and deconstruct men's presence in intersectional analysis, Hearn (2011) suggests that:

> In addressing these neglected intersectionalities, and so challenging the gender hegemony of men, I point to how this questioning of a taken-for-granted social category of men can be an avenue to a possible abolition of men as a significant social category of power (p. 90).

Thus, by challenging somewhat stereotypical portraying's of men, one can identify the multiple characteristics that some have, which in turn will create other, and perhaps, more nuanced constructions of men.

Recognizing gender as a category which affects how UMAs' age is understood and constructed, can serve as a contribution in extending the categorization of UMA. Moreover, it can reveal how gender differences can influence the immigration authorities practice as well as UMAs' access to rights.

3.2.1.3 Ethnicity in intersectional theory

Within intersectionality, the category of race has been prominent. Although race and ethnicity tend to overlap, I see ethnicity as a more expedient term to use instead of race because it grasps the more social dimensions of people rather than biological factors which is more in connection

to race[29]. Moreover, "ethnicity can be used as an academically 'neutral' term, which suggests an apparently equal, multicultural juxtaposition of cultures which tolerate and respect each other" (Lutz et al., 2011).

Ethnicity is a multi-layered phenomenon which occurs when cultural differences become visible through interaction (Hylland Eriksen, 2010). Ethnicity is referred to when a group shares the same origin and culture, and thus being part of the same group sharing some sort of collective identity (Sommerfeldt and Schackt, 2017). Although Afghans, the ethnicity most often referred to in this thesis, often belong to different ethnic groups (e.g., Pashtuns, Tajiks and Hazaras (Landinfo, 2015), they also have some overarching commonalities such as having an Afghan nationality.

Ethnicity is often discussed on the basis of how ethnic minorities tend to be discriminated against (see Crenshaw, 1989; 1991). A person's ethnicity, like class and gender, can result in being faced with stereotypical notions. Moreover, the intersection between categories can also create assumptions based on ideas one might have about how other ethnicities relate to gender. The ways in which women from the global south tend to be described as subordinate to men can create identities where they do not recognize themselves.

3.2.1.4. Social class in intersectional theory

Class has a long tradition of being a topic of scrutiny. For Marx, class was a matter of the power relations between two classes – the bourgeoisie and the proletariat[30] and the access to means of production. He argued that the way to break down the gap between classes was by carrying out a revolution (Ritzer, 2011). Pierre Bourdieu has influenced modern social sciences through theorization and discussions related to class (Bourdieu, 1989). Bourdieu explored class structures in the society where he theorized how capital was the equivalent of access to power (Aakvaag, 2008). Capital is often seen as many-folded in terms of economic capital; cultural capital; social capital; and symbolic capital. *Economic capital* is understood in a traditional sense concerning a person's monetary assets. *Cultural capital* is seen as embodied dispositions such as a person's way of speaking, dressing, moving, and so forth. It is also recognized as

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[29] I have observed that race and ethnicity are sometimes used interchangeably in the literature. Therefore, when I use the term ethnicity, race may sometimes have been the original term used in the literature referred to.
[30] The bourgeoisie was what Marx called capitalists in the modern economy while the work force was designated as the proletariat (Ritzer, 2011).

institutionalized in terms of becoming visible within institutions that traditionally is related to higher classes, such as the academy, nobles and professional designations. Cultural capital is also viewed as something which is objectified. It may exist as books, paintings and other types of material which can contribute to gaining embodied dispositions, but also economic capital. *Social capital* is based on access to different networks. These networks can give a person access to resources such as economic and relational ones. *Symbolic capital* is more of an abstract concept. It can become visible through the mixture of the other forms of capital and thus be expressed through the symbolic effect that assets, expressions, and relations may have (Esmark, 2006; Bourdieu, 1989).

Class has been one of the leading pillars within intersectionality. However, it is not seen as a separate category; rather, it is explored as a category which intersects with other categories. For instance, the intersection between gender and class is by Lerner (2013) argued to have historical roots. She suggests that:

> the commodification of women's sexual and reproductive capacities formed one of the major sources for the creation of private property, on which class is based. Historically, class was constructed out of gender relations which advantaged men over women (p. 56).

Moreover, the definition of class must always be seen differently concerning men and women. They have never belonged to the same class in the same manner (Lerner, 2013). How class structures contribute to inequality can be seen in relation to what Massey (2013) sees as "an effective system of social stratification" (p. 539) which categorize people into different groups, ascribing them specific features and creating some boundaries for them. As such, one can suggest that notions of people within different classes become reproduces which contribute to maintaining the social class structures which exist in society.

3.3 Previous research on unaccompanied minor asylum seekers

The final section in this chapter will show examples of previous studies concerning age assessment and UMAs as well as studies which have explored how UMAs are portrayed and constructed within various contexts.

Although the literature on migration to Norway as a whole, with sub-categories regarding refugees, asylum seekers, asylum policies, immigration authorities and administration, and

UMAs has expanded during the last decade, the research on age assessment connected to UMAs in Norway continues to be somewhat lacking. However, there is a growing body of research regarding age assessment and UMAs internationally, especially within the UK. Gower (2011) has explored how social workers in the UK experience assessing age on UMAs and how these are faced with multiple dilemmas in deciding whether someone is a child or an adult, which has a significant impact on that specific UMA's future. In scrutinizing the medical and non-medical approaches used in age assessment in the UK, Aynsley-Green et al., (2012) approach age assessment by looking at decisive factors that come into play when age is assessed. This is connected to ethics, rights, asylum policies and the lived experiences of those subjected to the procedure.

From the Norwegian research field on age assessment and UMAs, some examples are significant to refer to. In 2016, NOAS, in collaboration with other partners, launched a report that examined age assessment in Norway, by scrutinizing the Norwegian asylum system. The report aimed to study whether or not there is a holistic age assessment which follows the UN's guidelines[31] and to what extent the medical age assessment dominates the practice and process of age assessment. They argue that there exist significant shortcomings within the system and that this entails a legal problem for the minors. In her master thesis within law, Sletten (2013) examined the practice related to age assessment in Norway with focus on how age is legally assessed; how the process functions; if the practice is a violation of personal privacy; and if the assessment is sound and proportionate. She concluded that although age assessment is a necessity to preserve rights connected to be an asylum seeker, the research revealed severe lacks to the applicant's legal protection concerning access to information, legal aid and verifiability. Munir (2017) has interviewed current and previous UMAs about their encounters and experiences with the age assessment practice in Norway. Her study revealed how UMAs subjected to age assessment are perceived as physical objects when moving through the bureaucratic landscape of the Norwegian asylum system. Moreover, UMAs experienced severe psychological distress as a result of the age assessment both before, during and after the assessment.

As the literature mentioned above show, a number of scholars have reported about the discrepancy that age assessment can lead to. This is evident at different levels such as policy

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[31] See chapter two.

and practice, as well as the individual experiences by the UMAs themselves, and those working with this group. The literature regarding UMAs also examine the way this group is portrayed and understood. UMAs are a diverse group that can be seen as somewhat ambiguous. They tend to be labeled as vulnerable and helpless while simultaneously perceived as competent social actors and sometimes also as a threat to society (Crawley, 2011). This discrepancy often leads to confusion regarding this group. This dichotomy as an either/or can result in ignoring the complexity and disparity that in reality constitute this group, and thus lead to a stereotypical portrayal. Boyden and Hart (2007) have suggested that this "unreflexive employment of such categories significantly increases the potential for divergence between the approach adopted by agencies and outlook of young people themselves" (p. 245). In her studies on national policy aimed at UMAs in Sweden and Norway, Stretmo (2010) has identified a *myndighetsdiskurs* (authority discourse) which constructs specific ideas of UMAs. She argues that for example by combining gender (boys), nationality (Afghan, Somali or Iraqi) with age, minors are depicted as *strategical minors*. Hence, UMAs become suspects posing as minors so that they can gain access to extended rights which follows being a child in Norway or Sweden.

3.4 Summary

This chapter has sought to give insight into the theoretical frameworks and concepts which have been used in the analysis. I see it as valuable to include perspectives which can help shed light upon the mechanisms which construct UMAs and also challenge established hegemonic ideas which seem to surround UMAs. The concepts and frameworks can be seen as connected to each other. They all, in one way or another, show how ascertained ideas on a phenomenon are reproduced. For instance, age and bodies tend to be ascribed meaning on the basis of constructed ideas which are reproduced through different institutions. The intersectional perspective show how characteristics can become decisive in people lives which can be reproduced through formal and informal systems. Consequently, these reproductions can create 'truths' which might become determined.

4. Methodology and methods

Throughout this chapter, I will present the methodology and the methods which were used during this research project. The data gathering was completed by conducting qualitative interviews with a variety of actors that have experience with UMAs in one way or another. The participants have experience with UMAs in terms of practical work within the asylum system or working on cases that regard UMAs. Moreover, they also have a background with UMAs outside the asylum system where their roles regarding UMAs differs. The chapter starts out by giving a brief account of qualitative research. It then moves onto how the participants were recruited and what type of background they have. Then, I will give an account of the interviews that were conducted by discussing the interview guide, the interview context, rapport and trust, possible power structures, as well as the informed consent. Furthermore, I discuss and give examples of my experiences of being a researcher. After this, the chapter will touch upon ethical considerations. The last part of the chapter will elaborate on how the data material was worked with concerning transcriptions, analysis, reliability, and validity.

4.1 Qualitative research

When doing qualitative research, the focus is often on creating an understanding of a phenomenon based on people's perceptions, experiences, and encounters with what the researcher is exploring (Tjora, 2012). There exists a variety of qualitative methods; however, in this project, I saw qualitative interviews as the most appropriate method to use based on the projects objectives and research questions. The interviews in this project had a phenomenological starting point, where one explores a social phenomenon based on the participants own perspectives and descriptions connected to this specific phenomenon (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2015). Although the interview is an effective way of generating rich data, there are certain drawbacks associated with the use of qualitative interviews. For instance, by not being a part of the same social group as the participants, one may perhaps not have enough knowledge about the phenomenon one is exploring, regarding asking the right kind of questions. Moreover, one may have a social distance to the group which affects what the participants choose to share with the researcher (Miller and Glassner, 2011).

This is a project that is situated within the perspective of childhood studies. Within this discipline, it has been essential to include children's views of their own lives and experiences, especially concerning research (see Solberg, 2002; Woodhead and Faulkner, 2000), through the

right to be properly researched (see Ennew et al., 2009). However, I chose to interview adults because the research questions focus on how relevant actors within the asylum field experience and understand age, rather than UMAs' own experiences[32]. In relation to exploring adults' views on topics concerning children, Wyness (2012) argue that by bringing back adults into the analysis as "partners, collaborators and actors" when exploring phenomena related to children, one can get a "more interdependent and intergenerational [understanding] (…) with reference to children's perspectives, participation and voice" (p. 440).

4.2 Recruitment and accessibility

To explore how age is understood and interpreted when examining age assessment concerning UMAs, my starting point was to interview people that had first-hand experience with doing non-medical age assessment on unaccompanied minors, preferably within the Norwegian asylum system. At the beginning of the recruitment phase, I wanted to interview caseworkers within BFE in UDI, who is responsible for conducting interviews and make decisions regarding residence permits concerning UMAs. As the names of the staff were not available on UDI's web page, I needed to contact them through the organization's official switchboard. I started out by making contact with the Analysis and Development Department (Analyse- og utviklingsavdelingen) in UDI where I was asked to forward information about the project, themes for the interview guide, and the approval from Norwegian Center for Research Data (hereafter NSD). I had some email contact with my contact person in UDI during the spring and summer of 2017 and learned that the staff in BFE are very busy, and although UDI did not reject my project, I should have a plan B in case I did not succeed in recruiting participants from this unit. This experience is in line with what Tjora (2012) says about recruiting participants. It is not uncommon that recruitment can be difficult and that there are some experiences that one might not have access to explore, which is especially relevant when working on sensitive issues. The lack of participants made me think alternatively on who it would be expedient to talk to in exploring the project's topic.

I started contacting different agencies, organizations, and persons who have experience with questions regarding age assessment, which was done via email. In the emails I sent out, I wrote about the people I wished to get in contact with, the main topic of the thesis, that NSD had

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[32] For further readings on unaccompanied minor asylum seekers own experiences of age assessment, see master thesis by Munir (2017).

approved the project (Appendix A), and I also included the information letter (Appendix B). Some of the participants were contacted directly through their personal emails while I established contact with others through forwarding emails to the agencies' or organizations' official email. Some responded that it would not be relevant for me to talk to them but gave me names of others that I could contact. Others replied that they would find people within their organization or institution that it would be most fruitful for me to talk to as they had experience with age assessment. When I recruited participants through organizations and agencies, they were protected by gatekeepers as one might experience in many research projects when wanting to access a research site (Willis, 2006). In the recruitment phase when I needed to recruit through gatekeepers, I experienced that those I had been in contact with chose the participants for me. Although it impeded a more randomly selected sample, I got participants that had great experience with either assessing age or working with questions relevant to this topic.

The recruitment phase resulted in a sample of participants that have variating backgrounds. Almost all have in common that they in one way or another have experience with UMAs. Thus, the participants were chosen *ad hoc* due to their experience with age assessment and UMAs. One could say that the participants were strategically selected due to their qualifications and characteristics (Thagaard, 2013), although, in some cases, I could not control who were chosen as participants. This led the project into a more experimental and inductive format which meant that I had a very open starting point when going into the field interviewing the project's participants. At the end of the data gathering phase, I came in contact with an employee at BFE through one of the other participants. This method for recruiting participants is called the *snowball method*, which is done by gaining access to other participants through those participants that the researcher already has (Tjora, 2012). In late fall of 2017, I was contacted by the Children's unit in UDI, where they offered me participants for my project, so one more interview was completed. The recruitment phase resulted in 11 interviews with 12 participants, conducted in two different cities in Norway. All the participants have been interviewed once. The variety of participants has produced various perspectives that contribute to unique understandings of age and the age assessment practice in Norway, both outside and within the Norwegian asylum system.

4.3 Participants

The participants' experiences varied from 'hands-on' practice in assessing age to dialog and work with age-disputed UMAs. Due to the sensitivity of the topic and to protect the participants

so that their anonymity is fully maintained, I have chosen to only include their background in terms of the organization or the institution that they represent. It is also important to clarify that although I have interviewed people working within an organization or institution, it is their personal experiences and opinions which lay the foundation for the analysis, and not necessarily the organization or institution's point of view. In figure 2 below, I will present the sample that has contributed to this project and how they will be referred to in the analysis.

When I had established contact with the participants directly or through the gatekeepers, some of them wanted me to send them the interview guide beforehand so that they could prepare for the interview. I was somewhat reluctant to do so as I was worried that they would change their mind in taking part in the project because of the sensitivity of the topic. This did not occur, and all agreed interviews were completed. However, it is important to bear in mind that this can remove the spontaneous reactions from the participants who can create a more 'authentic' answer.

The participants in this project have different starting points concerning age assessment. Some of them are involved in the process and practice of assessing age, working within the Norwegian asylum system (PU, UDI/BFE, UNE), while the others merely have experience with UMAs that have been subjected to age assessment, or with general work with UMAs. This makes the sample quite varied both in perspectives and experiences. I would argue that this broad range in views and background is useful because by combining different perspectives upon the topic, one can "explore the nature of the phenomenon (…) including the contexts and situations in which it emerges, as well as insights into the cultural frames people use to make sense of these experiences" (Miller and Glassner, 2011, p. 137).

Figure 2: Overview of the project's participants

BACKGROUND	PSEUDONYM	CHARACTERIS-TICS
The National Police Immigration Servive (PU)	PU1 PU2	Experience with assessment of UMAs
The Norwegian Directorate of Immigration/ The Children's Unit (UDI/ BFE)	UDI1	Does not have experience UMAs
	BFE1	Experience with assessment of UMAs
	BFE2	Experience with assessment of UMAs
The Immigration Appeal Board (UNE)	UNE1	Does not have experience with face to face interaction with UMAs when age is disputed
	UNE2	Experience with face to face interaction with UMAs when age is disputed
Municipality	Municipality employee	Experience with UMAs from receptions centers and settlement
Norwegian Organisation for Asylum Seekers (NOAS)	NOAS1 NOAS2	Experience with UMAs through organizational work, legal help, and advocacy
Guardian	Guardian	Experience with UMAs by being their guardian

Not all of the participants have been included in the analysis. This is because some of the interviews provided more factual accounts of the asylum system and the practices regarding UMAs. The participants which have been excluded from the analysis are UDI1, BFE2, NOAS1, NOAS2, and PU2.

4.4 Interviews

The method that was used to generate data in this project was qualitative interviews, with structured interview guides. I chose to make the interview guides structured as opposed to semi-structured, because I incorporated questions which were relevant to include due to the nature

of the topic, such as the practicalities and policies which encompass the practice of age assessment.

4.4.1 The Interview guide

Because of the participants' various backgrounds and starting points, I made different interview guides (Appendix D). These differed from one another in terms of having variating questions due to their relevance. The interview guides were designed as a combination of questions regarding the participants' own experiences with age assessment and UMAs; practical questions regarding the specific practice of age assessment; and more reflective questions that made the participants reflect upon topics such as the age assessment practice in general and their thoughts and perspectives regarding UMAs in relation to age and age assessment. The interview guides had a thematic structure with questions attached to each theme. Although the interview guides had a clear structure and many questions, which I was prepared to follow, they proved in most cases to be more of a safety net for me to fall back into if the conversation stopped, rather than something that was followed chronologically. This made the interviews more open-ended than I had foreseen. Many of the topics that were brought up by the participants themselves led me to ask clarifying and probing questions related to what they had told me, which provided new knowledge that I was not aware of before the interviews. This was especially the case when the participants talked about the asylum process and practices within the asylum system. In most of the interviews, I experienced that the participants started talking about the topic before I had asked them any questions which I saw as a sign that the participants were eager to speak, and that the topic was perhaps not as difficult to talk about as I had assumed.

4.4.2 The interview context

The interview context is not just characterized by the people involved in the interview, but also by its surroundings, such as the physical environment. (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2015). I let the participants decide where it would be most comfortable and practical for them to do the interview. This resulted in that six of the interviews were done in the participant's work place, two was completed in a café, one was done via Skype and two via phone. In two of the interviews which was held at the participants working place, I got to see some of the surroundings that UMAs experience when they are within the Norwegian asylum system. The Norwegian asylum system has been criticized for being too bureaucratic and sometimes

inhuman. This had affected me to some extent in terms of having some anticipations about the staff that I was going to interview. Yet, by having face-to-face contact with employees within the institutions in the asylum system, their actions became more understandable for me as an outsider. During the data collecting phase, I had two encounters which made the topic in this project become much more alive, as I was able to experience some of the surroundings that UMAs move within. When I had my interview with PU, walked to the wrong entrance which resulted in me ending up where asylum seekers come when they first register themselves. I rang the doorbell unaware of the purpose of this entrance. I identified myself and said that I was looking for the participants that I was going to interview. I was let in and sat down waiting in the reception room, with three police officers behind a glass wall. In the second episode, when interviewing staff members in UNE, I had to wait in their reception area. Here I witnessed an episode of a family having a conversation with a lawyer, where one of the family's members was about to go into the meeting with UNE. There was a lot of frustration and tension, due to language difficulties and misunderstandings. Although these examples are not only connected to physical environments *per se*, they unfold within a physical environment that constitutes some sort of human behavior, and as such, become influential for me as a researcher, but also the participants.

Some of the project's participants were restricted in specific ways due to their employment within agencies that are responsible for sensitive information regarding a third party. Moreover, some of their procedures and information about the institution are beyond the public, which made certain questions difficult to answer because they were not able to go into detail when responding.

4.4.3 Rapport and trust

In this project, establishing report and trust was an ongoing process that was present both before, during, and after I conducted the interviews. Rapport is defined as "a trusting relationship between researcher and participant" (Ennew et al., 2009, p. 2.10). As I just met with the project's participants once, and often within time limitations, the process of establishing rapport and trust was dependent on the communication that was done via email. Moreover, when I met with the participants, I made further attempts to create trust by explaining my intentions. It was especially crucial for me to tell the participants that this was an academic project where I had no purpose of exposing them. The institutions represented from the Norwegian asylum system (PU, UDI, and UNE) are often criticized in media, and thus gaining

access and establishing trusting relationships with the participants can become even more important, but also challenging.

4.4.4 Power structures

An interview situation is characterized by an asymmetrical power relationship between the researcher and the participant. It is the researcher who takes precedence in terms of scientific knowledge, defining the interview situation, decides the themes for the interview and askes the questions. Although the researcher does not necessarily exercise power intentionally, this still might occur due to the nature of the situation (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2015). Throughout my data gathering process, I reflected upon that my own experience of the power imbalance was connected to who I was speaking with, and the surroundings that the interview was done within. As I completed the interviews with those working within the Norwegian asylum system, where the interviews were done at their working place, I felt that the bureaucratic surroundings and the governmental structures gave the participants a power position. This is because they were within their usual environment and I was a stranger moving into new territory. Since the institutions within the asylum system are compelling, I felt modest as I moved within their walls.

When I met the participants outside their working place, the atmosphere was more casual which hopefully made the participants feel relaxed. It did not seem to bother the participants that we were in a public place when they shared their information with me. When I thought that the participants were reluctant to answer questions, especially those who appeared as more dominating types, I hesitated to ask probing questions. I felt somewhat uncomfortable and I did not want the participant to get the wrong impression of me and, therefore, not answering the questions with depth. Another aspect which might contribute in being reluctant in answering, is that the topic is sensitive and also that some of the participants' organizations are frequently criticized in the media. Accordingly, one might want to protect oneself from harmful exposure. The examples mentioned above show that the power structures during an interview can vary between the interviewer and the interviewee. Thus, it is not necessarily so that the power lies with one party, rather, it can be a dynamic process where the power can move back and forth. For instance, Ansell (2001) suggests that:

The field is not (...) a scene apart from the discourses of age, race and gender through which power is exercised. The researcher cannot perform a neutral role, but inevitably participates in the (re)production of power relations in the field (p. 103).

In those cases where the interviews were done via phone or Skype, I found it difficult to establish a relation to the participant and the possible power structures were hard to identify. In the Skype interview, some technical problems resulted in the participant seeing me, but I did not see them. Although this was not an optimal situation, it was perhaps comfortable for the participant to see me which could make it easier to talk and answer the questions that I asked. However, this might affect the quality of the data because one loses some of the elements that the good interview relies upon. For instance, both the interviewer and the interviewee can feel insecure about who is on the other side of the phone (Tjora, 2012), which can affect the room to share information.

4.4.5 Informed consent

When doing qualitative interviews, informed consent is an ethical consideration that is desirable to be included because one wishes to explain, as far as possible, to the participants what it entails to be a part of the project and that all the information the participants contribute with is to be anonymous (Brydon, 2006). When I met my participant, I wanted them to sign a letter of informed consent which informed them of the aim of the project and their rights during and after the interview (Appendix C). In three of the interviews, which was done by phone and Skype, I sent the participants the informed consent letter via email because the participants were located in another city then myself. All though this is not optimal, I saw this as the best way to solve it. I also chose to offer the participants the transcriptions of the interviews. This is somewhat unconventional within qualitative research because it may result in the participants feeling confused and insulted due to the way a conversation potentially can appear on paper (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2015). However, I see this as an extension of the informed consent, as well as a means of trust, because this gave the participants the possibility to feel safe as to what was said during the interviews, which can be difficult to remember in retrospect.

