Title:

Navigating social pathways for youths transitioning from school to work: How young adults shape their life course with an eye on the future

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Content

Abstract

This research paper examines different perspectives on how pathways in the life course of young people transitioning to adulthood is prolonged, and how young people today are able to navigate and shape their own pathways. The paper is inspired by, and written in conjunction with, an international conference: *Transition to adulthood in times of inequality – the changing impact of intergenerational relations*, held by the Department of Sociology at the University of Bergen in the period of May 30th – June 1st 2017. In light of how increased flexibility for young adults today bring questions on increased uncertainty, the paper touches on how young adults transition from school-to-work in today's knowledge societies, in search for an ever better qualified work-force, is demanding longer educations. Which in turn can initiate questions on if such demands is prolonging the youth phase among young individuals.

To guide the paper onwards, two research questions are formulated: 1) *when making the transition into adulthood, how does young individuals navigate and manage their own lives with an eye on the future?* 2) *As young individuals transition from school-to-work, what risks-factors and uncertainties are present in the life course of slow and fast-trackers?* To discuss the two overarching research questions, perspectives on youth risks and uncertainties in connection with school-to-work transitions will be explored. Many of the studies and perspectives this paper is built upon are part of an extensive research field within youth sociology, concerned with youth transitions, including navigational theory, youth concepts and slow and fast-track transitions.

Keywords: Navigation, education, uncertainty, social change, contexualist life course perspective, youth transitions, risks, life-management, biographies

1 Introduction

1.0 Changing lives and changing contexts for young adults

"Our answer is the world's hope; it is to rely on youth. The cruelties and the obstacles of this swiftly changing planet will not yield to obsolete dogmas and outworn slogans. It cannot be moved by those who cling to a present which is already dying, who prefer the illusion of security to the excitement and danger which comes with even the most peaceful progress. This world demands the qualities of youth: not a time of life but a state of mind, a temper of the will, a quality of imagination, a predominance of courage over timidity, of the appetite for adventure over the life of ease [...]"

Robert Kennedy, Speech given June 6th, 1966, University of Cape Town (UCT)

The quote is from Kennedy's parliamentary address to students at the University of Cape Town, called the 'Day of Affirmation Address'. A liberal student movement, the National Union of South African Students (NUSAS), invited Kennedy. In the 'Day of Affirmation' Kennedy compared racial inequality and prejudice in the United States and South Africa. The speech appealed to the youth, to take charge of their country and its future (Rudolph, 1982). His appeal of the empowerment of youth were not mere words, but did become a reality. Exactly a decade later, on the 16th of June 1976, students in Soweto[1] protested against Afrikaans[2] as a compulsory medium of instruction in schools. The protest is known as the Soweto Uprising, with the date commemorated as a public holiday called Youth Day (Rudolph, 1982).

Why is the speech Kennedy made decades ago still interesting for youths today? Over the years, young people's lives have changed quite dramatically, causing both increased flexibility and responsibility, leaving young people exposed to risks, feelings of insecurity and uncertain futures. Society as we know it has undergone a major set of changes, and some important contexts which is being transformed are: education, labour market experiences and patters of dependency (Furlong, 2016:1). For young people, a greater proportion of their lives are spent on education, with many young entering into higher educational programs and getting university degrees. Studies from the United Kingdom (UK) shows that youth labour markets has declined since 1976, with an increase in school staying-on rates, while the proportion of young people that now enter higher education has risen (Dolton,Makepeace,Hutton & Audas, 1999; Bynner,Elias,McKnight,Pan & Pierre, 2002). By 2000, over 70 per cent of 16/17 year old youths in the UK were in some form of full-education, compared to under 50 per cent in 1984 (Jones, 2002:6). In 2000, only 11 per cent of youths were in employment, compared with 33 per cent in 1984 (Jones, 2002:6).

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[1] Soweto – township in the city of Johannesburg in Gauteng, South Africa.
[2] Afrikaans – a West Germanic language spoken in South Africa, Namibia, Botswana and Zimbabwe.

