

## “She Offered Me a Place and a Future”: Change is an Event of Becoming Through Movement in Ethical Time and Space

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**Abstract** Within mental health research, the promise of exploring the lived experience of those affected is increasingly acknowledged. This research points to the significance of social aspects. The present study is part of a series of qualitative studies exploring network-oriented practices in southern Norway. The aim of this study was to explore the social dynamics of change related to adolescents in psychosocial crises. From the perspective of lived experience the study focused changes related to the adolescents’ ways of existing in various social arenas. Data from qualitative interviews with adolescents receiving help from a mental health service, persons in their social network, and the practitioners involved were explored through a dialogical phenomenological–hermeneutical process. Two co-researchers, on the basis of their own experience with mental health problems, participated throughout the

research process. Concepts from the thinking of Mikhail Bakhtin, Françoise Dastur, and John Shotter were used as interpretative help. Main theme: change is the event of becoming through movement in Ethical Time and Space. Two dimensions, conceptualized as Ethical Space and Ethical Time, were identified: (1) “A place for me” or “No place for me” (Ethical Space), and (2) Before-Event of anticipation—Event of movement—After-Event of experience (Ethical Time). Four aspects within these dimensions emerged: (1) an opening Before-Event: offering space for my movement; (2) a closing Before-Event: not offering space for my movement; (3) a life-giving After-Event: the experience of being valued; and (4) a life-deteriorating After-Event: the experience of being devalued. The results are discussed in relation to other studies investigating how bodily responsiveness is at the core of human becoming.

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“She Offered Me a Place and a Future”—condensed meaning, not exact quote.

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## Introduction

Before, I always sat alone in the corridor. At this new school, if I go out and see someone sitting on the bench I can just go over and talk to them. I know them.

Perhaps the simple way in which this girl speaks of change in her life captures an essential aspect of what mental health is about: our experience of being able to move—or not—in relation to others. The aim of this study was, precisely, to explore the social and existential dynamics of change related to people in psychosocial crises from the perspective of lived experience. Both ways into, and out of, psychosocial difficulties are explored in terms of ways of being in the world together with others. Qualitative interviews form the empirical basis for the study. Phenomenological and hermeneutical perspectives from Mikhail Bakhtin, Françoise Dastur, and John Shotter were included in the exploration to reveal aspects in the material that otherwise could have gone unnoticed and to conceptualize the findings. The context of this study was mental health services in the southern part of Norway, where dialogical and network-oriented practices in mental health have been implemented and developed over the two last decades (Ulland et al. 2013). In 2010, a program for research and development related to dialogical practices titled “Dialogical collaboration in Southern Norway” was established and provided an opportunity for a series of qualitative studies of dialogical practices (e.g., Bøe et al. 2013; Grosås 2010; Hauan 2010; Holmesland et al. 2010; Lidbom et al. 2014; Ropstad 2010; Ulland et al. 2013), from which this study emerged.

### The Perspective of Lived Experience

Mental health can be, and has been, explored from various perspectives; for instance, through observation and the descriptions of the observer or through neurobiological approaches made possible by technological advances. Such approaches may represent a kind of “externalism” related to mental health (Wifstad 2008) that fails to include the subjective perspective found in the *lived experience* or the *lifeworld* of the ones suffering (Kogstad et al. 2014). From this recognition of a bias, leading to a neglect of people’s lived experiences of suffering and recovering, we now see a growing body of studies from the perspective of lived experience (e.g., Borg and Davidson 2007; Davidson et al.

2008; Wickstrom 2009; Hartzell et al. 2009, 2010). The concept of lived experience, as used in the phenomenological and hermeneutical tradition, derives from Husserl’s concept of “*erleben*” which literally means “living through something” (Van Manen 2004), and Husserl’s point was exactly that the phenomena of the world could not be investigated from any position outside (externalism), only from the way that they were experienced or “lived through.” Accordingly, describing and understanding mental health should start with an exploration of the way that it is experienced.

### Previous Research

Reviews of studies of mental health and recovery from the perspective of lived experience clearly point to the significance of social aspects (Leamy et al. 2011; Tew et al. 2012). When persons describe their *difficulties* it seems to be about their lives and experiences in various social arenas: family, work, friends, school, and society (Topor et al. 2006, 2011). These difficulties could be interpreted as resulting from a feeling of not being recognized or as struggles for recognition (Andersen and Svensson 2012; Eriksen et al. 2012) or in terms of feeling outside, or denied access to, social arenas and relations (Davidson et al. 2001). Furthermore, their difficulties could be experienced as a kind of “not knowing how to make their way in the world,” like “being stuck” or in an “impasse” (Davidson et al. 2010, p. 101 and p. 105), or like “living in a maze” or a “social death” (Biong and Ravndal 2009, p. 8), or “feeling like a stranger in life and places” (Andersen and Larsen 2012), or “not belonging” (Mezzina et al. 2006). These experiences may be in the realm of personal relations (Topor et al. 2006) or in the sense of being outside society, deprived of civil rights or citizenship (Andersen and Svensson 2012; Mezzina et al. 2006; Tew et al. 2012).

