**EXPLORATIONS OF NEOLIBERAL INFLUENCE ON SUBJECTIVITY
IN NORWEGIAN AND TURKISH SOCIETIES**

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Preface

Working as a pedagogical-psychological consultant the last few years, I have been shocked by how widespread neoliberal discourses have become. Given their dominance, even children do not escape the demands of neoliberal discourses. Kindergarten workers, teachers and pedagogues at school, health care professionals (school nurses, psychologists and psychiatrists) draw continually upon neoliberal discourses to describe children, to make sense of their problems and to come up with solutions to those problems. Meeting after meeting, it is frequently agreed upon that the child lacks some sort of quality, whether it is self-confidence, self-control/impulse control, self-regulation, self-love, self-leadership (a term increasingly used in Norwegian kindergartens to refer to management skills of the child in their play activities, including planning, organizing, initiating, self-monitoring). A host of explanations are put forth, most of which, in a reductionist manner, individualize the problem and demand thereby a change within the child. Even when situational or milieu factors are acknowledged, most professionals agree that the child ought to be trained to become a better version of her/himself rather than making structural changes in the child's environment. Just the other day, a teacher explained to me how she talked to an 8 year-old third grader, who has a difficult home situation (violent divorce, fights at home, demanding parents etc.) to make him aware that he is responsible for his own actions; that it is simply his *choice* to do harm (e.g. throwing rocks at others). Ignoring also other situational factors at school, the 8 year-old is then expected to simply refrain from making bad choices! This is just an example of how neoliberal subjectivity is promoted in society. Most people would agree that taking responsibility for one's own actions, especially given the Zeitgeist of the western culture, is a good thing. However, is there not a limit for personal responsibility? This anecdote aside, in the current thesis, my colleagues and I investigate different spheres of Norwegian and Turkish societies to discuss how neoliberal discourses may influence subjectivity. As a critical psychologist, I believe there is a pressing need to reveal and discuss how neoliberal discourses which promote individualizing (and also pathologizing) practices may influence subjectivity and well-being. The current thesis makes a modest attempt at this.

Oslo, September 17, 2016

Acknowledgments

I cannot take full credit for the work presented in the present thesis as it is a result of a collective effort. I owe a lot to my supervisors and co-authors and am grateful for all the help and support I have received. I do however take responsibility for any potential shortcomings of the thesis.

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In the later stages of writing-up the thesis, I have been fortunate enough to have lovely Serap Keles in my life. She has been a tremendously supporting friend and intellectual companion. Thank you Serap for challenging me, providing me with constructive feedback in the different phases of manuscript writing and for being a very good intellectual role model.

I dedicate this thesis to my daughter Emma Refika. She has unfortunately suffered the most because of my aspiration to do a Ph.D. She has been with me every step of the way and has been a constant source of inspiration and joy in my life.

Summary

This thesis explores and details neoliberal discourses through which individuals of contemporary societies of Norway and Turkey constitute themselves and are constituted as subjects. This overall aim is achieved in four empirical papers each of which presents a discourse analysis. My co-authors and I make use of Foucault's theoretical framework of neoliberal governmentality to make sense of and discuss discourses that are produced in each paper. From a governmentality perspective, "the conduct of conduct" or social control over citizens in advanced liberal states is achieved in a subtle way by a set of empowering techniques like autonomy, self-realization, and self-esteem. Each paper aims at revealing specific discourses in different spheres of society which may work in ways consonant to neoliberal governmentality. In each paper, we explore what subjectivities are promoted by neoliberal discourses and how these discourses may function to strengthen neoliberal practices and preserve status quo.

Papers I and II investigate specific media discourses and make use of already existing data, namely newspaper articles on self-development and a TV show on debt. The two papers present and detail similarly discourses of rationality, autonomy and responsibility, entrepreneurship, and positivity and self-confidence. In both papers, we found a strong reductionist tendency to depict any problem of life as lying in the domain of the individual. Both papers also explicate the role of psy-complex as reflected in the use of psychologists and self-development gurus as experts. Discourses promoted by these so-called experts function to individualize the social, thus concealing the socio-structural elements of society, and demand individuals to be a better version of themselves to tackle any problem of life. Media discourses on self-development and debt thus instill stronger individualism.

The aim of Papers III and IV was to investigate future orientation of youth in the Norwegian and Turkish societies. This was done to reveal currently dominant, neoliberal, discourses which youth draw upon to make sense of their lives and through which they constitute themselves as subjects of their respective societies. Our findings in paper III resonate with understandings of neoliberal influence in society which instills an *individualistic* subject who constitutes herself as independent, self-realizing, achievement-oriented, and sensation-seeking. We discuss implications of these discourses on subjectivity, pitting them against more relational or *collectivist/community-oriented* discourses of solidarity, significant others and good citizenship. Paper IV details two frameworks of discourses relating to materialism, and education and career. Drawing upon a materialism discourse, some youth in both national contexts see happiness only accessible through material possessions, defining their subjectivities in terms of what they have. We discuss how socio-structural differences between Norway and Turkey may lead to different discourses on education and career, and hence affect youth differently. We relate these discourses to neoliberalism and discuss the extent to which youth constitute themselves as neoliberal subjects of their respective societies.

Overall, each paper of the thesis contributes to our understanding of contemporary subjectivities and discusses how neoliberal discourses may lead to individualization of social and societal problems. It is discussed that when individuals understand themselves as autonomous entrepreneurial subjects (neoliberal subjects), they tend to accept personal responsibility for whatever problem they may have, for instance debt or unemployment. When individuals are made responsible for systemic failures, it may lead to preservation of the status quo of the contemporary capitalist societies.

List of papers

Paper I

Türken, S., Nafstad, H. E., Blakar, R. M. & Roen, K. (2016). Making sense of neoliberal subjectivity: A discourse analysis of media language on self-development. *Globalizations*, 13(1), 32-46. doi: 10.1080/14747731.2015.1033247

Paper II

Türken, S., Carlquist, E., & Allen, H. (2015). Chasing happiness through personal debt: An example of neoliberal influence in the Norwegian welfare society. In C. Walker & S. M. Degirmencioglu (eds.), *Social and psychological dimensions of personal debt and the debt industry* (pp. 160-179). UK: Palgrave Macmillan.

Paper III

Türken, S., Roen, K., Nafstad, H. E., & Blakar, R. M. (under review). Future orientation of youth in Norway and Turkey: Tensions between self-realization and belonging?

Paper IV

Türken, S., Nafstad, H. E., Phelps, J. M., & Blakar, R. M. (in press). Youth's future orientation and well-being: Materialism and concerns with education and career among Norwegian and Turkish youth. *International Journal of Child, Youth and Family Studies*.

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Foreword

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1. Introduction

1.1 Introduction to thesis

“Economics are the method. The object is to change the soul.”

Margaret Thatcher, *Sunday Times*, 7 May 1988

Who was responsible for the global financial crises in 2008? Who is responsible for the poor economic situation Greece currently finds itself in? Who is to blame for large scale unemployment and poverty in many countries today? Who is accountable for the accumulating personal debt in many societies? Who is responsible for my happiness? And how do I manage life altogether? The possible answers to these and similar questions relating to a variety of life domains may reveal critical knowledge about the way individuals make sense of themselves and their world. They can thus provide us with the possibility to investigate dominant discourses of contemporary societies through which individuals are constituted as subjects and constitute their subjectivities. Currently, we live in neoliberal societies. Inasmuch as neoliberalism has managed to change ‘the soul’, as intended in the quote above by the late prime minister of United Kingdom, Margaret Thatcher, who, for many, personified neoliberal policies, we would expect answers to above questions that would individualize such social and societal problems and thus responsabilize the individuals.

Individualizing the social and responsabilizing the individual would mean that people would be more inclined to blame individuals for whatever problem they, and also society, might face and have them deal with the problems on their own. In turn, the social and systemic elements of society remain out of sight: critique of the system is thus limited, leading to preservation of status quo.

In the present thesis, I explore contemporary dominant discourses which may function to reinforce neoliberalism in the increasingly individualized societies of Norway and Turkey. Discourses are the systems of meanings which individuals draw upon to interpret, negotiate and make sense of themselves and their surroundings (Burr, 2003). Connolly (1998, p. 14), emphasizing the deeply embedded nature of subjectivity in a socially constructed system of power and meaning, asserts that “discourses tend to define how the social world is ordered and organized, then it is inevitable that discourses will reach into the very hearts of individuals and come to influence and shape their sense of identity”. Thus, studying discourses provides a way of understanding contemporary subjectivities. Even though there exist a multitude of discourses which affect culture, society and conduct of individuals in the globalization era, some are more dominant and exert more powerful influence on social life by becoming part of the common sense of society. Currently, neoliberalism is particularly a salient ideology and/or a hegemonic discourse across the world. Neoliberalism has not only changed the economics and politics of many different societies since the 1970s, but it has also influenced the way we think about and understand the world as well as ourselves (Bourdieu, 1998; Foucault, 2008; Harvey, 2005; Rose, 1999; Walkerdine, 2006). Questions that need to be answered, then, are: Has neoliberalism managed to change people’s ‘soul’ or subjectivity? What are the particular discourses that work in ways consonant with neoliberalism? What kind of subjectivity is made available, promoted, strengthened or constrained within these discourses which individuals draw upon to make sense of themselves and their world? What purposes may these discourses serve?

I aim to provide insights to understanding contemporary subjectivities – ways of being and thinking in the world – made available to individuals by neoliberal discourses in Norway and Turkey. In two papers, my colleagues and I explore media discourses, around the concepts of self-development (newspapers from Norway and Turkey in Paper I) and debt (a

reality-television program in Norway in Paper II) – which are now everyday notions increasingly becoming a part of common sense of society – and explicate subject positions offered by those discourses and discuss them in relation to neoliberalism. Papers I and II provide us with specific examples of how neoliberal discourses may influence subjectivity in contemporary social life. In Papers III and IV, my colleagues and I analyze and discuss, from a broader perspective, particular discourses young people draw upon in their writings about their future in relation to large scale societal changes in Norway and Turkey. In doing so, we investigate the degree to which neoliberal discourses enter into the negotiation of subjectivity of Norwegian and Turkish youth, and to what extent there is resistance against these very same discourses.

1.2 Research focus and aims

This thesis addresses and provides empirical examples of how subjectivity is shaped by dominant discourses, which may function directly or indirectly to reproduce, strengthen and disseminate neoliberal thinking in society. Although there has globally been increased interest in studies of neoliberalism and its influence on subjectivity (e.g., Foucault, 2008; Rose, 1999; Walkerdine, 2006), empirical work within psychology on the relationship between neoliberalism and subjectivity has been somewhat limited. To address this gap in the literature and add insights into this interrelation, the current thesis aims at investigating media discourses and youth future orientation in the two national contexts, Norway and Turkey. Investigating multiple social contexts at different ecological levels or systems of society (e.g., Bronfenbrenner, 1979) such as media discourse and youth future orientation provides a powerful window into how neoliberalism is related to subjectivity throughout society.

Contemporary life can be conceptualized as ‘mediapolis’, “a comprehensively mediated public space where media underpin and overarch the experiences and expressions of everyday life” (Deuze, 2011, p. 137). As individuals are continuously subject to media influence, which is ideological (Thompson, 1988), the aim of the Papers I and II was to investigate the influence of neoliberalism on subjectivity through the exploration of media discourses surrounding the concepts of *self-development* and *debt*. As shall be discussed, neoliberalism demands a constant attempt to ‘do better’ and to ‘improve oneself’. The concept of *self-development* has lately become a buzzword and is increasingly used in various contexts by media, either on its own or related to the increasingly popular global self-help culture promoted by neoliberalism (see for instance, Binkley, 2011). For instance, a Google search of the word *self-development* currently returns a staggering 95 million hits, indicating a large global interest in the topic, and the term has been increasingly used both in Norwegian and Turkish media over time (Türken, Blakar, Bruer & Nafstad, under preparation). Regarding the focus on *debt*, Ross (2013) suggests we now live in ‘creditocracies’ where credit, and therefore debt, has become omnipresent. Moreover, Harvey (2005) connects the increase in credit use to neoliberal ways of strengthening consumerism. As debt relations are fundamentally social, and thereby also relations of power (Graeber, 2011), contemporary subjectivity, and by extension the contemporary social order, is in large part determined by these debt relations (Lazzarato, 2012). Thus, exploring discourses around debt provides us with the opportunity to investigate the ways in which individuals are subjected to neoliberal thinking.

