Self-Construction while Backpacking

Self-construction in Travel Blogs of Dutch Generation Z

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ABSTRACT

This thesis demonstrates how backpacking contributes to self-construction in autobiographical travel blogs of Dutch generation Z. The interpretation of the blogs through discourse analysis provided insight into fragments that showed constructive processes in the narrative. These entailed new identifications with the mode of travel and the variety of experiences that occur during the trip. The reoccurring themes of discourse appeared to support the argument that, independently of destinations and individuals, the cultural and ideological construction of a self is influenced by backpacking.

Keywords: self-construction; backpacking; reflection; unknown; development; self; purpose

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1. Introduction

"You push your own limits. I'm doing so much more than I would have at home." – Kimberley, 11-01-2018 (Translation from Dutch)

Kimberley left the comforts of home to go backpacking. She is familiar with the *assumption* that she will return home with more *knowledge* about herself. From personal experience, I also had several encounters with acquaintances who mentioned that I would "run into myself" or "I would find myself" because I went backpacking. This assumption is also shown in media, for example, in the popular movie *Eat, Pray, Love* where a woman travels to find herself, peace, and love. Cederholm describes this desire as "a longing for personal authenticity; to 'find the real me' and to live 'with the people and among the people'" (Noy, 2004, p. 91). This desire is recognised both in popular media and among many tourism researchers as a cause for the growth of countless 21st-century tourism activities (Bond, Falk, 2013, p. 430). Bosangit et al. describe backpacking as something "which might be considered amongst the most intense and meaningful consumption experiences in a person's life" (2015, p. 2). It is expected that this form of travel can create an impact on the tourist. Tourism is the business of selling experiences (Kim, 2010). Selling experiences is a very distinct economic industry because an experience is something "personal, unique, and memorable" (Bosangit, Hibbert, McCabe, 2015, p. 1). The assumption mentioned above is nothing new to the academic field of tourism and identity. However, the research is far from complete.

1.1. Constructing the Self

Within the existing literature connected to this field of research, there is a tendency to use *identity* and *self* interchangeably, which is also the case in this study. Understanding these concepts could be considered a slippery slope (McWha, Frost, Laing, 2018, p. 15). The wide selection of literature on these concepts does not provide one clear definition, but instead gives various descriptions. In exploring relevant studies on tourism and the relation to identity, a more concise definition will be constructed within this study.

1.1.1. Identity & Self explained

Desforges (2000) contributed a very interesting piece about identity and travel writing to the academic landscape. His research discusses "the process through which tourism consumption is mobilised for self-identity" (p. 926). He recognises that the self is not something to discover but rather something to actively construct. Desforges uses Giddens' (1991) theory of connecting the construction of self-identity, "self as *reflexively* understood by the person in terms of his or her *biography*" (p. 931), to future oriented reflexive biography or 'self-actualisation', "what it means to live life to the full" (p. 932). Desforges concludes that many travellers start their long-haul trips during moments when self-identity is questioned. He is convinced that tourism consumption plays a meaningful part in people's lives (p. 943).

A different approach to travel and the self is seen in Cohen's work (2010). He explores the experience of a coherent personal identity of life-style travellers. He questions the possibility of finding oneself through travel. However, Cohen also defines identity as *temporary* points of attachment which are *constructed* through difference and *reflected* through one's narratives. Cohen defines the concept of self as "each individual's reflective sense of her or his own particular identity" (p. 290). According to him, personal identity is expressed as "processual and developmental" (p. 295). After conducting 25 interviews, Cohen concluded that finding a coherent sense of oneself can be problematic when travelling. This occurred among participants who encountered more questions than answers about their identity. This could be a consequence of the changing environment and challenges that occur whilst traveling. This coherent sense of identity is an important part of the discussion on concepts of self and identity.

Scholars tend to divide between a core sense of self, core identity and constructive self. McWha, Frost & Laing (2018) develop this discussion and reduce it down to three theories on the concept of self. First is "the essential self", which is singular and discoverable (p. 15). Second is "the constructed self", "actively managed, jointly constructed, interactive, openly disinhibited, confessional, multiply manifest, and influenced by what we and our avatars do online" (p. 17). The third theory discusses "the transformable self", the process of reflective travel writing that leads to change in perspective and person (p. 20). In their attempt to answer "how travel writers personally experience their sense of self and the potential to construct the self online" (p. 17) they focus on successful contemporary travel writers. After 47 qualitative

interviews, it was concluded that "many travel writers (co)construct an online self and use their writing to transform themselves" (p. 14).

Wearing & Deane (2003) explore the *development* of self within the leisure and eco/volunteer tourism market. Wearing & Deane conclude that the change of reference groups whilst engaging in "voluntourism" allows individuals to take on a proactive role in decision making and think more about oneself (p. 11). This change of environment and experiences might instigate development and *transformation* of 'self' (p. 5). Chen, Bao & Huang's (2014) also focuses on developmental aspects. They provided research on personal development among backpackers and aimed to measure these processes. From a psychological perspective, personal development refers "to psychological changes in the whole process of life" (Chen, Bao & Huang, p. 522).

Gillespie (2007) also provides an alternative method for working with these concepts. He focusses on *the act* of identification through differentiation instead of referring to identity as a mere concept. His findings suggest that one recognises aspects within oneself by being in conversation about the (derogated) other. This recognition leads one to identify with the other, and, therefore, the previously discovered differentiation has collapsed. The *other* is originally brought into existence, or in other words constructed, through differentiation. Othering "occurs when Self represents Other in terms of what Self is not (and in terms of what self does not want to be) in a way that is 'self-aggrandising'" (Gillespie, 2007, p. 580). MacCannel (1989) believes that discovering the Other is one of the foremost motivations for tourism. Escaping from the modern world and embracing the supposed *authentic* other in an attempt to *discover a sense of self*. In this case, *the sense of self is* defined as something *sought* in or through others.

Bosangit, Hibbert and McCabe (2015) researched "how elements of the narrative relating to self-reflection and emotions are central to the process of transforming their travel experiences into personally meaningful experiences" (p. 1). Gillespie focussed on spoken narrative, but Bosangit, et al., focus on the online written accounts of tourists who backpack. They notice that to create meaning, the tourist's experiences are contrasted in relation to their *life worlds,* "their personal history, realm of experience, everyday norms, personal goals and aspirations" (p. 12). Making sense of their lives through narratives is seen as a natural mode of reflection (p. 4). These contrasting experiences also occurred in a study by Noy (2004). He studied change and transformation of backpackers' selves. He observed that transformative identity can be viewed as "an organic, inevitable theme in the travel narrative genre." (p. 87).

Noy concluded that self-*change* is a likely consequence of authentic and/or adventurous backpack experiences.

1.1.2. Narrative Identity

The connection between narrative and identity has been the focus of various research. Eakin has contributed extensive research on this topic to the academic landscape. In his book *Living Autobiographically* (2008) he discusses the construction of a *narrative identity* and that an individual draws upon personal resources during this process. These resources are specific discourses which are learnt and experienced throughout a person's life. Eakin argues that narrative identity is deeply rooted in culture. Constructing a narrative identity is seen as "a criterion for normality", a person is expected to be able to tell their own story (Eakin, p. 29). Eakin continues to explore ideas like co-construction of identity and the contrasting of experiences within a narrative. He declares that the existence of an *extended self* is defined as the self that exists outside of the present moment, the protagonist of self-narration (p. xiii; p. 48).

This extension of the self is also conceptualised by Belk (2013). He placed the extended self in the online spheres. His definition of the extended self highlights the connection one makes to their possessions and circumstances outside of the present day. Belk's research is focused on digital consumption changes that impact the self. He emphasises the importance of autobiographical knowledge as an aid to "self formation and preservation by providing a sense of continuity over time" (p. 488). Belk also notes the co-construction of oneself can occur on online platforms where individuals can create avatars and 'live' within digital worlds. The narratives one constructs through an extension of the self, can therefore differ from the reality experienced outside of the digital spheres.

1.1.3. Unanswered Questions of the Self

It has become clear that the discussions and usage of self and identity are inconclusive. The consideration of these concepts within tourist research appears to lack drastically in data. Therefore, such concepts could benefit from further investigation. Travelblogs are one of the many areas lacking in research. Furthermore, the research on identity and tourism could continue to develop with a particular focus on new generations. For instance, a modern generation could reveal new identity work or expose new demographics to the tourism sector. Finally, the focus on specific modes of tourism or travel could impact the results of such studies and this allows the tourism industry to provide a broad spectrum of possibilities. This paper aims to unpack these topics which contribute to the overall concept of identity. To provide data for this research, this study will use online blogs from Generation Z and will focus on backpacking as the mode of travel. Therefore, the research question for this paper is as follows: "How does backpacking contribute to the construction of oneself, expressed in autobiographical online travel blogs of Dutch Generation Z?".

1.2. Relevance of Self-Construction & Tourism

New generations, and the act of extending oneself, form a relatively new and interesting field of research. It is argued that the future of tourism can depend, at least to some extent, on the understanding of the social and demographic trends that influence the behaviour of travellers (Robinson, Schänzel, 2019, p. 128). Generation Z forms the next large focus group in tourism consumption. It is the experiences of the new generations that will be important for the future of the tourism industry. Their view on tourism will guide the tourism market and its activities to create meaningful experiences. Certain research could provide insight into this generations' outlook and profile towards tourism activities. The online medium could help in this investigation. For example, by presenting their own narrative of experiences which are not predetermined for the purposes of collecting data or research.

The COVID19 pandemic could continue to cause uncertainty for both the tourism industry and Generation Z, which may impact their ability to participate in constructing oneself through travel. The impact on this generation's construction of identity could be discovered by researching the unique contributions towards travel and how this contributes to the construction

of oneself. The outcome of this research might provide arguments to promote backpacking for future generations and discover new possibilities in the post-pandemic tourism industry. A *longing* to participate in tourism and *find oneself* might also have implications for the future where questions of overtourism and sustainability are discussed. The creation of more meaningful and sustainable tourism, where identity related motivations are actively employed for more impact, could possibly create less *need to escape* or search for oneself.

The assumption of "finding oneself" could transform into a niche market within the tourism sector. It is argued that within contemporary western late modernity, many struggle with their identity or acquiring a continuous identity (Desforges, 2000; Cohen, 2010). The possibility of taking on different identities, as opposed to traditional roles, can create "social saturation". Social saturation, as described by Cohen (2010) means that someone experiences doubt about everything (s)he "knows to be true" about oneself. It cannot be stated whether the future generations will experience social saturation, nonetheless, the self remains within a process of construction, and it is unclear if there is an end to this process or whether it is a continuous struggle as Cohen suggests. Analysing a collection of tourist experience could provide a valuable insight into this concept. Generation Z are at a stage in their life when the question of identity are yet to be answered.