In addition, in the UK and Wales, between the mid-1970s and the mid-1990s, the proportion of 16 year olds remaining in full-time education more than doubled (Jones, 2002). Politicians in the UK has argued that these changing patterns (stay in school or leave) reflected the expansion of opportunities and choices that young individuals had. In recent years in the UK, such choices has become more critical for those aged 16/17 in terms of adult outcomes by the time they are 23, and most young people continues into higher education (Dolton et al., 1999; Bynner et al., 2002). Some have argued that it is *not* because of positive choices, but rather because of a lack of alternatives for young people (Furlong & Cartmel, 1997). For some of the young that left school, menial jobs *now* seem more attractive than a vague promise of a job later, in an uncertain future. Even though studies suggest there lies a greater risk in not getting qualifications, not all young people seemed to realise this (McDowell, 2001).

1.1 Youth opportunities and the shaping of pathways

Today, many young people want to, and are required to become their own scouts of opportunities, and being able to come to terms with temporary engagements in many life spheres. Therefore, becoming an adult today require the coordination of multiple transitions; like completing education and entering employment, becoming a parent or setting up one's own long-term career (Furlong & Cartmel, 1997). As Furlong discusses, changes like these have encouraged researchers to attempt theoretical recapitalizations of both youth sociology, transitions to adulthood and the life course (Furlong, 2016).

In addition, the state expects that young people are actively deciding between different routes when establishing pathways through life. This also makes them accountable for the long-term consequences of their own pathway choices (Heinz,Huinink & Weymann, 2009). As Heinz and Marshall emphasises, one can explore how different life course policies can help in stabilizing transition biographies for young people and in turn act as launch pads into a more self-directed adulthood (Heinz & Marshall, 2003). As will be explored, differences between nations can become evident in such a process. Like with the United Kingdom and in the United States of America, where early economic independence is expected and the social monitoring of pathways is less institutionalized (Furlong, 2016).

1.2 Research questions

In this course paper, the aim is to *explore* how risks and uncertainties regarding a prolonged school-to-work transition can become important factors when young adults try to navigate and manage their own lives in order to shape their futures. As the field of research on pathways and transitions to adulthood in youth lives is quite extensive, this paper aims to contribute to the field by discussing some youth researchers and their perspectives on transitions into adulthood, with references to the wider literature. Therefore, it is important to clarify that this paper does not seek to determine youth transitions or

define social outcomes. Instead, the paper wishes to show how certain perspectives can be useful when discussing youth transitions into adulthood. The focus will be on discussing western societies, and raise questions on the life course becoming more diverse and less uniform, making future outcomes less predictable and more uncertain for young adults. Here, the paper will make use of empirical examples from studies concerned with school-to-work transitions and articles discussing youth risks and changes. The paper will be drawing on literature presented by distinguished scholars on the field of youth transitions. In order to guide the paper onwards, two specific and overarching research questions are formulated:

1) *When making the transition into adulthood, how does young individuals navigate and manage their own lives with an eye on the future?*

2) *As young individuals transition from school-to-work, what risks-factors and uncertainties are present in the life course of slow and fast-trackers?*

1.3 Life course policies and transitions

In the context of unpredictable and uncertain times, du Bois-Raymond (among others) emphasizes how *navigation* and *life management* have increased in significance, with education representing an essential resource through which transitions are shaped (Diepstraten, du Bois-Reymond & Vinken, 2006; Walther, du Bois-Reymond & Biggart, 2006). As societies' life course policies are intended to prepare young adults to navigate uneven pathways and actively design their own life plans, Heinz and Marshall argues that through models of self-socialization during the passage from school to work, young adults can develop specific guidelines in their lives, as a response to an increased flexibility (Heinz & Marshall, 2003).