The aims of Papers I and II were not limited to the investigation of the extent to which neoliberal thinking influences subjectivity through (media) discourses. Another aim in these two papers was to investigate the ways psychological knowledge is disseminated in society and used by experts (psy-complex) to promote neoliberal subjectivity. They are thus also concerned with whether or not this knowledge might contribute to the reproduction of the

status quo of neoliberal societies as has been suggested by Parker (1994), Prilleltensky and Fox (1997) and Rose (1999).

Papers I and II provide *specific* examples of media discourses, for instance that of autonomy, individual responsibility and entrepreneurship, which reflect and function to strengthen neoliberal thinking. However, while media disseminates certain ways of thinking and contributes to meaning construction in society, media discourse does not directly translate into individual thought and experience (Fairclough, 2001; Gill, 2008; Sputilnuk, 1996). To complement the picture, the aim of the Papers III and IV was therefore to investigate whether or not and/or to what degree presumably hegemonic neoliberal thinking (Bourdieu, 1998; Harvey, 2005) enter into negotiation of subjectivity in a more general sense in society. To examine this, youth were prompted to think and write about their future. Future orientation provides grounds for setting goals, planning, exploring options and making commitments, and guiding one's development in the process of becoming adults (Nurmi, 1991). Coming of age in an era of globalization, youth are exposed to local and global developments, changing discourses and various ideologies that make available new ways of seeing and being in the world (Arnett, 2002; Hermans & DiMaggio, 2007). Hence, investigating future orientation of youth offers the possibility to explore contemporary discourses and ideologies that make those orientations available to them, given that past, present and future are intertwined (Adam, 2004). While most research on youth future orientation focuses on *what* youth are preoccupied with, Papers III and IV also focus on *how* youth make sense of their future, and *how* youth constitute themselves as subjects drawing upon particular discourses as revealed in their writings. In these papers, my colleagues and I analyze text produced by high school students in Norway and Turkey. A less obtrusive approach was taken to get youth to write openly about their hopes, expectations, ideals and worries for the future. Such an approach provided the opportunity to study dominant discourses as young people relate to them on their

own, without us researchers prompting them to think in particular ways. Giving youth the chance to write freely about their future may indeed reveal what they perceive as ‘normal’, ‘dominant’, and ‘expected’ of them and their understandings of the limits of possibilities, what they can do or who they can be in their respective societies.

2. Background

In this section, I will place neoliberalism in the context of globalization as these two concepts are historically and systematically intertwined. I will then provide a concise literature review of research on neoliberalism before introducing the theoretical framework of the thesis, neoliberal governmentality, and how it is linked to the workings of psy-complex and individualization of risk in contemporary societies.

2.1 Globalization and neoliberalism

Kellner (2002) conceptualizes globalization as “a strange amalgam of both homogenizing forces of sameness and uniformity and heterogeneity, difference, and hybridity” which on one hand leads to standardization of a globalized mass culture, creating sameness, and on the other hand makes possible unique developments, thus encouraging hybridity, difference, and heterogeneity (p. 292). Accordingly, changes following globalization pose new challenges for social psychologists to understand human conduct and subjectivity (Chryssochoou, 2000; Sampson, 1989). Whilst there is currently an accelerating process of cultural convergence towards a global meaning structure, local customs, traditions and political arrangements are losing ground, which accompanies increased amount of uncertainty and confusion, especially regarding development of identity or subjectivity among young people across the world (Arnett, 2002; Friedman, 2004; Hermans & DiMaggio, 2007). Contemporary life, Beck

(1992) argues, has become de-standardized, with the consequence that traditions and established ways of being lose their weight on individuals: large scale societal changes and accompanying ideologies and dominant discourses, including for instance consumerism (Bauman, 2000), individualism (Bauman, 2001; Nafstad, 2002) and neoliberalism (Bourdieu, 1998; Harvey, 2005; Nafstad, Blakar, Carlquist, Phelps, & Rand-Hendriksen, 2007, 2009) all put new demands on and influence contemporary subjectivity.

One development that has been conceptualized as *pensée unique* of the globalization era is neoliberalism, seen by many as an overarching hegemonic global discourse and ideology (Plehwe, Walpen & Neunhöffer, 2006). As Bourdieu (1998) observed, "everywhere we hear it said, all day long - and this is what gives the dominant discourse its strength - that there is nothing to put forward in opposition to the neo-liberal view, that it has succeeded in presenting itself as self-evident, that there is no alternative" (p. 29). Harvey (2005) agrees that neoliberalism "... has pervasive effects on ways of thought to the point where it has become incorporated into the common-sense way many of us interpret, live in, and understand the world" (p. 3). Neoliberalism has consequently been construed as a metanarrative: a framework within which all other ideas about not only economics or politics but also social, institutional and cultural life are expected to operate (Roberts & Peters, 2008).

2.2 Literature on neoliberalism

Emerging against socialism in the 1930s and being implemented from 1970s as a political strategy, neoliberalism is a socially complex process, with many historical and current varieties (Foucault, 2008; Mirowski & Phelwe, 2009), meaning different things to different people (Springer, Birch & MacLeavy, in press). Accordingly, it is defined, investigated and analyzed in multiple ways as ideology, economic-political philosophy, discourse, historical

rationality and/or governance from a multitude of perspectives. Although there is not a single agreed upon definition, changes associated with neoliberalism share a historical and normative resemblance (Presskorn-Thygesen, 2015), based on the idea that “human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade” (Harvey, 2005, p. 2). Common features in most conceptualizations of neoliberalism, as a new stage in the capitalist ideology, are increasing marketization of society coupled with systematic decline of the welfare state, cuts to benefits, removal of tariffs and subsidies, the selling of state assets, flexibility in wages and working conditions, corporatization and privatization in health and education, and an emphasis on efficiency, competition and choice (Bondi, 2005; Bourdieu, 1998; Harvey, 2005; Kasser & Linn, 2016; Plehwe et al., 2006; Roberts & Peters, 2008).

There is also a scholarly consensus that neoliberal policies around the globe have replaced the ethics of social solidarity with a tendency to limit concern only to the self and one’s significant others, leading to an intensified individualism (Bourdieu, 1998; Layton, 2010; Nafstad, 2002). Leading to large scale changes in society and resulting in a convergence of economic and social policies, scholars agree, neoliberalism strongly influences our conceptions of social life and personhood (Foucault, 2008; Gill, 2008; Hall, 1996; Rose, 1999; Rose, O’Malley & Valverde, 2006). Scholars have examined the relationships between neoliberalism and a wide array of conceptual categories, including branding of the self (Hochschild & Garrett, 2011), working life and understandings of unemployment (Kelan, 2008; Olssen, 2006; Walkerdine, 2006), debt (Lazzarato, 2012; Walker, 2012; Walker & Degirmencioglu, 2015; Walker, Burton, Akhurst & Degirmencioglu, 2014), education (Apple, 2001; Giroux, 2008; Roberts, 2007), cities and urbanization (Candan & Kolloglu, 2008; Hackworth, 2007), gender and femaleness (Gill, 2008; Walkerdine, 2003),

citizenship (Enneli, 2011; Sparke, 2006), discourse (Springer 2012), value changes toward individualism, materialism and consumerism (Bourdieu, 1998; Kasser, 2015; Kasser, Cohn, Kanner & Ryan, 2007; Kasser & Linn, 2016; Nafstad, 2002; Nafstad et al., 2007, 2009), self-help culture (Binkley, 2011), sexualities (Adam, 2005; Oswin 2007), migration (Lawson, 1999), race (Haylett, 2001; Roberts & Mahtani, 2010), and homelessness (May, Cloke & Johnsen, 2005) to name but a few.

The complexity of neoliberalism and the wholesale changes in many spheres of society as a consequence of neoliberal practices have led to scholarly interest in different fields within the social sciences and humanities, including history, political sciences, economy, and psychology. While mainstream psychology largely ignores the relevance of such large scale societal and ideological changes due to epistemological preferences and reductionist theories (Nafstad & Blakar, 2012), there has been some interest in the topic of neoliberalism from a societal and critical psychological perspective (e.g., Greenleaf & Bryant, 2012; Madsen, 2014a; Walkerdine, 2003, 2006). In the present thesis, I build on literature from wider social sciences and existing societal and critical psychological literature which, underlining the embedded nature of subjectivity, relates neoliberalism to contemporary subjectivities.

While neoliberalism has largely been conceptualized as overarching or predominant, scholars are also wary of such hegemonic conceptualization of neoliberalism and are looking for counter-hegemonic discourses and also for local variations of neoliberalism in different national contexts (e.g., Freeman, 2007; Gershon, 2011; Morgan & Gonzales, 2008; Spivak, 1988; Springer, 2012; Sullivan, Spicer & Böhm, 2011). The present thesis contributes to the literature by examining local variations of neoliberal influence in Scandinavian Norway and in Middle-Eastern Turkey (see part 3.1 of the thesis for a review of neoliberal influence in the two societies). Studying youth future orientation in order to gain knowledge of how neoliberal

discourses affect (youth) subjectivity is also a novel approach. Acknowledging the relevance of all the societal changes and different theoretical perspectives on neoliberalism mentioned above, I draw on Foucault's (2008) understanding of neoliberal governmentality to investigate influence of neoliberalism on personhood or subjectivity in the two national contexts in the present thesis.

2.3 Neoliberal governmentality

Differing from its dominant conceptualization as a capitalist economic process (e.g., Harvey, 2005), for Foucault (2008) and Foucauldian scholars (e.g., Binkley, 2007; Dean, 2010; Lemke, 2001; Rose, 1999; Rose et al., 2006; Walkerdine, 2003; Weidner, 2009), neoliberalism signifies a specific and historically shaped normative rationality that justifies and guides participation in capitalism, replacing the rationality of the welfare state. Foucault (2008) uses the term *governmentality* and sees it as a more extensive strategy of governing human action: 'conduct of conduct', a principle and method for the rationalization of the exercise of government. In other words, governmentality refers to the practices that characterize the form of supervision a state exercises over its subjects, their wealth, misfortunes, customs, bodies, souls, and habits across a multiplicity of domains. While welfare ideology was based on endorsement of collective responsibility for social reproduction and applied social solidarity to address inequalities, neoliberal governmentality combines economy on the one hand, and society and politics on the other. Going beyond pure market relations and financial networks, governmentality designates a specific economic rationality which cuts across multiple domains of human social life. The processes or technologies of autonomization and responsabilization contribute to individualization of the social: the individual self is produced as a neoliberal subject through the discourses and

practices of neoliberalism to fit the demands of capitalism at its current stage and hence becomes a self-governing subject (Dean, 2010; Lemke, 2001; Ferge, 1997; Rose, 1999).

The neoliberal subject: One of the novelties of neoliberal governmentality is the idea of a new subject; *homo æconomicus*. Neoliberal governmentality works by installing in society this particular concept of human subject and establishing the particular conditions under which individuals understand themselves as such: The neoliberal subject is constructed as a free, autonomous, individualized, self-regulating actor understood as a source of capital; as human capital or *homo æconomicus* (Foucault, 2008; see also Binkley, 2007; Bondi, 2005; Gershon, 2011; Lemke, 2001; Rose, 1999; Weidner, 2009). Neoliberalism accordingly encourages the individual to become a self-entrepreneur, a self-enterprising individual, and demands a stronger degree of self-determination by pushing her toward engaging individually in the solution of the social problems of life – for example, illness, unemployment, education, poverty – which have earlier been seen as more collective concerns, and have more recently been the very essence of the welfare state (Lemke, 2001; Ferge, 1997; Foucault, 2008). Foucault claims that capitalist societies need to make bodies perform a particular type of labor which entails the insertion of power into bodies to ensure the necessary attitudes and behavior. This is achieved through practices and discourses that operate to construct 'docile bodies', which may be subjected, used, transformed, and improved. In this regards, autonomization entails that the subject sees life simply as a consequence of her own free choices. Thus, she becomes responsible for her own faith. In neoliberal governmentality, the individual transforms into an entrepreneur of herself, becoming her own capital, producer and source of earnings. Foucault (2008, p. 252) wrote:

[C]onsidering the subject as *homo æconomicus* does not imply an anthropological identification of any behavior whatsoever with economic behavior. It simply means that economic behavior is the grid of intelligibility one will adopt on the behavior of a new individual. It also means that the individual becomes governmentalizable, that

power gets a hold on him to the extent, and only to the extent, that he is a *homo æconomicus*.

