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After the Apocalypse: A Positive Psychology Approach to Post-traumatic Growth in Egyptian TV Drama Series *Finding Ola*

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Abstract

In the Egyptian TV drama series *Finding Ola*, sudden divorce is portrayed as a personal apocalypse, providing a compelling backdrop for exploring the potential for post-traumatic growth in the aftermath of major life crises. The series juxtaposes the protagonist's shattered world with her subsequent journey toward resilience and renewal. Bridging the realms of art and psychology, this article adopts a positive psychology framework to investigate the mechanisms underlying resilience. Utilizing Martin Seligman's PERMA theory of well-being, it provides a structured analysis of the transformative processes that enable individuals to reconstruct their lives amidst turmoil. Through this lens, the protagonist's evolution from survival to flourishing is illuminated. The article seeks to offer fresh insights into how psychological concepts can be intricately woven into the fabric of television drama and how popular media can transcend mere entertainment to reflect deeply on the human condition and the capacity for growth and renewal in the face of life's most harrowing disruptions.

Keywords

Finding Ola, positive psychology, PERMA theory, apocalyptic trauma, post-traumatic growth

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Introduction

“Apocalypse” is conceptualized in contemporary usage as a cataclysm of vast scale, characterized by sweeping repercussions involving the onslaught of chaos, loss, and disintegration of societal structures. Postapocalyptic narratives frequently probe profound existential quests set against the stark backdrop of such collapse. Rather than merely depicting desolation, these narratives are renowned for their subtle delineation of human resilience and adaptive mechanisms in the face of adversity, as survivors of the apocalypse endeavor to reconstruct the remnants of their once-thriving communities. More often than not, they manage not only to transcend the “apocalyptic trauma” which results from “the envisaged imminent annihilation of the known world” (Visser 304), but also derive meaning from the profound existential challenges posed by catastrophic events.

The concept of apocalyptic trauma can be extended to encompass a broad spectrum of adversities experienced both individually and collectively, wherein surrounding circumstances evoke a sense of world-ending upheaval. On an individual level, such trauma may manifest following stressful life events, such as severe illness, marital dissolution, or the loss of a loved one. Collectively, communities may grapple with apocalyptic tribulations in the aftermath of natural disasters, armed conflicts, or economic collapses. In each of these instances, individuals and communities alike are compelled to confront the fragility of their existence and

seek novel pathways towards resilience and well-being. This article offers a detailed examination of the traumatic experience of divorce and the ensuing post-traumatic growth depicted in the Egyptian TV drama series *Finding Ola*, directed by Hadi El-Bagoury and co-authored by Ghada Abdel-Aal and Maha Alwazir. Within the scope of the article, divorce is analogized to an apocalypse, where the end of marriage at some point mirrors the disintegration of one's personal world.

Released on Netflix in 2022 to both critical acclaim and widespread popularity, *Finding Ola* artfully delves into themes of loss and resilience in the wake of marital dissolution. The series follows the titular character, Ola, as she embarks on a journey of self-introspection amidst the challenges of single parenthood, financial independence, and the social stigma surrounding divorced women. Over the concise span of just six episodes, Ola's quest to rebuild her life and redefine her purpose unfolds with poignant messages of healing and empowerment uniquely resonating with those facing post-divorce complexities. The present article adopts the lens of positive psychology, developed by Martin Seligman, as a theoretical framework to scrutinize the dynamics through which Ola manages to reconstruct her shattered life and finds meaning in her transformed post-divorce reality. Seligman's PERMA theory of well-being is specifically utilized to analyze Ola's progression from mere surviving to thriving. In essence, the article aims at illuminating the factors underlying resilience and personal growth amidst traumatizing life-altering events.

Positive Psychology and Post Traumatic Growth

Positive psychology signifies a transformative departure from conventional "deficit-focused" perspectives within psychology (Baumgardner and Crothers 7). Rather than fixating solely on alleviating human suffering and reducing mental illness, it accentuates the cultivation of character strengths that facilitate the attainment of a life rich with meaning and purpose (Seligman, *Authentic Happiness* xiii-xiv). Since the late twentieth century,

major proponents of positive psychology such as Christopher Peterson, Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, and Kennon Sheldon have significantly advanced this subfield, with Martin Seligman propelling it into the mainstream during his 1998 presidency of the American Psychological Association. In stark opposition to the dominance of psychopathology within the field, Seligman describes positive psychology as a “paradigm shift,” redirecting the discipline’s focus “from the study of some of the worst things in life to the study of what makes life worth living (*Authentic Happiness* 266). In their article “Positive Psychology: An Introduction,” Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi present “a framework for a science of positive psychology” aimed at identifying “the factors that allow individuals, communities, and societies to flourish,” while addressing “the pathologies that arise when life is barren and meaningless” (5).

