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Modes of obeying: functional stupidity, despair, seduction, cynicism and authoritarianism

Young adults in precarious workplaces

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Abstract

This essay aims to study workplace obedience from the perspective of young adults in precarious work environments. The study was delimited to young adults that had experienced what they viewed as irrational management. These informants were interviewed to research the new and largely untested theory of functional stupidity. Functional stupidity means that employees at a workplace can become more functional by minimizing their critical capacities for reflections about the stupid practises that exist in that organization. Functional stupidity is one mode of obedience that in this essay was researched in the context of cynicism, despair, seduction and authoritarianism (Paulsen, 2017). This was done in an explorative small-scale study with a convenience sample of six informants that had this experience. Their age was 21-27. The informants were from western industrialized countries in the service sector in private companies with no work security. These informants were interviewed which were then interpreted in a thematic analysis.

The major findings were that the informants deliberately move between different modes of obedience including functional stupidity in these workplaces. The context of precariousness made the management very threatening and age was one way used to reproduce stupid practises. The experience of stupid practises is a new aspect that makes the precariousness worse. Age was one factor that formed experience of the different modes of obedience. Age was one way to set the agenda, individualising organizational problems and central to feeling of having to prove themselves. The major contribution of this study is on one hand to test the theory of functional stupidity in a new context and on the other hand to introduce the perspective of stupid practises in the scholarly debate on young adults in precarious work.

Concepts: functional stupidity, precariousness, young adult

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1. Introduction

1.1 Background

Work is always a topic central to public debate. The debate has centred around topics such as universal basic income, the work ethic of millennials, worsening of mental health, what the effects of a more flexible work regime will be, the effects of technology or how globalisation makes it harder for national politics to be effective.

A lot of different surveys have been done on how people think about their work. One Gallup survey of workplace engagement from 144 countries found that 13 % of workers are engaged at work, 63 % are not engaged, 24 % are actively disengaged and hostile to the company they work for (Gallup, 2013). Another survey paints a better picture in the Europe where workers are generally treated better (Eurobarometer, 2009). Still there *seems* to be a big awareness of the meaningless of much work. 37 % in a survey done in England believed that their work made no meaningful contribution to the world, and 40 % in the Netherlands (Graeber, 2018, p. xxiv). Graeber has coined the provocative term “bullshit jobs” when the worker has the experience of knowing that what they do is not meaningful, but they do it anyway (2018). Graeber has written an essay on what he calls “structural stupidity” where bullshit jobs are just one example of broad systematic stupidity (2016). Two other scholars that also has not shied away from using stupidity in an academic setting is Alvesson and Spicer who coined the term “functional stupidity” meaning that the individual manages to be functional in an organization where practises of stupidity exist (2012). Their argument is similar to Graeber’s in that stupidity exists structural; claiming that we live in a “stupidity-based economy” opposed to the well espoused view that we live in a “knowledge economy” (Alvesson & Spicer, 2012). One example according to them is consumerism which they view as part of an “economics of persuasion” that contributes 30 % to the economy, but is geared towards persuasion, creation of images and symbol manipulation, and a zero-sum-game in status competition (Alvesson & Spicer, 2012). Their claim is that organizations is partly driven by organising stupidity which makes the organization function in a stupidity-based economy.

At the same time what has been termed precarious work seems to be growing in western industrialized countries after years of liberalizations of the labour market, globalization and technological developments (Kalleberg, 2018). Proponents of increased liberalization argue that it provides flexibility to both employers and employees, but many researchers have pointed to that it seems as though employers benefit the most (Kalleberg, 2018). Importantly, flexibility is not always something that creates precariousness for example in high status

occupations. One group that are affected most by the precariosization of work is youths and young adults (Antonucci, 2016). It has been observed that mental ill health is growing prevalence among young adults, partly connected to precarity (Canivet, Bodin, Emmelin, Toivanen, Moghadassi, Östergren, 2016).

One part of the scholarly debate in sociology of work circles around how to understand power and the reactions to it. Different concepts have been used in research: obedience, compliance and coping; in order to study how workers, understand and experience their circumstances, what strategies they use in the face high demands, stress, management that they are critical of and hierarchies without legitimacy. Some scholarly work has focused on resistance and change, while others has focused on how reproduction of organizations and structures happen that are seen as unfair or exploitative (Bourdieu, 1998). Part of where this debate on reproduction, power and change happens is in the intersection between studies of precariousness and youth studies (Macdonald, 2009).

This study aims at contributing to these debates by examining stupidity in the context of precarious work experienced by young adults. The relevance for this is first: Functional stupidity as a concept has been inserted in the scholarly debate to give a better understanding of how obedience, compliance and similar term should be used (Alvesson & Spicer, 2012). Different aspects of irrationalities in society is not a new theme in sociology. One prominent example is Mcdonaldization where the supposed rationalization of service work leads to a facet of irrationalities (Ritzer, 2014). Alvesson and Spicers argue that functional stupidity as concept is more fitting in many circumstances because it focuses on the counterfactual in that functionality can be reached by minimizing critical reflections and just get the job done in the context of what they view as stupid practise (2012, Paulsen, 2017). The theory of functional stupidity is largely untested and is there for still in an explorative stage (Paulsen, 2017).

The second reason for the relevance of this study is the one-sided focus in research on obedience by overemphasising a particular mode of obedience (Paulsen, 2017). Paulsen sees that the new concept functional stupidity could create the same kind of one sidedness and becoming all-encompassing (2017). The view that the research has been too ones-sided should not be overstated as much as Paulsen does but there seems to be more work needed on a more multifaced approach that other researcher has done (Astvik, Mellin, Allvin, 2013, Kunda, 2006, Fleming & Spicer, 2007). Paulsen proposes a theory of contextualizing functional stupidity with other modes of obedience which the worker deliberately can move

between (2017). The theory of functional stupidity has only been empirically studied in one Swedish Public Employment Service office (Paulsen, 2017, 2018) and among young adults in investment banking (Alvesson & Einola, 2018). Alvesson and Spicer, and Paulsen points out that more research is needed on contingent factors that can affect if and how functional stupidity and other modes of obedience are expressed, practised and experienced by workers. These contingent factors can be many: class, ethnicity, gender, occupation, field, age etc. This study differentiates itself from the earlier studies by focusing on young adults (21-27), but instead of high-status work of investment banking as were the focus of Alvesson and Einola in their 2018 study, this study will focus on work permeated by precariousness. Paulsen's study was done on social workers that is in the public sector, unionized and secure work relative to people in the precarity (2017, 2018). The context of precariousness is a way of exploring and potentially give more richness and nuances to the theory of functional stupidity.

The third reason for the relevance of this study is the specifics of the debate on precarity for young adults. The debate centres around how to understand what effects the severity of precariousness, long term effects, experiences and strategies used by the young adults. What is lacking first how they experience it day to day, with changing emotions and thoughts. Secondly the debate lacks that precariousness is characterized by a lot of irrationalities or even stupidities. The experience of stupid practises could matter how adverse the situation feels for the young worker. Another debate in this field is what part choice and agency plays where obedience as a concept is valuable to research to further understand agency of the workers.

1.2 Purpose of study and research question

This is an explorative study with the purpose of testing the concept of functional stupidity in a new context of precariousness among young adult. The study will focus on young adults that experienced that their management was not rational or well-functioning, seeing if this irrationally is best described as "stupidity", to be able to test the theory of functional stupidity in this context. This will be studied by interviewing 6 young adults 21-27 in the service sector that has experienced adverse precarious conditions. The study is limited to young adults in western industrialized countries in the service sector to make the object of research more pointed but still grasp that precariousness, young adulthood and obedience are all cross-national social phenomenon. The paper will research one question:

- How do young adults experience obedience at precarious workplaces situated in the private service sector, in western industrialized countries when they view management as irrational?

1.3 Disposition

First the theoretical framework is presented followed by earlier research. The theoretical framework is presented first to be able to early elaborate more in detail on the different concepts that are in focus of this study as to make the earlier research more understandable. After the earlier research the method is presented. In the method section comes a discussion of the selection of informants, the choice of phenomenological approach, data collections of interviews and the thematic analysis. Reflections on the validity and reliability of the study are done followed by ethical considerations. Next the result and analysis are presented. The result and analysis are divided in three parts: firstly: management and organization, secondly: obeying under the regime, thirdly moving between modes of obedience. The paper ends with discussion of the results in the context of methodological considerations, the theoretical framework, earlier research and implications for future research.

2. Theoretical framework

The theoretical framework is outlined as follows. The meaning of the terms precariousness and young adults will be described. Next stupidity management as a form of managerialism will be described. Alvesson and Spicer have laid the groundwork for the theory but this study will build on how Paulsen has contextualized functional stupidity among other modes of obedience. Lastly, Paulsen's theory of different modes of obedience will be described: functional stupidity, seduction, cynicism, despair and authoritarianism, is synthesized with Goffman's theory of frontstage and backstage (Paulsen, 2017, 2018; Goffman, 1965).

2.1 Precariousness and young adults

Precariousness in this study means that objective qualities of the job are characterized by insecurity, low pay, unemployment risks with the perceived subjective experiences of that this makes them insecure, stressed etc (Campbell & Price, 2016). There is an objective precariousness and an experience of precariousness (Campbell & Price, 2016). This distinction between objective and subjective is used to open the analysis that the objective and subjective does not has to be linear or direct. There can be different factors that modify the experience of precariousness depending on the life situation and workers agency (Campbell & Price, 2016). Agency here means that the individual through reflexivity and interpretation can move deliberately through the world and reacting to practises, organisations, events in ways that the individual finds appropriate. The life situation that is in focus is that the informants are young adults 21-27. Young adulthood is often said to be characterized by a "transition" between youth and adulthood. The transition mainly includes establishing yourself at the work market and starting your own household (Bradley & Devadason, 2008).

2.2 Stupidity management

Managerialism is an ideology and practise were the decision power is concentrated or exclusively in the management of an organization. It contrasts with more democratic decision making, privileging a bigger influence from the workers (Paulsen, 2017). Hierarchies can be good if there is dignity and the management have legitimacy from the workers (Abrahamanssn, 2007, p. 20). Stupidity management is a specific kind of managerialism (Alvesson & Spicer, 2012). Stupidity management uses different techniques of blocking; to minimize and at times extinguishing critical thinking and reflection about the practises, means and goals of the organization (Alvesson & Spicer, 2012, p. 1205). The means and/ or goals has been unethical or suboptimal that it creates problems internally or that these problems are

externalized to the rest of society (Alvesson & Spicer, 2012). Stupidity management can be done in several ways. Of focus in this study the relevant has been the suppression of dialogue by not listening, direct suppression, agenda setting, making threats and the production of a certain identity that is positive to the organization and practices (Alvesson & Spicer, 2012). The techniques of stupidity management can be both subtle and more explicit (Paulsen, 2017). This organisational power exists in the context of insecurity of the job market and dependence on work to live and be a part of the working society (Campbell & Price, 2016).

