Values in Late Modernity

A Question of Modern Identity

Victoria de Leon Born
Candidate no. 13

Master thesis
Department of Education
PED4391

UNIVERSITY OF OSLO

1.6.2016
Values in Late Modernity
An inquiry into moral evaluations in the stories of travelling “gappers”, on the threshold to adulthood.
Summary

In this thesis, I am asking if I might find evidence for an epistemological fallacy, in the stories of six young people who has just finished high school, and is now taking a gap year, during which they will travel. I study if this fallacy, as it is described by Furlong and Cartmel (1997), can contribute to an understanding of how my informants experience their transition to adulthood. In short, the fallacy is described as a trait in late modern culture, where people tend to think they are more independent of social situation than they really are (Furlong & Cartmel:1997). I also ask what information lies within this tendency – why an epistemological fallacy?

The individualization thesis argues that late modern societies can be described as individualized. For the people living in these societies, this entails loose ties to society and its institutions, more freedom of choice and higher risks accompanying choices (Bauman:2000; Beck:2000; Giddens:1991). However, there is much evidence to support that social situation is still highly predictive for what choices that are made (Atkinson:2007). Furlong and Cartmel (1997) argue that we tend to think we are freer from these social markers than we really are. To answer my question of why that might be, I utilize the argument of the philosopher Charles Taylor (1989).

With reference to Taylor, I understand that the epistemological fallacy can be explained in terms of modern moral and values, which emphasise the importance of being independent, self-responsible, unique and autonomous. These values could be seen as facilitating a negation of external social influence, i.e. being free from these influences is “the right thing to do”. However, these cultural values are in themselves socially transmitted. In other words, the fact that one values autonomy goes to show that one is not completely autonomous with reference to social influences. It is in this contradiction I find the essence of the epistemological fallacy (Furlong & Catrmel:1997).

Subsequently, with reference to Taylor, I understand that some of the tendencies described in the individualization theses, can be understood as values in late modern culture. As shown, adopted values presupposes the social nature of the self. However, the individualization theses have frequently been understood as describing a development where individual free will, replaces and displaces the influence of socialisation (Krange & Øia:2005). Subsequently, in order for me to understand the tendencies described by theories of individualization, I argue that these theories do accept the social nature of the self.
I asked my six informants about their life orientation, their previous choices and their future plans. I wanted to see if their stories displayed traditional values like adherence to authority, the importance of community support and the recognised influence of tradition. Or if they connoted values that could be understood as individualization values, such as freedom, independence and self-responsibility. I found that the most frequent values in their stories could be understood in terms of an ideal of the autonomous self, thus supporting the hypothesis of the epistemological fallacy. The informants emphasised the individual’s supreme right to decide who and what to be, as well as the importance being self-responsible, and sceptical towards external influences.

However, this autonomy seemed to be challenged by their customization to the terms of the labour market, as well as to the unknown terms of the future. They communicated an unwillingness to “blindly” follow their dreams, as it could make it hard to find a “real job”. They also said that they were hesitant to make firm plans for their future, as they valued the possibility of being open to change. In both these lines of stories, they accept the terms of influences external to them (the labour market and the future), while in other stories, external influences were firmly denied.

I propose to understand this contradiction in terms of what kind of autonomy ideal that seems to inform these stories. I argue that this is an enlightenment autonomy, as opposed to a romantic autonomy. The romantic autonomy presupposes an authentic core. An adherence to this notion of the self would give meaning to stories of following dreams, and making plans for the future, in accordance with who one really is (Taylor:1989). Enlightenment morals, on the other hand, actively contradict this notion of the self, as they value self-responsible scepticism, stripping of illusions, and factual knowledge. It was this kind of autonomy my informants seemed to portray.

My informants also demonstrated more traditional values, such as the importance of social support, and the influence of tradition. However, these were rarer. Typically, when the informants told stories that valued social communities, these were communities of diversity, consisting of single individuals. I conclude that my informants did seem to portray an epistemological fallacy, as I understand an overweight of the values they communicated to be individualization values. I therefore find that the epistemological fallacy makes out an informative concept, in understanding how this group experienced their transition to adulthood.
Preface

So, this was no walk in the park! This has been a highly challenging and interesting year. I found *individualization* to be an interesting subject before I started this journey, and I find this to be even more true as I am closing up on the finishing line. This thesis has afforded hours of writing and reading, causing me to think, and rethink perspectives I held to be certain: I really like that about science.

There are many people who I owe thanks to. Firstly, thanks go to my informants. Without you, there could be no thesis. Thank you! Also thanks to my supervisor Kristinn Hegna. Thank you for your input and advice. I have always left your consultations feeling inspired and targeted. Your experience and insight have been priceless in this process. I would also like to thank you for your kindness and calm, this has done wonders in days where everything has seemed rather bleak and chaotic. I would also like to thank Marianne Takvam Kindt for reading through and commenting on written work, for giving me literature tips and feedback on thoughts and ideas. Thanks also goes to all my fellow students who have partaken in seminars with me, shared coffee breaks and interesting conversations.

Thank you to my three sisters; Hanna, Mia and Marlene. Your support and love have been one of my most valued treasures throughout my entire life, and this year has been no different. Thank you for your enthusiastic conversations, your generous hearts, and for reading and commenting on what I have written. Thanks are also warranted to my family for moral support and babysitter services. Thanks to my mum who has frequently “walked” me, made sure I ate right, and emphasised the importance of taking breaks.

Thank you to my amazing husband. This would not have happened were it not for you. Thank you for cooking every dinner for the past month, for reading what I have written, for suggesting and finding literature, for not holding it against me that I have been more than a little self-centred lately, and for keeping our home running while I have been working. I am infinitely grateful to you, I love you, Joakim! And last, but not least, thank you to my wonderful, wise daughter who frequently reminded me that “Not everything revolves around your master thesis, mum!” – That, my darling Elvira, is very true. I love you!
Table of Contents

Values in Late Modernity ................................................................. III

Summary .............................................................................................. V

Preface ................................................................................................. IX

1 Introduction ..................................................................................... 1
   1.1 An Interesting Observation ......................................................... 1
   1.2 Individualization ................................................................. 2
   1.3 The Epistemological Fallacy – a Subjective Level ....................... 5
   1.4 The Gappers ........................................................................... 7
   1.5 Research Questions .................................................................. 9
   1.6 The Following Pages ............................................................... 10

2 Theory .............................................................................................. 12
   2.1 Charles Taylor: Individualization as a Modern, Moral Ideal ........ 12
      2.1.1 Taylor’s Project ............................................................. 12
   2.2 The Historical, Moral Making of the Modern Identity ................. 14
      2.2.1 Romanticism and enlightenment ..................................... 15
      2.2.2 The modern notion of the punctual self ............................ 17
   2.3 My Application of Individualization Theory ..................................... 18
   2.4 Objective and Subjective Individualization ..................................... 19
      2.4.1 The individualized, social identity .................................... 21
   2.5 Theories of Individualization: Three Contributions ....................... 24
      2.5.1 Bauman ........................................................................ 25
      2.5.2 Beck ............................................................................ 26
      2.5.3 Giddens ........................................................................ 27
      2.5.4 Same, same, but different ............................................... 28
   2.6 Five Individualization Tendencies.................................................. 28
      2.6.1 Risk in late modernity ...................................................... 28
      2.6.2 The modern emancipation project ..................................... 30
      2.6.3 Autonomy and self-responsibility .................................... 32
      2.6.4 Reflexivity and loss of external stable points of reference ....... 34
      2.6.5 Individual construction of identity ..................................... 35
2.7 Narratives, Identity and Moral ................................................................. 38
  2.7.1 Identification ....................................................................................... 39
2.8 Summing up the Theory Chapter ............................................................. 40
3 Method ........................................................................................................ 41
  3.1 Interview as Method ............................................................................... 41
    3.1.1 A narrative approach ...................................................................... 42
    3.1.2 My use of the term “narrative”...................................................... 43
  3.2 Selection of Informants ........................................................................ 43
  3.3 The Theoretical Starting Point ................................................................. 46
  3.4 The Interview Guide .............................................................................. 47
  3.5 The Interviews ......................................................................................... 48
    3.5.1 The semi structured interview ......................................................... 48
    3.5.2 Conducting the interviews ............................................................... 49
    3.5.3 Transcribing and Translating the Interviews ..................................... 50
    3.5.4 Analysing the Interviews ................................................................ 51
  3.6 Presentation ............................................................................................. 53
    3.6.1 Anonymization ................................................................................. 54
  3.7 Quality and Transparency: Questions of Validity .................................... 54
4 A Narrative Analysis of Values in Transitional Stories: ............................... 57
  4.1 Following Dreams vs. Doing What is Sensible ....................................... 58
    4.1.1 Having fun, and getting ahead......................................................... 59
    4.1.2 What will get you the furthest?....................................................... 62
    4.1.3 The risk of following your dreams ................................................. 65
  4.2 The Scientific, Sceptical Mind ................................................................. 68
    4.2.1 Moral aversion ................................................................................ 68
    4.2.2 When nothing can be known ......................................................... 71
    4.2.3 The critical thinker ....................................................................... 75
  4.3 Self-Responsibility ................................................................................. 78
    4.3.1 Because I want to ........................................................................... 78
    4.3.2 It all depends on you ..................................................................... 80
    4.3.3 The heavy responsibility ............................................................... 83
  4.4 Choose Choice ...................................................................................... 85
    4.4.1 I knew I wanted the choice ............................................................. 85
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4.4.2</td>
<td>It is never too late to choose again</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.4.3</td>
<td>It will all probably change</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.4.4</td>
<td>Que sera, sera</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.4.5</td>
<td>Replacing the “what” with the “how”</td>
<td>91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>No Man is an Island</td>
<td>95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.5.1</td>
<td>Diversity</td>
<td>97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.6</td>
<td>Summing up the Analysis</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>102</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>What and Why is the Epistemological Fallacy?</td>
<td>102</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>The Narratives</td>
<td>103</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.2.1</td>
<td>The risk of dreaming</td>
<td>103</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.2.2</td>
<td>Two narratives of autonomy</td>
<td>104</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.2.3</td>
<td>Unchallenged autonomy</td>
<td>105</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.2.4</td>
<td>Moral relativism and narcissism?</td>
<td>106</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.2.5</td>
<td>The value of diversity</td>
<td>106</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.2.6</td>
<td>Some Concluding Remarks</td>
<td>107</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>Why is this Knowledge Important?</td>
<td>108</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.4</td>
<td>Limitations and Further Research</td>
<td>109</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>References</td>
<td></td>
<td>111</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix 1</td>
<td></td>
<td>115</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
1 Introduction

1.1 An Interesting Observation

It was a Monday evening. My husband and I was watching an episode of the series *Typisk deg*. The theme was sexuality. In a segment, the host of the show, Petter Schjerven, interviewed a couple who was waiting until they were married to have sex. When asked why, they explained at length how they felt individually and as a couple that it was the right thing to do for them. At the end, the woman added in an ad hoc, and a bit timid fashion: “And also we are religious, so...” Their personal reasons for waiting was a far bigger part of the explanation they presented than the one informed by the recognized external authority of God. Why was that? Why, when being self-proclaimed followers of a religion, did they seem so reluctant to base a choice of abstinence in their beliefs?

It made me think about what I had read about individualization. Could the reason for the lopsided explanation for the cause of their choice be understood in terms of that “I feel it is the right thing for me”, is a more legitimate reason in modern discourse than “God says it is the right thing to do”? In a culture where God is but one amongst many authorities, might it be that “I feel” becomes a legitimate alternative to “God says”, when communicating choices? “I feel” can be applied to a variety of different moral frameworks, allowing for personal commitment, without making claims to the ultimate truth, which could exclude and potentially bring about conflict with those who feel differently. Another thing stroked me as interesting as well. The choice of abstinence in itself, would not have awakened any associations to individualized culture, as individualization is described in terms of breaking boundaries, living dreams, emphasising freedom and rendering tradition obsolete. Quite the opposite in fact. It was their explanation, not their choice that connoted individualization.

Later, I read a journal I wrote when I was nineteen. I had written about my choice to travel alone to Nepal for three months after high school. It struck me that my explanations for that choice, closely resembled that given by the couple interviewed in *Typisk deg*. I wrote at length about how this was the right choice for me, and how it reflected my values and perspectives of the world. How I, by removing myself from what I knew, would come to experience a truer version of myself (this was written in slightly less elegant terms than what is rendered here, but the content remains precise). This made me wonder; how does youth
who take time off from work and studies to travel after high school today, explain this choice? Would their explanations also resemble that given by the couple in *Typisk deg*? Would they reflect tendencies that could be understood as *individualistic*? Before delving deeper into this question, it is necessary to briefly look at what this “individualization” entails.

### 1.2 Individualization

Late modern, western societies have frequently been understood in relation to the tendency termed individualization. Individualization can, in short, be understood as a “(...) weakening of collective forms of social practices to the benefit of more individualised ones. (...) The concept of individualization refers to a process of change affecting the way individuals are related to society.” (Enjolras:2000,23). The three main contributors to theories of individualization are held to be Bauman, Beck and Giddens. In the field of sociology, these are termed “the new classics” (Krange & Øia:2005,94). There are central differences between these three contributions, but there are also central areas where they overlap, as will be demonstrated further in the theory chapter.

Theories describing late modernity have been criticised for being too general, and for not specifying the time and place they refer to (Brennan & Nilsen:2005). I will not, in this thesis, contribute with a suggestion to a more specific definition. I consider individualization to be best understood as a *tendency* (Beck:2000,17-26), and not a uniform development, effecting the entire western society simultaneously, and to the same degree. However, in this thesis, tendencies of individualization are understood in relation to my informants’ experiences of transitioning to adulthood; today’s middle class youth, who choose to travel after high school.

Theories of individualization refer to the period in which individualization is relevant in different terms. There is high, liquid and late modernity. Also risk society, and just modernity. I might be accused of being a bit lenient with these concepts, as I to a large part use them as synonyms. When I refer to times assumed not to be influenced by individualization to the degree it is claimed to day, I specify that by using terms like early or heavy modernity, or also “traditional societies”.

In general, bot Bauman (2000), Beck (2000) and Giddens (1991) describe tendencies in late modern western societies, where the individual takes the centre stage, traditionally held by community and family. This development is understood in relation to modernisation
processes such as the industrial revolution and the development of the welfare systems. In this development, the government employs its citizens in occupations necessary for society to grow and prosper. In return the individual is promised freedom through the welfare system, in the form of insurance, pension and education (Harari:2011,392-408). This is all the mark of what Bauman (2000) calls heavy modernity. The individual is placed in a society of rapid change, and a newfound freedom. One is free to be a teacher, a firefighter, or a grocer. In liquid modernity, however, this translates into; “you are free to be whatever you want”.

Bauman (2000) states that in heavy modernity, the goal was to place oneself within a niche defined by society, suited to one’s station and rank. In liquid modernity, these niches are hard to come by (p.33). While one in heavy modernity was under the impression that one was moving towards a set goal, liquid modernity has disparaged of its goals (Bauman:2000,61). This, Bauman describes, leaves personal preference as the only guideline for choice. Bauman claims that freedom, in heavy modernity, was granted and sought so that one might be this or that, achieve a certain goal or find one’s proper place in the system. In liquid modernity, freedom is understood to be its own cause and goal (Bauman:2000,33).

According to Giddens (1991), this freedom is however paired with a lack of moral guidelines, informing what choice to make (p.78). The flow of information makes a vast number of conflicting authorities on any given area available. He states that there is no one valid authority that could provide a benchmark from which choices’ worth could be measured. Therefore, the individual has to rely on her own resources when she is to make a choice (Giddens:1991,47). In addition, Beck claims, individual focus has rendered social belonging lacking. Subsequently, negative consequences of a choice have to be carried by the individual herself. This is set up against the traditional way of making, and facing consequences of choices; that is to say as a social group, where class is held to be a prominent example (Beck:2000,174). This brings about potential distress, doubt and anxiety for the free individual who is left to choose. These consequences of individualization are assumed to be particularly relevant in transitional situations, where one is forced to make important choices for the future (Giddens:1991,113). Leaving high school and choosing a further trajectory for one’s life can be considered such a transition.

Subsequently, as I will demonstrate, the choice to take a gap year and travel might be, and have been interpreted as a reflection of these individualization tendencies. Perhaps the gap year represents a postponing of those important choices, rendered difficult due to the lack of social moral guidelines. Or perhaps it is, like was suggested by Frønes (2005,55) an
expression of wanting to find out who you are before deciding what to do. Or even yet, perhaps it corresponds with an obedience to personal preference as the only culturally articulated goal. Perhaps, but not everyone thinks this to be the case.

The sociologists, Krange and Øia (2005) suggests that such choices in Norway is better understood in relation to, amongst other things, the country’s demographics. Given that Norway has an old population, youth might find themselves to be on high demand, giving them more room to choose to do what they like: “Kort sagt, ungdom leker mer, eksperimenterer mer, de tar seg gjerne et friår og drar til Australia, og rett og slett nyter sin frihet.” (Krange & Øia:2005,218). In general, Krange and Øia (2005) are highly sceptical to the relevance of individualization theories (p.253), and there might be good reasons for that scepticism.

Across the board, individualization seem to be understood as increased agentic freedom, coupled with a decreasing attachment to, and guidance from societal structural influences. This implies that individuals in individualized societies should make choices and follow convictions independent on their relative social status. This was the hypothesis when Côté (2002) conducted a study on individualizations’ effect on the transition to adulthood. The data reported in the study was drawn from a 10-year longitudinal study of a sample of Canadian university students (Côté:2002,118). The hypothesis was that if individualization were to be understood in its most literal meaning, there should be no evidence of structural influence on choice. “In other words, there should be a randomness of choice that militate against any subgroup patterns.” (Côté:2002,128).

If, on the other hand, individualization was not influential, personal agency should not be predictive in relation to life choices, while differences in gender, financial parental support, and other structural influences should make out precise variables for prediction. The result of the study revealed a more complex interaction between the variables than was reflected in the structural or the individual hypothesis above. The results indicated both agency and structural influence (Côté:2002,131).

There are several studies that has researched what kind of choices that are made by different social groups, and concluded that social structures, such as class, sex and ethnicity, still play an important part in informing individual’s choices and transitions to adulthood. With grounds in this they render the thesis of individualization deficient or even redundant (Krange & Øia:2005; Atkinson:2007; Atkinson:2008; Dawson:2010; Brannen & Nilsen:2005; Snee:2014). But, returning to the couple in *Typisk deg*, and my own journal, it was not the
choices made that had the air of individualization about it, it was the explanations given for these choices. How should this be understood? Perhaps it can be explained through what Furlong and Cartmel (1997) terms “the epistemological fallacy”.

1.3 The Epistemological Fallacy – a Subjective Level

In the book Young people and social change (1997) Andy Furlong and Fred Cartmel also studied youths’ transitions to adulthood in relation to individualization. They reviewed empirical data relating to social change in late modernity. For the main part this consists in the comparison of quantitative data that disclose change and continuity in education, transition to labour market, lifestyle choices and political participation, amongst other things, in British society. By applying their term epistemological fallacy, they make important nuances in the conceptualization of individualization. Epistemological fallacy refers to a paradox of late modernity. On the one hand they claim that:

(…) although the collective foundations of social life have become more obscure, they continue to provide powerful frameworks which constrain young people’s experiences and life chances. Over the last two decades a number of changes have occurred which have helped to obscure these continuities, promoting individual responsibilities and weakening collectivist traditions. (Furlong & Cartmel:1997,109).

Further it is claimed that the obscuring of these social structures leads to the world being regarded as unpredictable and risky. As the broader collective categories are obscured, it is up to the individual to negotiate these risks – all the while the social categories are actively shaping understanding and choice, but without providing articulated support for these understandings and choices. Thus, on the other hand “(…) young people increasingly perceive themselves as living in a society characterized by risk and insecurity which they expect to have to negotiate on an individual level.” (Furlong & Cartmel:1997,10). The paradox described here is that people seem to experience themselves as being socially detached, all while social situation is still determining for options available, and choices made.

As far as I can tell, it is on the level of experience Cartmel and Furlong identifies the most substantial changes of late modernity, what I understand as the subjective level. Their wide-ranging overview of data shows that the experienced blurring of social categories and collective values have had little effect on actual social reproduction (Furlong &
Cartmel:1997,110), which I understand to be the objective level. However, they further claim that “(…) the process of individualization represents a subjective [my emphasis] weakening of social bonds due to growing diversity of experience.” (Furlong & Cartmel:1997,113). They describe how choice is affected by social situation behind the individuals’ back, so to speak – leaving the individual with a perception of being more voluntaristic than is the case (Furlong & Cartmel:1997).

Their argumentation, it seems to me, lean towards a subjective stance of individualization. However, their choice of data to review strikes me as uncompliant with their subjective position. It seems as if the data they refer to mainly has explanatory power corresponding with the objective perspective of individualization. As such one can understand Krange and Øia’s critique, as they observe That Furlong and Cartmel maintain their assertion that British society is strongly individualized in opposition to their own findings (Krange & Øia:2005,248). Although I do not find that the data that undergoes Furlong and Cartmel’s focus is particularly fertile when it comes to generating an understanding of the experiences of individualization, Furlong and Cartmel claims that:

(…) in the context of the risk society thesis, it is also important to examine the extent to which the greater protraction of transitions have led to growing unease and uncertainty as young people try to make sense in a world in which their future is perceived as risky and difficult to predict. (Furlong & Cartmel:1997,28).

I agree with Furlong and Cartmel, that generating knowledge of how individualization is experienced, as is described above, is important. Subsequently, I am in this thesis concerned with a subjective level of experience. That is to say, how late modern society is experienced and interpreted when transitioning to adulthood. Will the experiences of Norwegian youth today, on the threshold of adulthood, reflect individualization tendencies, as was found by Furlong and Cartmel? Or will their experiences reflect a recognition of social situation, socio economic background, collective support etc.? When studying these questions, I find the narrative approach to be the most suitable one. This method allows me to study how the choices of the informants in a transitional situation, is described in their stories. Do they understand their choices to be an expression of their own free will, or of social structures and tradition as fate? I will return to the narrative approach in the method chapter. For now, it is sufficient to say that I find the narrative method to be the most suited when studying how individualization versus social structures is experienced on a subjective level, when transitioning to adulthood. This leaves the question of
which group that would be the most suited when studying these tendencies. As has already been indicated, I have my eyes set on the travelling “gappers”.

1.4 The Gappers

King holds that youth who takes gap years is a productive group to study when wanting to understand the influence of individualization versus social limitations in transitions to adulthood. King states that “Whilst there is a growing consensus that transitions are more individualised and diverse when compared to those experienced by previous generations (…), some writers point to the continuing significance of structural constraints (…). The sociological analysis of the Gap Year provides a frame to consider such debates (…).” (King:2011,341). In this paper, King further argues that the group “gappers” provides a productive “window” to a broader understanding of the terms of youths’ transition to adulthood: “(…) the paper extends research on the Gap Year into wider debates about the changing nature of contemporary young adulthood.” (King:2011,354).

In accordance with King, I find that this group is particularly suited when understanding how the relationship between structural constrains and individualization is experienced by youth in their transition to adulthood. I also assume that the stories told in this context, reveals identity construction through narrative positioning. I will substantiate the suitability of this group, and how stories might be understood as identity construction further in my method chapter. For now, it is necessary to look at how the choice of taking a gap year and travel have been understood in previous research.

Gap year is an ambiguous term that might connote many different occasions (Jones:2004). Jones has, in this respect, provided a definition of the term that I find meaningful.

(…) gap year is defined as a period of time between 3 and 24 months taken out of education or a work career. The key criteria is the ’time out’ from the formal aspect of a longer term career trajectory. Gap years are best categorised in the first instance by the nature of the break taken from an educational, training or employment trajectory. (Jones:2004,22)

I am in this thesis concerned with the gappers who choose to travel. Lash states that “Travel and tourism today have greater annual sales than the auto industry and the steel industry combined (Lash:1993,19). There is probably little reason to suspect that the lucratively
related to traveling has declined over the past twenty years. There is also a fear amount of this industries’ marketing that is aimed at providing travels for youth (Cremin:2007,528). In Norway there are travel agencies like Kilroy and Adventureno that offers customary travels for youth. I have found relatively little research on the travel trends amongst Norwegian youth. However, in Norway, travelling after high school might seem to be a common plan for many. In a NOVA rapport from 2012, 1783 second grade high school students rated what they were likely to do before turning twenty-five. One of the options they were asked to determine the likelihood of, was whether they would travel outside of Europe for more than two months. Almost half of them stated that they were likely, or very likely to do so (47,8%) (Frøyland & Gjerustad:2012,147). These numbers do not inform whether these planned trips were ever taken, or if the plan included a gap year after high school. They do however give indications to the general level of interest amongst youth for travelling.

There also seems to be relatively little research on youth who takes gap years (Jones:2004,37). In the research that do exist, the gap year amongst youth have often been understood in relation to theories of individualization. King (2011) conducted a study where he investigated how youth presented themselves, i.e., constructed identity, when they talked about their gap year (King,2011,345). King’s conclusion to the study seems to concur with an assumption of individualization. King concludes that “(…) the young people in the sample saw it as their responsibility to make a success of their Gap Year; it was their actions and experiences that enabled them to grow up, enter university and plan their future lives as adults. [author’s emphasis]” (King:2011,353). He further claims that the interviewed sample illustrated biographical reflection and experimentation, which is understand as indicative of individualising tendencies in late modernity (King:2011,353).

In his review of gap year literature, Cremin (2007) understands the gap year as an expression of “really living”, and following dreams. That is to say, it holds a promise of authentic living, while still navigating the risks of the labour market (p.538). A similar conclusion was made by Heath (2007), and Brown, Hesketh and Williams (2003).

Ivar Frønes (2005) conducts a review of the cultural development in different areas of Norwegian society, using information from, amongst other sources, Norsk Gallup and Statistisk sentralbyrå (Frønes:2005,5). In the area of work and higher education, he registers that Norwegians finishes higher education, and enters the labour market later, than what is the case in Ireland, USA and Great Britain (Frønes:2005,53-56). Although he does not use this
term, the explanation he renders for this can easily be understood in relation to individualized society:


Frønes’ observations are interesting and important. However, his interpretation of the numbers he presents might benefit from more research of a qualitative kind. Is the subjective experience amongst youth that they “should” travel and see the world? Do they understand their late entrance to the labour market as a consequence of them trying to figure out who they are, so that they might decide what to do? Or do their experienced transition into adulthood reflect the continued significance of structural restraints, a factor which several studies show to be highly predictive for this transition?

Said in other words, will the narratives of young people who travel reflect the epistemological fallacy described by Furlong and Cartmel (1997)? If so, one relevant question still remains: what would that in case tell us about modern identity? How can this epistemological fallacy be understood? I would, with grounds in the philosopher Charles Taylor, suggest that this fallacy could be explained by understanding individualization as a moral perspective. That is to say that individualized culture entails individualization ideals that guide moral evaluation and provide values to informs self-understanding and the meaning of action and choice.

I have throughout this introduction demonstrated the relevance of understanding how youths’ transition to adulthood in late modern society is experienced. I have further argued that youth who takes a gap year to travel is a suited group to study for such insight. I have also indicated what kind of questions I will attempt to answer in this thesis. Now the time has come to articulate them more clearly.

1.5 Research Questions

My first research question will mainly be answered on an empirical level, and is as follows: How do youth today understand their own transition to adulthood? How do they explain their life-orientations, their future plans, and how do they understand the choice to take a gap year
and travel in relation to these plans? Will their narratives in relations to these questions reveal a recognition of social structures, the importance of collective support and social situation, and the sufficiency of relying on tradition? Or will they emphasise the importance of self-responsibility, being true to oneself and navigate a risky society? In other words: will their narratives portray an epistemological fallacy.

My second research question will mainly be answered on a theoretical level, and is as follows: How can the epistemological fallacy be understood? If I find this fallacy in the narratives of my informants, what will I have learned about their construction of identity, in relation to the societal context it is constructed in (late modern society)? Furlong and Cartmel has, I think, provided a valuable term, but I do not find that they give any real answer to what kind of information this tendency entails. If it is, as it seems to be, so that modern individuals tend to understand themselves as less conditioned by social situation than is actually the case, why is this? Could this tendency be understood as an expression of individualization ideals?

1.6 The Following Pages

I will first attempt to answer my last research question, by applying the philosopher Charles Taylor’s theory on modern moral and identity, where I find that he describes what could be understood as the underlying reason for the epistemological fallacy. This theory implies, I find, an understanding of modern identity as both being individualized and social. These two tendencies have often been held as opposites. I will therefore demonstrate that individualization theory, as it is given by Bauman (2000), Giddens (1991) and Beck (2000) (with relative clarity), do allow for an understanding of modern identity as being both individualized and social. I will then give a more thorough explanation of individualization as it is theorised by Bauman, Beck and Giddens, emphasising the elements central to my study. Here, I will show what tendencies it will be relevant to look for in the narratives of my informants, when deciding whether they indicate an epistemological fallacy or not.