In these cases, life course policies stress the notion of the individuals own responsibility to accomplish the transition to adulthood in a good way. Heinz points to how in countries like the UK and US, young people begin to work at an early age, with jobs often being low payed and insecure (Heinz & Marshall, 2003). On the other hand, in social welfare and in training societies like Germany, Netherlands, Norway and Denmark, there exists standardized vocational and academic pathways (Heinz, Kelle, Witzel & Zinn, 1998). These standardizations in turn help guide young people to social positions after an institutionalized process of qualification has been promoted. In these countries, the transitional outcomes depend on the constant and active matching of skills and credentials with employment opportunities. In addition, when it comes to cases of risk, state agencies often monitor – and intervene – to prevent individuals from falling out of school or work-related areas (Heinz et al., 1998).

2 Theoretical approach

2.0 A brief introduction to a contextualist life course perspective

The history of the life course perspective has its roots from the biographical approach developed by W. I Thomas and F. Znaniecki in their classical study *The Polish Peasant in Europe and America* in the years between 1918 and 1920 (Thomas & Znaniecki, 1918). One of the earliest sociologists who advocated that the biography-history dynamic was an important approach was C. Wright Mills. According to C. Wright Mills, what sets the contextualist perspective apart from other perspectives in sociology is the link between human agency , structural attributes of society and time (Mills, 1980 [1959]). Later Elder would observe that until the 1970s, mainstream sociology rarely dug deep into the complexities of life (Elder Jr,Johnson & Crosnoe, 2003). Heinz et al. (2009) summarize it: 'As a proper methodological basis for the analysis of social process, it [the life course approach] denotes an interrelationship between individuals and society that evolves as a time-dependent, dynamic linkage between social structure, institutions, and individual action from birth to death' (Heinz et al., 2009:15).

Elder's study, *Children of the Great Depression,* is one of the classical texts which serves as an example on how one can adopt the history-biographic approach Mills advocated in a life course perspective. Basing his work on longitudinal data of a cohort over time, Elder studied the impact of economic deprivation during a childhood period (children born 1920-21 in Berkley and Oakland, California) taking place at the same time as the Great Depression in America (Steinmetz & Elder, 1976; Elder, 1998). Elder defined the life course as 'consisting of age-graded patterns that are embedded in social institutions and history. This view is grounded in a contextualist perspective and emphasizes the implication of social pathways in historical time and place for human development and ageing' (Elder Jr et al., 2003:4).

Studies emerging from such a perspective do not seek to formulate any 'laws' about how transitions happen that transcend time and place (Nilsen & Brannen, 2014). As with Elders research, he did not set out to predict how childhood deprivation would affect a life course or individual development. Instead, by taking into account contextual features and historical period, Elder could study how historical contexts in themselves played a part in shaping individual's life stories over time (Nilsen & Brannen, 2014).

2.1 The concept of youth and transition

To be able to disscuss how youths can navigate and shape pathways in their lives, it is essential to first understand this complex concept in its self. The term 'youth' is a social construction, and how it is understood can vary, both over time and between cultures (Jones, 2002:1). Since it first emereged to the world in its modern form, as a 'stage in life', the concept of youth has continually been extended over time. In practice, this extension has come as a result of government implemented policies (Jones & Wallace, 1992; Jones, 2002). Particulary the extension of education and training has created a

wedge between the sequence of transitions, from childhood to adulthood. Before, it might have been possible to think of it as a single order of transition (from childhood into adulthood), but through various social changes the process of youth has been extended, making it far more complex (Jones, 1997). Jones offer a table to simplify the transition to adulthood by dividing it in economic dependence – and later – independece:

Table 1 Extended transitions to adulthood

Childhood	Youth	Adulthood
School	College or training scheme	Labour market
Parental home	Intermediate household, living with peers or alone	Independent home
Child in family	Intermediate statuses, Inc. single parenthood, cohabiting partner	Partner–parent
More secure housing	Transitional housing in youth housing market (e.g. furnished flats and bedsits)	More secure housing
'Pocket money' income	'Component' or partial income (e.g. transitional NMW)	Full adult income Economic 'independence'
Economic 'dependence'	Economic semi-dependence	

(Jones, 2002:2).