2.3 Different modes of workplace obedience: Functional stupidity, despair, cynicism, seduction and authoritarianism

The concept obedience in this framework has the meaning that the workers are enacting actions that they have articulately stated they would rather not perform; i.e. there is a counterfactual, that the individual instead wants to do (Paulsen, 2017). Central to obedience is the reproduction of the organisation practises. It contrasts with consensus where the reproduction is in the interest of all actors. The consensus can exist that one must work at a workplace, but the divided interests are in how this work is conducted and to what goals. Coping is another used concept but is more generally dealing with managing different kinds of demands, obedience is specifically about order taking (Paulsen, 2017, 2018). Another similar concept to obedience is the word compliance. Paulsen uses in one article the concept obedience, and in another compliance (2017, 2018). In personal correspondence with Paulsen I learned that he preferred the term obedience but with one of the 2017 article his reviewer refused letting him use the term obedience. Since this framework is Paulsen, I will use obedience, which is the term he used in the 2018 article (Paulsen, 2018). Compliance according to Paulsen in the email is too open in what is consensual and not. The differences should not be overstated though.

Paulsen's theory of obedience includes five different modes that the individual moves between. Mode in this theory means that it is a cognitive habit according to Paulsen (2017). These cognitive habits can elicit or be a reaction to certain emotions. The crucial part is the cognitive aspects in how the person at the moment is reflecting about his or her obedience (Paulsen, 2017). These five modes are functional stupidity, despair, cynicism, seduction and authoritarianism. Starting with the mode of functional stupidity, it is defined as the narrowing of thoughts to just focus on what gets the job done, accompanied with the disappearance of doubt and creation of a feeling of more certainty (Paulsen, 2017, Alvesson & Spicer, 2012). In the mode of functional stupidity, the questioning of the practises, routines, norms etc, is gone

for the moment. It is gone because of a willingness by the individual to not use the critical capacities that he or she has (Paulsen, 2017, Alvesson & Spicer, 2012). Functional stupidity can therefore be said to be an unreflective mode done willingly by “smart people” to “limit internal reflexivity” (Paulsen, 2017, p. 200). Functional stupidity is there for different from pure stupidity which is an individual trait that is not controllable. Functional stupidity is a mode that always exist in the context of stupidity management, so the worker must manage situations that are already stupid (Paulsen, 2017).

The second mode in Paulsen’s theory of obedience is “despair” that has a lot of nuances including emotions like fear, nervousness, being depressed, or stressed (Paulsen, 2017). The important point is that these emotions are connected to the cognitive aspect of reflecting on life at the workplace as something that is “damaged”, degrading or that they have “lost” time to do something that they want to do (Paulsen, 2017). To be viewed as “despair” according to Paulsen these counterfactual thoughts, that it could be different, must be followed by a will to change but not the enactment of these thought because of fear of losing the job for example (Paulsen, 2017).

The third mode in the theory is “cynicism” which is the experience of having “seen through” the system and there for can keep the act of obeying at distance (Paulsen, 2018). It includes a dis-identification with the organisation, the industry or even the whole working life. The “reflexive distance” makes cynicism less emotional but still a negative experience but not as strong as despair (Paulsen, 2017).

The fourth mode of obedience is called “weak seduction” which means that the individual is aware of the seduction of an idea, image or ideal (Paulsen, 2018). The individual is drawn to for example idea of being part of a certain industry or following a certain ideal. The “weak” part is supposed to point out that the individual is aware and reflecting of this seduction in contrast the strong versions of seduction that has been used by social theorists like Baudrillard where the individual is unaware of the seduction (Paulsen, 2018).

The fifth mode is a reflexive mode called “authoritarianism” where the person are aware of that they are critical of the practises but making it a virtue to obey in-itself. Seduction and authoritarianism are the two modes of obedience that are closest to consent in that is a mode that can motivate and inject positive emotions during the working day.

2.4 Moving between different modes of obedience

This theoretical framework has a view of the individual that is grounded in phenomenology. This perspective has the assumption that humans act and think with intentionality grounded in the lived world, which they have a strong ability to interpret and understand (Paulsen, 2017). The intentions are up to the individual to decide and for the researcher to study in specific situations but is still structured by social interactions and cognitive habits here called modes according to Paulsen (2017). Moving between modes is done deliberately by individual through “rationales of motives” which in other words are reasons that the individual gives him – or herself to motivate what mode of obedience to deliberate move to, or to stop obeying and start resisting for example. These deliberative moves are done in reaction to events of social interactions with management, colleagues, customers and being at different places (Paulsen, 2017). I will add the Goffman’s theory of backstage and frontstage which is similar in the assumption that humans act and think with intentionality. The individual wants to strategically presents him or herself at “the frontstage” in front of other people at the workplace. This presentation is not perfect, but the individual still strives for it. There is a control of how they act, what they say and how they think. Backstage when alone or with close friends or family, or in a bathroom at the office for example, emotions that are felt inside can potentially be shown on the outside (Goffman, 1965).

3 Earlier Research

Earlier research is divided into two parts: first research in different contexts on different kinds of obedience. The second part will give an overview of the debate in precarious and young adulthood.

3.1 Different ways of obeying

Obedience has been researched in different work environments and occupations.

Managerialism which is in focus here has been seen to have many different reactions like struggle, resistance, obedience, consensus and dialogue (Fleming & Spicer, 2007, p. 55). The research literature has shown different ways of obeying. There is a discussion on how obedience should best be understood. The literature has pointed out that this depends on multiplicity of factors: kind of work, class, the culture of the organization etc.

Desperation and strongly negative reactions to power have been well researched. Lower well-being is related to not having influence over your work, too high demands and low or no social support (Härenstam & Bejerot, 2011, p. 20). That this can create depression and stress syndrome and is well established and depends both on individual factors and the severity of the situation and work environment. One line of research has focused on how humiliation is a big part of order taking and difference in power at the workplace (Smith, 2001). Shame is another strong feeling that has shown that workers are guilty in believing that they are themselves the only ones to blame for their situation (Sennet, 1998).

Another reaction to soften the despair is cynicism. It has been researched in different work environments mainly in case studies, among audit firms, management consultants, a travel agency and knowledge worker in tech. In one travel agency cynicism existed in reaction to a “culture of fun” that was viewed as condescending, inauthentic and hypocritical (Fleming, 2005). This was experienced as condescending by the informants because their view of work was a place where they could show professionalism and experience that they were valued (Fleming, 2005). That hypocriticalness can create distance from the espoused corporate culture was also central when tech workers were hearing how they were “unique” and valued, while at the same time fearing to be reprimanded if they would question their heavy workloads, scheduling pressures and competition within the firm (Kunda, 2006, p. 112, 163). Consultants in audit firms and management were researched where the distancing was from their professional identity, from their work organizations and work methods (Kosmala & Oliver, 2006). The job was boring, constrained, stressful and they feared to speak up about

their work situation. Whittle researched management consultants that did not believe in what they were selling, that they talked about openly backstage, but never frontstage in front of the customers (Whittle, 2005). A classic study in role-distancing is Hochschild's research on emotional labor, where employees distance themselves from their own emotions and use it as a part of their work which has been seen throughout the service, caring, and expert sectors (Hochschild, 2012; Warton, 2009)

Another line of research has focused on what has been called "disciplined obedience". Through reprimands, very structured environments this is possible in the service sector in call-centers or fast-food companies for example. Wineicki in his ethnography of call-center shows that obedience is created through very extensive and detailed protocols of what to do when in front of the computer and taking calls (2007). Competition between the workers were created with public lists of how everyone was performing (Wineicki, 2007). Another well-researched way of disciplining workers into obedience is rationalizations that has been named Mcdonalidzation of how the whole service is structured in to standardized bits leaving no or small room to do anything (Ritzer, 2014). The standardization makes surveillance easier (Ritzer, 2007; Wineicki, 2007).

Seduction is a concepts that have been used to describe how the employee starts to identify with the brand, workplace and culture of the company which makes it harder for the person to question the practices in the organization that even can go against his or her interest (Alvesson & Wilmott, 2002). The identification in the workplace is often accompanied by harsh discipline. One study which shows how discipline and identification intersects showed how discourses from management were created about they were all a big "family" while at the same time they could be fired from "the family" (1999). In another study a consultant firm created obedience first in the hiring process through identification with the company. The identification comes from the perceived attractiveness of working in the corporation and that security of being connected to a company that has high status and esteem (Alvesson & Kärreman, 2009). Obedience was also created through standardized and formal structures of how decision making was done that was ingrained with the sense that the best and most experienced are higher up in the hierarchy making decisions (Alvesson & Kärreman, 2009)

Functionally stupidity is a new term in a similar manner as identification to capture how reflection and critical thinking is minimized through different measures by the organization and by themselves. The difference being that this done very deliberate by the individual rather than by internalizing discourses such as "the family" elaborated on above (Alvesson & Spicer,

2012, Paulsen, 2017). Functional stupidity has been researched in the field of social work (Paulsen 2017). Paulsen's research points to that the different strands of obedience exist in the same workplace. Functional stupidity, cynicism, weak seduction, authoritarianism and despair exists, and the worker moves between modes in response to events and places deliberative way, very aware of their obedience (Paulsen, 2017). Alvesson and Einola has made another study focusing on functional stupidity experienced by investment bankers in junior positions (2018). Their informants had a high-status education and start in their careers. Alvesson and Einola found that functional stupidity was prevalent on the topic of the excessive work regimes with long workdays that did not make their work any better (2018). The investment bankers experience was positive in enjoying their high-esteem and self-esteem. Still this was combined with a hierarchal organization that made it "unthinkable" for them to openly question the hours that they worked (Alvesson & Einola, 2018). A cynical careerism existed in that they junior bankers viewed their work calculative and strategic (Alvesson & Einola, 2018). One bachelor thesis has studied the different modes of obedience among social workers in Sweden (n=76) which showed that despair is the most common mode of obeying, that the use of functional stupid is correlated with well-being and that the Paulsen's model of functional stupidity has good internal consistency (Fagerberg, 2018)

Paulsen's theory has resemblances and is in competition with a socially contextualized understanding of coping. One study for example has looked at what coping strategies social workers use. Five different strategies were used to manage which was the following: work harder than what's expected (compensatory), disengagement, demand-reducing, voice and exit among social workers (Astvik, Melin, Allvin, 2013). The similarities exist also in that Alvesson and Spicer view functional stupidity as an "uncertainty-coping mechanism" (2012, p. 1214). The difference is to frame it as stupid organizational practices, and that in Paulsen framework voice and exit would not be seen as obedience.