Apart from identity struggles that appear to be tackled within tourism, creating certain experiences is central to the tourism industry. Furthermore, this is challenging because predicting or providing an experience always entails the individual tourist. A tourism experience involves both the individual and the tourism destination within a certain context. This creates the possibility of sociocultural reflection and identity-related experiences (Bond, Falk, 2013, p. 437). These identity-related aspects of tourism can create a useful platform for the whole tourism industry and allow for more meaningful experiences to occur. It is the individual tourist's self who internalises an experience as meaningful. However, if the tourism industry creates expectations of experiences without living up to these, the contradiction of expectation and lived experiences can damage the industry. Additionally, this research will contribute to ongoing research in identity politics.

1.3. Theoretical framework

This study's approach to the concepts of *self* and *identity* will aim to deliver a new perspective to the existing research. In this work, the *self* consists of the constructed, and subjective, answers to the questions "*who am I?*" and "*how do I live life to the fullest?*" in one's narrative. Desforges argued for the inclusion of both questions as part of the construction of the self (2000, p. 932). He explained that reflexive story telling contributes to the construction of the self, which does entail a sense of personhood *and* a self-consciousness about one's place in the world. The idea to include one's "place in the world" within the construction of the self is also described by MacCannell (1989) through the authentic other in tourism. McAdams argues that "most modern western individuals still seek a personal identity that reflects unity and purpose" (1997, p. 60). McAdams' argument implies that living life to the fullest, to one's purpose, is part of the self. It also means that the self is a cultural and ideological construct within the western world, which is actively constructed instead of found and influenced by one's surroundings and ideologies.

"*Who am I?*" provides a more descriptive sense of the self with a focus on how someone perceives an individual and their characteristics. The second question addresses the purpose and future orientation or self-actualisation, the way (s)he places the self in the world. Cohen's definition, "*finding oneself*", differs from Desforges' *construction of oneself.* According to Desforges, identity is not something that can be found. Cohen continues and defines identity as *temporary* points of attachment which are *constructed* through difference and *reflected* on through one's narratives. This suggests an agreement with Desforges' approach and MacCannels' notion of searching for the authentic Other as a tool to construct the self. Cohen argued that this is problematic because *feeling lost* whilst traveling creates more questions than answers in identity work due to the temporary points of attachment. It can be theorised that the *purpose* part of identity might give a more coherent sense of self. The definition for the concepts *self & identity* which are used during this research draw on existing literature, yet they provide a new view in research. This is because of the inclusion of Desforges' two questions. This definition has not been applied in this manner before and it will enable a broader focus within tourism and identity work.

The extended self from Belk or transformative self from McWha et al., refer to an existing construction of self which is then re-shaped into a new form and, extended beyond the *original* self (2018). This *re-shaping* implies that the features needed to *extend* the self were

already present. Eakin provides a similar argument about narrative identity. He explains that the construction of a narrative identity is formed through existing resources. One cannot draw upon resources that do not (yet) exist in someone's mind to create a narrative. However, the work within the existing resources could progress by encouraging various activities such as, general learning, new experiences and undergoing personal development. Personal development can occur whilst travelling and leads a person to not only shape but also add new knowledge to narrative resources. The self is a construct connected to psychological processes which indicate that personal development is directly connected to the development of a self (Chen, Bao & Huang, 2014, p. 522). Furthermore, Gillespie (2007) shows how reflecting in narrative on the Other, actually leads to identification, a collapse of this *othering* dynamic. Therefore, it's possible to create an argument which compares the contribution of personal development and reflection in narrative to the construction and or re-shaping of oneself.

Self and identity are grounded in narrative. According to Eakin (2008) a narrative is "something we tell, listen to, read, or invent; it is an essential part of our sense of who we are" (p. ix). The way someone can tell or write a story about their self is in direct accordance with their identity construction. Telling a story about *one's self* is *the self*. Eakin believes that constructing a narrative identity has become a normality which implies that many people create narratives without even realising it, in other words, the unconscious construction of a narrative identity.

Unconscious can be described as passive meaning making, existing behavioural patterns, automatised systems, or being unaware of the act of doing. This is opposed to a conscious construction of narrative identity which refers to active meaning making of experiences, constructing with focus and attention, making a choice and being aware of this. Noy argues that "at the core of the backpackers' stories, though often covert, is these youths' selves and identities" (2004, p. 79) suggesting that any travel narrative involves identity discourses that are often hidden. Another argument by Noy suggests that the conscious expressed self-change by backpackers is also embedded within the notion that others, who did not backpack, have not undergone the same change (2004, p. 97). This could influence the dynamic in written or spoken travel narratives with a public who did not travel.

The concepts, conscious & unconscious, are important because they can lead to different ways of impact of backpacking to the process of constructing a self in narrative. The theory of self-construction concludes that, if an individual does not *have* a self, but is actively

constructing a self, there is supposedly an element of choice involved. By exploring the aspects of backpacking that contribute to the construction of oneself, expressed in narratives, tourists could potentially use these aspects. Someone who is actively working with their identity, might place more effort in reflecting and re-shaping the self than someone who does not have this intention. Person A will most likely discover how backpacking influences the construction of a self because (s)he is looking for these. Person B on the other hand, might also be influenced in his/her self-construction by backpacking but this appears subconsciously. Noy mentioned the covert core of selves in backpacker's narratives. The case of person B is very interesting because it could show a foundational impact of backpacking on the self-construction, an inevitable transformative identity experience.

In this study the narratives which are used are autobiographical. The storyteller is also the main character and the writer, Eakin refers to this as the teller-effect. The 'I' in the story represents the imagined or experienced self in language. It is important to realise that the I is always co-constructed. The *co-construction* of a self is a result of the mediation of the narratives. Although the writing might be autobiographical and reflective, there is always someone to observe the published writing on trave. The online blogs are written with the assumption that an audience will read the text. These observers and other existing blogs can also influence the written narrative and thus, influence how it is constructed. This will be acknowledged, however, will not be the point of focus.

The construction of a narrative is a result of constructing an existing knowledge of language. It is important to remember that a person is constructing the self through narrative, as mentioned previously. The idea of 'finding oneself' is hereby replaced by constructing oneself in a new, transformed, or autobiographical narrative. This process, where the existing narrative expands or is reframed during the travels can be linked to certain aspects of backpacking.

The research will focus on Dutch Generation Z travellers. Generation Z compromises of individuals born in the year 1995 up to 2012 (Robinson, Schänzel, 2019, p. 127). The oldest members of this new generation are 26 years old. Travelling independently requires a certain age which will be set at the age of 18 years old. The focus on Dutch participants in the study is due to the sociocultural dimensions in narratives and other cultural influences which might influence participants (Noy, 2004, p. 80). Robinson & Schänzel (2019) provide an insight in the travel experiences of this new generation where emphasis has shifted from destination to

traveller (p. 127). They also highlight that their travel patterns are relatively similar to other generations, but the building of online identities is new and of influence to their travel experiences (p. 136).

The process of identity construction for Generation Z is ongoing. They are currently experiencing the so-called *psychological limbo* which "typically takes place in modern western societies when an adolescent's childhood identity is no longer experienced as suitable, but a new adult identity has not yet been established" (Cohen, 2010, p. 291). Erikson's argument of "psychosocial moratorium" which means that the late adolescent/early adult stage provides "the opportunity to try out new images, roles or identities in order to find one that best suits them" (Wearing, Deane, 2003, p. 7). Therefore, it is suggested that this generation is currently in a period of identity work.

1.4. Method

This thesis will focus on answering how backpacking contributes to the construction of one's self, expressed in autobiographical online travel blogs of Dutch Generation Z. The qualitative research will be done within a constructivist paradigm, concerning a relativist ontology and subjective epistemology. This consideration means that the existence of multiple realities and the subject & knower create meanings in a socially constructed world (McWha, Frost, Laing, 2018, p. 17). The construction of one's self in travel blogs fits within the social sciences approach and the constructivist paradigm because constructing the self is a subjective reality in a narrative that is used in a social context towards others. The constructivist paradigm takes the participant's reality as central rather than those at the receiving end of the narrative.

The research method *discourse analysis* explores the contribution of backpacking on narrative self-construction. A discourse analysis is seen as a form of content analysis (Schneider, 2013). A content analysis enables the researcher to subjectively interpret the content of text data through a systematic classification process of coding and identifying themes or patterns (Hsieh, Shannon, 2005, p. 1278). It is relatively similar to discourse analysis, yet it focuses on content rather than language patterns. The content might be of interest in a later stage of this research; however, the coding focuses on a discourse analysis, which is the leading research method. This method reveals how the participants construct a *self* and how it fits within the social practice of backpacking. It also reveals assumptions or self-evident statements that

the backpackers have established about travel and identity construction. The framework, from which the participants draw the meaning they give in their narratives, can be exposed and might develop and proliferate throughout the texts. While it will not show which mental processes precisely guide the participants, this method will enable a thorough analysis of the written narratives and the identity work within a text.

A discourse is "an interrelated set of texts, and the practices of their production, dissemination, and reception, that brings an object into being" (Phillips, Hardy, 2011, p. 3). According to Schneider (2013), a discourse includes all forms of communication. The texts can be taken apart through discourse analysis, and the building blocks of a narrative become visible. These building blocks provide the data to find an answer to the main question. A simplification of the central question becomes then "which building blocks influence backpacking and are used to build a self in the narrative?" The object in this study is the *self*, and the practice of focus is the production of these texts.

The analysis medium consists of autobiographical travel blogs written by selected participants during their backpack trips. The blogs are written in Dutch and analysed in Dutch. The author translated any fragments that may be used from these blogs throughout this study. The medium and participants will be further disclosed below.

1.4.1. Participants

The context of the medium which is used in the analysis is considered to be necessary. The context might influence the way the data is created and contributes to understanding the empirical data that will be gathered. It can illustrate a background from which statements originate and deeper insights into the implications and intentions of the author of the texts. Because this study includes multiple participants, specific criteria have been applied to limit atypical results in the empirical data.

Participants for this study were found through various online searches and a personal network. The researcher found 2 participants through her network. The social media platform Facebook was used to extend this search. There are private groups of backpackers active on this platform, where someone can post a message after joining the group. The researcher appealed for members of several backpacking groups to join the study, and 5 backpackers responded to

this message. Another frequently used online platform for backpackers is the travel blog website Polarsteps. Through searching for Dutch destination names, several blogs were found. The authors of these blogs were contacted to join the study, leading to a selection of 3 participants.

All ten participants have confirmed their age and nationality. They have given their accord to join this study. The contact with the participants happened through email or messages on social media. An overview of the participants is shown below, with details of their age and blogs. The participants will be referred to by their first name to protect their privacy. Attention has been given to the male-female corpus. Nonetheless, the number of male participants is distinctly lower. In previous studies, which have been presented above, there has not been any indication of significant differences in experiences between male and female participants, which made the researcher confident to continue the analysis with the selected participants.