But first Taylor. As indicated, I advocate that understanding the epistemological fallacy, entails understanding individualized culture as communicating individualization ideals. These ideals are in turn interpreted by the individual, and utilized so as to give meaning to experience and choice. Cultural ideals are also understood to provide a “moral map” for self-positioning, as well as language for self-understanding. This perspective on
individualization, as including a certain brand of moral evaluations, further indicates, as I will demonstrate, that modern identity can be understood as both individualized and social. The demonstration of this requires that Taylor’s theory is rendered at some length, so as to show why modern man might consider himself to be more autonomous than actually is the case. I think it is important to provide a thorough answer to the second research question, so that it is possible to gain a sufficient understanding of how the stories I gain from my informants are to be understood and analysed. In other words; what knowledge their answers entails.

Only then am I ready to conduct my narrative analysis on the stories from six young people who have just finished high school, and plan to take a gap year, during which they will travel. In this analysis I identify stories containing normative evaluations. I investigate if these stories seem to be informed by individualistic values, as they can be expected in relation to the theories that undergo scrutiny in the theory chapter. Or if they reflect a recognition of structural influence, importance of tradition, and communal considerations. I understand the values they display as expressions of cultural ideals, as well as being expressions of self-understanding, depending on how they position themselves through these ideals. It is mainly through this self-positioning I expect to find information of how they experience their transition to adulthood.

In this paper, I understand “self-positioning”, “self-understanding”, “identity” and “self”, as overlapping concepts. This might be considered a theoretical weakness, as these terms can connote relatively diverse aspects. None the less, in the context of this thesis, I understand these terms as descriptive of how individuals position themselves by utilizing cultural values. In the instances I refer to authors that use these terms in a way that do not answer to my definition, this will be specified. I will elaborate on my understanding of identity at the end of my theory chapter.
2 Theory

2.1 Charles Taylor: Individualization as a Modern, Moral Ideal

I will in the following demonstrate how the epistemological fallacy can be understood as an expression of values in late modern culture, that emphasise the importance of being self-responsible, autonomous, and independent of social influences. In his book, Sources of the Self, (1989) Taylor visits 143 theorists and thinkers, as he describes how shifts in moral connotations, has contributed to a shift in how the individual perceive herself (Fossland & Grimn:2001,276-284). That is to say, he describes how the individual has gone from perceiving herself in relation to social circumstances, to perceiving herself as independent of these circumstances.

2.1.1 Taylor’s Project

So, why do we consider ourselves to be more autonomous, more socially independent than we really are? I find Taylor’s answer to this question to be very informative, in relation to understanding how individualization is experienced. However, really understanding the answer to this question requires a rather extensive time travel. In short, Taylor describes how modern morals finds its sources in ideals that emphasise the importance of being autonomous and independent of external, social factors. However, these moral ideals are socially communicated as cultural narratives, as are all moral values. That is to say; autonomy, Taylor claims, should not be understood as a result of a stripping away of external influences, leaving the individual with a desire to express and be true to a “pure” self. Rather, Taylor states, autonomy needs to be understood as a result of external, social influences. However, due to the emphasis these moral codes put on the autonomous self, they simultaneously deny their own nature as social. This is the argument that will be constructed over the next pages. I will especially highlight two strands of moral philosophies that is described to be influential in modern moral orientation. These are enlightenment and romanticism. These two strands will be dealt with quite comprehensively, as I found them to be particularly relevant in informing my analysis.

In his book Sources of the Self, the philosopher Charles Taylor embarks on an ambitious project. He attempts to explore modern identity through its moral-historical
genesis. In his view, identity is closely intertwined with notions of “the good”, that is to say the answering of moral questions (Taylor:1989,3). The argument for this perspective is as follows: you cannot answer the question of who you are, to yourself or the world that surrounds you, without also answering the question of what is important to you and which life is worth living. To know who you are is to know where you are placed in a moral space, made up of implicit, unescapable moral questions (Taylor:1989,28). The question of what is good is described as being prior to all human choices; the choices we make will exist within the frames of an understanding that allows us to perceive the choice as being oriented towards that which is comprehended as “good”. This, following Taylors logic, makes choices an expression of identity. In this framework of understanding, it is possible to see the reasoning of my informants’ choices and plans as such; an expression of valued goods and of identity.

However, in the modern context, the process of answering such questions has been severely complicated. According to Taylor, identity - the question of who I am - is answered by an understanding of what is of crucial importance to me. Knowing what is of crucial importance to me provides me with a point of view, a positioning in moral space; it constitutes a moral horizon. This moral horizon, or framework, can be defined by religion (I am a Christian) or national culture (I am Irish) or other ideologies and orientations (I am a humanist and a family man). The importance of this framework, Taylor claims resides in the fact that it provides information to any given situation of what is good, bad, valuable, worth doing, what should or should not be done; it answers and thereby allows us to orient ourselves in the space of moral questions. The trademark of such frameworks is that if you for some reason were to lose it, you would lose the reasons as to why any given choice was right or wrong, valuable or indifferent (Taylor:1989,27).

Such frameworks have been thoroughly questioned in the modern western age. Between Weber disenchanting us, and Nietzsche killing God, globalization and pluralization of values, no framework gives itself as the framework. The pre secular western existence was also filled with doubt and questions. The difference being that their questions would sound something like: “am I God-fearing enough?”, while the modern version of this would be: “is there a God? And if there is – so what?”. The pre secular question defines itself well within the Christian framework, while the modern question questions the framework itself, as well as its importance and legitimacy. Taylor by no means claim that religion is a thing of the past, but even deeply religious people cannot but know that their moral horizon is but one amongst many – the horizon is not self-evident (remember the couple on Typisk deg?). The fact that
such frameworks has to be sought out, has to be chosen as one amongst many options, implies a realization of the possibility that you may make the wrong choice (Taylor:1989,17). These are the described circumstances that complicate the answering of the inescapable questions that surrounds us in the moral space we attempt to navigate and understand ourselves in relation to – this is, according to Taylor, a uniquely modern phenomenon (Taylor:1989,18).

Traditionally, notions of the good has been seen in relation to a bigger order, a cosmic reality. In such a reality, the individual’s mission becomes the realization of the good through the discovery of this higher order. Taylor identifies this view in, amongst others, Plato, who places moral sources outside the individual, in a cosmic system that the individual must discover. By visiting first Plato, then Augustine, Descartes and Locke, Taylor describes how the sources of moral becomes relocated, as the understanding of a cosmic order shifts. From being an order that is understood as something outside the individual that has to be discovered or realized, the emphasis shifts to the individual’s construction of a rational order. This moves the moral sources to the individual’s own faculties (Taylor:1989,93).

This new localisation of moral order, Taylor states, cemented the individual’s understanding of itself as such. That is to say the modern understanding of self, inherited from an Augustinian line of thinking, where self is, according to Taylor, understood like something you have, much like an arm or a heart; as opposed to something that is constructed in a dialogue with your environment. In addition, this understanding of moral order, as being something internal, made new abilities more essential, such as self-exploration and self-control (Taylor:1989,185). This in turn generated two new facets, described as visible in the modern identity; self-responsible independence and recognized individual uniqueness. These two facets are described as central tendencies in late modernity in theories of individualization (Bauman:2000; Beck:2000; Giddens:1991).

2.2 The Historical, Moral Making of the Modern Identity

I have shown that Taylor observes a historical shift in the location of moral sources, as being something external, to being something found internally in the individual. This, he claims, constitutes the modern understanding of “having” an independent self, that is something qualitatively different, and separated from the external environment. In this argument, we are closing in on the nature of and reason for the epistemological fallacy, as far as identity being understood as something independent of external influence. However, to fully understand
what the idea of a self, independent of external environment entails, what values and language it facilitates – which Taylor claims are visible in modern culture today – it is necessary to look more closely at how this idea of the self developed. I argue that gaining a deeper understanding of this fallacy and its sources, might also enable a deeper understanding of the experiences of those who exhibits this fallacy. In the context of this thesis, the experience I aim to get a deeper understanding of, is the transition to adulthood.

2.2.1 Romanticism and enlightenment

Taylor describe the development of several moral tendencies. I found that the ones that were particularly fruitful to my analysis, was the described development of romantic and enlightenment morals. Taylor also states that these two strands of morals are especially reflected in modern discourse (Taylor;1989,319). Both of these philosophies, Taylor states, found their moral source in the deistic view of the world. (Taylor:1989,266). This view considered the world as a providential order, where everything existed in relation to everything else. Therefore, self-love and social benevolence was the same thing – they existed in the same system and therefore were co-dependent (Taylor:1989,272). The task of the individual then becomes to understand this system. This was done by applying reason and emotive self-observation (Taylor:1989,283).

Taylor describes that one of the two philosophies that deism provided with moral source was the romantic notion, which adopted the deistic view of nature as an inner voice and moral source, but took a rather different view on reason. Rousseau, amongst others, viewed reason as a source of immoral. Reason, in his view, served to detach humans from nature. He took the subjective side of moral one step further, and parted with the deistic notion that what is good for the social order, was also good for the individual, and vice versa. He meant that the good was to find in freedom, understood as self-sufficient detachment from society (Taylor:1989,361). Later romantics were heavily inspired by Rousseau’s notion of nature as inner voice. Taylor claims that it was only through this inner voice one understood that nature could be known, and it was only by articulating it, this voice could be known to the individual (Taylor:1989,374). The expression of this inner voice was not only seen as articulation of something pre-existing, but as its creation. This gave further emphasis to the importance of individual expression. This in turn gave an even fuller individuation. The importance placed on individual expression gave emphasis to individual differences. Hence
came the romantic idea that every individual has an originality he is obliged to express and live by (Taylor:1989,175).

What Taylor refers to as “radical naturalist-enlightenment”, also, like the romantics, denied the deistic providential order, and kept the goods that this understanding brought with it: self-responsible reason, detachment from authority, and universal benevolence (Taylor:1989,316). *Reason* was to free people form religious superstition. It was in this way one would realize the good, stop hurting one another, and see that benevolence was the most rational road of action (Taylor:1989,330). In the 18th century, there was an obvious connection between reason and benevolence (Taylor:1989,331). Detachment and objectivity was to make it possible to look beyond one’s own selfish motives. One should gaze bravely into the meaningless universe, trying to make it a better place for mankind, instead of selfish, fruitless attempts to save one’s own soul (ibid).

However, Taylor describes that enlightenments’ rejection of religious sources caused for a purely physical foundation of moral. This, and the detached attitude towards the world, contributed to a devaluation of qualitative distinctions between moral and none-moral goods. However, when all desires are equal, Taylor claims, they all become equally unimportant. Without any distinctions ranking some desires as better than others, Taylor argues, they all lose their relevance. According to Taylor “(...) the approach is radical because it supresses the very question to which sin is one answer.” (Taylor:1989,322). As will be described in the following, Taylor identifies this lacking ability to admit to moral evaluations to be key mark of modern culture; he names this tendency “the naturalist orientation”.

Taylor understands this strand of thinking as a continued cultural conversation of the philosophies provided by radical enlightenment (Taylor:1989,5). Taylor describes that ontological explanations of the world implies what kind of life is higher, better, fuller, richer and so on, than other forms of life. The naturalist attitude finds that we can live without such distinctions. For example, the feeling of anger, sadness and disgust in the face of torture, killing or other actions regarded as inhumane, can be explained by our instinctual aversion towards such actions. Moral frameworks, on the other hand, is described as something that provides ontological explanations as to why these responses are provoked, and why they are *morally legitimate* (Taylor:1989,5). The naturalist approach, Taylor states, exhibits a distrust towards ontological explanations, referring to realities outside, and across individuals. It opposes distinctions like good and bad, right and wrong, better and worse, as it ascribes such
distinctions to human projections that serves as justification for actions that often operate within hierarchical, suppressing systems (Taylor:1989,85).

Taylor explains that having a point of view means being able to orient amongst options, where some are regarded as being better than others. The point of view provides orientation, it gives an upwards and downwards direction: a scale to measure your actions and feelings by. The modern moral also provides a scale, but this does not reveal an innate quality as being good or bad, instead it shows what option is preferable in accordance with what you want to achieve (Taylor:1989,85). According to Taylor, the fact that values today is a matter of choice – that what yesterday was as certain as sunrise today is discarded – is fuel to the reductionist’s fire. The naturalistic (and, according to Taylor, wrongful) conclusion is that values, as they are clearly relative, must also be purely fictional. In this perspective, values are projected in to an otherwise neutral reality (Taylor:1989,53).

2.2.2 The modern notion of the punctual self
Taylor claims that the naturalistic perspective aims at answering the question of identity, without qualitative distinctions, as these are viewed as fictional, and often integrated in a plot for justification of power and abuse i.e.: “I am a Christian, as such it is not only ok, but also required that I barbecue these heretics” (Taylor:1989,30). When the individual is understood without moral evaluations, it entails an understanding that does not define identity in relation to its position in an external, moral scale. This, Taylor states, leaves us with a typical modern view of the self as an object, a neutral, punctual self that exist as a “something”, independently of its surroundings. This understanding of the self, Taylor claims, has no historical precedence, and is recognized by a strong sense of individualism. It is an understanding that seeks to detach and make the self independent of its social foundation (Taylor:1989,36).

I would argue that we are now at the core of the epistemological fallacy. That is to say; this fallacy can be understood as a result of a moral orientation, facilitating a notion of the “self” as independent – an ideal of the autonomous self. This ideal can further be understood to inform individual interpretation of experience and choice, leading the individual to believe that she is more voluntaristic, self-responsible and autonomous than is actually the case. A point of irony is that this notion of the self, according to Taylor, finds its (denied) moral source in a deistic perspective that considers all elements of the world as co-dependently linked together.
In Taylor's view, the autonomous, socially independent self is not possible. “I” is part of an ongoing narrative that can only exist as articulated language in a language-community amongst other selves (Taylor:1989,35). Identity can only be developed over time, and through an interpretive understanding of one’s own history. There is no understood “I”, other than the one that exists as orientation in the space of moral questions that is answered so as to give life meaning and unity. It is only in this fashion one can provide meaning and unity to identity; identity lacking these qualities in turn becomes pathological (Taylor:1989,51).

Taylor argues that the value of the autonomous self, in part, is made possible by the perspective of “self” as being something independent of its surroundings (Taylor:1989,168). This way to understand the self, as have been shown in this sequence, is argued to be a result of the Christian deistic ontological explanation of the world as a providential order. The culturally detached self is the continued cultural conversation of this moral source. As the ideal of the autonomous, voluntarist-self is in itself a historical, cultural narrative, this goes to show that this idea of the self cannot be entirely realistic (Taylor:1989) – it could perhaps be described as an epistemological fallacy.

2.3 My Application of Individualization Theory

This rendering of Taylor’s theory explains, I think, why one can detect an epistemological fallacy in modern man’s experience of himself. From Taylor’s logic further follows, that an individualistic culture communicates individualistic values that are used as guidance when orienting moral questions, and thus give meaning and language to experience and identity. The tendencies described by Bauman (2000), Beck (2000) and Giddens (1991) can thus be understood as values in modern culture. These values are in turn socially transmitted and interpreted. This entails that modern identity can be understood as both individualized, and social. It is individualized as far as one cannot explain oneself without utilizing modern individualization ideals. On the other hand, identity is also social, as these are cultural ideals that are socially communicated. The next question then becomes: do the individualization theories allow for this understanding within its own reasoning, or does this perspective need to be forced upon these theories? The first would be preferable, as the latter would entail a risk of misusing the theories. I will in the following argue that modern identity, as it is described in theories of individualization, does not exclude identity’s social character. From
this follows that I can, with reference to Taylor, understand the tendencies Bauman, Beck and Giddens describe, as entailing a cultural, moral component.

When applying theories of individualization, the individualized and the social identity has frequently been considered to be opposites. One example is the conclusion made by Snee (2014) in her analysis of travel blogs. She recognises the experienced responsibility placed on individuals to make their gap year worthwhile (p.843). However, Snee (2014) seems reluctant to understand this in relation to the thesis of individualized identities, as it is understood as reflexive, as opposed to socially given. This is because the informants’ statements conformed to similar and common moral scripts, leading Snee to conclude: “A discourse of choice does not mean that individuals are free to choose.” (Snee:2014,858). I am inclined to agree with this statement, but I have some reservations as to what seems to be her theoretical premise for understanding individualization. This premise seems to be that as the narratives used in identity work were similar, they had to be understood as social, and since they were social they could not be individualized (Snee:2014,858-859).

Do the theories on individualization really require that individualized and social identity be understood as opposites? In order to answer this, I need to revisit the distinction between the objective and subjective level of individualization. I will argue that the understanding of individualized and socialized identity as opposites, stems from research mainly being occupied with the objective level of individualization; the choices that are actually made, as opposed to the interpretation of, and meaning given to these choices.

2.4 Objective and Subjective Individualization

Olve Krange (2004) points out that individualization, as it is explained by Bauman, Beck and Giddens, can be understood as both a driving force in, and a result of the modernization process. In regard to the first understanding, individualization refers to young peoples’ ability to act and make choices in a way that breaks with and surpasses the social terms set by tradition, socio economic background and institutional norms etc. The second understanding – individualization as a result of modernization – refers to the modernization process’ erosion of the authoritarian, cultural and normative legitimacy of tradition, background and societies’ institutions (Krange:2004,17). It is this result, that makes out the context in which young people experience their transition to adulthood.
This result leaves the individual lacking guidance and support in external frameworks which have historically provided moral orientation in life choices where the routines of day to day life is insufficient in informing what to choose and why (Giddens:1991,113). It is consequently an individual responsibility to make and give meaning to choices. This entails both freedom and risk, as the responsibility of the choice is placed exclusively on the shoulders of the individual (Bauman:2000; Beck:2000; Giddens:1991). The first understanding entails creating and living individualization – demonstrating actual freedom from social restraints. I understand this level as the objective level of individualization. The second understanding entails the experience of individualization – understanding oneself and giving meaning to experience in a culture where the traditional sources for generating such meaning and understanding are rendered unavailable, or illegitimate. This I understand as the subjective level of individualization.

It is my impression that empirical studies have mainly focused on the first understanding of individualization – individuals freeing themselves from their historical and social shackles, breaking boundaries and pushing limits as they discover and realize their true self. The new classics has, as far as I understand, in many instances been read as a description of namely this tendency (Kranger & Øia:2005; Atkinson;2007; Atkinson:2008; Dawson:2010; Brannen & Nilsen:2005). The first perspective of individualization entails an understanding of identity formation that strongly conflicts with the traditional understanding of how individuals form their identity. With the sociological and psychological heritage from Mead, Bourdieu and Erikson, identity has been understood as shaped by social situation and personal biography (Kranger & Øia:2005,153-158). Amongst others, Kranger and Øia claims that the theories on individualization requires a fundamental shift in this understanding.

Generally, the critics argue that the new classics does not pay enough heed to the old classics’ sociological categories like class, gender, ethnicity, and so on. It is claimed that “(…) individualisation theory emphasizes the agency side of the classic sociological dynamic – between the individual and society – and downplays structure.” (Brannen&Nilsen:2005,422). At times, the critics drive this argument to the extent that they seem to claim that the new classics does not consider identity to be social:

En radikal individualiseringstese impliserer at den klasse- og kjønnsspesifikk sosialiseringen det sosiolegiske perspektivet setter fram, ikke lenger har relevans. Dette gir et perspektiv på ungdom: Senmoderne ungdommer orienterer seg og handler i verden uten at de sosialiseringssprossene de har vært gjenom, virker som føringer på et de gjør. (…) Denne ekstreme formen for voluntarisme – en voluntarisme uten normer – kommer som vi har
sett særlig klart til uttrykk i Becks, Baumans og Giddens’ behandling av identitetsbegrepet (Kranger & Øia:2005,160).

This critique seems to be mostly related to an objective understanding of individualization. That is to say an emphasis on the voluntarist individual braking with social determinates, exercising his freedom of choice (Kranger & Øia:2005,47). So what then about identity formation in relation to the subjective level of individualization? How does the experience of late modern society influence the construction of identity?

I will not make any attempt to confirm or repudiate a hypothesis of individualization in this thesis. I will however make the argument that the second, subjective understanding of individualization has commonly been overlooked when repudiating the thesis. I also claim that the subjective understanding is very available in these theories, at least in the case of Bauman and Giddens. I find that the objective level has often been overplayed, leading to conclusions stating that there is no room to understand the self as social in the theories of the new classics (Kranger & Øia:2005,160). One could (I think with right), claim that theories of individualization has not made clear the distinction between individualization as actual, measurable freedom, and as experience. However, I think this distinction is even more severely underplayed in some of the critics aimed at these theories, leading to conclude that individualized identity cannot be social.

2.4.1 The individualized, social identity
Contradictory to the perspectives described above, I will here argue that the individualization thesis does not presuppose that the individualized self, is not also socialised. The new classics does claim that the old categories no longer conform moral pillars that can inform choice with meaning through the depth of tradition. They also hold that traditional social belonging and groups no longer has the power to provide symbols for identity (Bauman:2000; Beck:2000; Giddens:1991). I cannot, however, find that any of them states that the self is not social. I cannot but see that they on the contrary, although arguably to different extents, specify that the self is social, a claim I will substantiate in the following.

The freeing from the past and traditions is described by Giddens (1991) as bringing with it an abundance of choice, while information about which choices that are the right ones to make is scarce. On the other hand, not choosing is not one of the choices available. Even though the general flair of Giddens’ book Modernity and Self-Identity, might be said to be that
the modern individual is moving away from the “shackles of tradition”, Giddens makes a point of saying that both the choices that are made and the choices that are available is dependent on social position (Giddens:1991,82), a point which is often ignored in the critique of his theory, that accuses him of excluding a social understanding of the self. But Giddens claims, on the contrary, that the development of the self is only possible through interaction with its social environment:

The idea of the ’self-sufficient’ individual certainly emerged in substantial part as response to the developing institutions of modernity. But such a methodological standpoint is not implied in the analysis elaborated in this book. Nor does it follow from what has been said above that the individual becomes separated from wider contexts of social events. (Giddens:1991,148).

Beck makes it rather easy to read him as advocating the existence of a socially detached self, as Krange and Øia (2005,150) seems to do with grounds in, amongst others, this quote:

“We live in an age in which the social order of the national state, class, ethnicity and the traditional family is in decline. The ethic of individual self-fulfilment and achievement is the most powerful current in modern society. The choosing, deciding, shaping human being who aspires to be the author of his or her own life, the creator of an individual identity, is the central character of our time” (Beck:2000,164 found in Krange & Øia:2005,150).

In relation to this quote, it is however relevant to ask if “The ethic of individual self-fulfilment”, as Beck terms it, and the aspiration to be the author of one’s life, is the same as actually succeeding in these endeavours. When keeping in mind the distinction between an objective and a subjective level of individualization, I would argue that this quote mainly (but arguably not clearly) speaks to a subjective level of individualization. I interpret this quote as connoting how individualized culture is experienced, through the adoption of this cultures’ values, i.e. the ethic of individual self-fulfilment. This interpretation is strengthened by another claim Beck makes: “I dagens klasslösa, individualiserade tillvaro har det kollektiva ödet förvandlats till ett personligt öde, ett enskilt öde med en social tillhörighet som är statistiskt påvisbar, men inte längre möjlig att (upp)leva.” (Beck:2000,147). Here, Beck recognizes the social foundation of the self. He however states that social belonging might be measured, but not experienced. This I interpret as social belonging making unconscious claims to identity, that are not recognized by the individual on the subjective level of experience. That individualization theory recognise these unconscious claims made by social
context, entails, I would argue, that old classics, such as Bourdieu, are not made redundant by
the premises of these theories. In other words; individualization theories do not require that
one accepts a completely new understanding of how identity is constructed, rather it requires
a recognition of the new context these identities are constructed in.

When nuances I accentuate here is overlooked, individualization theory might be
understood as describing an unambiguous movement towards greater individual freedom and
pure voluntarism. When read in this way, the theories of the new classics resonate with a
marked liberalistic discourse that elevates the consumer, and undermines the citizen, and
where the markets guarantee freedom of choice (Brennan & Nilsen:2005,422). But, especially
in the case of Bauman (2000), I find it hard to identify the self-confirming, voluntarist
exercising her freedom in the liberalized market. I find it hard to recognize Krange and Øia’s
conclusion as they claim that:

I agree that Bauman implies an abdication of real social authority as a consequence of both
the share number of authorities, as well as a modern distrust towards authorities. I also agree
that this in consequence leaves identity formation to the individual as a reflexive project.
However, the claim that no other forces than the individual self-determined freedom is
involved in this process, I find to be questionable. On the contrary, one of Bauman’s central
points is that in the decline of legitimate moral social authority, market and commercial
interests manifests themselves as one of the main influences in this reflexive process,
masquerading as personal choice: “Obedience to standards (…) tends to be achieved
nowadays through enticement and seduction rather than by coercion – and it appears in the
disguise of the exercise of free will, rather than revealing itself as an external force,”
(Bauman:2000,86). I have a hard time seeing Bauman describing any real freedom in his
theory of individualisation, as is implied by Krange and Øia above.

What I have advocated here is that the theories of the new classics do not require that one
view individualized and social identity as opposites. I find that all three theories recognise the
social nature of identity. This entails that one, with grounds in these theories, can claim that
individuals are influenced by the context they are placed in, as well as being individualized. In the context of this thesis, the relevant point to make is that one might be individualized as far as one perceives oneself to be free from social restraints. On the other one is at the same time social, as it is transmitted cultural values that facilitates this perception of freedom.

Subsequently, individuals in late modernity can be expected to reproduce embodied social dispositions on an objective level (the choices that are actually made), as well as experiencing high levels individualization on a subjective level (the meaning and significance given to the choices made) – when theorising modern identity, both these levels would be relevant to take under consideration. I argue that the meaning and significance given to these choices is informed, to a large degree, by the values and ideals that are available in the individuals’ culture. I further argue, with ground in Taylor (1989), that if I identify an epistemological fallacy, as it is described by Furlong and Cartmel (1997), in the stories of my informants, this will be because values in late modern culture emphasise authenticity, autonomy and self-responsibility.

The conclusion to the argument I have made here, is that I do not find that I act against the premises of the new classics’ theories, when I understand the tendencies they describe as also connoting values in late modern societies. Understanding what these values are, and how they are interpreted and used, are thus crucial in order to understand how youth experience their transition to adulthood. In my analysis, I will attempt to identify what these values are, and if it makes sense to understand them with reference to the epistemological fallacy, or if the values they reflect recognises the importance of social situation, tradition and general external influences and limitations. But before I can do that, it is necessary to present the tendencies described by Bauman (2000), Beck (2000) and Giddens (1991). I will then explain what values these tendencies can connote, and how they are relevant for the experience of youth who are on the threshold of adulthood, and have to make choices for their future.

2.5 Theories of Individualization: Three Contributions

I will here identify five tendencies in individualized society, as they are described by Bauman (2000), Beck (2000) and Giddens (1991). These five tendencies are “Risk”, “Emancipation”, “Autonomy and self-responsibility”, “Reflexivity” and “Self-construction of identity”. I find these tendencies to be central to understand youths’ experience of their transition to adulthood, as it has also been described by other theorists referred to earlier in this paper.
(Furlong & Cartmel:1997; King:2011; Frønes:2005; Cremin:2007; Côté:2002). As I have demonstrated, I further understand these tendencies as entailing a value-component. This means that in the case of, for example “Self-construction of identity”, this tendency is not sufficiently explained by stating that late modern culture does not provide ready-made identities, like they did in traditional societies (Giddens:1991,149). This statement says nothing about how the lack of ready-made identities is experienced.

I understand that the description of this tendency also makes a claim to a cultural, moral evaluation, informing that you should be responsible for constructing your own identity. Now, if this cultural, moral evaluation is adopted on an individual level, I assume to find this value reflected in personal narratives. Further, I assume that what values I find, and the way they are weighted and applied in relation to specific events, tells me something about how these events were interpreted and experienced. But before I introduce these five tendencies, where I use Bauman, Giddens and Beck as advocates for the same tendencies, I want to give a brief presentation of their individual contributions.

This segment is an introduction to the central theories that supports my thesis. Zygmunt Bauman (2000), Anthony Giddens (1991) and Ulrich Beck (2000) has been referred to as “the new classics” (Krange & Øia:2005,94) in the field of sociology, with their theories on high modernity, liquid modernity and risk society. A central issue in all three theories, is that of individualization. There are significant contributions from all three theories that will not be given the attention it deserves in this thesis. For a large part this constitutes thorough descriptions of historical changes in society and its’ institutions. As my thesis concerns itself with individualization on a subjective level, my main focus will be on these theories’ reflection on individualization’s consequences for the individual experience. More specifically, I will accentuate the elements of the theories that I consider to be most relevant for youths’ experienced transition to adulthood, as they leave high school and must choose their path foreword.

2.5.1 Bauman
Zygmunt Bauman has titled his book Liquid Modernity, where I observes that “all that is solid, melts into air”. It is this modernity that Bauman observes; that is, the liquid modernity. In heavy modernity, it was always the notion that the liquidity signified a temporary change, and that liquid would at some point harden in to new and improved casts. According to
Bauman, this never happened. Instead, the rapid changes that were supposed to move society towards a higher goal, and a new and better future, became its’ own purpose (Bauman:2000,28).

A consequence of modernity’s liquidity is a lack of stable points of orientation in the form of norms, tradition and social rules. What follows is a melting down of the ties that links individuals together in collective enterprises: “(...) we are presently moving from the era of pre-allocated ‘reference groups’ into the epoc of universal comparison (...)” (Bauman:2000,8). This is what Bauman understand as the death of the citizen, which could find common cause and self-assertion through social belonging as it is given by social groups (Bauman:2000,64).