In the table, childhood is understood as a period of economic dependence (on parents or other protectors), and adulthood is seen as the time when economic independence is achived. Even thought these are simplications, Jones states that such a table (Table 1) helps to pinpoint were 'youh' can be found, as it is somewhere between the two (Jones, 2002). It is a period of semi-dependence during which transitions into adulthood occurs (Jones & Wallace, 1992). Using the table, Jones identifies several key changes in the transition to adulthood, such as the 'progress' to adulthood now involving more *backtracking* (like dropping out of education or training, returning to the parental home, cohabitation and tentative partnerships). 'Interconnected' pathways, meaning young people can become adult according to one criteria but not another (economically independent, but still living in parents house, or live independently with parental support).

Individual events, or rites of passage have changed within the transition to adulthood (houshold formation has now become more separated from family formation), resulting in that leavning home is now a more important life event in itself. At the same time,leaving school is now not so significant unless it is accompanied by getting employed (Jones, 2002:2).

2.2 Sociological perspectives: transitions as an research tradition

From the traditions of youth research, two main perspectives have emerged and developed over time: the cultural perspective, mainly focusing on ethnographic research to explore a whole range of local expressions of youth-based culture. The second one, the transitions perspective, focuses on the use of drawing on quantitative data to be able to study education to work within structural contexts (Furlong,Woodman & Wyn, 2011). Among others, MacDonald (2011) discusses how bridging these existing gaps between the two theoretical perspectives could lead to youth research gaining more relevance. His discussion, particularly concerning youth unemployment, on what has changed and what is still the same, is based on a 30-year research period on youth transitions from the UK (MacDonald, 2011). By using examples from an earlier longitudinal qualitative study, MacDonald demonstrates how incorporating biographical interviews makes it possible to combine the two traditions into a research design (MacDonald,Mason,Shildrick,Webster,Johnston & Ridley, 2001).

In Sociology, the research tradition on transitions is a well-established one. Like the changes to the British labour market in the 1970s and the increased relegation of many young people to a more 'secondary labour market' (Brannen, 1975). In the current landscape of uncertain economic times in the Western society, renewed interest in in the transition phase is emerging. Unlike in past decades, today's society of youths and young adults faces an increasing level of risks when it comes to making the transition to adulthood and being independent. In the 1950s and in the decades to come, people's lives were quite stable and predictable. The usual transitions such as getting an education, paid work and a permanent residence or housing happened in the space of a few years (Aassve,Iacovou & Mencarini, 2006:22).

This sequence, of setting up one's own separate household, establishing a long term relationship or becoming a parent is often viewed as major factors in the phase of transition and for determining later life outcomes (Elder Jr, 1985). In today's modern world, society grows at a fast rate. It demands for longer and more complex educations to meet an increasingly more competitive labour marked. In turn, this type of 'knowledge society' can prevent youths from getting job-related experiences early on, which may affect them in negative ways in later stages of life (Furlong & Cartmel, 2006). The focus on entering and completing higher educations also carry the possibility that young people will enter forms of employment that are very different to experiences their parents had. Transitions and pathways that young people now establish often takes longer, and is less likely to involve a linear movement from education to work (Shanahan, 2000; Furlong et al., 2011).

2.3 Navigation work, risks and the knowledge society

The term 'navigation' is often linked with nautical charts, which stears ship and crew safeley across vast oceans before bringing them all safely back to their home port. It is a metaphor, but one which is frequently adopted by youth sociologists in order to characterize the lives of young people (Diepstraten et al., 2006). As du Bois-Reymond explains, young people does not have clear-cut statuses or life curcumstances, and therefore is in need of active and informed navigators in order to do the intricate navigation work (Diepstraten et al., 2006). What makes such work difficult and its outcomes uncertain, is the increased tension between intended actions and unintended outcomes and risks. One of the earliest sociologist able to 'capture' this tension was Ulrich Beck and his work on the concept of 'risk society' (Beck, 1992). As Beck notes, living and growing up in contemporary risk societies intensifies feelings of contingency, of never being certain if personal decisions takes you where you want to go (Beck, 1992).