4.5 The researcher's role

With reference to Mishler (1990), Kvale and Brinkmann (2015) say that qualitative researchers are more similar to craftsmen than logicians. Thus, doing qualitative research can be described as a role where the person conducting the research has to adapt and work with people and data

in a creative and open manner. More concretely, the researcher's role should be characterized by moral responsibility, ethical demands, and a professional distance (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2015). Furthermore, the researcher should have a reflexive approach throughout the research process, i.e.,

> The self-aware analysis of the dynamics between researcher and participants, the critical capacity to make explicit the position assumed by the observer in the field, and the way in which the researcher's positioning impacts the research process (Gobo, 2011, p. 22).

Throughout my research process when reflecting on my role as a researcher, I discovered several things that might affect the role I have in relation to the participants and the project's topic. I especially reflected upon my position in connection with the topic. Because much of the literature available on this topic is critical (see chapter three for a literature review) – both within media and the academic literature – this affected my stance before going into the field conducting my interviews. Tjora (2012) explains that we are influenced by our own cognitive, theoretical, linguistic, political, and cultural possibilities and environments. I was therefore aware of the importance of having a reflected relationship to myself as a researcher and the ways the participants in the project might perceive me.

As previously mentioned, age assessment is a topic that is highly criticized. Being a researcher exploring this topic can be somewhat challenging because the participants might think that I have ulterior motives. Although I had taken what I saw as necessary precautions to notify the participants of my intentions with the project and where I was coming from, this was in some cases perhaps not enough. In one of my interviews, I experienced that one of the participants said that 'I know what you're after' Although I did not follow up this statement, and thus do not know what the participant meant, I felt the need to explain about my study program and why I was interested in exploring this specific phenomenon. When Thagaard (2013) discusses what the researcher represents for the interviewee, such as being associated with groups that the interviewee has knowledge about from before, this might affect the interview situation and the relation between the interviewer and the interviewee. This is also something that Eggebø (2012) has emphasized in her article on doing interviews with employees in UDI. She believed that some of her participants viewed her as a representation of the critical voice which is recognizable in the media and the public. The statement shown above from my fieldwork can exemplify how previous experience with people interested in the topic might have been

anchored in presenting and discussing the topic in negative terms, which can affect how the participant viewed me as a researcher and what the participant chose to share during the interview.

One of the things I thought was especially challenging during some of the interviews was not being able to react in a way that would have been natural for me. When Thagaard (2013) discusses the hidden sides of an interview, the researcher's reaction is something that is problematized both methodologically and ethically. On the one hand, an emotional response from the researcher might affect the quality of the data material, while on the other hand, not reacting to the interviewee's story can influence the relation between the interviewer and the interviewee. In one of the interviews, I experienced that I had to suppress some of the reactions that usually come spontaneously. This was especially the case when one of the participants told me a story about an UMA who had been placed in a reception center for adults which became very stressful for him due to his experience with sexual assault by adult men. The incident resulted in that the UMA was admitted to hospital due to the trauma he experienced. Listening to this story led me to the dilemma of me keeping a professional distance as a researcher while at the same time being an emotional person affected by the participant's story. This is emphasized by Lund (2012) regarding how the researcher deals with emotions during research when faced with emotional encounters. She suggests that emotions may, for instance, have an impact on knowledge production. Because my interviews varied in content – some were pragmatic and factual while others were more emotionally loaded and critical – I had to juggle between different roles in the ways I responded and related to the information that the participants shared.

4.6 Ethical considerations

When dealing with ethics, the researcher "must counterbalance their multiple responsibilities to their profession, their university or institutional affiliation, the pursuit of knowledge, the society, their informants, and ultimately, themselves" (Taylor, Bogdan and DeVault, 2015, p. 57). Thus, ethical questions are present throughout the research process, helping to shape the methods and findings (Alderson and Morrow, 2011). I would argue that the ethical considerations regarding participants are especially paramount. As I am writing about a sensitive topic, I see it as crucial to safeguard the participants concerning anonymity. However, I have chosen – with approval from the participants – to include their background which can have an impact on their instituting or organizations. Gender has been left out on the basis of

some of the participants' wishes. The participants also made it clear during the interviews what was their personal opinions and reflections and when they were speaking on behalf of their institution or organization. By telling me this during the interviews, hopefully misunderstandings were avoided when the data was analyzed, because it can lead to ethical implications.

4.7 Writing up the findings

The primary objective of this research was to explore how different actors who have had some relation to UMAs, understand and construct age. Although the interviews focused a great deal on age and age assessment practices, I was able to extract other topics from the data which was not thought of beforehand. Other topics which revealed itself is how various actors construct age-disputed UMAs.

4.7.1 Transcription

As my interviews were recorded, they were transcribed subsequently. Kvale and Brinkmann (2015) describe transcription as a something being transformed from one shape to another, in this case, from speech to text. I chose to transcribe the interviews verbatim because I wanted to maintain as much as possible of the original conversation. Some of the participants told me about incidents which they asked to be omitted from the thesis, so I excluded this from the transcription. I also left out the names of people they referred to, the names of their previous working place, and in some cases years, depending on the context they referred to when talking about specific events connected to years. These measures were taken to anonymize the participants as much as possible in the transcriptions, but also because the transcriptions were sent to them via email. One of the interviews was not recorded based on the participant's wishes. Therefore, I was not able to remember everything that the participant said during our conversation. However, much of the information that the participant contributed with could be extracted from the organizations web page.

Through my transcribing process, I learned a great deal about myself as an interviewer. I had a few weeks pause after the first two interviews were conducted, where I decided to transcribe these interviews. While transcribing, I listened to my tone of voice, the way I asked questions, what type of probing questions I asked, and how I engaged in the conversation with the participants. This made me aware of specific 'missteps' I did during these interviews, which I

learned from before conducting my next interviews. An example of this was when the participant and I discussed gender during one of the interviews, and I referred to previous research on the topic. Without being aware of it, I might have given the participant some sort of 'truth' which may affect what kind of response the participant had to the questions and the topic being discussed. On another note, this misstep created a new discussion point in the interview which led to interesting reflections. Building on the things I became aware of during the transcriptions of the first interviews, I became better equipped for my next interviews.

4.7.2 Analysis

The analysis was completed in different stages. I started out by doing a thematic analysis. Thematic analysis "refers to the process of analyzing data according to commonalities, relationships and differences across the data set" (Gibson and Brown, 2009, p. 2). This was done by developing different codes which had some overarching labels. By recognizing several topics which tended to be repeated amongst the participants, the thematic analysis resulted in four general topics: body; maturity; trust; and rights. These were utterly categorized based on the participants' perspectives and reflections. As I started to write the analytical chapters, new findings were made which did not occur during the thematic analysis. When I engaged with the data material and theory simultaneously, I was able to see the empirical data in other ways which created some new directions in the analytical chapters.

The interviews were initially conducted in Norwegian. However, the excerpts that have been used in the analytical chapter is translated from Norwegian to English. Although trying to be aware of the importance of maintaining the original meaning of the excerpts that have been used in the analysis, some sense might have been 'lost in translation' as a result of how words and sentences can change between languages. Accordingly, to keep a quote's original meaning, I sent the quotes which have been used in the analysis to the participants, so they could check if they felt that the translated quotes still had the same meaning as the Norwegian quotes.

4.7.3 Reliability

In general terms, reliability refers to whether other researchers using the same method(s) would be able the gain the same research results as the research project in question (Thagaard, 2013; Kvale and Brinkmann, 2015). However, since this study is based on qualitative interviews, which builds on the premises of interaction with different people, gaining the same results can

be hard to accomplish as dynamics between people might influence the results that come out of the interview. Moreover, the researcher has to argue for the reliability by explaining how the data developed throughout the research process so that one can convince the critical reader in terms of the quality of the research, and thus the value of the results (Thagaard, 2013). Throughout this chapter, I have accounted for the different stages and factors that have been present in the research project. By doing this, the process becomes more transparent to the reader. In the interview setting, I tried not to ask leading questions so that the participant would be able to reflect freely on the topic in question. In doing so, I was hoping not to affect the participants to answer in a particular manner (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2015).

As the topic of the thesis is both contested and sensitive, I tried being aware while conducting the interviews and in doing the analysis, not to become biased. Because the topic engages me personally as well as academically, there is a pitfall that my own opinions can compromise the objectivity of the project (Tjora, 2012).

4.7.4 Validity

A research projects validity can become visible through accounts of how the data has been interpreted, transparency, and by questioning if the interpretations that have been made reflect the reality (Thagaard, 2013). Moreover, a project's validity is present all through the research process (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2015). In the above, I have accounted for the ways in which the analysis was conducted. As the analysis developed through the writing stage, using previous literature and theory to reinforce the findings was seen as an essential part of the analysis to verify my findings. This is one way of ascertaining for the results regarding their validity.

Otherwise, the results of the analysis can have been affected by the answers the participants gave me due to their backgrounds. The participants working within the asylum system can be seen as more 'formal' actors who are affected by their organizational backgrounds and thus might not answer based on own accounts, but rather through their organizations point of view.

As many of the conversations during the interviews revolved around UMAs, one does not gain the group in question (UMAs) own perspectives on the topics discussed which can affect the projects validity. Because the results are based on other people's understandings of UMAs, one risk misrepresentations of this group as they have not been encountered.

Because this is a limited study, the number of participants is restricted. Thus, this affects whether or not one can argue that the findings can be generalized. The analysis in this thesis is based upon the participants' reflections and accounts which merely say something about their personal views upon the topic. On another note, it also gives insight into practices which seems to be present when UMAs are age assessed. Gaining knowledge about the topic in question can show how and why UMAs and age assessments are perceived as they are, which can give indications that reflect the bigger picture.

5. Where should we place them?

A body becomes a body, and a 'becoming body', ultimately through extrapolation: through references to contexts, relations and settings, and through a bifocal lens of maturity/gender (Janssen, 2009, p. 84).

This chapter is the first of three, which analyze and discuss the findings that emerged from the data material. It explores how age is perceived and interpreted based on UMAs' physical bodies[33], bodily practices, and their perceived maturity. These categories are discussed within a conceptual framework regarding age and bodies. The chapter focuses on the parts of the age assessment which is non-medical, often rooted in visual perceptions and interpretations of physical appearance and maturity levels. The data in this project revealed that age is connected to various aspects. For some participants, understandings of age were somewhat rooted in the ways we interpret and understand the physical body. For others, the emphasis was on how age is socially situated and constructed by society. Furthermore, age was also connected to ideas on UMAs' experiences from their home countries, such as having had responsibility and the effect that this has on development, which was used to give an indication of the UMA's age range.

This analytical chapter intends to show how differently age, and thus UMAs, are constructed. Furthermore, it demonstrates how the participants who move within different discourses (which will be elaborated on in chapter seven), although having in common that they in one way or another work or have worked with UMAs, emphasize different things when reflecting upon UMAs and age.

5.1 Navigating age through perceptions of UMAs bodies and bodily practices

The physical body can be understood as a key dimension when exploring age. As introduced in the theory chapter, the ways in which other people's bodies are perceived often help us to conceptualize and create meanings around age. According to Waskul and Vannini (2006):

> The body (…) [is] layered, nuanced, complex, and multifaceted – at the level of human subjective experience, interaction, social organization, institutional arrangements, cultural processes, society and history (p. 6).

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[33] When I use the term physical bodies, this includes physical appearance and characteristics such as beard, wrinkles and body size.

This can play out as constructions which are helpful for a person in terms of placing other people within categories such as gender, ethnicity, nationality, child, or adult.

5.1.1 Identifying chronological age on the basis of UMAs' physical bodies

Several of the participants saw physical appearance and physical characteristics as something that can help establish UMAs' approximate chronological age, and thus establish distinctions between adult and child. When navigating through the landscape of age, for those of the participants having hands-on experience with age assessment, the physical hallmarks used when assessing were: amount and structure of facial hair (e.g., beard); wrinkles; gray hair; posture; and physical size. Although there is awareness amongst the participants of the ways in which people develop differently, on the basis of biology, origin, ethnicity, and living conditions, the emphasis on physical characteristics and the meanings attached to these are still present when UMAs are assessed.

Drawing on James (2000) and how she argues that children's bodies are situated between other bodies, the same can be said for UMAs' bodies. It became evident throughout the interviews that almost all participants made comparisons between UMAs' physical appearance, based on their ethnicity and past experiences, and children growing up in a Western context, albeit it was understood differently. BFE1 reflected in this way:

> …to look at, are [they] ungainly like a teenager that's not fully grown, are there big hands, narrow shoulders in a way, one tries to see…which stage one is in the development. Is it like voice change here or is does one have a fully developed deep voice and coarse beard growth and wrinkles, right…It becomes difficult to say that you're 15,14 years, then they lean towards 18, right?

The recognition of physical characteristics as exemplified by BFE1 can be identified as moving within a naturalistic view on body and development. By having some notions on how teenagers bodies 'normally' looks and how teenagers should sound, the quote shows how the participant uses this to categorize the UMA as being within a specific age-range. Moreover, when an UMA appears to be older than what UMAs themselves say, this is seen as untrustworthy. The ways in which physical appearance is used as an indication of a person's age, correlates with ideas on the connection between age, development and appearance, and thus one can identify a

normative frame that UMAs' bodies are situated within. This way of using UMAs' perceived bodies in assessment, leaves little room for the inclusion of a person's social body. Although it is emphasized by the participant that one is seeking to establish a person's biological/chronological age, considering social dimensions of the body and how they are experienced can be argued to be essential. One does not need to ignore the biological dimensions because they very much exist. However, giving attention to the ways in which the body communicates information through its appearance can create understanding to why one construct bodies in a specific manner. Through her research with children about their perceptions of other people's bodies, James (2000) suggests that a body is culturally acceptable when that body is situated between two extremes. Based on this, one can suggest that UMAs need to have bodies that are seen as 'culturally appropriate', hence, they should perhaps be ungainly, should not have too much body hair, and not be fully grown.

Making assessments based on UMAs' physical appearance was also reflected upon by PU1:

> I didn't adjust his age up, but I had the opinion that he had to be an adult…together with appearance, a lot of wrinkles for example, it can be sun. I normally say 'you don't look like your 17 years'…but then they say 'no I lived a hard life' right, and that might be the case…But I meant that he [was older]…Sometimes if one is very short, from some countries, one aims at…or posing as a minor…

Having wrinkles and an appearance which resembles an adult can result in UMAs having to justify for their appearance. The excerpt shows how the UMA in question argue how having a hard life has made his skin wrinkly. Although the UMA did not get his age adjusted up, the participant had the opinion that he was an adult. Using the correlation between chronological age and appearance is argued to be an insufficient way of assessing age (SCEP, 2012; Crawley, 2007) because peers growing up under the same circumstances sharing the same ethnicity might have a large gap in their appearance (NOAS, 2016). Although, the excerpt suggests that there is a connection between how the professional make assessments based on the UMAs' physical appearance and how appearance is connected to being a child or an adult. As such, the communicating body becomes apparent as it receives feedback from its surroundings on how it is supposed to be (Douglas, 1975, in Burroughs and Ehrenreich, 1993). The social dimension of the body is recognized by Crawley (2007) which found that many of those who assess age tend to base their evaluations on physical attributes, which in many cases lead to different

assessment when several actors are involved. Thus, the individual interpretations made on the basis of the physical body plays out on the basis of individual interpretations that suggests that the body is socially constructed, hence the body is social. The discrepancies that can occur during assessments will be further explored in the next chapter.

When the Guardian reflected upon the ways in which bodies tend to develop differently, it was suggested that:

> As I have understood it, one gets body hair much earlier in other countries in the world than in Norway, so it's obvious that that type [of explanation], right that one has some expectations that you don't get down or beard before you're 14 or 15 or 16 or 17 [in Norway].

Here, the Guardian makes a comparison between Norway and 'other countries' regarding physical development. Using beard as an indicator of age can become insufficient because of how people from different parts of the world tend to develop differently. Making assessments based on characteristics such as beard was also reflected upon by the Researcher:

> …in those cases where one uses beard growth [to assess age]…and there are both life circumstances and genes which can differ. We know that we are pale/light in our skin and have blond hair and our strands of hair are thinner than those in Africa. We know that Asians have a much narrower bone structure than in many other countries. We can recognize a Dutch person hiking in Norwegian mountains, not because they're not good at walking or because they don't have proper hiking equipment, but because they're tall and have specific features.

Both the Guardian and the Researcher make a comparison between 'Norwegian bodies' and bodies that develop under other circumstances. By doing this, the participants make an argument for why it is unfortunate to use UMAs' appearance as an indicator of their age. How bodies tend to develop differently is also recognized by some of the other participants who work within the asylum system:

> …by having had many Afghans in board meetings, I must say that it's extremely hard to assess the age of a person, and we have also beard growth for instance…and also height and wrinkles too. People get things at different ages…we need good tools to assess. It is a part of the evaluation of evidence.
>
> – UNE2

As the three previous quotes suggest, one cannot treat the body as a homogenous biological entity because of factors such as ethnicity. As such, it should also be perceived as a social entity which has developed on the basis of interaction with its culture and social environment. Although all the participants acknowledge this, the reasoning behind why one perhaps should not depend on physical assessments differ. For the Guardian and the Researcher, it is a matter of why it is unfortunate to use physical bodies, through age assessments, to evaluate an UMA's age. For UNE2, it is more related to the ways in which the medical age assessment is an objective tool which can act as evidence in cases where a person's age is disputed. Accordingly, as previous research and reporting have shown (see NOAS, 2016), there exist different opinions on how age assessments should be conducted by professionals and what should be the basis of these assessments.

5.1.2 Size matters

UMAs' physical characteristics and how their bodies are perceived are vital in their consequence due to the decision of whether UMAs should be treated as children or adults, and thus which rights they are entitled to. The individual physical characteristics that UMAs have therefore become something that play out differently based on whether the professional perceive an UMA's appearance to be younger or older. Lønning (2018) found in her work on UMs that the appearance UMs hold when visual assessments are conducted, often is more advantageous for those who appear to be younger. Consequently, those who are perceived to be younger, hence identified as children, more easily access protection than those who have a physical appearance which reassembles an adult, such as having a beard or a larger body. Some of the participants in this project emphasized that being faced with young children made the job less problematic. This is because one did not need to engage with the difficulties that they encounter when needing to assess UMAs which appear to be adults or that there is some sort of ambiguity connected to the UMAs. When reflecting upon encountering UMAs at different ages, BFE1 said:

> One also gets younger [children]…then it's really ok because it is so obvious that they are small children right, you can see when someone is 14, then it's not an issue for those being below 15.

Being faced with an UMA which is relatively small and has an appearance that indicates that he or she is a child, makes the professional's job easier. The perceived physical appearance of the minor can be seen as being in accordance with a norm that one might have regarding a person's appearance, where the meaning ascribed to the body corresponds with a social imaginary on how a body is supposed to look at a certain age. Moreover, the excerpt suggests that it is also less troublesome for those who are perceived to be below 15. This might indicate that not needing to assess an UMA gives the UMA an advantageous position because he or she does not need to be troubled with the difficulties that often follows the process of age assessment.

Children and their childhood(s) are often depicted as being a vulnerable time. The construction of children's vulnerability is very much present in both research and everyday practices surrounding children (Christensen, 2000). Seen in relation to UM(A)s, as emphasized by Clark (2007), the ways in which the UNHCR considers children to be especially vulnerable contributes in portraying children as a group "of people assumed to share characteristics of physical weakness, emotional instability and economic dependence" (p. 285). This can be seen in relation to how PU1 talked about having a protective instinct in the encounters with UMAs:

> I had some Eritrean boys which I registered that said they were 16. This was in 2015 when we had the rush, and it could be that they were 16 but they were so tiny…and I adjusted their age down to below 14 or below 15 because I thought that they would be bullied together with the big boys [if] we sent to the unaccompanied minor reception centers. So, I adjusted their age down and that it because they were simply too small to be part of such a group of boys…I know that those with darker skin are bullied by those with lighter skin.

Engebrigtsen (2003) argue that there are cultural notions of care present in the Norwegian asylum system, mainly based on a Norwegian childhood model[34]. This can be illustrated through the how the participant wants to protect the UMAs in question from possible discomfort, which is based on the participant's former experience with different ethnicities, but also viewing the UMAs' size to be small. This shows that these UMAs were considered to be vulnerable in terms of their possible encounters with older boys. The participant's ideas on vulnerability thus becomes a means of protecting the UMAs against older UMAs, which in its

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[34] The Norwegian model is seen to revolve around the child as innocent, vulnerable and in need of constant guidance and protection (Andenæs 1996; Panter-Brick 2000, in Engebrigtsen 2003).

consequence can result in that the UMAs in question is granted legal protection in the asylum process. As James (2000) suggests, "small bodies are reminders of the stage of infancy" (p. 29) and can accordingly become reminders of a vulnerable state. Therefore, one can argue that UMAs who appear to be older based on their appearance might be 'excluded' from perceptions of vulnerability due to cultural ideas on what a more mature appearance symbolizes. Moreover, Boyden and Hart (2007) have suggested that "if they [UMAs] wish to receive full protection by the state and access to services it would therefore seem expedient for asylum-seeking children to display incapacity and immaturity" (p. 245). My point here is not to deprive UMAs of their vulnerability, but rather to show how their perceived vulnerability in combination with their appearance can become advantageous in terms of easier access to protection rights and services. However, this can also be argued to be significant the other way around. If UMAs are not seen as vulnerable, it might affect evaluations that professionals do, and thus, UMAs access to protection can for some become more difficult to gain. The social dimensions of the body become apparent through how the UMAs' bodies were looked upon as 'too small' to interact with the larger bodies, and thus smaller bodies are framed within a discursive understanding of how small bodies connotates to vulnerability, which in turn can indicate age.

Appearance and the connection to age is also recognized by UMAs' themselves. Although I have not talked to UMAs myself, some of their impressions were communicated through the Guardian:

> …many are not sent to the [medical] age assessment and that is experienced as very unfair. Especially when a boy sits [and says]: 'look at him, doesn't he look older than me?', and I sit there think that he does [look older] and I say 'I think it's hard to see'…but he looks much older than him [the boy that he is with] and he [the other boy] was not send to a [medical] age assessment. [They] come from the same place, does not have ID-papers.

The participant refers to an UMA who questioned why he was sent to the medical age assessment when others who appeared to be older were not. This can indicate that it is perhaps not always the case that those who appear to be younger is safeguarded by professionals' perceptions of physical appearance. Moreover, it displays how UMAs' themselves are aware of the process and that there exists a feeling of arbitrary from their point of view. This feeling of arbitrary can illustrate how UMAs find age assessments to be unfair and frustrating (Munir, 2017).