Accordingly, only when an individual becomes an entrepreneur of herself, does she become a subject of neoliberal governance. What subjectivizes an individual as *homo æconomicus* is not simply the economic transactions she conducts, but also the understanding or mentality of entrepreneurship which she develops in her relations in all spheres of life, which turns life itself into a cost-benefit calculation. At the same time, following Foucault's thinking, Rose and colleagues (1999, 2006) argue that subjects of neoliberalism perform the particular behavior or contribute to conduct of conduct by *fulfilling* themselves rather than being merely obedient. They understand themselves as free, but they are obliged to be free. Given such thinking, being free is not opposed to government. "On the contrary, freedom, as choice, autonomy, self-responsibility, and the obligation to maximize one's life as a kind of enterprise" is a principal strategy of neoliberal governmentality (Rose et al., 2006, p. 91). As Weidner (2009) puts it, "perhaps the most important way in which neoliberalism shapes subjectivity is in suggesting that each individual is the bearer of a human capital, who must seek to maximise her own self-value..." (p. 406). Accordingly, neoliberalism demands a constant reworking of the self (Rose, 1999; Walkerdine, 2006). A continual self-improvement and self-governance to fit the demands of the advanced liberal society, for instance in terms of a flexible and unstable market, is a must (Olssen, 2006). Replacing traditional coercive disciplinary mechanisms, neoliberalism thus constitutes the neoliberal subject as autonomous yet governable via continual self-monitoring, self-examination and self-disciplining, compulsively lead to engage in endeavors of self-improvement and self-critique (Dean, 2010; Foucault, 2008; Rose, 1999; Rose et al., 2006).

Reducing state services and social security systems, neoliberalism calls for more personal responsibility, self-care and self-help (Binkley, 2011; Cheshire, 2006; Lemke, 2001; Rose, 1999; Rose et al. 2006). The individual's wellbeing and development becomes the sole

responsibility of the neoliberal entrepreneurial subject. While neoliberalism has been a destructive force to the status quo of the welfare regimes based on social solidarity, many current discourses and ‘conduct of conduct’ under neoliberalism reproduce the status quo to fit the demands of the present stage of capitalism. Thus, imbalance of power and wealth in favor of capital over labor, and material and symbolic inequalities remain mainly unquestioned within neoliberal discourses. Not only is inequality (e.g. of economic resources and political rights) seen not as an unfortunate byproduct of capitalism, but it is accepted as a natural state of market economy which creates progress from a neoliberal perspective (Mirowski, 2013). The *unquestioning* or limitation to critique the system is indeed observed in the particular discourses surrounding both self-development (Paper I) and debt (Paper II). In both papers, it is shown that an array of discourses function together to individualize the (social) problems and constrain any critique of the system. Drawing upon these discourses, the individuals engage in self-critique and blame mainly themselves, and seek solutions to their problems only through self-improvement. Accordingly, autonomization and responsabilization produce ‘docile bodies’ and function as the disciplinary strategies of neoliberalism, providing social control (Rose, 1999).

Much research inspired by Foucault’s ideas regarding neoliberal governmentality investigates the ways in which individuals are constituted and constitute themselves as certain subjects who understand themselves as autonomous and take responsibility for their own well-being, and also embark upon a self-realization project to manage life in diverse spheres of society (Rose, 1999; Rose & Miller, 1992; Rose et al, 2006; Walkerdine, 2006). For instance, O’Flynn and Petersen (2007) and Youdell (2004) investigated how educational policy changes under neoliberalism have affected subjectivity, leading to the fact that students now take sole responsibility to develop themselves into good learners and employable citizens. Similarly, Bragg (2007) argues that even empowerment projects may work to instill

norms of individualism, self-reliance and self-management as students participating in such projects are led to turn themselves into enterprising subjects. Davies, Edwards, Gannon and Laws (2007) discuss how neoliberal discourses influence the way teachers working with ‘difficult’ or ‘problem’ students position the students in an individualistic and rational manner. Ayers and Carlone (2007), studying job training programs, showed that people blamed themselves for losing their jobs or not staying employed as they drew upon neoliberal discourses of individualism and personal responsibility (see also Kelan, 2008). Archer (2008) and Yurchak (2003) investigated how individuals construct career identities that fit the demands of neoliberalism. Olssen (2006) and Walkerdine (2003, 2006), studying dominant discourses in society, concluded that individuals needed to continuously rework and reinvent themselves in order to succeed in working life. Adam (2005) found neoliberal discourses of self-care and personal responsibility among HIV positive gay men engaging in risky sexual behavior. Neoliberal ways of constructing subjectivity have also been found in media conceptualizations of women (e.g., Gill, 2008) and marketing to children (e.g., Kasser & Linn, 2016; Oprea, Buijzen, van Reijmersdal, & Valkenburg, 2014). Others have observed neoliberal discourses and investigated the extent to which individuals are constituted as neoliberal subjects in diverse areas such as becoming users of welfare benefits (Maki, 2011; Morgan & Gonzales, 2008), being a patient in public health sector (Gibbon, Kampriani & zur Nieden, 2010), exclusion of queer citizens (Peterson, 2011), and crime control (Monahan, 2009).

Springer et al. (in press, p. 3) argues that “attempting to understand how far this vision of neoliberal subject making is recognized and assimilated, as well as exploring levels of resistance and refraction, is now one of the key goals of scholarship on neoliberalism.” This is also the overall aim of the current thesis.

2.4 Critical psychology and psy-complex

Prilleltensky (1989) argues that psychology could influence society in two opposite directions, (a) either reaffirming, reinforcing existing policies and thereby ratifying the status quo, or (b) criticizing the social order and thus fostering changes. “The former significantly outweighs the latter”, according to Prilleltensky (1989, p. 796) as prevalent cultural and moral beliefs are reflected at both the theoretical and practical level within psychology (see also Gergen, 1973; Parker, 1999; Sampson, 1977, 1981). Similarly, Sampson (1977) argues that psychology could serve an isolating, atomizing, individualizing, and alienating function and reproduce the existing arrangements of power and domination as it obscures the reality by putting too much emphasis on the individual in its reductionist theories and explanations. Such critique of psychology was echoed and further developed by scholars influenced by Foucauldian thinking (e.g., Miller, 1981; Parker, 1994, 2005; Rose, 1979, 1999). There has been a growing understanding that connects psychology with the workings of neoliberalism (e.g., Burton, Kagan & Duckett, 2013; Madsen, 2014a; Nafstad, 2002; Prilleltensky & Fox, 1997). Rose (1999) in particular argues that workings of neoliberalism are strengthened by the psy-complex which contributes to individualization of the social through various psychological discourses and helps preserve status quo of neoliberalism. In Foucault’s work, the psy-complex is seen as all that pertains to the individual, self-monitoring subject and the practices that subjects employ to survey and improve themselves (Parker, 1994). Similarly, according to Rose (1999), the psy-complex refers to all institutions relating to human sciences, particularly psychology and its affiliates, which diffuse in society a certain type of psychological expertise – the heterogeneous knowledges, forms of authority and practical techniques making it possible for individuals to construe and conduct themselves in certain ways. Rose (1999) claims that “the psy disciplines and psy expertise have had a key role in

constructing ‘governable subjects’ ... making it possible to govern human beings in ways that are compatible with the principles of liberalism and democracy” (p. vii). Rose states:

However constrained by external or internal factors, the modern self is institutionally required to construct a life through the exercise of choice from among alternatives. Every aspect of life, like every commodity, is imbued with a self-referential meaning; every choice we make is an emblem of our identity, a mark of our individuality, each is a message to ourselves and others as to the sort of person we are, each casts a glow back, illuminating the self of he or she who consumes. (Rose, 1999, p. 231).

In line with Rose’s statement, conduct of conduct is achieved through personal labor to assemble a way of life within the sphere of consumption. Self-realization, a major goal for the neoliberal subject, is thus imagined to be achieved for instance through becoming a consumer.

Parker (1999) suggests that to better understand and challenge the psy-complex, critical psychologists should study forms of surveillance and self-regulation in everyday life. This includes the ways in which psychological knowledge and culture operate beyond the boundaries of academic and professional practice. In Papers I and II, we investigated how particular psychological expertise was used in media to promote the neoliberal subject. These papers illustrate how governmentality functions by reproducing particular discourses around consumerism, debt, and financial literacy. Discourses around *self-development* (Paper I) and *debt* (Paper II) may contribute to disciplining of the docile bodies as they only allow the subject position of the autonomous and responsible individual, thus limiting any possibility for solidarity or collectivity and the critique that may target the social, systemic and structural mechanisms of the financial market or the society.

2.5 Individualization and risk society

While a certain degree of individualization has been necessary for capitalism to prosper over the last couple of centuries, scholars now notice intensified forms of individualism under the

neoliberal era. For instance, Bourdieu (1998) argues that neoliberalism has created structures which demolish the collective and put emphasis on the individual who is now isolated from the community and deprived of solidarity. Such thinking of neoliberalism as individualization resonates well with sociological scholarship on post-modernity and contemporary societies (e.g., Bauman, 2001; Beck, 1992; Giddens, 1991). As traditional framework of support that structures the individual's life-course weakens in contemporary post-modern societies, life becomes in principle a risky venture. Beck (1992, pp. 135–136) states:

In the individualized society, the individual must therefore learn, on pain of permanent disadvantage, to conceive of himself or herself as the center of action, as the planning office with respect to his/her own biography, abilities, orientations, relationship and so on ... As a consequence the floodgates are opened wide for the subjectivization and individualization of risks and contradictions produced by institutions and society.

Changes in institutional structures of contemporary societies governing education, employment and family life generate more diverse options on how people live their lives, leading to new parameters of individual decision-making, which may seem to provide the individual with a greater freedom of choice (Bauman, 2001; Evans & Hall, 1995). Young people in particular find it increasingly difficult to turn their aspirations into a lived reality due to the structural uncertainty defining contemporary society: youth increasingly face disappointment and the need to adjust their lives and their aspirations to different, perhaps more achievable, conditions and objectives (Cebulla & Tomaszewski, 2013).

A Beckian account of risk, however, tends to see risk as the fundamental feature of contemporary societies. Such an understanding based on realist epistemology holds that risks are brought by human activity and are thus inescapable in contemporary societies (see Aykan & Guvenc-Salgirli, 2015; Dean, 2010). From a governmentality perspective, risk is rather seen as a strategy and technique and/or as a form of governance. Risk becomes as a primary concern for the individual and mediates her position in life, regulating her actions, decisions and relations. For governmentality scholars, risk governance proceeds through individualizing

risks and responsabilizing individuals (e.g., Dean, 2010; Rose, 1999). As Dean (2010, p. 194) argues, risk management currently is essential part of an individual's every choice: "We witness the multiple 'responsibilization' of individuals, families, households, and communities for their own risks: of physical and mental ill-health; of unemployment; of poverty in old age; of poor educational performance; or of becoming the victims of crime."

Individualization under neoliberalism thus entails subjects becoming isolated from the collective ties and responsabilized by making them see social risks such as illness, unemployment, poverty and so on not as the responsibility of the state, but actually lying in the domain for which the individual is responsible and transforming it into a problem of 'self-care' (Lemke, 2001, p. 201; see also Arthington, 2016; Binkley, 2011; Dean, 2010). As neoliberalism creates a concept of self construed (illusorily) to be free and autonomous, the individual believes that her adaptability and capacity for change provides her with choice and opportunity while she ignores the socio-structural influence which demands continual self-development (Burman, 2008; Evans & Hall, 1995; Rose, 1999; Walkerdine, 2003).

Such a vision of oneself in the world might come at the cost of possible failure: dreams do not always come to fruition and the highly competitive individualist context always leads one to work harder and harder in the face of (potential or feared) failure (Walkerdine, 2003). The process of becoming an adult in increasingly neoliberal societies may also include, to a larger degree today, tensions and burdens for youth. These tensions and burdens may derive from continuously dealing with uncertainty and negotiating between various dominant discourses through which they are constituted and constitute themselves as subjects who have to take responsibility to govern themselves and their life. These discourses are likely to include individualist discourses through which subjects are exhorted to pursue their dreams and embark on a process of self-realization (Rose, 1999). At the same time, understandings about collectivity and belonging may be important, depending on the cultural context

(Kagitcibasi, 2005), and may be challenged and undermined by an increasingly dominant concept of the self driven by continuous change and development (Friedman, 2004). Indeed, as Paper III and Paper IV demonstrated, young people, in thinking about their future, grapple with a confusing tension between the idea that it is important to *belong* and make a contribution to society, versus focusing solely on an individualist project of *self-realization* in both national contexts.