Experiences and accounts of *recovering* similarly point to the significance of relations and social aspects (Schon et al. 2009; Topor et al. 2006) and the qualities of the communication they are involved in (Guregård and Seikkula 2014; Lidbom et al. 2014). In one study, Mezzina et al. conclude that recovery could be seen as an “ongoing interpersonal and social process” in which the significance of others can be expressed in terms of “standing alongside me,” “being there for me,” or “doing more for me” (Mezzina et al. 2006, pp. 63, 68, 77). Choosing carefully whom to turn to for help and doing this through making sound judgments about persons available is described as an important aspect (Topor and Di Girolamo 2010). Additionally, material aspects such as having a home and having an occupation and money are directly or indirectly conditions for access to social arenas that are important during recovery (Borg et al. 2005; Topor et al. 2011) and

the significance of dealing with crises in an everyday life context is emphasized (Borg and Davidson 2007; Winness et al. 2010). Social aspects also seem to include being able to *accept* support from family, friends, or services as well as being able to *give* support to others (Schon et al. 2009).

Some of these studies suggest that mental health perhaps should be understood as a relational and social concept belonging to the interpersonal, social, and political domain (e.g. Andersen and Svensson 2012; Mezzina et al. 2006; Strong et al. 2014).

This research indicates that further advances in mental health could be made through exploration of (1) the social aspects of processes of change related to a variety of social arenas, (2) practices where social network perspectives are included, and (3) the social–relational aspects of the phenomena that we refer to as mental health difficulties. This was the origin of the present study.

### Theoretical Perspectives

In the following, we will give a brief sketch of some ideas and perspectives that helped us in our process of interpretative analysis. In a “corporeal turn” (Sheets-Johnstone 2009) within the phenomenological tradition, we find the recognition of the *body* as a point of departure in exploring human living and experience. Bodily movement *and* the way that we experientially relate to the movement, our own and others, should be at the core of investigations into human existence (Gallagher 2012; Gallese 2005; Merleau-Ponty 2011; Quillman 2012; Sheets-Johnstone 2011; Shotter 2010).

Movement involves the categories of *time* and *space*, and phenomenological perspectives suggest that time and space should be examined in terms of “something” that we experience and not “something” objectively (pre)given (Dastur 2000; Merleau-Ponty 2011; Tucker 2013). Time and space are “experiential realities” that emerge from our interplay with the world and others in the world (Sheets-Johnstone 2009). In this study, such a notion provided the possibility of interpreting the descriptions of the respondents as experiences of movement taking place in what we conceptualize as *Ethical Time* and *Ethical Space*. The term “ethical” here refers to an experiential quality (This will be further explicated when presenting the findings).

Bakhtin (1993) puts “the ongoing event of being” (p. 17) at the core of his thoughts on human living, and we become, he says, as we participate in “being-as-event” through our “answerable acts” (p. 39). We have explored change as *event*, and the accompanying ethical aspects, in a previous study suggesting that change may be described as an “ongoing ethical event” (Bøe et al. 2013). Drawing on the intersubjective ethics of Emmanuel Levinas and Mikhail Bakhtin, we suggested that responsibility (Levinas)

and answerability (Bakhtin) seem to be fundamental in the dynamics of change. We become, and change, in a realm of intersubjective *responsiveness* as our acts, thoughts, and feelings are addressive in nature and originate as responses to others. This responsive becoming take place in the event. Becoming happens.

Dastur (2000), in her article “The Phenomenology of the Event,” explores these relations between the event, time, and human becoming. The experience of time “as a succession of events,” she says, “requires (...) not to be completely immersed in time” (p. 179), and human becoming is found in a multifaceted kind of temporal relating: to what has happened (the past), in *experience*, and to one’s own possibilities (the future), in *anticipation*. “We never experience the events of life as contemporaneous,” she says, “only (...) in a past time, in the mode of “it happened to me” (p. 186), in a kind of “*After Event*” (p. 183). Lived experience emerges *in delay*, relating to what (*just*) happened.

Shotter (2005, 2012) explores the significance of relating to the future, to what is about to happen, and suggests that we orient ourselves, and move, from sensing and imagining the continuance of what is happening. Our movements are conditioned by this sense of the future through “action guiding anticipations” (Shotter 2005). Shotter refers to a quote from Kierkegaard: “We live forwards, but only understand backwards” (Shotter 2012, p. 136). He adds to this that the steps that we take seem to gain their landscape from a judgment in which our *sensing* and *imagining* of what is “yet to be,” the future, are included. We move and relate to movements both by “looking” backward (relating to the past) and by “looking” forward (relating to the future).