3.2 Precariousness and young adults

The above research was not framed in the context of precariousness even though many of the studies describes characteristics of precariousness. Precariousness different aspects has been a central area of research in sociology of work the latest 30 years (Campbell & Price, 2016). The debate in the scholarship has centered on how to understand the term precariousness, differing between different kinds of precariousness and why precariousness affects workers in different ways.

Precariousness has been showed to be an important social factor to develop mental health problems in general, but the severity depends on different factors like class, age, welfare context etc. (Canivet, Bodin, Emmelin, Toivanen, Moghadassi, Östergren, 2016, Antonucci, 2016). One important mechanism that creates bad mental health such as a stress response is the insecurity itself which makes the future feel uncontrollable (Sverke, Hellgren, Näswall, 2002).

Precariousness is experienced by all ages but is most common among youths and young adults (Kalleberg, 2018). Since precariousness is a major characteristic for young adults it has become a focus for youth studies. Youth studies is an established part of sociology where a central part is how young adults make the transition from youth to adult. This transition has been seen to grow longer were it is often meaning 18-30 or 20-34 even (Bradley & Devadason, 2008). The end process of being an adult are also increasingly difficult to identify which challenges the term “transition” (Macdonald, 2009, p 174). There is debate in the literature for how and if when precariousness is transitional, or if it can be both precarious and transitional for young adults. “Precariousness trap” or the “retail trap” is two terms that has been used to describe how some young people get stuck in precarious work (Roberts, 2011, Duell, 2004, p. 19). For young workers that are migrant the term “hyper-precariousness” to describe the more adverse conditions that they work and live under (Lewis, Dwyer, Hodkinson, 2015). The term “hypo-precariousness” has been proposed when the precarious work has modest negative effects on wellbeing and future trajectory (Campbell & Price, 2016). The debate has also been to differentiate between precarious work and vulnerable workers (Burgess, Connell, Winterton, 2013).

The empirical research points out that precariousness affects different people in its severity and how the young adults think and experience their situation. One interview study found that for some young adult’s precarious work is transitional depending on if they went back to school for example (Nielsen, Dyreborg, Lipscomb, 2018). Another interview study also found that it depends on why they have to take that job, if they are studying or going back to studying, and what social class they are from (Antonucci, 2016). Youths in the precarity with low education, a long period of unemployment have to work in most adverse conditions and are constrained in their choices of work (Mumford & Sanders, 2019). Campbell and Price study of students with part time work that is precariousness was dependent on factors that acted like “cushions” which was social support, future alternative career, alternative income stream and risks of the market, specific workplace, the prevalence of not being unionized

(2016). For those with a lot of “cushion” they termed this group as hypo-precarious (Campbell and Price, 2016). Johnson in 18 interviews could preliminary see among his informants that what moderated the situations was the workers agency which came from “workplace sense of entitlement” meaning that those who expected more from work had better conditions if they spoke up and were able to be tough in negotiations (Johnson, 2015). What determined how much sense of entailment that the worker felt was connected to amount of years worked in the specific work and what social class they identified themselves with (Johnson, 2015). Relevant for this study is that Johnsons results pointed to that it was not the age itself, but rather the amount of years working in precarious work (Johnson, 2015). Those who believed that they deserved poor working conditions and not making demands created a self-fulfilling prophecy since precarious work is characterised by more informal negotiations (Johnson, 2015).

One study looked at how young adults that aspire to work full time in the creative industry with low amount of work opportunities (Morgan, Wood, Nelligan, 2013). This study found that the youths accepted this as a part of working life trying to establish themselves, while at the same time working part time in the service sector. To be a part of the creative industry was more important than full time and more secure work (Morgan, Wood, Nelligan, 2013). Still their experience was precarious with insecure project work where they had to comply closely what work they could find in order to build their portfolio (Morgan, Wood, Nelligan, 2013). This kind of ambivalence in precariousness is shown in another study of retail worker who supported and identified with the brand they work for but were unhappy with the terms of employment (Roberts, 2011). Another study also showed how for some youths, precarity is something that they can adhere to because they view it as a steppingstone in their career (Wong & Au-Yueng, 2019). Yet another study shows with 30 informants show the “steppingstone thesis” was how they viewed their work; while others in that study saw it as a “dead end” but saw no other option (Burrows, 2013). It is accepted as the normal condition, hard to imagine an alternative (Burrows, 2013). It was made more tolerable when viewing it as something transitional. This view is reinforced by discourse about entrepreneurship, branding of the self and the responsabilization of the individual young adult for his or her circumstances (Vallas & Cummins, 2017). Another study looked at future narratives the adolescents have and they all informants from all classes talked about how they have a lot of choice and agency to shape their future (McDonald, Pini, Bailey, Price, 2011).

Precariousness is also something that knowledge workers like journalist can experience where passion is mixed with fear, constrained space for the creativity that they wanted to do and working in hierarchical environment (Morini, Carls, Armano, 2014). Disillusionment and disengagement were present which resulted in “strategies of escape” by limiting work in their life and their engagement with it (Morini, Carls, Armano, 2014). Passion and hierarchical management worked in tandem to discipline them and make them obey (Morini, Carls, Armano, 2014). The same study found that the younger journalists were less disillusioned because they had not experienced the worsening conditions, so they had lower expectations than their older counterparts (Morini, Carls, Armano, 2014). The finding that young adults have lower expectations is supported by a study that combined interviews and surveys that found that millennials has higher work ethic than previous generations, even though the quality of work is lower (McCallum, 2018, p. 58). Another study showed that precariousness for knowledge workers that are young and highly educated experience alienation because there is a mismatch of skills which were viewed as a loss of control over their own life both in private and at work and a waste of their capacity and knowledge (Murgla, 2015).

The factor of family has been researched where the “boomeranging” back to the family home or never leaving is more common (Bradley, Harriet, Devadason, Ranji, 2008; Berrington, Tammes, Roberts, 2014). Young adults that get help and support from their family has it easier at the workplace and to establish themselves in the work life (Antonucci, 2016). The support that they get depends on the family’s class that have themselves better foothold in the market and more knowledge (Hardgroves, Mcdoweell & Rottham, 2015, Antonucci, 2016).

3.3 Conclusions of earlier research

This overview of earlier research focused first on the research on obedience in different work contexts. The conclusion is that functional stupidity captures how the experience of stupid practises can be an important part of work. Functional stupidity as a theory is still in an explorative stage in need to be studied in more contexts to nuance, test, contextualize the theory. The other conclusion is that a more multifaceted approach is done by some and Paulsen’s theory of obedience is one of those. Alvesson and Spicer’s six-year-old concepts of stupidity management and functional stupidity are largely untested. Paulsen’s theory is also untested outside the context of social workers. One area of research where Paulsen’s theory of different modes of obedience including functional stupidity could provide a new perspective is the field of precarious work for young adults. There has been a lot of research in describing

experience of precariousness and the trajectory, what happens later, and different factors that moderate the severity of precariousness. But there has been less research in how young adults reacts to the management day to day. It has been shown that there is ambivalence of feelings for young adults in precariousness. But not what modes that they go through a day, and how this happens. The perspective that the young adults view this as irrational or even “stupid” is also lacking, which the sensitizing concepts of functional stupidity and stupidity management can be a tool to explore empirically. The sensitizing concept can be used to see if precarious youths see and experience stupidity in their workplace and how they react to this. This study’s contribution is twofold: exploratively study functional stupidity contextualized in different modes of obedience in a new context: while at the same time bring a new viewpoint to youth studies of precarious workers.

4. Method

To explore how young adults in precarious workplaces experience different aspects of obedience a qualitative small study has been done. It was grounded in a phenomenological approach to capture the complexities and lived experience in 6 interviews. This will be interpreted in a thematic analysis.

4.1 Phenomenology

Phenomenology is an approach that lends itself particularly well to explorative studies because sociology should be connected to the lived experiences of people which is the main focus of phenomenology (Creswell, 2013, p.78). This explorative study is about a complex phenomenon with many different aspects which phenomenology can grapple with the by going deep in the informants' experience and thoughts (Denscombe, 2018, p. 192). The phenomenological approach is subjectivist in that what meaning and understandings that people have is central to understanding the phenomena. It is opposed to an objectivist perspective that questions the informant's ability to understand why act in certain ways (Aspers, 2013, p. 29). Phenomenology has the assumption that humans are aware of what they do and act with intentionally. Paulsen makes the argument that this is especially important when studying an act as obedience where the lack of listening is a central problem, which the researcher may continue in an objectivist perspective (Paulsen, 2017). To understand the informants means interpreting their speech. Interpreting an individual means to not treat their every statement as fact but still it is central to grant a high degree of parsimony because speech has a strong connection to the experience and meanings (Asper, 2013, p. 42). The assumption in phenomenology is that people are seen as agents that interpret their experience and actively creates their circumstances.

One criticism is that this approach is associated more with description than analysis (Denscombe, 2018, p. 198). In this study description is central. The study is describing how the informants experience obedience. The analysis is focused on understanding the patterns around the experiences that the informants describe, and the analysis is focused on interpreting these descriptions of experiences. Objectivist would point to that we do not have complete awareness of why think, experience and do what we do (Aspers, 2013, p. 60). Because of this the study is explicitly focused on experiences it does not oppose that there are more parts of the reality for example the experience by management that were not in focus in this study.