At the same time, while increasing individualization has created new and more flexible forms of social and economic life, many of society's traditional inequalities remain unchanged (Buchholz, Hofäcker, Mills, Blossfeld, Kurz, & Hofmeister, 2009). Indeed, neoliberalism contributes to reproduction of many social inequalities through individualization which treats issues such as poverty as "individual shortcomings, products of poor individual choices, to be remedied by emphasizing individual responsibility" (Cossman & Fudge, 2002, p. 21). Individualization of the social thus constrains system critique as individuals in disadvantaged positions are lead to seek individual solutions to systemic problems under neoliberalism (Bauman, 2001; Rose, 1999; Walkerdine, 2003). Discourses surrounding self-development (Paper I) and debt (Paper II) function, as revealed, to strengthen autonomization and responsibilization of individuals, leaving no room for system critique in the media.

3. The present study

The present thesis examines neoliberal discourses through which individuals constitute themselves and are constituted as subjects in the Norwegian and Turkish national contexts. The papers presented here were based on discourse analysis of particular media sources (Papers I & II) and future orientation of youth in the form of essays written by high school

students from each national context (Papers III & IV). In the following, I will explicate the socio-historical context of the study and deal with epistemological and methodological issues.

3.1 Socio-historical contexts – Norway and Turkey

Studying two different societies provides us with the possibility of understanding how neoliberalism is negotiated at the local level, revealing also the degree of divergence and convergence of neoliberal influence across national contexts. Both Norway and Turkey, despite their cultural, historical and economical differences, have been experiencing large scale changes, becoming increasingly neoliberal since 1980s. Neoliberal policies led to economic restructuring and incorporation into the global economy for both countries, with the result that the state services have been reduced through privatization. This process has been accelerated by neoliberal policies of the ruling AKP government since 2002 in Turkey (Bozkurt, 2013; Emrence, 2008; Önis, 2011). Meanwhile, despite implementation of New Public Management (NPM) in the 1980s, Norway remains a strong welfare state (United Nations Development Programme, 2010).

Regarding Norway, the core ideals of social equality, justice, and solidarity which underpin the welfare state are under threat of neoliberalism with the result of a value shift in society toward , from the primacy of the collective to the individual (Nafstad & Blakar, 2009; Nafstad et al., 2007, 2009). Citizens of the welfare state have also increasingly been constructed as consumers (Nafstad et al., 2007) as the Norwegian state has implemented NPM and contributed to spreading consumerism in society (Hermansen, 2005). In Paper IV, my colleagues and I observed that materialist discourses enter into youth's negotiation of subjectivity. Some youth in our study posited material possessions as necessary for feeling happy. Also, in Paper II, we explored how individuals were influenced by increasing

materialism in the Norwegian society with unprecedented levels of consumer debt, and showed how neoliberal discourses surrounding debt constitute neoliberal subjects who have no choice but to take responsibility to manage the economic life solely on their own, through self-critique and self-improvement.

Scholarly interest in neoliberal influence in Turkey has been formidable. Scholars have investigated and observed the influence of neoliberalism, in addition to spheres of economics and politics, from primary to higher education (e.g., Akkaymak, 2014; Degirmencioglu & Inal, 2015; Inal & Akkaymak, 2012; Kaya, 2015), social security, public and personal health and poverty (e.g., Aykan & Guvenc-Salgirli, 2015; Cosar & Yegenoglu, 2009; Senses, 2008; Yasar, 2012), citizenship and youth participation in society (e.g., Enneli, 2011; Lüküslü, 2005; Neyzi, 2001), urbanization and city planning (e.g., Candan & Kolloglu, 2008), news media (Sen & Avsar, 2012) and reality TV shows (Yildiz, 2013). Cosar and Yegenoglu (2009) argue for instance that during AKP years, social security has been gradually turned from a social right into a commodity. Understanding social security spending to be an injurious intervention into the functioning of the free market, citizens are tuned into customers and the state dissolves as the bearer of responsibility for the well-being of citizens. Sen and Avsar (2012) found that Turkish mainstream news media changed its discourse on specific issues such as poverty, unemployment and social rights and contribute now to acceptance of inequality as a natural part of the system. Additionally, studies of value orientations reported early signs of integration of preference for individualistic self-realization and collectivist group loyalty among university students in Turkey (Aygün & Imamoglu, 2002; Phaet & Claeys, 1993). Arguably, the neoliberal shift brought forth a dynamic struggle between collectivist values of solidarity and belongingness on one hand, and individualist values of freedom, independence, personal achievements, goals and entitlements on the other (Neyzi, 2001). Paper III and Paper IV explore such tensions youth feel when constituting themselves as subjects caught in

between demands of neoliberal individualist discourses on one hand and collectivist discourses on the other, in each national context.

Regarding especially youth, Gullestad (1996) noticed that changing economic, social and cultural structures in the neoliberal era correspond to a change from an emphasis on obedience to an emphasis on being and finding oneself in the upbringing of children in Norway. Gullestad further argues that increasing focus on self-realization among Norwegian youth seems to be in tune with the post-modern demands of flexibility and creativity needed in the present stage of capitalism. Similarly, neoliberal developments have been associated with a change in construction of youth in Turkey. While Turkish youth had been constructed as politically active, and socialized to become guardians of the nation up until the military coup in 1980, generations socialized in the neoliberal era are ‘depoliticized’ and socialized to become individualistic consumers in a globalised world, rather than active citizens concerned with social problems (Cileli, 2000; Demir, 2012; Lüküslü, 2005; Neyzi, 2001). Paper III and IV accordingly discuss the degree to which youth are constituted and constitute themselves as subjects of neoliberal era.

An especially important area of influence under neoliberal governance in each society is higher education. Turkey has experienced a rapid increase in the number of private universities and restructuring of existing universities to fit the demands of the market economy (Inal & Akkaymak, 2012; Degirmencioglu & Inal, 2015). As Rose and Miller (1992, 2008) argued, introducing the principles of economy and finance to the management of social conduct is a neoliberal form of governmentality. In Europe following the Bologna process, higher education has been reframed as “a commodity: something to be sold, traded and consumed” and students as “rational, self-interested, choosers and consumers” of this commodity (Roberts, 2007, p. 350-1), which applies well to the development in Turkey (Kaya, 2015). It is also argued that a narrower instrumental view of higher education as a

personal investment has replaced the universalist notion of higher education as a public good (Giroux, 2008). This tendency to construct higher education as personal investment is indeed observed in both national contexts (Papers I and IV), but with different concerns leading individuals to pursue personal investment in each context. While it seems largely related to the self-realization project for the Norwegians through constant self-development, for the Turks however, it seems to take a form of a necessity: the entrepreneurial subject of neoliberalism must develop herself at all times to turn herself into an employable subject in a society and market characterized by increasing uncertainty, precarious working conditions and large scale unemployment. While the Norwegian youth are mostly *interested* in getting an education of their choice that fit with their personal interests which will eventually lead to a job they would *enjoy*, their Turkish counter parts are mainly *concerned with* getting an education that will help them get a job that pays the bills (Paper IV).

3.2 Epistemological and methodical considerations

This thesis is based on social constructivist epistemology. We make use of Foucauldian thinking and Foucauldian method of discourse analysis in each of the four papers to achieve the objectives of the thesis.

3.2.1 Social constructivism and subjectivity

Contrasting realist epistemology which is itself a result of the Enlightenment philosophy that influenced traditional psychology to develop theories of the isolated, rational, stable individual, social constructivism contends that the individual depends upon her fellow human beings for developing her inner life and subjectivity through innumerable interactions within

society (Burr, 2003). She is born into a world with already existing practices and meanings, and systems of representation (e.g., language) through which she experiences the world. As much as subjectivity is a process of individuation, it is equally a process of socialization, the individual never being isolated in a self-contained environment, but endlessly engaging in interaction with the surrounding world, reflecting a continuous dialectic between the individual and her socio-historical world, which shapes her subjectivity and limits her activities and vice versa. Thus, becoming an individual, or a self, requires individual to engage with, negotiate and tune into the prevalent patterns of cultural practices and meanings existing at a historical point in time, underlining that society, culture, and history are interwoven with the very fabric of subjectivity (Berger & Luckman, 1966; Burr, 2003; Teo, 2015). Social constructivism consequently emphasizes embeddedness of subjectivity in social, cultural and historical contexts as one's self-production is always a social enterprise (Berger & Luckman, 1966).

Social constructivist notion of subjectivity moves away from the concept of a stable core of the self with an intrinsic and essential content. One is rather interested in exploring "points of temporary attachments to the subject positions which discursive practices construct for us" (Hall, 1996, p. 6) as social constructivist epistemology asserts that discourse constitutes subjectivity (Burr, 2003; Smith, 1996; Willig, 2001, 2008). However, discourses are dynamic and change over time. Social constructivism therefore holds that something assumed to be a social construction (e.g., subjectivity) is a product "brought into existence and shaped by social events, forces, history, all of which could have been different" (Hacking, 1999, p. 7). More concretely, I base my analyses in the current thesis on the thinking by Foucault (2000, p. 4) who wrote that subject "constitutes itself within history and is constantly established and re-established by history", underlining the embedded nature of subjectivity.

3.2.2 Foucault, discourse and power

Discourse can be understood as “a set of meanings, metaphors, representations [...] that in some way together produce a particular version of events” (Burr, 2003, p. 64). Laclau and Mouffe (1985/2001) argue that no object or phenomenon has innate meaning, but discourse always articulates meaning. Therefore, “meaning is a social production, a practice. The world has to be made to mean” (Hall, 2006, p. 134). This suggests that reality can be explained through a multitude, even an infinite number of ways. However, typically those with the power and means of communication create the dominant discourses, thus wielding great influence to construct the ‘truths’, ‘morals’, and ‘norms’ that govern social reality (Foucault, 1972). In Foucauldian thought, discourses then produce truths about the self and the world, what is ‘normal’, ‘common’ and ‘expected’ and what is ‘deviant’ (Parker, 2005). Discourses are thus prevailing meaning structures people draw upon to make sense of themselves and their surroundings.

Foucault sought to demonstrate how the development of knowledge, discourse and subjectivity was intertwined with the mechanisms of power, investigating the complex and shifting network of relations between power, knowledge and the body which produce historically specific forms of subjectivity. For Foucault, power, especially in modern societies, is about guidance, about governing the forms of self-government, structuring and shaping the field of possible action of subjects (Dean, 2010; Lemke, 2001; Rose, 1999). This, as discussed above through governmentality, is achieved through the work of discourses which install and promote in society a certain type of subject. Ultimately then, discourse becomes a means of social control via conformity to particular norms, values, and morals that legitimate the status quo with the current power configurations and social inequalities (Augoustinos, Walker & Donaghue, 2006; Greenleaf & Bryant, 2012; Parker, 2005; van Dijk, 1998).

Foucauldian understanding conceptualizes subjectivity as fragmented, fluid and flexible, and contingent. This contingency implies that the same person, depending on the contexts, can position herself differently drawing upon different discourses. Thus, we could observe that individuals often take on subject positions that might contradict each other, illustrating ‘multivoicedness’ of the speaking subject (Parker, 2005). As Gergen and Thatchenkery (2004, p. 240) put it “because discourse exists in an open market, marked by broadly diffuse transformations..., patterns of human action will also remain forever in motion – shifting at times imperceptibly and at others disjunctively”. Therefore, it is not expected to find ideologically coherent utterances in the way individuals speak. Rather, the Foucauldian understanding utilized in the thesis concerns itself with identifying the ideological and power effects of discourses, the constraining or opening-up possibilities for diverse subject positions individuals may take (Burr, 2003; Parker, 2005; Willig, 2001, 2008). As revealed in Papers III and IV, youth from both national contexts take on different subject positions drawing on different discourses, exemplifying the multivoicedness or the contingent understanding of subjectivity.