These perspectives seemed to reveal significant aspects of the experiences described by the adolescents and were used as aids in organizing and interpreting their lived experiences.

### Aim of Study and Research Questions

The aim of this study was to explore the social dynamics of change related to people in psychosocial crises from the perspective of lived experience. The focus was on life as lived and experienced in various social arenas (and consequently, the impact of the services was not a key focus). The goal was to contribute to an elaborated understanding of the social dynamics of change in a language deriving from lived experience, useful to advances in practice. Our focus was on change related to mental health in general, although respondents were recruited from cases related to adolescents.

The study originated in the following questions. How do people in psychosocial crises describe their experiences of

the way that their lives are changing? How can their experiences help us to understand the social aspects of the dynamics of change related to mental health?

## Methodology

### Methodological Approach: Participatory Research

In this study, two co-researchers (Ruud Lindvig and Zachariassen) participated, on the basis of their own experiences with mental health difficulties, throughout all stages of the research process. This kind of involvement is used increasingly in mental health research as a means of attaining findings that are as relevant, valid, and useful as possible (Borg and Kristiansen 2009; Moltu et al. 2013; Rautiainen and Seikkula 2009; Telford and Faulkner 2004; Trivedi and Wykes 2002; Wallcraft 2012; Wallcraft et al. 2009).

A group of adolescents with experience of mental health difficulties helped us both in our preparation of the study and in the process of interpretation through discussion of preliminary findings. Practitioners involved in the selected cases and the researchers met regularly, and preliminary findings were discussed, and the practitioners, in this way, contributed to the process of exploring the material. This participatory research design provided an ongoing two-way opportunity: the participants' contribution to the exploration and validation of the study, and the study's ongoing contribution to practice and participants (Borg et al. 2012). This process of including practitioners and adolescents went on parallel to the methodological procedure described below.

### Participants

The participants in this study were eight adolescents aged from 16 to 18 years in psychosocial crisis and seeking help from the mental health care system for the first time, and receiving network-oriented help. The adolescent chose one or two additional respondents from his or her family/social network. Practitioners involved were included as respondents in the final interview in each case, together with the adolescent (in two cases, such an interview was not conducted). In total, we interviewed the eight adolescents referred to, four mothers, one father, two friends, one sister, and six practitioners; i.e., 22 respondents in all.

### Creating Data: Procedures

Twenty-eight interviews, lasting from 1 to 2½ h, were conducted by the first author and the two co-researchers. The participants were interviewed individually or together

with the respondent(s) one person in from their network, according to their own choice. Interviews took place in settings chosen by the participants: at Sorlandet hospital or in the respondent's own home. In two cases, only one interview was conducted. In six cases, a series of interviews were carried out over a period varying from 7 to 12 months. To get a close sense of the bodily expressive way in which the participants responded, interviews were videotaped and transcribed by the first author. A diary note (five pages long) that was obtained from one of the adolescents was included as data.

### Procedure of Analyses and Interpretation

The first author and the two co-researchers formed a working group in the process of analysis and interpretation, and met regularly.

First, we read through the texts with “deliberate naïveté” (Kvale and Brinkmann 2009), to get a sense and first impression of the material. Impressions and ideas were discussed, and notes were taken.

In a second step, following Sullivan's (2012) dialogical approach to qualitative data analysis, we reread the texts and identified “key moments” throughout the material. A key moment, as suggested by Sullivan, is a sequence of utterances/voices in which we find a significant meaning unit, and the key moment is characterized by its readiness for further responses (p. 72). Key moments were chosen from a mix of what we were struck by, what seemed most interesting, what seemed particularly laden with feelings and importance to the respondent, and what seemed most relevant to the research questions.

Attention to what seemed laden with feelings was an important aspect when choosing key moments. Drawing on Bakhtin, Sullivan puts the concept of “voice” at the core of his analytical approach. In the voice, a point of view is expressed through *intonation*. “Intonation is the sound that value makes” (Sullivan 2012, p. 44), and “such intonation gives discourse a textured feeling of heaviness and lightness and also colour as discourse becomes *lived experiences*” (italics added). When exploring lived experiences, focus cannot be reduced to the said (content); the saying (expressiveness) must be included. Consequently, attention was given to the emotional aspects and expressiveness of what was said: tone of voice, bodily gestures, pace in speaking, and so on.

In a third step key moments were analyzed by the first author, identifying units of meaning and possible themes. Following Sullivan (2012), and drawing on Cresswell (2012), the analysis of key moments also included identifying the conditions in which meaning and possible themes emerged, in terms of addressees (who is talking to whom),

discourse genre (in what kind of language/words), emotional aspects (with what feelings), bodily dynamics (with what gestures and movements), and ethical aspects (how are expressions answered). This helped us to take into account how lived experience, meaning, and dialogue are interconnected.<sup>1</sup> Preliminary suggestions of themes were discussed with co-researchers, and key moments were reread in light of emerging ideas.