Modern authorities have not been abolished, it is quite the other way around; they have become so many, and so adverse, that they have lost their influence as authorities – they cancel each other out. They are, Bauman states, as the rest of modernity’s inventory, a matter of choice (Bauman:2000,65). The sum of this is the essence of Bauman’s notion of individualization, as it effects the individual. The modern individual is free and compelled to make her own choices without leaning on cultural guidelines through recognised authority or social groups. The result is that the individual is left to herself to do as he pleases, and to take the fall if it does not pin out: “(...) they [people] are told daily that what is wrong with their own lives comes from their own mistakes, (...) and ought to be repaired (...) by their own efforts.” (Bauman:2000,71).

2.5.2 Beck
Ulrich Beck introduces his theory by presenting the reader with an image of a society which is permeated with risk. Although the culture described in large parts is (as is the case with Bauman) a western culture, there are traces of him trying to bring about more global conclusions. The nature of modern risk is just that, global (Beck:2000,11). Beck’s risk society is (in part) a description of a future society, which he claims to already see the contours of (Beck:2000,17).

The nature of risks is dual. On the one hand Beck describes risks as the great “equalizer”, as no one can hedge against these risks – there is nowhere to hide from global warming, economic crises or massive nuclear pollutions – the risks are described as democratic. At the same time, “shit still run downwards”; the rich can still buy themselves free from many risks. Doing so, they transport the risks to those who is forced by poverty to take them on (Beck:2000,49-51). I find Beck to be a bit unclear on this issue, as he claims that
the distribution of risks conforms with the distribution of wealth (Beck:2000,51). Is it a matter of time before “the shit hits the fan”, so to speak, and the risks reaches their democratic potential through random distribution? I cannot find that Beck gives any clear answer to this, all though he does seem to imply it.

Even though there is no equal distribution of risks, the global risks still contribute to the dissolving of class, as they make for supranational and class independent threats (Beck:2000,22). The new times are posting problems where the answers cannot be found within class adherence. In addition, the post war modernisation of the welfare state contributed to the dismantling of class structures and class traditions – both on which class depends (Beck:2000,23).

2.5.3 Giddens
In his book *Modernity and self-identity. Self and society in late modern age* (1991), Giddens attempts to describe tendencies in what he refers to as the age of high modernity, which interact with the making of the reflexive modern self. In general, he describes a time which is recognized by its tentative social mechanisms, a lack of authorities (or to be more precise: an overwhelming quantum of claim to authority, which in essence amounts to no effective authority), deterioration of tradition and elevated risk, brought about by a rapidly changing, and thus uncertain future. In this climate, he claims, it becomes necessary to develop reflexive selves. The social setting in which the modern individual is embedded has a character of “until further notice”. In order to orient oneself in such a climate, it becomes necessary to have a reflexive self that is capable of swift repositioning (Giddens:1991).

Giddens describe a movement away from the pre-established towards the reflexive character of modern institutions. In this description, science plays an important role. The traditional view has been that science would allow for accumulation of certain knowledge and facts. Reason would overcome the dogma of tradition. But as modernity would have it, methodological doubt, and not certainty would be the mark of science. No matter how well established any given tenet might be, there is always the possibility that tomorrow will bring contradictory proof (Giddens:1991,21). For that reason, any knowledge termed as fact, has the air of temporality and doubt about it. This modern air of temporality and doubt is an issue that has to be dealt with, not only by science, but by individuals as well (ibid).
2.5.4  Same, same, but different

Even though there are important differences between these three writers, both in terms of how they describe the features, and predict the outcome of the modern, it is not controversial to view them combined when describing a modern trend towards increased individualization (Krænge & Øia:2005; Krænge:2004). All three theorists describe a condition where tradition, institutions and pre-existing frameworks for identity loose its capacity to provide the individual with guidance in life-choices. I will in the following render themes where they have a similar approach, while also explaining their differences.

The following themes are closely related, and could be organized in a different way. I have organized them as I have to underpin what elements are crucial to my understanding of the theory as it is applied in my analysis. It is also important to note that other elements of the theory could justly have been highlighted. I have however made the argument that it is the subjective significance of individualization that I am concerned with, as such, most space have been given to the theories’ dealings with this level.

2.6  Five Individualization Tendencies

What follows here is five tendencies that I understand to be central for the understanding of individualized culture. I also find these tendencies to be of particular significance when understanding how transition to adulthood is experienced. Lastly I understand, as stated earlier, that these tendencies entail a cultural, moral component that gives meaning to individual choice and experience. With reference to Taylor (1989), I understand experience as being twofold. On the one hand, there is the event or action – what actually happens. On the other hand, there is the individual interpretation of what the event means – how it should be understood. The interpretation of meaning of events, Taylor claims, is guided by cultural narratives, informing moral evaluations.

2.6.1  Risk in late modernity

Modern societies are described as entailing risks that were not an issue in traditional society. Giddens (1991) describe risks, as closely associated with what he terms abstract systems, and the loss of tradition. As knowledge is diversified one has to put trust in external systems supplying answers. Abstract systems involve a high set of risks; on one hand because the value of symbolic tokens, for instance money, is decided by circumstances that is not
controlled by the individual. Expert systems on the other hand, present a risk because no one can be an expert in more than one field, and therefore is forced to trust other experts in the unavoidable dealing with other fields. But the traditional way of facing risks, consulting the past to assess the future, is no longer available (Giddens:1991,31). According to Beck (2000), the capitalists know to capitalize this. Risks are described as a bottomless pool of needs, facilitating ever new markets, offering ways to avoid the risks (Beck:2000,78). As the traditional categories for handling insecurity, like family, marriage, the traditional role of the sexes, class consciousness, political parties etc., are losing their significance, the individual has to deal with the risk singlehandedly, as opposed to as a group; or to say it with Bauman: as a consumer, as opposed to as a citizen (Bauman:2000,64).

The deteriorating significance of the traditional categories described above, is by all three theorists’ understood in relation to the modern emancipation project. This project is described by Bauman as quite a paradox. On the one hand, emancipation is intuitively understood as freedom of choice, and the lack of restriction. At the same time, this freedom of choice extensively heightens the risk of these choices, making this risk act as a form of restriction on its own, making the non-optional choosing harder: “‘Being thrown on one’s own shoulders portends a paralysing fear of risk and failure without the right to appeal and seek redress.” (Bauman:2000,19). Bauman expresses serious doubts about this being the essence of freedom. It seems as though Bauman is arguing that “being freed” from the social norms that would limit our choices to what is socially acceptable, entails being robbed of both the socially conditioned preferences, and the socially shared responsibility, that makes sane choosing possible: “Freedom cannot be gained against society. The outcome of rebellion against the norms (...) is perpetual agony of indecision linked to a state of uncertainty about the intentions and moves of others around (...), making each move pregnant with risks difficult to calculate.” (Bauman:2000,20).

In essence, risks in modern societies are described in terms of the individual being left to herself, without the social support that was provided in traditional societies. This social support is described as tradition, informing and guiding individual choice. In this way, personal choices are not only an expression of the individual, but also of the cultural context that the individual is embedded in. Accordingly, consequences of choices are understood as relevant, not only to the individual, but to the community as well. In this way, social support is both understood as what generates guidance for choice, and also as that which helps the individual carry the consequences of choice.
“Risk” is here described as being something negative and anxiety inducing. From the perspective of moral evaluations, for risk to be interpreted and thereby experienced as such, it should be accompanied by a cultural narrative, informing that one should be guarded of risk. The descriptions above further entail that this cultural value informs that risks should be counteracted by the individuals’ own resources. How do youth who has just left high school experience the time when they have to make choices for their future? Do they experience it as “risky”; do they find it hard to make these choices, or do they experience the loose ties to tradition as freeing? Do the rapid changes in modern culture induce anxiety and cautiousness, or is it found to be exciting? Further, if risk is experienced as “risky”, how will they seek to counter this risk? Will they prefer it done by their own merits, as is indicated above, or do they seek to the safety of family, tradition and collective support?

2.6.2 The modern emancipation project

Late modernity is associated with higher levels of personal freedom. Giddens (1991) distinguishes between emancipatory and life politics. The age of modernity has been characterized by a lot of policies and ideas which connotes freedom from dogmatic tradition. One would, Giddens claim, shed the shackles of the past, walking into the future with an open and reflexive mind – autonomous and self-responsible. These emancipatory policies have traditionally entailed moving away from something, rather than towards something specific (Giddens:1991,213). That is to say, that the emancipatory thoughts have little to say about any guidelines for the choices that inevitably would follow the autonomous, self-responsible individual. Life politics on the other hand, is preoccupied with what happens after the individual has reached a certain level of freedom – which choices to make, which lifestyles to pursue. It is these life politics that is described as lacking in late modernity (Giddens:1991,216).

Beck’s hypothesis states that there is a process of societal change where man is freed from the industrial society’s social forms: class, rank, family and the traditional roles of the sexes (Beck:2000,119). He traces this process of individualization back to the period after the second world war, where a heightened state of living and welfare detached people from the traditional terms of the classes. Everyone is left to their own fortunes at the labour market, with all its’ risks and possibilities. Here, Beck claims, one is released from family, regional culture, and other identity forming determents of the industrial society. In order to survive and
thrive under these conditions, the individual has to put herself in the centre of her life plans (Beck:2000,120). In this manner the process of individualization repeals the very foundation that would divide and unite people in traditional categories. Subsequently, one is left to oneself, as “class” has lost its social power to divide and unite (Beck:2000,147).

This strongly resembles what Bauman refers to as the death of the citizen. That is to say, the absent ability to join forces in the face of adversities, together with the evasive centre of power, which diminishes peoples’ control over social settings that makes self-assertion possible. At the same time, such self-assertion is not only held to be favourable, it is a required necessity. Realistic self-assertion, Bauman states, has to be acquired by a collective effort, that the claim to this self-assertion is rendering impossible. It is in this contradiction that Bauman finds the greatest paradox that the liquid modernity has to offer (Bauman:2000,38). “(...) it is a wide and growing gap between the condition of individuals de jure and their chances of becoming individuals de facto – that is, to gain control over their fate and make the choices they truly desire.” (Bauman:2000,39). If it, despite the death of the citizen in the liquid modern, could be possible for a group to unite under the banner of the rebel, and they, despite the evasive ever moving feature of the powerholders, were able to identify them “(...) it is excruciatingly difficult, ney, impossible to imagine what the victors, once inside the building (if they could find them first), could do to turn the tables and put paid to the misere that prompted them to rebel.” (Bauman:2000,5).

With the freeing from, or loss of social categories and tradition, follows the loss of moral as an intrinsic aspect of living. Moral which, according to Giddens, is the opposite of modernity’s risk principle, requires a binding commitment, which the modern climate does not allow for. In addition to this, moral provide resistance against change, and whatever has the flair of “new” about it, a quality that is not compliant with modernity as it is described by Giddens (Giddens:1991,145). This loss of tradition, providing normative guidelines, leads to the replacement of guilt with shame. While guilt is brought about by the defiance of some external moral code, shame is linked to the lacking of basic trust (Giddens:1991,153). Moral codes, as a fixated point of orientation, Giddens claim, allowed for exploration of behaviour, without the fear of getting lost. If you did something wrong, you would know what it was. Modern man on the other hand, left to her inner referential system, would have no such luck, a circumstance that brings about uncertainty and doubt.

All three theorists are adamant that the freeing of individual terms, is not to be equalled with successful emancipation. As Bauman puts it: “A cynical observer” (which
perhaps fits the bill quite well in Bauman’s case) “would say that freedom comes when it no longer matters. There is a nasty fly of impotence in the tasty ointment of freedom.” (Bauman:2000,35). The freedom of the individual is dependent on the labour market, which in turn makes the individual dependent on both education and consummation. As traditional social belonging is lost, systemic, social problems are interpreted as personal problems (Beck:2000,123).

This is how the modern emancipation project is described, but is this how it is experienced? I argue, with reference to Taylor, that in order for the consequences described here to be actualized on an experiential level, there would need to be an accepted ideal, informing the value of freedom from tradition, family and socially defined roles. Is this freedom something that is interpreted as important when youth understands themselves and the choices they make for their future? Or will they rather accentuate the importance of adhering to tradition, finding their place in a social community or perhaps fighting a common cause? And further, if this freedom is weighted as important, does it also entail a reluctance to share responsibility with others or unite with others in the face of adversity?

2.6.3 Autonomy and self-responsibility

Bauman states that as the citizen die, the consumer is born. As a consumer, the modern man is compelled to help himself to the buffet of choice, but he is lacking a benchmark to organize and prioritise between the options. Bauman claims that the consumer is first and foremost guided by the rules of seduction, as opposed to normative regulation. There are no norms to inform which desires that are real needs, and which are illegitimate (Bauman:2000,76). The only legitimate (and untouchable) standard is the individual’s right and freedom to choose (Côté:2006,17). The markets that stimulates and offer temporary (always temporary) fulfilment of desires are described as doing so under the narrative of fulfilling dreams. It is this narrative that is sold with the products to the consumers (Bauman:2000,75).

The obedience to the flexible standards conveyed through media and commercials are masquerading as free will, as opposed to outer force (Bauman:2000,86). It is playing of the ideal of the autonomous individual, which in modern climate is understood in opposition to social influence. This constitutes a blind-spot in modern self-perception, that is reluctant to admit any referral of power from the self, to the social dialogue. This is what Furlong and Cartmel (1997) refer to as the epistemological fallacy. In essence it could imply the following
line of reasoning: “If I want this, it must mean that it expresses something genuine about myself”. Bauman identifies that in the heart of this individualistic tendency lays a corpse, more specifically that of the romantic concept of the authentic self, “(…) guessing a deep inner essence hiding beneath all the external and superficial appearances (…)” (Bauman:2000,82). Bauman himself does not seem to have much faith in the ideal he graphically refers to as a “corpse”.

However, Giddens (1991) claim, the modern social environment allows for greater autonomy in relation to social context in the making of the self (p.149). But to create a coherent narrative of the self against the ever changing, fragmented backdrop of modernity, is no easy task (Giddens:1991,185). This modern autonomy is accompanied by responsibility, which in turn is accompanied by risk, which in turn can generate a constant feeling of worry and anxiety. No matter what direction is chosen, it is impossible to be oblivion of the fact that it is just one amongst many, many possible (Giddens:1991,180). “To put it in a nutshell, ‘individualization’ consists of transforming human ‘identity’ from a ‘given’ into a ‘task’ and charging the actors with the responsibility performing the task and for the consequences (also the side-effects) of their performance.” (Bauman:2000,31). This individualization, although dressed in the lingo of liberation, is, claims Bauman, not itself a choice, but rather the common faith of the modern man. The only choice that is of the table, is that of not choosing.

Bauman observes that we today are presented with more options than ever before. There are more possibilities than anyone can ever hope to examine through the course of a lifetime (Bauman:2000,61). The one who knows how to utilize these possibilities, Bauman states, is the capitalist who travels light. It is he who holds the seat of power in late modernity. The wealthy capitalist is described by Bauman, as the nomad who knows the art of never being tied down, but is able to move swiftly and gracefully from one project to the next. He is invisible and undefinable: “If they [the passengers on the ‘Heavy Capitalism’ ship] grumbled (or sometimes even mutinied), it was against the captain for (…) being (…) neglectful of the passengers’ comfort. The passengers on the ‘Light Capitalism’ aircraft, on the other hand, discover to their horror that the pilot’s cabin is empty (…)” (Bauman:2000,59).

Do youth who make choices experience that these choices should reflect who they “really” are? Or do they weight the importance of external, social influences in the choices that are available, and the choices that are made, such as it might be seen when experiencing tradition as fate? Do they emphasise that they themselves should be engineers of their own future, or
are they willing to leave their lives to fate, as it may be decided by forces external to them? And do they seem to value the ability to “move swiftly and gracefully from one project to the next”, or will the express appreciation of a stable, firm footing?

2.6.4 Reflexivity and loss of external stable points of reference
Both Bauman, Beck and Giddens use the term “reflexivity” in different ways, and apply it to different levels of society. Whether referring to institutions, nature, the industrial model or the self, I would claim that the term in essence entails a lack of a stable point of reference. This, I think, is well exemplified in Giddens’ description of the late modern relationship to nature. Giddens (1991) challenge the common view of modern human’s dealing with nature, which postulate that this mainly happens in an instrumentalist fashion. What he identifies as the key characteristic in modernity’s relationship with nature, is that nature no longer appears as something external to humans. That is to say, it has become a part of the modern man’s inner referential system, and is governed, not by its own laws, but by social structure. In the past, nature has formed a relatively stable backdrop for human activities, this is no longer the case – it has become reflexive (Giddens:1991,137).

In terms of Bauman, heavy modernity was under the impression that effectivity, growth and expansion was used so as to reach higher goals. In liquid modernity, higher goals are lost as stable points of reference. Expansion and growth has, in this way, taken over the project of modernization (Bauman:2000,61). Beck refers to the institutional level of reflexivity in a similar manner. In the process of modernization, one was willing to accept risks as a side-effect of the production of wealth. These side-effects have now transcended the industrial model. The process of modernisation that would ensure economic expansion has, so to speak, outgrown its original object, and become an object and an issue of its own – it has become reflexive. To exemplify, Beck claim that the issue of technological development has been overshadowed by the issue of development of risks that accompanies it (Beck:2000,30).

Giddens suggest that the reflexive project of modernity on the institutional level extends to the personal level. The requirement for autonomy also requires reflexivity. In traditional societies, where one could count on things being more or less as they had always been, one still had to go through thorough changes in one’s identity, the difference being that the outcome was more or less given. In high modernity this personality has to be explored by one’s own merits (Giddens:1991,33). Identities, that were formerly given, now have to be constructed reflexively by the individual (Giddens:1991,74). In high modernity, one lacks the
moral guidelines to inform this construction. Instead, in the reflexive making of the self, the superior moral guideline becomes authenticity; to be true to and actualize oneself in the choices one makes (Giddens:1991,78).

Both Taylor, Bauman, Beck and Giddens comments on the modern dismissal of external moral standards. Bauman (2000) confronts this issue in relation to early critical theory. Bauman claims that in accordance to the demands of critical theory, everything is criticized all the time. Although critical theory was meant to defeat totalitarianism, it always had the seed of totalitarianism within it in the form of relativism (Bauman:2000,24). As everything is criticized, the critique becomes toothless. Any standard that could provide a firm ground for measurement for the critique of any given moral orientation, will itself be a victim of that critic. The same could be seen to be true for the scientific methodological doubt, which also make porous, any steady ground, as every standard is doubted.

The traditional view has been that science would allow for accumulation of certain knowledge and facts. Reason would overcome the dogma of tradition. But as modernity would have it, methodological doubt, and not certainty would be the mark of science, as science itself proved not to be immune to the methodological critique it would apply. No matter how well established any given tenet might be, there is always the possibility that tomorrow will bring contradictory proof (Giddens:1991,21; Beck:2000,264-302). For that reason, any knowledge termed as fact, has the air of temporality and doubt about it. This modern air of temporality and doubt is an issue that has to be dealt with, not only by science, but by individuals as well (Giddens:199,21). This puts modern moral in a fragile position. When it is no longer possible to substantiate moral in given reason or the nature of things, it becomes the task of each and every one to choose and discard amongst ethical point of views in accordance with a standard that can only be guaranteed by personal preference (Taylor:1989,33).

Will my informants’ stories reflect a value, connoting the denial of a stabile point of reference? Will they emphasise the importance of being critical, reflexive, and not tied down by any external moral codes? Or do they accept higher goals besides personal preference, that they find it valuable to reach after? Do they accept moral codes, tenets or goals outside themselves as stabile points of reference?

2.6.5 Individual construction of identity
Self-identity is a central term in Giddens’ book (1991). Self-identity is described as the reflexive identity of the self; a narrative construction of the self. The modern self-identity is simultaneously robust and fragile. Fragile because any given narrative will only be one of many possibilities, and robust because it for the most part is flexible enough to contain great tensions in the social space one navigates (Giddens:1991,55). It is this self-identity, which it falls upon each individual to construct for her or himself. This is, according to Giddens, for a big part done without the security of tradition. This entails the ever present risk that the choices one makes may be the wrong ones. In pre-modern societies, identity was decided through class, sex and other social positioning characteristics. The idea about the individual person that needed to be actualized was not an issue, and changes in identity only took place via transitional rituals, where the outcome of the transition was more or less socially given. (Giddens:1991,74). In high modernity, one lacks the rituals that would guide the individual to its’ defined niche of society (Giddens:1991,78). On the one hand Beck suggests that the new expectations to personal life, as being self-determined, evolves into new untraditional forms of existence – subcultures that experiments with social relations, life and body. On the other hand, he claims that this is a result of a search for social identity in a world that has lost its traditions (Beck:2000,124).

Bauman argues that the ideal and mark of the heavy modern was, as it is now, freedom and choice. But in the heavy modern this meant being able to establish oneself in a pre-established niche within the structures of society. It was the freedom to choose a set of norms, tradition and rules within the new order, and being led by them. Today there is a lack of such ready-made niches which leaves “the making of the self” to the individual. What is available is temporary holdings that can room any given shape for brief moments, but that does not hold any promise of fulfilment or any final arriving (Bauman:2000,33). It becomes the exclusive job of the individual to make end remake oneself and one’s life, without social points of reference to give information about the quality of these choices.

The ones benefitting from this state of mind and culture is, according to Bauman, commercial forces whose job it is to provide life-style choices which defines whatever identity one is shopping for on that or that day (Bauman:2000,63). A number of examples comes to mind of commercials, not only selling an identity-defining product, but also selling the philosophy, which this enterprise is based on. The most obvious is perhaps the soda, which has been held responsible for the modern interpretation of Santa Claus, amongst other things. The commercial opens with the obligatory happy, pretty people drinking the soda. The
image changes, and we see another group of people with slightly different clothes on, all though equally pretty and happy (where is the soda for the depressed and miserable?), drinking another variant of this soda. This repeats itself a number of times, while sub texted: “choose ’this kind’, choose ’this kind’, choose ’this kind’”, and so on and so on, while slightly different variants of the same soda flickers across the screen. At the end of the commercial, the consumer is left with the message: “Choose choice. Choose happiness”.

Individualization is described as influencing both the major and the private institutions that could guide development of identity. As such, Beck argues, the roles of the sexes and the family is unable to replace class as a stable frame of reference, a supplier of identity, and the individual is forced to construct his own existence both in and outside the family (Beck:2000,123). This lack of a stable frame of reference, and the uncertain mode of modernity in general, put great strains on the feeling of ontological security, a feeling that is crucial for the sense of a coherent self-identity. Ontological security is at first hand provided by the trustworthiness of early caretakers, and is sustained by routine and day-to-day activities. Ontological security means having unconscious answers to existential questions in a practical day-to-day level of being. In the pre-modern, it fell upon tradition to articulate an ontological framework for being. With the modern freedom of choice, this framework for ontological security becomes fragile, potentially leading to anxiety (Giddens:1991,47).

This becomes especially evident in what Giddens term “fateful moments”. These are moments where the daily routine is broken, and the deeper, more existential issues of being, which high modernity with its fragmented, “until further notice” character can give no satisfying answer to, makes themselves apparent (Giddens:1991,113). These are crossroads moments like death, birth, divorce, or other events when one is forced to rethink oneself from scratch, and where daily routine lacks the depth to give any sufficient support, such as choosing what to do after high school. Modernity has institutionalised existential questions in such a way, that they do not make themselves known in everyday life. Events that would have brought about existential and moral questions, such as, criminality, insanity, nature, sexuality, sickness and death, has been sequestrated (Giddens:1991,156). Subsequently, when fateful moments appear and forces the individual to make existential considerations, he can find no sources of support for this in daily life, which in turn puts ontological security at risk. This morally deprived environment can give the feeling of meaninglessness and challenge the feeling of a coherent identity (Giddens:1991,201).
When transitioning to adulthood, will youth to understand their identity in relation to their social context, or do they experience this to be an illegitimate source for self-understanding? Will they emphasise that they themselves are the only legitimate source, as far as deciding and defining who they are, or will they accept external guidance in this respect?

I have here described how individualization tendencies can be understood as cultural values. In my method chapter, I will render how this perspective on individualization values will be utilized in my analysis. But before I do that, I want to specify how I understand that moral evaluations might be used as means to self-understanding, in what way such moral evaluations might be observed, and also, what I understand to be moral evaluations in my informants’ stories.

2.7 Narratives, Identity and Moral

Tooby and Cosmides (2010) states that “moral” constitutes evaluating something as preferable to something else. Or oppositely, evaluating something as less desirable than something else. This means that walking out the door instead of the window every morning entails a moral evaluation, as one option is understood as being better than another in relation to an understood good. This “good” might be to avoid getting dirty, or getting funny looks; either way, there is a causal link between behaviour and understood “good” (Tooby&Cosmides:2010). It is with base in this definition I refer to moral evaluations. Further, Taylor (1989) stated that human life as permeated by moral questions. These questions are described as answered narratively, the answers are in turn claimed to be defining for self-understanding:

In order to have a sense of who we are, we have to have a notion of how we have become, and where we are going. (…) My life always has this degree of narrative understanding, that I understand my present action in the form of ‘and then’: there was A (what I am), and then I do B (what I project to become). (Taylor:1989,47).

Who we are is described as meaningfully understood in relation to what is perceived as good. What is to be understood as good can also only be understood through cultural narratives, as they entail the causal link described above (Taylor:1989,47). For example: “I will use the window to exit my house today because I like living outside the box”. From this follows that I understand self-understanding as expressed through moral evaluation, and that I assume that a
narrative approach to my informants’ stories, might be a good way to observe such moral evaluations.

Polletta, Chen, Gardner and Motes (2011,111) describe narratives as being innately moral. In addition, she states that “The stories that people told offered insight into the ways they fashioned their identity from available cultural materials.” (Polletta et al.:2011,112). As such I argue that a good way to determine if, and in what way, individualized values are used to make experiences meaningful, is to study how my informants use values to construct stories, and how they position themselves in these stories. From this follows that I understand narratives, both as expressions of cultural values, and as expression of construction of identity (Polkinghorne:1988; Wilson:2015; Polletta et al.:2011; Presser:2009). Before I move on to my method chapter, where several of these points will be elaborated, I want to specify how I understand “identity”, as I apply the term to the analysis of my data.

2.7.1 Identification

Taylor’s (1989) and Giddens’ (1991) use of “identity” coincides with its traditional meaning, as it is conveyed by Erik Erikson. Identity is here described as what allows for a unified experience of oneself as “the same” over time (Erikson:1992). This perspective on identity has been challenged in more recent literature. One of the questions asked in this context is if the modern climate of flux and lack of stable roles, corresponds with this understanding of identity (Kroger:2007). This is an interesting question, but my main concern in this thesis is the use of moral evaluations to conduct narrative positioning. In addition, I find it somewhat unsubstantial to make inferences about a unified identity on the grounds of single interviews. As such, I understand identity in terms of identification as it is described by Hall (1996). Here it is described, not in terms of essentialism, but as entailing constant semantic positioning. “(…) identities are about questions of using the resources of history, language and culture in the process of becoming rather than being (…). Identities are therefore constituted within, not outside representation.” (Hall:1996,4). The adoption of this perspective is, more than an ontological position, an epistemological one. I find that this perspective is the one that best coincides with what knowledge I retrieve from my analyses. This perspective opens for a focus on how sources of meaning is utilized, and what is accepted to be legitimate, important, significant, or “good”, as Taylor would term it, when understanding oneself, and making choices about one’s future. In other words, what is accepted as sources of identification. It is these sources I hope to identify as I continue with my analysis.
2.8 Summing up the Theory Chapter

Using Charles Taylor’s argument, I have advocated that the epistemological fallacy could be understood as an expression of values in modern culture. These values are described as emphasising the autonomous, and therefore socially independent individual. This might in turn facilitate the individual to experience himself as more self-responsible, more socially detached, and more voluntaristic than is actually the case. I further suggest that when understanding the epistemological fallacy in terms of cultural ideals, some of the tendencies described in theories of individualization might be understood as describing values in late modern culture.

That individualization tendencies are understood as ideals entails that modern identity is considered to be both individualized and socialised. One is individualised as far as one understands oneself with reference to individualisation values (e.g. autonomy). This also necessarily entails socialisation, as this is understood to be a cultural value that is socially communicated. However, as has been shown, it has been argued that individualization theories understand individualization and socialisation as opposites. I have advocated that this is not in fact the case, and that these theories do accept the social nature of the self. Therefore, I find that I can understand some of the tendencies described by these theories as values that facilitates the epistemological fallacy. The next question in then, if, and to what degree I would find individualized moral evaluations in the stories of my informants.
3 Method

As was shown in my theory chapter, I want to know if the stories of young people who are just out of high school, and choose to take a gap year during which they will travel, reflect what Furlong and Cartmel (1997) has termed the epistemological fallacy. I have further demonstrated that this fallacy can be understood as facilitated by individualization ideals. Subsequently, I want to see if my informants display what can be understood as individualization values, or if the informants’ moral evaluation emphasise collective support, tradition as fate or the importance of social situation. I assume that the relative weight given to different values grants insight into my informants’ experiences, as they stand on the threshold of adult life. I suggest that the interview is a method that will allow for such insight.