All participants are born between 1995 and 2012, which means they are part of Generation Z. The participants are of Dutch nationality. A person draws on existing knowledge and experience. By focussing on Dutch Generation Z, the socio-cultural influences could be seen as similar and will not create unusable divergent results. There has not been a further inclusion of, for example, graduate-level, occupations or other personal details about the participants. It has not been shown in previous research that these details influence *the process* of constructing the self. However, these features might be found within language use or as the content of discourses. If this is the case, it will be noted in the discussion of the data, and further research will be advised. This notion also applies to possible gender differences.

All selected participants have travelled or are still travelling. These travels are long-haul and independent of organisations or pre-arranged itineraries. A certain age is required to travel independently, which means the partakers of this study from Generation Z are 18 years or older. Further, they can be called backpackers according to the definition "backpacking is a particular travel style for those travellers who prefer budget accommodation, longer holidays, itinerary flexibility, meeting other travellers, and social and participatory holiday activities" (Chen, Bao, Huang, 2014, p. 522).

Another essential criterion for the participants is that they have written autobiographical blogs about their travels *while* they were travelling. The participants are recognised as contemporary travel writers. The definition used for contemporary travel writers is "as authors of texts about travel, in a professional or amateur sense, writing for a range of different purposes, including travel promotion, entertainment, inspiration and personal development, as

well as a diverse audience, ranging from the self to friends and family and larger more commercial or amorphous readers" (McWha, Frost, Laing, 2018, p. 15). To this definition, the criteria are added that the blogs are accessible online because of the co-creation that influences the process of construction (McWha, Frost, Laing, 2018, p. 16).

The written narratives are the focal point of this study. This data is reliable because the participants were unaware when writing the blogs of the possible purpose for research; thus, there has not been any interference in the writing that might influence outcomes of this research. The language in the blogs is unofficial. Images or other online activity surrounding the blogs will not be included as data for this research. All blogs in this study mediate in the online spheres. This mediation means they have all been influenced to a similar extent by this process. Therefore, the influence will not alternate the construction of identity in the autobiographical narratives to such an extent that it could be noted in this study. The blogs are accessible to the public, and they are likely written with the intention to inform or entertain friends and family about the journey. After scanning the blogs, this intention is deducted from the responses shown below to blogs and references within the blogs to family and acquaintances.

Table 1- Overview Participants

	Name	Gender	Year of Birth	Destination of travel	Number of Posts	Period of travel	Found through
1	Anne	Female	1999	New Zealand, Fiji, Australia	39	07/01/2020 – 13/02/2020	Polarsteps
2	Else	Female	1998	Australia	15	04/01/2019 – 15/06/2020	Facebook
3	Esmee	Female	1995	South America8	40	14/01/2019 – 25/03/2019	Facebook
4	Floor	Female	1999	Amerika	28	29/07/2019 – 24/08/2019	Polarsteps
5	Jerome	Male	1998	Australia, New Zealand, Bali	69	15/01/2019 – 02/07/2019	Personal Network
6	Kimberly	Female	1996	Asia	12	11/01/2018 – 17/05/2018	Facebook
7	Koen	Male	1996	South America	6	31/10/2019 – 02/12/2019	Polarsteps
8	Madelief	Female	1997	South America	7	10/02/2016 – 31/05/2016	Personal Network
9	Rik	Male	1998	New Zealand	26	10/01/2020 – 13/08/2021	Facebook
10	Yvanna	Female	1996	Asia, Australia	44	03/01/2018 – 15/04/2018	Facebook

1.4.2. Discourses

A discourse can be seen as all forms of communication. However, through discourse analysis, specific patterns of language can be revealed, which can be defined as a discourse (LeGreco, 2017, p72). A person makes choices in their use of language and draws upon their knowledge. These knowledge-based decisions in language mean that the patterns, or discourses, are narrative representations of a person and reflect the person's view of reality. Noy (2004) showed that many backpackers see *self-change* as organic while travelling (p. 87), which might lead to an implicit presentation of this in discourse. The construction of oneself, "*who am I?"* and *"how do I live life to the full?"* becomes visible through these textual patterns in the narrative. On the contrary, for other backpackers, the *quest* to find oneself might be an explicit topic of the narrative. This study focuses on the subconscious identity construction in the narrative.

The analysis is conducted based on codes consisting of one or several words, categorised into themes of discourses. Based on the knowledge acquired from the literature review and the leading question, several themes are taken into the analysis. These themes are a mere starting point. It might occur that the themes will not appear, or various others are found. A first theme was hypothesised based on the language which was used in the literature, the *reflective discourse*. Cohen (2010) and McWha, et al., (2018) are two examples of scholars who used reflexivity as a vital part of self-construction. Travel writing is a reflective act, which would mean that this form of language use will probably be present. Another theme is the *development discourse*. Narratives can be developed and expanded, and while travelling, the possibility to develop has been mentioned several times (Wearing & Deane, 2003; Chen, Bao & Huang, 2014). The definition of the *self* could also lead to two themes in discourse based on the two questions involved in constructing the self. The *self-perception discourse* and *purpose discourse.* The self is present in a narrative; thus, themes based on the definition of the self should be found through the analysis.

The researcher conducts the study through systematic reading of the blogs and coding. The codes will be indicators for themes throughout the blogs, and the themes will be colour coded. The interrelation of discourses is analysed within the whole blog series of one backpacking trip. For example, Kimberley's blogs consist of 12 posts in which patterns across posts will be included as a focus of the analysis. After the initial coding and themed blogs, the researcher will review the findings within the context of the specific mode of travel,

backpacking. The practical use of statements and language levels will be analysed in more detail and interpreted in a discussion. The complete account of the data will be available in a separate file, and a summary will be placed within the appendix.

1.5. Structure

This short explanation of the following chapters will clarify the structure of the thesis. The method, as explained above, will be applied to the participants' blogs, and the findings will be discussed in three chapters. Chapter two will focus on the discourse themes and fragments. This chapter should explain how the participants construct a *self* and the fragment that makes this process visible in the participants' narratives. The next chapter will concentrate on language use and statements. The discussion shows how self-construction fits within the social practice of backpacking. It also shows the beliefs that might have been established about travel and identity construction and their influence. All data will be combined in the fifth chapter of this thesis. The connection is presented between the discourses and specific aspects of backpacking in autobiographical travel blogs. The possible limitations of this study, as well as future new subjects of research, will receive attention in this final chapter. The concluding remarks answer the central question of how backpacking contributes to the construction of one's self, expressed in autobiographical online travel blogs of Dutch Generation Z. The remaining chapters will entail the bibliography and appendices of this thesis.

2. Self-Construction in Narratives

This study uses sub-questions to assist the analysis of the blogs. This chapter aims to find fragments of text that show how the participants construct a *self* in the narratives. The previous chapter discussed the foundation to find these fragments as four themes of discourse. The discourse themes could be expanded or changed throughout the analysis. The analysis of the blogs use codes as a foundation to keep consistency in the discourse. A code is recurring words or small groups of words. The tables in chapter 2.1 present a summary of the collected empirical data. The remaining chapter 2 will discuss this data.

2.1. Exact data from the analyses

The discourse analysis' exact results are presented in the following tables. The amount shown in table 2 represents how often a code appeared. The discourses connect to specific codes. This connection results in a highlighted code only when it fits within a theme of discourse. For example, "my" is highlighted when referring to an identification discourse. If "but" is highlighted, it leads to a reflection, indicating the discourse.

Further, codes like "I love" have also been highlighted in the opposite sense, for example, "I do not love" or "not like". The colour coding of the blog is created in the first analysis. The exact calculation of the appearances of the codes is from the revision of this analysis. This revision led to a difference in the number of colours and codes connected to the discourse themes. One fragment of text can also belong to several discourse themes simultaneously. The codes used were partly hypothesised and partly discovered throughout the analysis. This method of hypothesising and discovering is also applied to the themes, as explained in chapter 1.4. The participants each have their own writing style, and the number of blogposts differs per participant. For example, this difference leads to Rik having relatively few posts but significantly larger texts in each post, while Yvanna has multiple posts but shorter ones. Table 3 presents the number of posts and the total appearances of the discourse theme.

Table 2 – Overview Appearances Codes per Theme

	Name Participant	Rik	Esmee	Floor	Koen	Else
Discourse	**Codes**					
Reflective	But also/ But yeah …	55	15	1	2	7
	Anyway/about time	18	1	0	1	1
	Regret & accidents	23	11	0	2	3
	Any statement of emotion as reflection of the moment	51	19	10	0	30
	…good/bad for …	11	1	1	1	4
	Saying goodbye	13	5	0	0	1
	I expect/I thought	16	2	4	1	4
Development	… is still/even … hard/easy	11	3	0	0	2
	To learn	16	9	0	0	4
	Again	19	5	0	0	2
	Figuring out /Discovered	32	5	7	0	7
	Until	13	0	1	0	2
	Challenge	16	4	1	1	4
Purpose	To have to / a must	23	6	2	1	6
	My planning	27	5	4	0	8
	Worth the effort	9	2	2	0	0
	So still / thus	30	6	1	2	4
	To do / decide	28	12	7	0	9
	Look forward to / want to	15	3	0	0	10
	Bucketlist	5	1	2	0	2
Self-Perception	I love to	15	0	0	0	2
	My …	9	5	0	0	13
	I am…	15	0	0	0	8
	I as a …	33	9	2	0	8
Comparison	To compare	15	2	0	1	2
	It is like	6	4	1	0	3
	Like any other	1	0	2	0	1
Unknown	Special/unique/awesome/ cool	57	14	10	4	8
	Statement of expressing "most" special	4	3	0	0	0
	Statement first time/ never before in my life	13	3	0	1	1
		599	155	58	17	156

	Name Participant	Madelief	Kimberly	Yvanna	Jerome	Anne
Discourse	Codes					
Reflective	But also/ But yeah …	10	2	9	27	24
	Anyway/about time	1	2	5	2	6
	Regret & accidents	1	0	0	4	2
	Any statement of emotion as reflection of the moment	20	20	16	25	38
	…good/bad for …	1	1	0	5	3
	Saying goodbye	0	0	1	3	5
	I expect/I thought	2	2	2	8	6
Development	… is still/even … hard/easy	4	2	2	6	8
	To learn	6	4	4	4	10
	Again	0	0	1	6	0
	Figuring out /Discovered	2	3	2	7	14
	Until	0	1	4	7	1
	Challenge	6	3	0	X	8
Purpose	To have to / a must	3	8	0	10	10
	My planning	5	4	1	9	7
	Worth the effort	2	2	2	1	0
	So still / thus	0	0	1	2	8
	To do / decide	6	6	5	8	10
	Look forward to / want to	2	3	0	1	1
	Bucketlist	1	3	0	1	0
Self-Perception	I love to	5	5	4	1	6
	My …	0	0	0	20	4
	I am…	5	4	0	2	11
	I as a …	6	6	1	12	13
Comparison	To compare	3	4	1	6	2
	It is like	6	3	3	9	2
	Like any other	0	0	0	5	0
Unknown	Special/unique/awesome/ cool	3	4	13	9	7
	Statement of expressing "most" special	4	5	3	34	4
	Statement first time/ never before in my life	10	7	1	9	10
		114	104	81	243	220