What transforms traditional societies into risk societies is the speed in which new technologies are applied, spread, developed and then re-developed again by others. Interestingly, the fear of abusive technologies and knowledge seems more downplayed these days (Furlong, 2016:31). Today's society, which some scholars have come to call the 'knowledge society' has a more positive connection for most people. The term in its self signifies that the acqustion of knowledge for individuals is both worthwhile and necessary, in order to cope with modern life (Hargreaves, 2003). Incalculable risks, more diverse ethnic-cultural compositions of the population and growing knowledge are all influencal conditions which can steer navigational work and outcomes for young people.

2.4 Slow and fast-track transitions into adulthood for young individuals

In the discussion to follow, it is important to distinguish between youth-sociological *discourses* and the empirical evidence. As du Bois-Raymond mentions, the two does not always match each other (du Bois-Reymond & Chisholm, 2006). Discourses may exaggerate societal developments and the impact it has on youth lives when they transition into adulthood. Also, there may exist 'blank spots' in discourses overlooking important developments which are essential to the lives of young people (du Bois-Reymond & Chisholm, 2006). When it comes to the 'navigation discourse' concerning youth sociology, the focus is strongly centered around transitions from school-to-work. If *education* in this context is the driving force behind the prolongation of youth, it does matter what and how much education young people receives. When it comes to transitioning from school-to-work, researchers within the field of youth transitions continually point to the divide between those who are 'slow-track' and 'fast-track' (Bynner & Parsons, 2002).

As Bynner and Parsons show, this distinction still corresponds closeley along class lines, to middle- and lower-class affiliations, as well as with certain ethnic minority groups. Gender has also lost its discriminatory demanor, with females catching up[3] with males in educational terms in most of the western-style countries (Bynner & Parsons, 2002). Young people with working-class backrounds are often thought of to be left out from a slow-track, as Yoon states about young South Koreans and their cultural practices: "they suffer from a lack of reseources and are restrained by traditional norms and familial ties" (Yoon, 2006:375). The result of this exclusion is faster employment, formations of partnerships and possible parenthood.

In addition, more often it resulted in leavning home to live with a partner rather than to live with friends or to live alone (Heath, 2008). A more slow-track transition is formed upon the reflexive confrontation of changing circumstances and the understanding that the phase of transitioning to adulthood has become increasinlgy prolonged (Heath, 2008). Heath argues that this process is "primarily associated with middle-class young people and/or those who have benifited from the expansion of higher education in recent years" (Heath, 2008:9). As Robers states in his article *Beyond 'NEET'*[4]*and 'tidy' pathways* (2011), these two positions continue to reflect how many young people experience school-to-work related transitions (Roberts, 2011:30).

From June 2010 to June 2011, the NEET numbers rose by 2.1 per cent in England: from 16.3 per cent to 18.4 per cent of that age group. However, the data, from the Labour Force Survey, did show that there was a drop in NEETs aged 16 – 18, indicating that more people in this age group were continuing education, opposed to finding some form of employment (Sissons & Jones, 2012) Still, Roberts, with his studies incorporating biographical accounts of young working-class men, argued that in more recent times, these categories is becoming ever more hybdridizied (Roberts, 2011:30).

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[3] In Norway, there is (in 2017) an ongoing debate whether to give males extra credits (quota), in clinical psychology subjects at the university. Psychology, usually male dominated in the past, has in recent years experienced a massive drop in male students, as many males are unable to qualify to the program in competition with females. An example is the University in Bergen, which now has about 80 per cent female students, compared to 20 per cent males in many of the semesters in clinical psychology (Eilertsen, 2017).
[4] NEET – Short for an individual aged between 16 – 24 who is not in employment, education or a training scheme.