3.1 Interview as Method

Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) differs between knowledge-retrieval and knowledge-construction as two different epistemological starting points that determine what kind of knowledge you can hope to gain through interviews. The knowledge retrieval position is one held by the behaviourist position. This entails that meaning is something fixed, just waiting to be retrieved in a pure form. In standardising the stimuli (i.e. questions), the aim is to avoid “polluting” the answers, and thus generate answers that are as close as possible to what the informant really means (Kvale & Brinkmann:2009,67). In this perspective on the interview, the questions represent the stimuli, and the answers represents the response (Mishler:1986,21; Kvale & Brinkmann:2009,76). This is a behaviouristic understanding of the interview situation. In this setting, it becomes the researchers job to standardise the questions, using ever more rigours methods to block any contextual interference. This is however claimed to be a nearly impossible task; a position I concur with (Mishler:1986,11; Kvale & Brinkmann:2009,76). This way of approaching the interview also presupposes an epistemological assumption that may not be without problems.

Mishler describe interviews as being a discourse between the informant and the interviewer (Mishler:1986,33). The knowledge gained in the interview is described as a construction between the two parties. There are substantial evidence suggesting that meaning, values and opinions are highly sensitive to context, and as such is not available in its “pure”
form (Jerolmack & Kahn:2014). What information that can be contrived from interviews is not obvious. I share the position of Mishler and Kvale and Brinkmann as it is described above. This position entails that I do not believe I have gained the ultimate truth about my informants’ experiences. This is not the same as to say that the stories I have got are without value, on the contrary. Sandberg (2010) states that: “If the researcher’s primary interest is in culture and value-systems, however, questioning the truthfulness of research participants may be unnecessary. (…) The narratives we tell differ, but this does not make them less interesting or valuable sources of data.” (p.461). As has been showed in my theory chapter, my main interest is such culture and value-systems as Sandberg describes above. At the end of this chapter, I will return to the potential threats to validity, that accompanies the fact that the accounts I have been given, may not reflect the complete realm of my informants’ experiences. For now, I will argue that a suited way to gain information about my informants’ values, is through a narrative approach.

3.1.1 A narrative approach

“Narrative” is a widely applied term that appears in many different contexts. In this thesis I understand narratives as a sequence of relevant events that are causally linked together based on a plot (Polletta et al.:2011,111). Secondly, and centrally, I understand narratives as normative, they have an evaluative component. It is by this component I identified the narratives as such. Polletta et al. puts it this way: “Insofar as stories draw on a cultural stock of plots, they communicate the normative values that are associated with those plots.” (ibid). The plots, as I regard them, are made visible by the moral evaluations they entail.

Presser (2009) refers to Mills as she states that all narratives are “tailored to social conventions and general normative standards.” (Presser:2009,180). With reference to this I assume that the narrative statements I have received are ones that are perceived to be compliant with cultural norms. Further, Presser states that the reasons we give for our actions, are made so as to make sense to ourselves and to imagined or real interlocutors (ibid). As my informants and I did not know each other, it seems likely that they would utilize what they perceived to be accepted and common “cultural stocks of plots”, with associated accepted norms. This both so that the stories would be meaningful in the social setting of the interview, and also so that the informants would present themselves in a perceived favourable way (ibid). As one of my informants responded as we were saying goodbye, and I said it had been very nice to meet her: “Well, you have only seen my, somewhat good sides.” (Anna). By this
follows that the values I identify in my analysis are assumed to reflect what is understood to be commonly legitimate values. Although these values might not grasp the entirety of my informant’s experience of transitioning to adulthood, I do assume that they have a central function in this experience. One could argue that recognised cultural values are likely to either be opposed or conformed to – that indifference, in other words, might be a less available option. As such, cultural values might be said to influence experience and identity, whether one agrees with them or not.

3.1.2 My use of the term “narrative”

“Narrative” refers to a vast field of meaning (Poletta et. al.:2011), and is a central term in this thesis. Here, narratives are understood as means by which moral and values can be socially understood and transmitted, and as means to understand oneself and to express and construct identity (Polkinghorne:1988; Wilson:2015; Polletta et al.:2011; Presser:2009; Taylor:1989). Stories and narratives are to a large degree used as synonyms in narrative research (Polletta et. al.:2011), but for the sake of clarity, I will use the term “narrative”, when I refer to social construction and transmitting of moral ideals and values. When referring to the accounts granted from my informants – how these social narratives are interpreted and used, I will use the term “stories”.

3.2 Selection of Informants

Stories about gap years have often been understood in relation to theories of individualization, (not implying a whole-hearted adoption of the individualization thesis). That it, in short, constitutes an expression for the individualistic tendency to reflexively form and experiment with identity (Bagnoli:2009; King:2011). Or also as expressions of the cultural demand to live authentically, all while following the rules of the market (Cremin:2007; Heath:2007), or navigating “risk society” (Ansell:2008; Brown et al.:2003). I wanted to see if this understanding only applied (if at all) when they talked of gap years, or if it was relevant in other stories as well.

I view these stories as personal interpretations of social dialogue. That is to say that my informants’ stories are understood as reflecting values at a cultural level. They say something about what norms, language, motives and meaning are available, and rendered
legitimate (Gubrium & Holstein:2009; Presser:2009; Polkinghorne:1988; Sandberg:2010). The informants’ statements are assumed to contain information about their culture, i.e. modern society. In this respect, my informants were also chosen on the basis of them being youth on the threshold of adult life, having to make choices defining how this life would be lived. Youth are assumed to be especially sensitive to social change. As such, there is reason to believe that youth constitutes a particularly informative group when attempting to understand social life and its’ effects (Krange & Øia:2005,18). Furlong and Cartmel puts it this way:

In many respects, the study of youth provides an ideal opportunity to examine the relevance of new social theories; if the social order has changed and if social structures have weakened, we would expect to find evidence of these changes among young people who are at the crossroads of the process of social reproduction. (Furlong & Cartmel:1997,2).

Although my field of focus is not on external social change, as it is described above, I find it reasonable to assume that social culture will also be reflected on the level of moral evaluations and motives, as they are conveyed by the youth I have interviewed.

I have so far explained my selection on the grounds of the choice to travel, and the social position of being “youth”, on the threshold to adulthood. In addition, I more specifically chose youth who were fresh out of high school, and in the process of making choices for their future. I argue that this situation constitutes what Giddens term a “fateful moment”. This is described as moment where one cannot rely on habit, but have to actively utilize social resources of moral, so as to make a meaningful choice (Giddens:1991,113). Bagnoli claims that choices to travel are often made in such “fateful moments” (Bagnoli:2009,325). As such, this is a particularly suited group to investigate, when trying to understand modern culture’s moral resources, and how they are interpreted and utilized.

Subsequently, I looked for informants who chose to take a gap year after high school, and were conducting a journey during this gap year lasting for one month or more. The duration of the informants’ journeys was between one and six months. This choice is considered to be most common amongst middle class youth representing majority society background (King:2011,343). I therefore primarily searched for informants within this demography.

I also looked for youth that was not travelling to study or work abroad. These types of traveling could more easily be understood as a continuation of an expected trajectory, actively
positioning oneself in society as one enters adulthood. I was interested in the narratives that gave meaning to the “gap” in this process. King states that the gap year represents “(…) an interruption in institutional transitions and consequently in some young people’s transition to adulthood.” (King:2011,341).

The common number of informants in qualitative interviews are typically relatively small (Kvale & Brinkmann:2009,129). I use interviews from six informants. It would have been favourable to have a few more informants, to better be able to observe the strength or weakness of tendencies that were identified, as well as variations within the expressions of these. However, due to limited resources, I evaluated that the time I had was better spent conducting thorough analyses, rather than including more informants to the study. Sandberg notes that in the case of narrative research “The more data you have, (…) the harder it will be to discover the nuances of narratives.” (Sandberg:2010,451).

The six informants were selected by what could be understood as purposeful, or selective sampling, as there were a specific set of criteria that had to be met, in order for the informants to qualify as fit to answer my research questions (Coyne:1997,624; Marshall:1996,523). I searched for informants using my network and social medias. I was put in touch with four of my informants by mutual acquaintances. One of these informants put me in touch with two others who suited my requirements for selection, and was thus selected by chain sampling (Coyne:1997,627). These ways of selecting are associated with a skew representation (Lund, Kleven, Kvernbekk, Christophersen:2002,133), however, this skewness was here deliberate. Although the sample does not allow for generalisation, it is consistent with the criteria assumed to be best fitted as far as answering my research question. The circumstance that two informants were obtained by chain sampling, set higher requirements to the process of anonymization, so that the informants that knew each other would not recognize each other’s statements as they are presented in this thesis.

All six informants had recently finished high school, and planned to take a gap year, during which they would conduct a longer journey outside Europe. All six came from middle class backgrounds, as it could be measured by parental education (university educations) and occupation (service occupations) (Hjort:2014,737), and all had Norwegian or European backgrounds and thus belonged to majority society. All but one of them where located in the west side of Oslo, an area generally considered to be wealthier than the east side of town. Four of them had attended high schools located around the centre of Oslo. They all reported
having relatively high, or high average grades when they left high school, and they all reported being invested in, and putting effort into their academic work.

All six were adamant that they at some point would attain university degrees. They all seemed very ambitious, and wanted careers within rather prestigious occupations, as is revealed in analysis chapter, although it varied how precise their plans were on this point. Due to confidentiality considerations, I will not delve deeper into general differences between the informants. This could be considered compromising to the contextual validity of the paper (Polkinghorne:2007,476). However, at a surface level, this could be considered a rather uniform group on some significant social variables. Subsequently, I regard that the negative effect on validity is not significant. Nuances and differences in the stories that were identified will be accentuated in the analysis.

3.3 The Theoretical Starting Point

A part of my investigation consisted of identifying whether the stories submitted contained evaluations that could be understood in relation to an individualistic ideal. As such, my theoretical glasses were tuned in from the very beginning. This was necessary as I wanted to demonstrate how individualism could be understood as an ideal providing moral guidelines, and thus providing nuance and analytic tools to the application of these theories, which I at times have found to be one-sided. Although entering a research with a thorough theoretical understanding can benefit the quality of the study, it can also provide a bias and one-sided analysis (Kvale & Brinkmann:2009,241-245). The advantage was that I had a clear understanding of what my preunderstandings consisted of, thereby allowing me to constructively develop and utilize counter means (Polkinghorne:2007,482), both in the interview guide, during the interviews and in my analysis, so as to strengthen the validity of the results that were generated (Kvale & Brinkmann:2009,244; Polkinghorne:2007,482).

In my interview guide, this meant asking questions where I primed for the revealing of collectivistic values. I also, when hearing stories I deemed to draw on individualistic ideals, asked questions that might nuance that impression. In my analysis I actively searched for stories containing such ideals, entailing moral evaluations preferring community, tradition and adhering to external moral authority.
3.4 The Interview Guide

The appearance of my interview guide is a bit misleading to the style, manner, and purpose the interviews were conducted in. To look at, the interview guide is quite extensive, containing 65 main questions, each with succeeding follow-up questions, corresponding with different alternatives of answers. To be sure; never was all of the questions on the interview guide asked, and always were other questions added in the situation. The many questions in the interview guide were formed to answer eight theoretical questions, based on theoretical assumptions of individualization. Even though I was aware that there were too many questions in the interview guide to be covered by one interview, I decided to keep them.

The reason for this was not so that I would speed through the questions, trying to get as many as possible asked. Rather – with me being a novice interviewer – it was a reassurance, having an interview guide that covered several eventualities. In the situations where I interviewed informants who were not so talkative, I found it very useful to have thought through follow up questions available. My focus in the interviews was that the eight theoretical questions were well covered. Each theme in the interview guide was introduced with an open ended question, encouraging the informant to answer narratively (Mishler:1986,68). It was never a point in itself, or any attempt to ask every question in the interview guide.

The interview guide itself has five sections. The first is marked “Introduction”, and covers general background topics like living locations, what school they went to, family situation and the likes. The second, “Social Living”, asks what the informants like to do in their spare time, and what is important to them in their lives. “The Journey” delves deeper into the planning and aim of, expectations to and reasons for the trip. “The Future” covers the planned as well as the ideal future of the informants. Lastly, there is a debriefing where the informant is invited to tell me how she experienced the interview and to ask any questions she may have. I also ask whether there are any questions I should have, but did not ask, if I want to understand why she is going on her trip, and what is important to her. Before meeting with the first informant, I ran through the guide with a fellow student, who provided useful comments.

Being aware of my own theoretical lens, I aimed at constructing the questions in such a manner that, when it was relevant, they would prime for collectivistic values and perspectives, rather than individualistic. This was done in order to increase the validity of the
material, through guarding against simply reproducing the stories I expected to find (Polkinghorne:2007,482).

3.5 The Interviews

In order for the informants to feel comfortable talking to me, it was important to be engaged in what they were saying. This was also essential in relation to being able to pick up on things that perhaps were not said, or only indicated, so as to be able to ask appropriate follow up questions (Mishler:1986,31). In addition, my theme of investigation is cultural narratives, as such it would have been an unrealistic expectation to place myself “outside” those narratives of shared meaning, and still hoped to have them conveyed by my informants. Being an active part in the interview, showing I understood, and empathized with what was being said, made it impossible to not ask leading questions, or make leading remarks. I was however careful to ask leading questions in several directions, so that contrasting information might be revealed (Kvale & Brinkmann:2009,182-185).

I accept the position stating that the meaning constructed in interviews is done in a discursive environment between the informant and the interviewer (Mishler:1986; Kvale & Brinkmann:2009,67-75; Gubrium & Holstein:2009,42-53). I also assume that the cultural narratives we shared, and thus were available for communicating and constructing meaning, are in fact cultural, as they have been described earlier. None the less, at all times were the informants given as much space as possible to lead the way in this construction. Thus it is their experiences that is described, using our resources of shared cultural narratives. I also assume that the informants typically would lean towards a self-representation that they perceived to be favourable (Presser:2009,180), therefore utilizing what they understood to be commonly accepted moral evaluations, and it is precisely here the point of interest in my research lays.

3.5.1 The semi structured interview

The semi structured interview was used so as to open for extensive answers on the part of the informants, while at the same time ensure that their answers covered ground that was relevant to my research questions. This was often a fine line to walk, and as I listen to the tapes, it became clear that I stumbled at times. In hindsight I observed that there were times I
introduced a new subject prematurely, perhaps leaving interesting stories untold. But more often, in my eager to make the informants feel comfortable and talkative, I entertained less relevant subjects for too long. From this followed that some of the interviews took longer than planned for. None of the informants this regarded stated, or seemed to mind the extra time when I asked them.

3.5.2 Conducting the interviews

All informants had received an email where I told them about the study and the informed consent, which they all signed before the interview started. In addition, I informed them orally that I was bound by confidentiality, that all information that could identify them would be anonymised, and that they had the right to pull out on the interview whenever they wanted to, up until January 2016. No one evoked this right. The interviews were conducted between July 2015 and January 2016. In the case of the last interview, the informant was told that the deadline did not apply for her, as it had already past. The information form said that the interview would take approximately one hour. However, after conducting my first interview, I found that this time was hard to manage precisely. As such, I asked all the following informants if they would mind if the interview took a little longer. None of them minded. The interviews lasted between one and two hours.

Two of the interviews were conducted at a café, where I bought them a beverage. During the first interview, I found this location to be a success. Being on “neutral ground”, with a relaxing environment seemed to work so as to “even” the position between me and the informant (Mishler:1986,118). In addition, interruption brought about by the waitress, or funny incidents outside the café window, seemed to provide fruitful “breaks” from the interview (Kvale & Brinkmann:2009), where the informant would ask me questions, both personal and about the interview. However, the café setting also provided challenges. There were a lot of sound pollution on the tapes which made the transcribing more time consuming. In addition, we ran the risk of having people seated right next to us, which assumedly would make free talking harder for the informant. As a consequence, four of the interviews were conducted in private group rooms at UIO. I made sure to secure the nicest rooms with a window view, and bought coffee, so as to recreate the relaxed environment of the café.

However, my experience was that the needs and expectations of the informants differed. Some seemed to talk more easily when I put on my more neutral “scientist-hat”. This was done by me giving responses in the way of nods and more neutral “mhm”, to show I was
listening, as opposed to more empathetic responses that signalled understanding: “oh really” “I can see that” – and the likes. Some even seemed more comfortable as I started taking notes on my notepad, perhaps because the pressure of making eye contact with a stranger was eased. My initial plan was to avoid making notes, but in these cases I made notes more continuously through the interview. Other informants slipped in to intimate conversation almost immediately, actively seeking understanding and confirmation as they told their stories. Either way; me being empathetic to the situation and my informants’ needs and expectations appeared to be important in order for them to be comfortable with answering my questions (Mishler:1986,31).

Even though my approach varied, depending of the informant, every approach was aimed at making the informants comfortable, and thus talk more easily. As was to be expected, some talked more than others, but all six provided narratives with moral evaluations, all though some required that I asked more follow up questions to get them. That is to say, they all gave statements that qualified to be interpreted with a narrative analysis. This entails, as discussed earlier, giving stories understood as both being expressions of cultural values, and personal positioning and self-representation by the means of these values.

3.5.3 Transcribing and Translating the Interviews

When transcribing the interviews, I did so word for word as they were spoken, including pauses and pause words. I also included tone of voice, laughter and sighs. This so as to compensate for the loss of context the transcription entails (Kvale & Brinkmann:2009,192-195). Impressions and thoughts that occurred in relation to the interview while I was transcribing were put in clams. Cursive is used to indicate emphasis on a word, while [] is used to indicate interruptions and overlapping speech.

A further abstraction of the material came through its translation. While translating, it soon became evident that a lot of the pause words and expressions did not carry the same meaning when they were translated. I found the same to be true for grammatical errors in the language. I therefore “cleaned up” the grammars in the translation, as well as taking out a lot of the pause words. When I found expressions to be hard to translate while keeping its original connotations, I kept the Norwegian expression in clams in the excerpts. When translating, I also did not include my comments that indicated active listening, like: “yes”, “ok” and “mhm”. All comments beyond this simple conversational encouragement was included.
3.5.4 Analysing the Interviews

I have conducted a narrative analysis with bases in thematic coding, as it is suggested an exemplified by Reissman (2008, 53-77). I found the coding to be necessary, both in order to make the material more suited for systematic analysis, and also so that the process would be more transparent, and thereby more valid (Creswell & Miller: 2000, 126-128). In addition, I found that the coding would make the presentation easier to follow. I started out by reading thorough the transcripts several times and consulting notes made straight after the interviews, before underlining words and phrases containing moral evaluations in a story. I then set out to identify the frames of the story influenced by that evaluation.

As I did this I started coding in groups of evaluations. Initially the codes were all empirical, drawn from the informants’ statements. At the end of this process I would typically have between a hundred and two hundred codes per interview. I then started to gather the codes in larger clusters, also applying theoretical concepts. Several stories were placed in more than one category. The combining of codes into clusters, and combining several small clusters into larger categories, was done in a hermeneutic fashion. I constantly returned to my data material, to revisit the larger context the statements were made in, so as to place them appropriately, and so as to make appropriate categories to place them in (Morse, Barrett, Mayan, Olson, Spiers et al.: 2002, 17).

I categorised the transcripts in relation to the moral evaluations the stories entailed. Stories with similar moral evaluations were categorized under the same theme. As I narrowed my codes down, I was left with five main categories, representing four strands of valued goods: “Following dreams”, “The scientific mind”, “Self-reliance”, “Being open to change”, and “Social belonging”. “Following dreams” was made out by stories that emphasised the value of doing what one dreams of, being true to oneself, and doing that which is found to be intrinsically meaningful or enjoying. “The scientific mind” was made out by stories that emphasised the value being critical, doing what it sensible and realistic, and applying and adhering to rational logic. “Self-reliance” was made out by stories that emphasised the value of deciding for oneself who to be and what to believe in, and taking responsibility for one’s actions. “Being open to change” was made out by stories that emphasized the value of taking things as they come, being adaptable, and holding options open. “Social belonging” were made out by stories that emphasised communal values, such as sharing, uniting with others in the face of adversity, or legitimizing action and choice with reference to a larger social order or authority, such as for example tradition.
After having identified these five main categories, I started a preliminary analysis, studying how the different categories related to each other, and what themes and symbols the stories reflected. This revealed that some values made most sense when they were analysed together, as they often appeared within the same story. What I identified to be the overarching ideal, in relative degree, in all these strands of narratives, was the ideal of the autonomous self. But as will be shown in the analysis, this ideal was not portrayed without ambiguity and contradictions.

Polkinghorne (1995) distinguishes between pragmatic and narrative cognition. The first approach to analysing entails finding instances that bind events together in a category – what makes them similar. The second focus on what makes an event special, and different from other events. In my analysis, I have done both. That is to say, although the narratives are categorized as belonging to the same group, I also accentuate what sets a particular story apart from the other stories in the category. This was done to exemplify how ideals were being used, as opposed to just stating that the stories could be understood as influenced by a certain ideal.

In a qualitative research, the analysis is in practice conducted throughout the entire process (Kvale & Brinkmann:2009; Maxwell:2013). As I asked questions in the interviews and follow up questions, I had already begun analysing the information I received. This is an important component in a good interview, allowing for relevant questions, and a clearer understanding of the stories told (Kvale & Brinkmann:2009,151). I do not assume that the stories rendered here are analysed to completion, and that there is no one now who could add any meaningful interpretations beyond what I have already done (Mishler:1986,186). I do however consider that I have conducted a meaningful analysis, that contributes to a widened understanding of both the data and the theory (Krange:2004,68).

Polkinghorne states that narrative coding reasons through understanding the meaning of the whole “seeing it as a dialectic integration of its parts.” (Polkinghorne:1988,35). The relevant question then becomes what is to be considered “part” and “whole”. Indeed, there is the part and wholes of the exact story, but I often found stories echoing themselves, or commenting on earlier stories stated through the course of the interview. As such, I applied this guideline, by not only relating the parts of the story to each other, but also seeing every story in relation to the entire interview. This was done by making myself very familiar with the interviews, both reading through the transcripts several times, and also listening to the
tapes, taking notes as I did. When it has been relevant to analyse a story in relation to an earlier part of the interview, this has been explicated in the analysis.

My aim in the analysis was to identify what Polletta et al. (2011) terms “the moral of the story”: “Storytellers rarely say explicitly to their audiences, “and the moral of the story is…” Rather, the story’s larger meaning seems to be given by the events themselves.” (Polletta et al.:2011,111). My analysis aimed at identifying the values that gave meaning to the stories. What qualities seemed to be cherished, or considered best discarded? What was described as worth doing, and what was to be avoided? What were described in terms of being legitimate motives for action? This process had, as I stated earlier, already begun during the interviews and the categorization of the stories. However, as I started my analysis, the nuances and ambiguities in the stories became more apparent. They are commented as they are identified in the analysis.

3.6 Presentation

With ground in Polletta et. al.’s definition of narratives, as being a sequence of relevant events that are causally linked together based on a plot (Polletta et al.:2011,111), it is possible to alter stories in a narrative analysis, so as to make it a unified understandable whole. There are obvious advantages to doing so. Not doing so implied including more text in the presentation, so that the entire line of the story was made clear, and at times it made for a more complicated analysis. Even so I chose to keep the excerpts as they were told for three reasons. Firstly, I wanted to make the analysis transparent by creating a space between the analysis, and the stories analysed – making clear what is my interpretation, and what are statements. Secondly, by making this apace, I take seriously the position that this analysis is not all conclusive, allowing the material to stay “clean” for alternative interpretations. Lastly, I find this to be consistent with Polkinghorne’s requirement for transparency, ensuring the integrity of my analyses (Polkinghorne:2007,476).

As such, I often present rather lengthy excerpts, so as to include the whole story. When parts have been cut out, this is indicated with (…), except when cuts or alterations has been done for the sake of anonymization. These excerpts can at times be somewhat fragmented and chaotic. This required the analysis following them to be thorough, so as to provide the wholeness and unity that were at times lacking in the stories. The analysis typically starts out with a short summary – highlighting what I find to be relevant in the story,
followed by my interpretation, and lastly how this interpretation can be understood in relation to relevant theory, and how relevant theory can be understood in relation to my interpretation (Krange:2004,68).

3.6.1 Anonymization

Sensitive information, as it is defined by NSD, was disclosed during several of the interviews. Two of my informants were recruited with chain sampling, and several stated the importance of anonymity as we talked. As such, I have been meticulous in the process of anonymising my informants. My sample included four girls and two boys; in the presentation, they have all been made girls, as a potential difference between sexes is not a question asked here. All are given fictional names. In addition, I have added an extra name to the analysis, who has been “given” stories from the other informants. All information that could identify my informants has been altered to what I have considered to be similar alternatives on the relevant variables. As far as their itinerary goes, I have only included what part of the world they are going to, and not the specific countries.

I have constantly made assessments where scientific and confidentiality considerations were evaluated. I do realise that both not including more information about my informants, and making them all girls, take away important contextual information, that allows the reader to form an impression of who these stories belong to, and thus strengthen the validity of the analysis (Creswell & Miller:2000,128-129). The same might say to be the case with my decision to add one name to the mix. However, I estimate that these were the necessary steps to take in order to protect my informants’ confidentiality. It is also important to note that the analysis was conducted with insight and consideration to the elements that is obscured in the presentation.

3.7 Quality and Transparency: Questions of Validity

I have, throughout this chapter, commented on how the decisions I have made have affected the validity of this paper. Morse et. al. (2002) notes that a mean of ensuring validity in qualitative research, is by means of verification. One way to conduct such verification is to ensure methodological coherence. That is to say that the method is suited to the research questions (p.18). I have thoroughly argued how, and why I believe that the narrative method
is the best suited to answer my research questions. Morse et al. also, in the same context, emphasise the need of an appropriate sample. This is to say that the people selected are the ones “(…) who best represent or have knowledge of the research topic.” (Morse et al.:2002,18). I have similarly argued the appropriateness of my sample in relation to my research questions.

I have aimed at transparency in all levels of my research, so that the reader might “(…) be able to follow the presented evidence and argument enough to make up their own judgement as to the relative validity of the claim.” (Polkinghorne:2007,476). It is also with this in mind I have rendered the excerpts from the interviews with as much length and precise wording as I have. I have also rendered, and have my self been aware of, my theoretical lens from the very beginning. This has allowed for reflexivity (Lincoln & Guba:2000,183), and has had consequences for how the interview guide was constructed and for how the interviews and the analysis were conducted, so as to counteract bias, and strengthen validity (Kvale & Brinkmann:2009,244; Polkinghorne:2007,482). In the interview guide, this was done by priming for collective, rather than individualistic perspectives when this was possible. When I, in the interviews, experienced that an informant reflected very individualistic values, I would ask leading follow up questions that were assumed to prime for collectivistic values. In my analysis, I have actively searched for stories that did not seem to be influenced by individualistic values.

The transparency of the paper may however be considered challenged by the fact that all my informants are made girls, that one name is added, and that I only share little information of their backgrounds, that could otherwise serve to contextualize my findings. However, I feel these steps were necessary in order to protect my informant’s confidentiality. In addition, as noted earlier, this was a rather uniform group with reference to family background, academic performance and future plans. Therefore, withholding specific contextual information about specific informants, may not be as compromising in this case, as it could have been with a more diverse group. In addition, I did observe any significant differences between the stories told by the boys and the girls.

Polkinghorne (2007) claims that the central threat to validity in narrative research comes from the disjunction between language and experience. The limitation of language, abilities of reflection and social norms stand in the way of informants conveying “truthful” experiences (p.480). This is a valid concern for my thesis, as I want to research how transitions to adulthood is understood and experienced. However, although I might not be
able to contrive my informants’ complete and absolute realm of experience, does not mean I cannot learn something valuable their experience. My premise for the knowledge generated is that their stories reflect experienced cultural norms, understood and expressed through social narratives. In addition, as has been argued earlier in this chapter, I assume that these norms provide moral sources for identification, reflected in how they are used in narrative positioning and self-representation. I assume that perceived cultural norms are central in influencing how personal action and choice is interpreted, and thereby experienced. Sandberg puts it this way:

Meaning is constructed locally, from minute to minute, but always in a way that reflects “discursive environments” and “families of language games”. (…) In this way, no matter what kind of stories are told, or whether they are true or false, they tell us something important about values, identities, cultures, and communities. (Sandberg:2010,455).

One could argue that if any group were likely to display values of individualization, it would be western middle class youth, who are taking time off to travel the world. I would be inclined to agree. My sample is not suited for generalisation, subsequently I cannot know if the tendencies I find will be present with other groups. However, my premise for my research is that language and values are socially constructed, and individually interpreted and expressed. I can therefore assume that my informant’s accounts do reflect a cultural context. However, I cannot know exactly what cultural context that is the relevant one; if it is the cultural context of the middle class, of Oslo youth, or a Norwegian context etc. This question would require further research.
4  A Narrative Analysis of Values in Transitional Stories:
The Ideals of an Individualized Culture

In my analysis, I wanted to research what kind of moral evaluations were used by my informants to explain and give meaning to their choices and experiences as they stand on the threshold of adulthood. In a critique of Beck’s thesis of risk society, Atkinson states, there is a large volume of evidence that indicates that social situation and structures are deciding for both what choices are available for, and what choices are made by the individual (Atkinson:2007,365). I also assume that to be the case for my informants. They all planned for higher education and rather prestigious careers. They also planned to take a gap year and travel. These are all plans that could probably be predicted with reference to their middle class background, as reproduction of social situation still seem to take place (Atkinson:2007). Would their stories reflect the importance of this social situation, or would they reflect individualization ideals, as they are described in the theory chapter, and thus reflect an epistemological fallacy? Would they weight ideals connoting the importance of tradition, social belonging and collective support, or ideals of autonomy, self-responsibility and freedom?