4.2 Informants

In order to answer the research questions of this study a specific sample of informants was needed; that had experienced obedience in workplace environment in precarious conditions that were young adults and in the service sector. The search proved harder than I thought which made a convenience sample the method of selecting informants. Convenience sample has the advantage in small scale research projects with a small budget for time and cost for finding a strategic selection according to Trost (2010, p. 140). I have an artblog where I have international followers. I wrote a call for informants to see if someone would be interested. The focus on western industrialized countries of this study was i.e. born from what informants I got through my convenience sample. I would argue that there is a point in researching cross-national because precariousness at the workplace is an international phenomenon and have similar characteristics in industrialized countries (Kalleberg, 2018). These characteristics are hierarchical management with low social support, low influence by the workers, low job security or none, and being non-unionized (Kalleberg, 2018). The transition from youth to adulthood also has more cross-national similarities that are bigger than the difference among western industrialized countries (Macdonald, 2009). It should be acknowledged that a lot of research is done inside national borders because of the same law, more similar culture, history etc with good empirical results (Chernillo, 2011). The national differentiation of a social phenomenon should not always be disregarded but it has been criticised and called “methodological nationalism” because it does not give enough weight to how social phenomena is strongly influenced by globalization and commonalities across nation-states (Sassen, 2010; Chernillo, 2011). The informants were from US, Croatia, Denmark and Ireland which are all western industrialized which has similarities in culture, history and law.

Another variation among the informants is that they work in 4 different occupations, which is a potential drawback because different practices, cultures etc can exist in different occupations. This is the result of the convenience sample again. The commonalities are though that all occupations are in the service sector, three informants work in the culture industry (marketing and movie production); and the other three informants work in sales and banking. Even though there are variations it is argued that the commonalities still make the study coherent: the precariousness, being in young adulthood and in the service sector. The most crucial and necessary commonality is the informants experience of obedience under irrational management. The informants should not either be too homogenous to lower the chance that opinions are very unusual or connected to a specific workplace (Trost, 2010, p.

144). One important point is that representativeness cannot be reached in a qualitative study because of the low number of informants (Repstad, 2007, p. 89). Denscombe draws a distinction between explorative and representative selections of informants (2018, p. 71). This study selection is explorative which is often used in small scale research and when the research is in an explorative stage (Denscombe, 2018, p. 70). Both Paulsen's theory of obedience and the theory of functional stupidity that Alvesson and Spicer propose is at an explorative stage with a small amount of empirical research having been done. Explorative selection is chosen because it can be used to find informants with a lot of experience of what you are studying, which in turn makes them potentially able to provide a rich and detailed account (Alvesson, 2011, p. 48). To research obedience I was dependent on someone with a lot of experience of this. The argument that not that all people in precarious work situations have the experience of obeying as strong as my informants.

The number of informants in a small-scale study is dependent on if a saturation of themes is reached (Aspers, 2013, p. 200). A recommendation is to have a smaller number of informants because the analysis can be deeper and more thorough; avoiding the danger of grasping with a too large of data material at the end from too many transcribed interviews (Trost, 2010, p. 144; Repstad, 2007, p. 92). Trost recommends 4-8 informants which makes 6 informants for this study suitable. The interviews were 1 hour long, some a bit longer which is seen as appropriate to capture rich and detailed accounts (Trost, 2010, p. 142).

What I wrote to find the informants is in appendix 2 where I was explicit in that they had to have an experience of obeying or complying against their interest and giving some example of how it might have made them feel: bad, worthless, the management not listening, dumb yourself down, focus on the positive. One potential drawback of being so specific is that I influence my informants answer (Trost, 2018, p. 141). At the same time, I had to be strategic, so I knew that they had the experienced that I was looking for which is crucial in explorative studies. This was a purposive selection based on their attributes because of their knowledge and experience that you think could bring most value to understanding the phenomenon (Denscombe, 2018, p. 72).

The informants that were selected worked in marketing, sales, the film industry and banking. All had experienced obedience in the private sector. They were in the ages between 21 and 27 (mean 23). One had a trainee job after a bachelor thesis, two had a student job (working while studying), one was going back to school in the future, two had no formal education. This variation is good combined with that the similarities were bigger than differences. The

analysis was open for that there can be differences in how obedience was experienced connected to different situations outside work therefor. A longer discussion of this is in earlier research above. The informants were all non-migrants which is something that studies has shown worsening the condition in precarious work which would have been too different in experience for the study to be coherent (Lewis, Dwyer, Hodkinson, 2015). The informants had all moved on from the work that they are talking about. They had either switched business, gone back to school or switched industry. One informant was in the middle of it when it happened. One difficulty when talking from memories is that they can change (Denscome, 2018, p. 80). This drawback can be minimized if the descriptions are rich, concrete and not too long ago. The longest this experience was from was 1 ½ years ago.

In conclusion there are several potential drawbacks of the selection of informants from the variations. These variations can be used as a resource in the analysis. To generalize from this sample to youths in adverse precarious work circumstances but should be done in caution as with all small-scale studies even if there is a saturation of themes (Troost, 2010, p. 142).

4.3 Interviews as data collection

Interviews is the most common method of data collection in a phenomenological approach (Creswell, 2013, p. 78). Interviews are appropriate when opinions, emotions and experiences are researched in order to understand them on a deeper level. It is also appropriate for complex questions about how social phenomena work and how different factors are connected (Denscombe, 2018, p. 268).

The questions I had prepared was about their workplace, management and their reactions to it and can be read in full in appendix 3. Semi-structured interview is used when you have some sort of theoretical framework and also wants to open up for the informants to bring in their understanding, lived experiences and thoughts that might go against the theoretical framework (Aspers, 2013, p. 143). In this sense the informant has a chance to become a co-constructor, and the interview becomes a conversation that is more dynamic and equal, and more akin to an “inter-view” (Aspers, 2013, p. 143).

The interviews were done by me over Skype 2017 in November and were transcribed a few days after. The interviews went well in the sense that it felt relaxed, with some laughter and mutual appreciation and gratefulness for the meeting i.e rapport. Another advantage was that it was easy to make it relaxed because the informants were in a setting where they felt home and were not stressed. The interview guide had 26 question in the case of the informant

would not be so talkative. This was not the case, so not all questions were used, and some questions were posed in a different way to follow the flow of the interview. I was careful not to use any of the concepts that were part of the theoretical framework to put words in their thinking and shaping how they described their experience. What was positive was that many of the informants talked long on relevant aspects so many of the questions could be answered before I asked them. Some interviews needed more guidance on my part, with more questions to elicit narratives and exemplify and concretize certain reflections. But mostly I could take more of a listening role, while being engaged and encourage them to carry on. This gave made the meanings of the informants could come forth, which was crucial for the phenomenology approach having validity (Aspers, 2013, p. 144).

There are limits to interview as a method of data collection. Observation would have been a way of triangulation what the informants said in the interview. This was not possible with the informants being international. To make up for this the interviews I understood that they were not alone in their experiences of the workplace. They described how the other employees were reacting and also when they were describing their thoughts and experiences, they gave accounts of events with richness in detail. It would still have been an advantage of adding observation which Paulsen did in his study of functional stupidity (Paulsen, 2017). But Alvesson and Einola has studied functional stupidity only with interviews (2018). Important is that the studies purpose is focused on their experiences (Denscombe, 2018, p. 293).

4.4 Thematic analysis

Thematic analysis is a common approach in qualitative studies. The thematic analysis is interpretative with the purpose of finding patterns in the text of the interview. The themes that were created comes from experiences and thoughts that the informants have (Denscombe, 2018, p.78). Part of the analysis is to look for patterns that connects to the different modes of obedience: functional stupidity, cynicism, weak seduction, authoritarianism and despair. Another was to search for how they described their days and what happened and how they reacted to this. Another was how they described their management. Another focus was what rationales they use for what they did. Then it was important to be open if they use other ways of describing their experience of obedience that would show other understanding than Paulsen's and Alvesson & Spicer's theory give. The focus was to see if the themes had another variation, if there were other themes or different "rationales of motives" (Paulsen, 2017). This was crucial in order to test the theory if it really fitted with the experiences of the informants.

The first phase of the analysis was to become familiar with the transcribed interviews in order to get an overview of the material and start looking if there were some patterns (Creswell, 2013, p. 184). The next was to look for patterns more systematic that were coded primarily (Bryman, 2011, p. 325). Different codes were then connected to bigger themes (Bryman, 2011, p. 325). This process of producing codes, connecting it to the themes was a back and forth process, from details to the whole. Some codes fitted better in another theme for example than I first had thought. One example of this was exactly what statement in an interview should be viewed as an example of a mode of obedience. I looked at the context and that they were really saying. It was important that I would not strive away and start guessing “what they really meant”. The themes that were produced is an abstraction of the lived experience of the informants, but these themes are still crucially grounded in their experience. For example, coding for the functional stupidity theme, one important part was that they explicitly talked about the irrationalities, using words like stupid, silly, absurd and unethical and pointing to example of this. This was part of the criteria for coding that statement as they describe functional stupidity which I will go into more detail in the results and analysis part. Furthermore, I then reviewed the themes to see if there were contradictions in the analysis, if something that was coded could be the same theme for example and was then fixed. One important part of phenomenological approach is to make room for that the informant can have what would seem as “contradictive” descriptions of their experience (Denscombe, 2018, p. 191). This was used as a resource in the analysis, that they could view something different during a day, or using different motives of rationales, which I have discussed in the theoretical framework (Paulsen, 2017)

4.5 Validity and reliability

Validity and reliability are criteria's that are connected to a positivistic and quantitative research (Creswell, 2013, p. 179) These two criteria have been adapted to qualitative and interpretive research (Bryman, 2011, p. 400). Validity is that what is set out to be studied is researched with accuracy. A crucial part of this in a qualitative study is first the selection of informants that has been described and problematized above. The next part is the interview guide, so the questions can elicit answers that describe how the experienced obedience at their workplace. The accuracy of what really is studied I have shown above in how the interview guide was done and how the interviews went.

Reliability is that it could be done again. With a similar selection of informants, it should come a similar result, with similar question asked to them one way to increase the probability of this is that there is a “saturation” of themes (Aspers, 2013, p. 99). This means that the same patterns come in the interviews. This was reached among my 6 informants. One important potential drawback in an interview situation that can affect both the reliability and validity of study is the interviewee effect (Aspers, 2013, p. 154). The interviewer can create a bias in the interview-situation. As discussed above this seems to not have been the case since the informants talked very freely, answering questions that I had thought about before I had asked them, and their descriptions were rich and detailed.

Another criterion that has been proposed for qualitative research is credibility that points that if the theoretical framework and concepts are relevant for the purpose of the study (Creswell, 2013, p. 250). This has been discussed in the theoretical framework, introduction and when discussing the informants. The interpretation of what the informants is interpreted by a theoretical framework that has been used to study this experience before, but within a different context than earlier studies. Another part of credibility is that there is a clear description of procedure of the study which I have done above. Last if the purpose and research has been answered and discussed. This will be shown in the result and analysis part. One part of this reflexivity is to not neglect data that contradicts the rest of analysis and control for competing explanations (Denscombe, 2018, p. 425). This will be dealt with in the analysis and discussion.