3 Discussion

3.0 Prolongation, risk and uncertainties in the life course

One of the main reasons for the prolongation of youth lies with education. As described earlier in the paper, it now takes conteporary youth much longer to pass through school and further education, compared to earlier generations (du Bois-Reymond & Chisholm, 2006). The prolongation in its self may be seen as an expression of the needs of the 'knowledge society', demanding better and higher qualified workforces. As emphasized by du Bois-Reymond, this prolongation is an quite debated field among youth researchers. If one were to look at life course in distinct phases, thinking it would develop in an ordered and neat sequence, one would soon come across empirical evidence pointing to more 'yo-yo biographies' in young peoples lives (du Bois-Reymond & López Blasco, 2003).

This concept is developed from how some young people switch between life stages and phases. Examples could be when a young mother choses to start studying again, a married couple, who after separation both goes back to a youth cultural lifestyle, or a young man in his thirties, still living at home (du Bois-Reymond & López Blasco, 2003). The examples can all help to provide the same understandning: that young people can feel both young *and* adult at the same time, they are able to reverse life stages based on what they feel is right. In the case of education, many young often changes from employee to student, or back again. Such swiches helps to create the 'yo-yo biographies' of young individuals and is, as du Bois-Raymond indicates, becoming more and more frequent (du Bois-Reymond & López Blasco, 2003).

Following du Bois-Reymond, she argues that the prolongation of the youth phase in the modern life course of young people transitioning into adulthood shows less uniformity and more diversity, and she makes a link between the prolongation and destandardization (of pathways): is it so that the longer educational trajectories become, the more destandarized the life course becomes for young individuals? Or should one think of it in terms of different forms of destandardizations? Her main point being, that as so often with causes and effects of modernization, it can be both (du Bois-Reymond & López Blasco, 2003). Using education as an example, if one were to compare the life courses of well and badly educated persons, of black or white persons, or female or males, there would be different forms of destandardization in play.

To find out how young people in these cases would be able to shape their own pathways, one would have to look to the degree of autonomy each person was granted by social institutions (du Bois-Reymond & Chisholm, 2006). In addition, the extent to which the same persons would be able to make their own decisions and live their life according to them as they transition into adulthood would be indicators of destrandardizations. Today, many young people do not stick to one type of

educational pathway, with some chosing more a voicational path, and others a more academic route. Studies that looks to inequality in higher education has shown that when entering higher education, young people can often switch programs, schools or suddenely decide to take time off to work, before going back to study again (Hillmert & Jacob, 2003). As Hillmert and Jacob argued, when comparing educational systems in Germany, different types of institutional systems can reproduce class differences when it comes to who chooses vocational or academic training.

In addition, risks of shifts, or drops in world economy may directly impact young peoples view on which studies to apply for, or which they considered as 'safe' choices. A small example: when prices on oil plummeted in 2014, many highly sought-after petroleum subjects, teached at university level in Norway, experienced a massive drop in applicants in the years that followed the crisis (Halvorsen, 2016). A survey done by the research company Sentio, for the student organization (NSO) and Universitas, found that 7 per cent of the student body (approximatly 20.000 students) were considering switching from petroleum- and geo subjects to other programs, as a direct cause of the uncertainty felt in the offshore and oil industry. In the same survey, the students were asked what they thought would affect their futures the most, 29 per cent answered the oil crisis, which made it second only to the effects of global warming (NTB, 2016).

The example above may serve to show how individual biographies, with more options to choose from, is becoming more frequent in the 'knowledge society'. Many young people seeks higher education, but at the same time, they keep a close eye on which educations are able to provide safe employment in the future. In a Norwegian context, getting a master's degree is considered a quite expensive endeavour, leading to student loans and high debt. Coupled with a growing uncertainty about future developments in labour markets, like the crisis described with the oil industry (or other areas), young people may cope by drawing up specific plans for the future (Nilsen, 1999). Here, a young person might begin her or his life as a student at school, with certain dreams, occupational wishes and plans about how to arrive at that goal. On the way, she or he may come across interesting alternatives, resulting in a switch in vocational or educational trajectories.