Drawing on his experience as a psychotherapist, Seligman illustrates a core tenet of positive psychology: alleviating negative emotions like depression, anxiety, and anger does not suffice for genuine well-being. He observed that merely reducing symptoms of mental illness often left patients feeling “empty” rather than truly content (*Flourish* 156). His findings concur with Christopher Peterson’s argument that “what is good in life is as genuine as what is bad—not derivative, secondary, epiphenomenal, illusory, or otherwise suspect ... what is good in life is not simply the absence of what is problematic ... the good life requires its own explanation, not simply a theory of disorder stood sideways or flipped on its head.” Seligman thus critiques the philosophical underpinnings of traditional approaches influenced by major thinkers like Freud and Schopenhauer who viewed happiness as an illusion and aimed solely to minimize misery and suffering (*Flourish* 54).

Seligman’s seminal work not only shapes the theoretical foundations of positive psychology but also illuminates innate human tendencies towards growth and resilience, even in the face of

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adverse circumstances. His research challenges the prevailing notion that trauma uniformly yields negative consequences. Unlike much of pop psychology and human development books, the appeal and credibility of his writings stem from their grounding in rigorous scientific methods: “statistical tests, validated questionnaires, thoroughly researched exercises, and large, representative samples” (Seligman, *Flourish* 1). Collaborating with fellow psychologists, Seligman investigated the relationship between trauma and character strengths, empirically examining the concept of post-traumatic growth as outlined in Tedeschi and Calhoun’s groundbreaking book *Trauma and Transformation: Growing in the Aftermath of Suffering*. Their findings affirm the reliability of post-traumatic growth as a psychological concept, demonstrating that “people are more resilient than extant theories predict” and that traumatic experiences can catalyze positive psychological transformations, including enhanced relationships, openness to new possibilities, greater resilience, and spiritual development (Peterson et al. 216).

The core objective of positive psychology for Seligman is to harness human potential for optimal functioning in all life circumstances. He introduced the PERMA theory of well-being, which comprises Positive Emotion (P), Engagement (E), Relationships (R), Meaning (M), and Accomplishment (A), as a structured framework for understanding and promoting well-being across different domains of life (*Flourish* 16). In the subsequent analysis, I will examine the applicability of Seligman’s PERMA theory to *Finding Ola*, evaluating whether experiencing what Seligman describes as the “five measurable elements that make up well-being” is associated with the protagonist’s post-traumatic growth (“PERMA” 333). By exploring Ola’s journey to transcend mere survival and attain a state of flourishing after divorce, the study aims at critically investigating the extent to which this TV drama series aligns with the PERMA framework and conveys

messages of positive psychology applicable to individuals going through transformative experiences.

The PERMA Model in *Finding Ola*

Positive Emotion

In Seligman's well-being theory, positive emotion is foundational, yet the term "positive" has been so overused that its meaning has become diluted, often invoking associations with transient mood states of cheerfulness or elation. Seligman critiques this connotation as incongruent with the deeper aims of positive psychology, emphasizing that "[t]o 'take advantage' of positive emotions is not to suggest that you are going to be walking through life only seeing the positive in everything and having a big smile on your face at all times" (*Flourish* 139-140). Instead, positive emotions contribute to cultivating an enduring sense of well-being that transcends momentary mood fluctuations. While Seligman acknowledges that positive emotions are those feelings that bring pleasure: "rapture, ecstasy, warmth, comfort, and the like," his theory expands the concept to include deeper feelings of contentment, gratitude, and overall life satisfaction, reflecting a more profound understanding of human flourishing beyond fleeting emotional states (*Flourish* 11).

This distinction becomes particularly relevant when facing disruptive life events, where the immediate experience of positive emotions often seems incongruous or inaccessible. *Finding Ola* epitomizes such a context, as divorce temporarily overwhelms Ola, causing trauma that exceeds her capacity to integrate its associated emotional complexities. Part of what defines an event as traumatic is that "it produces psychological distress or harm" (Mersky et al. 2) and "at least temporarily overwhelms the individual's internal resources" (Briere and Scott 10). The breakdown of an individual's assumptive world—those foundational beliefs that provide a sense of self-worth, security, and stability—undoubtedly elicits significant distress. As Ronnie Janoff-Bulman asserts, trauma largely stems from the shattering of basic assumptions about the self and the

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world (169). In Ola's case, divorce shatters her assumptions about herself, her family, and life in general. In the immediate aftermath, it is expected that she feels angry, broken, and isolated, going through the emotional turmoil and uncertainty about the future commonly experienced in such situations.