If the first is found to be the case, it would be relevant to assume that the description of individualized culture, and the epistemological fallacy, make out relevant contributions to understanding how my informants experience their transition to adulthood in late modernity. If, on the other hand, traditional values are found to be dominating, it would be natural to assume that individualization theories carry limited information, as far as understanding my informants’ experience of this transition.

I also wanted to see if different ideals were drawn upon in relation to different stories, or when talking about different areas of their lives. Stories of gap years have often, directly or indirectly and with relative agreement, been understood in relation to theories of individualization (Bagnoli:2009; King:2011; Cremin:2007; Heath:2007; Ansell:2008; Brown et al.:2003). Would I find similar stories, reflecting individualized values? And if so, would these types of moral evaluations be limited to stories of travelling, or would they be reflected when they talked of other choices, and other fields of experiences as well?

By far, the most central value I identified can be understood as that of autonomy. This ideal was understood expressed in values of “following dreams”, “the scientific mind” and
“self-responsibility”. However, autonomy was more ambiguously portrayed, and perhaps even challenged in two other prominent narratives, that of “doing what is sensible” and “choosing choice”. I propose to understand the contradiction presented through these narratives, by means of understanding what kind of autonomy is informing these stories. I suggest that this is an autonomy best understood as an “enlightenment-autonomy”, as opposed to a “romantic-autonomy”. The latter presupposes a notion of an authentic, core self, the first do not. Lastly, I will look at stories that connoted traditional, collective values that cannot readily be understood in relation to the individualization thesis; although, also these stories seemed to be presented with a modern twist.

My six informants were all middle class, between nineteen and twenty years old, and had all recently finished high school. I have named them Beatrice, Rakel, Cecilia, Anna, Lotte, Emma and Diana (as mentioned in my method chapter, one extra name is added for confidentiality considerations). All six were taking a gap year, and all six planned to travel during this time. Their journeys went to south America, Asia and Australia. They all seemed to be very reflected and forthcoming. All six reported high academic performances, and all six wished for rather prestigious professions. I asked them about their journeys, their general likes and dislikes, their past choices and their future plans and dreams. In the following is presented a narrative analysis of what they answered. I chose to present those stories that I found were most illustrating for those tendencies I identified. I also chose stories in order for the nuances in these tendencies to be visible.

4.1 Following Dreams vs. Doing What is Sensible

Taylor states that the sources of self-responsible independence and recognized individual uniqueness, is, in individualized culture, a continuation of respectively, enlightenment and romantic ideals. In modern culture, he claims, these two lines of reasoning are in constant conflict (Taylor:1989,413). The first entails an emphasis on rational and sensible evaluation. The second gives meaning to stories of being true to, and expressing your inner most self. In the following I analyse what could be seen as a negotiation between these two strands of values. Enlightenment morals are interpreted as expressed in stories of doing the sensible thing and avoiding risk. Romantic morals are understood as giving meaning and language to stories of following dreams and doing what is internally rewarding.
As my informants told their stories of why they made the choices they had, and why they planned the choices they did, two conflicting narratives became apparent. On the one hand they were oriented towards the value of utilizing their freedom and following personal dreams. This value was however heavily challenged by the value of avoiding risk through competing for high positions, getting a “real job”, and not being made redundant on the labour market. In most stories, these two values seemed to be conflicting, except in stories of travelling, where they appeared to cooperate.

4.1.1 Having fun, and getting ahead

I ask Diana, who is travelling several countries in Asia, why she chose this destination.

Diana: I think it might be one of the easiest places to go backpacking, especially when you are travelling alone, just because so many people has done it before you. And also I have heard so many great things about the countries I’m visiting! So I was thinking that: “This is really the region I want to travel to now”. And also I consider that region to be safer than for example south America. (…)

Diana’s reported reason for choice of destination may be considered twofold. On the one hand she has a personal desire to see the places in question, prompted by all the wonderful things she has heard about the region. On the other hand, she explains how those destinations entails less risk than others. In this story, it does not appear to be much conflict to speak of between the two values, as what she wants, and what seems sensible leads in the same direction.

The same might be said for the segment, where I ask Beatrice to elaborate on an earlier statement, saying she thinks the journey she is about to embark on might make her look at things differently.

Beatrice: I think it will, or I hope it will make me see the advantages of being a bit international, having footing in different countries, and like having different contacts, and how much fun that is. And also how important it could be later.

Beatrice says she hopes the journey will make her see, on the one hand, the advantages of having international connections, and on the other hand, how fun this is. Illeris, Katzenelson, Nielsen, Simonsen and Sørensen (2009), claims that the elevated conciseness surrounding
risks in late modernity is accompanied by an increased focus on being realistic (p.86). Subsequently, the “important” part of her reasoning, could be understood in relation to reducing risk, as the consciousness of risk is what is claimed to prompt an orientation towards what is found to be realistic, reasonable and safe. The “fun”, could on the other hand be viewed as an intrinsic motivation, and is as such related the value of “following dreams”. In this story, the expected advantages, and the fun-having seem to go hand in hand.

Typically, the values of following dreams and avoiding risk, seemed to conflict less, than was the case when these values appeared in contexts that were not related to travelling. This corresponds with what Cremin (2007) argues to be typical for narratives about these travels. He further claims that this echoes how society in general sees these travels, and specifically, how travelling agencies market them:

An institutionalised way of living life to the full, the gap year is a period of time – often in a distant location relative to lived experience – when we can fulfil our dreams, however structured, and sustain a relationship to the labour market back home. (…) It is an instrumentalisation of the most authentic of experiences, the world trip. (Cremin:2007,526)

The emphasis on having fun and gaining some kind of advantage, either on the labour-market or in terms of knowledge or personal development, was a very common way for my informants to talk about their trips. In the perspective of Cremin’s argument, gap-year traveling offers a reconciliation of these two values that seems to conflict in other contexts.

Lotte’s next story might help to inform how it is that these values seem to coexist so peacefully in tales of travelling. At the end of the interview, I ask Lotte if there is anything I should have asked her, but didn’t, if I want to understand why she is travelling. Earlier, Lotte has emphasized that this is her time to do what she herself wants to do. This is however not the only value at play.

Lotte: Well, a lot of the reason why I chose to take this trip is because it is accepted by society. Like, you don’t fall behind (laughs) if you take a year of. I heard that in America, you have to have a really good reason not to apply for college or university straight after high school.

Lotte has earlier told stories about how she wishes to travel, and the fun experiences she will have. However, this last statement implies that this wish would not have been a sufficient motivation if the travelling had not been commonly accepted, and had thus entailed a higher risk in the form of “falling behind”. Lotte’s stories about her reasons for travelling can be
interpreted as oriented both towards the value of fulfilling personal wishes, and avoiding risk. More so, they seem to coexist quite peacefully in this story. If they had been conflicting in this context, Lotte claims she would not have gone. Seemingly, these two values interact well in these stories because the choice of traveling is both accepted by society, which makes it sensible, and is something which is fun and intrinsically rewarding. This next story might serve to corroborate this interpretation.

When I ask Diana if she thinks her trip is going to change her in any way, or make her look at things differently, she replies by speaking of independence and becoming more self-secure. Goals associated with self-affirmation and personal growth. The value of these goals is however challenged by risk-assessment, as independence as trait is evaluated in a market-rationalistic perspective. I ask Diana if there is anything about her future she considers challenging or scary. Diana replies by talking about the competition in her work field of interest.

Diana: It is often very talented people that are applying for those jobs. So I’m kind of wondering if, how should I put it, if I’m edgy enough, or exciting enough. If I have the qualities and experiences that an employer is looking for. Now I’m thinking very far ahead, but I almost feel like I should do that. And that makes you question your choices: “Should I start my studies now, instead of travelling? Or is this trip something that will be appreciated later, because you’re showing that you have an interest in the world, and that you dare to make choices that are not the most comfortable?”; and so on. But, yeah, it’s always a bit risky to think: “Am I going the right way?”.

When Diana questions just how accepted her journey really is, the value of “following dreams” and “doing what is sensible”, immediately becomes conflicting. The independence Diana states that she hopes to achieve on this trip, is earlier referred to as an experience of personal growth. In this context, the intrinsic value of being able to “not lean on anyone else”, seems to be evident. However, the choice to travel is questioned as Diana states to be unsure whether this value will be recognised as such, and thereby able to “sell” in the labour-market. The risk in this story, consists in these characteristics’ ability to translate into extrinsic values that could give Diana an edge in a competitive environment.

Snee (2014) found that the competitive edge was an important element of the youth’s reasoning concerning their travels: “Individual [authors emphasis] responsibility is placed on young gappers to make their time out worthwhile and to stand out from the crowd.” (Snee:2014,843). This seems to correspond with Diana’s story when she asses the possible
risk of her endeavours not being recognized as valuable in the labour-market, which in turn would make her trip “not worthwhile”.

It was emphasised by most of the informants that they chose to travel because it was something that they wanted, and that would be fun on its own account. They simultaneously held that traveling was a good decision because it might provide them with an edge in the future. It seemed important that gap years were understood as accepted by society, and therefore did not entail any risk, concerning their future plans. As such, the choice to take a gap year and travel does not seem to be primarily interpreted as a “detour” or break, but rather as a step on the path to position oneself in adult life.

4.1.2 What will get you the furthest?

Although the value of doing what is sensible and following dreams coexisted quite harmonically in stories about traveling, they conflicted more in stories concerning other choices. When I ask Beatrice what line of work she could envision herself in, her story about what to study when she returns from her trip indicate such a conflict.

Beatrice: Now that I’m in a stage in my life where I have to start choosing, I’m like: Fuck! It will probably end up with me ending up with medicine, that’s what I’m thinking, but I don’t want to. I’m just thinking that all the signs are pointing in that direction. (…) Because my entire family has studied medicine, it has just always been there, and to me it’s like a safe haven. And I’m always told: If you study medicine you’ll get a job. If you study medicine you’ll get a job you can keep building on, you can develop within different fields, you can become whatever you want. But I do not have that feeling that it seems so exciting, or that it would be really rewarding, I don’t.

I proceed to ask her about the parental influences she hints to in her statements, whether her parents have stated clearly they think she should study medicine. As the excerpt shows, Beatrice also states to take tradition and parental advice under consideration when deciding what to study. I will return to this at the end of this chapter.

Beatrice: (…) They are very concerned with, like when it comes to choosing a career, that I choose something that gives me a job. That I choose something that gives me a profession. Something that can get me a real job pretty fast, and not a profession that is redundant. And that input is something I take with me all the time.
Beatrice talks about how she is scared that she will end up in a profession that she has no passion for, but that non the less offers security. Her story can be viewed as informed both by the cultural narrative of following her dreams and of avoiding risk. This conflict continues as the interview proceeds. Here, I ask her to tell me about law school, as she has described this as a potential career path.

Beatrice: (...) I have always thought it seemed like an interesting subject to study. And also, it’s a profession with high status, and I could use my grades. Cause I have always wanted to be a midwife. I can hear myself saying: “I always wanted to be this, and I always wanted to be that”, but midwife was something I wanted to be from a really young age. But then I realised that when you leave high school with such good grades, you have to, or you don’t have to, but you could use them. I know that sounds stupid, because midwife is a beautiful profession, but I wanted use my grades in some way, fight for a spot, and law school is really hard to get into. (...)

On the one hand her potential choice of law school is described as motivated by an always present interest in the subject, and on the other hand it allows her to use her grades to climb the social latter, a climb that could be considered a risk-reducing, sensible move. She does however immediately comment on the insufficiency of such a motive as she “know that sounds stupid”. Again the narrative conflict is negotiated by describing her original dream as less attractive, as it entails someone else being in charge of her.

When I ask Lotte about her future, she tells me that the most important thing is that she spends her time doing something she likes. She states that she has always been really into history, and is not really taken with medicine. However, she is conflicted about what direction she should take. When I ask her what she will do when she returns from her trip, she answers:

Lotte: I’ll have to wait and see what programme I’m accepted to. But it’s a bit like: should you study history or medicine, what will get you the furthest (hva kommer man lengst med)? I Don’t know, or like, you’ll come a longer way with medicine.
Victoria: What do you mean by “coming a longer way”?
Lotte: What will get you a job. Just that.
Victoria: Right. But you mentioned before that it was also really important for you to study something you were interested in?
Lotte: Yeah, and it is. But I think history is a study I could be really happy with, because I find it very interesting and very important. But what kind of…. And I think doctor is a job I could like in a way. The study itself isn’t that interesting to me, but what I like about it in a way, is the profession. (...)
In this story, I am the one instigating the negotiation between “getting a job”, and “doing what interests you”, by confronting Lotte with an earlier statement. When debating what she wants to do, Lotte asks the question of what line of direction will get her a job. When I bring up her earlier statement about the importance of doing what interests her, she changes her position slightly, stating that she thinks she might find the profession interesting, just not the study. This allows the story to contain both the value of “getting a job”, and “following your interests”.

Rakel has told me a lot about her passion for literature, and her thoughts about some of her favourite books. She has also told me that she has applied for the programme for clinical psychology in Denmark. When I ask her why she chose this study, she answered:

Rakel: Well I always loved when we were having about psychology and the human mind in school, sooo. (pause) If I were to study for the dream job, I would probably have taken a master degree in literature. But I feel it would be too hard to get a job with an education like that. And you can always read books in your spare time as well, so…

This account states two motives for choosing psychology. On the one hand it is a subject she always loved in school, and on the other hand it is an education that will not make it too difficult getting a job. Aiming for the dream education would make the “getting a job”, too risky. The value of following ones’ dreams become apparent even though it is not given to be the main motivation for her choice. She does state to be really interested in psychology, even though it is not her biggest dream. The blow to the value of following ones’ dream is softened/ negotiated in the story, as the main passion is not abandoned; it can always be entertained in one’s spare time.

Illeris et. al. (2009) identifies, in accordance with the theories of individualization, an increased risk accompanying choice (p.86). Beck understands this risk in relation to the loss of “class”. Beck claims, that the risk of choice is elevated, as the ramifications of these choices are only made relevant to the individual, as opposed to a social group (Beck:2000,147). I make no claims to the validity of this societal description, as my data gives me no grounds to so, and nor were they meant to. However, avoiding risks seems to be a valid point of orientation when making sense of important choices. Illeris et. al., accepts this premise of elevated risk, and claim it is accompanied by an increased focus on being realistic: “De vilde drømme bliver i stigende grad sorteret fra, og de unge orienterer sig mere mod det,
de finner fornuftig og sikkert (…)” (Illeris et.al: 2009,86). This value seemed to be mirrored in many of my informant’s stories, and rather explicitly so in the next story given by Anna.

4.1.3 The risk of following your dreams

In the “battle” between “doing what is sensible” and “following dreams”, the latter appears to be losing. This next account can perhaps contribute to an understanding of why this is, why following dreams is portrayed as risky. I ask Anna about her likes and dislikes, and what her “dream day” would look like. In the line of her answering she states very clearly that it is important to her that what she is doing engages her, is fun and catches her interest. These statements could be associated with the “following dreams”- narrative. However, it is not as easy as all that.

Victoria: And what usually engages you?
Anna: I’m usually engaged by math, chemistry and physics (pause). So you might ask why I don’t choose to study that (laughs a little)
Victoria: Yeah, because you have made up your mind?
Anna: I’m so conflicted about that! But the thing is, in Norway everybody is like: Follow your dreams, and yada yada yada. But I view it as extremely risky to enter a study where it’s pretty hard to get a real job. (…) And to do something because it engages you… (pause) In my experience, engagement can disappear, and then you’re stuck. So I view it as very risky, in my own case. So there are very many reasons for, and very many reasons against studying medicine, but I’m not like really passionate about it (pause), at all. It’s more because of the stability in having such a serious and steady education.

Anna comments directly on the perceived cultural narrative of following dreams (and yada yada yada), and confronts it with the perceived risk of complying to this value. She comments on the risk involved in pursuing an education that would make it hard to get a “real job”, and the risk of losing the interest responsible for making her follow her dreams. This delegitimization of the value of following dreams, can be viewed as an attempt to negotiate the described conflict between the two values – “following dreams” and “doing what is sensible”. Pursuing a career because of the stability and seriousness it provides, as opposed to the passion it invokes, is in this narrative made legitimate, as the passion may be nothing more than an expression of a fleeting interest that might be lost at any time.

Taylor and Bauman both describe the notion of a core self, as essential to the individualistic culture. The value of following dreams, defining yourself independently of
external authority, and “finding your own way in life”, is by Taylor described as a continuation of the 17th century’s romantic philosophy of the self. The self was viewed as something only the individual himself could define and express (Taylor:2013,39-44). Anna says she is reluctant to follow her passion on account of it being perceived as something fleeting. This could be understood as a detachment of the value of following dreams, from an understanding of the self as an authentic core. The romantic narrative understands dreams and passions as expressions of who one really is, here lays the logical, and moral incentive to follow such dreams. Anna’s story does not seem to recognise such a connection, thus removing the moral source which render “following dreams” a value. However, the dream narrative still seems to have some influence in her stories. In a later part of the interview, I ask Anna what is the biggest difference between the kind of jobs she describe she does not want, and her dream job – her answer clarifies the difficulty with expressing that the choice she is likely to make, is not the path that leads to the ultimate dream.

Anna: The fact that I would be working with something I wanted to do, something I could do in my spare time as well. It wouldn’t be a job really, I would just be doing what I wanted to do. But as I’ve said I’m choosing not to go in that direction, and for good reasons. So perhaps it’s wrong to call it my dream job, but, yeah, it’s a complicated term.

The complicated character of the term “dream job”, seem to stem from the circumstance that it in these stories conflicts with the value of doing the sensible thing, or avoiding risk. As Anna chooses to go in another direction than the one that is motivated by her passion an interest, she is reluctant to term it her “dream job”. This might indicate that the dismissal of the value of “following dreams”, might not be that easy, even though conflicting values are readily acknowledged.

Cremin (2007) reasons that there exist a modern demand to enjoy one-self (p.534). Enjoyment is explained in terms resembling the narrative of “following dreams”. Cremin argues that this narrative serves to confirm the subject’s identity as authentic and fully human, as opposed to being an “(...) enterprising machine calibrated to maximise career and lifestyle opportunities.” (Cremin:2007,531). Following this logic, the significance of the narrative of “following dreams”, lays in it allowing for the individual to identify as such; a whole human who is not completely dictated by external circumstances. All though heavily challenged, it seems as this value is one that is hard for the informants to dismiss entirely.
Values of following dreams could easily be recognised as corresponding with how society is explained in theories of individualization. Modern society is described as leaving personal preferences as the only available guide for action, as well as fronting a requirement to be true to one’s authentic self (Beck:2000; Bauman:2000; Giddens:1991; Taylor:2013; Taylor:1989). However, this class of motives hardly ever seemed to be allowed to carry a choice alone, and in the instances they did, they often were accompanied by statements reducing their legitimacy. After Cecilia told me about all the fun, new things she was going to experience she added, in a tone of laconic irony: “Really just feed the ego with a lot of cool impressions.” Or as was Anna’s first statement when I asked her what she wanted to do on her trip: “Just have fun, if it’s allowed to say that?”.

Making choices that are in accordance with who you really are, reflecting authentic wishes and dreams, is, as has been showed in the theory chapter, in theories of individualization, closely related to an idea of the autonomous self, who is defined by internal, as opposed to external influences. It does however seem like these values are being challenged by that of avoiding the risk. These stories do not seem to reflect values associated with the breaking of boundaries, or aiming for self-expression on the cost of, or regardless of the community. Quite the opposite; this line of reasoning implies that avoiding risk includes a secure footing in an established social order. So where does that leave the claim to modern autonomy? The value of autonomy is frequently reflected in modern society (Côté:2006); in the educational system, in political discourse and commercials. Does it, in relation to these stories, make most sense to understand this as an external value, that has no real consequence as a narrative giving meaning and language to self-understanding and choice?

No, is the easy answer. The complicated answer follows below, as I attempt to reflect a nuanced understanding of the value of autonomy, as it was identified in the stories of my informants. As has been explained previously, the value of following dreams is assumed to be based on a conviction of a core self that reflects who one “really” is. This assumption of the self, as well as the language that generates it, has deep roots in religious ontological explanations of reality (Taylor:1989). Accepting such a belief can be viewed as taking a leap of faith, as it entails believing in an ontological explanation that cannot be observed or measured. As the next strand of narratives reveals, my informants seemed highly reluctant to make such leaps of faith.
4.2 The Scientific, Sceptical Mind

Traditionally, Taylor claims, the nature of things has been decided by its placement in the whole. For example, the choice of a profession being understood as an expression of placement in a socio-economic hierarchy, as opposed to being an expression of who that person is. The choice is made understandable, and meaningful without reference to the surrounding world. There is a separation between subject and object, where the one now can be seen as independent of the other (Taylor:1989,188). Where the community used to form a solid background, an a prior reality, it has now fallen dependent on individual consent (Taylor:1989,93). The individual will accept no external authority to itself, that it has not given its consent to.

These circumstances put great emphasis on individual autonomy and ability to understand oneself (Taylor:1989,194). As the emphasis has been laid on personal autonomy and denying external authority, we today, according to Taylor, have problems articulating our reasons for moral. Moral sources have been, and still are imparted culturally through the telling of stories. Modern society however is reluctant to recognize these, and for good reasons. Cultural stories have the ability to convey meaning and substance to human living. This power is exactly what causes modern man to be sceptical towards them, as they may be, and have been used to create extremely destructive narratives (Taylor:1989,97). This perspective could be translated into a cultural narrative of only accepting that which is known to be real, as well as informing the importance of being sceptical towards external authorities and moral evaluations.

4.2.1 Moral aversion

In the excerpts below, Cecilia is exhibiting distrust towards morally founded assessments. When discussing politics, Cecilia states that she has issues with a political party on account of a particular trait in their line of reasoning.

Cecilia: I have a hard time with their value conservatism, or like their moral ethical approach to things. Moral as an argument, I have a hard time liking that.

Victoria: What is it that you don’t like about that?
Cecilia: The fact that you don’t have arguments that is based on science or experience, as much as you just say: “that is wrong”. (...) I feel there is a lot of moralism, or like: “It is like it is, because that’s what it’s like”. There is not really an argument, it’s just really empty.

Cecilia tells me how moral is insufficient as argument given its tautological nature – “It is like it is, because that’s what it’s like.”, as opposed to knowledge and argument contrived from science. The story explains the shortcoming of moral by its opposite – science. Science could here be understood as based in fact, whereas moral operates more in the realm of fiction and emotion. The value of moral scepticism, marks a resistance against making moral claims, as moral is considered something that cannot be trusted. Giddens claim that moral has lost footing in high modernity. He reasons that with the loss of tradition follows the loss of moral as an intrinsic aspect of living. Moral which, according to Giddens, is the opposite of modernity’s risk principle, requires a binding commitment, which the modern climate does not allow for. In addition to this, moral provide resistance against change, and whatever has the flair of “new” about it, a quality that is not compliant with modernity as it is described by Giddens (1991,145).

Again, I would like to make clear that this analysis, all though utilizing theory referring to a systemic, societal level, is not making inferences to this level. Still following Taylor’s (1989) reasoning, I suggest that concepts like the “loss of tradition”, in order to be made relevant, would have to be accompanied by a value informing a dismissal of tradition as a legitimate source of meaning, or perhaps a value that suggest a compliance to its opposite; that which Giddens describes as “the flair of new”. In Cecilia’s story, there is nothing to suggest a favouring of “the new” by its own merits. However, the story echoes what could be considered a declaiming of tradition. Cecilia says she has problems with value conservatism, and tautological arguments stating that things should be a certain way because that is the way they are. This way of reasoning, that Cecilia contradicts, could easily be associated with a reasoning that finds its moral source in tradition. In this manner, Cecilia’s story could be seen as demonstrating that tradition is not “simply lost” on an objective level, it is actively devaluated on a subjective, narrative level.

When I ask Lotte if she can tell me about something that provoked her she says:

Lotte: (...) I read, there was someone who committed suicide because he was bullied at school. Then the writer of Nemi was asked to come to the school and make a speech in honour of that student, but instead she wrote a very angry letter, saying that she wouldn’t talk to these horrible teachers and students who had drove this person to suicide. I was provoked by that because I view
situations like that to be so much more complicated. It was incredibly unfair to throw that at the students and teachers when the situation probably was so complex. Of course I understand her, I have been bullied myself, and I see it as a very complicated situation where it’s not good and evil, it’s not good and bad. (...).

In this story, Lotte seems hesitant to draw clear lines between good and bad, so as to make a moral distinction. What is described as preventing her from doing so, is the recognition of the complexity of the situation. When she continues to elaborate on this, she talks about the intricate system of different roles, and lack of insight into personal conduct in terms of bullies not recognising the ramification of their own actions. Handing out guilt, in this story, seems to be equated with simplifying the situation. Another way to understand this is that moral judgments would require a division between good and bad that is not found in reality. Reality is complex, while the image that would allow for moral judgement is simplified, and therefore artificial. When I ask her if she feels that anyone is responsible for her being bullied, she answers:

Lotte: That depends on what you mean by “responsibility”. In my eyes responsibility is just a concept we construct in order to make people do things. Not necessarily consciously, but it is a manipulation of people by playing on their feeling of responsibility. It doesn’t really exist, it’s not like you actually have responsibility for a child. Like, what does that even mean, who in the world can say that?

Here, Lotte continues to reject moral evaluations, this time in the form of responsibility. The reason she gives is that responsibility is a construction, it is not real. One might have feelings of responsibility, but for them to be recognized as actual, they would have to correspond with something external as something you “actually have”. In other words, the feeling of responsibility would have to be generated from a source outside the individual to gain status as more than emotional projections that allow for manipulation. This source would have to give this feeling a position in a moral order. That is to say a moral order that could dictate that acting upon feelings of responsibility is the right thing to do; i.e. that you actually have responsibility, but as Lotte timely asks: “who in the world can say that?”. This question indicates a lacking recognition of moral authority, that would allow for clear moral evaluations by providing a scale these evaluations could be understood in relation to.

Giddens argues that in previous times, moral codes provided a fixated point of orientation, a legitimate ethical standard, that allowed for exploration of behaviour, without
the fear of getting lost. If you did something wrong, you would know what it was. Modern man on the other hand, left to his inner referential system, would have no such luck, a circumstance that brings about uncertainty and doubt (Giddens:1991,153). Bauman describes the claimed decline of moral in terms of absolute emancipation, allowing (and demanding) each individual to decide, without normative restrictions, what to do with themselves: “If there are no wrong moves, there is nothing to distinguish a move as a better one, and so nothing to recognize the right move (...)” (Bauman:2000,63). Modern man, according to Bauman, struggles to answer questions that would separate right from wrong. A way to see this is that modern culture has, by the means of the individualized ideals, supressed these answers’ legitimate anchoring in a frame of social culture.

Lotte certainly seems to exercise great scepticism towards moral and ethical standards as a fixated point of orientation. But there is no sign of the uncertainty and doubt described by Bauman (2000) and Giddens (1991). On the contrary they are composed in a manner that conveys both certainty and conviction. This makes sense if it is understood in relation to an ideal of the autonomous self, informing a resistance against external moral authority, as opposed to a complete lack of normative guidance leaving one doubtful and uncertain. More than being lost, it seems, moral is denied.

### 4.2.2 When nothing can be known

If ambivalence and uncertainty was not present in Lotte’s stories, it is in this next story told by Anna. As far as commenting on the lack of a moral scale, no one does this more explicitly than Anna in the following story. Here, it leads to a questioning of whether there even exists such a thing as right and wrong. When I ask Anna if she has a life philosophy she lives by she tells be that she dislikes the concept of “belief” (tro). When I ask her why, she tells me that: “I dislike it because you can’t (pause), there is really no difference in what you believe in as long as it is based on belief, then it’s just something you believe in without, like, it could just as well have been []” (Anna).

Here Anna draws a causal link between her feelings about “believes” and their inconsequential nature. Anna describe all believes as equal, and therefore equally insufficient, and as a consequence she states that she dislikes the concept. Her statement, before I interrupt her, looks as it is connoting that any belief in principle could replace another, as it, regardless of what it contains, never can be any more than “just something you believe in”. However, the
scope of experiences that are relegated to the realm of “believes” are quite substantial in Anna’s case, something that is made clear when I ask her:

Victoria: [] As opposed to having evidence, you mean, or?
Anna: Yeah, only I don’t regard evidence as a very proper expression, (talking to herself) how do I put this? There’s almost no way I can know anything for sure, there is nothing I know. And, you know the old saying: ‘the only thing I know is that I don’t know anything”, but I don’t even know that. It’s a paradox, but, yeah.

Similar to what Cecilia did in the first story rendered under this headline, I, in my question, polarise “believes” with “evidence”, a premise Anna challenges. She then continues to explain the logical consequences of this: There is almost no way she can know anything for sure, not even that she doesn’t know anything for sure.