5.2 Acting and enacted bodies

In this thesis, bodies are not just understood in terms of biological development or physical appearance. In order to move beyond the somewhat deterministic and medical sense of the body, the body is seen in relation to how behavior, which is communicated through a person's body, is interpreted by others. For instance, how behavior is identified through bodily practices, such as age-related behavior, body language, and facial expressions, is vividly present in the interpretations that the participants make in connection to UMAs' age. As such, UMAs' bodily practices can become symbols of whether they are children or adults. Moreover, by examining perceptions of bodily practices, one can utterly gain knowledge regarding notions of how a person acts, or is expected to act, when believed to be a at a certain age. These notions can be challenged when encountering UMAs who show bodily practices that do not correspond well with cultural ideas on how one is supposed to act at a certain age. The title of this section, *Acting or enacted bodies*, can be understood as the body being a social entity which through behavior communicates something to its environment which can be interpreted as being a matter of a conscious act or unconscious actions.

A person's social environment might affect a person's bodily practices, and thus appearing as a child, a youth, or an adult. PU 1 responded in this way to a question about when it is obvious that someone is an adult and not a child:

> …you see it on their appearance, the[ir] way of being, they might have grey hair…But there's something about, they often sit, some nationalities sit and crouch together because they make themselves small and poorly. It's a body language they use on us. I don't know if it is culture or something that they pass along, that's how you should be, so they sit like this [the participant shows how with (x)[35] body] and looks down…

Here, PU1 makes a connection between body language and age. In this excerpt, body language is seen as something that people from some nationalities do in order to seem younger, accordingly, what UMAs communicate with their bodies can thus be perceived as an act. This can be seen in relation to what BFE1 says in chapter 5.1.1 and how expressions made through the body can act as a means for professionals to situate UMAs within specific age-categories,

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[35] To safeguard the participant's gender, I write (x) instead of his or her.

such as childhood or adulthood. Based on the account that PU1 makes of UMAs' bodily practices, this performance can be viewed as a way of fighting against the physical body, namely the 'adult' or physically bigger body. By doing this, one can suggest that it is disadvantageous to have a body that resembles an adult body and thus one has to use bodily practices to fight a body that communicates adulthood. It is argued by Munir (2017) that UMAs' bodies become their enemy which stands in the way of protection and care. This can be connected to culture-specific ideas on appearance and that some bodily practices belong within certain age-categories, such as when being a child, a youth or an adult (man). The latter is not supposed to crouch or perhaps avoid eye contact. Instead, he should sit up straight. This can be argued to be culturally conditioned and being decisive in terms of how the professional positions the UMA within a specific category.

On another note, when bodily practices are seen as age-specific, one might end up ignoring UMAs' embodied experiences which make their bodies act as they do. As seen in the excerpt, when UMAs have a body language which does not match specific ideas on age-appropriate body language, they are more likely to be seen as adults rather than children. Seen in relation to Laz (1998) and the concept of age-as-accomplished, what PU1 reflects on can be viewed as UMAs being aware of the ways they use their bodies when encountering professionals within the asylum system. One can therefore ask the question of whether the doing of age, such as having an 'age-specific' body language and behavior, is something that UMAs do intentionally or if there are internalized practices that the professionals witness. The accomplishment of age can become visible through attributes that we ascribe specific age categories, such as being dependent or independent, competence, and maturity (Laz, 1998). As such, one can argue that this is a two-folded situation. On the one hand, UMAs might use bodily practices strategically, thus act, to appear as younger by using body language that one tends to ascribe children. On the other hand, professionals may use notions about age-specific categories to cast suspicion upon the way that UMAs act because their physical appearance does not correspond well with what they express through their bodies. For instance, Crawley (2006, p. 15; Boyden and Hart, 2007) argues that:

> the fact that [UMAs] have worked and taken on 'adult' responsibilities from an early age, the experiences of traumas associated with migration' are amongst the reasons likely to cause asylum-seeking children to 'appear older than children brought up in a Western culture and context (p. 245).

The guardian had long experience with UMAs, which amongst other things meant participating in many asylum interviews with UMAs. When reflecting upon how UMAs' behavior can be perceived by professionals conducting asylum interviews, the Guardian said that:

> You can imagine an interview situation where you are fighting for your life. It's a job interview to live in a way. So, it's not certain that you act in this interview as you would have done under normal circumstances.

The excerpt can be connected to how one can identify how people perceive other people's actions, for instance through bodily practices, and how this results in situating and creating meaning to the persons in question. In this case, it might suggest that UMAs act in a certain way during 'extraordinary' circumstances, may it be intentionally or not. Moreover, it also shows how the Guardian acknowledge UMAs possible 'unusual' behavior during the asylum interview. Accordingly, UMAs' bodily practices are not seen as something that can be suspicious, rather, it is seen as a natural consequence of the situation.

5.3 Perspectives on UMAs' maturity and behavior

As this chapter has discussed until now, UMAs' age is constructed on the basis of their physical appearance and how behavior can be communicated through bodily practices. The last part of this chapter will also revolve around behavior, but here it is rather a question of how behavior can contribute in the perception of UMAs maturity. As suggested in the theory chapter, maturity has traditionally been connected to biological and psychological development. However, maturity should be seen as a social construction (James and James, 2012). Furthermore, the section analyzes how UMAs' previous experiences is used to suggest that they can be perceived as an adult or a child.

5.3.1 Constructing maturity

Maturity amongst UMAs was a topic that most of the participants reflected upon. This sub-chapter explores how maturity is connected to construction of age, and especially in terms of how UMAs' circumstances are seen to affect their development as well as level of maturity. These circumstances may be war, not having attended school, and the culture they originate from. The main focus in this section is how the process of maturing is something that happens outside 'normal' circumstances.

When reflecting upon maturity, the Guardian suggested that:

> The maturity of someone coming from a primitive society compared to our own [is] naturally lower I think, but I don't know if that is correct, but I think that when you come from a society where the everyday perhaps consist of Koran School and herding sheep and not much more than that, not much education…and being with the family and taking care of the family is what applies. I think that you don't get the same maturing in the same short time as we get when we start school at 6 years.

Here, the Guardian discusses how growing up in a primitive society can affect how development happens. The participant gives examples of activities which are not seen as 'adequate' to develop normally. Thus, one can suggest that there is a strong connection between how development of maturity is seen in relation to formal schooling instead of religious practices and other activities. Children partaking in activities (e.g., work, child rearing), which in the global North is seen as an unusual part of childhood, is often viewed as 'wrong'. As suggested by Liebel and Saadi (2012):

> while the present-day societies of the minority world[36] childhood is considered a distinct and mostly pre-social life stage which is fundamentally differentiated and separated from the one 'inhibited' by adults, children in the majority world are more often understood as being an integral part of the social whole and, accordingly, they take part in activities that in the minority world would be perceived constitutive of 'adult' social domain (p. 167).

Accordingly, taking part in activities which in the global North is seen as belonging to adulthood, can become a way of constructing UMAs as 'underdeveloped' and not at the right developmental stage (c.f., James and James 1997 on age class systems). However, as many children in the majority world move in and out of roles which corresponds with both childhood and adulthood (Punch, 2003), dichotomizing these categories and connecting them to maturity can ignore the fluidity and context-specific nature of development of maturity. Moreover, not having attended school also becomes a factor which contribute to seeing UMAs as underdeveloped when compared to children growing up in Western societies. Thus, it indicates that there is a view that the 'right' development happens within institutions where formal

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[36] Minority world is understood as the global North or Western societies.

knowledge becomes decisive in how a person develops maturity which is in accordance with the right norms, hence Western norms. Another way of constructing UMAs' maturity can be recognized in the next excerpt:

> Many will say: 'yes but he seems a bit immature and he hasn't attended school, therefore it explains why he acts as he does' …even though you act as a 14-year-old because you have not attended a proper school and you have not developed yourself by yourself, low maturity, it does not mean that your biological age…is low, it can still be higher, and that type of assessment I also make.
>
> – BFE1

Here, the participant reflects upon that an applicant can be older although having a maturity level which is ascribed younger people. The excerpt shows that there is a vital connection between how the development of maturity is seen to be based on having attended school. For instance, by suggesting that when an UMA act like a 14-year-old because he has not attended school, it illustrates how we tend to ascribe schooling significant meaning in terms of development of maturity. James (2005) use the term *the standardized child* to exemplify how cultural norms connected to children can stigmatize children who do not correspond with these norms. Thus, the way schooling is being attached to development of maturity in this excerpt can suggest that immaturity can be perceived as something that can be used against the UMA. This is because it might not correspond with ideas that the professional has on how one is supposed to act when for instance having the looks of an older person. Accordingly, making evaluations of maturity based on schooling makes the margins quite narrow in terms of labeling something as the right type of maturity. This means that one can may potentially ignore other aspects which partake in children's development in their specific context, because schooling is seen as a way of developing children to their full potential (Abebe and Bessell, 2011).

5.3.2 Adult, child, or something in-between

How maturity is perceived, often depends on cultural specific ideas connected to this concept (James and James, 2012). Notions on adulthood and childhood can become evident through how UMAs who behave in a more 'adult-like' way can be constructed as adults instead of children. PU1 shared this story during the interview:

…I had two brothers coming from a country. The oldest told me how he had been a farmer…We talked a bit about this and being farmer and yes and no and 'then I sowed that and tried that'… but he talked like a grown man that had responsibility, and I understand that as a 17-year-old you can have responsibility for your family too, but he talked with such an authority about it and how he had tested different things and he had sown that and yeah this and that, and for me he appeared as a grown man with responsibilities who have had responsibilities for many years…

The UMA in question had experience with being a farmer in his country of origin. The narrative that the UMA shares with PU1 made the participant think that the UMA have had a great deal of responsibility. This makes the participant ambiguous towards the UMA's story. Although the participant understands that a 17-year-old can have responsibilities, the perception of the mature UMA seems to be more decisive in evaluating the UMA as an adult or a child. As such, age-disputed UMAs can be perceived as 'in-betweeners' because they might have characteristics which one tend to ascribe adults in Western societies while at the same time perhaps being minors. The term in-betweeners can be understood in several ways. Firstly, it can identify how minors, whose age is unknown, find themselves in liminal stages. This is identified by Kaukko and Wernesjö (2017) in terms of how "they [UMAs] are moving from one country to another, from childhood to adulthood, while negotiating their identities and belonging according to be (assumed) requirements of new circumstances". (p.7). Secondly, the ways in which UMAs are in-between is that they are often ascribed features which both correlates with childhood and adulthood, and thus carrying an ambiguity (Punch, 2003). Furthermore, the way childhood is perceived within the welfare state does not correlate with UMAs' childhoods which can be situated at the outskirt of society in term of being alone (Engebrigtsen, 2003). For instance, taking on a journey on their own and having had extended responsibilities in their families is somewhat unfamiliar to modern childhoods in the west. Thirdly, being in-between does also reveal itself through discourses. Discourses of UMAs being especially vulnerable while at the same time being considered as a risk, shows the complexity that surrounds this group.

The concept of vulnerability was identified when some of the participants reflected upon the significance of being below or above eighteen has concerning UMAs. Turning 18 has great meaning in Western societies because it reaffirms that a person legally is an adult and shall be treated accordingly. This way of thought also affects UMAs because they are entitled to different rights and services due to their age. Several of the participants connected being above

or below 18 to maturity, childhood, adulthood, and vulnerability. The Municipality employee reflected upon the connection between being eighteen and adulthood in this way:

> The majority limit does not say anything about adulthood. Some can be very mature at 16, while others become adults first at 23 or 26. It is the chronology which controls it, and it is, what do you call it, natural science…it says little about adulthood.

This can be seen as a problematizing of the tendency to connect maturity and adulthood to chronological age. James and James (2012) suggest that it is problematic to use prefixed characteristics, especially within a legal context, of age to define the child. A consequence of this is that children that have the same age, although the children might be different, experience boundaries which are anchored in definitions of age (James and James, 2012). The authors connect this to the CRC and the ways the convention tend to universalize childhood and age. Children's vulnerability can thus become a question of age-specific categories and how maturity is perceived.

Burr and Montgomery (2003) also see these factors in relation to CRC. As children are still in a developmental phase, they can be perceived as less mature and more vulnerable than adults, and thus dependent on adults. Furthermore, children are seen as unknowing of the world and therefore lack experience which make them have less competencies in making judgements about their best interests. Another view is that they also lack communication skills, and as such can struggle to convey their thoughts and feelings. A last point is that they possess less power and are accordingly at risk of exploitation and abuse. However, there is evidence that notions of vulnerability can have the opposite effect than intended, through for instance, the CRC (Sandberg, 2015).

The findings in sub-chapter 5.3.1 and in this one can suggest that there is a paradox in the ways in which UMAs' behavior and previous experiences are perceived. Having done alternative activities, such as work, as well as having had a role which is not 'normal' for children, UMAs are on the one hand seen as underdeveloped and childish, while on the other, responsible and mature. This paradox can result in that the way they appear can be perceived as 'wrong' because they always seem to have characteristics which does not correspond with ideas about childhood or adulthood in a Norwegian context. This will also be made evident in the next section. Moreover, biological/chronological age seems in some cases to be connected to maturity and

vulnerability which is age-specific. However, it is not necessarily so that adults cannot be immature or vulnerable although these characteristics often are connected to childhood. One can therefore argue that this type of argumentation may fall short because it can lead to stereotyping a certain type of behavior as well as classifying some as more or less vulnerable due to age.

5.3.3 Skipping childhood?

Notions of childhood originating from the global North became visible through inquiry with the data material. Although the participants had knowledge and understanding regarding the discrepancy that exists between a childhood in the global North and a childhood in the global South, the inquiry revealed that the participants tended to view childhood in a hegemonic manner. As described in the theory chapter, childhood has been constructed and depicted differently through time and space based on culture and history, and therefore childhood is argued to be a social construction (Montgomery, 2003; Jenks, 2009; James, Jenks and Prout, 1998; Norozi and Moen, 2016). Constructions regarding age are also relevant because it connects with the dichotomy child/adult, and thus childhood/adulthood. In the previous section, it was suggested that UMAs can be perceived as in-betweeners due to an ambiguity. The ambiguity which surrounds UMAs can be seen as a more complex continuation of debates regarding the content of childhood. Because one often is unaware of UMAs' accurate age, placing them within or outside childhood or adulthood can depend on cultural notions related to these categories as well as the personal references people might have.

While talking about the clear-cut division which distinguishes a child and an adult legally in Norway, namely turning 18, the Guardian reflected upon UMAs and their somewhat differing, or perhaps lacking, childhoods:

> I fully agree that we have to place the limit somewhere for being a child or an adult, but I think that on the one hand many of those that comes have been through so much that they are mature much earlier because they have experienced so much in their lives. And I also think that they have not had the time to have a childhood, so they are still very much 'children' because they perhaps have had to work from they were 8/10 and worked with rocks or been a carpenter or been a dance boy[37] for that matter from a very young age.

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[37] Dance boys is a phenomenon which is an old Afghan tradition where very young boys are used as sexual slaves or entertainment, owned by older influential men (Landinfo, 2011).

The excerpt associates to a Western or globalized discourse on childhood. Punch (2003) describes these discourses on childhood as "a special time when we (children) need to be protected, often resulting in exclusion from the world of adults, especially from adult responsibilities of work" (Bracket not in the original text) (p. 279). Accordingly, the quote shows how work and duties can deprive children of their childhood(s), and thus illustrates how childhood is a social construction. This can be exemplified through how one, on the one hand, is more mature due to life experiences and, on the other hand, is perceived as less mature as a result of not being able to play and do 'normal' activities which children are supposed to do during their childhood.

The Municipality employee also argues that many UMAs have not had the possibility to be a child:

> Some are very distorted, that means that inside many of them there lies a little child. A little child that has not been allowed being a child for as long as we think a child should be a child. And the problems that caused the youth to flee, they might have emerged a long time ago or recently. Afghan youths for instance, there we know that there has been war and turmoil for a long time, so they are characterized by it inside their hearts, with conflicts, with problems, many [have experienced] poverty.

The experience the Municipality employee has with UMAs who have been subjected to war, turmoil, and poverty, show that they might 'lack' the experience of being a child and perhaps in the sense applied to the concept in the global North. The excerpt can exemplify how the above-mentioned factors are seen as something that belongs outside of childhood. This is recognized by Read (2002) with reference to how NGOs (Non-governmental organizations) suggest that children who have experienced war has not had a childhood and thus being a child, and how they are forced into adulthood. Read (2002) argue that this is a simplified notion. The author emphasizes that these children and their families may have very different opinions about what constitutes childhood and adulthood than NGOs, which often stem from Western notions building on ideas of an innocent and romantic childhood (Read, 2002; Montgomery, 2003). As such, when the Guardian and the Municipality employee suggest that there is a lack of childhood, this can be seen as a way of arguing that some UMAs need to have to possibility to

experience the childhood that they never had. This might be achieved through giving them protection in the country they seek asylum.

Cultural-specific notions of how childhood tend to be constructed differently was also visible when UNE1 reflected upon the age of majority:

> I think like this, in relation to the evaluation that we now are facing in relation to the significance it has if you as a 17-year-old cannot go home due to the general security situation and has to be internally displaced, right. You can say that as a 17-year-old you are seen as a child [in a Norwegian context], but an Afghan 17-year-old in an Afghan context is seen as an adult…and what significance should that have when you are evaluating, what should I say, if it is secure, available and secure in relation to internal displacement.

In this excerpt, the participant shows how being seen as a 17-year-old in Norway and in Afghanistan can play out differently. It is suggested that one is perceived as a child in Norway at this age but more as an adult in Afghanistan. It differs from what the Guardian and the Municipality employee says because here it might not necessarily be a question of not having a childhood, rather, it can be interpreted as growing in to adulthood sooner. What UNE1 says can be seen as a way of legitimating a contested practice, namely returning UMAs which are seen to not be in need of protection from the Norwegian immigration authorities. Because UMAs might be perceived as adults in their country of origin, they can perhaps have the ability to cope when returned to internal displacement. Moreover, it also illustrates how childhood is context-specific as the perception of child and adult differ from Afghanistan and Norway.

5.4 Summary

This chapter has shown how UMAs tend to be constructed based on their physical appearance, their bodily practices and how their maturity is perceived. All these factors contribute in situating UMAs within, outside, or somewhere in between childhood and adulthood. A main argument at the end of this chapter is that constructions which tend to surround UMAs, may it be seeing them as an adult or a child, do not give UMAs themselves much space to take part in how they are perceived (see Kaukko and Wernesjö, 2017). This will be further explored in the next chapter which concentrates on how UMAs' ethnicity, gender, socio-economic background, and unknown age can play a role in UMAs' access to legal rights.

6. The intersections of an unknown age

This second part of the analysis investigates how categories such as age, nationality and ethnicity, class, and gender unfold concerning trust and distrust in the process of age assessment. This is explored within the theoretical perspective of intersectionality and connected to previous research. The analysis will also draw on the concepts presented in the theory chapter, which associates with the understanding of age, as I see them connected at many levels.

It is important to remember that the participants move within different discourses on a regular basis and is therefore most likely shaped by these. For instance, those working within the asylum system can be seen as bureaucrats who are obliged to follow Norwegian law, and thus sometimes speak on behalf of their unit. However, as stated by some of the participants working within the asylum system, they are not inhuman beings unable to feel and think about the consequences of their choices (see Eggebø, 2012). One can also presume that the participants who do not work within the asylum system speak more freely about the topics in question.

My examination of the data material made it evident how some UMAs might be more fortunate than others due to their personal dispositions and background. As will be shown in the forthcoming analysis, the categories and characteristics that UMAs belong to and have, in addition to the discourses and constructions they are situated within, creates an utterly more challenging situation for them.

6.1 Trust and distrust towards UMAs

When analyzing the data, one of the topics which emerged is how trust and distrust unfold in relation to UMAs. As elaborated on in the theory chapter, UMAs are constructed differently based on gender, age, nationality, and ethnicity. Moreover, they are situated within western constructions of childhood or adulthood that are not necessarily applicable to their socio-cultural backgrounds, as shown in the previous chapter. These discourses and constructions can contribute to how UMAs are met and understood both outside and inside the Norwegian asylum system, creating trust or distrust towards the specific UMA or UMAs as a group. Distrust is according to Jubany (2011) something that derives from "ambiguous stereotypes nurtured by (…) experiences and social prejudice" (p. 74). Moreover, discourses which tend to surround refugees, and also UMAs, can be argued to be rooted in how they are depicted in the media and

the public, and how this lately has been adopted into policies regarding asylum seekers and UMAs. Boyden and Hart (2007) argue that:

> anxieties about security have added to the eagerness of elements of the media, the public and political establishment to control the asylum system ever more tightly, limiting the numbers allowed in and removing more quickly those who are not granted refugee status or leave to *remain* (p. 241).

As explained in chapter two, Norway has also introduced stricter immigration legislations making it harder to get asylum approval, as well as measures to prevent people not being in need of protection seeking for it.

6.1.1 The gendered UMA

The perception of gender cannot be excluded from the constructions which surround UMAs. Boyden and Hart (2007) stress how gender becomes relevant in terms of UM(A)s because of gender notions and connotations. For instance, this is evident through how women traditionally have been depicted as vulnerable. Portraying women as vulnerable is recognized through hegemonic stereotypes which refer to how women have been subordinate to men, having more 'feminine' characteristics which make them more fragile to adversity and their surroundings (see Entwistle, 1998). Moreover, constructions of vulnerability have also tended to surround children. As such, ideas related to female UMAs, as opposed to male UMAs, can become an interesting topic of inquiry. Taefi (2009) argue that "uniquely situated as both women and children, gender bias and paternalistic attitudes towards children synthesise to intensify girls' marginalization" (p. 345). Moreover, the characteristic as refugee or migrant can utterly reinforce the way females are perceived as vulnerable and marginalized.

Through my interviews, I asked the participants to reflect upon whether they had experiences with gender differences in terms of UMAs[38]. This question led to that the participants contributed with own examples, but the topic also moved beyond UMAs to general notions on gender. The Municipality employee gave me this example:

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[38] Although the participants had little experience with female UMAs, this because the majority arriving to Norway is male, they offered valuable reflections on the topic.

> I remember a case we had in the reception center. It was actually, it was a girl in the minor department and she came and was said to be 17,5 and she got [a] residence [permit]. It turned out that she was above 30 and had children in her home country…

The fact that the person in the excerpt above was much older than the age she claimed to be, but still received a resident permit, might indicate how the intersection of being both female and refugee can play out more favorably for women than men. Lønning (2018) argues that the categorization of women and (girl) children as especially vulnerable can "minimize the possibility of men being understood and perhaps equally (but differently) affected by conflict and displacement, and that men can also be especially vulnerable due to gender and age" (p. 150). Furthermore, the Municipality employee stated that one tended to be more flexible in relation to girls and more often believed in what they said.

Experiencing female asylum seekers as trustworthy is recognized through how asylum-seeking women that display appropriate emotions, not over-acting or lacking emotions, are more likely to be believed regarding their stories (Spijkerboer, 2005). As such, stereotypical ideas regarding gender can become decisive related to receiving protection. Reflecting further, the Municipality employee drew a line to what can be connected to stereotypical notions regarding gender:

> …it has to do with the experience of, also that honesty should be generally more expected from a woman…that one thinks that there is a vulnerability there which can inflict girls more injury, [on] a woman then a man, if one is misunderstood or not believed.