To understand how deeply traumatizing divorce is for Ola, it is crucial to recognize the significance marriage holds for her. Within her cultural milieu, marriage carries deep personal and societal meanings, symbolizing her value and identity as a woman. Marriage, therefore, has been her major life dream and a paramount goal she so diligently worked to achieve. This cultural importance of marriage is underscored by the fact that *Finding Ola* is a sequel to a 2010 TV drama series titled *I Want to Get Married* [Ayza Atgawez]. In the earlier series, Ola Abdel-Sabour, a young pharmacist, goes through a batch of romantic misadventures driven by both her and her mother's aspirations for her to get married before turning 30. The comic portrayal of her struggles deftly elucidates broader themes of societal expectations, familial pressures, and the indoctrination of women within the cultural construction of marriage and womanhood. After a string of disappointments and repeatedly meeting Mr. Wrong, *I Want to Get Married* ends in a dream coming true with Ola's wedding to her final suitor, Hisham.

Ola's character in *Finding Ola* evolves from her experiences in *I Want to Get Married*. Representing not only the dissolution of a marital bond but also the dismantling of deeply ingrained beliefs about her value as a woman, divorce shocks her like an apocalypse that ruins the life she has painstakingly tried to build. This mirrors Solly Dreman's argument that the "aftermath phase" of divorce can be as devastating as a natural disaster, with individuals feeling "as if an earthquake or hurricane has struck" (116). Dreman further notes that "few are able to articulate their experience during this period, amid the shock and confusion" (116), a state Ola precisely finds herself in as she grapples with the collapse of her marriage and the beliefs that once defined her.

According to Monica Borschel, divorce can be particularly traumatic when it involves “feelings of shock and betrayal,” often stemming from “abuse, affairs, or a sudden end to the marriage.” Ola’s divorce fits this description as it occurs unexpectedly. In the opening scene of the first episode, “Take Me Back,” she is portrayed as a “happy” wife who appears to have realized the envisioned life she pursued in the preceding series: “I’m very happy, really ... what else does a woman want in her life? Nothing” (00:00:31-00:00:54). However, moments later, she is blindsided by her husband’s sudden declaration that he wants a divorce. No clear explanation is given for Hisham’s decision, except for his simple assertion: “I’m not happy anymore” (00:07:28-00:07:30). While he does not attribute blame to Ola, she pleads with him to stay, saying, “Just stay. Stay and I’ll do what you want. I’ll change” (00:07:24-00:07:27). Despite her attempts to salvage their marriage, Ola is suddenly thrust into the role of a divorcee forced to rebuild her life after her cherished dream is shattered, a single mother responsible for her two teenage children who are traumatized by the divorce as well, and a daughter who must contend with her own mother for whom marriage is a relationship meant to last forever. In short, Ola’s life is abruptly stretched across uncharted territories, leaving her uncertain of how to navigate them alone.

At this stage in her journey, positive emotion plays a minimal role for Ola. She seems to be on the verge of depression, and there is little basis in positive psychology to suggest that fake smiling or feigning positive emotion will alleviate such distress (Seligman, *Flourish* 201). Instead, as Cyrine Saada puts it, she psychologically “strips down and we see every layer of insecurity and vulnerability. We get a glimpse of what is like to be a middle-aged divorcee woman in Arab society, facing social prejudices and pressures, the guilt she feels of not doing enough, and everything in between.” Seligman’s research indicates potential causal connections and cross-correlations among the elements of the

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PERMA theory, though the specific sequence through which these elements influence each other may vary individually (“PERMA” 334). Ola’s experience exemplifies this intricate dynamic; her path to cultivating positive emotion appears contingent upon first integrating the other elements. Achieving engagement, meaning-making, fostering positive relationships, and accomplishing personal goals serve as the foundational pillars that enable her to eventually transcend her grief and experience a flourishing of positive emotions. This highlights the synergistic interplay within the PERMA framework, where progress in one element acts as a catalyst for growth in others, with individual variations in the pathways toward well-being.

Engagement

Despite her initial engulfment in a tumult of negative emotions, retreating into seclusion within her room and relying on antidepressants as a palliative measure to survive the harrowing phase of divorce, a turning point emerges as Ola begins to confront her reality with a renewed perspective. Echoing the ethos espoused in Emily St. John Mandel’s postapocalyptic novel *Station Eleven*, where the notion that “survival is insufficient” is eloquently expressed (56; ch.11), she feels compelled to step beyond her shelter and start to live again. Faced with the responsibility of tending to her children’s multifaceted needs—both physical and psychological—she recognizes the necessity of transcending her self-imposed isolation and charting new pathways forward. This recognition marks the beginning of her immersion into a new phase in life, which aligns with Seligman’s concept of “engagement.” Seligman describes “engagement” as “being one with the music, time stopping, and the loss of self-consciousness during an absorbing activity.” This state is characterized by a sense of “flow” where complete absorption in certain pursuits leads to the dissolution of temporal boundaries and the recession of self-awareness into the background (*Flourish* 11).