In all papers of the dissertation, we make use of a particular version of Foucauldian discourse analysis as articulated by Willig (2001, 2008) and informed by Parker (2005) and Hook (2001, 2007). Following the discussion above, my colleagues and I investigated “what kind of objects and subjects are constructed through discourses and what kinds of ways-of-being these objects and subjects make available to people..., describe and critique the discursive worlds people inhabit and to explore their implications for subjectivity and experience” (Willig, 2001, p. 91). In doing so, we explicated the ways of being that, when negotiated and taken up by individuals, have implications for their subjectivity and experience. The ways in which we make sense of our world enable us to become particular kinds of subject. A discursive framework then affords us the view of individuals as practicing

how to be a certain kind of person by negotiating meanings that are embedded in the various discourses that they face in everyday life.

Discourse analysis can thus be utilized to provide knowledge of how particular understandings of the self and the world are diffused in society. At the same time, discourse analysis deals with not merely a search for meaning but also with a search for scarcity of meaning, with what cannot be said, with what is impossible or unreasonable within certain discursive locations (Hook, 2001, 2007; Willig, 2001, 2008; see also Billig, 1991). For instance, for the participant, Norwegian girl 11, in the Paper IV who draws upon a materialism discourse and equates happiness with material possessions (“To live happily without material happiness, is it real? I do not think so.”), it becomes unreasonable or impossible to reach happiness in any other way. Discourse analysis hence offers the possibility of questioning and challenging those understandings, as discourses function ideologically and present an oppressive version of the world (Parker, 2005). We adopted this thinking in the analysis in each paper of the thesis to discuss how certain subject positions are constructed as available and certain subject positions constrained by the discourses which might help preserve status quo.

3.2.3 Media discourse as data

Naturally occurring data such as media discourse are regarded as a primary source of data for qualitative research (Parker, 2005). Additionally, media discourse is particularly suitable for studying power and ideology (e.g., Fairclough, 1995; Thompson, 1988) as mass media in modern societies function as major ‘machineries of meaning’ (Hermans & Kempen, 1998), depict ‘appropriate’ ways of being for individuals (Croteau & Hoynes, 2014) and help

reproduce ideology, “...specifically the ideology which maintains capitalism to be an inevitable and immutable reality” (Garland & Harper, 2012, pp. 414-415).

Mass media is often conceived as a vehicle for culture, providing for the readers ways of seeing and understanding the world which arguably shape the way they participate in society (Croteau & Hoynes, 2014; Fairclough, 2001; Spitulnik, 1996). However, what is made available in media discourse cannot be directly translated to everyday talk and experience (Fairclough, 2001; Gill, 2008; Spitulnik, 1996) and although media tend to reproduce values that underpin the dominant ideology(ies), it may not without problem be seen as simple agents of the powerful (Croteau & Hoynes, 2014). Yet, Spitulnik (1996, p. 162) argues that media discourse can function as “both reservoirs and reference points for the circulation of words, phrases, and discourse styles in popular culture”, thus contributing to meaning construction in society. In this social circulation of media discourse, readers take an active part in interpretation and appropriation of messages, negotiation of meanings and re-use of words and phrases in new contexts. Croteau and Hoynes (2014, p. 163) argue that:

The ideological work lies in the patterns within media texts. Ideas and attitudes that are routinely included in media become part of the legitimate public debate about issues. Ideas that are excluded from the popular media or appear in the media only to be ridiculed have little legitimacy. They are outside the range of acceptable ideas. The ideological influence of media can be seen in the absences and exclusions just as much as in the content of the messages.

Echoing Billig’s (1991) theorizing about ideology and discourse, such thinking is highly relevant from a discursive point of view as subject positions which are limited or constrained totally in discourse are as important as subject positions which are explicated and promoted (Hook, 2001, 2007; Parker, 2005; Willig, 2008). It is beyond the scope of the present thesis to track empirically dissemination of subject positions offered in media discourse to the general public and their everyday talk and experience. Having said that, both

the newspapers that were analyzed in Paper I and the TV show *Luksusfellen* in Paper II provide us with many different voices: columnists, authors of self-development books, life coaches, psychologists, economists, politicians, lay people who have participated in various self-development courses and the indebted participants of the TV show. We investigated the discourses that were drawn upon and subject positions that were made available in newspaper articles and *Luksusfellen*, and discussed whether or not these discourses work in ways consonant to neoliberal governmentality. In Paper II for instance, it seemed impossible for any TV show participant to draw upon an alternative discourse than that of individual responsibility promoted by the show itself (the economist and the psychologist). Thus, the participants ended up blaming *only* themselves for the debt they accumulated over time, with the discourse constraining any possibility to posit debt as a social relation and to criticize the financial system for instance for making such reckless behavior possible for the individuals.

3.2.4 School context as data gathering site

Paper III and IV report data gathered in a school context. While school context per se is not the focus of investigation, it is a social site with a lot of influence on how youth develop their subjectivity. Schools are seen as panoptic spaces, where power is exercised through constant surveillance and monitoring to ensure discipline (Gallagher, 2010). In psychological terms, the Panopticon is a kind of conscience-building device whose design, for Foucault, typifies the functioning of disciplinary power in modern western societies. The power relations generated by the educational system extend outside the school, as the educational system contributes to construction of 'normal' subjects or citizens. This is what Foucault (1977, p. 211) calls 'the swarming of disciplinary mechanisms': Standardized education creates a system which locates individuals within a predefined framework with the result that the 'normal' becomes a form of coercion.

Discourse analysis can be applied to any kind of text, indeed to anything that has meaning (Parker, 2005). Short essays or narratives like the ones written by the student participants in a school setting in Paper III and IV have been successfully used as a rich data source in qualitative research (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990; Nygren & Blom, 2001), also as way of comparing samples from different cultures (e.g., Hardal & Wærdahl, 2009). Given the embedded nature of subjectivity, school context provides us with a micro system in which individuals/youth negotiate their subjectivity relating to the demands of the dominant discourses permeating daily school life as an extension of societal influence. Students' writings (Papers III & IV) provided us with the possibility to investigate how they relate to dominant as well as non-dominant discourses and ideologies. It is argued that schools have become increasingly dominated by neoliberal discourses (e.g., Apple, 2001). As education is always political (Apple, 2001), educational system is used as a tool for neoliberal governments to promote internalization of their policies, providing continuity of their economic system (Giroux, 2008; Hursh, 2005; Olssen, 2004). However, schools are also places where young people may have the opportunity to consider other values and ideologies. Hence, we should expect students to draw upon a variety of discourses some of which may be more widespread and more dominant.

3.2.5 Discourse analysis as research method: The question of 'truth'

The general attempt of social constructivist inquiry including discourse analysis as utilized in the current dissertation, in contrast to traditionalist empiricist approach in psychology (most often based on positivist epistemology), is not to establish what is ultimately true, either about subjectivity, meaning, or discourse itself. Rather, as Gergen (2014, p. 52) puts it "the chief hope is to liberate the society from problematic forms of speaking and writing, and thus to bring about social change" and to illuminate forms of public discourse which may be

“prejudicial, oppressive, unjust, or misleading” (see also Watkins & Shulman, 2010; Willig, 2008).

Social constructivist thinking holds that language and discourse have strong implications for our perception of reality. Realities are produced through an on-going process of meaning-making (Burr, 2003; Smith, 1996). As Žižek (1993 as cited in Smith, 1996, p. 174) puts it, “...with the entry to the symbolic order, our immersion in the immediacy of the real is forever lost; we are forced to assume an irreducible loss; the word entails the (symbolic) murder of the thing, etc.” A pre-given reality becomes a problem for social constructivist theories which investigate how human beings create systems of meaning for understanding their worlds and experiences. Meaning is created through language use, through discourses.

Since discourse is understood as constructing ‘reality’ (or realities), and research process is itself a discursive act, the analysis presented in each paper of the current dissertation is a construction, and thus can and should be criticized as such. Eschewing also value neutrality in the analyses in the dissertation, the aim of the dissertation was not to establish an absolute truth about human subjectivity but rather, to paraphrase Parker (2005), to open up for a polemical discussion of the ways in which subjectivity relates to neoliberalism. Moreover, my colleagues and I try in each paper to illuminate and discuss forms of neoliberal discourses which may be “prejudicial, oppressive, unjust, or misleading”, given the particular ways individuals make use of these discourses in each national context.

I acknowledge the difficulty in theorizing construction of reality. On one hand, I agree that ‘reality’ is mediated by discourse which constructs representations of the world. On the other hand, there is no way of knowing if it is the discourse that enables these representations or the particular material conditions of society that enable such discourses. For example, Marx and Engels (in Tucker, 1978) have suggested that subjectivity is a product of the particular

material and economic structure that the individual is born into. Rather, a common thread in discourse analysis is the idea that discursive constructions have ‘real’ implications for the ways in which we experience the world (Burr, 2003; Willig, 2008), acknowledging simultaneously that one-to-one relationship between discourse and subjectivity is problematic (e.g., Gill, 2008).

3.2.6 Reflexivity, trustworthiness, consistency, and transferability

This dissertation presents four qualitative papers, based on a *particular* epistemology (social constructivist) and a *particular* research method (Foucauldian discourse analysis). While some authors claim that the established criteria for scientific rigor in quantitative research can be applied to qualitative research (e.g., Kvale, 1996; Mays & Pope, 1995), others suggest use of alternative terminology and criteria reflecting the complexities and challenges of qualitative research (e.g., Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Malterud, 2001; Mruck & Breuer, 2003). I agree with the latter approach and hence will discuss the issues of trustworthiness (validity), consistency (reliability) and transferability (generalizability) accordingly. However, the topic of reflexivity needs to be examined first as it is a fundamental element of qualitative research, relating to each of these issues.

Reflexivity can be understood as a way of working with subjectivity so as to reduce the risk of self-referential circle of academic work and being aware of the structures or the institutional context that frame the experience and reflection of the researcher (Parker, 1994, 2005). Reflexivity invites us to think about how our own reactions to the research context and the data actually makes possible certain insights and understandings (Willig, 2008) as knowledge and knower cannot be separated, knowledge expressing the interests and values of its producers (Spivak, 1988; Steedman, 1991; Parker, 2005). Such reflection is important

because without it the outcomes or findings of the research process are regarded as ‘existing realities’ despite their constructed nature which is conditioned by various choices and decisions the researchers make throughout the research process (Mruck & Breuer, 2003; see also Finlay, 2002). Hence, the present thesis is a constructive process involving (i) my interest in a specific subject (that of the relation between neoliberalism and subjectivity) which is itself conditioned by (ii) what is acceptable to study within the discipline I adhere to (regarding both the epistemological and theoretical foundations of societal, cultural and critical psychology), (iii) what data to collect and with what method (qualitative data collected mostly in an unobtrusive way), (iv) how to analyze, interpret and present the data (use of Foucauldian discourse analysis), (v) data collection sites (media and school settings) in addition to (vi) my personal, political and scientific critical stance regarding the workings of neoliberalism. Thus, as a qualitative researcher I am aware of these issues, acknowledging also my role in the production and interpretation of data in the analysis of both media discourse (Papers I & II) and text written by students (Papers III & IV). Pope and Mays (1999) and Nafstad (2005) argue that making personal and intellectual biases plain at the outset of the research enhances the credibility of the researcher’s findings, and remaining sensitive to role of prior assumptions enables an honest interpretation of the data. To maintain reflexivity, I have throughout the research process, discussed my thoughts and interpretations with my supervisors and my co-authors who have helped me adjust, revise and improve the interpretation of the data.

One other central element to consider regarding reflexivity is the research relationship, the one between the researcher and the participants. We used already existing data from media in Papers I and II and gathered data by using essay writing as method in Papers III and IV. There was naturally no face-to-face relationship between us researchers and ‘the participants’ in Papers I and II. In Papers III and IV, the relationship was minimal. I was in classrooms and

met groups of students face-to-face and informed them about the project. They were otherwise given the task of writing about their future as an answer to a single question without further interaction.

Production of data occurred either within the institutional framework of media or classrooms at high schools, both of which can be seen as socio-historical arrangements within nation-states that affect what might be possible for individuals to do or speak. I recognize this as a strength given the focus in the present research on the relationship between power, discourse and subjectivity. The way media or school context promote or constrain individual voices provide us with the possibility of studying discourses which individuals may draw upon also outside the school milieu and re-produce dominant ideological positions and/or resist and transform them.