Table 3 – Overview of Discourse Theme Appearances

Discourse	Appearances Jerome	Appearances Kimberley	Appearances Anne	Appearances Koen	Appearances Madelief
Reflective Discourse	74	27	84	7	35
Development Discourse	30	13	41	1	18
Purpose Discourse	32	26	36	3	19
Self-Perception Discourse	35	15	34	0	16
Comparison Discourse	20	7	4	1	9
Unknown Discourse	52	16	21	5	17
Total of posts	69	12	39	6	7
Period of travel	15/01/2019 – 02/07/2019	11/01/2018 – 17/05/2018	07/01/2020 – 13/02/2020	31/10/2019 – 02/12/2019	10/02/2016 – 31/05/2016

Discourse	Appearances Floor	Appearances Rik	Appearances Else	Appearances Yvanna	Appearances Esmee
Reflective Discourse	16	187	50	33	54
Development Discourse	9	107	21	13	26
Purpose Discourse	18	137	39	9	35
Self-Perception Discourse	2	72	31	5	14
Comparison Discourse	3	22	6	4	6
Unknown Discourse	10	74	9	17	20
Total of posts	28	26	15	44	40
Period of travel	29/07/2019 – 24/08/2019	10/01/2020 – 13/08/2021	04/01/2019 – 15/06/2020	03/01/2018 – 15/04/2018	14/01/2019 – 25/03/2019

2.2. Reflective Discourse

The reflective discourse is one of the themes that originated from the literature review. This discourse expects to entail fragments of identity construction because reflecting on oneself has been noted as necessary in this process. In other words, when someone is evaluating or giving feedback to him/herself in writing; these are moments of reflection. In discourse, various words or sets of words suggest reflection on the self and context. Giddens (1991) argues the importance of understanding the self intuitively in writing. It could say that the whole process of writing a travel blog is a reflection. Logically following the process of creating narratives of the experiences during travelling, reflection is inevitable. The interest, however, is in how these reflections interplay with the construction of the self.

Therefore, it is not surprising that this discourse theme appeared in all the blogs. The reflective discourse presents itself in 90% of the blogs. In 50% of the blogs, the reflective discourse appears twice or more in each post on average. Looking closely at coding table 1, it becomes clear that the reflection of emotions or feelings gained more attention than other sub-themes of the reflection discourse. Rik shared, for example, "I was very stressed, especially because this is my first outside landing and is someone else's plane" (02-03-2020). Else wrote one post where she shared multiple emotional reflections, which were both positive, "always a relief", and negative, "I honestly admit that I do not feel completely safe on my own in poverty" (20-09-2019). There are many more examples like these. They show a connection between the experienced reality and emotional reflection that has become part of the narrative about the self in this reality.

Next to emotions and feelings, there are several other sub-themes in the reflective discourse. Narrating expectations of the experienced reality in a reflective sense is another theme. For example, "Uruguay turned out to be much more adventurous and fun than I could have ever thought" (Madelief, 25-02-2016). This example is a very positive reflection, but there have also been more negative reflections like "only it was a little less deep than expected" (Jerome, 05-02-2019).

Dealing with unforeseen conditions, accidents, and regret also seems to lead the participant to reflect on themselves. Rik travelled the longest from all the participants and shared several of these reflections in his blog "So, basically since I started working in March, I have only worked for the campervan. Great to realise this" (12-11-2020). Other participants like Madelief, Else, and Anne tend to stay more positive in their reflecting discourses or instead change their experiences into positive reflections that might otherwise be understood as

unfavourable. An example of this is "Looking back, it was not so bad at all, and it makes for a good story" (Madelief, 03-04). Madelief wrote this quote after a series of events described as "hell".

2.3. Development Discourse

The development discourse consists of sets of text that illustrate progress in the participant's known self. Existing narratives are expanding through development, and this expansion creates the possibility for the narrative identity to expand. The theme of development was less present than the researcher initially expected based on previous research like Chen, et al. (2014). In their research, they use self-actualisation, in the shape of self-cognition, "as one of the personal development constructs, […] and self-improvement has been identified as motivations behind backpacking travels" (2012, p. 522). This identified motivation suggested that development would indeed be a theme of backpacking and contributes to identity construction. In Anne's blogs, development was the second most important theme, and in the blogs of Rik, Yvanna, Esmee and Madelief, the theme was third in the most present.

This discourse displayed discovering or figuring things out as the main sub-theme based on the code. The development in these fragments is found in the *discovery* itself because it shows progress in knowledge about a subject or experience. "And then you slowly discover not to trust people too much" (Jerome, 13-02-2019). These discoveries link to challenges that the participants might have encountered. Gmelch (1997) argues that travelling independently in unknown environments challenges growth. Anne shows growth in her statement, "the fact that I was worried about making friends seems so weird right now. Talking is so easy when you are backpacking, there is always something to talk about" (05-02-2020). [AR1] The example shows development from experiencing or identifying with something and changing or developing this through acting. Anne saw difficulty in making friends, and her experience helped her develop a new stance on this. Encounters of discovery that can be described as more superficial are also taken into account in this discourse theme for example, "I realised that I did not have a photo yet with a coconut and this typical holiday picture is of course while drinking a coconut on the beach" (Kimberley, 14-03-2018).

The acquiring of new skills and experiences or the literal sense of learning something also shows developments in this theme. Here narratives describe acts and new experiences retaining something. For example, "The days that followed actually went better, the more you

practice and more classes" (Yvanna, 28-02-2018). Yavanna shared by the end of her trip in her blog, "I learned so much, seen and done new things" (15-04-2018). She confirms the contribution of travelling to improving and learning, which has been suggested by scholars like Chen, et al.

2.4. Purpose Discourse

The chapter on the method explained that the purpose discourse could connect directly to the question of "*how do I live life to the fullest?*" which is part of constructing a self. Fragments that can fall under this discourse do not necessarily answer the question directly but relate to this idea of what to do. The self-constructed narrative can be found in this discourse because of this relation, and it is the first sign of self-actualisation. The purpose discourse is the second most present discourse in 60% of the blogs. The discourse is visible in various ways and subjects with intertextual connections and codes, primarily suggesting actions in the present or the future.

The most evident sub-theme of this discourse is travel plans and goals. Decision making in travel plays a big part. "After doubting it for a while, we decided nonetheless to …" (Floor, 05-08-2019). "For our last day in Medellin, we decided to go to Guatapé" (Esmee, 23-01-2019). These two examples show the use of "to decide", which directly indicates the decision that guides the participant's actions. Participants showed patterns of "having to" do certain things. For example, in Rik's focus on flying, which is a recurring pattern throughout his texts and in Kimberley's blog, this pattern could be found around photography. For example, she would state something as beautiful, and thus, she *had* to take pictures (11-01-2018). The purpose discourse can show both a purpose and, in some cases, an obsessive or compulsory tendency of a participant.

This discourse also revealed the preferences and consequential acts of the participants. Their necessities while travelling, which they shared through their blogs, imply particular importance. These needs also show some form of a compulsory act. For example., "Having to leave New Zealand and Jerry are closing in. Thus, I made sure I enjoyed my last nights in Jerry even more" (Jerome, 19-02-2019). Jerome shows 'enjoying' as a consequence and needs because of what is to come. "So to complete this trip sporty we …" (Esmee, 16-01-2019) is an example of a preference of being sporty and the consequence in action noted by "so". Revealing preferences in stating plans like "and we really wanted to visit this" (Floor, 01-08-2019).

Finally, the purpose discourse was shown many times in the connection to 'bucket lists' or 'wish lists' expressed by the participants. In writing about specific activities, which were in multiple cases connected to the development discourse, they would describe it as an achieved goal since it was part of a participant's bucket list. In Rik's blog, he writes about doing something not because he was into the activity at the time, but rather because it was on his bucket list (20-01-2020). The bucket list itself formed the mere motivation needed for Rik to act on multiple occasions (18-02-2020; 18-02-2020).

2.5. Self-Perception Discourse

The self-perception discourse shows a more unambiguous indication of the participant's answer to the question 'who am I?' as part of their constructed self. The fragments that belong to this theme show parts of the narratives that describe the author him or herself in the narrative. These fragments can be literal statements using, for example, the reference code "I am" or a form of this. The fragments may also refer to other objects identifying oneself, starting with "my". Continuing, statements like "I love" are part of the identification fragments that colour someone's characteristics and preferences.

In the literature review, the extended self-explained possibility to include material objects as part of the self (Belk, 1988). This extended self in a material object is discovered because of the practical use of "my". Even the notion of "my hostel" (Anne, 09-01-2020) shows identification with a place and integrating it as a 'possession'. "It is not that I am that addicted to my phone…" (Anne, 19-01-2020). Next to possessions, identification fragments also showed identification with places or activities. Else, for example, states, "I have been working my lovely new job" (28-04-2019).

An exciting sign is that all the participants appear to identify as Dutch citizens. This identification might seem obvious since the participants of this research are Dutch. Unexpectedly participants explicitly declare this in their writing; for example, Rik "I, as a typical Dutchman, thought that …" (18-03-2020). This explicit identification also appeared for *being a backpacker*. "Very chill as a backpacker" (Jerome, 09-03-2019). Identifying as a backpacker is vital for this research to answer how backpacking contributes to the construction of the self. These examples show the code "I as", which has also made appearances referring to other identities or characteristics. An example of this is found in Rik's blog, where he refers to

himself and his travel partner at the time as Tarzan and Jane, "where we could let our inner Tarzan and Jane run free" (Rik, 08-02-2020).

2.6. Comparison Discourse

The comparison discourse is one of the two themes which have come to attention during the analysis. This discourse consists of patterns of text where a comparison is made between experiences while travelling and 'common' or 'known' things. This discourse displays the use of a familiar narrative to understand the unfamiliar. Fragments that present a comparison statement can provide data about previously constructed narratives and new ones. The construction of the self appears through comparing and what is chosen as a comparison. For example, "It was like I was in a Jurassic Park movie" (Jerome, 14-02-2019). "A beach like that would be used in an ad from a travel agency" (Rik, 18-02-2020). The things to make comparisons are expanded throughout the trip, for example, "Over here it is much rougher than at the Eastcoast" (Rik, 18-02-2020). Although this is a relatively minor discourse, it is relevant to the research because the discourses fragments provide data about the participant and their frame of reference. Eakin (2008) argues that from the existing frame of language, someone constructs their narrative identity or, in other words, from their existing frame of reference.