The municipality employee proposes that the consequences might be more severe for female UMAs than male UMAs if not believed. This can illustrate the ways in which society tends label men and woman differently. Drawing on Olivius' (2016) recognition of constructions of refugee men as reckless troublemakers, one can suggest that this becomes a reinforcement of men as masculine arch types as well as a risk to society. Moreover, stereotypical constructions of women as especially vulnerable can continue to be reproduced when men and women are perceived and treated as 'opposites'. Furthermore, the ways in which men and women are constructed differently can thus reveal itself through practices which surround UMAs. Boyden and Hart (2007) refer to an article in the *Sunday Times,* where a girl seeking asylum was not believed by caseworkers to be 16 as she claimed, she was believed to be younger, because she had accompanied and looked after her eight-year-old niece on the journey towards the UK. This

might illustrate that one does not acknowledge that girls can have specific competencies when being a certain age. Furthermore, when the municipality employee makes a distinction of what can be perceived as male and female vulnerability, vulnerability can be seen as gendered. The construction of gendered vulnerability can be recognized in the next excerpt where PU1 talked about child marriage[39]:

> It became very special in 2015 when all those Syrians came and there were a lot of child brides…they are married and have several children with them…the youngest was 14 and had a child and was pregnant with number two. They are little wives and they live into the role as expected as a wife…and we have rules when we realize it…there are many cases where they report to have a boyfriend for instance…but then it turns out that they are religiously married, because they are not allowed to be married according to Norwegian law. Then we contact the children's social services…because we are supposed to separate them if they [the girl] is below 16, the sexual age limit, so they can't live together because it's a marriage that is not valid here in Norway.

The excerpt shows how asylum-seeking girls who are married when being below 16, should be protected when applying for asylum because the practice is illegal according to Norwegian law. Before moving further, it is important to mention that this is a complex matter where it should not be ignored that many of these girls might have experienced forced marriages, sexual exploitation, and trafficking. However, it can be useful to explore how the protective view that one tends to have towards asylum-seeking girls can result in ignoring the vulnerability of asylum-seekers of the opposite gender. Lønning (2018) identifies how male UMAs can be victims of sexual violence, such as rape, during their journeys towards Europe. She suggests that:

> While not normally perceived as the most at-risk to sexual violence (…) young males may in some instances in fact be particularly at risk from various actors, both resulting from how they travel, destitution faced and lack of intervention" (p. 158).

As such, when male UMAs experience hazards, they might not be acknowledged to the same extent as female UMAs. Although females which are married as children and males exposed to sexual exploitations is not necessarily a question of asylum protection *per se,* it can be seen in

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[39] Child marriage is understood as a marriage where one or both parties are under the age of 18 (Gangoli, McCarry and Razak, 2009).

relation to the identification of practices which can be harmful to the one who has experienced it. Young married asylum-seeking girls have gained a lot of attention the last couple of years. They are often depicted as victims resulting in large media coverage. Moreover, NGO's also have campaigns where it is argued that child marriage, with an emphasis on girls, is a large offence on children's rights and a global issue cutting across national borders, cultures, religions, and ethnicity (PLAN, 2018). This can be seen in relation to how gender contributes in creating a social identity which bears with it various connotations and thus one might have a hegemonic understanding of how different genders relates to hazards. According to Pain (2001), "in much of the literature men are viewed as fearless but fear-provoking, and women as fearful and passive" (p. 899). One can therefore suggest that boys' and men's vulnerability and victimization can become under-communicated or perhaps ignored.

How the characteristics of age, gender, and refugee status intersect, is illustrated above. It shows how being female might result in more protective measures within the Norwegian asylum system. This is especially the case for Afghan women due to oppression. The oppression of Afghan women is visible through sexual abuse, gender-based violence, and restrictive rights (UNFPA, 2017; UN, 2017b). BFE1 mentioned that being a woman in itself could be reason enough to be granted asylum in Norway. The point here is not to underestimate females' marginalization and vulnerability, but rather to keep in mind how we in the global North tend to construct women's oppression. By seeing female refugees as solely vulnerable and in need of (our) protection, one can end up ignoring the fact that they are active agents who have completed a dangerous journey on their own which show a great deal of independence.

Figure 2: Illustrates a mechanism which can lead to marginalization of male UMAs
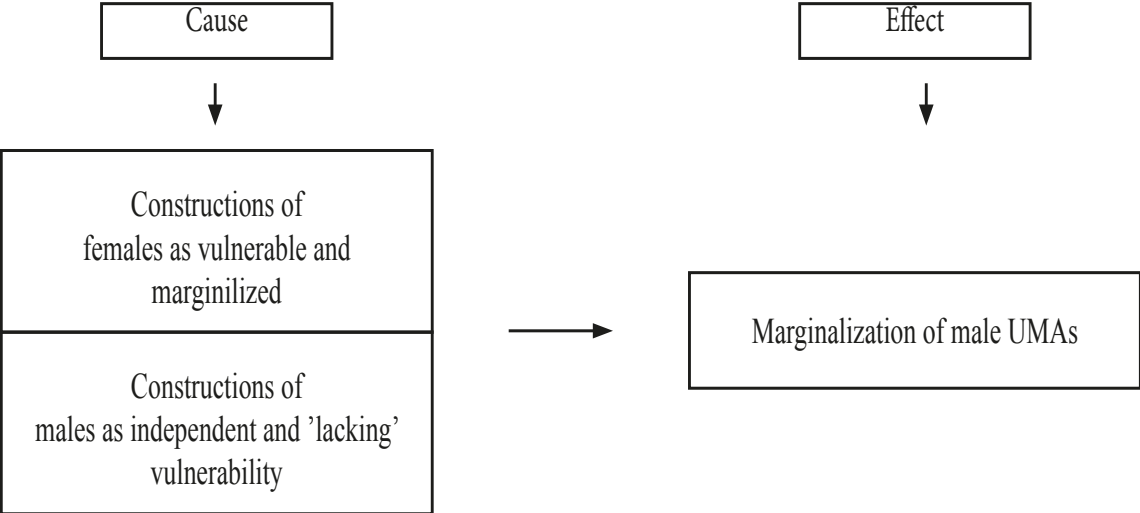
Thus, I wish to illustrate how these constructions of females can work as a mechanism which in turn can marginalize male UMAs, as girls within the Norwegian and Swedish asylum system sometimes tend to be seen to be more at risk than boys (Stretmo, 2010). This becomes a cause and affect situation where the cause is that female refugees and female UMAs are constructed as vulnerable and marginalized, and thus treated in this manner, while the effect is that male UMAs as such becomes marginalized in terms of constructions which does not favor them. As such stereotypical notions on how men's gender is shaped becomes visible (Murray, 2015). The ways in which UMAs tend to be constructed within the Norwegian and Swedish asylum system with an emphasis on nationality, age, and gender, contribute to a stereotypical portrayal of 'the UMA' (e.g., Afghan, male, and weak grounds for protection). Thus, UMAs are seen in a simplistic way labeled with overarching categories such as 'the strategic minor' and 'the anchor child' (Stretmo, 2010)[40].

6.1.2 Socio-economic background matters

Coming from a society that does not have formal and standardized ways of documenting birth to verify for a person's identity, has become an enormous challenge for the immigration authorities as well as for those individuals lacking such documents. In questions regarding unidentified age, the lack of documentation has as previously mentioned increased the use of age assessments to establish a person's probable chronological age. In this section, I will explore how trust and distrust might reveal itself when UMAs display knowledge about their own age, which is seen in relation to level of education and socio-economic background. Class, in a Bourdieuan sense, is often connected to various forms of capital. As such, the capital which UMAs have available, can make them more or less adaptable to the asylum system in terms of portraying themselves in a manner which makes them more credible. According to UDI (2017b), a general lack of creditability in an applicant's case will possibly weaken the applicant's information regarding age.

Some of the participants reflected upon aspects of UMAs knowing their own birthdate. Although not necessarily being able to prove this through valid documentation, some UMAs claim to have gained knowledge about their age through others, often family members. UMAs referring to their mother's accounts of their age are mentioned by several of the participants

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[40] The strategic minor is seen as a person who put forward the wrong age to be perceived as a child, when in fact being an adult. The anchor child is someone who is viewed as an anchor for entire families, sent to a country to gain protection so that one can apply for family reunion (Stretmo, 2010).

(NOAS, 2016). Moreover, a considerable amount of UMAs calculate or guess their age based on certain events that have occurred through life (NOAS, 2016). The main impression is that most Afghans do not know their precise birthdate. However, when UMAs demonstrate knowledge about their age, they are met and understood differently. When reflecting upon how UMAs relate to their age, BFE1 said:

> Some have been lucky to attend school…they often have a good idea of when they were born, they might even have a birth date, and if it is obvious from the person that I speak to that they understand their own situation, are able to reflect and answer my questions in a good way, then you immediately experience that the person has attended school, and that he also explains his schooling like first, second, third [grade] and up, and add 'I'm born then and then, and I lived…from the first to the third grade I lived there and then we moved there' right, at once you have boom, boom, boom…then it's very easy to base [an evolution] on the applicants explanation, when it's so credible with that type of explanation.

'Adequate' schooling is something that many Afghans are missing because of decades of war and turmoil, as well as traditions related to child work. Less than 50 percent of Afghan children are enrolled in school (Landinfo, 2014). The emphasis on formal education as being a vital part of childhood is especially connected to hegemonic ideas on "individual welfare, success and a 'good life' as future adults" (Kjørholt, 2013, p. 245). BFE1 makes a connection between UMAs that have attended school and the way they make an account of their upbringing and age. As such, class background can become visible in the asylum process and thus a resource which also forms capital. By appearing to be more proper, a person can be perceived to have good judgment which is visible through how the ability to recognize and master the high culture in society (Aakvaag, 2008). The account that BFE 1 makes can be seen as an example of how UMAs who have had a more 'privileged' background, for instance, by having attended school, can become more privileged within the Norwegian asylum system. Thus, cultural capital can contribute in how UMAs who come from more privileged backgrounds are able to present themselves. By describing his or her background in a distinct manner to professionals, the UMA appears more credible. This can also indicate that for UMAs who does not have the 'skills' to make an account of their upbringing in a chronological and precise way, their credibility might be lowered.

According to Skodo (2018), asylum seekers can on the basis of various types of capital, be more or less successful within the asylum system. He suggests that cultural and economic capital can be transferred into 'asylum capital'. Asylum capital is understood as the

> experiences of human rights violations, cultural and social skills (or social and cultural capital), dispositions, narratives, and documents recognized by the state migration agency (…) as sufficient for the granting of refuge status determination or subsidiary protection (Skodo, 2018, p. 2).

Accordingly, when BFE1 suggests that those who have attended school are more credible in their accounts, this might be an example of how cultural capital, and asylum capital, make him or her more successful within the asylum system because they are able to present themselves and their narratives in a way that corresponds well with the professional. Thus, the accumulation of goods based on a person's cultural capital becomes evident through how professionals interpret asylum seekers' narratives as well as how the asylum seeker makes use of own cultural capital. However, it is important to keep in mind individual differences that does not relate to class, such as experience of trauma, cultural differences, and so forth. This may affect the statements that UMAs give in terms of that the narratives of their experiences might differ from time to time, and thus include differences and inconsistencies (Crawley, 2010).

As previously mentioned, for many UMAs their mothers are often the source of their knowledge about their age. In Afghanistan, mothers who are illiterate usually calculate their children's birth from lack of water that specific year or if their children are born during fall or spring (Munir, 2017). Other practices in estimating age are by noting the week or month the child is born, and from this calculating the child's age (Munir, 2017). BFE1 reflected upon why using mothers as a source to verify for one's age is not sufficient enough when stating one's age:

> 'Ok, how does your mother know how old you are?'. If she didn't give birth at a hospital but gave birth in the countryside in Afghanistan where they really don't care about a calendar, some get their age written in the back of the Koran, like a custom. The year there (in the Koran) might be correct, but it often relates to the rest of the statement…that the information supports one another, but just saying that my mother said so is not good and strong information, because you know that 'but how does your mother know' there is some insecurity there, it might be that the mother may be wrong with a year, right.

The excerpt illustrates how rural practices and ways of living are demoted into being ignorant and thus perhaps less credible. The notions that the professional has about specific practices in Afghanistan can become a way of arguing for why one cannot believe in the UMA's age explanation, and thus the use of formal age assessments becomes necessary. Moreover, it illustrates that it perhaps is the professional's own perceptions about the UMA's country of origin that become decisive, rather than listening to what the UMA has to say. This is recognized by Crawley (2010) who states that professionals conducting asylum interviews with children tend to hear but not listen which creates difficulties for the children in question. Accordingly, one can suggest that Afghan UMAs' socio-economic background can become an obstacle because how they are perceived is based on notions connected to their ethnicity and socio-economic background instead of the UMAs' own testimony.

UNE2 also showed hesitations when Afghans display awareness about their age based on information regarding the Afghan culture and how Afghans normally relate to age. In the forthcoming, the knowing/unknowing UMA is also connected to ethnic origin – to being Afghan:

> …some Afghans know exactly when they're born, it might have to do with social class and where they have lived…but culturally we notice that, we see very rarely, and notice that those we encounter does not know their birth date…and then one might question, if one knows exactly when one is born one might question why you're so sure that you're 17 and not 18, right, that's a question that we ask them 'how do you know when you're born?' 'it was told to me before I left, it's in [my] Koran' right, and in many of the cases they don't put forward a *tazkera*, but again the tazkera does not have validity, it can easily be forged…they cannot document their identity, they can at best substantiate it, because the *tazkera* and passport has low validity the age assessment becomes all the more important, it is perhaps the only objective thing we have.

UNE2 questions the fact that some Afghan UMAs are certain of their age. This can be understood in different ways. Drawing on the excerpt presented above, it is also possible that stating one's age as 17 instead of 18 can be a strategic maneuver from the UMA because 17 is an age of threshold which still give access to specific rights. This can be linked to what Lønning (2018) calls *migration skills*. Migration skills become visible through the ways in which UM(A)s can share capital amongst themselves which accumulates knowledge on unfamiliar

environments leading to protective measures (Lønning, 2018), thus social capital become visible. Therefore, UMAs stating that they are 17 instead of 18 can be a means to protect oneself from possible difficulties in the asylum system. PU 2 referred to how UMAs talk to each other before entering a country. This can be understood as a knowledge sharing amongst UMAs as a preparation to the asylum regimes that they move into where they can act on protective measures such as stating to be 17 rather than 18 because they are aware of the consequences it entails. When this is said, it does not mean that UMAs know how old they are because they put forward a particular age.

Furthermore, the excerpt might indicate that when professionals encounter Afghans who claim to have knowledge about their age, it creates suspicion. Although some have their date of birth noted in their Koran or they have a *tazkera*, these sources are not reckoned as valid by Norwegian immigration authorities. Moreover, saying that one was informed about one's age upon departure is nor a good enough source of information. Thus, one can suggest that being Afghan can become a decisive factor in relation to trust because of perceptions about Afghanistan that professional use when they make evaluations of grounds for asylum. Professionals within the asylum system relates to information from Landinfo[41]. Jubany (2011) found in her studies that the specific knowledge immigration professionals have about an asylum seekers origin "informs them about the nature of the applicants' stories" (p. 83). As such, the knowledge that one has about Afghanistan in terms of documentation and culture seems to result in a general skepticism of whether Afghans actually are able to have knowledge about this, homogenizing an entire population and ignoring social and cultural differences. Moreover, notions related to Afghanistan and Afghan UMAs might reveal itself in the asylum system through how boundaries can cut "across legal, social, or cultural criteria for admission" (Seeberg, 2016, p. 44). The practice regarding temporary resident permits can be seen as a boundary, especially in cases where male Afghan UMAs which are assessed to be between 16 and 18 years of age and are not recognized as being in need of protection. Accordingly, this group of asylum seekers do not have many available resources to convince immigration authorities of their age. When they present age-specific knowledge, this can be used against them on the basis of notions related to Afghanistan and Afghan culture.

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[41] Landinfo contributes with land information from countries that asylum seekers originate from to the Norwegian immigration authorities. They offer reports with content that include general information about culture, religion, security situation, formal systems, and so forth.

6.1.3 Consequences of distrust

The distrust that UMAs encounter during the asylum process is not necessarily rare. As explored above, the distrust that UMAs face is rooted in constructed knowledge and beliefs about specific cultures and countries (e.g., Afghanistan), lack of documentation, constructions regarding gender, children and childhood. This suggests that there is a widespread culture of belief that countries have homogenous cultures and practices. In the case of Afghanistan, which consists of multiple ethnic groups, this might be the case. Professionals working within immigration authorities are first and foremost supposed to evaluate if a person is entitled to protection. Some of the participants talked about how they create space for the UMA during the interview so that they could have as much opportunity as possible to make an account of their past experiences. However, they are also trained to reveal lies through asylum seekers narratives (Jubany, 2011). According to Crawley (2010):

> the difficulties that asylum-seekers have in establishing a credible account of their experiences are compounded for asylum-seeking children, many of whom have only partial knowledge of the circumstances from which they have fled and about conditions in their country of origin (p. 165).

As such, making an account of the past can be challenging because it is situated between professionals' possible suspicion and asylum-seekers possible difficulties narrating their stories. This section will explore how the distrust that UMAs might encounter during their asylum process can result in unfortunate conditions. For instance, when BFE1 reflected upon the response that UMAs give when they do not agree on the professional's line of argument in terms of age, some could reply to every comment that the professional gave with "'no, no, that's wrong, you're lying (…) it's not true, it's not true, it's me telling the truth'. They can get very, very angry".

The quote above show how UMAs can react during the asylum interview when their testimonies are opposed. Moreover, being faced with resistance from professionals can become a continuum that have consequences after the asylum process. Having experience with UMAs subjected to age assessment, the Municipality employee reflected upon the questioning regarding UMAs' own accounts of age in this way:

Sometimes…they were saying 'mom said that I was 14 years, I don't have any more documentation, mom says I'm 14', and then it becomes like 'is it my mother they are doubting?', and that's not a good feeling for a youth, that the Norwegian government is questioning what my mom has said about how old I am, it becomes a personal thing.

As the municipality employee exemplifies, the distrust towards the UMA can result in UMAs having both distrust and doubt towards the Norwegian authorities. It is not rare that UMAs have suspicion and distrust towards the immigration authorities, but also to other actors such as staff at reception centers and guardians (Munir, 2017). The municipality employee told me that some UMAs think that reception center staff share sensitive information with the immigration authorities and therefore choose not to share information with the staff. According to Raghallaigh and Gilligant (2010), the distrust that UMAs show can function as a *coping strategy*. By distrusting others, UMAs can protect themselves in the difficulties they encounter, and thus be safeguarded from distress (Raghallaigh and Gilligant, 2010). Moreover, the distrust that UMAs might be confronted with within the Norwegian asylum system can have severe consequences. As the Researcher stated:

…they are used to not being able to trust anyone, and this will have consequences when they are going to build a network to others. They are skeptical, (...) it creates a social insecurity.

Furthermore, the Researcher said that:

They basically experience a form of mistrust which does something with the entire relationship of trust to adults and the system [and] we can imagine ourselves if we said something we knew was correct which had a great significance, and then people say that I don't believe you, or they don't say it, we must investigate this, all have to be investigated.

According to the researcher, distrust is not necessarily a fortunate situation neither for the immigration authorities nor the UMA. In the case of the immigration authorities, they might not access the valuable information they need from the UMA to make their case as nuanced as possible, as suggested through the quote from BFE1. The distrust that UMAs experience can result in creating a distance between UMAs and the societies that they might become a part of. As a result, one can end up alienating a group of young people leaving them on the outskirt of society. According to Jensen (2011), the ways in which ethnic minorities, especially young

males, are constructed by various discourses, and thus perhaps alienated, can result in reactions through resistance.

6.2 Using a contested method to preserve UMAs' rights

Because UMAs often cannot formally verify their age, it exists ambivalence to whether they should be perceived as children in need of specific rights, 'just' as refugees (Hedlund and Cederborg, 2015), or as both. The previous chapter as well as this has discussed the ways in which UMAs are constructed on the basis of their appearance, behavior, nationality, ethnicity and gender. These elements are also relevant in the forthcoming analysis due to their implications of whether an UMA is sent to a medical age assessment. Moreover, how the various elements tend to intersect can create the basis for UMAs' access to legal rights. This section explores how the medical age assessment can have implications for UMAs on the basis of why it is being used and how professionals chose to relate to it while making decisions regarding UMAs' age.

6.2.1 Giving UMAs the benefit of the doubt

As presented in chapter two, Norway has increased the use of medical age assessments as a means to sift out those who deliberately pose as minors or to place those who are unaware of their age in the right age category. This illustrates how chronological age is crucial in terms rights in a Norwegian context. The emphasis on the (medical) age assessment is not just a question of age disputes, it is also relevant in terms of "the political significance and salience of this issue" (Crawley, 2007, p. 3). Thus, age assessments are also a political field which is affected by immigration control. Although UMAs should get the benefit of the doubt due to their unique situation, this can be argued to be based on professionals' own perception of UMAs as suggested earlier. Therefore, it can indicate that various constructions (e.g., vulnerable, suspects, calculated) as well as nationality, gender, and the appearance of UMAs' become decisive in how they are perceived and as a result of this, is sent or not sent to a medical age assessment. Also, context-specific ideas on childhood and adulthood become apparent. When encountering other cultural ideas on what describes age and life stages, which is very much embedded in formal systems in Norway, UMAs may be confronted with unfamiliar constructions regarding age which might result in insecurity and doubt. Moreover, it may contribute in distrust towards UMAs because they do not fit into the Western ideas on what being a minor entail.

When reflecting upon the medical age assessment, the Researcher showed a great deal of skepticism and reluctance towards this practice:

> The [medical] age assessment is based on an insecure test, and therefore I'm really skeptical, and it has huge consequences…If there is doubt connected to the test…one loses the legal protection if one can't say in these cases that if the defended does not have the benefit of the doubt, one isn't defended, but it's almost like being on an inducement bench…you say that you're 17 and they say you're 20…what do you have to offer? You didn't put your birth certificate in your back pocket when you fled, and if you did that then people would have thought that it's not real. So, you're in a situation where…you're not believed.

The Researcher compares being age assessed with being on trial where the UMAs do not have much opportunity to state their case. It is also suggested that whether or not asylum seekers carry identity documents, both can be considered to be suspicious. This can be related to previous arguments regarding how different factors intersect and create suspicions towards a certain group. For instance, being an undocumented young male Afghan can be argued to be a reason in itself to be sent to a medical age assessment. According to NOAS (2016), there have been tendencies to a differential treatment based on origin regarding medical age assessments. Occasionally, due to capacity problems, some have been except from the medical age assessments. Those who have been excluded are Afghans where age has not been doubted and Eritreans that obviously are under-aged (NOAS, 2016). Based on this, one can also argue that constructions regarding age and childhood are present. As suggested earlier, some professionals base their evaluations on appearance and notions regarding age-specific behavior. As such, this can become a decisive matter to whether UMAs are sent to the medical age assessment.

Accordingly, when the Researcher states that 'you say that you're 17 and they say you're 20…what do you have to offer?', it suggests that the protection of UMAs and their access to rights to a minimal degree is something that the UMAs' themselves have control over. Although suggested earlier that UMAs may use different strategies to gain protection, this might not always come to their benefit because of the 'power' that professionals have in determining their case.