In a moment of flow during a spontaneous exchange with her former husband’s cousin and other friends, Ola unwittingly reveals

her ambition to establish an enterprise centered on crafting organic skincare products. This unplanned disclosure of her long-dormant dream reflects her emerging sense of autonomy. Further discussion highlights her past success in creating homemade skincare formulations inspired by ancient Egyptian recipes she learned about during her collegiate years. Engaging with this rekindled aspiration not only frees Ola from the emotional shackles of the past but also sparks a shift in her perspective, focusing her attention on what can be gained rather than what was lost.

Eschewing futile attempts to alter the past, Ola finds solace in the flow of creativity, redirecting her energies toward her entrepreneurial vision—a venture that demands concerted time and effort yet promises a future replete with potential. Through deliberate reframing of her narrative, she reconceptualizes the termination of her marriage not as the conclusion of a book, but as the prelude to a new chapter characterized by resilience, empowerment, and untapped possibilities. In a climactic moment captured on camera while recording a promotional video for her products, Ola articulates her epiphany with poignant clarity:

My name is Ola Abdel Sabour. I'm a mom and a pharmacist. A month ago, I was leading a totally different life. What changed in a month? I got divorced. And like many women, I thought my life was over. But then, I realized that when a woman gets divorced, there is a part in her that dies, true, but something new grows in its place. A part that belongs to her. And I came alive again when I focused on doing exactly what I love. Inside every jar, there's the experience of a pharmacist, the love of a mom, and the warmth of a woman. The products I've been making at home for years gave me my second chance. Because we all deserve a second chance. And that's why I decided to name my brand 'Second Chance.' ("Bills to Pay" 00:49:45-00:51:03)

This simple declaration marks Ola's transformation from a woman lost to one empowered. Embracing the ethos of "Second Chance,"

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she imbues her nascent brand with the essence of redemption and renewal, symbolizing her own rebirth from the ashes of divorce and epitomizing the human spirit's inherent capacity for transformative growth. The active engagement of her family and friends is instrumental at this critical juncture. Her friends contribute collaboratively; her mother stars as the face of the advertising campaign; and her children take on the essential roles of recording and directing the promotional videos.

Relationships

When asked to summarize positive psychology in no more than two words, Christopher Peterson, a founding figure in the field, replied, "Other people," as noted by Martin Seligman (*Flourish* 20). Seligman, in turn, emphasizes the pivotal role played by relationships in well-being, arguing that positive interpersonal connections foster happiness and enhance life satisfaction. He contends that "[v]ery little that is positive is solitary," and, countering Sartre's claim that "[h]ell is other people," asserts that "[o]ther people are the best antidote to the downs of life and the single most reliable up" (*Flourish* 20). Although this principle may not hold true in all situations, it is particularly evident in the case of Ola, whose post-divorce well-being is significantly influenced by the quality of her relationships, both with others and with herself.

Central to Ola's post-divorce growth is her reconnection with Nisreen, an old friend who emerges as a steadfast confidant and source of encouragement. Nisreen exemplifies Peterson's assertion that "good social relationships are buffers against the damaging effects of disappointments and setbacks" ("What Is Positive Psychology"). Unlike Ola, she embodies a firm belief in female autonomy, advocating that women are complete individuals capable of self-sufficiency irrespective of their marital status. Her unwavering support provides Ola with a safe space to process her emotions and explore new ventures, thereby facilitating her engagement in activities that foster personal growth and fulfillment. A pivotal moment occurs when Ola, buoyed by the supportive environment created by Nisreen, finds the strength to publicly

acknowledge her changed marital status on Facebook—a symbolic gesture of self-assertion and determination to embark on a new chapter of her life without fear or shame.

It is noteworthy that the constructive influences shaping Ola's growth trajectory extend beyond her relationships with supportive female friends. The narrative does not hinge solely on the presence of "strong independent women;" men also play pivotal roles in fostering Ola's personal and professional development. A key figure is Tarek Zohni, a renowned business coach who not only recognizes Ola's potential but also provides her with free strategic advice and a tangible roadmap for realizing her ambitions. Through his mentorship, Tarek Zohni imparts to both Ola and the audience important messages that resonate profoundly throughout the series. As he guides Ola through the steps of founding her small business, she perceives a subtle ambiguity in his demeanor, suggestive of possible romantic inclinations. Confused by his "mixed signals," she asks, "Why are you so interested in me, Tarek?" To this, he sagaciously responds, "I admit it, I did give you mixed signals ... Yes, I'm a man after all. And you're a beautiful woman ... But actually, that's not why I'm here right now ... the question is why you are here" ("Bills to Pay" 00:45:12-00:47:24). This response underscores the necessity for Ola to reaffirm her agency and reject any conception of herself as a mere passive object susceptible to male manipulation, highlighting her own responsibility for establishing healthy boundaries between personal life and work.