2.7. Unknown Discourse

Although close to the development discourse, a new discourse appears through the analysis. Where development builds on existing knowledge, the unknown discourse shows fragments with entirely new experiences. Exclamations that express the uniqueness of situations or describe the intensity of experiences fall under this theme. The unknown discourse consists of patterns in text that result from new, formerly unknown experiences. This discourse is present in all blogs from the participants. It argues that this is a logical result of travelling to new places. The participants travel to 'foreign' places in which "…power, identity, meaning and behaviour are constructed, negotiated according to socio-cultural dynamics" (Pritchard, Morgan, 2000, p. 167). This argument means that through participating in travel, someone will experience new socio-cultural dynamics and behaviours, and so forth. This discourse can bring about entirely new narratives to contribute to the construction of a self.

The unknown discourse appeared through three codes which represent different ways of the experience by the participant. New scenery was often described with words that state it as unique, beautiful, cool or similar expressions. "Men, what were those waves high and wild, really cool" (Yvanna, 24-02-2018). Participants added words like "most" or "best", which can indicate the intensity of the new experience, for example, "Probably the best night out of my life" (Jerome, 23-04-2019). Other statements include "ever seen" or "never before". "This must have been the scariest thing I have ever done in my life" (Jerome, 14-02-2019). There could be multiple appearances of the same discourse within one blog, and each appearance may entail different codes. For example, in Madelief's blog on the 31st of May 2016, she wrote the quotes "It is unique and a place like I have never seen before" "one of the most beautiful things I have had the privilege to see and experience during this trip" "to arrive in this breath-taking city, it was really awesome" (Madelief, 31-05-2016).

2.8. Conclusion Discourses

The analysis of the autobiographical travel blogs focused on fragments that show self-construction has resulted in several noticeable discourses. The reflective, purpose and perceived-self discourse appeared in the most extensive number of blogs. Likewise, the development, unknown, and comparison discourses were present in many narratives. All of these discourses show fragments of self-construction within the travel blogs. The examples of fragments explain how the discourse shows up in the narratives and illustrate how the codes are used. The implications of these identity construction examples are complex in language and connected to the context of the narratives. The themes of the discourses are presented separately in this chapter; however, they interconnect. A fragment might entail several discourses at once.

The reflective discourse shows interplay with the construction of the self in that the participants take a moment to relive experiences and emotions in their text. In doing this, the participant constructs a narrative that represents the experienced reality. The story someone tells about him or herself is the self, and the experiences are part of this story (Eakin, 2008). The awareness of emotions shows the underlying covert identity in the narrative, and the reflection on actions shows what is desired as part of the self.

The development discourse enables existing narratives to expand through moments of learning, discovery challenges and progress in actions. The development of a person also shows

development in someone's identity, and the fragments clarify this in discourse or show when a person is reliving similar moments, which could mean identity continuation.

Fragments presenting discursive representations of purpose contribute to the question of the self and "how to live life to the fullest?". While travelling independently, the participants make every choice throughout the journey. Participants may not represent every choice. This lack of narrative leads to the deduction that the decisions presented in the narratives carry a particular value. These choices in narrative and decisions are part of the construction of the self.

Self-perception fragments are connected to decision making but do not always show a decision made. This discursive theme entails how a participant views him or herself. These views can have particular inclinations. They see themselves for example as Dutch. This identification brings about a range of preferences, language, connections to people, places and more. Identification with backpacking and being a backpacker also shows various aspects and views. This notion might be essential to reveal how backpacking plays a role in self-construction.

Comparing fragments can be connected to the concept of "othering". "Othering is the imaginary construction of different people by external individuals who remain marginal (yet powerful) in their encounters with the exotic 'others'" (Bosangit, Hibbert, McCabe, 2015, p. 10). Gillespie (2007) argues that this process of othering collapses if there is recognition of the other in the self. In other words, they are comparing oneself with the other. This comparison results in new insights/identification. Someone can identify through a comparison. However, it could also suggest how one experiences a new thing if it does not compare to anything known before. The comparisons might also hold certain statements that the participant sees as truth.

Insight into the unfamiliar and how participants describe this is revealed in the unknown discourse. Without any previous references, the participant describes reality as experienced by the self. These new narratives can be used as new ways to construct identity by the participant.

The sub-question "how do participants construct a *self* in a narrative?" provides discourse fragments relevant to this study. The information derived from the language of these discourse fragments will, in turn, answer how backpacking contributes to the construction of the self in autobiographical Dutch generation Z travel blogs. The analysis adopts a more detailed approach to the individual language and statements in the next chapter within the context of backpacking. More ways of the interplay of discursive themes, self-construction and backpacking will become apparent from a more detailed analysis of the fragments.

3. Awareness & Co-construction

The context of the travel blogs has in part been established in the previous chapters. Participants were selected based on specific criteria, and this criterion limits the influence of context in the outcome of this research. Nonetheless, the context does always have an influence, and especially within discourse analysis, it is relevant to take a closer look at this. A discourse analysis looks at how context might inform a statement (Schneider, 2013). This chapter will hone in on the sub-conscious narrative identity construction and the relevance of the co-constructive element. These are foundational next to the criteria of backpacking for the participants' writings. The context of backpacking has been highlighted in the introduction. This context takes the particular blog reading public into account.

3.1. Awareness and Narrative Identity

The introduction briefly discussed the normalisation of narrative identity, resulting in a subconscious construction of it. In analysing the blogs, there was no clear indication that any of the participants were aware of the possible process of identity construction, nor did they show a purpose of 'finding themselves'. This lack of awareness does not mean a lack of identity construction in writing. Each writer always chooses his/her own words and constructs a narrative, making decisions of what is and is not presented in them. These decisions can show insight into the construction of the self.

Eakin argues for the normality of narrative identity, whereby someone who integrates narrative identity does not realise creating the narrative identity. It could be argued that the construction of a self in autobiographical blogs is an integral process within the writing function and influences the author on a subconscious level.

Throughout the blogs, the participants made 45 explicit identity statements where they used 'I am …" to show identification. As mentioned earlier, explicit identification in the narrative was also visible in the self-perception discourse. This explicit identification shows an awareness of this specific part of the self. The aspects of backpacking that contribute to the construction of a self could be found only after deducting them from the implicit discourses believed to contribute to this process.

3.2. Co-construction of the Self

It can be argued that the blog reader's knowledge would have steered the authors in a specific writing style, while on the other hand, some authors expressly declare their own unique style. As is shown in the introduction, co-construction is a theme of importance in the identity research landscape. The online landscape creates co-constructive influences, so the criteria for the participants to participate in this research have been similar. What stood out in several blogs was the actual mention of the readers and breaking the narrative to directly address the readers or specific persons of the texts. This breaking of the narrative also implies a specific influence on the narratives, which makes it essential to mention and consider in answering the main question. Several examples will highlight the co-constructive influence in various blogs.

Anne wrote, "People who know me a little bit, know how extensive I always like to tell things, so if you do not like this, you are in the wrong place" (10-01-2020). This statement shows that she identifies with a specific writing style. In identifying with this, Anne creates a clear group of readers who go along with her in this identity. In a different post, she counters this strong statement of her writing style to an extent in saying, "*Wow,* this has become a real weird cringe post hahaha oh well…" (15-01-2020). Her reflection on the post shows that she expects the readers to identify it as possibly "weird" and "cringe". Anne mentions her "whole family" as a specific reader public; however, she also states that since she is away "there is nothing they can do" which guides her style of writing (23-01-2020).

Madelief, like Anne, implies that her reader public has specific knowledge of herself and develops a narrative in which this known identity is challenged and developed through an experience. "Now, everyone who knows me a little bit recognises that I am physically incapable, but miraculously it went all right" (25-02-2016). Madelief mentions her reader public more often and identifies with them as familiar. She also states that informing 'them' is a purpose of writing blogs. Madelief seems to inform the readers and ensure her safety and joy during the trip. Jerome has this tendency as well, although he shows a different approach. With exclamations like "Sorry mum!" (02-05-2019), he addresses his mother directly through his writing while reflecting on his behaviour at the same time. By apologising to his mother, he implies the influence of his belief that she would disagree with his choice of action. These convictions about the readers can be argued to be part of the co-construction of the self.

4. Causes of Self-Construction in Narratives

This chapter attempts to answer what identifications and aspects of backpacking possibly influence the construction of the self. The previous chapter focussed on how various themes of discourse aided self-construction. This chapter uses the language of the fragments of self-construction to figure out what led to this construction. The chapter finishes with various concluding remarks that summarise the findings and attempt to answer the sub-question mentioned previously. Looking back at the preliminary results of the analysis, the six discursive themes that were discovered are very much intertwined. This entanglement is significant to mention, especially in this more detailed analysis. One statement can entail several discursive themes.

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4.1. Reflecting and Developing

This connection of a fragment to multiple discursive themes also appeared in the following context. A development discourse often follows the discursive themes of reflection. Kimberley reflects on her journey "To be honest, I actually find it very exciting", and she continues in the same post ", That is why I decided not to go to Vietnam, but to return to Thailand" (10-02-2018). This quote reflects on her feelings and how these developed into a different decision. This decision also fits within the purpose discourse and entails a development based on reflection. The difference between the discourses is difficult because they are fluent and connected. Development fragments are, in a sense, a reflection too because they recognise change or progress in reflecting on an experience. Reflections and developments that follow can be positive or negative, which is sometimes difficult to interpret. Kimberley's example does not describe a feeling of regret or relief to developing this decision. It does show a certain explanatory level indicating a need to clarify the reason for her actions through a feeling she identified in herself.

The participants can do something they deem relevant to mention in their narrative. This relevant selection might show what a person thinks which contributes to their overall experience. In saying what happened and what part was played in the event reflects the self. They have learned, acquired or discovered new skills, which shows as a development. The moments where a lesson or skill was learned might not always have been mentioned in the

blogs. There might have been more learning moments throughout the trip. The ones mentioned in the narrative can be seen as important or significant to the participant and their experience. At least these moments carry as much importance as those shown in their narrative.

The moments of development and reflection that were not mentioned in the narrative seem tempting in wondering whether there was less impact made through these experiences. Someone may wonder about the purpose of the aforementioned experiences. Are these to inform the reader public or for the sake of telling a story in a complete sense? What made the participants arrive at specific reflections? For example, in Rik's case, he reflects on his behaviour of waking up and his struggle to wake up early.