From the perspective of Giddens (1991) and Beck (2000), one could say that Anna portrays a subjection of the scientific premises to the all-permeating doubt. Evidence is not considered legitimate in this story. As described by Beck and Giddens, it was believed that methodological doubt would provide accumulating certainty, i.e. evidence. When Anna claims to question the legitimacy of evidence, and indeed any certain knowledge, one can in terms of Beck and Giddens, interpret this as an expression of the method of doubt being applied on the method of doubt, making its generated knowledge uncertain (Giddens:1991,21; Beck:2000,264-302). Anna goes on to explain how, when nothing is certain, nothing can make out a stable foundation for moral assessments. Therefore, this described resistance against accepting any knowledge as certain could be seen in relation to the value of the critical thinker, which will be treated independently later. The next excerpt also illustrates how the value of the critical thinker can be understood in relation to moral aversion.

(…) So that’s the big problem, without believing in something, how can you know what is right and wrong, how can you know what is good and evil, how can you act morally? And it’s a really big problem. In my head it’s just that, that I have no idea what is right and wrong. That was a really big existential crisis for me, so, I don’t believe in right and wrong. Lucky for me, my feelings are pretty similar to most people around me, so I can fit into society even though I don’t believe that what I’m thinking is right. For example, I really hate torture, like, it sickens me to my bone marrow, or whatever you call it, but that doesn’t mean that I believe torture is wrong. I mean, how in the world (laughter in her voice) can I claim that I know what is wrong just because I feel that it’s wrong? I can’t believe by feelings, cause my feelings just lie (…). (Anna)
Anna claims that she does not believe in anything, and therefore cannot believe in or know what is right or wrong, subsequently, all she has to go by is her feelings. She describes strong physiological responses to torture, but none the less, these are just feelings and cannot be trusted to revile what is right or wrong, or if such a distinction even exists.

As was shown in the theory chapter, Taylor (1989) claims that moral questions are answered through moral horizons which individuals understand themselves in relation to. When Anna says that she does not believe in anything, it can, in Taylors terminology, be understood as a lack of a moral horizon. Taylor’s implications of lacking trust in moral horizons corresponds with Anna’s description of the consequences of lacking believes: she says she does not know what is right or wrong – there is no recognised horizon to answer moral questions.

However, according to Taylor, rejecting moral judgments is itself a moral position, and a typically modern one to boot. Through repealing the division between right and wrong, one has already made what Taylor would call a qualitative distinction. That is to say, you are rendering one kind of life, namely one where the distinction between right and wrong is repealed, better than another kind of life, namely one where it is not. Although supressed or even denied, still according to Taylor, the poster-way of modern living, entails in it an ideal of what kind of life one ought to be living, and what kind of humans one ought to be. This ideal did not just appear one morning in the dawn of modernity, it is, despite its own claims, narratively transmitted as social dialogue (Taylor:1989). This is described as the ideal of the autonomous self. I have argued that this ideal contribute to what has been described as the epistemological fallacy, as it seems to entail a delegitimizing of external, socially anchored moral standards. In Anna’s story, the dismissal of moral standards leads to her questioning the concept of moral all together.

Anna does not only question the content of right versus wrong, she questions the very distinction between right and wrong, or to be more precise, she states that she does not believe in it. The existence of such moral distinctions are experienced as thoughts and strong feelings, but in her description, she cannot accept them to be true, as her thoughts and feelings cannot be trusted: “I mean, how in the world can I claim that I know what is wrong just because I feel that it’s wrong?”. This statement can readily be understood as Anna describing lacking conviction that her moral experiences correlates with a reality external to her; her feelings are certainly not held to be proof of such a correlation:
(...) So basically my life philosophy is that at the moment I can’t find (pause), can’t like the concept belief. I can’t reach, I can’t allow myself to think that the things that I think is right, because how the hell, like statistically there is never any likelihood that I am right about anything. So I just live by my feelings because they don’t allow me to do anything else. For me, it would be too painful to go kill someone. That doesn’t mean that I think it’s wrong to kill, but I will stand for that it is wrong to kill, simply to protect myself. The reword system in my brain just makes it that way. (Anna)

Anna sums up her answer as she returns to my original question about her life philosophy, which is described as a dismissal of believes. She does not believe her feelings, but says she lives by them to avoid the pain it would cost to ignore them. In this account, moral is dismissed as a reward system in her brain that just “makes it that way”.

At two occasions in this story, Anna makes a comment about the dual nature of moral. There is the physiological response to, in Anna’s example, torture, and then there is the interpretation of this response, which in Anna’s instance is described as refused. Taylor (1989) makes a similar distinction. Taylor explains moral judgments as a dual process. On the one hand, it entails an instinctive emotional response, which may be a result of evolutionary development that has given its hosts a social advantage. On the other hand, it also entails an ontological articulation, an explanation of these responses which says why, and in what context these responses are morally justified. The modern, naturalist strand of thinking is highly sceptical of such ontological explanations, and their generated moral frameworks, implying that we can, and must do without them. Since we do not know how the world should be, we must make do with how it is, thus refraining from making moral evaluations.

However, according to Taylor, the naturalist reduction of moral responses does not recognize the inevitable character of qualitative distinctions. Humans, as explained earlier, are dependent on such distinctions in order to ascribe meaning to their actions and life, to understand others as well as themselves. More so, the naturalist approach does not recognize itself making the exact same qualitative distinctions as it is trying to avoid. Circling around ontological explanations is in itself a recommendation of a point of view that is regarded as better than other point of views. It is advocating a way of life that could not be exchanged with any other way of life – the naturalistic approach is itself morally founded (Taylor:1989,23). Anna’s story could be viewed as reflecting this strand of thinking, denying such ontological explanations.

Closely associated with moral aversion, both in the stories of my informants, and theories of individualization, is the recognised value of the critical thinker. Both the stories
organized under “moral aversion”, and “critical thinker”, seemed to be anchored in their opposition to external authority, a tendency I here presume to be informed by the ideal of the autonomous self.

4.2.3 The critical thinker

The ideal of the critical thinker, and that of moral scepticism, can be viewed as collaborating narratives. They could both be understood as expressions of the naturalist strand of individualization, rejecting external moral authority, as it is described by Taylor and was rendered previously. Reber (2016,29) comments on the fact that critical thinking is a broadly accepted ideal in the western world, heavily advocated by its education systems. The potential problem of critical thinking, he claims, is that it has no natural stopping-point. It could, potentially, go on for ever, making the act of taking stances and making decisions very difficult. The stories of both Anna and Lotte under the previous headline, could, as well as expressions of moral scepticism, be viewed as reflecting the value of such “never-ending” critical thinking.

In the stories of moral skepticism, moral was referred to in terms of being manipulating constructions, the opposite of evidence and fact, empty and tautological. In the following stories, critical thinking is, to a large part, described as what will counteract such, and similar threats. Preceding the following story, I ask Beatrice if there was anything in the public sphere that particularly engaged her. She responds with discussing her views on politics, and how her parents have influenced her. Beatrice: “Uhm, yeah, so I’ve probably been a bit brainwashed. But at the same time I’m very critical about it, I see both sides really, really well.” Here, critical thinking is associated with being able to recognize a complex reality. Beatrice admits to being colored by her parents in her political inclinations. However, this statement is immediately nuanced by her claim to being very critical about it, which leads her to see both sides. In this story, critical thinking is described as the quality that keeps Beatrice from completely adopting her parents’ political position, and thus making up her own opinion.

Cecilia also talks about the value of critical thinking in relation to being able to see different perspectives, all though Cecilia more clearly draws a causal link between the two. This is what Cecilia answers when I ask her if she has a life philosophy, or a way she thinks it is wise to live her life by.
Cecilia: If I’m to mention something that recurs in my way of thinking, it would be that you should be skeptical to everything you hear. (…) Victoria: What is so important about being skeptical of everything you hear, what could happen if you aren’t? Cecilia: (pause) You can miss out on seeing different sides of an issue. You might think that the things you’re told are actually true, and more often than not, I would claim, they aren’t true. I have experienced so many times that things aren’t true, or that they’re distorted, or bias, or that they’re told for a specific purpose. (…) Like: “why is this person saying this? Is this person trying to accomplish something?” And it doesn’t even have to be on purpose. Just be skeptical, just think for yourself, just like, yeah, think for yourself.

Cecilia says that it is crucial to practice critical thinking, on the pending cost of not seeing different sides of an issue, being tricked, missing important information, and being made instrument of someone else’s will. She further emphasizes the individual’s ability to expose those external influences as untrue, by the instrument of critical thinking.

Lotte also leans on what can be understood as a critical line of thinking, when she, on my suggestion, explains why she herself is not religious when her family is.

Lotte: (…) Well, in Norway we have the opportunity to seek out information ourselves. So whether your parents are Christians or Muslims or whatever, you have access to the information you need to make a choice for yourself. (…)

Although Lotte does not comment on critical thinking explicitly, it might be considered an underlying moral narrative. She states that she herself has not adopted the religion of her parents, as she has had the opportunity to seek out and compare relevant information, as to make an informed choice in accordance with her own convictions. Again, the value of critical thinking can be viewed as informed by the ideal of autonomy. The link between critical thinking, and not blindly adhering to authority is elaborated when Lotte goes on to talk about her Christian confirmation. I ask her if there were any themes in the confirmation classes she found interesting, or that she learned something from.

Lotte: We talked about a lot of interesting things, but everything had an incredibly stupid perspective, if you ask me. Everything was seen through the eyes of the bible, and, like now, when I think about it it’s just appalling, if you ask me. To base your thinking on a book that is 2000 years old, and written by humans, it says that itself, it’s written by humans, that’s just completely insane. It’s not because of faith or anything, but that’s just dogmatic. It’s just a lot of rules, and no reason to have them, or no rational reason to have them. So it’s really just about submission,
you’re asked not to think for yourself. (…) It’s all a bit braindead. You get served the way to live your life on a silver platter.

Lotte talks about the insanity of abiding by the 2000-year-old rules found in the bible, as there is no rational reason to do so – it is all “a bit braindead”. Here, rationality can be viewed as the factor that will counteract blind obedience to dogmatism, and thus allow the individual to make independent choices about her own life. Lotte makes an interesting, though brief distinction between faith and the dogmatic rules of the bible. She never elaborates on this distinction, but faith might be considered something personal and private, whereas the dogmatic character of the bible may be understood as a set of extrinsic rules that apply for all. The first, subsequently, is accepted, the latter is not.

Emma makes a similar distinction between faith and religion. She tells me she believed in God as a child, but growing up, she wanted to find out if it was something she really believed in. Her Christian conformation is described as a way of figuring this out. Emma does exactly what Lotte indicates that she did; she sought out information, and made a choice for herself.

Emma: And really, the more I read about religion in general, the more I opposed it. Not necessarily the faith, faith may be a good thing to have. (…) It’s not the faith I’m rejecting, it’s the religion, in a way. (…) I’m not saying it’s wrong to believe things that is written in the bible, but I think religion in general is hard to relate to, in a way. (…) I think it brings with it a lot of negative things, to concretize something that is so vague to begin with.

The sensation of faith from childhood was described as insufficient grounds for choice of religious orientation. The confirmation is given to be a source of information that would serve to investigate her feeling of God. I would argue that this approach to religion is informed by the ideal of autonomy, and the value of critical thinking. Emma’s described opposition to religion does not extend to faith. After dismissing religion, she modifies her statement by excepting faith from this rejection.

All the stories submitted here can be considered as illustrating of how critical thinking may work as “defense line”, guaranteeing autonomy in the face of external influences. However, this was not always the case. When I asked Anna what traits she appreciated with people in general, she quite simply stated: “I really like it when people are criti…skeptical. I regard that to be a really good quality. (…)”.
I understand that the stories rendered here are informed by a cultural ideal of the autonomous self. This ideal seems to be supported by a scientific approach to life, entailing values of opposing external moral authority, and critical thinking. These are explained as qualities that will keep the individual from being fooled, used or brainwashed, and permits her to make up her own mind – as opposed to adopting someone else’s.

4.3 Self-Responsibility

I have so far exemplified what I understand to be stories informed by the cultural ideal of the autonomous self, through two lines of narratives. I argue that both lines demonstrate this value through resisting external influences. In the first line of stories, this was ambiguously done, as the autonomous self who follows her own dreams, were challenged by the value of avoiding risk, and doing what is sensible. However, it might speak to the strength of this value, that “following one’s dreams” seemed to be hard to dismiss, even when different classes of motivation were explicitly given. I relate the seemingly reluctance to base choices on dreams, to the second strand of narrative “the scientific mind”. Here, resisting external influences was visible through the denial of moral evaluations, as moral can only make sense through the acceptance of an external standard (Bauman:2000,61). Critical thinking was described as the stance protecting the individual from being manipulated by external influences. In the strand of narrative rendered here, resistance against external influence is demonstrated by their devaluation. In these stories, it is the individual who has the power, the responsibility and the right to determine who to be and what to do.

4.3.1 Because I want to

In the following, the ideal of autonomy is understood as informing a willingness to accept personal responsibility; rendering personal willpower, consent and abilities as the crucial factors to any outcome. First up is Emma.

Victoria: Do you have a life philosophy, or a way you think it is wise to live your life?
Emma: No, I don’t think I have any, like, slogans for myself, like: “This is the way I am going to live my life”. But I think perhaps I have many things that I relate to quite categorically because I want to.
Before she explains to me what her life philosophies are, she points out why it is she relates to them – because she wants to. It seems to be insufficient to simply state her guidelines, without also making clear where these guidelines find their authority, namely in herself. In the next story, Anna also seems to emphasize that she does what she does because she wants to. Here, I ask her to mention one thing she is not so found of about our society.

Anna: One thing I don’t like so much (talking to herself). I am very hypocritical when it comes to this, but every time I buy clothes… It’s like, on the one hand, I really want nice clothes, but on the other hand it’s incredibly materialistic and unsustainable. (laughs) I’m in constant war with myself. And I hate myself for it, but I always end up buying clothes, so it’s really hypocritical. I don’t consider it to be a sustainable way to live, having as many things as we do. But as I said; hypocritical, because I still buy them.

Victoria: Right, so on the one hand, society stage for consumption, and on the other hand it’s like []

Anna: [] And I want to do it! But on the other hand I don’t view it as sustainable.

Up to this point, Anna had very consistently told stories, seemingly reflecting very individualized values. When I suggest to Anna that her consumption-habits is a result of her society’s culture, I wanted to see if different values could be reviled, when framing the questions in a different manner – but Anna did not take the bait. This story can partly be understood as a case of dis-identification (Cremin:2007,530), as Anna describes herself as a hypocrite in relation to certain choices, explaining that these are not coherent with her actual values. As such, these choices are related in a manner that does not allow for an identification with them. In my second question, I offer Anna an opportunity to “share” some of the responsibility for her claimed hypocrisy, with society (which I regarded to be a rather inconspicuous distribution of responsibility). Anna does not take this opportunity, but instead interrupt me, pointing out that these choices are a result of her will. This could indicate that even though she states that she hates herself for making the “wrong” choices, this is preferred to understanding these choices as being influenced by external factors. One could say that the moral of the story is that you may make the “wrong” choice, as long as it is your own. As such, the account seems to relate to the value of self-responsibility.

This value also appeared valid in stories revolving around other peoples’ choices. Emma has previously indicated that she thinks diversity is something valuable. Here I ask her to elaborate on this. She confirms that she for the main part thinks it is an asset, although there
are some challenges. Here she talks about how she experienced those challenges in junior high.

Emma: (…) lots of the people who didn’t identify as Norwegians were second or third generation immigrants, so I was like: “What?” I didn’t say that, but I was thinking, like: “But you are Norwegian!”, but obviously you get to choose that for yourself.

Emma says she had clear perceptions about what nationality these second and third generation immigrants had, and thus it would be natural for them to identify with. When they did not, she reports responding with disbelief, that she none the less kept to herself. Despite having strong opinions on the matter, they are described as being obviously trumped by the right to choose for oneself what to identify with.

4.3.2 It all depends on you

In the previous story, Emma’s external evaluation, is stripped of authority in the meeting with autonomous choice. This also seemed to be the case in stories evolving around a traditionally more recognized provider of external authority. Beatrice tells me about her experiences at camp for Christian confirmation, as I ask her if she found any of the teachings interesting.

Beatrice: (…) it was kind of lame. I remember the camp leaders, very happy Christians (glad-kristene) many of them, were sharing their stories of how they became Christian. And I remember rolling my eyes inside of me and thinking, like: this is a bit (gesticulates in a manner that implies far-fetched, or a bit too much).

Victoria: Ok, what about it didn’t you like?
Beatrice: I didn’t like the idea of putting your faith in someone else’s hands. And like, that what happens to you is thanks to him. It’s a bit like, you yourself are responsible. It’s you, you can’t thank him for everything that happens, thank yourself. (…) And there was this one girl who told us that she became a Christian because she really wanted to get into some school, and so she had prayed really hard to God, like: “Please dear God, if you exist, let me get into that school”. And then the next day she got told that she had been admitted. And then she got her religious epiphany and became a Christian. And I looked at her and was like: “I think you got in because you did good, I don’t think it was because God wanted you to get into that school”. But of course, everyone has different reasons.
Victoria: Is that something you think is important, taking responsibility, or like, giving yourself credit when you accomplish something?
Beatrice: Yeah, absolutely! I don’t think you can learn much if you all the time put responsibility on other people. Like in high school, if you get bad grades, you can’t put the responsibility on someone else. It’s you who’s there, you just have to do the best you can do, it depends on you.

Here Beatrice states an uneasiness with putting her fate in the hands of a higher power. Beatrice reasons that if you do not take responsibility for your action, you will not learn anything – “it all depends on you”. In addition, Beatrice relays a clear scepticism towards external moral authority, as far as she doesn’t want to lay her faith in its hands.

Another interesting aspect of both this story, and Emma’s story preceding it, is that both of them report having clear opinions, but also keeping these opinions to themselves in the relevant situations. Emma claimed that she expressed her disbelief internally, and likewise, Beatrice states that she rolled her eyes on the inside. This might be a further indication of the recognition of the individual’s supreme right to decide for himself who to be and what to believe in. Further, this value seems to create an interesting predicament in Beatrice’s story. The ideal of autonomy can be seen as both informing an opposition to the world view underlying the camp leader’s story, and informing an acceptance of the camp leader’s right to believe as she did, leading Beatrice to conclude: “But of course, everyone has different reasons.”.

Bauman claims that in a culture valuing autonomy to the extent found in high modernity, the responsibility, as well as the choices, are individualized. One may take advice from each other, sharing experiences and copying examples, but the responsibility for every advice taken, as with every example copied, will eventually fall upon the individual (Bauman:2000,30). When I asked my informants about both victories and failures, the majority of the answers seemed to revolve around personal, as opposed to external qualities. I asked Emma what she thought was in place, for her to be able to reach as many of her academic goals as she did.

Emma: Well, I made a decision. (…) And I’ve gotten good studying habits because I have dyslexia, so I have had to work maybe twenty percent more than others. And that gives you that: “There is no excuse.” It’s kind of like, if you want to do it, you can do it. (…) I have had really good guidance all the time, and not everybody has that. But at the same time I think it’s a bit, like, it’s not going to say on your rapport card that you have dyslexia. No one is going to know, and no one needs to know either if you just work hard enough. So it’s kind of like, I just made a decision.
Like Beatrice, Emma emphasize that good results come from hard work and personal abilities. In Emma’s story there are descriptions of two external influences; the dyslexia, and the guidance she has received in relation to it. None of them are given much power in the story. Those external factors can all be made irrelevant by the body of hard work, and the power of personal decision-making. It is up to, and in the power of the individual to decide her own destiny. The wording in this question was very deliberate. By asking “what do you think needed to be in place”, as opposed to for example “how do you think you were able to accomplish those results”, I aimed at avoiding priming for personal resources that might follow the “how do you think you were able to”. By asking what needed to be in place, the idea was to make associations to factors outside personal resources more available. None the less, personal resources in the form of hard work, wit and determination, amongst others, by far made out the central reason when accounting for results when this question was asked.

Diana told a similar story when answering what she thinks needs to be in place in order for her to be happy about her future:

Diana: Work and everything, that’s like entirely on my shoulders. And of course, the house I want depend on what kind of economy I’ve got. And if I have a husband and child, that depends on me. Like, the family part could be a bit coincidences, I think. But when it comes to economy and career, that’s entirely on my shoulders. And that’s ok, that’s just the way it is.

Explanations by personal resources was very common, also in the cases where performance was considered lacking. In those cases, some informants used phrases like “lack of self-discipline” (Cecilia), “choosing the fun path” (Beatrice), and so on. Here, I ask Emma about the subjects in high school that didn’t interest her.

Emma: (…) I was like mediocre at it. If I had been a bit more interested I could have probably done alright. But in a way it was just… I wasn’t interested, and I got annoyed with myself because I wasn’t able to just: “Hello!” (gesticulating in a manner implying: “get it together”), like I did in all the other subjects. You know, just: “This isn’t fun, but you just do it anyway”. So I ended up getting a four. The irritating part was that I could probably have applied myself more.

Although Emma has previously talked about her dyslexia, making it necessary for her to work harder than everybody else, it is not mentioned in relation to what she terms her mediocre achievement. Like was the case with the previous stories, the responsibility for the result lays within her own powers. However, at times these explanations were more complex.
4.3.3 The heavy responsibility

When I ask Cecilia what her motivation was for achieving good grades she answers: “Because it was expected”. She tells me that these expectations stem from her parents. The following excerpt is taken from Cecilia’s elaboration of these expectations.

Cecilia: (…) Uhm, my mum has what I call a “good girl syndrome” (flink pike syndrom), a syndrome that I have inherited, or gotten branded into my head (laughs a little). It’s there, no matter how aware I am of it, I got it, exactly the same, like, exactly the same. I just have to perform in accordance to a scale, the schools’ scale in this case, in order to feel that I’m doing good, or that I’m worth anything. I’m struggling with the same thing, or like, I’m thinking that it’s a problem. (…) And my mum is pretty verbal, it’s not indirect pressure, it’s pretty direct. (…) It’s not like I feel I’ve been damaged by it, but it’s one of my flaws, or one of my things that could be different.

Cecilia’s story states that she is struggling with a “good girl syndrome” that stems from her mother, and that make her dependent on performing in accordance to a scale to maintain her self-worth. Here, her strive for good grades does not reflect any expression of personal desire or motivation. When I earlier asked Cecilia why she thought she had this issue, she described it as a product of early childhood socialisation. In contradiction to the other stories portrayed here, Cecilia describes herself as conditioned by an external power, that has “branded” a set of expectations into her head. This, she tells me, is experienced as a problem.

Cecilia’s conclusion is however interesting as far as understanding who this problem belongs to. Cecilia states that she would prefer this situation to be different; but it is not the school system applying the scales that need to be different, nor is it her mother exerting pressure for her to excel by the terms of those scales – it is herself. By that note, the value of the autonomous, self-dependent, self-responsible individual is made relevant again. As far as it is described as a problem it is her problem, it is one of her flaws that she wishes could be different. In addition, her statement saying that she “does not feel like she has been damaged by it”, can be interpreted as both a devaluation, and an acquittal of those external factors.

The following story can be considered as demonstrating a similar acquittal of external factors, also, it seems, on the expense of the individual. Previously Lotte has told me about her experiences of being bullied as a child, emphasising the complexity of the situation, and an unwillingness to place blame. When I ask her if she considers anyone to be responsible for
the situation, she dismisses the term “responsibility” as a construction, but after long pause, she continues with saying:

Lotte: (…) But I guess it was a combination of me being special, doing perhaps some strange things, being different, wearing strange clothes, and liking strange things. (…) And I developed (pause) a lot of problems, and then it just escalated. (…)

Lotte says she is reluctant to place blame on any external instances for her being bullied, but she does however end up explaining the reasons for her being bullied by terms of her own conduct and appearance.

Like the other stories, these last two seem to convey a reluctance to admitting power to external factors, making the responsibility of their situations their own. According to both Beck (2000) and Bauman (2000), these modern responsibilities are heavy to bear. I would argue that the previous stories support an understanding of the emphasis on personal responsibility, as also being informed by a cultural, moral narrative – even though it might not be recognized as such. That is to say; the lack of emphasis put on external circumstances is not just due to them having been rendered unavailable in modern societies. There seems to be an active disparagement of them by the ideal of the autonomous individual.

I understand the stories under this headline as also portraying an ideal of the autonomous self. I consider that this is done through the emphasis put on the value of being self-responsible. Here, this value is demonstrated by the lack of legitimacy and power given to external influences, and the amount of power granted to personal resources. For the most part, in these stories, this distribution of power does not seem to be related to any negative emotions, such as anxiety, as would be expected when consulting Beck (2000) and Bauman’s (2000) description of this tendency. In most of the stories, personal responsibility seems to be associated with strength and accomplishment. However, although not stated explicitly, some of these accounts also hints to the weight of this responsibility. I find that this is especially the case in the last two stories.

Giving language, understanding and meaning to the modern ideal of the autonomous self, are, according to Taylor, narratives developed from romantic and enlightenment morals (Taylor:1989,319). All though both strands of moral rest upon an assumption of an autonomous self, they are, Taylor claims, in constant conflict with each other in modern western culture. The romantic narrative gives language and meaning to choices of following
dreams, expressing unique individuality and becoming who one really is. The enlightenment narrative, on the other hand, inform choices reflecting rational and sensible thinking, seeing through illusions and criticising authorities (Taylor:1989,316). From the stories of my informants, it seems as though the latter strands of narratives are the prominent ones.

This tendency can perhaps in part be understood through the value of flexibility, as it is visible in the following stories of choosing choice. The romantic idea of the self requires a level of constancy in expression. This ideal entails a notion of the unique and authentic individual that executes his life in accordance with that unique core quality (Taylor:1989,175). However, in this group of informants, the ability to change rather than remaining constant, as an expression of being “true to oneself”, seemed to be sought after.

4.4 Choose Choice

Reflexivity is a central term with both Giddens, Bauman and Beck, but it is applied differently, and at both an individual and an institutional level within all three theories. Bauman’s reflexive individuals are in description closely associated with his general theme; they are liquid. Light modernity is described as not allowing for the heavy forms of tradition and moral. Instead the mark of power is the evasive and flexible individual, ready to change course to follow the rapid currents of modernity at a moment’s notice.

It is now the smaller, the lighter, the more portable that signifies improvement and ‘progress’. Travelling light, rather than holding tightly to things (…) is now the asset of power. Holding to the ground is not that important if the ground can be reached and abandoned at whim (…). (Bauman:2000,13)

I understand this description of reflexivity, as equal to the term flexibility. It is this reflexivity that is the theme of the following pages. In the context of my thesis, the question becomes if, and in what way the value of the mobility and reflexivity – the individual who resists being tied down, appears in my informant’s stories. And how, if at all, can it be understood in relation to the ideal of the autonomous self?

4.4.1 I knew I wanted the choice

When I ask Rakel what kind of job she wants when she finishes her planned studies, she says: “I have firsr been thinking about getting into the course, and then I’ll take it from there”. When I continue to ask her if there is anything within that field she does not want to work with, she
Rakel says she will firstly concentrate on the course, implying she wants to take it one step at the time. Further, she says she do not want to rule out any line of work. This could indicate a value informing that the present do not hold information about the future. When future becomes present, the things that appeared dull might be found interesting.

In the next story, Lotte also seem reluctant to rule out options for the future. I ask her why she thinks she succeeded in getting such good grades as she did in high school. Lotte: “I’ve battled for a long time with what to study, I’ve wanted to study psychology for a long time, but I’ve had a lot of doubts as well, but I knew all along that I wanted the choice.” The choice is here described as the operative ingredient in the motivation for her high grades.

Anna answers in a similar manner when I ask her why she chose the programme she did at high school: “I chose the programme because it was the one that opened up for the most opportunities for later studies.” (Anna) The causal link in this brief story, is made between Anna’s choice of programme, and plurality of later study-opportunities. In essence, one could say, that when asked why she chose as she did, she answered that they chose choice. Bauman explains this tendency in relation to relativity and flexibility. With the cultural emphasis put on freedom of choice, but supplying no standards to rank the quality of that choice, it is the right to choose that is ethically charged. What should be chosen can only the chooser herself choose (Bauman:2000,87).

Following this – that it is chosen, becomes more important than what is chosen. Any given situation will be saluted or criticized, depending on how many options for choice it offers (Bauman:2000,87). Bauman Claims that the only guideline provided is one rising from this value; whatever you choose, it must allow you the flexibility to undo the choice, and choose again. “(…) above all one needs to guard one’s flexibility and speed of readjustment to follow swiftly the changing patterns of the world `out there´.” (Bauman:2000,85). My group of informants seemed to accept the value of being able to swiftly repositioning themselves.

4.4.2 It is never too late to choose again

The emphasis on choice was common amongst my informant’s stories. They typically held high the value of keeping all options open until the last minute, and preferably a bit longer if
possible. This could be viewed as being the case in the next story, as Lotte talks about the subjects she chose away at high school.

Lotte: (...) I wanted to take the subjects I needed and make it a bit easier, so that I could reach my goals. But in hindsight I think I might have achieved my goals even if I took the fun subjects. Then I might have had even more options open if I for some reason wanted to be an engineer or something. But at the same time I have the opportunity to retake those classes and get a second certificate and be accepted with that, so I guess it’s ok.