The Municipality employee emphasizes how age assessments can be seen as a means of administrative purposes[42]:

> Regarding [medical] age assessments, in my head...demanding medical assessments for administrative purposes, that's not usual. It's not often that the authorities tell a person that they need to complete a medical assessment that is an x-ray too, for administrative purposes.

Many UMAs who seek asylum do not know their correct age, and thus the use of medical age assessments can be understandable. However, when medical age assessments become a result of suspicion towards individuals, their rights may become absent. The excerpt can suggest that using medical assessments for administrative purposes is connected to a culture of disbelief and suspicion towards UMAs. Accordingly, this can result in stereotypical notions regarding a specific group of people, as suggested earlier in the chapter, where giving them the benefit of the doubt can become far more unlikely. Giving UMAs the benefit of the doubt is by Thevissen et al., (2012) argued to be case specific, implying that there is an inconsistency that plays out differently for each applicant. Moreover, as the medical age assessments are looked upon as imprecise in their results, UMAs risk being wrongly assessed. Administrative purposes conducted through assessments thus become a matter of a culture of disbelief (see Crawley, 2007; Lønning, 2018) rather than seeing UMAs as legitimate asylum seekers.

6.2.2 Assessing age up and down – an inconsistent system

The medical age assessment is the tool that professionals within the asylum system mostly relate to when making decisions regarding UMAs' age, especially in the final stage of the asylum process. However, it exists some discrepancies in terms of perceiving UMAs differently and therefore, as a result, UMAs are assessed differently by different professionals. Moreover, the ways in which UMAs are perceived by professionals within the asylum system, and by other actors such as guardians and staff at reception centers, differ (see NOAS, 2016). This can result in UMAs being labeled with different ages throughout the asylum system that make them move back and forth between ages that other people have decided for them.

When asked about ever being doubtful and if there was a consistency between the different age assessments that are conducted, BFE1 responded in this manner:

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[42] Administrative purposes can be understood as the categorization of people into correct categories so that they are treated accordingly.

I've had…interviews with applicants where…there hasn't been a full age assessment, where I still mean that there is doubt regarding whether the applicant should be fully assessed, or where there have been evaluations where [someone else has said] 'no, the applicant is obviously a minor, there is no need', and then I sit there and think 'no it's not obvious that this person is below 18 years'.

– BFE1

This excerpt shows that it exists discrepancies within the asylum system concerning the assessment of UMAs. It illustrates how UMAs can be assessed to one age in one part of the system and that this is being questioned in another part. As such, the determination concerning UMAs' age 'lies in the hands' of someone else. Moreover, BFE1 said that:

Sometimes I feel…that they don't correspond…that I'm thinking 'oh this person looks a lot older than what the age assessment says' in a way, and where PU did not believe the person when he arrived and thus adjusted up the age and then the medical age assessment comes which really supports the applicant's information, and then I adjusted him down again.

The age assessment of UMAs is not just a question of upward adjustment because their age also tends to be assessed down. However, the inconsistency between the different actors involved in assessments can be argued to be problematic. When different actors suggest different ages, and that these proposals also may differ from the medical age assessment, it can create UMAs into passive objects that do not have a say in questions regarding their age. However, as the excerpt shows, the medical age assessment can correspond with the UMAs' own statement and as such their age is assessed in line the medical evaluation. One another note, when UMAs' individual accounts correspond with the medical age assessment, it can indicate that the medical age assessment is decisive in the evaluation of the UMAs age and not necessarily what the UMA claims.

The inconsistency in age assessments is also made visible through Lønning's (2018) research where she found that the age assessments of UMAs tended to "yield (…) multiple and contradictory results, which reversed their classification numerous times between minors and adults" (p. 238). This illustrates how people can interpret age differently and that age in a Norwegian context is not something that is fixed, rather it is fluid (Lønning, 2018).

UNE1 told me about how those working within UNE tend to relate differently to how much emphasis they put on the medical age assessment when treating cases concerning age disputed UMAs:

> …we evaluate the age assessment, the medical, different. I see that it can be questioned and that the method isn't entirely sure…You have a gap from those who almost disregards the expert assessment [the medical age assessment], it's not that many of those…It is that one you often, what should I say, not necessarily base on, but it has in a way the biggest impact, the biggest impact in the holistic assessment.

Emphasizing the medical age assessment to make decisions regarding an UMA's case can be a matter of personal believes and perhaps the trust that the professional have in the medical age assessment. This can be seen as problematic because it illustrates how professionals have the power to choose whether or not they want to put emphasis on the medical age assessment. Accordingly, whether or not UMAs should be perceived as a child or not then depends on personal convictions that professionals have regarding the medical age assessment which can lead to unequal treatment of UMAs.

The Guardian had not experienced that the medical age assessment differed from the caseworker's evaluation:

> I have not encountered a case where the caseworker's assessment deviates from the medical age assessment…When they assess age they should do so based on a holistic evaluation of all information available in the case, and then in many cases, as a guardian, I have obtained statements from others, it can be teachers, it can be reception staff, and I've often done that in cases where I've known the results from the age assessment, right…'the age assessment clearly states obviously above 18' for instance, then try to get statements from others.

Age disputed UMAs are supposed to be assessed holistically; however, NOAS (2016) argue that this is not the case and thus the age assessment practices used in Norway violates the UN guidelines on age assessment. As the analysis has showed until now, professionals in the asylum system make non-medical assessments of UMAs. Nevertheless, the problem in question is the emphasis that the medical assessments get. As the Guardian had experienced, the medical age assessment normally corresponds with the caseworker's assessment. As such, this might mean

that the statements that other actors contribute with to find a UMAs' approximate age perhaps is ignored. The Guardian told me that they are always encouraged to contribute with their point of view regarding age to UDI, but that this never is taken into consideration and that no matter how many statements the Guardian collects concerning the UMA's age, the medical age assessment is mainly emphasized. One can argue that it might not be the case that what UMAs say regarding their age is very often believed. Munir (2017) suggests that UMAs are made into physical objects when subjected to age assessment. As such, notions about their background, their appearance and how they act becomes more decisive than what they actually have to say themselves.

6.3 Summary

Igesund (2015) has suggested that there exists a differential treatment of UMAs based on the rights that they are entitled to when being assessed to be above or below 16. I would argue that having an unknown age also creates a basis for differential treatment. When seen in relation to gender, ethnicity, nationality and, socio-economic background, the matter of an unknown age can be argued to reinforce differential treatment of UMAs. Moreover, the categorization of UMAs into different age groups can also become arbitrary because the perception of UMAs seem to be based on individual interpretations as well as personal believes because one might question the medical age assessment. Thus, the access to legal rights can become a matter of subjectivity embedded in constructions which is unfortunate

7. UMAs caught between discourses

In this final analysis chapter, I will present two discourses that have emerged through inquiry with the data material. Discourse can be understood as "representing the social constructions of language and knowledge, organising the ways in we think about the world and what we come to regard as appropriate or true" (Connolly, 1998, p. 11). As such, discourses contribute in creating a reality which can become decisive in how specific groups or individuals are constructed, as in this case, UMAs, and how they are treated accordingly. The discourses which will be used in this chapter have been called *the tenacious approach* and *the pliable approach*. The discourses can in many ways be seen as two opposites. However, it is not necessarily so that the what the participants say can only be situated within one or the other. As the analysis will show, some of the participants tend to move back and forth between the two discourses. This chapter will situate these constructions more systematically so that one can exemplify how they reveal themselves amongst the participants statements. The chapter will first make an account of the discourses in question. I will then present examples from the data material which show how the participants' statements can be situated within the different discourses, or in some cases, move between them. The chapter ends with summing up the discourses in a figure which utterly concretize *the tenacious* and *the pliable approach*.

7.1 An account of the tenacious approach and the pliable approach

In this section, I will describe the two discourses. It became apparent that the participants position themselves differently regarding UMAs and also in terms of practices related to UMAs. As such, it can be beneficial to show how the participants construct UMAs on the basis of their surroundings, their personal beliefs, and experiences with UMAs. Surroundings are in this context understood as formal workplace or organization. Personal beliefs are connected to the ways in which own perceptions are used to explain UMAs' behavior and motives. Last, personal experiences can be exemplified through how previous encounters with UMAs can contribute in positioning UMAs within different constructions.

The tenacious approach can be seen to constitute a rigid approach when speaking of UMAs. Here, the focus often lies upon how social systems are affected by UMAs, such as the Norwegian society, the asylum system, and not at the individual itself. The approach perceives the medical age assessment as the most factual and objective tool that one has concerning assessing age and can be decisive in decisions regarding age (UDI, 2017a). The medical age

assessment, although being insecure, is used to legitimate rejections of asylum, temporary residence permits and credibility amongst UMAs. Within this discourse, UMAs are often seen as strategic, who position themselves differently to gain protection (see Stretmo, 2010). The ways in which UMAs act can also be seen as suspicious. This has been illustrated throughout the analysis where some participants have shared reflections about UMAs which put on an act or make accounts regarding their age which does not correspond with perceiving's about their backgrounds. Moreover, UMAs tend to be viewed as a homogenous group.

The pliable approach is more flexible concerning UMAs. Instead of having a focus on how systems might be affected by UMAs, it focuses on the individual UMAs. It relates to how UMAs might be affected by the systems they move within. There is skepticism towards the medical age assessment because it has been contested to be unscientific, and also unsafe. Moreover, the rationale for the use of medical age assessments is seen to build upon as a distrust towards UMAs. Therefore, the focus is more connected to listening to UMAs' accounts instead of using evidential means. UMAs are perceived as vulnerable and thus in need of protection. One seeks to find explanations for UMAs' actions which is believed to be a matter of desperation rather than being calculated. There is also a focus on giving UMAs the benefit of the doubt, where one wishes to understand underlying reasons for why UMAs might lie, or that notions about UMAs might come from ideas from the global North which are not applicable to UMAs. This approach resonates with what Stretmo (2010 building on Jenks, 1995) refer to as *det traumatiserade barnen* (the traumatized child) where UMAs are depicted as innocent and exposed.

7.2 Positioning UMAs

This section will focus on how perspectives on UMAs' actions and knowledge might construct them as strategists. This will be connected to the discourses presented above and show how the participants' statements can be situated differently based on their perceptions of UMAs' actions. UMAs displaying themselves as their true selves might not be fortunate because they risk being misjudged if they appear as resourceful and independent actors. As shown in the previous two chapters, being an Afghan male can make it especially difficult to be seen as an individual within the asylum system because factors such as an unknown age, ethnicity, socio-economic background, and gender tend to put UMAs within certain constructions. As such, it might be necessary for UMAs to make use of strategies. Stretmo (2010) has argued that there is a construction present within the Norwegian and Swedish immigration authorities – *den*

strategiskt underåriga (the strategic minor). Because UMAs are entitled to special rights, it is suggested that some asylum seekers claim to be younger than they actually are. In the following, I will present different accounts of how UMAs are perceived when they make use of what I see as 'strategies' to gain protection.

7.2.1 Perspectives on the lying UMA

UMAs are a group who often have experienced loss, trauma, separation, and despair (Cemlyn and Nye, 2012). However, despite having faced difficult and sometimes extreme situations, UMAs show a great deal of resilience and ability to cope (see Carlson, Cacciatore and Klimek, 2012). Lønning (2018) found that UMs tended to register themselves as adults upon arrival in Greece so that they would avoid protective custody and could continue their journeys. If being assessed to be an UM, and thus taken into protecting custody, UMs risked being separated from their peer group. Peer groups function as a protective mechanism and a supportive structure (Lønning, 2018). This shows that there is some rationale behind acting younger or older based on specific contexts, or putting forward a specific age.

The Guardian was aware that some UMAs might lie. However, the Guardian connected this to the desperation that UMAs may experience when entering a second or third country:

> I have contact with some of those who have run away, and they tell me that 'now I am in France and here I've said that I'm 20 years'. So, I understand that if it's so easy for the applicant to say that he's 20 in another country in Europe, it might be that it has been easy for him to say 'yes I'm 16' when he comes to Norway because he has been told so by somebody. So, I understand that it's easy to lie about age. If they can lie in France, they can also have lied here too. At the same time, I think that it's easier and you're more desperate when you come to country number 2 or country number 3 than it was when you came to Norway when you thought you would get a residence permit because the smuggler had said so.

In the account that the Guardian made, UMAs were not seen as dishonest in the sense that they have questionable motives, but rather, their actions can be seen as a strategy to gain protection. The participant explained how many of the UMAs who he had been a guardian for had run away from Norway. Disappearances are widespread amongst those who have received temporary residence permits (Sønsterudbråten, Tyldum and Raundalen, 2018). As such, when the Guardian speaks about UMAs who lie, there is a no calculated rationale to this. Instead, the

Guardian expresses understanding and empathy, perceiving UMAs' actions as a result of desperation. Perceiving UMAs' actions as desperate say something about where the focus lies. By showing understanding, the focus is on the individual and what systems, such as the asylum system, can do to people seeking asylum. The system might put UMAs in such a position that they need to lie because smugglers have told them that they would get residency, while this might not be the case. These accounts can place the Guardians' statement within *the pliable approach* because it is apparent that the views on UMAs do not stem from an understanding of UMAs as calculated strategists, instead, UMAs are perceived as someone in need. During the interview, the Guardian suggested that the practice that one has in Norway might send people out on a new flight. As such, the system can be seen to create more refugees which place them in desperate situations leading to desperate measures.

The next excerpt suggests that it is more important to safeguard those who seek for protection than being occupied with revealing lies:

> Above or below 18 years is a magical border…if you are assessed and get an age which makes you older than you actually are, then there is a child being sent to great uncertainty. And the consequences of assessing a child wrong, and generally they are assessed to be older than they say they are, are so significant that we have to deal with [the fact] that someone might lie about age…because that's how we otherwise think in the legal system. If you cannot prove that someone has done anything wrong, you're not convicted.
>
> – Researcher

This excerpt shows that the participant has more focus on the individual regarding consequences that may occur if a person is wrongly assessed. It also illustrates the principle of the benefit of the doubt which shall privilege UMAs. The participant acknowledges that some might lie. However, it can be suggested that having too much focus on that some put forward untruthful accounts may have consequences in its results. This situates what the Researcher says within *the pliable approach* because the focus is more oriented on the consequences that unrightfully treatment can have on the person in question. Being assessed to be over 18 is connected to being returned to an endangered future which has severe outcomes. Moreover, suggesting that most UMAs are assessed to be over 18, can be seen as a critique towards the system when seen in relation to what the participant says about that some lies. It can indicate that the researcher believes that most UMAs are credible in their accounts; however, they might

not be believed when they justify for their age to the Norwegian immigration authorities. Accordingly, the system can create a group of 'adults' which in fact are minors.

Presenting different ages in different countries can also be seen as a form of strategy. UMAs can make use of their knowledge about specific countries so that they present themselves in a way that makes it easier to gain protection. This is a belief emphasized by UNE1:

> We must not be blind to that someone says that they're minors because it will pay off. I think that what our director [said], she was in Italy a couple of months ago, there they don't have a problem [with unaccompanied minors], they almost didn't have unaccompanied minors, most likely because the rules are different there, it does not pay off to be an unaccompanied minor.

The participant argues that because of specific regulations in some countries, it might not be advantageous to be a minor. Regarding strategies, this can be discussed in at least three manners. Firstly, as previously suggested, if one has knowledge regarding policies and regulations, one might not choose to seek asylum in that specific country because the access to protection can be hard to accomplish. In a Norwegian context, more rigid legislations have resulted in an enormous decrease in UMAs who seek protection. In 2015, 5480 UMAs applied for asylum in Norway, while in 2017, 184 applied. Out of these, 46 got a residence permit (Sønsterudbråten, Tyldum and Raundalen, 2018). Secondly, the legislation might be perceived as creating UMAs, as the gap between entitled rights are so big that more people find it advantageous to be, and worth trying to become, a legal minor. Thirdly, the legislations protecting minors might also make it more attractive for minors to flee to Norway and seek asylum there, rather than in countries with less protection. Legislations aimed at reducing the influx of unjustified asylum seekers can thus create new challenges for immigration authorities. As UMAs might have encountered different protective regimes throughout their journeys, being faced with arbitrary categorizations as children in need to be protected by law while simultaneously seen as irregular migrants in need of control (Lønning, 2018), these differential treatments can make UMAs more aware of how it is advantageous to present oneself to immigration authorities.

Moreover, UNE1 suggests that one 'must not be blind to that someone say that they're minors because it will pay off'. This illustrates a suspiciousness towards UMAs which situates what the participant says within *the tenacious approach*. Here, the UMA is perceived as a calculated

strategist, not as proposing the right age or the wrong age simply out of being misinformed by his family, but rather as one who only put forward a lower age to access rights entitled to those below 18. This corresponds with Stretmo (2010) and her accounts of 'the strategic minor[43]'. Accordingly, UMAs can affect asylum systems because the ways they are perceived can result in adjustments and new legislations aimed at this group, for instance, temporary resident permits.

The participants who work within the asylum system suggest that they do not only experience that applicants present themselves as younger than they necessarily are, but also older.

> I have my thoughts when I sit there with humans in front of me, and I also know that Eritreans…previously they could lie themselves older because they believe that they will be able to work sooner because they want family reunion…send money home and different things. For them there is no reason to lie about their age because they all get a residence permit.
>
> – PU1

Being Eritrean, and especially a minor, often gives a reason for protection due to the country's regime regarding military service (UDI, 2017e). One would, therefore, presume that UMAs from Eritrea would not lie, although, PU1 tells that some of them actually do lie. Presenting an older age is seen as a way of accessing family reunion and other resources more quickly. This suggests how age might be perceived as more flexible in the encounter with rigid legal immigration systems, as a tool used strategically to achieve something among asylum seekers. As such, being flexible regarding the age one put forward can be seen as a necessity to access rights which due to a rigid system is less accessible for some groups, for instance, based on nationality.

The phrase 'for them there is no reason to lie because they all get residence' suggests that it might be necessary for some nationalities to lie. It indicates that they would lie if necessary, and the reason why they do not is that it is not beneficial. This reveals a negative attitude and a general distrust in the UMAs. The distrust that asylum seekers encounter within the asylum system have in the previous chapter been exemplified through the ways in which the participants perceive UMAs' testimonies of age and notions regarding the UMAs' (especially

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[43] See chapter six.

Afghans) cultural background. Moreover, it can illustrate how the participant believes that someone lies and that there are ulterior motives behind this. Accordingly, the participant's statement can be situated within *the tenacious approach* because it perceives UMAs as strategists, lying in order to engage in work and receive family reunification.

7.2.2 The knowledgeable UMA and the ignorant UMA

Professionals working within the asylum system relate to Landinfo's information about the specific countries that asylum seekers originate from. Presenting knowledge or appearing as ignorant can be argued to be crucial in the asylum process. As previously suggested in the analysis, it seems that UMAs who come from specific countries are not supposed to have knowledge about their age. However, if their knowledge is looked upon as correct, as suggested in the previous chapter, their socio-economic background matters.

The next excerpt exemplifies how BFE1 perceives Afghans who know their own age, and thus deviates from the norm that Afghans are supposed to be ignorant concerning age:

> We know that it's not very common to know when one is born in Afghanistan. Surprisingly many are very determined on when they [are] born, and they want to explain that they have celebrated birthdays, and then I think, 'well yeah but it's not a culture in Afghanistan for celebrating birthdays'.

The excerpt suggests that when Afghans display knowledge about their age, it can become a question of credibility. This might indicate that one should present the 'right answers', and not necessarily the ones which are true. As argued by BFE1: '[when] they are ignorant concerning their own age, it is more credible and more understandable'. Thus, being ignorant in terms of one's age can become a way to be perceived as more trustworthy because it fits within the professional's understanding of cultural practices in Afghanistan. As such, it can suggest that the information that professionals within the asylum system relate to (e.g., Landinfo) builds upon notions about a homogenous Afghan culture with uniform practices, ignoring potential cultural variations between urban and rural, poor and rich, tribes, educated and uneducated, class, and so forth. The excerpt shows how the participant relates to the UMAs as the 'knowing UMA'. The element of knowledge is perceived as something which is used by UMAs on the basis of information gained from others, and not something that they have brought with them from their country of origin:

> That's like a pity …that there are rumors in the in the asylum environments regarding what they
> have to say, which make them say things that…perhaps weakens their credibility in term of their
> explanation about own age…
>
> − BFE1

BFE1 reasons that this knowledge is a result of rumors among asylum seekers preparing UMAs on what they need to say when they speak about age. Thus, being knowledgeable might weaken their creditability. This suggests that the professional's perceptions of cultures in a specific country become more deceive than the testimonies of UMAs. As such, what the participant says can be situated within *the tenacious approach* because the UMA is perceived as someone who makes accounts that are not credible, and thus not true. For instance, the ideas that the participant have about culture in the UMA's country of origin can be interpreted as evidence which is objective, while UMAs own testimonies become something that one should be suspicious towards as asylum seekers are believed to discuss strategies, and consciously calculate which one suits the most.

The ways in which the UMAs are regarded based on their origin might also be favorable to them:

> …they don't know how old they are, or at least they say that they don't know and that might be
> correct. At least Afghans, they don't have focus on birthdays…when you are born, so that they
> often come without any documents. And in the worst case they might have an asylum
> explanation that we don't believe. And then in most cases one might say that their identity hasn't
> been substantiated when you don't have documentation on anything. But at the same time, we
> have to take into consideration that Afghans don't have, they can get a passport, but we don't
> trust the passports…they are kind of in a somewhat weird situation.
>
> − UNE1

The participant suggests that UMAs are in a somewhat strange situation because they come from a culture where there is not much focus on chronological age, nor is one obliged to have formal documentation. However, this is a requirement when seeking asylum in Norway, and thus their identity cannot be substantiated. It has been suggested several times throughout this analysis that an UMA's country of origin, especially in the case of being Afghan, may become disadvantageous in the Norwegian asylum system. Nevertheless, this excerpt suggests that

UMAs' origin can also be advantageous because it might give them the benefit of the doubt when they put forward an age or choose to sustain from it. This shows the complexity that UMAs have to relate to when their age is assessed as well as how professionals might construct them. The statement that UNE1 makes corresponds with *the pliable approach* because it shows flexibility towards UMAs on the basis of their origin. On another note, it was suggested earlier in this chapter that what UNE1 says is situated within *the tenacious approach* which shows that one can *move between different construction*s of UMAs.

The next part of this chapter will turn its focus towards perspectives on age assessments and how the participants argue differently regarding its value and the consequences that using age assessments might cause.

7.3 Positioning the participants' statements based on perspectives on age assessment

Perspectives on the medical age assessment were explored in the previous chapter where it was connected to an inconsistent practice. In this section, I will examine how views on age assessment can position what the participants say within *the tenacious* or *the pliable approach*.