Nevertheless, on several occasions, he refers to his acclaimed irregularities where he does manage to wake up early "amazingly, I did manage to wake up early" (30-03-2020). "Amazingly" means a surprise within himself by his behavioural development and would suggest a positive change. This identification and development in behaviour suggest the question of social influences to perhaps share a more desired behaviour even though the identification claims a different action.

Most participants travelled independently and alone (80%) or started together and then switched to travelling alone (10%) which could influence the self. This influence is suggested in the blogs, for example, "It turns out to be tough on your own" (Esmee, 07-03-2019). Engaging in this example is the distancing in language. Esmee could have written "on *my* own", yet she used 'you'. This distancing creates a statement that suggests a general encounter of travelling alone to be tough. The other blogs do not confirm this statement, presenting positive developments about travelling alone. Else is an example of this and develops a more positive outlook on travelling alone. She mentions, "Going away for a year all by yourself is definitely something" (06-04-2019), and later she reflects ", It is so weird that this year is just for me to do my thing and only taking myself into account" (28-04-2019). The second quote was in the context of a moment where she expressed gratitude for her opportunity. In the first quote, the "challenge" of "going away" is written with "*yourself*" as a subject instead of *my*self. When she turns to the appreciation, Else uses "my" and identifies with travelling by herself.

Participants showed fear of experiencing moments alone or being set in a new environment and forced to be social; however, like Else's, these tended to turn into positive developments. Anne writes about this "the fact that I was worried about making friends seems so weird right now. Talking is so easy when you are backpacking" (05-02-2020). This development reveals

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another generalisation through distancing. From her description of worry she uses "I", Anne moves to using "you" and "backpacking" as a cause of the development of the ability to "talk easy". She is not alone in this newly discovered ease in social situations Yvanna also expresses that she "has not felt alone even once" (10-02-2018), which indicates she expected this to be different. She even writes in a later blog that "it is so nice to meet and get to know people from different countries" (15-04-2018).

Yvanna revealed expectations about feeling alone while travelling because she used "not even", which indicates a positive surprise and, therefore, a different expectation. Backpackers might identify with certain expectations that can influence their decision, and these influences cannot be guessed from blogs. However, expectations can be made visible in the narratives in focussing on the word choice, as is shown with Yvanna. The disappointment when expectations are not met is often described. Jerome too shows this in expressions such as **"**to find out that nothing is going on in this village" (12-04) which shows how he was hoping to find more than he encountered on location. Knowledge of what is and what is not of interest to a person is also vital in constructing oneself. Experiencing disappointment gives a clearer idea of what would suffice as a preferred encounter. Kimberley also wrote about a village she visited that "it was not for me", thus realising more perhaps where her interest lay (23-04).

A theme that showed all participants to reflect was found in the act of saying goodbye. Among participants, this theme was portrayed as part of the journey and a consequence of the act of travelling. "Unfortunately, I have to say goodbye again to this lovely group of people who all go their own way" (Esmee, 27-02-2019). The use of "have to" also refers to returns within the purpose discourse. There is a connection between the reflection as "an *unfortunate* event" and describing it as "obligatory because of travelling". This connection seems to assist the traveller in accepting this as unfortunate. Jerome uses this connection as a reason to behave a certain way; "leaving New Zealand and Jerry are closing in. Thus, I made sure I enjoyed my last nights in Jerry even more" (19-02-2019). He describes "thus" to imply the causality of leaving as a reason to "enjoy". Rik shows to reflect on his feelings in the process rather than a reason to act; "I found this really difficult since I would have to say goodbye to all of them and continue on my own" (Rik, 18-02). These reflections present different stories that someone tells about the self with others and different stages in social dynamics.

4.2. Evidentialities and Discoveries

Chapter two identified the subthemes of making plans, decision making, discoveries and "have to" within the purpose discourse. The "have to" is significant to analyse further, and it displays power in statements and encounters of the participants. All the participants apart from Yvanna have written fragments with this code of "having to". The theme of saying goodbye is a first example originating from this evidentiality of action as is implied by the use of "have to". How do the participants arrive at this suggestion to their readers and themselves that something "has to"? What beliefs are mentioned within these fragments?

The statements that can be deducted from the use of "have to" might find their origin in a social context. This social context might be typical for backpacking. One belief that showed through the usages of "have to" is the pressure to see or do as much as possible *while being there*. Descriptions as "only one chance to do this" (Rik, 04-06-2020) create the modality that one should experience something. The use of "of course" calls for action; "If you are on such a beautiful island like this one, you will have to go for a day at the beach, of course" (Kimberley, 25-01-2018). The participants almost describe a certain pressure. For example, Madelief expressed, "I try to see as much as possible of the city" (10-02-2016); however, she reflects as well to be all right with the fact that she never sees all, showing development in purpose and reflection on the self.

50% Of the participants describe aspects of backpacking that they deem as "part of it". Statements like these come from participants' frames of reference, and they show ideas of what "should" or "could" belong to their experiences and are most likely to be socially influenced. The convictions are used in a manner that leads the participant to accept the experience because "it is part of it". Normality is used as an excuse to deal with the conditions. For example, when feeling disappointed, "oh well, that is also part of this" (Yvanna, 25-02-2018).

Another example is dealing with delays; "however that too belongs to travelling" (Madelief, 21-04-2016). This acceptance becomes part of their answer "how to live life to the fullest". "It is what it is*"* (04-06-2020; 14-07-2020; 12-01-2021) has been mentioned multiple times in Rik's narratives as if it is an achieved purpose.

Apart from the "having to do something", the bucket lists appear to have been a self-chosen "have to". A participant's actions seem to be guided by "the list". The bucket list contains things one "should" do or chooses to do before one dies. In 70% of the blogs, their

bucket-list or dream destinations, the must-see destinations were mentioned and "checked" for example, "two checks on my bucket-list (list of everything you HAVE to do in your life)" (Kimberley, 13-05-2018). The checks on the list form a confirmation of self-actualisation.

Other decisions and plans could be for the storyline logic follow-up of events. It can be a simple presentation of the self, the preferences of someone that might also change or shape the trips. What interests influence someone to do certain things or plan specific trips can be deducted partly from the context around these decisions, like the reflections that lead to a choice in the example of Kimberley (10-02-2018). Sharing their plans can guide their reflection about the next destination and guide the readers in the narrative as it forms a journey in text. Several participants show that they are set before choices or decisions they had "never" encountered before. These are sometimes described as tricky. For example, "I made decisions which I had never thought I would make. I pushed my boundaries multiple times" (Kimberley, 17-05-2018). Else mentions in her writings that she feels she must be a grown-up and a responsible person because of all the options to decide on as a solo traveller (04-04; 06-04-2019).

4.3. Identifications

Identification discourse shows three outstanding concepts described as identifications of the participants. The identifications are the concepts *backpacker*, *adventurer* or *Dutch.* These concepts were recognised amongst other identifications which came forth from the indicative code "I as …". The identifications can be theorised with othering and placing oneself in contrast with different cultures, people and nationalities. These contrasting processes have been mentioned above. Identifications show an insight into expectations that people might take with them on their trip. The literature review focused on the act of backpacking and the experiences or aspects of the journey; however, what it means to identify with, for example, *being a backpacker*, was left out. This identification shows a lofty expectation that someone is aware of what it means to identify as something. It shows that the person who identifies as a particular thing has an idea of what this entails and makes a statement by identifying it.

4.3.1. Being a Backpacker

The first stand out concept with which participants identified with is *being a backpacker*. This identification can be seen as a logical consequence of partaking in a backpacking journey, yet this does not mean it is less critical. On the contrary, this identification has shown a significant impact on 50% of the participants. In their narratives, Anne, Jerome, Rik, Yvanna and Else explicitly write about being a backpacker. Madelief, Floor and Esmee identify also as tourists, and Kimberly identifies herself as a traveller, among other things. For Anne, backpacking means "living on the edge and doing crazy things" (23-01-2020), which shows a statement of behaviour as a backpacker. Else identified herself and people she met as "sweaty and hungry backpackers", arguing for particular characteristics that come with backpacking or simply describing her situation in the act of backpacking (24-04-2019). Jerome seems to be used to *being a backpacker* as guiding his behaviour, e.g., "And everything free is of use for a backpacker" (02-02-2019) and "Sometimes, a backpacker just needs to be a bit smart" (24-06-2019).

The examples mentioned above are explicit in their identification with *a backpacker* to illustrate this phenomenon. It is those implicit influences of identifying with the concept that could be of more interest still. It is uncertain what a participant might integrate as possible normality of backpacking and identifying as a backpacker. Esmee talks about "lovely tourist-like" (16-01-2019) when writing about particular experiences. She seems to categorise *specific* things or locations as touristic while seeming very comfortable in taking part in these. Identifying as a backpacker or tourist can be seen as a statement or evidentiality of behaviours or encounters. However, they might also be used to approve certain behaviours, for example, in how Jerome explains his "smart"-behaviour as a consequence of being a backpacker.

4.3.2. Adventurer

Identification with adventure is different, and it seems more of a consequence of a wish for adventure. All three identifications appear Janus-faced. Behaviours are described because specific identifications and identities are a result of specific behaviours. This works both ways resulting in the placement of the concept under-identification, and it can also be described under the purpose discourse. They are showing the self as existing between two questions.

Interesting to note is the difference in Jerome's identifications. He identified with being a backpacker to explain specific behaviour and, in some cases, more *as a joke*, for example, when talking about free things, which could indicate a backpacker to be low on money. However, in his identification as an adventurer, he explains his behaviour in a more empowering sense, for example, "The adventurer whom I am" (08-04-2019). Furthermore, he also shows to be or go on an adventure, in the more purposeful sense, "but I do love adventures thus I left with all good courage" (27-01-2019). Here he also shows specific empowerment through the concept of finding *courage* through his *love* for adventures.

Yvanna also writes about adventures as an act in itself, for example, "Arrival in Bangkok, off to the adventure!" (03-01-2018). Esmee and Kimberley join her in this approach in writing about their travels as "Another new adventure" (Kimberley 14-03), "Amazon adventure", "very adventurous" (Esmee, 03-02; 27-02). There is rhetoric given to travel that connects to adventure. Those who travel are adventurous which can be contrasted with those at home who are not on an adventure. The participants seem to naturalise as common sense or fact without further explaining what makes an adventure. Choosing to use the concept of adventures marks their experience as an adventure. The participant has formed a definition of what this means, which fits into this concept. It is challenging to state whether this was a pre-existing definition or formed during their backpacking travels.