Trustworthiness (validity), referring to the internal procedures of a study, and consistency (reliability), referring to the interpretation and knowledge claims derived from the data, are two aspects which both pertain to the research process and knowledge production in qualitative inquiry and should therefore be seen as overlapping and mutually informed, rather than distinct and separate (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). To increase trustworthiness and by doing so to increase consistency, Lincoln and Guba (1985), Mays and Pope (2000), and Shenton (2004) suggest among others use of different data sources, frequent debriefing sessions between the researcher and his/her superiors, negative case analysis, searching for deviant cases which do not support the emerging patterns of data analysis, and reflexivity, which is already discussed. The current thesis indeed made use of data collected from different sources (media and youth). There was a comprehensive debriefing process where the initial interpretation by me as the first author was discussed and refined after rounds of collaboration with my supervisors and co-authors. As it is also a purpose of the discourse analysis, we searched for deviant cases in our analyses. Following Parker (2005) and Willig (2008), we

actively searched for not only silent acceptance of the subject positions promoted by discourses but also the possible resistance toward the established discourses and alternative or counter-hegemonic ways-of-being. As for consistency, the same procedure of doing Foucauldian discourse analysis was followed based on the six steps suggested by Willig (2008, 2009) in each paper. Regarding the issue of interpretation (or production) of the data in each paper of the thesis, working as a group of co-authors enabled us to discuss the many interpretations that were possible and decide on the more fitting ones.

Transferability refers to the degree to which the interpretations of research can be generalized or transferred to other contexts or settings beyond the context in which the study was done (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Contrasting quantitative methods, the purpose in qualitative research is not to establish a random or representative sample drawn from a population to be able to generalize the results of the study, but rather to identify groups of people who either possess characteristics or live in circumstances relevant to the social phenomenon being studied (Mays & Pope, 1995). As the aim of the current thesis is to investigate dominant societal discourses related to neoliberalism, influence of which there is a large scholarly agreement upon (e.g., Harvey, 2005; Walkerdine, 2006), the findings of the thesis should have relevance beyond the particular contexts of data collection. This is especially true given that Papers I and II provided analysis of mainstream media which reaches large populations. As a way of establishing transferability, Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggest describing the phenomenon in sufficient detail to put it context, making explicit the patterns of cultural and social relationships. In each paper of the thesis, I and my co-authors attempted to make connections between the individual utterances and discourses, and wider societal context. While the particular utterances of individuals are observed within certain contexts, and are thus contingent on the particular setting or a micro system under scrutiny, such settings are never isolated from the wider society and its discourses. At the same time,

the discourse is trans-individual (Parker, 2005). As the purpose of discourse analysis is not to focus on individuals but rather to investigate the cultural frameworks of meaning that they reproduce (Burman, 2004, Burr, 2003, Willig, 2001), and inasmuch as similar discourses are available in wider society, we may expect that individual subjectivity is arguably, at least to some extent, similarly influenced across different settings. The analyses in this thesis should then not be viewed as unique to the participants in the present study. Instead, the analyses and conceptual frameworks for instance in Papers III and IV detail processes which I will argue offer knowledge that pertains not only to the high school students who participated in the study but also those youth who live their lives in the two national contexts of the thesis. As discussed in each paper of the thesis, the discourses that were revealed are indeed disseminated and reproduced widely in each society respectively.

3.2.7 Ethical considerations

Every study might bring forward a number of ethical considerations. An ethical consideration that is relevant for the present thesis relates to the recruitment of participants and informed consent. For the papers I and II, we made use of already available media discourse (newspapers and TV program) as data source, and hence did not directly recruit participants. As media discourse is publicly available, we did not have to seek informed consent. However, the Papers III and IV were based on data collected among young people, thus requiring us to get informed consent. The study was designed to meet the requirements of the statutory data privacy administrated by The Norwegian Social Science Data Services (NSD), which have accepted the study. The law of *protection of privacy* makes clear that those who participate in a study must give their consent to participation. For those under the age of 18, parents should consent to their participation. However, as the law of protection of privacy states that if the collected data is not sensitive character, the young people can give their consent from the age

of 15. The current study meets these requirements and is accepted by the NSD. Additionally, local educational authorities in Turkey approved and allowed the data collection. All participants, youth from Norway and Turkey, were informed that the study was anonymous and that we did not require any sensitive information about them. They were also informed that the participation was voluntary. Voluntary participation should be considered a more important issue when participation takes place at institutions such as schools on which children depend. To avoid both a collective normative influence to participate and direct obedience to an authority figure (the teacher), they were explicitly informed that they could choose to write as much as they please or refrain from writing at all.

4. Summary of papers

4.1 Paper I – Making sense of neoliberal subjectivity: A discourse analysis of media language on self-development

This paper investigates media discourses on self-development in Norway and Turkey based on the claim that such discourses may function to spread neoliberal thinking in society. The paper aims to contribute to our understanding of how neoliberalism enters into the production of contemporary subjectivities by analyzing articles from a mainstream newspaper in each national context. We focus on the ways in which journalists, experts such as psychologists and self-development coaches who offer their advice and opinion on how to solve a variety of problems in the lives of, among others, disadvantaged groups of individuals such as the poor and the unemployed, promote a certain type of subjectivity. The paper examines discourses on self-development as a technology of neoliberal subjectification and details the ways in which neoliberal subjectivity is promoted as a solution to many problems of life. Our analysis detailed four interrelated discourses – rationality, autonomy and responsibility,

entrepreneurship, and positivity and self-confidence – in both newspapers demonstrating for instance how social problems such as unemployment are constructed as lying in the domain of the individual. These discourses promote a neoliberal subjectivity and constitute the individual in ways consonant with Foucault's understanding of neoliberal governmentality. We argue that such discourses individualize the social, concealing or making irrelevant the socio-structural elements of society. Discourses on self-development thus instill stronger individualism: the four interrelated discourses promote and disseminate the proper way of managing life in neoliberal societies, namely engaging in self-developing actions. Accordingly, the individual subject ought to re-work and reinvent herself and become a better version of herself. Various voices in media discourse in both national contexts construct the individual as the sole person responsible for managing life, constraining a collective identity. One further argument is made which explicates how psychological expert knowledge, the *psy-complex*, is used to position and constitute individuals as neoliberal subjects. The paper thus argues for paying attention to ways in which neoliberal discourses as disseminated in media may provide social control and contribute to preserving the status quo.

4.2 Paper II – Chasing happiness through personal debt: An example of neoliberal influence in the Norwegian society

Paper II builds upon the investigation of media discourse performed in Paper I. Paper II is based on the understanding that the relationship between creditors and debtors is fundamentally social and political, not merely financial. This empirical study aimed at investigating discourses featuring in the Norwegian debt TV show *Luksusfellen* (The Luxury Trap). The paper argues that reality television programs, or 'debt-TV', such as these function as technologies of neoliberal governmentality that notably produce and reproduce narratives associated with debt, principally that it is exclusively an individual financial problem, not a

social or political one. We undertake a Foucauldian discourse analysis of the TV show, utilizing social theory about debt and neoliberalism as well as social psychological literature on individualization. In so doing, the paper demonstrates how debt-TV functions to discipline both the participants and, importantly, the audience into more ‘financially literate’ subjects, and by extension more governable citizens. The term ‘debt subjectivity’ is also introduced in order to capture the significance of being in debt to the contemporary social and political order. Moreover, it highlights how debt as a problem is constructed and often treated in a very simplistic individualized manner, not addressing the more structural concerns that might both lead people to be in debt in the first place and force them to remain indebted over time. As was the case in Paper I, Paper II explicates the role of psy-complex, as reflected in the use of psychologists as experts in Luksusfellen. Discourses that are drawn upon by the experts in the TV show individualize the debt and responsibilize the individuals. Participants of the TV show seem to accept the construction of themselves as neoliberal entrepreneurial subjects who find themselves guilty and ought to invest in self-developing activities as a solution to their difficult situation. We argue that such individualization and responsibilization function as technologies of neoliberal governmentality and may indeed contribute to preservation of the status quo of the contemporary capitalist societies.

4.3 Paper III – Future orientation of youth in Norway and Turkey: Tensions between self-realization and belonging?

The aim of Paper III (and Paper IV) was to investigate future orientation of youth in the Norwegian and Turkish societies. This was done to reveal and come to an understanding of currently dominant discourses which youth draw upon to make sense of their lives and through which they constitute themselves as subjects of their respective societies. Most societies, including Norway and Turkey, have been experiencing social, structural as well as

ideological transformations due to increasing globalization, which demands new ways of understanding contemporary subjectivities. Transforming traditional values and leading to increased free market capitalism, consumerism and individualism among other large scale changes, globalization influences identity or subjectivity development, especially among youth. Coming of age in a globalization era, youth are simultaneously exposed to local, national and global developments, changing discourses and ideologies. Future orientation was thus used as a way of gaining knowledge about how youth subjectivities in two distinct cultures may be influenced by the changing dominant discourses.

We performed a discourse analysis of Norwegian and Turkish youths' future orientation. Samples of 106 (67 girls and 39 boys) in Norway and of 236 (83 girls and 153 boys) in Turkey at the last year of high school wrote essays detailing their hopes, expectations, ideals and worries for the future, which provided the data for Paper III (and Paper IV). Data were collected in 2011. Our analysis produced different themes or discourses youth in both national contexts, albeit in varying degrees, found important and drew upon in their writings. In Paper III, we present a framework of relationality, consisting of two clusters of discourses that may create tension for youth in negotiation of their subjectivities. These are discourses of independence, self-realization, individual achievement and sensation-seeking on one hand, and discourses of solidarity, significant others and good citizenship, on the other. Our findings resonate with understandings of neoliberal influence in society which instills an *individualistic* subject who constitutes herself as independent, self-realizing, achievement-oriented, and sensation-seeking. We discuss implications of these discourses on subjectivity, pitting them against more relational or *collectivist/community-oriented* discourses of solidarity, significant others and good citizenship.

4.4 Paper IV – Youth’s future orientation and well-being: Materialism and concerns with education and career among Turkish and Norwegian youth

We in Paper IV make use of the same data as in Paper III. We investigate what dominant discourses are revealed in youths’ writings and how they may influence their subjectivities and well-being. We detail two frameworks of discourses, one pertaining materialism and one pertaining education and career, which our participants draw upon in their writings. We relate these discourses to neoliberalism and discuss the extent to which youth constitute themselves as neoliberal subjects of their respective societies.

Drawing upon a materialism discourse, some youth in both national contexts construed happiness only accessible through material possessions, defining their subjectivities in terms of what they have. Socio-structural differences between Norway, with high social security and very low unemployment rate, and Turkey, a country struggling both with social security and high unemployment rate, seem to affect youth differently. While the great majority of Turkish participants in our study seemed to develop a worried self in their pursuit of attaining higher education and keeping a job afterwards, majority of their Norwegian peers showed a relaxed attitude and wanted primarily to attain an education and a job they ‘enjoy’, being primarily concerned with self-realization and sensation-seeking. We discuss implications of socio-structural changes toward a neoliberal system in both societies on youth subjectivities.

5. Discussion

Each paper in this thesis provides an analysis of discourses through which individuals living in Norway and Turkey are constituted and constitute themselves as neoliberal subjects. In papers I and II we revealed exclusively individualistic discourses, especially strengthened by the psy-complex, in specific media contexts in which individuals are posited as entrepreneurial subjects who ought to be rational, autonomous, positive, and with self-

confidence and capacity to turn themselves into agents who should take full responsibility for their own well-being and for tackling problems of life. In Papers III and IV we showed that similar individualistic discourses were prominent in the future orientation of youth. We revealed the degree in which youth from both national contexts constitute themselves as neoliberal subjects, indicating the possible tensions youth may feel caught up between dominant individualistic discourses on one hand and discourses that pertain to relatedness and belongingness on the other.

I will now argue that a majority of the discourses revealed in each paper may function as technologies of neoliberal governmentality as they individualize the social and responsibilize the individual. I will also discuss how power plays a role in constitution of subjectivities in Foucauldian thinking.