Looking back, Lotte says she kind of regret the decision she made when she chose away some subjects to make it easier to reach her goals. In the story, she links this regret to the potential loss of possibilities in the future. However, she describes it as ok, as it is always possible to go back and change that choice, so that more choices are made available. Bauman claims that the presence of seemingly endless possibilities generates a feeling of being able to become anyone. The operative word in this context is “becoming” – it is a perpetual, never-ending work, where the making of yourself is always transported to the possibilities still laying ahead of you (Bauman:2000,62).

During the interview, I talked to Lotte about what she dreamt of working with, and what she said she probably would end up working with due to practicalities. In none of those contexts was engineer mentioned. That is to say, engineer was neither described in terms of a personal wish, nor by the value of practical, reasonable choosing. It may seem as the option of being an engineer, is only supported by the value of holding opportunities open for choice. In this way, Lotte’s story recognises the significance of “becoming”. She reflects having information about what she dreams of and what she plans to do. As far as what she might become, that information is held by the future, and is apparently deserving of consideration by its own merits, by keeping options open. This was not exclusive for Lotte’s story. Here I ask Beatrice why she chose away the subjects she did in high school.

Beatrice: Well, you don’t choose away the fun road for the hard road when you don’t even know for sure what you’re going to do next. I mean, you know what you dream about, but you don’t know if you’re actually going to do it. And I’m thinking, like: If I still want to pursue that profession in a year, I can just take the subjects up then.

Beatrice says that since she was not sure what she was going to do after high school, she chose the fun road, which excluded some opportunities. But similar to Lotte, this is described
as not being such a big deal, as she can always go back and take those classes later if she wants to. Bauman claims that without cultural guidelines providing higher goals, the only rational goal available is that of maximising personal satisfaction. Nevertheless, even with this goal set, it is no easy job navigating a land where any decision can be altered at any time, where “Few defeats are final, few if any mishaps irreversible; yet no victory is ultimate either.” (Bauman:2000,62). Bauman notes that the alluring possibility of becoming someone else is always present. That is to say, the `becoming` never meets its final result, “the game goes on”, as Bauman notes.

I am not making any inferences as to the legitimacy of Bauman’s claim to the shortcomings of higher goals, and though it could be claimed to be the case with Beatrice’s story above, maximizing personal satisfaction did not seem to be a prevailing value in my informant’s stories. It does however seem to be a cultural narrative, resembling Bauman’s description of the value of choice, informing their stories – choice seems to be described as a good thing, worth pursuing for its own sake.

### 4.4.3 It will all probably change

In the following story, Anna describes herself as openly relating to the possibility of her might becoming someone else, all though the “alluring” character of this option, as described by Bauman, is not evident. This is what she answers when I ask her if she thinks the journey is going to change her in any way, or make her look at things differently:

Anna: I expect I’m going to change a lot in the course of my life at any rate, but I don’t know if this trip specifically is going to change me. I really just expect that I’m going to change all the time anyway, but I’m open to it. Statistically there is a likelihood I’m going to change if I can say that.

Towards the end of the interview we talk about her landing her dream job, fifteen years down the road. I ask her if she thinks it will be a different kind of job than the one she wants now. In answering this question, Anna’s reasoning is similar to the previous story.

Anna: Absolutely! (…) Probably, like, from a statistical point of view, you change all the… Like, one of the reasons I don’t want a tattoo is that I don’t see it as likely that I want anything that I’m going to want forever.
From a statistical point of view, Anna reasons she is going to change, and subsequently, she won’t require anything that lasts a lifetime. Bauman (2000) claims that while early modernity also entailed rapid movement and change, our forefathers were under the impression that this perpetual movement was directed towards an ultimate goal that would be reached sometime in the future. The project of identity took shape under some kind of recognised telos or ideal that it would eventually match – this is no longer the case (Bauman:2000,28).

In this context, Anna’s story may be seen as testimony to the value of flexibility, and thus expressing reluctance towards anything that would make claims to her identity for a lifetime. If this story was informed by a recognition of an ultimate goal, it would have been possible for Anna to choose, or choose away a tattoo on the grounds of such an ideal. Instead, Anna, in this story, might be seen as choosing it away on the grounds of not accepting an ultimate goal; one that could trump any change of perspective that the future might bring. This makes the recognized value in this story that of being open to change, by the merits of not being “tied” to anything.

Beatrice also states that she is open to the possibility that she might change perspectives. I ask her to elaborate on an earlier statement indicating that she is not very fond of talk surrounding feelings.

Beatrice: When people talk about really deep things it can become a bit sticky in a way, the language. (…) I’ve started to care more about what is here (hits the table), what is around us, not necessarily what is inside of us. But that’s probably going to change. I will probably get that back.

Although Beatrice has earlier conveyed rather strong opinions about digging into feelings, the story is concluded with a statement saying that those opinions will probably change. Beatrice’s story implies that a current perspective is no guarantee for a future perspective. More so, it implies that the trajectory of development is not necessarily accumulative in one direction, she might regain a point of view that used to, but no longer resonates with her – she might “get that back”. In this story, the value of being able to change, could be seen as equally informative as her normative evaluations of “talk about feelings”.

The next story also conveys openness to change and flexibility. I ask Lotte if she has any thoughts about what has to happen, or what she has to do for her future to be as she wants it be.
Lotte: Not like… You could perhaps say: “Then you need have to have the education you need”, but that is really tough, that your entire future is dependent on that one education (…). I can’t work targeted either if I don’t know what the goal is. I like the idea of the path being crated as you walk it (veien blir til mens du går). You can’t always… Like, suddenly I’m pregnant (laughs). That doesn’t mean I’m going to be any less happy, or, like, it may be that that ideal change over the years.

Lotte describes that right now, her attitude is that the best thing to do is to take one step at the time, but that ideal might change as well.

4.4.4 Que sera, sera

In the previous stories, the value of flexibility can be read indirectly, as justification for, or moderation of perspectives and choices. However, similar values were expressed more explicitly as well. I ask Diana if she has any life philosophies, or a way to live her life that she thinks is wise.

Diana: I don’t have a special life philosophy, no. I go a lot back and forth between living in the present and planning for the future. (…) But, yeah, I try to relax, I do. I think it’s important not to stress so much. I try to take one day at the time, even though it’s not always easy. I think perhaps, actually, that’s the most important.

Here, Diana polarise between planning for the future and living in the present, seemingly expressing a preference to the latter. Whilst planning for the future indicates applying present knowledge for future situations, the “taking one day at the time” can be viewed as allowing for the character of the present to set its own terms. Giddens claim that consulting the past to assess the future is no longer available (Giddens:1991,31). Within the premises of this thesis, this translates into: Consulting the past to assess the future does not seem to be the favoured way to go.

Previously, Emma has told me that there are many things that scare her, and that she has challenged herself, and thus overcome her fears. The way she says she has done this echoes Diana’s “taking one day at the time”. A bit later, I ask Emma if this is her attitude about her future: “I’m probably not thinking that I’m taking everything as it comes, not really. But I’m trying to think more like that.” (Emma).

In these stories, Diana and Emma seems to explicitly describe the value of relating to the present by its own terms, and thus remaining flexible enough to take on the future “as it
comes”. Bauman claims that this used to be the other way around, that the present was utilized to claim the future. He states that the traditional worry of people has been the question: “by what ends do we meet this goal?”. In light capitalism, however, the goal itself is described as seemingly impossible to pin down. The result is a never-ending process of reflection, as opposed to finding the right means to reach a goal, which only calls for logic. No matter what goal you end up putting for yourself, Bauman claims, whatever you end up choosing, you cannot avoid knowing that infinitely more was chosen away, and there are no available guidelines telling you if you made the right choice (Bauman:2000,61).

By this logic it is rendered very difficult to decide what to do. Emma and Diana’s stories seem to be informed by a narrative, recognising the value of keeping the “what” open. None the less, I would suggest that this does not exclude a higher goal. But instead of this goal being understood as a what, it may perhaps be understood as a how.

4.4.5 Replacing the “what” with the “how”

I ask Cecilia what she is going to do when she gets home from her journey.

Cecilia: I’m going to take another year of.
Victoria: Ok, what are you going to do that year?
Cecilia: I’m going to find one thing, and it doesn’t really matter what it is, but I’ve decided I’m going to find one thing and become really good at it. Like, it can be playing an instrument, it can be a sport, it can be (pause) anything, I’m just going to get really good at it. That’s my only goal.

(…)

According to Cecilia, she wants to take an additional gap year, before she starts university, to become really good at something. The “what” is not important. This story does seem to display a want for substantial goals. However, it appears to do so rather frictionless by means of making the “what” redundant; it is simply replaced with the “how”, as the “only goal”. The “how”, in this case doing something really well, seems to be a legitimate object for identification, allowing the “what” to hang in air until further notice. The replacing of the “what” with the “how” occurred several times in the stories collected during the interviews. In relation to the question of dream occupation, several gave answers in the line of: “something project-based”, or “something where I have the opportunity to travel from time to time”. Or as Cecilia said when I asked her if there were anything she wanted for her future: “(…) I have no idea, and I don’t think it’s healthy to think about it either. (…) I just want to feel good about
myself”. Anna answered in a similar fashion to the same question: “(...) That I’m lucky enough to feel the good feelings, you know. Just having the opportunity to feel good. (...) I don’t know what it takes for that to happen (laughs), but I hope I’ll feel good” (Anna).

It is perhaps only to be expected that people in their late teens and early twenties word themselves in general terms when talking about a distant future. It did however seem to be a discrepancy between this way of answering, and the general level of performance they reported, the purposefulness and clear goals associated with the highly competitive studies, and fields of work most of them said they sought after. In addition, this way of answering also appeared when hopes for a more immediate future were described. This is what Lotte said when I asked her what she hoped to experience on her journey: “(...) I hope to see cool places. I hope I’ll be able to appreciate it. It’s always a privilege, being able to feel positive feelings, so I hope I’m able to achieve the joy of looking at new and beautiful things” (Lotte).

As opposed to talking about what she hopes to experience, as was my question, Lotte tells me how she hopes to experience it. In general, when talking about their journeys, it became evident that their stories reflected a value indicating a particular way such journeys were to be experienced. These next stories, like the ones preceding them, can be viewed as made meaningful, by the influence of the recognised value of being able to adapt to the environment as you go along, as opposed to plan things out ahead. Here, I ask Beatrice about her trip.

Victoria: Do you have any plans for what you are going to do, except from []
Beatrice: [] Yeah, I’m going to be spontaneous, because, like, I don’t know anything yet. I feel that like, you can’t plan a journey from a computer, that’s way too… I don’t know anything about what’s going to happen yet. And I know I’m not going to be traveling alone, the challenge is only that I haven’t met the people I’m going to be travelling with. I’m probably going to meet them over there (in the countries she is visiting).

Beatrice tells me her plan is to be spontaneous; an interesting contradiction in itself. What makes it even more interesting is that after saying this, Beatrice goes on, for quite a while, to talk about all the things she actually has plans for. This includes places she wants to visit, and the things she would like to do on the different sites. I am not implying by any rate that Beatrice was untruthful, neither when she said that she didn’t have plans, nor when she told me what her plans was. The point to notice is that it would have been just as logically consistent, if not more so, to the totality of her accounts, if she had just said that “Yes, these
are my plans”, and then gone on to describe them. That she did not say this, I would argue, is an indication of a narrative influence, holding flexibility and spontaneity as more valuable than planning everything out in advance.

This was not exclusive for Beatrice. Here is what Rakel said when I asked her if she has any life philosophies: “Not really, I really like to take things as they come (ta det som det kommer). Just take one day at the time. Like, with this trip as well, my plan is to have very little plans. Just a vague idea about where I’m going to be” (Rakel). As Beatrice, Rakel, in her story, states she plans to have very little plans, but also like Beatrice, Rakel later tells me about plans revolving around her journey, both made and discarded as they were investigated.

Diana, on her hand, did admit to making plans, but only as a result of necessity. This is what she answered when I asked her if she planned her trip:

Diana: My initial plan was to kind of take everything as it comes (ta det som det kommer). I was just going to buy my ticket and take it from there. But then I heard that that could be a problem, because some of those countries wants to see your return ticket as soon as you enter. (…) Even though it would have been very nice to just travel without any time perspective.

Diana describes that her original desire was to “take everything as it comes”, and it seems to be with a flair of regret, she reports not being able to so. In the stories of both Beatrice, Lotte and Diana, flexibility may be viewed as an ideal way to approach their travels.

In addition, there were stories reflecting that travelling could be a way of requiring that valued flexibility. Here, I ask Emma why she wants to travel alone.

Emma: Being alone is something you rarely are. (…) And also I think I’m very bad at taking things as they come (ta ting på sparket), I’m bad at doing things…Or I’m good at doing things I don’t really want to do, because I’m in general afraid of many things. But I think that if I’m able to see it through, or if I want to, and even enjoy myself, and do something that actually could be a bit dangerous, I might stop thinking about other things as dangerous.

Emma opens by stating that she is not that good at taking things as they come, implying that she wants to be better at it. She continues to describe her traveling alone as a way to face the things that scare her, presumably so as to be better at taking things as they come, i.e. being more flexible, and not pinned down by her fears.
I understand these stories as being informed by a cultural narrative that values the ability of being open to change, keeping options open, and taking each day as it comes. This seemed to be a value that both informed considerations about their future adult lives, and more present plans. One of the interesting features about these stories is that they could seem to contradict the value of autonomy, which I have described as being the most reflected ideal in my informants’ stories. These stories emphasized the importance of taking your fate in to your own hands, resist external influence, and, in essence, being the master of your own life. This does not seem to fit well with values which informs that future, unknown terms should be deciding for what to do, and who to be.

However, in the last story presented by Emma, these two values seem to coincide. Getting better at taking things as they come, is described as means to take more charge of her own life. This story was the only one where I found this link stated explicitly, and it would be an interesting link to subject to further examination. In this way, the value of flexibility could be seen as cooperating with the ideal of autonomy. There is also another way to regard the connection between the ideal of autonomy, and the value of flexibility.

Earlier in this chapter, I suggested that the seeming difficulty with accepting a value of following dreams, could be explained by the demonstrated reluctance to take a “leap of faith”. This was exemplified with stories valuing “the scientific mind”. The value of following dreams is explained by Taylor as finding its source in the notion of an authentic, core self. It is by this notion “following dreams” is made meaningful and thus valuable. Subsequently, when the conviction of a core-self is lacking, following dreams loses its meaning. This was demonstrated by Anna, rendered under the first headline of this chapter, when she talked about why she did not pursue her dream occupation: “In my experience, engagement can disappear, and you’re stuck”.

I have argued that adopting the notion of a core-self would require a leap of faith – accepting something invisible and unmeasurable. My group of informants generally seemed unwilling to take such a leap of faith, explained here as anchored in the ideal of autonomy. Perhaps this unwillingness can also give meaning to the value of flexibility? Perhaps a notion of a constant, core-self is also necessary to project an image of oneself into the future. If this notion of an authentic self is not present, the individual cannot make any claims to who she will be in the future. Nor does social situation seem to be able to make claims to future identity. Subsequently, if future plans cannot be made in accordance to who one “really” is,
these plans will only serve as a “prison” to whoever one might be in the future – “and then you’re stuck”.

Before I move on to the last section of the analysis, I feel a precision is in order. I am not suggesting a causal relationship between the lacking notion of a core-self, and flexibility, where the lacking notion of core-self make up the cause, and flexibility the effect. I am simply suggesting that one can gain a more substantial understanding of them, when they are seen in relation to one another. Nor am I claiming that it could not be meaningful to consider the statements in this analysis with reference to external, societal circumstances. On the contrary; for example, it is not unreasonable to think that one could expect to find a value of flexibility in societies and times that is marked by rapid changes and uncertainty. However, making inferences to an external, societal level, has not been the task of this thesis.

4.5 No Man is an Island

I found that individualistic values were dominating in informing the moral content of my informants’ stories, particularly that which is understood as the ideal of the autonomous self. That is not the same as to say this was the only influence. There were moral evaluations that did not seem reasonable to understand in terms of individualistic ideals as they can be understood by Bauman (2000), Beck (2000) and Giddens’ (1991) descriptions. Values of community, social support, tradition and family were also expressed. Some accentuated the importance of a good social environment in their potential work place, and used terms like, “sharing responsibility” and “sharing the joy of seeing a project through together”. Others expressed similar hopes for their experience at university. There were also instances of stating that they took their parents’ opinions under consideration when making choices, both regarding their travels, and life in general. One precarious example has been rendered earlier in this analysis, but in a different context. It is when Beatrice talks about what she is going to study.

Beatrice: (…) It will probably end up with me ending up with medicine, that’s what I’m thinking, but I don’t want to. I’m just thinking that all the signs are pointing in that direction. (…) Because my entire family has studied medicine, it has just always been there, and to me it’s like a safe haven. And I’m always told: If you study medicine you’ll get a job. (…)
Medicine is described in terms resembling a family-fate, that she might just be swept of by, even though she does not want to. Although she later states that her parents input is something she values, she also later claims that she does not think she will end up in medicine after all. None the less, this account demonstrates that tradition makes out a conscience influence in Beatrice’s future plans.

The same can be said for Cecilia who has a religious tradition in her family. When I ask her why she chose a Christian confirmation, she answers:

(…) It was taken for granted (var en selvfølge), both by me and by them (the family). (…) It just happened, I didn’t think it through that much (laughs), I just did it. I think it was just because:

“Like, of course I’m going to have a Christian confirmation. I don’t regret it either. It happened, it’s no big deal. (Cecilia)

The choice of a Christian confirmation is here grounded solely in tradition and external expectation. However, Cecilia’s last remarks might be considered a transferral of some of the power this story gives to these external factors, back to herself. “I don’t regret it” implies that it was not a choice that contradicts her values. “It’s no big deal” might connote that this was not a choice that required much reflection and thought. So, even though influential power was granted to tradition and external authority, it did not seem to be done easily.

Most of the informants expressed – as far as they had plans for their future – rather traditional hopes. They typically said they wanted to get married, have children and houses. For the most part, these wishes were delivered rather plainly, but also here there were exceptions. Anna, for instance, told me she wanted a husband because it was so unpractical to raise children alone, seemingly connoting a risk-orientation. This also demonstrates the strength of a narrative approach to questions of individualization. It might reveal that seemingly traditional choices may have a modern twist.

Also, sympathies towards equality and sharing were emphasised. Beatrice tells me she had a period a year ago, when she pondered the meaning of life, and reached a conclusion.

I kind of reached a conclusion that none of all the strange things in life, none of this matter if we don’t help each other. I kind of felt that was number one. Like, if anything is to make any sense, it starts there, us reaching out to each other. I don’t know, acting together, making something of a fellowship. (Beatrice)
As mentioned, these kinds of moral evaluations were not uncommon, but they mainly seemed to be utilized in an abstract, theoretical context, as is the case with Beatrice’s story above. When discussing *actual* choices and scenarios, they appeared to be less prominent. Next is Beatrice discussing such an *actual* choice of helping someone else. As she refers to her own generations tendency for traveling as egotistical, I ask her about the voluntary work she is planning to do on her journey.

(...) I’ve asked myself that question so many times: “Am I doing it because I’m going to *save* these children, or am I doing it to lighten my own conscience?” Is it so that *I* get to see how… Like what factors are most important for me to make that choice? Is it because *I* am going to learn something, or is it to save them? And I think, first and foremost it is because *I* want to learn. And in that process I might save some children. (Beatrice)

Although values of altruism and community seemed to be influential, they also seemed to be harder to apply to concrete situations. This was not exclusive for the story above. In addition, these kinds of moral evaluations were often delivered with an emphasis on the personal (thus relative) quality of the statements, with fraises like: “In my opinion” or “I think” and “but that’s just my opinion”. Or as Cecilia ironically finished a statement, bashing what she termed an egotistical line of politics: “Said the nineteen-year-old brat”. In other words, although these values were clearly there, they often (but not always), seemed provide some ambiguity. This ambiguity could be explained, as demonstrated above, by the value of “the scientific mind”, which seemingly inform a reluctance to admit to unverifiable moral evaluations.

4.5.1 Diversity

The stories that seemed to be the most common in relation to recognising the value of social community, was the narrative strand informed by the value of *diversity*. It was in relation to this value that the informants most frequently seemed to recognise the benefits and importance of social community. Also this value could be readily interpreted as closely related to the narrative identified as “the scientific mind”. The value of “the scientific mind” was often conveyed in relation to having one’s perspective challenged, and being able to see different sides of a matter. Recognising different perspectives, and individuals’ right to choose different ways of living, was frequently referred to in many contexts. It was also with reference to these types of values that the informants’ typically seemed to relate themselves to
a larger social fellowship. Here, I ask Emma why she chose the high school she did, and not one that was closer to her home.

Emma: (…) I actually qualified to be accepted to most of the schools in Oslo, but it wasn’t that that was important to me. (…) I think that the school I chose was a very good school for me. I wished that there were more students that could pull me a bit more in the theoretical subjects, because it was a lower level amongst the students at that school, but it was a more mixed level. There were several in my class that had like more than five as their average grade, and others who had much lower, and I like that. At that other school everyone would probably be around 4.8 to five. And there is nothing wrong with that, but I think it makes a difference that it’s more of a mix

Emma explains that she chose away a school that both would have been more convenient, as it was a lot closer to her home, and that probably would grant more prestige, as it required higher grades in order to be accepted. Subsequently, diversity, or having a mixture of different people, seem to be regarded as a very important.

Cecilia talks about why she chose her high school in a similar manner. She states that she wanted to get away from the more uniform environment in her junior high school. I ask her what it was like to shift environment.

Cecilia: Really, really healthy, [at least for me (laughs)].
Victoria: [In what way?]
Cecilia: I got to see different values. I like got to see that people cared about completely different things, well, in many respects, (laughs) people are quite similar as well. But the small differences from, with regards to places and those things. It at least taught me a lot.
Victoria: Nice. Do you have any examples?
Cecilia: Yeah, like for instance, people come from completely different… like, I don’t think there were any foreigners in junior high, not one. Well, maybe one or two of like 70 students in tenth grade. And that’s really sickening, that you don’t have that, when Oslo consists of so many different people, different places, different families. So I got to see values that, yeah, like, up close, from different cultures, people that I wish I had met earlier. Like, just being able to experience…it’s very hard to pinpoint exactly what it is, you can just tell from their personality, and the way they think and talk. Some has a lot of different positive sides, and some has a lot of different negative sides, even though that’s subjective (laughs).

The value of diversity is here linked to learning, and to being a reflection of the world as it really is. After the comment that some of the new being positive and some negative, Cecilia adds: “even though that’s subjective”. This was a very common way for my informants to
relay their point of views. More often than not, when taking a stance, they pointed out the subjective (thus relative) nature of their opinion. This corresponds well with the occurrences of explicit suspicion expressed towards moral judgments.

The value of diversity could be seen as including a recognition of the importance of getting once opinions and perspectives challenged, and horizons broadened. This was also one of the main reasons reported for travelling. I ask Anna if she thinks she would be missing out on anything if she had skipped the journey and gone straight to university.

Anna: Yes, of course, but that is dependent on the sort of person I am. I wouldn’t claim that others would be missing out on the same (...). I would feel I was missing out on an important experience to me, but that doesn’t mean that I think others would miss out on the same personally. I perhaps mean it’s healthy for society that people travel and get to see more of the world, but I wouldn’t go as far as to say it is necessary.

Victoria: In what way could it contribute to society?

Anna: It would just be the same as general knowledge, an expanded perspective. You get to see other ways of living, other ways societies are shaped, and so on. (...) Like, the more the general person in a society knows, the more likely it is that that society functions well.

Being exposed to what is different, is here associated with learning and a healthy society. Anna does however seem a bit reluctant to make general claims to this value. Beatrice argues in a similar way, when she explains that she hopes the trip will contribute a more comprehensive understanding of reality.

Beatrice: (...) In a way I want to experience, I want to feel a bit pain, and I think I will, working as a volunteer.

Victoria: You say you want to feel pain, why, or like what []

Beatrice: [] I think that’s why I’m travelling. I want to, or like, I’m not travelling to be in pain, I want to travel to see different things, and like, I know that the standards I live by is not the standards for the rest of the world in a way. Like, 90 percent of the worlds’ population don’t live by my standards (laughter in her voice). So I’m kind of counting on this to be sort of a wakeup call, that can motivate me, and disillusion me a bit.

It could be argued that these stories also reflect a rather individualistic attitude, as it is the informants’ experiences that make out the central theme of the accounts. The community they relate to and seek out, is a diverse community of single individuals. A diverse community seems to be a good thing on a count of reality being diverse. Diversity is a reflection of how
the world really is; the point being that the value of diversity can be adhered to without any admitted moral evaluation. Diverse is just the way the world is, and it seems to be a good thing to be able to recognise and adapt to that.

4.6 Summing up the Analysis

I understand that the cultural narrative of the autonomous self was the one that most frequently informed stories where the informants made moral evaluations. That is to say stories where they positioned themselves, legitimized their choices, envisioned their future and the paths thereto. However, there were some conspicuous ambiguities to the values I understand as supporting this ideal. Firstly, in stories of following dreams and doing what is sensible, the autonomous ideal was made visible by the value of following dreams. Most emphasis seemed to be given to doing what is sensible, this could be understood by the principle of risk in late modernity, described both by Beck (2000) and Giddens (1991). However, the way to reduce risk was to conform to the pre-established social order of the labour market – a seemingly not very autonomous strategy.

I have understood this contradiction in relation to what kind of autonomous ideal that here seems to be relevant – namely the one informed by narratives from an enlightenment tradition, as opposed to a romantic tradition. Romantic narratives presuppose a notion of a stable, authentic core-self, whereas enlightenment narratives are supposed to oppose this notion (Taylor:1989,175). I found further support for the assumption that the autonomy portrayed by my informants are of the enlightenment-kind, in the stories that valued the scientific mind. In these stories, the informants discarded moral evaluations and valued critical thinking, thereby resisting external influences that would seek to manipulate them, and thus protecting their autonomy.

In accounts that valued self-responsibility, external influences were stripped of power, while personal resources were portrayed as the determinative factor. It was in these stories I found the ideal of the autonomous self to be most evident. In stories valuing “the sensible”, the labour market seemed to challenge full autonomy. In stories valuing choice, autonomy appeared to yield to the future. However, in some cases, the value of flexibility was presented as a way to gain more control over one’s own life, i.e. a way to be more autonomous.

The informants also portrayed values of being responsive to authority (taking parental advice), and following tradition (planning for family, marriage and buying property). But
these were not presented to be determining considerations when choices were made, narrative self-positioning was conducted, and plans were made – autonomy did. When the informants related themselves to larger communities, these were communities valued for their diversity. In other words, these were communities of unique \textit{individuals}, they were not described as uniform groups, where the members validated each other by means of similarity.
5 Conclusion

5.1 What and Why is the Epistemological Fallacy?

I asked what kind of information an epistemological fallacy entails, and why it might be present in modern culture. To answer this question, I used Charles Taylor’s (1989) argumentation. He states that modern culture communicates ideals that facilitates a negation of the social nature of the self. Central to these ideals are inherited romantic and enlightenment morals, that emphasise the importance of autonomy. In the case of the romantic narratives, this autonomy is understood with reference to an authentic, core-self that cannot be decided by any external factors. It is only the individual that can (and must) know and express his unique individuality. It is by this notion of the self that stories of following dreams, and doing what is internally rewarding, finds its moral source and meaning (Taylor:1989,175). Enlightenment narratives emphasise autonomy through values of being critical, sensible and self-responsible, as well as being sceptical towards external authority and ontological explanations of the world (Taylor:1989,53).

Both of these moral strands accentuates that the individual can and should be understood independently of social influences. I therefore suggest that the epistemological fallacy can be understood as a cultural ideal of the autonomous self; being autonomous and self-responsible is “the right thing to do”. As such, the individual might believe herself to be more socially independent than is actually the case. I further found it reasonable to assume that the relative weight given to values of autonomy, would be influential on how youth experience their transition to adulthood.

With grounds in these conclusion, I considered that some of the tendencies described by Bauman (2000), Beck (2000), and Giddens (1991), could be interpreted as values in late modern culture. This would entail an understanding of modern identity as being both individualized and social, as values are something that is socially transmitted (Taylor:1989,35). However, these theories have frequently been understood as claiming modern identity to have become less social as it becomes more individualized. I therefore found it necessary to argue that the individualization theses do not require that individualization, and socialisation be considered opposites. In doing so, I have suggested the importance of distinguishing between individualization as it is objectively lived (the actual level of freedom and individual responsibility in choices made), and individualization as
subjective experience (the experienced level of freedom and individual responsibility in choices made).

I have advocated that theories of individualization do recognise the social foundation of the self, and that I therefore legitimately can interpret some of the tendencies they describe as values. I have attempted to determine if such values are present in the stories of my informants, and that their experienced transition to adulthood, therefore can be understood with reference to the epistemological fallacy. Or if their stories reflected values that recognised their social position, the importance of community support and the influence of tradition, in which case, the epistemological fallacy would not be a relevant contribution to understanding their experienced transition to adulthood.