4.3.3. Dutch

50% Of the participants identified explicitly as being Dutch. These identifications read as stereotypical notions and behavioural patterns that showed their explicit identification with being Dutch, like Esmee's Dutch skin who could not handle the sun (26-01-2019), which was also mentioned by Madelief (16-03-2016). Rik focussed more on "Dutch needs", explaining on several posts that he "bought typical Dutch things" and expressing that he "actually felt like I was back in the Netherlands" (12-01-2021). Meeting up with other Dutchmen and talking in Dutch was also a reoccurring pattern in Rik's blogs. In blogs of other participants, the notion of meeting up with Dutchmen was mentioned as well. Esmee did not say that she was Dutch apart from referring to her skin as Dutch. However, she did talk about fellow travellers through their nationalities and no names "so we could hang out with friends from Amsterdam for a day" (23-01-2019). For her not to mention her nationality could mean a certain distance of the nationality.

The interest in meeting people from a similar nationality can also link to the theme of "feeling at home". Although the theme contains the word 'feeling', which can be associated with reflection, the reason this feeling arises comes from identifying an environment or things as belonging to the idea of "home". Madelief, for example, sums up several characteristics of her new destination and ends with, "and so you understand that I felt a little bit at home pretty quick" (25-02-2016). It says something about their identity and what they classify as *home* or *away*. While the "*who am I?*" question might not entail a location in its answer, the self identifies with this idea of home. Home seems to refer to a place where a participant belongs or comes from

4.4. Sense through Comparison

Comparing the unfamiliar to the familiar might assist the participants in explaining and understanding new environments. Familiar images of well-known sights evoke comfortable feelings in foreign places within the tourism industry. This method of what might be called coping is present throughout all the blogs. The discourse theme of comparison shows explicit comparisons, but for example, in stating that someone is Dutch, the implicit comparison is made in contrast to others who are not Dutch. Comparisons are statements of similarities or differences. Anne states, for example, "a resort which you can best compare to a sort of centre parks bungalow" (11-01-2020).

The use of comparison shows that someone understands one half of the comparison to understand both sides in contrast to one another. Anne understands the "centre parks bungalow" and explains the new environment of the resort in contrast to this. Another example from Jerome, "I made a few nice photos like any other tourist", shows that he compares himself and his behaviour to the identification of tourists. He explains his behaviour through a comparison (24-02-2019). Explaining behaviour can also be seen in the discursive theme of identification. The developments within comparisons are visible in the addition of recent experiences to compare the new experiences too. "Even more beautiful than the Brazillian side" (Koen, 21-11-2019). Some comparisons have the goal to explain and carrying a statement. Other comparisons are to entertain, like Jerome's example naming a film as a comparison or describing the experiences in an understandable manner to grasp them. It could be asked whether the explanations aim at the participant themselves or the readers.

4.5. Adjectives and the Unknown

The fragments within the unknown discourse refer to new experiences. The new seems to lead to a lot of hyperboles or exaggerations. However, an exaggeration for one might be the minimal description of the impact of the experience for another. Alternatively, it might indeed be exaggerating the experience for entertainment purposes. The unknown showed three different themes tagged through the codes. The theme containing adjectives like "most" and "best" describes a significant impact on the participant. This excessive use of adjectives can be compared to blogs where participants instead use descriptive words such as "cool", "beautiful",

and "awesome". The choice to use these descriptive words and rarely mention them as the "coolest" or "most beautiful" can imply a different impact or a preference in writing style. The theme is placed under the unknown; however, it is also a comparison in a sense. The topic comparison is missing, giving the experience an autonomy of the "title" of being beautiful or most beautiful.

The theme of arguments that state "for the first time" or "ever seen" shows that the participant incorporates the new experience as something unique. Esmee wrote "for me one of the best experiences ever!" about paragliding (22-01-2019) and mentioned having done "my first heavy hike ever" (27-02-2019). These activities show the decision to step out of everyday activities and can create new narratives or identifications as, for example, I am a hiker. It can lead to a contrast between travel experiences with those experiences at home. Madelief was surprised by her own decisions to take on new things like horse-riding (26-02-2016) and football (16-03-2016). Else experienced this too: "Who would have ever thought that I would do a job like this one. (Loved every second)", which shows an unknown new development in identity (12-01-2019).

4.6. Conclusion

The discourses entailing self-constructing were further analysed on a level of language to uncover how these constructions came into existence. Evidentiality, hyperbolic statements, distancing of the object, causalities and connections between fragments received detailed attention throughout this chapter. The chapter also displayed the entanglement of the discourses, which can affect the way they might be interpreted.

Reflective and development discourse showed a particular relationship within the texts. A reflection does not necessarily lead to development or vice versa. Nonetheless, the two discursive themes often followed one another or could even be found within the same fragment. The recognition of someone's development by writing about it can also be seen as a reflection. Explanatory needs also appeared as a possible explanation to describe a reflective moment that leads to development.

The narratives in the participants' blogs present a selection of the experiences and events that happened during their travels. The choices they made in what is part of the story and written

in the narrative and what is not can indicate what someone deems essential. What has not been mentioned might be of less importance to someone's self-construction; however, it can also be a choice of creating a coherent story. Eakin (2008) argues that the story is the self which means that choice of importance is equal to the self-construction. What influences play a role in the selection of these narratives?

Travelling independently is part of the content of the narratives. There are statements about travelling alone that are presented as typical. These travelling features seem to be written with "you" as a topic rather than "I". This impersonal writing style suggests that although the participant recognises this as belonging to the mode of travel, it might not belong to their identity. The distance in topic appears more often in these features presented as commonalities. There is no indication of what led the participants to attain this belief or who claims authority over its truth.

Reflections and developments in choice came forth from expectations too. Within this theme, the expectation could be deducted through the presentation of the unexpected. Social and cultural influences might shape the participants' expectations, but this has not been explained through the analysis. The expectation or inevitable act of saying goodbye presents another commonality among the participants. Viewing goodbyes as a consequence or as part of the mode of travelling can assist the participant in acceptance and moving forward after a more difficult moment.

The acceptance of experiences based on statements of inevitability happened in more instances throughout the blogs. The pressure of "having to do things" and "having specific experiences" guided participants in their actions. The other side of this was accepting experiences to be part of travelling that might not have been desired. The activities are chosen by participants to write in narratives, guiding the reader and the writer in the narrative.

In contrast to other cultures, people, nationalities, participants identified themselves as various concepts. The most outstanding were the identifications as a backpacker, adventurer and Dutch. In identifying with these concepts, the participant states what it means to take this identity and simultaneously expects a certain level about this meaning from the reader. On the one hand, the identification guide actions of the participant in an explanatory manner. On the other hand, actions can lead to a particular identification too.

A certain level of knowledge deemed standard is part of the comparison discourse. One thing compares to another in order to explain the unfamiliar. This comparison suggests that either one of the two is recognised as familiar by the participant and blog reader. The comparisons can be aimed both at the reader to explain or to grasp the subject in a more familiar context. Comparisons are found both implicit and explicit throughout the blogs.

The new and unfamiliar experiences are not always explained through comparisons to make them familiar. They are indeed described as something completely new and "never seen" before in many instances. This description places the experiences in contrast to the ordinary life of the participant and contrast with the readers' experiences. The description carries statements of the object attaining the definition given by the participant. An object is described as being beautiful and not as being perceived as beautiful.

All the interplays of language within the discourses as mentioned above show more insight into self-construction in autobiographical narratives while backpacking. The complex indications found within language lead to essential data that can be interpreted and applied to this research. The final chapter discusses how self-construction fits within the social practice of backpacking and will show how this mode of travel contributes to this process.

5. Conclusion

This thesis has questioned how backpacking, as a mode of travel, contributes to the construction of one's self within autobiographical online travel blogs of Dutch Generation Z. The idea of "finding yourself" whilst travelling sparked the researcher's interest in travel and identity work. Through a critical look at existing research, it became clear that *finding* oneself should be replaced with *constructing* oneself. Within a narrative, the self is defined by subjective answers to the questions "*who am I?"* and "*how do I live life to the fullest?"*. The theoretical framework of this thesis formed the foundation of the study.

The statement that an individual does not *have* a narrative self but is *constructing* a self suggests an element of choice. This element of choice is apparent in the language used. The participants of this study were not consciously working on constructing themselves but were subconsciously presenting themselves within the narrative.

Discourse analysis was adopted as the method for this research. This method enables the researcher to uncover the travel blogs in which self-construction occurs. The discourses reveal where the construction of oneself occurs, and a closer look at the language reveals how it is constructed. How self-construction is influenced within the context of backpacking will answer the main question.

1.1. Backpacking and Self-Construction

Within autobiographical narratives, backpacking influences the construction of one's self in a variety of ways. A self is always constructed within a narrative, and backpacking appears to have a positive effect on this process. This study revealed several discourses of self-construction throughout their blogs. Cohen argued that some forms of travel prove problematic for identity work (2010, p. 298). None of the participants showed any sign of loss or uncertainty about their identity. Instead, they have developed their sense of self by constructing new or more extensive answers to the questions *"who am I?"* and *"how do I live life to the fullest?"*.

5.1.1. Indications of Identifications

The stereotypical identifications that may arise when using this mode of travel appears to have a profound influence on constructing oneself. From the analysis, there were three outstanding concepts; *backpacker*, *adventurer,* and *Dutch*, with which the participants identified. Their writings about identities as a tourist, backpacker, or traveller connect behaviour and experiences to their definition of the concept. The participants chose these concepts to describe self or part self.

It could be argued that the way someone identifies with their mode of travel influences their behaviour and the construction of themselves because it guides the experiences and brings about specific expectations. While identifying as a tourist or traveller might apply to different forms of tourism, *being a backpacker* is a unique aspect of backpacking that can be part of the self-construction.

The definition one might give to backpackers might immediately affect those who partake in this form of travel. The introduction briefly discussed how Noy argued that "backpackers'" awareness of self-change also comes from the notion that those who did not backpack have not undergone the exact change (2004, p. 97). This partaking in backpacking could lead one to argue that one takes part in backpacking to be a backpacker. However, backpacking can take on various forms, yet this identification with *being a backpacker* seems to be separate from how this is acted out.

The identification with adventure can also be seen as a consequence of partaking in backpacking. Chen et al. did not include "adventure" in their definition of backpacking; "backpacking is a particular travel style for those travellers who prefer budget accommodation, longer holidays, itinerary flexibility, meeting other travellers, and social and participatory holiday activities" (2014, p. 522). However, the appearance of *adventure* within the participant blogs suggests a connection between these aspects. Having an adventure, or being an adventurer, questions whether an act is deemed as adventurous thus, someone is an adventurer or the other way around.

The final concept *being Dutch* falls in line with the first in the sense that it seems an almost inevitable identification since the selected participants for this study were indeed all Dutch. The same argument applies, that although there is a logical continuation, it does not take

away the importance of influence and how these identifications appear throughout the travel blogs while backpacking. One may wonder whether this identification is continuously present or whether it is (more) present since the participants are taken from their Dutch environment and are now placed in contrast with other nationalities that make them indeed Dutch.