Still, this might not lead to the desired result (the dream or intended plan), and demand further switches. Eventually, it could lead to the person deciding that long-term planning is useless, making them stick to a more ad-hoc strategy of making decisions by the day (du Bois-Reymond & López Blasco, 2003). Essentially, the 'yo-yo biographies' may end up shaping the pathways in which young people navigate.

3.1 Social outcomes of navigation: exclusion, inclusion or adaptation

In a time of rapid structural changes, both to contexts and to individual lives, Furlong (2016) emphasiszes that discussing these changes and how they affect social outcomes for young people transitioning into adulthood, is becoming ever more important. To fully understand the concept of youth transitions, and how navigating from school-to-work may shape young life courses, one must look into rather comprehensive and cross-cutting picture of different dimensions, that may produce inequality (Furlong, 2016). As Jones (2002) shows, the ways in which transitions take place for young adults today can vary between different social groups, following his discussion, one can start to identify a polarised view of transitions to adulthood. Historically, middel-class transitions have been more prolonged than in the working-classes, and the middle-class families is known to have been providing economic support for longer (Jones, 1988). Similiary, Women have also entered partnerships and become parents at an earlier time then men.

As Jones discuss, social class and gender differences in youths transitioning into adulthood may be chanigng, but they are not dissparearing (Jones, 1988). How then, does these changes in transitions into adulthood affect the risk of social exclusion or inclusion? Here, Jones highlights the fact that the releationship between the child and the wider society (citizenship), which to a great extent (and for better or worse) is mediated by carers, usually parents (Jones, 2002:3). An example is welfare benefits, which is paid to parents and not directly to the child. In addition, a child's status of poverty is measured at the level of the household, rather than the individual child (Jones, 2002:3). This cloudiness, of being half citizen in their own right and half citizen via their parents puts young people in an exposed postion of risk, and may lead to inequality.

In addition, it shows that disadvantages (or advantages) accrue to young people in part directly as individuals, and indirectly via their parents. The point being that to get an comprehensive picture of young peoples transitions, family characteristics should be taken into account (Jones, 2002). Following Jones', there is a problem for researchers who is seeking for indicators of risks or events that may lead to social exclusion (Jones, 2002). Generally, social exclusion is identified with individuals that are excluded from areas such as work, housing, health care, education and other factors. But to some extent, all young people are (or in risk of being) excluded from aspects of the wider society. They are, as Jones states, an marginalised age group (Jones, 2002). Youths are also a heterogeneous group, with people at the same age finding them selves in different stages in their transition into adulthood.

The result is that they may be exposed to risks or suffer social exclusions in different forms and to different degrees (Jones, 2002). As they are all navigating their different pathways in life, some may not be out seeking jobs, be in need of a place to stay or taking responsibility for their own health care.

On the other side, others may have been trying to access these goods but then failed in doing so (Jones, 2002). When it comes to navigating educational pathways, Jones highlights the importance of the public belief in the fact that education is valuable, which he refers to as 'the educational ethos' (Jones, 2002:15). People need to be certain that their personal investment in getting educated will be worth it in the long term. Here, Jones points to the increase in qualifications resulting in a reduction in their value, and that earning bonuses of gaining a degree becomes less apparent (Jones, 2002:15).

There is also the dimension of education not being accessible to some ethnic minority groups, and even for those who do end up with a degree there is still disadvantages in the labour market. These are indicators that education might not 'work' for everyone. In addition, the social benefits associated with university life is reduced. This could vary from nation to nation, but in an Norwegian context, university life is expensive (Hellevik, 2005). Here, many students depend on a small income, usually funded by the government, to be able to get higher education. Some portion of the loans have the option of being credited, but only if the student passes exams and finishes her or his degree. For people unsure if they made the right choice, or are in risk of becoming drop-outs, such a system can have negative effects for those unable to get a degree.