It is suggested that conducting age assessments is a means which favors the immigration authorities as well as the applicants themselves (UDI, 2017b). However, doing age assessments have been argued to challenge ethical and moral principles based on the risk of violating a person's autonomy, safeguard people's dignity, in addition to protect the interests of a vulnerable group (Graff et al., 2006). Although various professionals and scholars have recognized this, PU1 emphasized the importance of having an age assessment when deciding upon UMAs' age:

> People didn't think it was easy when starting to assess age, it was a lot of resistance…they were afraid that it should be given too much weight. But we are obliged to do it and I have the opinion that we need do it…because I've seen the other side of how it was before.

PU1 had experienced encounters with UMAs before and after the National Police Immigration Service started assessing age. During the interview, the participant talked about the difficulties of not having the opportunity to assess the age of people who claimed to be minors and that this resulted in sending adults to reception centers for minors, which was seen as very unfortunate. This was also expressed by the Municipality employee during the interview, stating that it is

unfortunate that young girls had to share the same facilities with older men. Therefore, being able to assess age is something that is a necessity because it can be helpful in separating those who are obviously adults from children. Based on this, one can recognize a focus on both the individual in terms of safeguarding, as well as seeing a need to have evidence-based means to establish a child from an adult. It, therefore, shows how the participant's statement is both *the tenacious* and *the pliable approach*.

By having experience with working in a reception center for UMAs, the Municipality employee shared some reflections on how UMAs experiences that their age was disputed:

> When some had been to the age assessment and returned…the answer could be something totally different than the information they had given themselves…'have they doubted what I said?'…'what am I supposed to think about the doubt that arise about what I have said or what my mother has said, or what I know'. And we also got those who said, 'No but I have documentation'. They [the immigration authorities] don't find it good enough…the age assessment shows something totally different, one or two years difference. Then it becomes clear that there is a doubt about the youth and these assessments, if they actually have any value. We noticed these things in the reception centers.

What the Municipality employee explains in this excerpt shows that the use of medical age assessment can be harmful towards the UMAs that are subjected to them. As indicated earlier in the analysis, it suggests that the medical age assessments become a means based on little or no trust in the UMAs' testimonies regarding age. The participant questions the value of the assessment when they do not correspond with what the UMAs tell. As such, there is focus on the individual accounts instead of evidence-based means. This situates the Municipality employee within *the pliable approach*. It is seen as unfavorable that conducting the medical age assessment makes UMAs question themselves as well as their mothers. On another note, as referred to above, the Municipality employee also saw it as problematic not having medical age assessments because it was seen as unfortunate that adult men shared accommodations with young girls. This illustrates an ambivalence towards the medical age assessment which can show how the Municipality employee's statement move between the two discourses.

As previously mentioned, the medical age assessment is by some seen as the most objective tool one has to assess age:

If one knows exactly when one is born one might question why you're so sure that you're 17 and not 18, right, that's a question that we ask them 'how do you know when you're born?' 'it was told to me before I left, it's in [my] Koran' right. And in many of the cases they don't put forward a *tazkera*, but again the tazkera does not have validity, it can easily be forged…they cannot document their identity, they can at best substantiate it, because the *tazkera* and passport has low validity the age assessment becomes all the more important, it is perhaps the only objective thing we have[44].

– UNE 2

This excerpt can be used to illustrate how it is more important to have objective tools to assess age than basing evolutions on UMAs' testimonies or the identity documents that UMAs might have. The statement can be situated within *the tenacious approach* because the focus is on using evidential means, such as the medical age assessment which is objective, to establish UMAs' approximate age. Moreover, based on the account that UNE2 makes, one might ask why UMAs are asked about their age if their testimonies regularly are questioned, and their identity documents are invalid. Accordingly, it seems that there is a conception of UMAs as untrustworthy because their testimonies or how they act frequently appears to be disputed.

7.4 "What will the punishment be for doing this job?"

The heading of this section is a quote from PU1. It indicates how it might be difficult to conduct the tasks which are related to the assessment of age. Some of the participants working within the asylum system had reflections upon how it sometimes feels to undertake these assignments. This section will contribute with aspects based on two of the participants' narratives relating to how they speak about their work tasks. By doing this, I propose that there is a complexity attached to their role connected to feelings and awareness of the consequences their evaluations may have for those seeking asylum. According to Eggebø (2012), professionals within the Norwegian immigration authorities "negotiate two somewhat different ethical principles where the foundation for ethical conduct is either emotional or reason" (p. 301). This reasoning became evident through the interview with BFE1 where it was stated that:

They expose their soul and inner thoughts and horrible experiences to a stranger. So, one feels an incredible amount of responsibility towards that person. At the same time, one has to follow

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[44] This quote has been analyzed previously, however, it will be looked upon in a different way in this context.

laws and legislations and practice, so everyone is treated equally. You can't let your empathy towards a person [affect]…because then it becomes unfair for others [applicant]. As long as you're conscious about the two, the 'I' and the 'bureaucrat' in a way, then it's easier.

The statement that BFE1 makes builds upon recognizing applicants' humanity, being vulnerable people who share their most inner thoughts and experiences. Furthermore, the participant feels responsible towards them. This perspective corresponds well with *the pliable approach*. However, because one needs to relate to statutory guidelines when performing one's job, the focus is turned away from the individual because all should be treated in the same manner. A way to do this is to separate personal feelings from the bureaucratic being, so the job is easier to conduct. Accordingly, it suggests that perhaps one cannot see the individual within the asylum system. Rather, the focus should be on the system making sure that it is just. As such, those working within the asylum system have to act in line with *the tenacious approach*, avoiding the risk of differential treatment. Moreover, one can argue that the emotional professional, which recognize the vulnerable individual in cases they are treating, has to give room for the more rational person who not necessarily acts on emotions, but instead relates to rules and legislations which they are obliged to follow.

Being ambiguous towards asylum seekers can be connected to how professionals position themselves and reflect upon how their role when treating cases:

One can become very tired and like 'pfh' [sound]. Now I've heard the umpteenth[45] case about the exact same. But one thinks that the next person, all have their life stories, everyone has their story to tell you, and the next one might tell the truth and have a real need [for protection], so it's about…having that inner dialogue.

– PU1

What PU1 says suggests an ambivalence towards the group of people one is registering as asylum seekers and that one needs to have awareness so that one does not become "tired or cynical" (PU1). As such, the participant reckons an importance of meeting each applicant with an open mind and with a clean slate. The statement is individual oriented because the focus is on the stories that each applicant shares, and thus *the pliable approach* becomes visible. However, there is also a focus on suspicion as the account shows that most testimonies are seen

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[45] Umpteenth refers to a large number of repeatedly occurring similar situations.

as lies. When applicants have similar testimonies, this is seen as suspicious, and thus the statement falls under *the tenacious approach*. Acknowledging that everyone has a story to share, and that story deserves to be heard because there might be a real need for protection, while at the same time one encounters lies which can make the professional tired, the statement thus has features corresponding with both the discourses. This displays a complexity where professionals have to navigate between trust and lies while finding asylum truths (see Jubany, 2011).

7.5 Summing up the tenacious and the pliable approach

The last section of this chapter sums up the two discourses in a systematic way, as illustrated in figure 4. The analysis reveals that the participants emphasize different things when reflecting upon UMAs' testimonies and age assessments. Some speak of strategists which are looked upon as calculated when UMAs put forward their age. Others stress UMAs vulnerability who should have their testimonies recognized so that they can receive proper protection. Moreover, the participants report different views regarding the age assessments practice. In some cases, the medical age assessment is seen as a necessity because it is the most objective tool one has to assess age. In other cases, practices regarding age assessment are rejected on the basis of the implications it might have for UMAs.

The two previous chapters illustrate that those working within the asylum system can be more skeptical towards UMAs. This might be a combination of prior experience, work training, work morale, and because professionals within the asylum system 'cannot afford' to think otherwise because it can conflict with the regulations that they relate to while performing their job. Moreover, not having face-to-face encounters with UMAs may affect the way this group is perceived. As illustrated in the first analysis chapter, encountering UMAs who are small in their size and thus regarded as more vulnerable, can create another construction of UMAs which works for their benefit. In these cases, one does not need to relate to questions regarding trust. Eggebø (2012) found in her studies that "face-to-face contact [with asylum seekers] may give an intuitive feeling about a case" (p. 308), although regulations should be decisive in determining a case. This positions professionals between personal perceptions and statutory regulations which they are obliged to follow. The participants who are not employed in the asylum system relate differently to behavior and statements from UMAs. For instance, if UMAs lie, there is a valid reason for this which refers to desperation regarding protection. Moreover,

long-term consequences for the young asylum seeker as a result of not being believed is much more emphasized by the participants that do not work within the asylum system.

Figure 4: Illustration of what identifies the tenacious and pliable approach

	THE TENACIOUS APPROACH	THE PLIABLE APPROACH
VIEWS ON UMAS	UMAs as strategists Actions provoked by calculation Faith in official information on country profiles	UMAs as vulnerable Actions provoked by desparation Giving UMAs the benefit of the doubt
VIEWS ON PRACTICES RELATED TO UMAS	Focus on systems Positive to medical age assessment Evidential means to establish approximate age	Focus on the individual Skeptical to medical age assessment Faith in UMAs testimonies

Accordingly, it exists, at least, two very different ways of perceiving UMAs. The different ways of viewing UMAs can create a gap between actors who have relations with UMAs. This might be unfortunate because it can hinder cooperation between actors who can find more advantageous solutions for age-disputed UMAs.

8. Conclusion

In the existing body of academic literature, UMAs tend to be described by having ambiguous and versatile identities. One of the significant factors which contribute to the discrepancy towards their identity is first and foremost the lack of a known identity, often because of missing or invalid documentation. Having an undocumented identity within societal structures which have institutionalized the principle of chronological age, can be argued to be a challenge for those having an undocumented identity but also for those who encounter people with an undocumented identity. Moreover, undocumented UMAs are also situated within a sensitive politicized field where measures to reduce asylum influx in its consequence can result in refusing children their inherent rights, sending them to insecure futures. The phenomenon of being an undocumented UMA does not only reveal itself through difficulties connected to legal rights and services. It also becomes visible in terms of having to categorize this group as either children or adults. However, as has been shown throughout this thesis, this is a complicated task to complete when UMAs sometimes have an appearance and behavior which in a Western context is perceived as adult-like or symbolize adulthood.

This last chapter will highlight the overall findings of the analysis. Through three analysis chapters, I have shed light on practices and understandings which intersect with age. It has become apparent through these chapters that UMAs are caught between constructions of childhood and adulthood, as they are seen to belong within childhood or adulthood on the basis of other peoples' interpretations of their physical appearance, their behavior, characteristics, and their backgrounds. Thus, one can argue that there is little or no room for UMAs voices when their age is disputed. This concluding chapter will point to the main findings, but also make an extensive discussion of the overall findings. Additionally, I will also propose policy recommendations for relevant actors working on this specific topic and recommendations for further research.

8.1 Summarizing findings

The starting point in this thesis was to explore how interpretations of age make themselves visible in the context of age-disputed UMAs. The topic has been approached on the basis of interviews with relevant actors and analyzed by using theoretical perspectives and concepts which corresponds with the thesis topic. I would propose that the findings in the first analysis chapter can be just as relevant within the framework of the second analysis chapter, and *vice*

versa. Perceptions of bodily practices, such as the acting body, does also constitute elements of distrust which was discussed in the second analysis chapter. Moreover, the characteristics that were analyzed in the first and second analysis chapter intersect and can, accordingly, not be separate from each other. There are complex mechanisms which partake in the constructions of UMAs based on their unknown age, and therefore, one cannot exclude the intersections of differing characteristics.

It seems that there is a hegemonic understanding of children and childhood, and thus age, amongst the participants. However, these understandings play out differently depending on the participant's reasoning. In some cases, childhood is seemingly lacking due to elements that do not belong in (a Western) childhood. In other, this understanding unfolds by categorizing individuals on the basis of notions which corresponds with Westernized ideas about life stages. Nevertheless, hegemonic perceptions of age become challenged when UMAs hold characteristics which do not correlate with one another. Thus, social age plays a significant role when UMAs age is understood and constructed as their behavior seem to deviate from Westernized cultural norms and expectations that one often has towards them, implying that age, as childhood and adulthood, is a social construction.

A general observation of the analysis is that there is not much space for UMAs' voices. This is especially the case within the asylum system. Interpretations of UMAs appearance, behavior, and testimonies seem to be more decisive regarding their age than what they actually say themselves. Although UMAs have a right to be heard, this seems to be disregarded. Instead, constructed knowledge and suspicion is prevalent.

8.1.1 The inappropriate 'child'

Throughout this thesis, it has been suggested on several occasions that UMAs' who have characteristics that resemble an adult are more likely to be assessed to be adults than children. One can argue that the views that are presented in the analysis stem from Western ideas on how children are supposed to look and act and that UMAs should have a culturally appropriate body. Although there is an awareness that people can develop differently based on their origin and circumstances, this seems to be somewhat ignored by some. When assessments of age are made, physical appearance can become decisive regarding the age an UMA is assessed to be. The rationale behind these types of assessment is that some bodies do not resemble the bodies of children or youth and thus they cannot be children or youth. As such, chronology is made

factual. Using hegemonic understandings of appearance can be argued to be unfortunate because it does not necessarily say something about a person's age *per se*. This might especially be the case for people who find themselves in a life stage where it is normal that change rapidly happens, such as during youth. As such, one can suggest that childhood bodies are seen as something universal and that there is a norm on how a child or a youth is supposed to look.

UMAs' physical characteristics can also become decisive concerning if one is perceived to be vulnerable. As shown in the analysis, UMAs having an appearance which is a reminder of childhood is seen to be more vulnerable and thus might access more extensive rights and protection. However, I would argue that this is unfortunate because it can exclude people who have other biological dispositions from rights and protection. Moreover, one can suggest that how one perceives other people is a matter of subjectivity. How UMAs' vulnerability is seen therefore becomes a matter of the professionals understanding of vulnerability where other significant circumstances are left out of the evaluation.

The ways in which UMAs' bodies are interpreted based on how they behave was understood differently by the participants. By some, the way UMAs use their bodies during asylum interviews is seen as an act. Expressions made through UMAs' bodies are not seen as something natural which is a consequence of the situation, as argued by another participant. It was suggested in the analysis that this way of viewing UMAs' bodily practices are connected to how an adult man is supposed to sit and thus it illustrates cultural norms on how people in specific age ranges are supposed to act. This categorization of behavior can be seen as problematic because it builds upon stereotypical assumptions regarding the correlations between chronological age and behavior, and thus this becomes decisive in establishing that some are children while others are adults.

The analysis also displayed how maturity and development of maturity is perceived. Activities which UMAs might have been a part of in their country of origin was seen as something belonging outside of childhood. These activities were connected to the paradox of UMAs being perceived as either underdeveloped or too mature. Based on this, it seems like UMAs are seen as damaged in some ways not having developed in the chronological way that one expects. Moreover, because childhood is understood as something universal, UMAs' childhoods and what it has contained, is depreciated in favor of a Western childhood which should include play, schooling, and be work-free. Schooling was especially attached to normal development which

indicates that if one is to develop in accordance with the norm, one needs to attend proper schooling.

Accordingly, the main factors that are present when age-disputed UMAs' age is understood are physical characteristics, interpretations of behavior, and perceptions of maturity. This can particularly be argued regarding maturity because Western hegemonic understandings of children and childhood are used to claim that UMAs might lack a childhood and thus have not had the opportunity to be a child. Moreover, when age assessments are made, it seems like an UMA needs to have characteristics which complement each other such as looking small and not coming off as to mature in the way one presents oneself. If these characteristics differ, professionals might become suspicious. As such, understandings of age are both complex and context-specific.

8.1.2 The 'correct' way to be an UMA

The analysis of this study has also looked at what constitutes trust and distrust towards UMAs when their age is disputed. It became evident through the analysis that UMAs' characteristics and background can become both favorable and unfavorable to them on the basis of other peoples' notions. Features that UMAs have tended to intersect with one another creating circumstances which can be argued to result in differential treatment.

It was stressed in the second analysis chapter that stereotypical assumptions of gendered vulnerability creates a mechanism which can result in marginalization of a specific group, namely male UMAs. I would say that this is unfavorable because one might end up excluding a group of people from holding particular characteristics due to their gender. It can also create constructions of a group, where categories that intersect with unaccompanied minor asylum seeker, such as nationality and gender (e.g., Afghan male), in addition to having 'weak' grounds for seeking asylum, creates a categorization of UMAs as a group which is simplified (Stretmo, 2010). A consequence of this can be that access to rights and protection might become harder to accomplish when notions based on simplified gender stereotypes are present in practices.

The ethnic group which was most referred to in this study are Afghans. The analysis illustrated how ethnicity together with socio-economic background can become crucial regarding trust and distrust. It was suggested that having a socio-economic background which has laid the basis for accumulating cultural capital can be used, but also perceived, in an expedient way within the

asylum system. UMAs who appear to be credible have often attended 'proper' school and thus one is able to present oneself in a manner that corresponds with the professional's ideas. It, therefore, becomes legitimate to have knowledge about own age. Nevertheless, because Afghan UMAs are not supposed to know their own age, when they do, this is seen as suspicious amongst professionals, and thus their testimonies are not seen as credible. This illustrates a differential treatment based on ethnicity and socio-economic background which makes it harder to be successful within the asylum system based on dispositions and background. This can be criticized because it results in that some groups' testimonies might not be acknowledged due to predetermined assumptions about their backgrounds and how one on the basis of this ought to present oneself and make personal accounts.

Mistrust in testimonies was problematized in the analysis. It was suggested that being faced with suspicion can result in alienating a group of people which is unfortunate for the UMAs themselves, but also for the immigration authorities and the society as a whole. It might lead to that UMAs does not want to share vital information with professionals working in the asylum system. This is unfavorable because it can harm the UMA in their general case as well as in later stages. If an UMA receives a permanent residents permit, being used to mistrust professionals can have implications. For example, it can affect relationships with persons and institutions that the UMA will have relations to when being settled in Norway.

The analysis showed ambiguity and discrepancies regarding the medical age assessment. Some stressed that this assessment builds upon a general suspicion towards UMAs, while others suggested that one needs to have objective tools when estimating age. I would also argue that the latter, often used as evidence which is emphasized, can be merely viewed as objective. Before UMAs undergo the medical age assessment, they are assessed by professionals who, as shown in the analysis, make subjective evaluations stemming from Western ideas on children and childhood. Thus, those who are subjected to medical age assessment are first assessed on the basis of subjective assumptions which decides if the UMA in question should go through with the medical age assessment or not. Moreover, the analysis illustrated that there are inconsistencies when UMAs are assessed on the basis of physical appearance and perceived behavior. Throughout the process, the UMA can end up with differing results which make the person in question move between being legally defined as an adult or a child. This is not a fortunate situation for young people who often have experienced traumatizing events.

I would argue that if UMAs are to be seen as credible asylum seekers, they need to be 'correct' in terms of appearance and behavior. However, the intersections of their gender, their ethnicity, and their socio-economic background can prevent this. These characteristics can create prefixed ideas which exclude individual differences so that their access to rights and protection become minimized.

8.1.3 Prevalent discourses

In the last analytical chapter, I systematized the participants statements within two discourses. The purpose behind this was to show more concretely how UMAs are constructed, and often constructed differently. The participants in this project emphasize different things when making statements about UMAs. For instance, the rationale behind what was seen as strategies differed. Within *the tenacious approach*, strategies were perceived as calculated, while in *the pliable* approach, strategies were instead seen as something that UMAs need to do to gain protection. I suggested that these two different discourses can be problematic. When it exists two so very different views on UMAs, there might be a risk of creating a gap which is unfavorable for UMAs. I would argue that collaboration is paramour because then different actors can gain more understanding of the rationale behind the differing perceptions of UMAs.

8.2 Recommendations on policies and further research

There are no easy answers on how one should assess UMAs unknow age. However, as age assessment is a practice which is part of formal institutions in Norway, I see it as advantageous to provide some recommendations that can contribute in creating more awareness based on the results in this thesis. Moreover, as this is a field, especially within a Norwegian context, that is somewhat lacking regarding research, I will also make recommendations for further research.

8.2.1 Policy recommendations

Distinguishing between above or below 18 concerning age-disputed UMAs can be stressed to be undesirable. One can argue that being vulnerable is not something that is age-related. UMAs might be just as vulnerable and at risk of danger the day after they turn 18 as the day before. Thus, I see it at advantageous to use other ways to distinguish UMAs in need of protection than through estimations of chronological age. Many UMAs who receive temporary resident permits are returned to their country of origin after they turn 18, where new legislations have opened up for that UMAs do not need a network to return to. Statistics show that UMAs who receive temporary resident permits can end up disappearing from reception centers or hurting

themselves. These are severe consequences, and thus the need for other measures should be taken into consideration. Norwegian social services use *Ettervern* (aftercare) for young people between 18 to 23 years as it is recognized that although a person turns 18, he or she still needs measures concerning care. *Ettervern* is a means to preserve young people in the transitional phase between childhood and adulthood when parental care is missing. In some instances, this measure is used for UMAs who have received permanent resident permits in Norway. However, I also see this as a beneficial solution for UMAs who risk being returned. As age assessments are unsafe and cannot find a person's exact age, extending the age limit for returns, where *Ettervern* is offered so that the person in question can be more prepared for the future, can be argued to be advantageous, although one legally is perceived as an adult in Norway when turning 18.

It is also paramount to listen to UMAs' own testimonies about their age. Using constructed knowledge and making assessments based on perceptions stemming from a Western context, can be argued to be insignificant because it does not extensively take into consideration UMAs' backgrounds. As UMAs have the right to be heard in their cases, embedded in the Immigration Act and the CRC, it is unfortunate when their testimonies are looked upon as untruthful. Therefore, I would recommend professionals interviewing UMAs to put more emphasize on their accounts rather than prefixed ideas and skepticism related to this specific group as it seems like interviewing UMAs concerns finding untrue answers rather than finding the truth.

Although stated otherwise, age-assessments seem to be based on subjective understandings of age. Therefore, it needs to be more awareness amongst professionals working within the asylum system on what they emphasize when assessing age. Because there seem to be inconsistencies, UMAs risk being labeled as a child or an adult on the basis of subjective reckonings. This can create insecure situations for UMAs, affecting their well-being.

Further collaboration between actors and organizations working with matters concerning age-disputed UMAs can be beneficial. I see it as disadvantageous that actors within and actors outside the asylum system holds different standpoints towards one another based on lacking knowledge about each other's rationale behind practices. Moreover, as UMAs relate to actors both within the asylum system and those working outside, being faced with differing understandings of themselves might result in insecurity and doubt towards formal institutions and professionals which interact with this particular group. As this group find themselves in a

vulnerable situation, where their future prospects sometimes are unsure, a polarization between actors working with age-disputed UMAs can hinder more expedient ways of understanding this group. Thus, I would suggest that it is fruitful to have further dialogue between different collaborators so that one can make solutions which are beneficial for UMAs. By having interdisciplinary networks where one meet and openly discuss practices and understandings regarding age-disputed UMAs, one can establish new ways of treating and perceiving UMAs which is more beneficial for them. UMAs can also be invited in to share their experiences from the trajectory through the asylum system to gain their perspectives which is valuable.

8.2.2 Further research

Age-disputed UMAs and age assessment is a topic that needs to be further researched. Because this is a limited study with few participants, it would be advantageous to make further inquiry into age assessment practices which explores how professionals make use of their own understandings of age when making assessments, for instance through participant observation. As such, one can gain more knowledge about what becomes decisive, except the medical age assessment, when age is disputed.