4.6 Ethical considerations

Ethical considerations are important, especially when dealing with very personal feelings and experiences. This creates the need for the researcher to be respectful and create a secure environment both in doing the interview and the rest of the study. This has been done by firstly informing all the informants of how it will be anonymized and how it will be used. The interviews that was recorded was firstly asked for permission, and then they were informed that interviews would be store safely. Consent by the informant was a guiding principle through the whole study, from getting permission to record, to inform them that they do not need to answer questions they are uncomfortable with or do not like in any other way (Vetenskapsrådet, 2017, p. 41). They were further informed that they can withdraw their

participation a few weeks after the interview, if they changed their minds. The informants were informed that the study would be archived and searchable at Diva and in Uppsala Universities library. (Vetenskapsrådet, 2017, p. 40). The consequence of a study is an important aspect (Vetenskapsrådet, 2017, p. 19). The point of the study is to better understand a problem in society so that it might be easier to solve. One important part is to understand those who have experienced this.

5. Result

To reiterate, the research question was as follows: How do young adults experience obedience at precarious workplaces situated in the private service sector, in western industrialized countries when they view management as irrational? The answer to this question will be presented in three parts. Firstly, how they viewed the management and experienced the organization. Secondly, the experience obeying under that management. Thirdly, how the experience of obedience was a multifaceted one where they moved between different modes. The presentation will use other names than were the real names of the informants. I used made up names instead of “informant 1” etc to create a better flow in the in the text. When the informants are quoted it is in Italics to make it clear what they said. When the quotes are longer than three lines they have been separated from rest of the text for clarity.

5.1 Management and the organization.

One subject in the informant’s stories were how management treated them. The common theme was that management blocked dialogue by disregarding opinions of the informants and creating a threatening environment with no social support. Emma explained that at meetings she “*quickly learned that if you use a little more time to reflect on the question it meant that you didn’t know the answer*”. Reflections was not premiered rather that you were quick with an answer. Emma also tried to have a dialogue about different aspects of her work but were disregarded and she got a bigger workload the longer she worked there which added to her stress. Thomas said he was “*attacked*” when asking for better equipment for the production’s safety and efficiency. The management told him that there is no money for it, but he could by it with his *own* money. Oliver said that his only choice was to quit and had no influence over his work situation as a salesperson. Emelie saw people being fired very easily so she did not dare to speak up. Emelie said that if you asked to many questions they got “*mad*”. Oscar’s management was a middle management that had put in system of blaming interns and those in junior positions if something went wrong. Oscars closest superior could get very “*angry*” when something did not go as she had planned.

Part of the blocked dialogue was also that there was no social support from management for any of the informants. In Sophia’s case her assistant manager screamed at her, and her manager thought that she should have dealt better with a customer that were aggressive and at the end threw coins at her inside the store where she worked. Emelie experienced a threatening management with a big part of cynicism as shown in this excerpt:

“Like last night my boss made a joke, to my superior and to myself that he is working in a college student film, because everybody on set are doing 3 peoples job and I’m like in my head, so it’s not just me, you guys are just understaffed, like you’re having me do all the jobs the normally 3-4 people would be doing. And you are making it seem like it something wrong with me, but you are the one trying to work me to be crazy.”

The management were aware of the workload but at the same time all the blame and responsibility were put on the employees and as Emelie says, *“making it seem like it something wrong with me”*. Emelie also points to a detail that she was alone in talking about which is shown in this sentence: *“You perform well because you know that if you don't, they will tell other people about it”*. This adds another dimension of the threatening environment; in a tight industry the management can spread the word about you even if this would not be the truth.

Oliver were pushed and challenged by his boss: that if he quit or did not make enough sales this showed something about his character, and that character was *“weak”*. Oliver boss was *“extremely tough”* and *“oldfashioned boss”* that would yell at and argue with employees. Emma, Oscar and Thomas did not have any support either. None of my informants had work security. And they experienced having no influence over their working conditions. The only choice was to exit the organization. This was more or less explicit talked about by management. For the most part it was shown in Oscar, Emma, Oliver and Emelie they saw people getting fired quick and without good reason. Emma told this: *“that people would say: o we are used to people being fired, then the owner get a new idea of how to do business, but then they hire and then they get bored and then they fire the person.”*

The effects on the atmosphere in the organizations were another theme in the interviews. All other employees were overworked together with my informants. They were also not satisfied with management which the informants made it clear. Emelie, Emma, Oscar and Sophia all spoke about the dissatisfied talk that colleagues practised when the management weren't around. Emelie was said that the employees only talked shit instead talking about their dreams or movie in general: *“Well everybody complains it’s just like, everybody is constantly complaining. It’s really funny, all people do on set is talk shit about other people or about the job”*. Emma were surrounded by colleagues that complained about their work, other people at the company or on their own children.

Emma got to hear from other colleagues that you had to get “*a thick skin*”. But some people did not have that: and Emma had to take care of a younger assistant that was crying in the bathroom of the office, and another time there was a girl that crying in the office at her desk because she was so stressed. Oscar explained that at his workplace that even though “*the whole atmosphere was awful*” and that he would be “*anxious or nervous*” parts of the day he found support in his colleague:

“had friends there and we all became friends, the students that have worked there 2 or 3 years they were supportive, they told us all the secrets: this one is a little bit fucked up, this is bad. They helped us.”

For Oscar his colleagues were more a support than for Emma and Emelie. Sophia on the other hand was being bullied, so she had to take comments of dislike from her colleagues for example one person thought she smiled too much. Oliver were alone “*90 percent of the time*” but when he was at the office, he described it as “*awful*” with people quitting very often. Thomas was alone most of the time sitting doing the technical stuff in the production of the film. Thomas spoke about how the long work passes made the crew tired, stressed and especially when they had to work late in the night till morning overtime to finish it all.

5.1.1 Being young in the organization

The informants discussed how their age had influenced their work situation. Oscar said that it was part of the system to blame faults on the student workers. But those not in management but were older and had worked there for a time were supportive. Oliver also saw a clear pattern because of age pointing out that “*older employees would stay longer than others, as well as those who had a family to provide for.*” Oliver said that about the older employees:

“I think they didn’t accept as much pressure from the manager as we did, so he probably wasn’t as tough on them. I guess in a way the manager was aware that older employees were vital for the business as they were the only ones who stayed. It looked like he had a bad idea about younger employees, so he pushed them to the edge.”

Oliver clearly points out that the boss treated the older workers differently and the older workers also had a better bargain position, were more valued and did not accept as much. This shows the age can have an impact on how a precarious job is experienced. Age is not something neutral because as Oliver boss shows has preconceptions about young people that affects his behaviour towards them.

Thomas explained a similar experience:

“Where because I was in my early 20s I was viewed like a runt almost. However, when several of the crew discovered I was the Data Management Tech and not just a production assistant, I actually had one higher up in the crew say: “I will now treat you with a modicum of respect”

The above experience is one of outright disrespect which were connected to his age. But important point is that being more than production assistant mattered.

Emma pointed out that she as young were not as good as setting boundaries at work:

“Because I could see my older colleagues, they had a louder voice than me they could say: I’m not staying I’m hungry I wanna go home or something.”

The informants clearly felt the age mattered in their experience. Their age is connected to another theme that they talked about in connection to the age aspect which was the code of “proving yourself” which is analysed on page 38 because it is connected to theme of the self.

5.1.2 Was this stupidity management?

Could the management that my interviewees talk about be described as using “stupidity management”? In Alvesson and Spicer’s 2012 article they focus mostly on how this kind of management frame ambiguities, doubts, problems as something positive, through positive, grand visions. This was not the case among for my informants. Alvesson and Spicer also theorize about more threatening ways of doing stupidity management one way is to show what happens if you don’t follow instructions could lead to a quick firing, talking condescending and aggressively, agenda setting and show no social support. This more negative atmosphere and threatening management techniques is similar to what Paulsen found in his study of social workers (2017, p. 199). Crucial is that stupidity management has the purpose of shutting down critical dialogue, which was done efficiently by all management.

A crucial part of the analysis is listening to what the informants thought. If the informants did not point out that something was irrational, stupid, or unethical it should not fit here that the experienced stupidity management. All of them described irrationalities, bad priorities and unethical behaviour according to them. Three of the informants themselves used the word the stupid. Emelie used it frequent to describe how her superior organized and prioritized the film production. *“So it’s like I don’t care at this point, if you wanna spend money on stupid shit, like go and spend it on stupid shit then.”*

Oliver thought that *“he had wasted 2 months of life just to prove myself”* and *“Which was very stupid now that I look back at it, still that was what I wanted to prove.”* Here he is viewing himself as stupid not the management, but he sees himself stupid for going along. The management pushed him by calling him weak if he quit. Stupidity management can also have unethical goals which Oliver thought about in his work when selling to elderly people:

“According to my boss they were easy target, he said I couldn’t fail, that was what I hated because I thought it was so immoral. So I just feared everytime knocking on the door, because I felt so bad for the people.”

Sophia was the other salesperson among the informants that had to deal with what she saw as *“unethical”* sales practises that were *“ripping”* people of. As a result of this customers came in everyday being dissatisfied. Sophia gave the absurd example of a customer that locked herself out of the her newly bought Ipad and they had to say that there was nothing she could do to fix it.

One thing that Oscar explained when he worked at what he called the *“stupid student job”* was the practise of the informal system of blaming the youngest in the organization. As an organizational practise this seems at least bad priorities because you are not getting to the root of the problem in the organization. The youngest are newest and least experienced so the responsibility for the organization should not be pushed on them. Emma used the word *“silly”* when describing an episode when she as a marketing assistant had to teach her new manager how do her work, which she also thought of as *“humiliating”*. She saw that she had to *“manage her manager”*.

One central part of stupidity management seen in the interviews is the individualizing of organisational problems. For example, Oliver had a *“weak character”*, Emelie was made to think that it was something wrong with here, Sophia was held responsible for being thrown coins at and management blamed individual young employees were Oscar worked. When the individual is blamed this is a way of setting the agenda, so the real organizational problem is hidden (Alvesson & Spicer, 2012).

The narratives above bring a new detail to precarious work which is that young adults are acutely aware of the stupidities that surround them and that they must manage deliberately as will be shown below in the analysis. The stupidity management effects the whole atmosphere in the organization. The informants do not seem to have been alone in their experience judging from the complaining and crying for example. A pattern exists here in

which stupidity management has an age factor. Age can be used to stereotypically judge young adults. Precariousness has an age factor and also stupidity management that works in tandem. This in contrast to Johnson's study that argues that age do not matter in the experience of precariousness (2015). These opposing results is explainable by the small samples in both studies and slightly different focus, but I would argue that it is a mistake to leave out age as a factor that Johnson does.