5.1.2. The New and Familiar

Travelling to the unknown appears to influence the construction of oneself in the sense that it can add completely new narratives to one's frame of reference. New narratives mean a broader choice of language that could be integrated into the story one tells about oneself. In new environments, a person learns the most because it challenges innovation and creation. This argument of challenging innovation and creation has been shown by Gmelch's study (1997). His argument for the impact of independent travel cannot be confirmed through this study because there is no way to measure the impact of the environment. The discourse suggests being in line with Gmelch because of the expressed learning moments and developments.

Backpacking removes oneself from "normal life" and the feeling of boredom, and it can evoke the feelings of participating in an adventure. This adventure is also created in contact with *the authentic other*, introduced by McCannel (2016). The unknown discourse touches upon these influences and displays patterns within the text connected to an uncertain reality. The uncertainty comes from the juxtaposition between what is familiar and what is not. Alternatively, in other words, what belongs to the self and what is not seen as part of one's self. From the analyses, it became clear that this occurs around social aspects, food, culture and destinations. These new experiences provide the backpacker with new insights and a broader outlook on the world.

The unknown and unexpected appears to be something that the participants prefer. Claims of "going on an adventure", which have been used as examples throughout the chapters, can be connected to this preference. The unfamiliar is outside the comfort zone or the ordinary and might receive the title of the adventure. However, this concept of adventure is not explained explicitly. Through the interpretation of the fragments, this connection can be suggested. Actively looking for unknown things appears to be unique to backpacking. An internet search for organised trips or holidays appear to provide safe form of travel, and the expectations set

by destinations are assured to be met on holiday. During backpacking, an unexpected situation is more likely to occur. These unexpected occurrences are also sought after and welcomed in the participants' narratives. Jerome went on a tour where an unexpected turn influenced him positively. "He turned out to be a real Kiwi. So, I heard all these interesting stories about New Zealand" (10-02-2019).

The tendency to explain or understand the unknown becomes apparent through the comparison discourse. This clear and reoccurring pattern within the blogs shows that a backpacker may not immediately accept something new or unknown. Instead, they connect it to something familiar in order to understand this within the context of their narrative. According to Bosangit et al., people contrast their experiences with their *life-world*s to make sense of life (2015, p. 12).

The reflection on feeling at home is unique for the tourism business and might have to do with this contrasting tendency to make sense of the world. Many people travel to get away from the ordinary. For backpackers, this could be a motivation; however, since backpackers travel for a more extended period of time, they might look for this feeling to reconnect to a part of themselves. It is an awe-inspiring skill of humans to create this feeling away from what someone usually calls home. The insight, unconscious or conscious, of what makes a person feel at home can be a valuable construction to the self for the backpacker and seems to be unique for this mode of travel.

5.1.3. Alone in a Social Context

The experience of being alone in a foreign environment appears to be a key influence on the participants' narratives. Some participants showed initial fear in certain social situations within the reflecting discourse, and the development discourse highlighted that these same participants were able to resolve this initial fear. The social side of backpacking contributes to the construction of oneself because the solidarity of the self in a new social environment can cause someone to assess themselves and compare it with others.

Noy explains that "frequent social interactions are commonplace among backpackers and are, in fact, among the primary motivations for travelling, constituting a central experiential attribute of the trip" (2004, p. 81). It can be argued that because many backpackers may travel

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alone, the social aspect increases in importance. Being alone might be a challenge, even at home, and will be even more present whilst travelling because it is away from familiar things and among strangers and other cultures. Being alone and the social aspect of travelling brought about reflections, developments and purpose discourses in the blogs.

Furthermore, the co-constructive influences are different from the social environments experienced at home and might steer the backpacker towards new narratives. Belk (2013) explains this through his conceptualisation of the extended self in the digital world. The self, while backpacking, is almost an extension of the self at home and can therefore choose a different narrative or construct a new reality of the self.

5.1.4. Travel Goals

The participants of this research appeared to adopt the idea of backpacking as a *once in a lifetime* journey. This idea allowed the participants to push themselves beyond personal limitations. It also provided them with motivation to gain more experiences during their travels abroad. These consequences of the *once in lifetime* mindset occurred in the purpose discourse. The purpose discourse mainly described the participants' travel goals. The participants displayed a tendency to focus solely on travel goals and not look any further into the future. This focus could suggest that the construction of self during a backpacking trip may only last for the travel period and might alter when the person is returning home. The purpose of travel blogs is focussed on writing about traveling. However, they may contain participant's thoughts on future travels.

There is also the element of the bucket list that plays a vital role in backpacking. The bucket list is described as an existing or definitive list of tasks or goals to fulfil in life. In other forms of travel, this list can, in theory, also play a role in the choice of activities. Backpackers or tourists can chase after their bucket list. A backpacker's bucket list seems to encourage activities that might not be easy and create feelings of anxiety. It can be a guiding tool in their decisions as tourists, whether in planning ahead or last-minute decisions. For example, Rik mentions his bucket list to motivate him to *still do something* he was not planning on (28-01-2020). At the same time, the backpackers encounter (extreme) sports and activities that become a part of the itinerary and are detached from any daily life activities. Surfing, paragliding, or

hiking seem to be new challenges to experiment with. Backpacking can trigger participants to practice new skills in a foreign place based on their bucket list or other motivations.

A bucket-list may help a backpacker in his/her choices, the element of being responsible for oneself whilst travelling brings broad significance to the choice. Making decisions is in line with constructing oneself. These choices all contribute to the answer "*who am I?*" and *"how do I live life to the fullest?*". Backpacking takes a person out of the comfort zone. Any disappointment that might be experienced is due to one's own decisions. Consequences are for the backpacker's self to carry and integrate into the narrative. Patterns of reflection showed that the backpacker incorporated the narrative and transformed the self by developing a new method or insight. Backpacking seemed to affect the participants by showing that every experience is turned into good experience for the self and those who read the narratives. Negative experiences seem to be non-existent within the narratives of the participants.

5.1.5. Positive Coping

This positive *coping* with disappointment during backpacking is unique, and it can be seen as a valuable skill to bring home after the backpacking trip. In general, when expectations are not in line with reality, the backpacker's experience is not necessarily negative but rather a process, part of the journey. The tendency to have a good trip might lead each participant to disappointment, however, this may turn into a positive experience. Nonetheless, Madelief showed this by describing specific experiences as "hell" but ends with a positive remark, "looking back at it" (03-04). This positive mindset which can deal with such experiences might be the result of the responsibility of the participant him/herself. However, this is not explicitly stated in the blogs but can be suggested by the reflections. What might support the backpacker in creating these positive narratives is the inevitability that something is normal. From the analysis, it seemed that within the purpose and reflective discourse, the inevitability of a situation was a reoccurring theme to explain experiences or choices. The *inevitabilities* lead the backpacker in certain decisions and reflections that now seem to be integrated into their narrative. It creates the question of whether this is part of the identification as a backpacker.

5.2. Critical Theoretical Reflection

This study has both strengths and limitations. It is first and foremost exploratory research because of the inclusion of a relatively young generation and the adoption of a new approach to the self. One of the research strengths can also be seen as a limitation; the travel blogs. The blogs suffice as untampered data, and they were created without any interference of the researcher or knowledge of the possible use for research. However, that also resulted in the data of the blogs being rather superficial. The participants' narratives were written for specific public and accounted for documented experiences of their travels. Because the participants all used their writing style, some blogs had very little depth or were written more formally. This formal style made it more challenging to analyse the different layers.

Another possible limitation of this blog could be the amount of data. The data was collected from 10 participants; however, a more extensive analysis of more blogs could provide more data and create more credibility of the results. The balance between male and female participants had been recognised as missing; it is unclear how this might have influenced the results. The length of the blogs might also form a possible limitation of this study. In general, blogs have not been written for research purposes. Therefore, they will differ in size and language use, which can create difficulties in creating research criteria and the use of codes for the analysis.

A level of interpretation is also involved in the discourse analysis and qualitative research, which cannot be generalised. The results of this study can form a foundation for further research but cannot provide general answers to the questions asked in this study. The constructive work around the self while backpacking can be placed amid the broader sociological trends in contemporary western societies to travel, focusing on identity work (Cohen, 2010, p. 299). However, these findings are not factual.

Discourse analysis can be extended to other media, like images and speech, outside texts. These extensions have not been taken into account in this research, which could lead to differences in interpretation of the text fragments or the outcome of the study. The focus of the study was on the written fragments, which led to this exclusion of other media.

The study might also be limited because of the lack of other variables at play in the participants' writings. These variables, for example, education level or motivation before travelling, could have influenced the self-construction in the autobiographical narratives and

might not have been noted. The noted variables can also connect to things outside of backpacking, although they have been speculated to connect to backpacking.

A final limitation can be the researcher's own experience with backpacking and writing travel blogs. A stance to analyse the data from a non-bias professional perspective has been taken on; however, sub-conscious influences of the frame of reference might have influenced the researcher towards specific interpretations. On the other hand, the researcher's foundational knowledge from personal experience might have also supported her to focus on details and connections that others might have missed and are a result of the systematic analysis.

5.3. Suggestions for Further Research

The exploratory aim of this research is to create a platform for further research. The young Generation Z forms a source for research topics and an essential group for the future tourism market. The limitations of this research create opportunities to continue research in identity work and tourism. The utilisation of identity work and tourism activities can be a reason to research the impact of different modes of travel on this process. It is clear that travelling influences the construction of oneself within the narrative, and there could be more research into a way to measure these influences. The narrative identities could be supported through in-depth interviews or by following backpackers in their journey to uncover their reflection on the experiences and observe the experience in the present time.

New questions arose from the data gathered because there are many more layers to uncover around the identity construction of travellers and backpackers. The data from this study demonstrates an initial insight into how backpacking influences backpackers in their construction of oneself, independent of their destination, as expressed in autobiographical travel blogs. Further research into the experiences as they occur and their immediate effect would offer a wider window into the impact of backpacking. It would be worthwhile to explore whether the impact of backpacking on oneself remains after the trip or whether it is a fading effect on someone's perceived identity.

In contemporary times where this same generation has been unable to travel, questions can be asked about the influence of the absence of travel on the construction of oneself. It could be appealing to, for example, analyse the participants of this study and compare their sense of

self to those from the same generation who have not travelled. There might be a need for guidance programs in the complex process of constructing a self and travelling. Perhaps backpacking, or a different mode of travel, is more than a contribution to self-construction. What if someone needs to travel to construct oneself?

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7. Appendix

The excel files containing the data collection of the blogs were too large to enter in the word document. The overviews can be found in a separate attachment.

The blogs can be found online and the analyses of the blogs with the use of colour codes have also been attached in a separate file.