In addition, since being a student potentially is a costly enterprise, some young find vocational or training programs more attractive, or they enter into part-time employments to cover full-time student expenses, or eventually drop out altogether switching from student to employee. Potentially, part-time engagements may have negative effects on academic results, as the students are unable to dedicate all their time to being a full-time student (Sjøberg, 2014). Again, such examples help to illustrate how concepts of slow and fast-track determinations might be problematic, as young people today are able to switch statuses and adapt to social conditions at a faster rate (du Bois-Reymond & Chisholm, 2006).

In the view of discontinuities, reversals and detours, the shaping of one's own biographical continuity is a formidable task for any young adults growing up. But despite the uncertainty regarding their future, many young adults attempt to adapt their ambitions and decisions by actively shaping their own life course with an eye on the future (Furlong, 2016:7). In the context of fragmented pathways and changing opportunity structures, this process of adaptation can be vital to accumulate resources that can help young individuals to shape biographies and make individual decisions (Furlong, 2016). In the context of life management, it has certainly been interesting to explore the different dimensions between the early stress of preparing to make individual decisions, and the extended period it takes to actually reach full adulthood (Furlong & Cartmel, 1997).

4 Conclusions

The two research questions, outlined at the start to this paper, were concerned with how trajectories play out and how young individuals can navigate and shape their own pathways into adulthood. The second question explores how risks and uncertainties are presented to young people when they transition from school-to-work. In a general sense, human life develops in time and space. Therefore, the life courses of contemporary people, and young individuals in particular, can be said to be no different from the life courses of earlier generations. But as this paper have explored, youth sociologists tend to discuss this question in a more restricted manner (Diepstraten et al., 2006). When referring to the future now being more open, researchers point to the decades that came after the Second World War. Here, class and gender, with corresponding behaviour determined the life courses strongly. Since then, the life course has transformed, and now consist of more individual biographies, with young people having more options to choose from when navigating. At the same time, as du Bois-Reymond states, more options increase real and felt risks and uncertainties (Diepstraten et al., 2006).

Whether one transitions fast or slow through life, you never know what the result of a certain choice will be. Such uneasiness can make young individuals feel constantly uncertain, if the choice they made was the 'right' one, at the right time (Furlong & Cartmel, 2003). What is also true is that in being young, their futures is still less determined. Young people have not yet accomplished much of their life paths, resulting in young people becoming more exposed to risks and uncertainties, just by having to make more choices then older people. As discussed, young people can react to the situation with two types of coping strategies. One were to draw up specific life plans (like getting a certain type of education to enter a specific labour market), the other was to refrain from making plans, sticking to short-term planning, or even no deliberate planning at all (du Bois-Reymond & López Blasco, 2003). In the face of modern circumstances and risks of exclusion, both these strategies seems sensible.

Another development in young people's navigation is that they now are more aware of new contingencies in their lives. Awareness's can be more pessimistic, as with people identified as NEETs, or they can take on a more optimistic awareness that they will be able to cope with their lives and plan accordingly (Diepstraten et al., 2006). Still, the specifying of general trends has to be taken carefully into account. du Bois-Reymond suggests that one research strategy could be making comparisons at a regional or national level pointing to cultural, ethnic, gender and economic factors which influences young people (du Bois-Reymond & Chisholm, 2006).

Transitioning in a time characterized by breath-taking acceleration (entering the knowledge society) and experiences of destandardizations ('yo-yo biographies'), navigation work will become even more complex for young people. Preparing for such work through broad educational strategies is therefore of essential importance (Furlong et al., 2011). Even so, as emphasized by Jones, not all young people will be up to that task.

Despite rapid changes, there is also an extent in which life models for young people can be regarded as unchanged. Young people still stick to family traditions, realize normal biographical life plans and follow 'old' values of religion and moral obligations (du Bois-Reymond & Chisholm, 2006). Even so, a normal biographical life course developing according to the 'old' rules is not the same today as it was for former generations. Simply, one can say it is because it takes place in another time, which opens for new options and pathways even if they are not used. Finishing with the words of Kennedy: 'the world demands the qualities of youth', and for youth researchers studying social changes and outcomes, the task for the future could be to bridge the trends of continuity and discontinuity in the life courses of young people.

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