5.1 Individualization of the social and responsibilization of the individual

The construction of the individual as an entrepreneurial subject in Papers I and II fits well with neoliberal governmentality, constraining communality and collective identity. Such subjectivity is also widespread among youth both in Norway and Turkey as revealed in Papers III and IV. There is a strong tendency to posit problems of life such as debt and unemployment solely as personal problems in TV shows like *Luksusfellen* or in various self-development courses offered to the individuals in both national contexts. Additionally, positing individuals as transformable or malleable subjects, entrepreneurship demands that they rework and reinvent themselves and turn whatever disadvantage they might have into competence. Any problem of life is suggested as solvable through self-development since life is construed as simply a consequence of an individual's choices. When the social is individualized, in other words, when individuals understand societal problems solely as a consequence of their own actions or competence, or lack thereof, it leads to responsibilization of the individual (Rose, 1999). Overall, analyses in the current thesis reveal that the social and

structural nature of life conditions, e.g., unemployment, is largely ignored and the burden of tackling any problem is placed on the shoulders of the individual. The individualistic discourses promote the entrepreneurial subject who sees herself as ‘human capital’ and for instance constitutes herself, in the realms of education and work, as ‘the portfolio self’ who ought to continually increase her value and make herself marketable and employable according to the constantly changing demands of society (Kelan, 2008; O’Flynn & Petersen, 2007; Walkerdine, 2006). The case of participants in self-development courses (Paper I) and in debt TV show (Paper II) illustrates the *individualization of the social*: The subject of the current stage of capitalism is thus subjugated as she understands and accepts herself as autonomous, rational, self-realizing, self-monitoring and responsible self with the belief that she herself is ‘the maker of her own happiness’. Also among the youth both in Norway and Turkey (Papers III and IV), there was a high degree of acceptance of this autonomous self which contributes to and strengthens the fact that the social and structural components of society, the historical rationality of the state, the ideology(/ies) and power effects that govern life and demand constant reworking of the individuals remain taken for granted and hidden. In line with Foucault, Walkerdine (2003, p. 241) contends that workings of neoliberalism “produce a constantly failing subject who has to understand their position in essentially personal and psychological terms”. For instance, when the poor and the disadvantaged draw upon these neoliberal discourses to make sense of their disadvantaged position in society, they see it fundamentally as a consequence of (lack of) their own actions, and are led to seek individual solutions to their problem. Such neoliberal subjectivity was widespread among the participants of self-development courses (Paper I), among participants of debt TV show (Paper II), and also among youth in both societies (Paper III and IV). This subjectivity, based on the principles of personal responsibility and entrepreneurship, then demands an array of activities under the term self-development which is posited to transform the inadequate

subject into a successful subject through for instance ‘being positive’ ‘seeking further education’, ‘becoming a better version of oneself’ (Paper I), ‘developing financial literacy’ (Paper II), among others.

The neoliberal subjectivity promoted in media discourses on self-development (Paper I) and debt (Paper II) implies a self-help culture, especially strengthened by psy-complex. Within these discourses, psychologists as well as other so-called self-development experts disseminate psychological knowledge which constructs individuals as neoliberal entrepreneurs. Self-help discourse has become increasingly influential in the last few decades, with the increasing influence of psychology in society (Arthington, 2016; Binkley, 2011; Greenleaf & Bryant, 2012; Madsen, 2014a; Rose, 1999). Indeed, promotion of self-help has been intended as a device to save public expenditure and encourage individuals to take greater responsibility for their own well-being in neoliberal societies (Cheshire, 2006). Self-help discourse has been increasingly infiltrating everyday thinking and instilling the idea of the entrepreneurial subject in both the Norwegian (Madsen, 2014b) and Turkish (Can, 2013) societies. This argument is supported by the findings of the present thesis, highlighting one possible way the psy-complex may serve the capitalist system, as argued among others by Parker (1994), Prilleltensky and Fox (1997), and Rose (1999).

The analyses in Paper III and Paper IV support the findings in Paper I and Paper II, revealing the degree to which such neoliberal discourses are disseminated in the Norwegian and Turkish societies. When prompted to think about the future, youth in both societies make sense of themselves and their surroundings by drawing upon, not only but largely, neoliberal discourses. Thus, a large number of youth in both contexts draw upon similar discourses of independence, self-realization, individual achievement and sensation-seeking. Understanding themselves as isolated, self-made and autonomous individuals, these youth understand life as simply a consequence of their own choices and that they can achieve anything in life if they

work hard for it. These discourses indicate the degree to which individualization of the social and responsabilization of the individuals are achieved in the two societies. When talking about their opportunities and problems in life, risks in the contemporary societies, for instance relating to leading a happy life, getting education or employment, a majority of youth in both national contexts largely ignore the socio-structural conditions as they understand themselves as autonomous subjects. Such subjectivity implies that any failure in life would be a personal failure, thus creating possibly a greater worry or anxiety for individuals (see also O’Flynn & Petersen, 2007; Walkerdine, 2003).

While similar discourses, for instance of personal failure, are found in the writings of youth from both contexts, our data reveal that socio-structural differences between the two societies affect youth subjectivities in different ways. The differences largely relate to the worry youth feel for the future and the role of discourses pertaining to communality. First, while Norwegian youth also show worry for the future, their worry is primarily related to the self-realization project. Taking for granted the advantages made available for them by the socio-structural functioning of the Norwegian welfare system, Norwegian youth are more likely to be worried about not achieving self-realization and sensation-seeking when thinking about the future. Indeed, sense of security is felt so strongly among Norwegian youth that it is posited by some of them as an issue of dissatisfaction, lessening their well-being. Norwegian boy 14 writes:

“I wish that a lot of things will not happen for me... I do not want to know what the future holds. I sometimes think life is boring since I know all that is going to happen. I know I will get an education, establish a family, live, work, have kids and eventually die... I need to live as much in the moment as possible.”

Turkish youth, in contrast to their Norwegian peers, show a larger degree of concern for what the future holds. An uncertain future with a limited access to education and limited potential

of stable employment leads to a worried self, diminishing well-being among Turkish youth (Paper IV).

Regarding the discourses pertaining to communality and relatedness, these can be pitted against the neoliberal discourses which pertain agency and individualism, creating possible tensions for youth. While individualistic discourses have been influential in Norway (Gullestad, 1996; Nafstad et al., 2007) and in Turkey (Neyzi, 2001), the discourses of solidarity, significant others and good citizenship, as discussed in Paper III, provide alternative ways of constituting subjects. In both societies, we see a diversity of discourses young people draw upon. Yet, overall, the neoliberal discourses seem to outweigh alternatives.

Papers II and IV also reveal that materialism is an especially influential discourse which affects subjectivity and well-being of individuals in neoliberal societies. There were a number of youth who not only equated material possessions with well-being, but also rejected the notion of being able to be happy without possessing money or material goods in both national contexts (Paper IV). Rose (1999) argues that individuals in neoliberal societies are led to assemble a way of life through consumption so as to accomplish self-realization, a predominant discourse among youth in both national contexts (Papers III and IV).

Accordingly, acquiring material possessions becomes almost a normative demand for the self-realizing subjects within the widespread discourse of materialism (see also Dittmar, 1992; Dittmar, Bond, Hurst & Kasser, 2014). Paper II presents an apt example of how materialism normalizes continual consumption and shopping, and may even turn it into a demand for the neoliberal subject who seeks further possessions of goods in pursuit of self-realization and happiness, which may lead to huge amounts of personal debt for some. The discourses around debt lead to ignorance of the socio-structural elements of debt industry and responsibilize solely the individual debtor who must seek self-development and increased financial literacy

to manage the debt. Given the paradoxical relationship between material possession and happiness (Dittmar et al., 2014; Kasser, 2015; Kasser et al., 2007; Kasser & Linn, 2016), one can argue that such widespread discourse of materialism may create an illusory link between money and well-being.

Social control and possible resistance

Governmentality scholars argue that neoliberalism produces bodies whose conduct as subjects become conducted without much protest (e.g., Dean, 2010; Rose, 1999). Can it then be argued that neoliberal discourses as revealed in this thesis provide social control and reproduce the status quo? Many argue that neoliberalism promotes individualism at the cost of cooperation and communion, which tends to legitimize economic and social inequalities (e.g., Augoustinos et al., 2006; Jost, Blount, Pfeffer, & Hunyady, 2003; Nafstad et al., 2007). All four papers in the current thesis arguably support this sentiment. They present neoliberal discourses such as autonomy and self-realization in both national contexts which function to individualize the social and thus responsibilize the individual. As far as individuals understand themselves solely responsible for their well-being and for tackling the problems of life, social control is achieved. For instance, we found in Paper II that the debtors in *Luksusfellen* understood debt solely as a personal problem. Thus, they could not demand any systemic solution and were rather encouraged by the experts to participate in self-development activities to be able to pay their debt.

The construction of the self as autonomous then arguably serves hegemonic ends and function to preserve status quo (Augoustinos et al., 2006; Fairclough, 2001; Parker, 1999; van Dijk, 1998) as individuals are led to seek individual solutions to their problems, ignoring the systemic and structural preconditions of their problems. Accordingly, as long as individuals understand themselves as neoliberal entrepreneurial subjects, they are led to engage in self-

developing activities and change themselves rather than seek changes in the social, economic or political system. For instance, the unemployed youth participating in empowerment projects (Paper I) and the debtors in the TV show *Lüksusfellen* (Paper II) were led to seek self-development and increase their financial literacy. The only possible solution for wellbeing of these individuals seemed to be changing themselves so that they would be better equipped to deal with their problems rather than demanding change in the system which, given the dominant discourses, were not held responsible for the disadvantages and inequalities in society. Thus, neoliberal governmentality can be said to contribute to the preservation of status quo. Given the influence of media discourse on subjectivity in society (Fairclough, 2001; Spitulnik, 1996), the argument can be stretched to apply to the viewers/readers and the general public; that media disseminates neoliberal thinking, instilling stronger individualism in society.

However, much evidence renders neoliberal ideas such as individual achievement and meritocracy a myth as social mobility has declined in recent decades (e.g., Greenleaf & Bryant, 2012; Goldthorpe, 2003; McNamee & Miller, 2004; Lawton, 2000). Bradford and Cullen (2014) discuss for instance how young people's increased levels of educational participation and heightened aspirations across Europe have not been matched by opportunities in the labor market and beyond, and how social inequality still remains a great issue to be resolved in contemporary societies, proving the belief that education and the labor market would drive social progress illusory. Paper I illustrates how neoliberalism offers solution to unemployment through continual self-development specifically in terms of additional higher education and lifelong learning. However, individuals who constantly engage in reinventing and developing themselves are not guaranteed success. For instance, statements from the Turkish youth in Paper IV who constructed higher education as a guarantee for a good career, successful future and hence their overall wellbeing were infused

with worry and anxiety as the education system and the university exam in Turkey necessarily lead to failure for many: More than half of the students seeking higher education, no matter how hard they work and develop themselves, end up as losers of the university exam. Explaining this systemic failure in terms of individual shortcoming or incompetence, students are led to try harder, yet many cannot avoid failure (see Bauman, 2001). Constituting themselves as neoliberal subjects, self-governing and autonomous, they cannot reasonably blame anyone else but themselves (Walkerdine, 2006).

Such findings resonate with Smart (2012; see also Jost et al., 2003) who found that participants from poor families in difficult economic circumstances, who might have been expected to protest against the implication that their difficult circumstances were the result of laziness or a lack of hard work, expressed support for neoliberal explanations of inequality. The general argument is that disadvantaged groups such as the poor might arguably accept the status quo with all its inequalities as natural and blame themselves for the situation they find themselves in. Drawing on neoliberal discourses, the participants of the self-development courses (Paper I), the individuals with debt (Paper II), and a large number of the students (Papers III and IV) indeed saw life as a consequence of their own choices and were led to seek personal development (i.e., increasing financial literacy) as the proper solution to their respective problems. Hence, when people draw upon neoliberal discourses and position themselves as neoliberal subjects, they end up blaming themselves and seeing self-improvement as the only solution.

From a discursive point of, what is not said or what cannot reasonably be said may be as important as what is in fact said within discourse (Billig, 1991; Parker, 2005). Lack of critical subject positions within a certain discourse would be indicative of the power of the discourse to limit critique toward the established social order. We found no evidence of critical voices in our explorations of media discourses in Papers I and II. Within these

individualistic media discourses, difficulties in life from unemployment to debt, tended to be constructed as a personal problem. Showing no resistance to this construction, the disadvantaged individuals accepted the dominant construction of entrepreneurial subject and were thus subjugated. In this subjugation, the psy-complex represented by experts plays a great role. These so-called experts construct what is seen as normal and what is deviant, and what is normatively expected. Individuals were thus led to find individual solutions to systemic problems, to paraphrase Bauman (2001), through self-management and self-development. Moreover, in the Turkish case, the collectivist values of solidarity and social responsibility seemed to be reproduced (Paper I) to make way for projects that aim to empower and equip the individual with more resources rather than seeking collective solutions to the systemic problems that produce disadvantaged subjectivities. Such empowerment privileges individual autonomy and thus works in ways consonant with neoliberal subjectivity (Bondi, 2005; Dean, 2010).