5.2 Obeying under the regime

Now the second part of the result will be presented which focuses on the themes that centred around how they reacted to the management. The themes that were found has been structured as follows: functioning at the workplace, dis-identification with the workplace and careerism, despair and stress, glamour in fashion and magic in film, fixed and changeable selves and glimpses of positive experiences.

5.2.1 Functioning at the workplace

In order to keep their job all informants had to produce certain results which entailed concentrating, pushing away doubt and stressful thoughts. The informants described what they would think in order to this.

Oliver describes how the will to "prove himself" was used as rational to stop thinking and normalize the situation:

"Well I think, I was just in such a big need of proving myself. That's really how I got through it, that's how I pushed myself, so after a while I just stopped asking myself question and I just did it. And I was like yeah, I'm going to work, this is normal. When you stop asking yourself questions it becomes normal."

Oliver points out that he literally stopped asking himself questions, which is the central part of "functional stupidity". As is shown Oliver is not stupid in the sense of low IQ, he is deliberately pushing away questions as conscious act in order to function in what he saw as unethical. There for as Alvesson and Spicer has pointed out, you have to be "smart" in order to be functional stupid. Emma talked about that she "had tunnelvision" and that she was "holding my breath" which is a phrase that she used a lot in the interview. For example, she used it in the context dealing with orders from management: "instead of holding my ground and saying stop I just hold my breath and do what has to be done and keep it moving." Again, as Oliver is Emma very aware of what she is doing, she is deliberating forcing her to focus on

the task that she had to get done. Another illuminating passage from the interview with Emma was this:

“Though I was very busy I felt like some of the worst responsibilities was unnecessary, managing a manager that was silly in my eyes, but at the same time it gave me like an adrenalin to be able to carry that burden.”

Emma points out that it was silly but that give her adrenalin to carry the burden. Emma is literally seeing the stupidity or in her words silliness and this has an effect of giving her an adrenalin push. She is using the silliness as a challenge to make her functional for the situation.

Thomas explained that he had saw it as he was *“not being able to afford to get kind of distraught”* and that if he let himself do that said this could happen: *“Because if you open it up now it could through you of the rails completely.”* Thomas is aware of that he is guarding himself of certain thoughts that could if he would let them take over his consciousness would make the experience harder for him.

Emelie said that explaining what feelings she would go through during a day *“The thing is that I have 50 % is like indifference, I don’t care I just do it, then I would say 35 % I hate this job, and 15 % is that I like it.”* Emelie said for the most part indifference is the mode she is in, but at another place in the interview she says that she is *“on edge the whole time”* following instruction and focusing on the work. Emelie also said that she was *“entirely overworked, I have too many responsibilities. Each responsibility requires precision and a lot of attention to detail.”* That Emelie needed a lot of concentration for the work and also that she said that she was indifferent, and just did it point to a lowering of reflexivity about her work situation at those times. Again, this was done intentionally by doing breathing exercises to calm herself down to refocus herself away from what she thought of as stupid, which she pointed out several times in our interview.

All the informants were aware of what they were doing. They were all smart, but during the workday they would deliberately lower their reflexivity in order to cope with stress of the work. The more reflexive modes could be in the form of cynicism that I will present next.

5.2.2 Dis-identification with the workplace and careerism

The distancing from the management was a reaction that all my informants shared. One way of doing this Oscar described. He was ordered to something outside his work description in a

demeaning way: *“And at that moment I was like you are so sad, why do you have this need, I was feeling sad for her I don’t know how to explain it. But at the same time, I was pissed.”*

Oscar also had this both a distancing that at the same time saddened him:

“I was it as looking at it as a student job, it wasn’t my life, I knew I was there for a short period. In my head I wouldn’t allow them to get them to me, I couldn’t care less what they said to me or treated me, it was sad for me”.

Distancing from something also contains emotions as Oscar is saying. This is connected to that distancing is often a said thing, because you do not feel authentic and that cynicism is akin to a “soft-depression” (Fleming, 2005, Paulsen, 2017). Emma also show a dis-identification from her colleagues that she thought were “*draining*” here with their complaining. She was both distancing herself from the management and her colleagues, who themselves also were distancing from the work they did.

Being strategic was important for all the informants. They were using this bad experience for money to pay bills and to build their CV. Sophia tells about this here:

“Like quitting wasn’t really an option because I owed money on a car and so I knew that I had to stay, so that was kind of what was keeping me, keeping my attitude good. So I thought stick through this, you got it , it will be a good job to have for a reference, I figure out a lot about technology, I learn about sales, it was a lot about the experience of working there and the benefit of that for the future.”

The risk of losing their job were important motive of rationale for all my informants. Emma said that she was “*afraid of the unknown*” of being unemployed. One could say that she could have looked for other work while still working there. Emma seemed to have forgot this. But at the same time, she had other motives of rationale that she wanted to prove herself, gain experience for example. Emma tells on her motive of rationale: *“I thought I’m going to use this to work my way up and show another place what I’m capable of this kind of responsibilities.”* Emelie said in a similar vein that her goal was to “*gradually moving up the ranks*”.

This dis-identification and distancing from the workplace is here coded as cynicism. My informants were at the start of their work life trying to build a career and good CV. This kind of “careerism” has been found in earlier studies on young adults in precarious work (Yong & Au-Yueng, 2019, McDonald, Pini, Bailey, Price, 2011). The difference is that is in the context

of the young adult are aware of stupidity around them. Compared with Paulsen's informants who were older and seemed that they wanted to stay in the social work office (2017).

5.2.3 Desperation and stress

In my material what sticks out is how many and strong negative feelings that they had towards their workplace. Emelie pointed to that she was *“really dreading going back, I was under so much stress, I was like terrified, feeling like scared, and they have no problems yelling at you”*. She was aware that she had to manage her feelings which she did by for example doing breathing exercises. Sophia told me that her colleagues were *“targeting”* her, and this made it *“really awkward, everyone was kind of against me at this point, everyone just wanted me gone. It was just me against everyone, and that was how I felt coming into work every day.”* Thomas described his work that he was *“irritable and exhausted, you're kind of like on autopilot”*, that he was *“feeling like a battery, like you know you were a battery totally drained by the production”* and that work had *“become omnipresent in my life”*.

This way of describing their workplace could be interpreted as a form of despair. Paulsen's point about being taken advantage of as part of the desperation that he is theorizing which my informants were experience. Paulsen reference to Theodor Adorno who talks about a *“wasted life”* (2017). Oliver thought he had *“wasted two months of your life”* but were the only informant who used the word wasted. The feeling of letting themselves be taking advantage were part of this desperation. Thomas talked about it: *“So I was kind of letting myself get taken and advantage of, abused because it was kind of, it was literally I sold out, it was that is.”* This sentiment was share by all informants. Sophia used the words *“be walked all over”*. Emma explained that the experience of being taken advantage of in this way: *“putting the company and the brand was my number priority. When in reality they didn't think of my health.”* She also thought that when she had to train her new manager it was *“humiliating”*. Paulsen includes feeling of hate in his *“despair”* term, which were shared by all of the informants. For example, Thomas said: *“I started dreading going to work, I started to hate it”*. Paulsen includes that hope can still exist in this state, which were the case for my informants. Emelie speaks about this when she says that she *“think it will better, it will all be worth someday”*.

All the informants were in their work pushed far. Two of the informants ended up being clinically diagnosed with depression and stress syndrome. Oliver almost got in a car accident stressing between the difference houses that he was selling to in his car. Thomas and Emelie

had strong reactions of fear for their health. The effects were so severe that what can be transitionary in time can be very severe while it is happening. This shows that even while precarity can be transitionary it can be still be very precarious experience opposed the discussion that Nielsen, Dyreborg and Limpscomb had in their 2018 article.

The “cynicism” and “despair” that the informants describe were pointed towards how the the management managed the workplace. They were not critical against work itself, or hierarchies in themselves. Rather they point how the hierarchy did not have legitimacy in their eyes because of how it was done. It was an unfair exchange. The word dignity has been used to describe what employees strive for (Abrahamsson, 2007, p. 151). Being treated well and have some influence over their work were what they wanted to not feel like it was an unfair exchange.

5.2.4 Glamour in fashion and magic in film

Three of the informants worked with culture: Emma in fashion and Emelie and Thomas in a film production. They were the only informants that wanted to stay in the industry that they worked in and the identified with the certain parts of the industry. Emma when explaining why she thinks she and other people want to be a part of the fashion industry: “*everyone wants piece of the glamour that they think that exists in the fashion industry*”. She explains that

“everyone wants to work for the highest fashions brand, because then they can tell o I worked for Gucci or whatever, and it is like status. But in reality, those company or actually the worst because so many wants to work for them, so if you don’t like it here, we just find another one.”

Emma is here aware of how the glamour that big brands have can be used against their workers, because there are so many who wants to work them. Emelie explains the term “move magic”:

“we call it “movie magic”, when you see that in action that stuff really gets me excited, then I feel like it’s worth it, than I can be a part of the movie magic, when you see that in action that stuff really gets me excited, than I feel like it’s worth it, that I can be a part of the movie magic”.

Thomas has a strong identification with the end product because he sees himself as an “*artistic soul*” but said that the film production in itself is “*not really glamorous at all, it’s like closer to working in the mines*”.

What Emelie, Emma and Thomas described as being drawn to magic and glamour of these industries was part of why they stayed at the job. For the other three informants: Oscar, Oliver and Sophia there were nothing glamorous in why they were in their industry. This glamour and identification with the end product can here be interpreted as “weak seduction” as one mode of obedience were the informants are aware of that they are being drawn or “seduced” to the industry (Paulsen, 2018).

5.2.5 Fixed and changeable self, professionalism and proving yourself

The informants in order to make sense of their behaviour describe the relationship to their own selves. The informants both said that something happened because of how they were as a person and at the same time they described how their selves were changeable. These two discourses were used by all informants.

Sophia explains that it “*is maybe my personal problem in life. As a person I am a pleaser. As a person I would not say that I’m shy of conflict but i choose my battles very carefully.*”

Sophia explained that she “*want to avoid confrontations at all costs*” and that “*I’m kind of a passive person*”. Emma in a similar vein states that there are according to her “*certain people who are good at dealing with conflict and I don’t think that I’m that person.*” Paulsen coined the term “ego-essentialism” when his informants described their personality as an explanation of why they do something. They are at that moment “essentializing” their personality. This was not always the case because the informants talked also about how their selves could be changed and that this was something that they wanted.