I would also argue that it is of great significance to explore UMAs knowledge and understanding regarding their own age. Including UMAs' voices on policies, practices, and research aimed at them heightens the understanding of this specific group. By conducting extensive studies which include their perspectives, one can avoid the 'pitfalls' of making assessments based on constructed knowledge which rarely seem to favor to UMAs.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Approval letter from NSD

Appendix B: Information letter

Appendix C: Letter of informed consent

Appendix D: Interview guides

Appendix A: Approval letter from NSD

NSD

Marit Ursin
Institutt for pedagogikk og livslang læring NTNU

7491 TRONDHEIM
Vår dato: 20.06.2017 Vår ref: 54561 / 3 / BGH Deres dato: Deres ref:

TILBAKEMELDING PÅ MELDING OM BEHANDLING AV PERSONOPPLYSNINGER

Vi viser til melding om behandling av personopplysninger, mottatt 29.05.2017. Meldingen gjelder prosjektet:

54561

Behandlingsansvarlig Daglig ansvarlig Student

An analysis of the practice and policy related to age determination on unaccompanied minor asylum seekers in the context of Norway

NTNU, ved institusjonens øverste leder Marit Ursin
Aurora Sørsveen

Personvernombudet har vurdert prosjektet og finner at behandlingen av personopplysninger er meldepliktig i henhold til personopplysningsloven § 31. Behandlingen tilfredsstiller kravene i personopplysningsloven.

Personvernombudets vurdering forutsetter at prosjektet gjennomføres i tråd med opplysningene gitt i meldeskjemaet, korrespondanse med ombudet, ombudets kommentarer samt personopplysningsloven og helseregisterloven med forskrifter. Behandlingen av personopplysninger kan settes i gang.

Det gjøres oppmerksom på at det skal gis ny melding dersom behandlingen endres i forhold til de opplysninger som ligger til grunn for personvernombudets vurdering. Endringsmeldinger gis via et eget skjema, http://www.nsd.uib.no/personvernombud/meld_prosjekt/meld_endringer.html. Det skal også gis melding etter tre år dersom prosjektet fortsatt pågår. Meldinger skal skje skriftlig til ombudet.

Personvernombudet har lagt ut opplysninger om prosjektet i en offentlig database, http://pvo.nsd.no/prosjekt.

Personvernombudet vil ved prosjektets avslutning, 10.09.2018, rette en henvendelse angående status for behandlingen av personopplysninger.

Vennlig hilsen Kjersti Haugstvedt

Belinda Gloppen Helle Kontaktperson: Belinda Gloppen Helle tlf: 55 58 28 74

Appendix B: Information letter

<div align="center">

Informasjonsskriv

</div>

Aurora T. Sørsveen   Trondheim 2017

Tel: 47649114

E-post: aurorats@stud.ntnu.no

Jeg leter etter personer med som ønsker å dele sine erfaringer omkring aldersbestemmelsesprosessen som er relevant for enslige mindreårige asylsøkere i forbindelse med mitt masterprosjekt.

Masterprosjektet er en del av masterutdanningen *MPhil in Childhood Studies* tilknyttet Norsk Senter For Barneforskning ved Norges teknisk-naturvitenskapelig universitet (NTNU). Prosjektet har som utgangspunkt å utforske forståelse av alder og erfaringer med aldersbestemmelse. Gjennom erfaringer og refleksjoner som dere kan bidra med, kan man få innsikt i hvordan man erfarer denne prosessen, som er verdifull i forbindelse med hvordan man forstår alder og praksiser knyttet til dette i en norsk kontekst.

Deltakere ønskes til uformelle samtaler i form av individuelle- eller gruppeintervju der tidspunkt og sted bestemmes etter deltagernes ønske. All deltakelse i prosjektet er frivillig og deltakerne forbeholdes retten til å trekke seg på hvilket som helst tidspunkt. All informasjon som deltakerne deler vil bli behandlet konfidensielt og anonymisert gjennom hele prosessen slik at det ikke er mulig for utenforstående å identifisere deltakerne i det ferdige produktet.

Med Vennlig Hilsen

Aurora T. Sørsveen

MPhil in Childhood Studies

NTNU

Veileder:

Marit Ursin (kontornr: 73596243)

marit.ursin@ntnu.no

Førsteamanuensis ved Norsk Senter For Barneforskning, NTNU

Appendix C: Letter of informed consent

Brev om informert samtykke

Dette masterprosjektet er en del av masterutdanningen *MPhil in Childhood Studies* tilknyttet Norsk Senter For Barneforskning (NOSEB) ved NTNU. Prosjektets formål er å utforske erfaringer og refleksjoner fra relevante aktører rundt aldersbestemmelsespraksisen i Norge. Prosjektet vil foregå over et år med avslutning i mai 2018. Prosjektet veiledes av Marit Ursin, førsteamanuensis ved NOSEB, NTNU.

Som deltaker i prosjektet forbeholdes du retten til å trekke deg på hvilket som helst tidspunkt. All informasjon som gis under intervjuer holdes konfidensielt og blir anonymisert i sluttproduktet. Opptak av intervju og transkripsjoner samt utskrifter vil bli slettet og makulert etter prosjektet er avsluttet.

Med Vennlig Hilsen
Aurora T. Sørsveen
Masterstudent i MPhil in Childhood Studies ved NOSEB, NTNU
Tel: 47649114
E-post: aurorats@stud.ntnu.no

Informert samtykke

Ved underskrivelse har jeg blitt informert om prosjektets formål og varighet og hvordan informasjon vil bli holdt konfidensielt og vil bli anonymisert. Jeg ønsker med dette å delta i forskningsprosjektet.

Sted/dato   Underskrift

....

Appendix D: Interview guides

Intervjuguide UDI (BFE)

Mitt navn er Aurora Sørsveen og jeg er student ved NTNU der jeg for tiden holder på med masterprogrammet MPhil in Childhood Studies. I dette masterprosjektet ønsker jeg å intervjue mennesker på ulike fagområder som jobber opp mot aldersbestemmelse for å utforske hvordan aldersbestemmelsesprosessen tilknyttet enslige asylsøkere blir forstått og foregår i praksis. Videre ønsker jeg å høre deres erfaringer og refleksjoner tilknyttet denne praksisen.

Alt som kommer frem under intervjuet vil være konfidensielt og vil bli anonymisert i det ferdige produktet. Du kan trekke deg når som helst, både under intervju og senere i prosessen uten noen som helst forklaring. Er det i orden for deg at intervjuet blir tatt opp? Grunnen til at jeg ønsker å ta opp intervjuet er fordi det er lettere å vite eksakt hva som ble sagt i ettertid og fordi da kan jeg ha fokus på deg mens vi snakker sammen. Opptaket vil bli slettet etter det har blitt transkribert. Om det er spørsmål underveis du ikke ønsker å svare på så er dette helt i orden.

Jeg vil først si at jeg setter veldig pris på at du ønsket å stille opp på dette intervjuet som bidrar til at jeg får gjennomført mitt masterprosjekt. Jeg syns det er viktig å si at det er du som er eksperten på ditt felt og jeg er her for å forstå.

Oppvarmingsspørsmål
- o Kan du fortelle litt om deg selv?
- o Kan du si litt om utdanningsbakgrunnen din?
- o Har du jobbet her lenge?
- o Hvilke arbeid gjør du her?

Hoveddel

Generelle spørsmål
- o Kan du si noe om UDIs mandat/hovedoppgave i den norske stat?
- o Når dere jobber med saker, hvilke instanser henter dere ut informasjon fra som omhandler en asylsøker og vedkommendes sak?
- o Hvor lang tid bruker dere vanligvis på en sak?

o Har du jobbet med noen konkrete saker der aldersbestemmelse har vært relevant? Kan du fortelle om dette?

o Kan du fortelle litt om hvordan dere går fram når dere er usikker på en persons alder?

o Har du noen generelle tanker rundt den aldersbestemmelsespraksisen som vi har i Norge?

o Egen praktisk erfaring

Alder

o Hvilken type saker er det snakk om når aldersspørsmålet er relevant?

o Får dere noen formell opplæring i å estimere alder?

o Følger dere noen retningslinjer når dere jobber med saker der aldersbestemmelse er relevant?

o Kan du fortelle litt om de ulike momentene som ligger til grunn i en slik sak der aldersbestemmelse er relevant?

o Hva er det som skal til for at en enslig mindreårig blir sendt til en medisinsk aldersundersøkelse?

o Kan du si litt om hvor ofte alderen til en enslig mindreårig blir justert opp?

o Har du hatt noen opplevelser knyttet til aldersbestemmelse der du har tenkt på hvordan **kultur** kan påvirke vår forståelse av alder?

o Har du noen refleksjoner rundt det at enslige mindreårige asylsøkere, som kanskje ikke er vant til å forholde seg til alder på den måten vi gjør, møter et system der kronologisk alder legges mye vekt på?

o Har du noen erfaring med hvordan enslige mindreårige forstår sin egen alder?

o Opplever du noen ganger at de eventuelle retningslinjene du følger kommer i konflikt med din egen forståelse av personens situasjon og deres forståelse av egen alder?

o Har du noen tanker om hvordan du selv er påvirket av den forståelsen av alder som vi har i Norge?

o Hva tenker du om 18 års grensen som er som brukes i dag?
  o Tenker du at den er hensiktsmessig?

o Trur du det finnes bedre måter å bestemme alder på enn de som brukes i dag?

Avslutning

- Opplever du noen ganger at det kan være utfordrende å jobbe med den tematikken og de sakene som dere gjør her i UDI? Kan du fortelle litt om dette?
- Hva er det som gjør denne jobben spennende?
- Da har jeg fått svar på det jeg lurer på. Er det noe du syns det er rart jeg ikke har spurt om eller noe du har lyst til å legge til?
- Er det greit for deg at jeg eventuelt tar kontakt hvis det er noe jeg trenger å oppklare med tanke på svarene du har gitt?

Da vil jeg bare si tusen takk for at du stilte opp på intervjuet og det er bare å ta kontakt om det er noe du lurer på. Du har min kontaktinformasjon?

Intervjuguide forsker og kommunerepresentant

Mitt navn er Aurora Sørsveen og jeg er student ved NTNU der jeg for tiden holder på med masterprogrammet MPhil in Childhood Studies. I dette masterprosjektet ønsker jeg å intervjue mennesker på ulike fagområder som jobber opp mot aldersbestemmelse for å utforske hvordan aldersbestemmelsesprosessen tilknyttet enslige asylsøkere blir forstått og foregår i praksis. Videre ønsker jeg å høre deres erfaringer og refleksjoner tilknyttet denne praksisen.

Alt som kommer frem under intervjuet vil være konfidensielt og vil bli anonymisert i det ferdige produktet. Du kan trekke deg når som helst, både under intervju og senere i prosessen uten noen som helst forklaring. Er det i orden for deg at intervjuet blir tatt opp? Grunnen til at jeg ønsker å ta opp intervjuet er fordi det er lettere å vite eksakt hva som ble sagt i ettertid og fordi da kan jeg ha fokus på deg mens vi snakker sammen. Opptaket vil bli slettet etter det har blitt transkribert. Om det er spørsmål underveis du ikke ønsker å svare på så er dette helt i orden.

Jeg vil først si at jeg setter veldig pris på at du ønsket å stille opp på dette intervjuet som bidrar til at jeg får gjennomført mitt masterprosjekt. Jeg syns det er viktig å si at det er du som er eksperten på ditt felt og jeg er her for å forstå.

Oppvarmingsspørsmål

- o Hvor gammel er du?
- o Hvor kommer du fra?
- o Kan du fortelle meg litt om utdanningsbakgrunnen din?
- o Kan du fortelle litt om arbeidet du gjør her?

Hoveddel

Generelle spørsmål

- o Kan du si noe om din erfaring rundt tema som har med barn og unge asylsøkere å gjøre?
    - o Er det noen tema som har vært spesielt viktige å gjøre forskning på? Hvilke?

- o Har du noen generelle tanker rundt den aldersbestemmelsespraksisen som vi har i Norge?

o Kan du fortelle litt om din erfaring med temaet aldersbestemmelse?

    o Har du noe forskningserfaring der du har snakket med enslige mindreårige asylsøkere som har vært i en aldersbestemmelsesprosess? Kan du fortelle litt om dette?

    o Tenker du at aldersbestemmelse er en hensiktsmessig praksis?

Aldersforståelse

o I vestlige land så har vi jo ofte en **kronologisk forståelse** av alder der vi har noen forventninger som ligger til grunn når man når en viss alder, mens man i en del andre områder i verden forstår alder veldig annerledes, at for eksempel skillet mellom barn og voksen avgjøres gjennom sosiale hendelser som arbeid eller skole.

    o Har du noen tanker rundt måten vi her i Norge/vesten forstår alder? Kan du fortelle litt om det?

        ▪ Har du noen eksempler på hvordan alder henger sammen med modenhet og kompetanse, eventuelt ikke gjør det?

    o Hva tenker du om at asylsøkere som kommer fra land der man forstår alder på en annen måte, kan være skeptisk til en kronologisk forståelse av alder?

    o Trur du det kan oppstå utfordringer når ulike forståelser av alder møtes? Kan du gi noen eksempel på dette?

o Har du hatt noen opplevelser knyttet til aldersbestemmelse der du har tenkt på hvordan **kultur** kan påvirke vår forståelse av alder?

    o Kan du identifisere noen kulturelle forutsetninger for hvordan vi i vesten forstår alder?

        ▪ **Vignett** – Jeg har med en liten praksisfortelling som jeg har lyst til å lese for deg, med noen oppfølgings spørsmål.

    o Kan denne historien være representativt for møtet enslige asylsøkere har med deler av asylprosessen i Norge?

    o Har du noen tanker om hva som kan være utslagsgivende for hvorfor det kan være vanskelig å tru at Ahmed er 15 år? Hvis du har egne eksempler på en slik type historie så kan du gjerne fortelle.

    o Hvilke muligheter tenker du at Ahmed har for å kunne overbevise de han møter i systemet om det han trur er sin egen alder?

- o Hvordan tror du en kulturell forståelse av alder spiller inn i historien om Ahmed?
- o Hvis Ahmed hadde vært en jente, tror du at utfallet kunne ha vært annerledes?

- o Kan det være slik at nasjonal lovgivning og praksis som er gjeldende for aldersbestemmelse av enslige mindreårige springer ut i fra en kulturell forståelse av alder? Hvis ja, hvordan?

- o Hva er dine tanker rundt situasjoner der staten ikke tror på alderen gitt av asylsøkeren?
  - o Hva tror du dette kan komme av? (*Stereotypier? Antakelser? Lite kunnskap om en asylsøkers bakgrunn?*)
  - o Hvordan tenker du at staten bør agere i slike tilfeller?
  - o Har du noen refleksjoner rundt det at enslige asylsøkere, som kanskje ikke er vant til å forholde seg til alder på den måten vi gjør, møter et system der kronologisk alder legges mye vekt på?
  - o Har du noe erfaring med hvordan enslige mindreårige forstår sin egen alder? (Om dette er kulturelt betinget?)

- o Tror du det finnes noen bedre måter å bestemme alder på enn de som brukes i dag?
  - o Hvordan kunne dette heller ha vært gjort?

Kjønn
- o Når du har gjort forskning og snakket sammen med enslige mindreårige, opplever du da at kjønn er viktig?
  - o På hvilken måte blir dette viktig?
- o Ser du noen forskjeller på alder og modenhet på gutter/menn med minoritetsbakgrunn og de som er etnisk norske? Hvis ja, hvilke tanker har du om dette?
  - o Hvordan tenker du at dette eventuelt utspiller seg? (*fysisk, psykisk, kulturelt*)
- o Ser du noen forskjeller på alder og modenhet på jenter/kvinner med minoritetsbakgrunn og de som er etnisk norske? Hvis ja, hvilke tanker har du om dette?
  - o Hvordan tenker du at dette eventuelt utspiller seg? (*fysisk, psykisk, kulturelt*)
- o Hva tenker du om at dette for eksempel kan være påvirket av hvordan vi forstår kjønn har her i Norge?

o Har du noen andre refleksjoner rundt hvordan forståelsen av kjønn kan spille inn når man jobber med aldersspørsmål?

<u>Avslutning</u>

o Har du erfart at den forskningen du eller andre forskere har gjort på dette området for noe gehør hos for eksempel de som lager policy og praksis som er relevant for enslige mindreårige asylsøkere?

o Da har jeg fått svar på det jeg lurer på. Er det noe du syns det er rart jeg ikke har spurt om eller noe du har lyst til å legge til?

o Er det greit for deg at jeg eventuelt tar kontakt hvis det er noe jeg trenger å oppklare med tanke på svarene du har gitt?

Da vil jeg bare si tusen takk for at du stilte opp på intervjuet og det er bare å ta kontakt om det er noe du lurer på. Du har min kontaktinformasjon?

Intervjuguide NOAS

Mitt navn er Aurora Sørsveen og jeg er student ved NTNU der jeg for tiden holder på med masterprogrammet MPhil in Childhood Studies. I dette masterprosjektet ønsker jeg å intervjue mennesker på ulike fagområder som jobber opp mot aldersbestemmelse for å utforske hvordan aldersbestemmelsesprosessen tilknyttet enslige asylsøkere blir forstått og foregår i praksis. Videre ønsker jeg å høre deres erfaringer og refleksjoner tilknyttet denne praksisen.

Alt som kommer frem under intervjuet vil være konfidensielt og vil bli anonymisert i det ferdige produktet. Du kan trekke deg når som helst, både under intervju og senere i prosessen uten noen som helst forklaring. Er det i orden for deg at intervjuet blir tatt opp? Grunnen til at jeg ønsker å ta opp intervjuet er fordi det er lettere å vite eksakt hva som ble sagt i ettertid og fordi da kan jeg ha fokus på deg mens vi snakker sammen. Opptaket vil bli slettet etter det har blitt transkribert. Om det er spørsmål underveis du ikke ønsker å svare på så er dette helt i orden.

Jeg vil først si at jeg setter veldig pris på at du ønsket å stille opp på dette intervjuet som bidrar til at jeg får gjennomført mitt masterprosjekt. Jeg syns det er viktig å si at det er du som er eksperten på ditt felt og jeg er her for å forstå.

<u>Oppvarmingsspørsmål</u>
- o Kan du fortelle litt om deg selv?
- o Kan du si litt om utdanningsbakgrunnen din?
- o Hvilke arbeid gjør du her?

<u>Hoveddel</u>

<u>Generelle spørsmål</u>
- o Kan du si noe om NOAS sitt mandat/hovedoppgave?
- o Hvordan jobber dere for å ivareta interessen til asylsøkere?
- o Samarbeider dere med andre aktører som jobber med de samme spørsmålene som dere gjør?
    - o Hvordan foregår dette samarbeidet?
- o Er aldersbestemmelse noe dere må forholde dere ofte til?
- o Kan du fortelle litt om din egen erfaring tilknyttet aldersbestemmelse?

o Har du noe praktisk erfaring der du har snakket med enslige mindreårige asylsøkere som har vært i en aldersbestemmelsesprosess? Kan du fortelle litt om dette?

o Har du noen generelle tanker rundt den aldersbestemmelsespraksisen som vi har i Norge?

<u>Aldersforståelse</u>

o Trur du det kan oppstå ulike utfordringer når ulike forståelser av alder møtes? Kan du gi noen eksempel på dette?

o Når alder er fastsatt, har du noen tanker om hva som er utslagsgivende for den alderen en enslig mindreårig får? - *manglende dokumentasjon, stereotypier, antakelser, for lite kunnskap om asylsøkerens bakgrunn, hva de har opplevd/gjort i livet, medisinske aldersundersøkelser*?

o Hva tenker du er mest utslagsgivende når man estimerer alder?

    o Hvorfor tenker du det er slik?

o Har du hatt noen opplevelser knyttet til aldersbestemmelse der du har tenkt på hvordan **kultur** kan påvirke vår forståelse av alder?

    o Kan du identifisere noen kulturelle forutsetninger for hvordan vi i vesten forstår alder?

o Hva er dine tanker rundt situasjoner der staten ikke tror på alderen gitt av asylsøkeren?

    o Hva trur du dette kan komme av? – *manglende dokumentasjon, stereotypier, antakelser, for lite kunnskap om asylsøkerens bakgrunn, hva de har opplevd/gjort i livet, medisinske aldersundersøkelser*?

    o Hvordan tenker du staten bør agere i slike tilfeller?

o Har du noen refleksjoner rundt det at enslige mindreårige asylsøkere, som kanskje ikke er vant til å forholde seg til alder på den måten vi gjør, møter et system der kronologisk alder legges mye vekt på?

    o Tror du at asylsøkere som kommer fra et land der man forstår alder på en annen måte, kan være skeptisk til en kronologisk forståelse av alder?

o Trur du det kan oppstå utfordringer når ulike forståelser av alder møtes? Som i aldersbestemmelsessaker.

o Har du noe erfaring med hvordan enslige mindreårige forstår sin egen alder? Kan du komme med noen eksempler?

o Hva tenker du om 18 års grensen som er som brukes i dag?

  o Tenker du at den er hensiktsmessig?

<u>Kjønn</u>

o Når du er sammen med enslige mindreårige, opplever du da at hvordan man forstår kjønn var viktig?

  o På hvilken måte blir dette viktig?

o Ser du noen forskjeller på alder og modenhet på gutter/menn med minoritetsbakgrunn og de som er etnisk norske? Hvis ja, hvilke tanker har du om dette?

  o Hvordan tenker du at dette eventuelt utspiller seg? (fysisk, psykisk, kulturelt?)

o Ser du noen forskjeller på alder og modenhet på jenter/kvinner med minoritetsbakgrunn og de som er etnisk norske? Hvis ja, hvilke tanker har du om dette?

  o Hvordan tenker du at dette eventuelt utspiller seg? (fysisk, psykisk, kulturelt?)

o Hva tenker du om at dette for eksempel kan være påvirket av hvordan vi forstår kjønn har her i Norge?

o Har du noen andre refleksjoner rundt hvordan forståelsen av kjønn kan spille inn man jobber med aldersspørsmål?

Avslutning

o Har du erfart at det dere måtte mene om aldersbestemmelsespraksis, eller andre ting som forså vidt også er gjeldende for denne gruppa, får gehør hos for eksempel de som lager policy og praksis som er relevant for enslige mindreårige asylsøkere?

o Trur du det finnes bedre måter å bestemme alder på enn de som brukes i dag?

  o Hvordan kunne dette heller ha vært gjort?

o Da har jeg fått svar på det jeg lurer på. Er det noe du syns det er rart jeg ikke har spurt om eller noe du har lyst til å legge til?

o Er det greit for deg at jeg eventuelt tar kontakt hvis det er noe jeg trenger å oppklare med tanke på svarene du har gitt?

Da vil jeg bare si tusen takk for at du stilte opp på intervjuet og det er bare å ta kontakt om det er noe du lurer på. Du har min kontaktinformasjon?