Another significant message surfaces when Zohni remarks, "You know what your problem is, dear Ola? ... You see everything in life as black and white. But it's not one or the other, 'Should I stay home with the kids or have a career?' ... that's not how it works" ("Bills to Pay" 00:46:20-00:46:45). By challenging Ola's conventional binary thinking and reliance on a simplistic either/or mindset, Zohni exposes the fallacy of viewing family and career as mutually exclusive for women. He urges Ola to reconsider the rigid gender roles that have shaped her perspective, advocating for a more

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nuanced understanding of her choices. His critique promotes a balanced approach to the complex demands of life, empowering women to seek holistic fulfillment beyond restrictive dichotomies. For Ola, this approach proves pivotal as it allows her to forge a new path that harmonizes her career ambitions with her familial responsibilities.

Even Ola's post-divorce relationship with her former husband, Hisham, showcases a relatively positive dynamic that challenges prevailing notions of divorce as inherently adversarial and demonstrates the feasibility of an amicable dissolution of marriage. Despite initial hurdles and emotional strains, they maintain open lines of communication and place paramount importance on the well-being of their children. Their conscientious handling of financial matters is particularly commendable: Hisham assumes responsibility for the children's expenses, while Ola, opting for financial independence, declines spousal support despite his willingness to provide it indefinitely in recognition of her earlier career sacrifices for the marriage. While the idealized nature of Ola and Hisham's post-divorce relationship may not be universally applicable across diverse socioeconomic contexts, it offers an inspiring example of how mutual respect and a shared commitment to supportive co-parenting can foster positive interactions after separation.

Ola's psychological awareness as a mother is poignantly revealed in a significant exchange with her teenage daughter, Nadia. Nadia's expression of solidarity, "I am on your side," is met with Ola's composed response, "It's not a war, Nadia. We're not forcing you guys to take any sides" ("Take Me Back" 00:30:34-00:30:54). On another occasion, she advises her daughter not to judge her father, saying, "When you grow up a little, you're gonna stop being so quick to judge ... You need to cut him some slack. Because you're his daughter, not his wife or ex-wife. Your dad didn't leave the family. The only one he left was me" ("Bills to Pay" 00:08:53-00:09:37). This attitude reflects adept parental wisdom and

prioritization of the children's emotional health. Notably, Ola's relationship with her children emerges as a pivotal aspect of her post-divorce journey. Her unwavering dedication to nurturing this bond is palpable throughout the series, most prominently in the fifth episode, "No Men, No Cry," where she attends a parent-child camp originally designed for fathers due to Hisham's absence for health reasons. Within the camp's immersive environment, moments of genuine connection and vulnerability unfold as Ola and her children engage in heartfelt conversations, revealing their innermost thoughts and feelings. Prior to the divorce, Ola's focus seemed to be predominantly on meeting her children's physical needs. In the aftermath, however, she develops a deeper understanding of their emotional landscapes and actively shares her own emotions with them. Through being attentively heard and empathetically understood, they are all fortified to endure the complexities of post-divorce life with grace and resilience.

In many ways, the divorce experience compels Ola to confront and reassess the troubled relationships in her life, with particular focus on her strained bond with her mother, Suhair. Their relationship has long been fraught with tension and misunderstanding, with Suhair embodying societal expectations and cultural norms that confine women to restrictive roles, valuing them primarily as wives and mothers. The dissolution of Ola's marriage prompts both women to reflect deeply on their bond. At a crucial moment of introspection, Suhair bitterly recognizes parallels between her relationship with Ola and her own relationship with her mother, who held the belief that women should endure any hardship to preserve their marriages. Despite this insight, Suhair remains firmly rooted in such traditional beliefs, which impedes her ability to fully adopt new values and perspectives. Consequently, the mother-daughter tension persists throughout the series, with Suhair continually urging Ola to reconcile with Hisham or consider a second marriage, albeit with a gradual reduction in the intensity of

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this tension. As Ola achieves notable success in her entrepreneurial ventures and Suhair becomes the public face of her anti-aging creams, the latter begins to develop a sense of pride in her daughter. Nevertheless, Ola's mounting frustration with her mother's relentless pressure to remarry culminates in a powerful emotional outburst. Finally expressing the depth of her feelings, she declares,

It's over, Mom. I have had enough of this game. For my entire life, I've been trying to be the daughter you want, to be like you, to make you happy, but it's not working anymore! I can't take this. Look at me! As harsh as it sounds, I hate this side of me. ... I'm scared to be myself. And to tell you how I'm feeling. ... I don't need a mother who will scare me. I need a mother who'll be my friend. I'm never going to be exactly like you, Mom. I tried really hard, but it didn't work out. But myself? I can be myself. So, get to know me. I'm worth it, or at least try. ("40 is the New 40" 00:34:29-00:35:36)

This moment of candid revelation affords both Ola and Suhair the opportunity to bridge the longstanding gap between them, potentially forging a deeper and more genuine connection that transcends superficial expectations and external validation.