Thomas that he had a “*artistic soul*” and at the same time that he “*will kind of take it, I got a threshold for it*”, the it is tough working environments. Thomas said that “*this is the kind of environment that could break someone, if I weren’t kind of tough*”. Toughness was something that he had trained, it was not giving to him: “*you build it slowly*”.

Connected with the changing self was the theme of proving yourself. Oliver said that: *Well I think, I was just in such a big need of proving myself. That’s really how i got through it.*

Emma was the informant who talked about proving herself the most and that was connected to different aspect of the work as in shown in this excerpt:

“you wanna prove that you are right for the job. So me beginning as an intern it started of with the vibe that I always has to prove myself that I was capable of being more than an intern, and when I got the job that I was capable of being more than an assistant. And I think that is very common for the fashion industry, that you always have to prove yourself and that education isn't always something that they look on first, they look at skills and what you can do.”

“So I think being in this stage or continuing of always having to explain myself, looking back that was something that kept me in a place, like always feeling like an underdog. But at the mean time always having to prove myself.”

Emma also thought that *“the mentality that you have when you are fresh out of school and you are green and now you have to prove your worth in a real job.”*

Professionalism was a theme elaborated by Emelie, Thomas and Sophia. Thomas explains when he had worked late in the night that *“If I ever dosed of I'd worry about my professionalism. Cause at the end of the day I consider myself a professional”*. I asked him to explain more what he meant by professionalism. Thomas said: *“Present yourself diplomatically, any case most people has too much to worry about, so I try to keep my feelings to myself.”* Sophia had an exactly similar view of professionalism: *“really hard to keep it to myself because I knew that is just unprofessional, wearing your heart on your sleeve at work”*. Professionalism is one rationale of motive that controls how they conduct and discipline themselves.

Paulsen's defines “authoritarianism” as being able to see it as something as bad, but still gaining something from it, and even making it at virtue. The informants shows that in precariousness circumstances they can push themselves very hard. The view that we can grow with experience and challenges is fair but the trouble for my informants is that this kind of thinking here seems to be taken too far. Emma and Sophia developed severe symptoms of stress and depression. Oliver almost were in a car accident driving stressed between the sales, so he almost lost his life or could have injured himself badly. The severity of the challenge was not reasonable and was not something that *they* really thought were reasonable or fair. This adaption makes it possible to push yourself very far which were shown to be dangerous. The reasonable view that you have a changeable self and that challenges are something that can be overcome and something you can grow from, can be taken to the extreme as has been the case in these informants. Emma shows how the school and the work encourages this

thinking with. Because they were not making a virtue out of obedience in itself it would be more appropriate to call this weaker form “weak authoritarianism” with inspiration from Paulsen concept “weak seduction”.

5.2.6 Glimpses of positive experiences

All of the informants’ stories there were still what I would call “glimpses of positive experiences in the work”. Emelie talked about how being part of the movie magic was important and which she experienced at the set sometimes. Oscar had positive experience when he talked with his co-workers and when he could leave some paperwork in another building and be able to get out from the office. This positive experience was connected to literally getting out of the office.

Emma got her positive experience when the work was done well:

“Yeah, I would say, that if I really did something that worked well in a newsletter went well and brought in a lot of sales or a collaboration with an influencer that made beautiful photos for us. I mean those positive experiences that was what kept me alive. That gave me energy and that was when I felt that I was really good at my job and this is, I mean, I know my stuff. When something good happened, it kept me going.”

The positive experience is here connected to the final products of her work. This contrasted with the building stress and how the management were treating her.

Oliver explained that:

Yeah of course you know sometimes you go and knock on the door at very lonely people, and they are truly happy to see you, they actually expect you’re visit, they don’t get out of their houses. Those times it truly feels good, you truly felt like you helped them. You know you are allowed stay a bit and have a chat. I really like to talk to new people, it was rare, you just needed one in a day to make your day. And sometimes it became like a social job when they asked me to change a lightbulb.

The positive experience had nothing to do with his work. The positive experience came when he could connect with the elderly person and not sell something to them. Emelie and Thomas point to a practise in film production in US, that good food was given as a way to motivate them.

The positive experiences are important to not neglect in analysis of obedience under a regime. In a stressed environment positive experience might be even more important to keep us going. This was the case for the high-status young adults in investment banking and they seemed to have got more positive experiences and build of their identity as an elite-group in society which was not the case for my informants, instead they feared the opposite (Alvesson & Einola, 2018). The positive experience can in that way be something that could make you think that it is worth staying. The cost of staying was still very high for my informants in paying with their health worsening. Alvesson and Spicer theory of functional stupidity points to that positive experiences and emotions is something that can make it easier to handle doubts and dissonance (2012). Alvesson and Einola (2018) also points to that positive experiences are important part while functional stupidity can be prevalent. Paulsen shows in his study how one way was to adapt was to concentrate on the fun part or reinterpret what they viewed as stupid as fun (Paulsen, 2017). Positive experience is important, because if it only was negative experience it would made it clearer for people that they need to change their work situation even if this come to as a cost of risking unemployment.

5.3 Moving between modes of obedience: events and places

The informants also described how events, places and motives of rationales was used to move between different states as Paulsen theory of obedience predicts.

Emma shows how she could move from functional stupidity at the workplace, despair when she came home, followed by distancing from her situation and them at the workplace and view them as “big idiots”

“instead of holding my ground and saying stop I just hold my breath, and do what has to be done and keep it moving. And then when I come home I will scream and yell and do what I have to do but I do it alone. And then I sit for myself and think for myself o my god they are so big idiots and whatever.”

The movement from frontstage to backstage seemed to be what effected the movement. At work she focused on getting it “done and keep it moving” and at home she let her feelings come out in full force. Still she could also be distancing from her work at work, this was when listening to her work colleagues complaining about how they were stressed. Emma also speaks about how two other young adults cried, one time in the bathroom and another one at her desk one time under the pressure.

Thomas explained how:

at moments it caught up to me for sure being alone at 5 in the morning and nobody cares and everybody has gone to sleep, and you are exhausted, yeah it catches up to you like, you feel kind of lonely, upset, angry. But for the most part I was trying to keep it together until the end.

Thomas knew that this was a particular hard period that was a rationale of motive for him, that it would end. Thomas talks about how it can catch up with you when stop focusing on the work for a moment. Thomas were alone most of the time, so he was mostly in backstage, but still had to work very concentrated.

Oliver explained that he “stopped asking question” to himself so it became normalized he said. Part of what became normalized was also moving to states of despair:

“Well hehe, I had a couple of breakdowns, I’m not gonna lie. You would just stop by the side of the road and cry a bit. People would just get crazy at you, they would yell at you, they would insult you, I had one person for example sending their dog after me. That was quite stressful, so sometimes you just sat and break down.”

When people reacted strongly to him trying sell, this would throw him to despair. And he did this in the car, that would be backstage. I asked him how common those breakdowns he answered that *“It became almost like the daily task, I was kind of used to it, and was not making a big deal out of it.”*

Sophia talked about how she at frontstage handled the competition and bullying that she experienced from her colleagues which made her “would get frustrated and just shut down”. Frustration at work and when I asked where she would “shut down” she said at home which meant that she cried.

Emelie moved between indifference and hating it, but sometimes liking it. Emelie explained how she went from despair to concentration with breathing exercises:

“I had to go sit in the car on the parking lot by myself like, during lunch, I had to just be by myself, being around them to much was just making me crazy. I was feeling very overwhelmed, I just wanted to be by myself.”

“I’m thinking I wanna quit, fuck this. But the thing is there is nothing else i can do at this point, I’m 27 I have been pursuing this for like forever, I went to school for this, there is nothing else I can do, you know. There’s gonna come a day when it’s gonna be you know worth it, it don’t have a doubt about that. Yeah that’s what I’m thinking about, like in the car, it will be worth it, there will be a day. One thing that helps me, there will be a day when I’m going to be in charge of other people and i want treat them, the way that people have treated me, so I think about that, that’s kind of like motivation, like maybe I can change things.”

In order to calm herself down, to functionality she is thinking on different aspects. Emelie was the oldest informant. We see that the age becomes important. She has invested so much going into the film industry. She also feels that there is nothing else she can do. At another place in the interview she said it is her passion. At the same time, she is not doubting it will all be worth it. Alvesson and Spicer points to the importance of creating certainty to reach functionality again. Hope for a better day is used to create certainty and meaning today. Another rationale is seen here and that is when she is in change, she will do it better and change things.

6. Conclusion and discussion

6.1 Concluding the result and analysis

This study posed one question: How do young adults experience obedience at precarious workplaces situated in the private service sector, in western industrialized countries when they view management as irrational?

The result to this question was divided in three parts. The first part focused on how the management and organization was experienced by the informants. The question is if they experienced it as “stupid” as Alvesson and Spicer’s concept “stupidity management” would point to. Because the informants used words such as silly and stupid themselves and clearly explained how management by a threatening atmosphere, no social support, and did not welcome any dialogue from the informants. Part of the stupidity is the unethicalness that they were very aware of. Stupid priorities combined with a management style that perpetuated these priorities were shown. Age was a factor in how the stupidity management worked. Age was seen as a weakness or liability and were a factor that that elicited stereotyping from management. Agenda setting were a technique that was used were the problems of the organization were individualized and connected to their age. The stupidity management was very adverse, so what has been shown here is a precarious form of stupidity management, that differs from stupidity management in a high-status more “knowledge intensive firms” (Alvesson & Einola, 2018).

The second part of the answer to this study’s question was how the informants experienced obeying under this regime. The experience of this was multifaceted for the informants. Functionality in the work were made by in a very deliberative way pushing away thoughts that questioned what they were doing. The informants were smart and could see that by lowering their reflectiveness and just “get it done” they would become more functional. In the context of stupidity this functionality could appropriately be called functional stupidity. Dis-identification was there in distancing from the workplace and the other colleagues. They saw it as strategic transaction because they felt they were not cared for, so they returned this by not caring about the company. Still the despair came among the informants that they had given more of themselves that they wanted. Glamour and movie magic were a part of the experience for three of the informants. They worked in movies and fashion, compared with the other three that did not talk about anything like that. This identification that they are aware

of seem to be a thing that is more common in more cultural industries where image is more central to the business. There were two views of the self that were present among the informants' stories. The fixed and the changeable self that were two discourses that the same informant could use about themselves which were used as motives of rationale to obey. Glimpses of positive experiences were still present during the desperation, stress and precariousness.