Intervjuguide PU

Mitt navn er Aurora Sørsveen og jeg er student ved NTNU der jeg for tiden holder på med masterprogrammet MPhil in Childhood Studies. I dette masterprosjektet ønsker jeg å intervjue mennesker på ulike fagområder som jobber opp mot aldersbestemmelse for å utforske hvordan aldersbestemmelsesprosessen tilknyttet enslige asylsøkere blir forstått og foregår i praksis. Videre ønsker jeg å høre deres erfaringer og refleksjoner tilknyttet denne praksisen.

Alt som kommer frem under intervjuet vil være konfidensielt og vil bli anonymisert i det ferdige produktet. Du kan trekke deg når som helst, både under intervju og senere i prosessen uten noen som helst forklaring. Er det i orden for deg at intervjuet blir tatt opp? Grunnen til at jeg ønsker å ta opp intervjuet er fordi det er lettere å vite eksakt hva som ble sagt i ettertid og fordi da kan jeg ha fokus på deg mens vi snakker sammen. Opptaket vil bli slettet etter det har blitt transkribert. Om det er spørsmål underveis du ikke ønsker å svare på så er dette helt i orden.

Jeg vil først si at jeg setter veldig pris på at du ønsket å stille opp på dette intervjuet som bidrar til at jeg får gjennomført mitt masterprosjekt. Jeg syns det er viktig å si at det er du som er eksperten på ditt felt og jeg er her for å forstå.

<u>Oppvarmingsspørsmål</u>

- o Kan du fortelle litt om deg selv?
- o Kan du si litt om utdanningsbakgrunnen din?
- o Har du jobbet her lenge?
- o Hvilke arbeid gjør du her?

<u>Hoveddel</u>

<u>Generelle spørsmål</u>

- o Kan du si noe om PUs mandat/hovedoppgave i den norske stat?
- o Hvordan jobber dere med å balansere innvandringsregulerende hensyn og en asylsøkers interesser?
- o Kan du beskrive en typisk sak som dere jobber med her? Gjerne en sak om enslige mindreårige.
    - o Forekommer det hyppigst at personer sier de er over eller under 18?

- o Kan du fortelle litt om hvordan dere går fram når dere er usikker på en persons alder?
  - o Er dere flere som jobber sammen om å estimere alder?
  - o Hvor lang tid har dere/bruker dere på hver sak?
  - o Kan du fortelle litt om hva dere legger vekt på når dere jobber med aldersestimering?
  - o Hva er det som er utslagsgivende? – *Manglende dokumentasjon, oppførsel, kompetanse, modenhet*?
- o Får dere noe formell opplæring i å estimere alder? Kan du fortelle litt om dette?
- o Om dere jobber etter fastsatte retningslinjer, kan du fortelle litt om dem?
  - o Er det mulig og få se disse retningslinjene?
  - o Tror du (eller vet du) om det finnes individuelle forskjeller på hvordan man jobber med denne problematikken?
- o Kan du fortelle litt om metodene dere benytter dere av når dere estimerer alder?
  - o Har du noen tanker om metodene dere bruker for å estimere alder?

Aldersforståelse

Praktisk utførelse

- o Dere møter sikkert veldig mange ulike typer mennesker med ulik bakgrunn når dere estimerer alder. Kan du fortelle litt om hvor disse menneskene oftest kommer fra?
  - o Opplever du at de har likhetstrekk eller er hver sak noe nytt å forholde seg til?
  - o Ser dere at noen mønster har endret seg i hvem som kommer ettersom man nå opplever en stor flyktningkrise?
  - o Opplever dere at det kommer flest jenter eller gutter? (Hvorfor trur du i så fall det er slik?)
- o Kan du si noe om hva som kan være utfordrende når man skal estimere en persons alder?
- o Er denne praksisen noe dere diskuterer i kollegiet for å både lufte erfaringer og gi hverandre innspill på
- o Legges det vekt på **kulturelle forskjeller** på personer i retningslinjene dere jobber etter? Hvis ja, på hvilken måte? (oppvekst, religion, geografi, familiesituasjon)
- o Legges det vekt på **biologiske forskjeller** på personer i retningslinjene dere jobber etter? Hvis ja, på hvilken måte? (Jente, gutt, biologisk utvikling, hvordan vedkommende ser ut)

o Legges det vekt på **psykologiske forskjeller** på personer i retningslinjene dere jobber etter? Hvis ja, på hvilken måte? (tidligere opplevelser, traumer, ansvar, kompetanse, individualitet, hvordan vedkommende fremstår, hva vedkommende deler, ikke deler)

o Kan du fortelle med litt om hvordan en eventuell ulik forståelse av alder mellom deg og den personen som alderen skal estimeres på kan utspille seg?

o Dette med aldersbestemmelse er jo noe som har fått mye oppmerksomhet i media blant annet. Påvirker dette jobben deres på noen som helst måte? Hvis ja, kan du fortelle litt om dette?

o Kan du fortelle litt om hvordan for eksempel politiske vedtak påvirker jobben dere gjør når dere estimerer alder?

o Har du hatt noen opplevelser knyttet til aldersbestemmelse der du har tenkt på hvordan **kultur** kan påvirke vår forståelse av alder?
    o Kan du identifisere noen kulturelle forutsetninger for hvordan vi i vesten forstår alder?

o Hva er dine tanker rundt situasjoner der staten ikke tror på alderen gitt av asylsøkeren?
    o Hva trur du dette kan komme av? – *manglende dokumentasjon, stereotypier, antakelser, for lite kunnskap om asylsøkerens bakgrunn, hva de har opplevd/gjort i livet, medisinske aldersundersøkelser*?
    o Hvordan tenker du staten bør agere i slike tilfeller?

o Har du noen refleksjoner rundt det at enslige mindreårige asylsøkere, som kanskje ikke er vant til å forholde seg til alder på den måten vi gjør, møter et system der kronologisk alder legges mye vekt på?

o Har du noen erfaring med hvordan enslige mindreårige forstår sin egen alder?

o Opplever du noen ganger at de eventuelle retningslinjene du følger kommer i konflikt med din egen forståelse av personens situasjon og deres forståelse av egen alder?

o Har du noen tanker om hvordan du selv er påvirket av den forståelsen av alder som vi har i Norge?

o Hva tenker du om 18 års grensen som er som brukes i dag?
    o Tenker du at den er hensiktsmessig?

o Trur du det finnes bedre måter å bestemme alder på enn de som brukes i dag?

<u>Kjønn</u>

- o Opplever du at det er flest menn eller kvinner som klager på vedtak som er gjort angående deres asylsaker?
- o Ser du noen forskjeller på alder og modenhet på gutter/menn med minoritetsbakgrunn og de som er etnisk norske? Hvis ja, hvilke tanker har du om dette?
  - ▪ Hvordan tenker du at dette eventuelt utspiller seg? (fysisk, psykisk, kulturelt?)
- o Ser du noen forskjeller på alder og modenhet på jenter/kvinner med minoritetsbakgrunn og de som er etnisk norske? Hvis ja, hvilke tanker har du om dette?
  - ▪ Hvordan tenker du at dette eventuelt utspiller seg? (fysisk, psykisk, kulturelt?)
- o Trur du måten vi forstår kjønn i en norsk eller vestlig kontekst kan påvirke hvordan man forstår denne personen og hva utfallet i saken blir?
- o Har du noen andre refleksjoner rundt hvordan forståelsen av kjønn kan spille inn når man jobber med aldersspørsmål?

<u>Refleksjoner rundt aldersbestemmelse</u>

- o Har du noen erfaringer med etiske dilemmaer i møtet med asylsøkere der man setter spørsmålstegn ved vedkommendes alder. Har du lyst å fortelle litt om dette?
- o Har du noen tanker om hvordan du selv eventuelt er påvirket av den kulturelle forståelsen av alder i Norge?
  - o Hvordan kan dette være utfordrende for deg som skal estimere alder eller den som man er i tvil om alderen på?
- o Har du noen tanker rundt hvordan man forstår alder i en norsk/vestlig kontekst?
  - o Hvordan tenker du rundt at alder henger sammen med modenhet og kompetanse?
  - o Tenker du at det er en hensiktsmessig praksis?
- o Dette er kanskje et veldig personlig spørsmål så du trenger ikke svare hvis du ikke vil. Men tenker du noen ganger på konsekvensene av dine vedtak?
- o Etter du begynte å jobbe med dette, har din egen forståelse av alder endret seg?

Avslutning

o Hva er det som gjør denne jobben spennende?

o Da har jeg fått svar på det jeg lurer på. Er det noe du syns det er rart jeg ikke har spurt om eller noe du har lyst til å legge til?

o Er det greit for deg at jeg eventuelt tar kontakt hvis det er noe jeg trenger å oppklare med tanke på svarene du har gitt?

Da vil jeg bare si tusen takk for at du stilte opp på intervjuet og det er bare å ta kontakt om det er noe du lurer på. Du har min kontaktinformasjon?

Intervjuguide UNE

Mitt navn er Aurora Sørsveen og jeg er student ved NTNU der jeg for tiden holder på med masterprogrammet MPhil in Childhood Studies. I dette masterprosjektet ønsker jeg å intervjue mennesker på ulike fagområder som jobber opp mot aldersbestemmelse for å utforske hvordan aldersbestemmelsesprosessen tilknyttet enslige asylsøkere blir forstått og foregår i praksis. Videre ønsker jeg å høre deres erfaringer og refleksjoner tilknyttet denne praksisen.

Alt som kommer frem under intervjuet vil være konfidensielt og vil bli anonymisert i det ferdige produktet. Du kan trekke deg når som helst, både under intervju og senere i prosessen uten noen som helst forklaring. Er det i orden for deg at intervjuet blir tatt opp? Grunnen til at jeg ønsker å ta opp intervjuet er fordi det er lettere å vite eksakt hva som ble sagt i ettertid og fordi da kan jeg ha fokus på deg mens vi snakker sammen. Opptaket vil bli slettet etter det har blitt transkribert. Om det er spørsmål underveis du ikke ønsker å svare på så er dette helt i orden.

Jeg vil først si at jeg setter veldig pris på at du ønsket å stille opp på dette intervjuet som bidrar til at jeg får gjennomført mitt masterprosjekt. Jeg syns det er viktig å si at det er du som er eksperten på ditt felt og jeg er her for å forstå.

Oppvarmingsspørsmål

- o Kan du fortelle litt om deg selv?
- o Kan du si litt om utdanningsbakgrunnen din?
- o Har du jobbet her lenge?
- o Hvilke arbeid gjør du her?

Hoveddel

Generelle spørsmål

- o Kan du si noe om UNEs mandat/hovedoppgave i den norske stat?
- o Hvordan jobber dere med å balansere innvandringsregulerende hensyn og en asylsøkers interesser?
- o Hvordan foregår prosessen når dere mottar en klage på et vedtak?

- o Møter dere personen som har klaget på vedtaket eller forholder dere dere til dokumenter som er utarbeidet gjennom sakens gang?
  - ▪ Om dette er tilfellet, hvorfor er det slike at dere ikke møtes personen?
  - ▪ Hva trur du eventuelle konsekvenser av dette kan være?
- o Samarbeider dere med andre enheter, som PU og UDI i saker dere behandler?
  - o Hvis ja, hvordan gjøres dette?
- o Hvor lang tid har dere/bruker dere på hver sak?
- o Har du jobbet med noen konkrete saker der aldersbestemmelse har vært relevant? Kan du fortelle om dette?
- o Har du noen generelle tanker rundt den aldersbestemmelsespraksisen som vi har i Norge?
  - o Har du noen praktisk erfaring der du har snakket med enslige mindreårige asylsøkere som har vært i en aldersbestemmelsesprosess? Kan du fortelle litt om dette?
- o Har du noen tanker om hvorfor aldersbestemmelse kan være hensiktsmessig eller uhensiktsmessig?

Alder
- o Hvilken type saker er det snakk om når aldersspørsmålet er relevant?
- o På hvilke måter kan alder være en faktor som er viktig når dere skal behandle en klage?
  - o Kan du fortelle litt om hva dere gjør i saker der aldersspørsmålet er relevant?
- o Følger dere noen retningslinjer når dere jobber med saker der aldersbestemmelse er relevant?
  - o Hva går eventuelt disse ut på?
  - o Er det mulig og få se disse?
  - o Er det noen politiske føringer dere jobber etter?
  - o Legges det vekt på **kulturelle forskjeller** på personer i retningslinjene dere jobber etter? Hvis ja, på hvilken måte? (oppvekst, religion, geografi, familiesituasjon)
  - o Legges det vekt på **biologiske forskjeller** på personer i retningslinjene dere jobber etter? Hvis ja, på hvilken måte? (Jente, gutt, biologisk utvikling, hvordan vedkommende ser ut)
  - o Legges det vekt på **psykologiske forskjeller** på personer i retningslinjene dere jobber etter? Hvis ja, på hvilken måte? (tidligere opplevelser, traumer, ansvar,

kompetanse, individualitet, hvordan vedkommende fremstår, hva vedkommende deler, ikke deler)

o Kan du fortelle litt om de ulike momentene som ligger til grunn i en slik sak? – *asylsøkerens gitte alder, uttalelse fra verge, PU, UDI, medisinsk aldersundersøkelse, mottak*?

   o Hva er det som er viktig og mindre viktig å ta hensyn til?

   o Er det ofte samsvar mellom uttalelser fra de ulike instansene?

o På hvilken måte har dere saksbehandlere i UNE innflytelse i utfallet av klagesaken?

o Har du hatt noen opplevelser knyttet til aldersbestemmelse der du har tenkt på hvordan **kultur** kan påvirke vår forståelse av alder?

   o Kan du identifisere noen kulturelle forutsetninger for hvordan vi i vesten forstår alder?

o Hva er dine tanker rundt situasjoner der staten ikke tror på alderen gitt av asylsøkeren?

   o Hva tror du dette kan komme av? – *manglende dokumentasjon, stereotypier, antakelser, for lite kunnskap om asylsøkerens bakgrunn, hva de har opplevd/gjort i livet, medisinske aldersundersøkelser*?

   o Hvordan tenker du staten bør agere i slike tilfeller?

o Har du noen refleksjoner rundt det at enslige mindreårige asylsøkere, som kanskje ikke er vant til å forholde seg til alder på den måten vi gjør, møter et system der kronologisk alder legges mye vekt på?

o Har du noen erfaring med hvordan enslige mindreårige forstår sin egen alder?

o Opplever du noen ganger at de eventuelle retningslinjene du følger kommer i konflikt med din egen forståelse av personens situasjon og deres forståelse av egen alder?

o Har du noen tanker om hvordan du selv er påvirket av den forståelsen av alder som vi har i Norge?

o Hva tenker du om 18 års grensen som er som brukes i dag?

   o Tenker du at den er hensiktsmessig?

o Tror du det finnes bedre måter å bestemme alder på enn de som brukes i dag?

<u>Kjønn</u>

- o Opplever du at det er flest menn eller kvinner som klager på vedtak som er gjort angående deres asylsaker?

- o Ser du noen forskjeller på alder og modenhet på gutter/menn med minoritetsbakgrunn og de som er etnisk norske? Hvis ja, hvilke tanker har du om dette?

    - ▪ Hvordan tenker du at dette eventuelt utspiller seg? (fysisk, psykisk, kulturelt?)

- o Ser du noen forskjeller på alder og modenhet på jenter/kvinner med minoritetsbakgrunn og de som er etnisk norske? Hvis ja, hvilke tanker har du om dette?

    - ▪ Hvordan tenker du at dette eventuelt utspiller seg? (fysisk, psykisk, kulturelt?)

- o Hvis tilfellet er at dere møter den som har lagt inn en klage, trur du da måten vi forstår kjønn i en norsk eller vestlig kontekst kan påvirke hvordan man forstår denne personen og hva utfallet i saken blir?

- o Har du noen andre refleksjoner rundt hvordan forståelsen av kjønn kan spille inn når man jobber med aldersspørsmål?

Avslutning

- o Opplever du noen ganger at det kan være utfordrende å jobbe med den tematikken og de sakene som dere gjør her i UNE? Kan du fortelle litt om dette?

- o Hva er det som gjør denne jobben spennende?

- o Da har jeg fått svar på det jeg lurer på. Er det noe du syns det er rart jeg ikke har spurt om eller noe du har lyst til å legge til?

- o Er det greit for deg at jeg eventuelt tar kontakt hvis det er noe jeg trenger å oppklare med tanke på svarene du har gitt?

Da vil jeg bare si tusen takk for at du stilte opp på intervjuet og det er bare å ta kontakt om det er noe du lurer på. Du har min kontaktinformasjon?

Intervjuguide Verge

Mitt navn er Aurora Sørsveen og jeg er student ved NTNU der jeg for tiden holder på med masterprogrammet MPhil in Childhood Studies. I dette masterprosjektet ønsker jeg å intervjue mennesker på ulike fagområder som jobber opp mot aldersbestemmelse for å utforske hvordan aldersbestemmelsesprosessen tilknyttet enslige asylsøkere blir forstått og foregår i praksis. Videre ønsker jeg å høre deres erfaringer og refleksjoner tilknyttet denne praksisen.

Alt som kommer frem under intervjuet vil være konfidensielt og vil bli anonymisert i det ferdige produktet. Du kan trekke deg når som helst, både under intervju og senere i prosessen uten noen som helst forklaring. Er det i orden for deg at intervjuet blir tatt opp? Grunnen til at jeg ønsker å ta opp intervjuet er fordi det er lettere å vite eksakt hva som ble sagt i ettertid og fordi da kan jeg ha fokus på deg mens vi snakker sammen. Opptaket vil bli slettet etter det har blitt transkribert. Om det er spørsmål underveis du ikke ønsker å svare på så er dette helt i orden.

Jeg vil først si at jeg setter veldig pris på at du ønsket å stille opp på dette intervjuet som bidrar til at jeg får gjennomført mitt masterprosjekt. Jeg syns det er viktig å si at det er du som er eksperten på ditt felt og jeg er her for å forstå.

<u>Oppvarmingsspørsmål</u>
- o Kan du fortelle litt om deg selv?
- o Kan du si litt om utdanningsbakgrunnen din?
- o Har du mye erfaring med vergearbeid?
- o Hvilke arbeid gjør du her?

<u>Hoveddel</u>

<u>Generelle spørsmål</u>
- o Kan du si noe om vergeforeningens mandat/hovedoppgave?
- o Hvordan jobber dere for å ivareta interessen til enslige mindreårige?
- o Samarbeider dere med andre aktører som jobber med de samme spørsmålene som dere gjør?
  - o Hvordan foregår dette samarbeidet?

- o Er aldersbestemmelse noe dere må forholde dere ofte til?
- o Kan du fortelle litt om din egen erfaring tilknyttet aldersbestemmelse?
- o Hva er verger sin rolle i aldersbestemmelsespraksisen?
    - o Får dere noen opplæring i hvordan man estimerer alder?
    - o Blir dere bedt om å bidra med informasjon til myndighetene i aldersspørsmålet?
        - Hvis ja, hvordan foregår dette?
        - Hva syns du om dette? Har du noen tanker om etiske hensyn?
        - Hvis nei, tenker du at det hadde vært hensiktsmessig om dere hadde gjort det?
- o Har du noen praktisk erfaring der du har snakket med enslige mindreårige som har vært i en aldersbestemmelsesprosess? Kan du fortelle litt om dette?
- o Har du noen generelle tanker rundt den aldersbestemmelsespraksisen som vi har i Norge?

Aldersforståelse
- o Hvis du har deltatt, kan du fortelle litt om hvordan et asylintervju foregår?
    - o Hvordan tar man tak i aldersspørsmålet under et asylintervju?
    - o Opplever du at den enslige mindreårige blir hørt og forstått når han eller hun forteller sin alder?
- o Når alder er fastsatt, har du noen tanker om hva som er utslagsgivende for den alderen en enslig mindreårig får? - *manglende dokumentasjon, stereotypier, antakelser, for lite kunnskap om asylsøkerens bakgrunn, hva de har opplevd/gjort i livet, medisinske aldersundersøkelser*?
- o Hva tenker du er mest utslagsgivende når man estimerer alder?
    - o Hvorfor tenker du det er slik?

- o Har du hatt noen opplevelser knyttet til aldersbestemmelse der du har tenkt på hvordan **kultur** kan påvirke vår forståelse av alder?
    - o Kan du identifisere noen kulturelle forutsetninger for hvordan vi i vesten forstår alder?

- o Hva er dine tanker rundt situasjoner der staten ikke tror på alderen gitt av asylsøkeren?

- o Har du noen refleksjoner rundt det at enslige mindreårige asylsøkere, som kanskje ikke er vant til å forholde seg til alder på den måten vi gjør, møter et system der kronologisk alder legges mye vekt på?
    - o Tror du at asylsøkere som kommer fra et land der man forstår alder på en annen måte, kan være skeptisk til en kronologisk forståelse av alder?
- o Har du noen tanker om hvordan vi forstår alder i Norge og mer vestlige land? Kan du fortelle litt om dette?
- o Trur du det kan oppstå utfordringer når ulike forståelser av alder møtes? Som i aldersbestemmelsessaker.
- o Har du noe erfaring med hvordan enslige mindreårige forstår sin egen alder? Kan du komme med noen eksempler?
- o Hva tenker du om 18 års grensen som er som brukes i dag?
    - o Tenker du at den er hensiktsmessig?

Kjønn

- o Når du er sammen med enslige mindreårige, opplever du da at hvordan man forstår kjønn var viktig?
    - o På hvilken måte blir dette viktig?
- o Ser du noen forskjeller på alder og modenhet på gutter/menn med minoritetsbakgrunn og de som er etnisk norske? Hvis ja, hvilke tanker har du om dette?
    - o Hvordan tenker du at dette eventuelt utspiller seg? (fysisk, psykisk, kulturelt?)
- o Ser du noen forskjeller på alder og modenhet på jenter/kvinner med minoritetsbakgrunn og de som er etnisk norske? Hvis ja, hvilke tanker har du om dette?
    - o Hvordan tenker du at dette eventuelt utspiller seg? (fysisk, psykisk, kulturelt?)
- o Hva tenker du om at dette for eksempel kan være påvirket av hvordan vi forstår kjønn har her i Norge?
- o Har du noen andre refleksjoner rundt hvordan forståelsen av kjønn kan spille inn man jobber med aldersspørsmål?

Avslutning

- o Har du erfart at det dere måtte mene om aldersbestemmelsespraksis, eller andre ting som forså vidt også er gjeldende for denne gruppa, får gehør hos for eksempel de som lager policy og praksis som er relevant for enslige mindreårige asylsøkere?

- Kan dere være med på å påvirke aldersbestemmelsen ved å uttale dere om en enslig mindreårigs alder? Kan du fortelle litt om dette?
- Trur du det finnes bedre måter å bestemme alder på enn de som brukes i dag?
    - Hvordan kunne dette heller ha vært gjort?

- Da har jeg fått svar på det jeg lurer på. Er det noe du syns det er rart jeg ikke har spurt om eller noe du har lyst til å legge til?
- Er det greit for deg at jeg eventuelt tar kontakt hvis det er noe jeg trenger å oppklare med tanke på svarene du har gitt?

Da vil jeg bare si tusen takk for at du stilte opp på intervjuet og det er bare å ta kontakt om det er noe du lurer på. Du har min kontaktinformasjon?