Meaning

Central to PERMA theory is the premise that enduring states of contentment and satisfaction arise from leading a life imbued with meaning. Seligman elucidates that genuine meaning is attained when individuals unlock their full potential and cultivate a profound sense of purpose. He defines a meaningful life as one in which individuals recognize their highest strengths and apply them toward pursuits that extend beyond personal self-interest. As he puts it, this involves "using your signature strengths and virtues in the service of something much larger than you are" (*Authentic Happiness* 263). Meaning in life is a complex, multifaceted construct derived from various sources, including family, social ties, work, religion, spirituality, personal ambitions, and broader aspirations (Emmons 108). Roy Baumeister and Kathleen Vohs further posit that the

pursuit of meaning, regardless of its source, is intrinsically linked to fundamental human needs for purpose, values, efficacy, and self-worth (610). These needs are fulfilled when individuals engage in activities that align with their authentic sense of meaning, investing in their inherent talents and areas of excellence. Ultimately, the realization of a meaningful life is inextricably connected to the recognition and expression of one's authentic self.

Ola's marital dilemma serves as a poignant illustration of the erosion of meaning that accompanies a life lived inauthentically. Initially, she perceives her role as wife and mother as the sole source of meaning in her life, sacrificing both her career aspirations and social connections to conform to her husband's desires. This sacrifice starkly contrasts with the concept of authentic behavior, defined by Psychologist Kennon Sheldon and his colleagues as freely chosen conduct congruent with one's core values and inner feelings; "People feel most authentic when they act with a full sense of choice and self-expression" (Sheldon et al. 1381). Ola's pre-divorce life lacked this essential element of authenticity, as her sense of meaning was primarily derived from external validation, compelling her to contort her true self to fit others' expectations. This incongruence between social conformity and inner convictions is vividly depicted in the first episode, where Ola presents a facade of contentment while harboring inner turmoil. She metaphorically wears a mask, concealing her true emotions while striving to maintain amicability and satisfy those around her, even as she breaks the fourth wall to share her genuine feelings with the audience.

Throughout her thirteen-year marriage, Ola consistently conformed to the demands of her cultural milieu, prioritizing what was supposed to be done and said over what she truly felt and believed. Her inability to satisfy her husband can be attributed to her pursuit of an idealized image, rather than embracing her authentic self. As Sheldon and his colleagues note, "[a] person who constantly remolds him or herself in line with role-related

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pressures or demands would seem to lack integrity and self-direction ... and might suffer accordingly” (1381). Such a person may also indirectly impact others negatively, including those for whom they have compromised their authenticity. This sentiment is subtly reflected in a retrospective dialogue in the final episode, where Hisham reminisces about Ola’s genuine zest for life prior to their marriage, implying her subsequent shift away from authenticity:

Hisham: Do you remember when we first bought this place? I remember the day we saw it for the very first time. You ran through the apartment, straight to this balcony. You told me, ‘This is it, Hisham, this is it.’ Not the best negotiation position even though I told you in the car, ‘If you like it, just whisper in my ear, don’t say it in front of the owner.’ We were really happy back then. You weren’t forcing it. Everything was easy. Life was just sweeter. What happened, Ola?

Ola: Boredom, routine, the kids, the debts, the bills ... I hated all these things, just like you did ... except they never made me want to leave our marriage for good, Hisham. It was the opposite ... I cut my best friend out of my life for you. I quit my job cause I thought it’ll make you happy, it’ll be less selfish. But in the end, you still left because you were bored. That’s what happened. (“The Good Ex-wife” 00:38:24-00:39:50)

This dialogue underscores the mutual failure of Ola and Hisham to fully acknowledge the complexity of their situation, suggesting that accountability is rarely one-sided. The introspection spurred by the divorce becomes a catalyst for Ola’s journey toward meaning, prompting her to reckon with existential questions regarding her identity and authenticity, such as “Who am I?” and “What am I becoming?” Only after the divorce does Ola fully grasp the extent to which she has relinquished her true self. This period of self-reflection allows her to shed the inauthentic persona she had adopted and realign with her innate talents and genuine aspirations.

Ola's decision to revive her career and reconnect with her friend Nisreen symbolizes this reclamation of authenticity. By asserting her autonomy and leveraging her strengths to pursue endeavors consonant with her core values, she begins to create a new path imbued with meaning—one that not only enriches her own existence but also positively influences her children.