5.2 The Narratives

So, did my informants display values that could be understood as individualization values? Did the assumption of the epistemological fallacy appear to make out an informative contribution, when understanding these youths’ experienced transition to adulthood? I would say yes. At the same time, it is important to note that I do not assume that the epistemological fallacy can inform a complete understanding of their experienced transition to adulthood. I found that the most prominent values in the stories I collected were natural to understand with reference to the ideal of the autonomous self. This was the case both in stories concerning their travels and stories revolving other areas of their lives. This leads me to believe that individualistic influences are not only relevant in relation to giving meaning to their travels, but constitutes a broader cultural discourse, drawn upon in relation to a variety of situations. However, this autonomy was portrayed with some interesting nuances.

5.2.1 The risk of dreaming

In general, my informants seemed more concerned with doing what they considered to be sensible, than with following their dreams. None the less, the dream-narrative appeared frequently, and seemed to be the cause for quite some friction. This was however not the case in stories revolving travel, where these lines of values seemed to go hand in hand. The fact that a romantic line of language was utilized, even when very different lines of motives were
explicitly given, might speak to how entrenched the “following-dream-narrative” is in modern culture.

An orientation towards doing what is sensible, and risk-reduction, could be an expected value in individualized culture (Illeris et al.:2009,86). However, when orienting in this manner, the informants clearly related to the socially established order of the labour market. Even though the informants (for the most part) reported being interested in the fields they might study, it seemed as if it was more important that they were not made redundant on the labour market. It was in other words the needs of this market, and not the interests of the individual, that seemed to be given as the main motive for what higher education they aimed towards. How can one understand, in value-terms, that the otherwise so autonomy-oriented informants, seemed to allow the external authority of the labour market to decide what they were to do with their lives? I have suggested that a deeper understanding of this tendency might be gained, by considering it in relation to the distinction between the enlightenment, and the romantic notion of autonomy.

5.2.2 Two narratives of autonomy

According to Taylor, moral in modern culture is a continuation of narratives informed by the conflicting romantic and enlightenment strands of philosophy (Taylor:1989,393). Both strands are presupposed by an emphasis on the autonomous self, understood as independent of external factors. However, the romantic line of thinking emphasises this self as a constant, a core of who one really is. This conviction also entails an obligation to express and live according to that true self (Taylor:1989,175). This, according to Taylor, constitutes the moral source, providing meaning to narratives of following dreams, doing what interests you, and what is found to be intrinsically enjoying (ibid). Enlightenment morals, on the other hand, is also founded on an idea(l) of the individual defining itself independent of external, social influences. Here, however, the mark of that autonomous self is the rational thinker, who is not seduced by her own feelings, or deceived by external authority (Taylor:1989,308).

In one particularly interesting story, the preference towards following the needs of the labour market, instead of following dreams, is explained it terms of the fleeting nature of interest – it could suddenly disappear. I have suggested that the willingness to accept the terms of the labour market might connote that my informants are mainly oriented towards an enlightenment strand of values. These are values that Taylor describe as conflicting with enlightenment values. Enlightenment values weights scepticism, criticism and factual
knowledge. Romantic values, on the other hand, finds their moral source in the notion of an authentic self. I have suggested that adopting this notion of the self requires a leap of faith, this leap can be regarded as prohibited by the values emphasised by the enlightenment values. Subsequently, since interests are not regarded to be an expression of who one “really” is, they could suddenly disappear.

I also suggested that the value of “choosing choice” could be seen in relation to the lacking acceptance of a core-self. My informants seemed reluctant to make any certain claims to the future. Instead they talked about how they would do things, as opposed to what they would do. They also said they wanted to keep their options open and take one day at the time. It seemed as if they granted the unknown terms of the future authority to determine many central aspects of their lives. Nor this seemed to be corroborating with the overall weight they put on autonomy. However, if there is no authentic core-self, it might be hard to know what your future-self might require. As such, leaving the future open, might be a way to ensure the autonomy of a future self – who is the present-self to tell the future-self what to do.

5.2.3 Unchallenged autonomy

There were however stories that conveyed autonomy values rather unprecariously. The informants spoke of the importance of being able to think for oneself, be self-responsible, and to be sceptical towards external influences. They also, directly or indirectly, promoted the individual’s exclusive right to decide who to be and what to do. For the most part, stories portraying such values did not tell of anxiety or uncertainty, as might be expected with reference to the individualization thesis. On the contrary, these autonomy values seemed to connote accomplishment and personal power.

However, these youths might be assumed to be better fit to handle the demands put forth by these values, than many others. I am not implying that this group did not have a care in the world, but their middle class background might make them particularly equipped to handle such demands of autonomy. Also, not all the stories that connoted these values were stories of accomplishments. There were cases of explicitly stated uncertainty, due to individualized responsibility. There were even more cases were, though not stated clearly, one could easily imagine that the responsibility they took on could be heavy to carry.

These values of autonomy seemed to be related to how the world really is – only the individual has the right to make decisions concerning herself, the individual has the responsibility for his own life, one should be responsive to different perspective because the
world is complex. In other words, these moral evaluations did not seem to be considered moral evaluations, but confirmations of reality. They were in general rather sceptical towards moral, as it was described in terms of being constructions, something unsubstantiated or as means for manipulation, i.e. not real. Further, it seemed as if, when they themselves consciously committed moral evaluations, were typically very careful to emphasise the relative nature of these evaluations. This was done with statements like: “But that’s just my perspective”, “Of course, that’s subjective”, and the likes. They generally seemed very reluctant to admittingly holding one moral perspective above another. Thus they portrayed another tendency commonly associated with late modernity and individualization, namely moral relativism

5.2.4 Moral relativism and narcissism?

Moral relativism in late modernity has frequently been understood in relation to narcissism and hedonism (Taylor:2013; Nuber:1994; Lasch:1983). When external moral authorities are rendered as illegitimate sources of guidance, the individual has to ground her reasons for choosing and believing as she does in herself (Bauman:2000,76). As such, it is personal wishes and wants that becomes the guiding factors – if you want something, it is not only a good enough reason, but the only legitimate reason to get it (ibid). This constitutes what is described as the modern moral relativism, which in principle can legitimize any line of action – “because it was the right thing to do for me”. This, along with an understanding of the self as detached from social community, in short, makes out the ground for the notion of the modern narcissist.

As was shown in the analysis chapter, I did find strong evidence of moral relativism in my informants’ stories. But as also became apparent in the analysis, there were relatively little emphasis on individual satisfaction, the importance of personal interest, or any other statements connoting hedonism. Contrary to what I have found to be a common understanding of such relativism, namely as justification of personal desires, I found that it almost exclusively served as including others’ perspectives and opinions.

5.2.5 The value of diversity

This inclusion of different perspectives, was explicitly stated to be important several times, by several of the informants. For example, four of the informants said that they chose the high
school they did, because, amongst other reasons, they wanted to be exposed to more diverse influences. In addition, generally, when the informants described themselves with reference to a community context, they described communities of diversity.

This last strand of narrative might make relevant Durkheim’s perspective on individualization. Where at least Bauman (2000) and Beck (2000) observes communal solidarity and individualism to be contradictory (e.g. the death of the citizen, the birth of the consumer (Bauman:2000,64)), Durkheim does not. Instead he holds them to be to aspects of the same social state (Østeberg:1983,37-53). Like the other theorists referred to in relation to individualization, Durkheim observes that modern humans tend to become more detached from their social base, as they become more mobile. In this development lies a shift from a mechanic to an organic solidarity (ibid). In short, mechanic solidarity is based on an experience of collective likeness between members of a society. Organic solidarity is on the other hand based on individual cooperation and dependence. In individualistic culture, Durkheim see the potential for a collective solidarity, and affiliation that transgress particular social groups of similarity; a solidarity which includes the entire and differentiated human race (ibid). Perhaps it is this kind of social belonging the stories above are best understood as expressions of?

5.2.6 Some Concluding Remarks

As my informants made plans and choices for their adult lives, they seemed to accept that it was their responsibility to make it turn out as they wanted. They also seemed to consider that previous victories and defeats were their own responsibility. Further, they stated choosing options that kept options open. They seemed reluctant to make plans that would make firm claims for their futures. All six of them expressed that they assumed that they themselves, and/or what they wanted, would change. Also, all six of them, though to relative degrees, legitimized many of their past choices and future plans, by their quality as being rational, sensible choices and plans. Overall, they relatively seldom seemed to accept “the dream” as legitimate ground for choice, at least not on its own. Even so, the narrative of following dreams seemed to “force” its way into their stories.

There were also stories where tradition and parental authority was valued, but these were exceptions. Also, in the cases of valued parental authority, authority might be the wrong word. For the most part, the parents appeared to be portrayed as advisers and confidants, rather than authority figures. When they valued communities, these were more often than not
communities of unique individuals. These were communities where the individuals could be challenged, and learn from one another. With basis in these findings, I regard that my informants to a large degree, did portray what has been described as the epistemological fallacy.

5.3 Why is this Knowledge Important?

So, why is it important to gain knowledge of individualization narratives? Why do we need to understand the values youth use to give meaning to themselves and their experiences? Firstly, I want to point out that the fact that individualized culture can be considered a provider of moral sources for identification, does not entail that all the described challenges ascribed to the construction of the modern identity are rendered irrelevant. The interpretation of experience can be argued to constitute a central part of what comes to be understood as personal reality. This can be understood as one of the founding theses in narrative therapy, where one aims at changing experience, through changing the personal narratives used to interpret it (Etchison & Kleist:2000). As such, interpreting outcomes as being dependent of personal efforts and abilities, will bring about many of the same consequences for self-understanding, as if that in fact had been the case.

The claim that the content of moral values is of a kind that negates an understanding of the self as social might have crucial consequences, both for the individual, and for society. In Angsten for oppdragelse (2012), Foros and Vetlesen confronts what they perceive to be problems in individualized, modern cultures. What individuals chooses to do, they argue, has effects, ranging longer than just his or her lives, something that becomes obvious in the case of global warming. If we, Foros and Vetlesen claims, are to take realistic measures to stag this development, this requires a collective effort. The problem is that modern man does not orient and move collectively, but individually (Foros&Vetlesen:2012,28-38).

The psychiatrist, Skårderud (1999) also claims that the importance of social support and belonging is unrecognized in modern culture. He relates this to an experienced need for perfectionism, shame and anxiety. He states that:

Vi strekker oss etter ideale om det autentiske som et fritt og uavhengig menneske. Vi prøver etter beste evne, men fordi den bråmodne selvstendigheten kanskje aldri har vært flokkdyret menneskets mening, kommer i stedet
There might, in other words, be both external ecological reasons, and reasons concerning individual’s well-being, that speaks to the importance of understanding the ideals that inform modern identity.

In addition, the ideal of the autonomous self, as resisting external authority, might serve as to counteract its own object. Lash (1993) refers to Foucault, who recognises that the means of power, more than having been concord by the individual, has changed its appearance: “What appears as freedom of agency for the theory of reflexivity is just another means of control for Foucault, as the direct operation of power on the body has been displaced by its mediated operation on the body through the soul.” (Lash:1993,20). Therefore, paradoxically, by denying the influential power of external factors, with grounds in a modern ideal of autonomy, we might become less autonomous – these external factors get a “free pass”, so to speak.

When the social character of the self is denied, one lacks the means to counteract such demonstrations of power. It could prove a formidable task, convincing the modern individual that what he wants is not really what he wants, but that he instead has been socialised into believing that he wants it (Côté:2006,17). The ideal of autonomy has deep rooted, historical legitimacy in modern culture (Taylor:1989), and I be no means claim that it has played out its part, or that it is no longer necessary. However, I suggest, with basis in both my theoretical and my empirical findings, that it is important that its limits be understood sufficiently. As a concluding remark, I would suggest that a relevant and important challenge consists of constructing narratives where the self can be understood as both autonomous as well as socially conditioned. In other words; if there is a way one could recognise the legitimate importance of autonomy, as well as recognising that this ideal is a socially transmitted cultural ideal, I propose it is worth finding.

5.4 Limitations and Further Research

The sample I base my analysis on is relatively small. It would be interesting to see if, and how strong the tendencies I have identified are. It could also be interesting to see if there are any differences between boys and girls, as far as how they utilize cultural narratives. Also, my
group took a gap year. It is possible to imagine that youth who goes straight to higher educations, might be more willing to make firm plans for their future, as such choices might indicate clear goals.

My informants made out a rather uniform group. As such, this sample does not reveal potential differences amongst social groups, as far as what, or how cultural narratives are being utilized. There is research to indicate that different groups may utilize different narratives when giving motives for their choices. In Kindt’s doctorate article (submitted), she interviews second and third generation immigrants who takes prestigious higher educations, much like my informants aimed to do. Like with my informants, she found that individualistic narratives seemed to be dominating their stories. However, when reading the article, I found that this group seemed to rely more heavily on the notion of the romantic self, following their inner most dreams. What such a distinction could further imply, was it proved to be consistent, would be an interesting question for further research.
References


Appendix

Informert samtykke

Jeg heter Victoria Born, og holder på å skrive min master i allmenn pedagogikk ved universitetet i Oslo, utdanningsvitenskapelig fakultet. I forbindelse med denne oppgaven ønsker jeg å intervju ungdom som nettopp er ferdig med videregående, og som velger å reise ut av Norge (i mer enn en mnd.) istedenfor å gå rett over i jobb eller videre skolegang. I dette intervjuet vil jeg prøve å finne ut av hva som er årsakene til ønsket om å reise. Jeg vil komme til å stille spørsmål som dreier seg rundt informantens forhåpninger og refleksjoner rundt denne reisen, hva informanten vurderer som viktig i livet sitt og hvilke planer og drømmer hun/han har for fremtiden.


I utgangspunktet er det kun jeg som intervjuer og min veileder som har tilgang til personidentifiserbare data, men det hender unntakvis at sensor for oppgaven ber om å få tilgang til lydopptak for å kunne vurdere mitt forskningsarbeid. Både jeg, veileder og sensor er underlagt taushetsplikt etter gjeldende regler. Prosjektet er meldt til Personvernombudet for forskning, Norsk samfunnsvitenskapelig datatjeneste AS, og har blitt godkjent.

Hvis du som informant har noen spørsmål er det bare å kontakte meg eller min veileder Kristinn Hegna.

Victoria Born
Tlf: 93034345

Kristinn Hegna
Tlf: 22840711
Victoria-born@hotmail.com  kristinn.hegna@iped.uio.no

Informantens underskrift:
**Intervjuguide**

- Informere kort om prosjektet
- Skrive under på samtykkeerklæring
- Informere om diktafon og prosedyrer rundt anonymitet
- Det er ingen gale svar – jeg ønsker å høre dine tanker rundt spørsmålene.
- Er det noe du ikke vil eller kan svare på er det helt i orden.

**TEMATISKE INTERVJUSPØRSMÅL**

- #Teoretiske spørsmål relaterer til *intervjuspørsmål*

  - **1#** I hvor stor grad opplever informanten at andres verdier/ normer er anslagsgivende for de valgene han/ hun tar?
  - **2#** I hvor stor grad opplever informanten at han/ hun selv, kontra ytre, sosiale forhold, er ansvarlig for omstendigheter i hans/ hennes liv.
  - **3#** Hvor orientert mot planlegging av fremtiden er informanten når han/ hun fatter livsvalg?
  - **4#** Hvordan vurderer informanten nederlag?
  - **5#** Hvor vanskelig/ lett opplever informanten at det er å ta valg som kan ha betydning for fremtiden. Giddens og Baumans antagelser om at valg blir vanskeligere å treffe i og med at man selv er ansvarlig for å fatte dem og å ta konsekvensene av dem.
  - **6#** Hvordan opplever/ kategoriserer informanten seg selv? Livsstilvalg og grupperinger.
  - **7#** Hva vekter informanten som viktig? Moral – Taylor: Kvalitative distinksjoner. Er disse orientert i en retning individualiseringstesen ville tilsi, eller mot mer kollektive verdier?
  - **8#** Hvor viktig er det å ha kontroll, versus å være fleksibel i forhold til de muligheter som byr seg?
Innledende spørsmål

#1

1.0* Kan du begynne med å fortelle litt om hvor du bor?

1.1-Bor med mor, far, søsken?

1.2-Bodd på samme sted/ flyttet mye?

1.3-Kan du fortelle litt om stedet/ stedene du har bodd, beskrive hva slags sted det var/ er og hva slags mennesker som bodde/ bor der?

#1

2.0*Hva jobber foreldrene dine med?

2.1- Vet du om/ hva slags utdanning de har?

2.2- Er det noe du kunne tenke deg å studere/ jobbe med - 2.2.1– Hvorfor/ hvorfor ikke?

2.4- Tror du foreldrene dine ønsker at det er noe du skal holde på med?

#2

3.0*Hvilken videregående og hvilken linje gikk du på?

3.1- Var det førstevalget ditt da du søkte 3.1.1– hvis ikke, hva?

3.2- (Hvis ikke førstevalg) Hvorfor kom du ikke inn på førstevalget ditt? 6.2.1 – Hvorfor tror du at du ikke hadde gode nok karakterer/ for høyt fravær?

3.3- Hvorfor tror du det lykkes deg å komme inn på førstevalget ditt?

2#, #3, 8#

4.0*Hva var grunnen til at du hadde den linjen og den skolen som førstevalg?
#4, #8

5.0*(Hvis ikke førstevalg) Hva følte du om at du ikke kom inn på førstevalget ditt da du fikk vite det?

5.1- Hva tenker du om at du ikke kom inn på førstevalget ditt nå?

#5

6.0*Hvordan synes du det var å skulle velge videregående? – Vanskelig/lett?

6.1- Har du angret på det valget noen gang? – Hvorfor?

#6

7.0*Hva slags folk gikk på skolen og linjen du begynte på?

7.1-Kom du godt overens med de som gikk der?

7.2- Hvorfor/ hvorfor ikke?

#6, #7

8.0*Hvordan trivdes du ellers?

8.1- Sosialt: Venner, lærere, fag

8.2- Hva var yndlingsfaget ditt? 8.3.1– Hva var det du likte med det faget?

8.3- Hvilket fag likte du minst? 8.3.2- Hva var det du likte minst med det?

#1, #2

9.1*Er du fornøyd med egne prestasjoner fra videregående?

9.2- Hva gjør at du er/ ikke er det?

9.3- (Hvis nei) Hva tror du manglet for at du skulle prestert på en måte du hadde vært fornøyd med?
9.4- (Hvis ja) Hva tror du var på plass, slik at du klarte å prestere på en måte som du er fornøyd med?

9.5- Hva synes familien din om skoleprestasjonene dine? 9.5.1– Er det viktig?

#5

10.0*Hvordan opplevde du den generelle skolehverdagen? 10.0.1– Stress?

#5

11.0*Hva føler du om å ha sluttet på videregående? - Angst, glede?

11.1-Hvorfor tror du at du føler det sånn?

Sosialt/ fritid

#7

12.0*Er det noe spesielt du liker å gjøre på fritiden din?

12.1- Sport, være med venner, tv, filmer, serier, spill.

12.2- Hva er det du liker med det?

#7

13.0*Hvis du kunne fått en dag hvor alt skjedde akkurat slik du ville, en drømmedag, hvordan ville den vært, kan du beskrive den?

13.1-Hvorfor ville det vært en perfekt dag?

#7

14.0*Er det noe du kan bli spesielt glad av, eller rørt av?

14.1- Hvorfor?
#7

15.0*Hva, hvis noe, er det du blir skikkelig provosert av?

15.1- Hvorfor?

#7

16.0*Er det noe i det offentlige bildet som opptar deg spesielt, er du politisk engasjert, miljøspørsmål, frivillig arbeid?

16.1-Hvorfor/ hvorfor ikke?

#7

17.0*Kan du nevne en ting som du synes er bra med det samfunnet vi lever i i dag?

#7

18.0*Kan du nevne en ting som du synes er uting ved det samfunnet vi lever i i dag?

#7

19.0*Har du en livsfilosofi du forsøker å leve livet ditt etter? En måte du tenker det er klokt å leve livet sitt på?

19.1- (Hvis nei) Hvorfor ikke tror du?

19.2- (Hvis ja) Hvorfor er det en klok måte å leve livet sitt på?

19.3- Synes du alle burde leve livet sitt på den måten?

#7

20.0*Er du konfirmert?

20.1- (Hvis nei) - hvorfor ikke?

20.2- (Hvis ja) - hvorfor?
20.3- Hva slags konfirmasjon?

20.4- Opplevde du at du fikk noe ut av det, lærerikt, tankevekkende? – Hva, hvorfor?

#7

21.0* Vil du si at du tilhører noen religion, eller bestemt livssyn?

21.1- Hva tror du at du ville følt hvis noen sa til deg at det er bedre å ha denne religionen, eller dette livssynet? 21.1.1 – Hvorfor hadde du følt det slik?

Reisen

22.0* Reiser du alene, eller sammen med noen? 22.0.1 – Hvem?

#1, #5, #7

23.0* Kan du fortelle litt om hvor du/ dere skal?

23.1- Hvorfor valgte du/ dere akkurat det stedet?

23.2- Var det vanskelig å komme frem til det valget? – Hvorfor?

23.3- Hva vet du om landet/ stedet, lokalbefolkning, historie.

23.4- Reise til ett sted/ flere steder – Hvorfor?

#8

24.0- Ville du reist selv om du måtte reise alene/ sammen med noen andre?

24.1- Hvorfor/ hvorfor ikke?

#6, #7

25.0* Hva er det du gleder deg aller mest til ved denne reisen?

25.1- Hvorfor
#5, #8

26.0*Kjenner du på at du gruer deg?

26.1- (Hvis nei) Hvorfor ikke?

26.2- (Hvis ja) Hva er det du er engstelig for?

#5, #8

27.0*Hvor lenge skal du reise?

27.1- Hvordan føles det å skulle være så lenge borte? - Trist/skummelt/befriende?

#3, #8

28.0*Har du/ dere planlagt denne reisen nøyde, eller tar du/ dere det litt som det kommer?

28.1-Hvorfor?

#1, #2

29.0*Hva sier foreldrene dine til at du skal ut å reise?

29.1- Hva med andre familiemedlemmer og venner, er de støttende/ skeptiske?

29.2- Har du noen tanker om hvorfor de er det?

29.3- (Hvis skeptiske) Har det på noe tidspunkt fått deg til å tvile på hvorvidt du vil reise?

29.4- (Hvis støttende) Er det viktig for deg at de er det?

29.5- (Hvis støttende) Tror du at du hadde dratt selv om de hadde vært skeptiske?

#1, #2

30.0*Vet du om det er noen andre i familien din som har vært på en slik reise som likner den du skal på nå?
30.1- Hva med andre venner/ bekjente?

30.2- Hvorfor tror du at de valgte/ velger en slik reise?

#1, #3

31.0*Kan du huske hva det var som først fikk deg til å begynne å tenke på at du kanskje ville reise etter videregående?  
31.1-Hvorfor tror du at du bestemte deg for at det var dette du ville gjøre?  
31.2-Noe du vil reise fra, eller noe du vil reise mot, eller begge deler?  
31.3-Har du vært usikker på noe tidspunkt? – Hvorfor?

#1, #2, #7

32.0*Kan du fortelle litt om hva du håper å oppleve mens du er der?  
32.1- Hvorfor er det en viktig erfaring?  
32.2- Hvorfor er dette noe du ikke kan oppleve hjemme?

#1, #2, #7

33.0*Tror du en slik reise vil komme til å forandre deg, eller gjøre at du ser annerledes på ting?  
33.1- Hvordan/ hvorfor?  
33.2- (Hvis ja) Tror du det er en bra ting? – På hvilken måte?

#7

34.0*Jeg kan tenke meg at en slik reise koster en del, hvordan fikk du råd til den?  
34.1- Hva tror du at du ville brukt pengene på hvis du ikke skulle bruke dem på å reise?

#7

124
35.0*Tror du at de som ikke velger en slik reise etter videregående, men går rett over i jobb eller videre studier, går glipp av noe viktig?

35.1- Hva / hvorfor

###

36.0*Tror du slike reiser er vanlig i dag?

36.1- Hvorfor/ hvorfor ikke?

###

37.0*Tror du slike reiser var vanlig for to, tre generasjoner siden?

37.1- Hvorfor/ hvorfor ikke?

### #3, #6, #7

38.0*Hva håper du på å få ut av denne reisen?

### #6, #7

39.0*(Hvis reise flere) Når man skal være så lenge, så tett sammen med andre kan det kanskje bli litt mye for noen, er du engstelig for at det skal bli krangling og slikt på turen?

### #6, #7

40.0*Hvordan pleier du å forholde deg når du diskuterer med mennesker du opplever er uenig med deg? 40.0.1 – Hva synes du er en god måte å løse konflikter på?

40.1- Konfliktsky?

40.2- Konfronterende?

### #6, #7
41.0* (Hvis reise sammen med noen) Men dere er kanskje veldig gode venner, i og med at dere har bestemt dere for å dra på denne reisen sammen. Hvilke kvaliteter er det du liker best med reisefølget ditt?

41.1- Hva er det som gjør at du setter pris på disse kvalitetene?

#6, #7

42.0*(Hvis reise alene) Hvis du skulle valgt noen å reise sammen med, hva slags egenskaper måtte de ha hatt?

#6, #7

43.0*Hva slags mennesker kunne du overhode ikke tenke deg å reise med, hvilke egenskaper ved folk er det som går deg skikkelig på nervene?

#6, #7

44.0*Hva tenker du er den beste egenskapen et menneske kan ha?

#6, #7

45.0*Hva mener du er den verste egenskapen et menneske kan ha?

Fremtiden

#3, #5, #7, #8

47.0*Hva tenker du at du skal gjøre når du kommer tilbake fra turen?

47.1- Jobb/ studier/ reise mer? 47.1.2 – Er det noe du tenker du vil holde på med lenge?

47.2– Hvorfor den jobben/ de studiene? – (Viktig ift. fremtid?)

47.3- Er det noe du ser fram til?

47.4- Hvorfor vil du ikke gjøre det med en gang?

126
#3, #5, #7, #8

48.0*Hvordan tror du det blir å komme tilbake etter å ha vært borte?

#2, #6, #7, #8

49.0*Hvis du fikk bestemme helt fritt, hvordan hadde din drømmefremtid sett ut da?

49.1- Barn, gift, jobb? 48.1.1 – Hvorfor/ hvorfor ikke

49.2- Tror du det er slik den kommer til å se ut? 49.2.1 – evt. Hvorfor ikke

#2, #6, #7, #8

50.0*Hva skal til for at du er fornøyd med livet ditt i fremtiden?

50.1- Hvorfor er det viktig?

#2, #6, #7, #8

51.0*Hva tror du skal til for at fremtiden din blir slik du ønsker at den skal bli?

#2, #6, #7, #8

52.0*Hva slags krav stiller du til en jobb når du en dag skal ha det?

52.1- Hvorfor er det viktig?

#2, #6, #7, #8

53.0*Hva tror du at du kommer ti å jobbe med?

53.1- Hvorfor tror du at du kommer til å jobbe med det?

53.2- Ville det vært drømmejobben din?
53.3- (Hvis ikke) Hvorfor tror du ikke at du kommer til å jobbe med drømmejobben? 53.3.1 – Hvilke forhold hindrer at du får den?

#2, #6, #7, #8

54.4- (Hvis drømmejobb) Hvordan tror du at du kommer til å klare og få drømmejobben? 54.4.1 – Hvilke forhold må være/ ikke være tilstede for at du skal få den.

#2, #6, #7, #8

55.0* (Hvis ikke drømmejobben) hva er drømmejobben din?

55.1- Hva er det som tiltaler deg ved den jobben?

55.2- Er det en jobb du kunne tenkt deg å hatt hele livet?

55.3- Tror du det er mulig at du kommer til å forandre deg i fremtiden, slik at du kommer til å se på en annen jobb som drømmejobben? 55.3.1 – (Hvis nei) Hvorfor ikke?

#2, #6, #7, #8

56.0*Er det noe du absolutt ikke kunne tenke deg å jobbe med?

56.1- Hvorfor ikke?

56.2- Hva er den største forskjellen mellom en slik jobb og drømmejobben din?

#3, #5

57.0*Er det noe ved fremtiden som du oppfatter som skremmende eller risikabelt i forhold til ditt eget liv, eller ser du stort sett lyst på fremtiden?

#6, #7

58.0*Hvis du får barn, hva tror du at du hadde sagt hvis hun eller han hadde kommet til deg og sagt at de ville reise ut i verden etter videregående?
#6, #7

59.0*(Hvis støttende) Kan du tenke deg noe sønnen eller datteren din kunne sagt til deg at de skulle gjøre etter videregående, hvor du hadde prøvd å få dem til å ombestemme seg?

Debrifing

60.0*Er det noe du kjenner nå at du ikke fikk sagt som du har lyst til si?

61.0*Jeg forstår at du har formidlet … Vil du si at det stemmer? Eventuelle siste oppfølgingsspørsmål

62.0*Hvordan synes du det var å bli intervjuet?

63.0*Er det noe ved intervjuet du synes burde vært annerledes, som jeg kan forandre på til neste gang jeg intervjuer? Er det noen spørsmål jeg ikke stilte, som du tror kunne vært relevante hvis jeg vil forstå hvorfor du reiser, og hva som er viktig for deg i livet ditt?

64.0*Hvis jeg skulle ha noen oppfølgingsspørsmål senere, er det i orden om jeg ringer deg eller sender deg en mail?

Hvis du skulle ha noen spørsmål til meg er det bare å ringe, eller sende en mail. Også hvis du plutselig kommer på noe du vil legge til.

Da må jeg bare si tusen takk for at du stilte opp, så håper jeg du får en god tur! 