Lastly the analysis focused on how the informants described how they moved between different modes of obedience. The results points to that the informants could move from any of the modes. The switch could be quick depending on events and what place they were in: backstage or frontstage. The last part of the answer was how they moved between different modes of obedience. Throughout different rationale of motives was shown to be used by the informants. The rationales that accompanied events and places were the following: feeling sad for the management, proving yourself for yourself and/or the management, passion for the industry, hope for a better future, careerism, hope to change it for the better, money and insecurity of unemployment, professionalism, investment of time in a certain occupation, positive experiences, the management as idiots and ego-essentialism. All these rationales show the complex reasoning that comes with obedience.

6.2 Earlier research and this study result

This study's contribution is that it tests both how functional stupidity in a new setting and brings a new perspective to the scholarly debate on precariousness and young adult.

First age as a factor is again shown to matter as Alvesson and Einola showed (2018). The difference in this study is that in this study age was a specific part of the stupidity management by making the informants feel that they had to "prove themselves" and individualizing organisational problems. This was a new rationale that I found in the context of functional stupidity. Paulsen's study was made on older social workers. Careerism prevalent among my informants. Another rationale of motive that was found was that "feeling sad for the management", which was not in Paulsen's study (2017). It is interesting how part empathy is used to understand why the management is being bad towards them. One new rationale was also that of they would change when they were in management, and so that they would make it right. This is part of the combining careerism with more noble goals in that they do not want someone else to experience what they have gone through. This could mean

that the experience of precariousness could be something that make them try to not to reproduce it when they have come further in their career. This study showed how functional stupidity exists in very negative atmospheres as Paulsen's study did (2017). Alvesson and Spicer in contrast explains that functional stupidity can be pleasant in some circumstances. This is probably more common in organizations that are less stressful and have higher status.

This study's contribution to the scholarly debate on young adults in precariousness are first that perspective of how much they are aware of the stupidities that they are surrounded by. They do not view precarious work as rational. This is part of what makes the experience more distressing. Not only do they experience insecurity, the arbitrariness of decisions by management not being well-founded makes it even harder. This study also contributes that precarious work is stressful when viewing what they do as fully or partly unethical. This is tentative but would be fruitful to research comparatively between sectors where they feel that their work is holly ethical and, in another sector, where it is felt as unethical. The perspective of stupidity in precarious work is important because there is a tendency among some scholars to focus too much on how young adults have internalized uncritically certain thinking (Vallas & Christin, 2017). This study points out that these discourses are something that they are aware of and using instead in a deliberative manner to motivate themselves. They are thinking strategic because that is how they are treated by the management. The informant Emma is also very aware of the discourse of working hard, she was able to distance herself from this discourse not just internalizing unknowingly. This study rather points out in similar vein that other scholars have done in the debate that young adults are aware of what they are doing (Wong & Au-Yeung, 2019). Passion and identification with the industry was showed here again as has been done for journalists and book agents (Morini, Carls, Amrono, 2014). This is similar to what was found in this study. I found were if you identified with the industry and wanted to stay there. 3 of 6 wanted to stay and saw it as a passion. This had the effect that their choices seemed more constrained because they wanted to be in that industry. This is an important difference. Identification with the industry you are in probably increases the chance that you will like your job, but it can be a part of creating the feeling that your options on quitting and exiting the organization are more narrowed. This had forceful edge in that Emelie said that how you do in one film productions spreads, so if you do bad in one, these spreads, which was one thing that created more pressure for Emelie and Thomas being in the same industry.

A lot of earlier research on young adults focus on the trajectory, and for example how having an alternative career can be a “cushion” for not experience so severe effects of precarious work (Campbell & Price, 2016). That perspective is needed to understand who stays in the precariat. But it misses that these cushions can be part of why people stay where they are, that cushions as “I can go back to school” or this is just a “stepping-stone”, is what keeps them obedient to organizational practises that they are highly critical of. This study also points out that something can be both transitional and precarious, because the effects are so adverse as to be diagnosed with depression and stress syndrome, or almost get in a car crash.

6.3 The result and the theoretical framework

This study was motivated on the grounds that theory of functional theory has not been explored in different contexts and populations. The theory has been useful in interpreting and structuring how the informants described their experiences. Paulsen’s theory of obedience has small differences between the 2018 and 2017 article. In the 2018 article Paulsen’s proposes that the individual always has to move through the mode of cynicism. In that model the move from despair and functional stupidity directly could not happen (2018). The 2017 model is instead connecting despair, cynicism and authoritarianism trough motives of rationales to functional stupidity. What I think Paulsen must have seen is that the case is that the individual can move between all 5 modes. This what the result that showed in this study. Paulsen model has similarities with the coping model of Astvik, Melin and Allvin (2013). The difference is that Paulsen’s model is not interested in the outcome in deliverance to the citizens. Paulsen is focused more on how to understand obedience. Especially that an individual can move very quick between different modes of obedience.

All of the informants left the company. Were they then obeying if the left? This is a reasonable view since comparing with a more extreme like leaving: you can still obey in the cult and then leave.

Functional stupidity is a concept that can be seen as *condescending*. Important is that this concept describes a deliberative move made by intelligent people to function in stupid organizations or stupid practises. As a concept it is fruitful to sensitize researchers to the counter factualness that functional organizations still can be riddled by stupid practises. Alvesson and Spicer make the claim that stupidity is prevalent throughout society. This study was able to show how some parts of how this is experienced. Alvesson and Spicer proposed

that a bit of functional stupidity can be positive for society in some cases, this was not the case in this study.

Cynicism and weak seduction were seen in my material. Paulsen's concept authoritarianism was in the analysis seen as too strong, since authoritarianism in his conception makes obedience a virtue. The informants of this study did not make obedience in itself a virtue, but they did make pushing themselves and growing with the challenges a virtue. Some made proving themselves a virtue also, but not everyone. Therefore "weak authoritarianism" seems more appropriate.

In the analysis Goffman's theory of frontstage and backstage were utilized. This synthesis was able to be done because Paulsen's model also was very close to the dramaturgical à la Goffman with granting a lot of agency and awareness of the individual.

6.4 Method and results

This is a small explorative study that can be used when a concept or theory is in an explorative stage (Denscombe, 2018, p. 78). The results of this study are still tentative because of the small sample. In qualitative research saturation of themes is another way reaching validity rather than representation. This was reached in this analysis. The differences that existed was that three of the informants were in an industry that would continue working in; and the other three had worked in an industry that they did not want to continue working in. This difference became a resource in the analysis. The other variations among the informants were discussed in the methodological section and the analysis shows that the variations were a resource in the crucial homogeneity in the experience of obedience.

Interviews went well because it elicited rich description and long stories about their experiences. Furthermore, they answered questions before I could ask them which shows how the informants could come with their experience and understandings.

The analysis was testing to see if the theory worked in a new setting. The framework was both used to interpret the experiences which was fitting to most of their experiences. The differences have been discussed in the theoretical framework and result, which shows that the interviews made it possible to nuance, question and add to the theory that was used.

6.5 Implications for research

This study has studied different modes of obedience in the context of precariousness for young adult. Age was found to be a factor which could be researched in other age groups

comparatively. Another study could be focusing on more longitudinal data to see what happens with different rationales of motives and modes of obedience during a life span.

Another perspective would be to explore more systematically from the perspective of management how stupidity management works from their perspective.

Paulsen has pointed that national representative data would be able to answer if as Alvesson and Spicer argued we really live in “stupidity-based economy” (Paulsen, 2017). Case studies of organizations in different industries like advertising, finance, start-ups, management consulting were that they are knowledge based would be another route for further research (Alvesson & Spicer, 2012).

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Appendix 1: Call for informants

"Hi everyone!

I haven't really introduced myself, im Anders and im studying sociology at the moment in Sweden. Hope this instagram still is bringing someone som joy. And thank you for all your support, i will try to do something good with it.

Im writing also because at the moment im writing my bachelor thesis. In that I will interview people about their experiences of compliance and obedience in a workplace. That is feeling that you have to do something against your own will. It might be thinking that what the company is doing to it's customers is wrong or against there interests, or that you fellt that you have put up with a management that is not listening to you, making you feel bad, or even worthless. It can be that you feel that you have to dumb yorself down, focus on the positive or become cynical in order to get by in the work.

Im looking for people who have experienced this, that would like to be interviewed. The study's goal is to bring the interviewes perspective and so that it can provide a better understanding of how it is to obey and comply to bad working conditions/ an bad organization. Im looking for those who have experienced this or is experience this now, and is something you have thought about a bit.

If you would like to be a part of this, and help me with my project, leave a comment under the photo and i will contact you on your DM, or DM me.

All the best! Thank you!

Anders"

Appendix 2: Interview guide

First part

1. Tell me about yourself? Your age, what you did before the job. What education have you had?
2. What was your job description. What kind of activities were you supposed to do, in a formal sense?
3. How long did you work there? How long ago was that?

Second part

4. Can you tell me about your experiences working at your job? From beginning to the now/the end? (Depending on if they are still working there)
5. Can you tell me of an example of a working day? Give many examples
6. How did you first get to know how it "worked" at your job?
7. Can you tell me how it was to come home from after a working day?
8. How was it to wake up on work day?
9. Can you tell me about when it was worst? What was the worst part of the job?

Third part

10. What is demanded from you? What do you think about it?
11. What did you think about what the company did to its customers?
12. What did you think about yourself that this was happening to you?
13. How could you feel during a working day?
14. Could your feelings change during the week?
15. What do you thought about the management/ your boss? How did they seem to respond to the workplace?
16. How was it talk with your boss? Tell me a few examples of these could be, give as many examples as you like.
17. What do you think about your coworkers? How did they seem to respond to the workplace? How did the others seem to be adapt?
18. How were the climate on the job?
19. How did you deal with the pressure? Different thoughts? Attitudes? Habits? Places you would go to?
20. How did you deal with your frustration? How did you deal with the stress? Can you tell me the last time you had to deal with this?
21. How did you think about the future when working there?
22. Did you do something to change what was happening? If how? If not, why?
23. Tell me about a time where what you wanted to do or valued, was opposed or not accepted by the management or other workers.
24. It was a time ago? How has your thoughts been after leaving there? How do you look back at it? (if it was a time ago)

25. How would you like the work to be organized, and how is it organized?

26. Where you thinking of leaving the workplace?