Ola's belief that sacrificing her career to focus solely on her family would be in the best interest of her children is met with irony as she discovers that abandoning her individuality did not foster a deeper connection with them. A jaw-dropping revelation occurs during a family gathering in the first episode, when Hisham's cousin belittles Ola for forsaking her career ambitions. While serving her daughter meat, Ola responds, "Well, Soha, you can't have it all ... You chose to have a career and I chose to raise a family, and, honestly, I have no regrets. See, if I had a career going on while I was raising my kids, how would I be able to know them as well as I do?" Her daughter's quick retort—"Mom, I've been vegan for two years"—serves as a wake-up call, exposing the gap between Ola's perception and reality ("Take me Back" 00:03:29-00:04:13). Post-divorce, Ola realizes her lack of authentic engagement in her children's lives and acknowledges that genuine maternal investment requires quality time beyond merely meeting physical needs. Her pursuit of previously suppressed aspirations ultimately benefits her children, demonstrating that her personal fulfillment enhances, rather than diminishes, their well-being. Through this self-assertion, she embarks on a journey toward collective meaning, where, as Cyrine Saada eloquently states, "[h]er identity merges into a blissful unity with the subjectivities of others," reflecting a broader understanding of meaning and fulfillment.

Accomplishment

Seligman employs the term "the achieving life" to illustrate the fifth and final element in his Perma theory: accomplishment (*Flourish* 19). He argues that an achieving life embodies a profound desire for competence, a drive to exert mastery over one's

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environment, and engagement in activities chosen for their intrinsic value when free from coercion (*Flourish* 20). Accomplishment enriches individuals with self-esteem and self-determination, significantly enhancing overall well-being. In *Finding Ola*, the pinnacle of accomplishment is captured in the closing scene, where Ola, standing alone against a picturesque Cairo backdrop, embarks on a solitary boat ride, symbolizing her newfound autonomy and resilience. This defining moment is preceded by three pivotal scenes, the first of which occurs when Hisham expresses a desire to “come back,” to which Ola responds decisively:

Come back where, Hisham? Back to what? Am I a hotel to you? Don't you see you can't check in and out whenever you please? The least you could do is to have some respect ... cause I respected your choice to leave me. Back then, I had to get up every morning, go to work, had to take care of the kids, take care of myself also, feeling like I was hardly good enough. I'm not blaming you. But you did hurt me, Hisham. And that pain changed me. So no, I can't do it ... (“The Good Ex-wife” 00:40:07-00:41:44)

The second pivotal scene takes place during a business meeting in which Ola successfully presents her products to an international company, securing financial sponsorship and access to overseas markets. The third scene features Ola on a boat with Dr. Marwan, a widower and father of Nadia's best friend Zeina, introduced in episode 5 as a potential love interest and future partner for Ola. Their interactions exude warmth and familiarity, prompting Ola to remark to Nisreen, “You know that feeling when you've known someone forever? When you don't have to explain yourself all the time, you feel understood, you feel seen?” (“The Good Ex-wife” 00:10:09-00:10:22). Despite their connection, they do not end up together. Marwan asserts that it is “too soon” for a commitment and advises Ola to sort out her life first,

Your life is crowded, Ola ... I need to know you better, see you more, to open up to you. I need to experience you when I have your undivided attention and you have mine as well.

I've never felt as comfortable as I do sitting right here talking to you. But truthfully, we barely know each other. We both feel this thing, but we don't have the proper time to explore it yet. You're not ready, Ola. It's not the right time ... When your life becomes less crowded, call me. I'll be waiting. ("The Good Ex-wife" 00:48:19-00:49:28)

Ola implicitly rejects the binary choice presented by Marwan. When he offers his hand to help her off the boat, she replies, "I'll keep going." By continuing the journey alone, without either Hisham or Marwan, Ola demonstrates her realization that life is not about finding Prince Charming but about finding oneself. She decides to prioritize personal fulfillment over the allure of companionship, acknowledging that she is not yet ready for a second marriage.

This transformation marks a profound departure from Ola's earlier preoccupation with remarriage, even amidst her growing professional success. Throughout the series, she fluctuates between positive and negative emotions, grappling with concerns about aging, loneliness, and the search for a marriage partner through dating apps. By the series' conclusion, however, she stands alone with newfound strength, having gained mastery over her personal fears and social environment. While she does not dismiss the idea of marriage or the value of connecting with a soulmate, she comes to understand the importance of being fully prepared for such a commitment. Ola's journey ultimately underscores the significance of grounded hope—an approach to life rooted in a realistic understanding of one's circumstances. Rather than succumbing to unrealistic expectations, she embraces a pragmatic mindset, reassessing her priorities and charting a course for a life defined by authenticity and personal agency. This shift in perspective epitomizes her evolution towards genuine accomplishment and self-realization.

The Societal Implications of Ola's Journey

The implications of *Finding Ola* extend beyond its narrative and character arcs, encouraging the audience to reassess prevailing societal perceptions of divorce and resilience. Divorce, in its raw reality, remains a significant life challenge—one that carries heavy consequences, especially for children, and cannot be reduced to a mere opportunity for growth. The series does not romanticize the profound loss divorce entails or downplay the emotional toll it takes. However, it does emphasize the potential for growth and transformation that can arise from such adversity. Rather than depicting it solely as an irrevocable failure, *Finding Ola* presents divorce as a complex, multifaceted experience that, while deeply painful, can open space for redefinition and personal renewal in the aftermath.