In Papers III and IV however, students varied in their conviction and the degree to which they draw upon individualistic neoliberal discourses. For instance, some Turkish youth were critical of the existing education system and university exam, constructing it as an unfair system which saw students as ‘race horses’. These youth, not accepting the neoliberal subjectivity, refused to blame themselves for results of a rigged educational system which systematically leads to failure for many. Similarly, a small number of youth from both contexts opposed the dominant materialism discourse, resisting the idea of happiness only accessible through material possessions. Also, the existence of discourses of communality and relatedness which enable collective identity and solidarity in each national context indicate that neoliberalism may not be as hegemonic as suggested by for instance Bourdieu (1998) and Harvey (2005).

5.2 Issues of power and agency

A key assumption in Foucauldian thought relates to how individuals are subjected to power. Foucault's work implores analysts to identify the structures through which power is disseminated and enforced, the inescapability of power's effects, permeating every aspect of social relations, conduct, knowledge structures, and institutions (Dreyfus & Rabinow, 1982; Hayes, 2009; Hook, 2007). In his earlier work, Foucault investigated subjectivity primarily with a view to "docile bodies" and stressed processes of discipline, thus conceptualizing individuals more as passive subjects who are formed and disciplined through discourse. The individual accordingly is "the product of power" (Foucault, 1972/2000, p. xiii). However, Foucault's (1982, 2000) later theorization of power, especially when he detailed how governmentality functioned, posited individuals as more active agents who are constituted as subjects and constitute themselves as subjects. Such understanding holds that individuals turn themselves into subjects by participating in power games (Dreyfus & Rabinow, 1982). Butler (1997, p. 2) elaborates this further:

We are used to thinking of power as what presses on the subject from the outside, as what subordinates, sets underneath, and regulates to a lower order. [...] But if, following Foucault, we understand power as forming the subject as well as providing the very condition of its existence and the trajectory of desire, then power is not simply what we oppose but also, in a strong sense, what we depend on for our existence and what we harbour and preserve in the being that we are.

Accordingly, power may be seen as embedded in the processes through which people are constituted as particular subjects. In such thinking, power is *exercised*, for instance, through knowledge and discourse that establish what is accepted as 'common', 'deviant', 'right' or 'wrong' (Foucault, 1982; see also Hook, 2007; Parker, 2005). A close mutual relationship between discourses and practices exists. Dominant discourses which become taken for granted support and enable social and institutional practices which in turn maintain and reproduce those discourses. Discourse can thus be understood to produce dominant as well as

submissive ways of being, producing at the same time inclusions and exclusions, what is possible to think, feel and act and what is not. Power then is not to be understood as something that is possessed, but *exercised* through discourse. Individuals are subjected to discourse in the sense that their subjectivity, who they can become and how they understand and experience themselves – how they act, think and feel – come about through discourse. There is, as Butler argues, a duality in this discursive constitution of subjectivity, individuals being constituted as subjects as well as constituting themselves as subjects (see also Søndergaard, 1996).

Individualization as liberation?: Foucault (1977, 1982) particularly holds that power cannot be located; it is everywhere and also exercised by individuals. Accordingly, individuals should not simply be construed as cultural dopes, but as agents. Davies (2006, p. 426) suggests an agency in which subjects “can reflexively and critically examine their conditions of possibility and in which they can both subvert and eclipse the powers that act on them and which they enact”. Similarly, Lemke (2001) argues that power relations do not always result in a removal of liberty or options available to individuals, rather power in the Foucauldian sense, could result in an ‘empowerment’ or ‘responsibilization’ of subjects, providing them with ‘free’ decision-making in their everyday life. However, individuals are still understood to be shaped by their embeddedness in power relations, which means that their capacities for freedom and autonomous action are necessarily limited. Especially regarding governmentality, by actively deploying the techniques and models of self-formation that are proposed, suggested, imposed upon them by society (Foucault, 2000; Rose, 1999), “individuals may creatively transform themselves and in the process supplant the normalization operating in pernicious modern technologies of the self” (Sawicki, 1998, p. 105). Hence, individuals make use of their agency, negotiate their subjectivity drawing upon discourses some of which they may claim to belong to while resisting and subverting others.

Arguably then, whatever is constructed as ‘standard’, ‘normal’, ‘expected’ within discourses stipulates the range of actions possible for the individuals. And therein lies the power of discourses in the Foucauldian sense.

The central point to be made is that power, as embedded in discourses, affects how individuals understand and experience themselves and relate to their surroundings. Such influence was unmistakable in the media discourses analyzed in Paper I and II. Discourses surrounding concepts of *self-development* and *debt* to a large degree function to individualize the social and construct the individual as self-governing subject who has no choice but to ‘improve oneself’ to master life. In both papers, there was interestingly no resistance to the established dominant discourses. One should however be aware the fact that media (newspapers and TV) make editorial choices and decide on both the format and content of their products. This might explain the lack of alternatives or resistance against the dominant discourses among the individuals participating in TV shows such as *Lüksusfellen* or others participating in self-development courses. At the same time, media is an institution that serves to strengthen broader trends in society and one such trend is the primacy of self-governance and self-reliance (Deuze, 2011). This might indicate how powerful media is influenced by the dominant discourses, especially the discourses which function to strengthen neoliberalism. However, there is a need to problematize any assumption of one-to-one relation between power/ideology and media discourse on one hand and subjectivity on the other (e.g., Gill, 2008; Spitulnik, 1996). The influence or conduct of conduct is achieved in that ways of being are regulated through what prevails as common in discourses, not through a top-down coercive process. Such a conception of power demands a complex rather than an active or a passive notion of agency. Hence, what we observe for instance in Paper III and IV is that young people in both national contexts negotiate themselves within or according to some discourses to which they claim to belong, while they experience others as problematic. They

resist some discourses they show knowledge of, subvert some and even contribute to invent new understandings related to others. Although a large number of discourses revealed in the analyses in Paper III and Paper IV function in ways consonant to neoliberal governmentality, the way youth in both national contexts make sense of their surroundings and themselves was based on a wide range of discourses. Some of these may be construed as counter-hegemonic (e.g., discourses of solidarity and communality in Paper III), implying some resistance to the dominant neoliberal individualistic discourses.

5.3 Limitations of the current research

Parts of the current research were based on analyses of media discourses (Paper I and II) with the claim that such discourses instill in society certain type of thinking, thus influencing subjectivity. Although media is a powerful tool to disseminate meaning and thereby influence subjectivity in society, people do negotiate their own understandings and may even oppose media's positioning of subjecthood (Fairclough, 2001; Gill, 2008). The present study does not investigate how media discourses on self-development and debt are negotiated by the readers or viewers, which could be seen as a limitation of the Paper I and Paper II. This could be a fruitful approach for future studies.

The method of essay writing used to collect data in Papers III and IV, reduces researcher intervention. This way of collecting data might be seen as a limitation of the study as it did not allow us to interact exhaustively with the participants. Any method such as interview or focus group with a possibility for open conversation with a small number of participants could provide space for larger meaning exchange and clarifications in regard to what the participants say. Essay writing was though much more efficient way of collecting data from a larger number of participants from each national context.

The present thesis presents only discursive studies, thus studying solely language use either in media or in youth essays. Given the epistemological and methodological choices, it can only represent a ‘partial’ reality. As discussed above, this ‘partial’ reality is a constructed one. Researchers with other epistemological orientations could be critical of the findings and knowledge claims made here. Additionally, it was an active choice to leave *ideology* out as an analytical tool from the thesis, taking instead a Foucauldian approach to investigate the relationships between neoliberalism and subjectivity. This does not in any way mean that I do not acknowledge the importance of ideology to understand contemporary subjectivities and reproduction of status quo (see Billig, 1991; Eagleton, 1991; van Dijk, 1998). Some authors (e.g., Downey, Titley & Toynbee, 2014; Eagleton, 1991; Hall, 1985; Spivak, 1988) insist on the need to use ideology as an analytical concept to critique neoliberalism as it helps uncover domination and the concealing and preservation functions of ideology on social and systemic inequalities in a way not covered by Foucauldian approach. For instance, from a Marxist perspective, scholars make use of concepts such as ‘false consciousness’ and ‘mind management’ to refer to how ideology functions to influence subjectivity so that individuals without resistance come to accept the status quo as natural, and thus not demand system change (e.g., Augoustinos, 1999; van Dijk, 1998). Others, however, see the benefits of a Foucauldian approach for critiquing neoliberalism as it may be a supplement and enrichment to ideology critique (e.g., Dawes, 2016; Weidner, 2009). In the present thesis, I utilize the latter approach which leans on the ‘governmentality studies’ and investigates the productive and individualizing aspects of power (e.g., Dean, 2010; Rose, 1999; Rose & Miller, 2008; Rose et al., 2006).

5.4 Concluding remarks

The aim of the present thesis was to investigate subjectivity as embedded in contemporary dominant discourses in two increasingly neoliberal societies. This was achieved by exploring subject positions that were made available within specific media discourses of self-development and debt on one hand, and within writings of youth relating to their future on the other. All four papers of the current thesis show examples of dominant neoliberal discourses in the two national contexts. Can it then be argued that neoliberalism has managed to change people's 'souls', as intended in the words of Margaret Thatcher? And in that case, what is the implication of such a change? Overall, the thesis reveals individualistic discourses in the two national contexts which function as technologies of neoliberal governmentality as these discourses contribute to *individualization of the social* and *responsibilization of individuals*. Individualization under neoliberalism thus entails subjects becoming isolated from the collective ties and responsibilized by making them see social risks as primarily a personal problem. The discourses employed around self-development (Paper I) and debt (Paper II) in various forms of mass media and the discourses in the writings of students in their relation to future (Papers III and IV) show the degree to which individuals are constituted, and constitute and understand themselves as entrepreneurial subjects. The dominant discourses disseminate in society what's accepted as 'common', 'right' and 'wrong', thus affecting how individuals think, act and feel. Hence, inasmuch as individuals draw upon dominant neoliberal discourses and constitute themselves as autonomous and entrepreneurial subjects, they would be more likely to accept the notion that they themselves should be able to cope with any conditions and problems of life. If they do not succeed due to a range of potential factors (e.g., social and structural elements of society leading to unemployment or limiting access to education and so on), then they would be inclined to understand this failure as an individual shortcoming or incompetence. A possible solution for the rational autonomous entrepreneurial subject to such

failure would then be engaging in an array of activities in the name of self-management and self-development. In doing so, the structural and/or systemic elements of society would remain ignored, and consequently unchanged. Given the extent to which *individualization of the social* and *responsibilization of individuals* are achieved, neoliberalism can be argued to provide social control, and contribute to legitimating and reproducing the status quo with the existing social structural mechanisms of contemporary societies with all of their inequalities.

Given the normative aspect of doing discursive research (Gergen, 2014), critical psychologists should occupy themselves with studying forms of surveillance and self-regulation in everyday life (Parker, 1999). The findings of the current thesis show the power effects of neoliberal governmentality in society, which may be seen as oppressive as it heavily promotes self-regulation in many aspects of life. Ultimately, we researchers ought to not only make visible how governmentality and the psy-complex function but also open up for a polemical discussion of how individuals and groups may be liberated from oppressive discourses and practices of neoliberalism. Many scholars argue that neoliberal hegemony is persistent despite its many visible failures and limitations (e.g., Bourdieu, 1998; Rose, 1999; Scholl & Freyberg-Inan, 2013; Stephen, 2010). However, neoliberalism needs to be produced and reproduced continually to exert power. Although there might not be a coherent or consistent alternative political vision available for the majority of poor and working-class people (Bourdieu, 1998), there are today examples of counter-hegemonic struggle globally in diverse spheres of life (e.g., Preston & Aslett, 2014; Steger & Wilson, 2012; Sullivan et al., 2011). Thus, we need to pay more attention to counter-hegemonic perspectives which “reveal ideological and political possibilities that are closed down when neoliberal ideology is theorized as seamless and complete” (Morgan & Gonzales, 2008, p. 233). Thus, future research should not only investigate local variations of neoliberalism but also aim to show areas of human functioning which may show resistance to such powerful influence.

6. References.

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