A key aspect of Ola's narrative is her evolution from a woman defined by her marriage and its dissolution to one empowered by her autonomy. This shift exemplifies the dynamics of resilience, a concept often narrowly defined in the context of enduring hardship. While the traditional view of resilience emphasizes the capacity to “bounce back” from adversity (Smith et al. 194), *Finding Ola* offers a more expansive interpretation that includes the ability to forge a new path, to redefine oneself, and to construct meaning from seemingly devastating circumstances. It thus suggests that resilience is not merely an adaptation to loss through a return to normalcy but a proactive process of reinvention and self-assertion. For many viewers, especially those who may have experienced similar transitions, Ola's journey illuminates how resilience can manifest through self-reflection, intentionality, and the pursuit of authenticity. Showing that it is possible to emerge from the shadows of a broken relationship with a renewed sense of self-worth and purpose, *Finding Ola* offers a message of hope and inspiration, presenting an opportunity to rethink the very notion of “success” in life.

The final scene, in which Ola embarks on a solitary boat ride toward an uncertain future, visually encapsulates the series' deeper message. This symbolic act serves as a profound statement about life's journey—not as a destination defined by external expectations, but as an ongoing process of becoming that does not require validation from others. The image of Ola navigating the waters alone reinforces the idea that, while relationships are integral to life, they should not define an individual's entire existence. In this way, the series reframes the narrative of marriage and divorce, urging viewers to prioritize self-actualization and personal growth over societal pressures to conform to conventional relationship trajectories. This reframing is particularly significant in a cultural context where divorce is often stigmatized, especially for women, who are frequently portrayed as either broken or incomplete post-divorce. Ola's narrative challenges this view by providing a model for how women can emerge from such a disruptive life event not only intact but empowered.

The impact of TV dramas like *Finding Ola* in shaping public perceptions of social issues such as divorce cannot be ignored. As pervasive media, TV dramas possess the capacity to challenge stereotypes and inspire viewers to reconsider cultural norms and long-held beliefs about relationships and personal identity. Functioning as a cultural artifact, *Finding Ola* contributes to the evolving discourse surrounding gender and women's roles in contemporary society. The depiction of a resilient woman confidently steering her own course, without relying on others for emotional or social validation, serves not only as a powerful symbol of personal growth but also as a call for a more progressive, inclusive understanding of womanhood, relationships, and life beyond loss. By presenting divorce through a lens of positive psychology and post-traumatic growth, asserting that individuals can thrive despite, or even because of, the difficulties they face, *Finding Ola* offers a paradigm shift—suggesting that divorce, instead of being seen as a purely negative event, can be a moment of

pivotal change, a juncture where individuals can chart new, more authentic paths for themselves.

Conclusion

Divorce should neither be glamorized nor lightly endorsed. Nevertheless, it occasionally becomes an inevitable recourse when a marriage, for whatever reason, ceases to be “a real wedlock,” as aptly articulated by Nora in *A Doll’s House* (Ibsen 58; act 3). In such cases, divorce need not be perceived as an apocalyptic end to one’s well-being; it can rather signify the beginning of a profoundly transformative journey that opens avenues for significant growth and autonomy. This is the essence of *Finding Ola*, a series that, through a delicate blend of humor and insight, depicts a woman’s transition from initial trauma to eventual empowerment. Though divorce presents Ola with challenges and setbacks, she ultimately manages to build a new, fulfilling life, exercising agency over her choices and confronting adversity with renewed strength. Her post-divorce journey is presented as a multifaceted process involving the recognition and acceptance of pain while moving toward renewal and flourishing.

The significance of *Finding Ola* extends beyond its focus on divorce. By portraying a protagonist who navigates a perceived “apocalyptic upheaval” toward personal growth, the series offers a broader message of resilience not only for divorced women, but also for anyone grappling with traumatic life changes. This message implicitly invites reflection on the cultural constructs of success, failure, trauma, and self-reinvention. Inspired by positive psychology, I have approached *Finding Ola* as a compelling case study that demonstrates the transformative potential inherent in confronting life’s formidable trials. Contextualizing Ola’s narrative within the framework of Martin Seligman’s PERMA theory, the previous analysis explored the importance of embracing positive emotions while acknowledging negative ones, engaging in activities aligned with personal strengths, nurturing supportive relationships while setting healthy boundaries, and cultivating an authentic sense

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of meaning that fosters purpose and accomplishment as the key elements that enhance well-being and facilitate post-traumatic growth. I hope this exploration contributes to enriching scholarly discourse on the intersection between positive psychology and artistic narratives that transcend the realm of entertainment to offer insights into the human condition and the potential for positive change even in the face of profound loss.

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