Following a dialogical hermeneutical approach (Cresswell and Smith 2012; Sullivan and McCarthy 2005), we, in a fourth step, included theoretical perspectives (introduced above) as interpretative help in the explorative–analytical process. These outlined steps were not chronological but rather an ongoing multivoiced process of co-creation of meaning in which theoretical perspectives were included.

### Ethical Considerations

In this study, adolescents and persons in their network were invited to be interviewed about sensitive aspects of their lives. It was emphasized that respondents should not feel compelled to speak about themes uncomfortable to them. The interviews could have a character close to therapeutic conversations, and clarifying the role of the interviewers was important. Possible emotional difficulties from interviews could be followed up in the ongoing mental health care initiatives. The study was approved by The National Committee for Medical and Health Research Ethics.

### Findings: Emerging Through Explorative Dialogues

In the following, we present the emerging findings in a way that also displays the dialogical explorative process. This is done through three steps. First, we describe some sensitive points in our exploration that were decisive for the findings. Key moments from two of the cases are introduced. Then, we present the findings in terms of a main theme, two dimensions, and four aspects, and display these in a diagram. Finally, we explore these findings further through key moments from a third case by pointing to a possible dynamics of change in the girl's movements into, and out of, her difficulties. Although they are presented through key moments chosen from three cases, the findings emerged on the basis of all data.

<sup>1</sup> These dialogical conditions were taken into account in our process of analyzing but are only indirectly part of our presentation of results.

### Meeting Phillip<sup>2</sup>

#### *Movement in Relation to Others' Movement: A Matter of Life and Death*

Phillip, a 16-year-old boy, told us about how he was bullied in school.

I walked over to some friends, but they walked away. I felt, “Why would they do such a thing?” (said with a raised voice and in a tone of despair). It was violation. It hurt so much it was hardly bearable. It was like being beaten to death.

This utterance stood out as particularly laden with feelings and made a strong impression and moved all three of us (First author and co-researchers). We again and again returned to this key moment in our discussions.<sup>3</sup> We saw that this utterance turned out to be a possible prism in our search for crucial experiences in the respondents. Phillip's description of this event is about *movement*, it is about *movement in relation to the movement of others*, it is about his *experience* of movement. And—perhaps the reason that his utterance is so striking—he experiences this event as *a matter of life and death*.

This key moment, along with *movement* and *experience of movement* as key concepts, we brought with us in a new reading of all the chosen key moments, and we found that many of them involved movement in relation to the movements of others.

### Meeting Monica

#### *Dimension 1: A Place for Me—No Place for Me (Ethical Space)*

In our ongoing exploration of the material, we found some concepts that helped us to find a way of revealing aspects related to movement and experiences of movement that seemed to run through many of the chosen key moments. From Monica, we got the idea of the first dimension that we found essential in many of the adolescents' experiences: *Ethical Space: A place for me—No place for me*. Monica told us that at a difficult time in her life, she had a quarrel with her foster parents, and they “called me some very nasty things,” which ended with her foster father's voice saying, “You have totally disappointed me. Please leave.” Monica remembered this very well and felt it as very hurtful; it was like a betrayal, she says, and continued as follows.

<sup>2</sup> All names are pseudonyms.

<sup>3</sup> This utterance and the story of Philip are elaborated on in our article “Change is an ongoing ethical event: Levinas, Bakhtin and the dialogical dynamics of becoming” (Bøe et al. 2013).

Because then I went to my room and I sat there for, I don't know how long I . . . , and I cried and I cried and I cried and I cried. I didn't know where to go. You are in so much pain that you consider taking your own life. It's a bit difficult to explain.

She expresses her despair in “*I didn't know where to go.*” She felt that the ones that she always knew she could go to were no longer there for her. This feeling literally turned into thoughts of killing herself. It was a matter of life and death socially, existentially, and bodily. Monica also expressed the way that things turned for the better, after a period of withdrawing from her social life, in terms of having someone to go to and somewhere to go: “My friend, she got me out of my shell. She is my rock.” Her friend offered her a space in which she could move, we might say. “She gave me safety,” she said.

This spatial feeling of “a place for me” or “no place for me” seemed to articulate a dimension at the core in the adolescents' experiences of their difficulties *and* ways out of difficulties. We conceptualized this as *Ethical Space* to capture the way that their sense and experience of this space seemed to have a fundamental relational and ethical quality. This space, as an experiential reality, seemed to be ethically laden by the way that others valued or devalued their movements. To move and feel alive, they needed this *life-giving* Ethical Space to be offered to them by others. Conversely, not being offered this space seemed to lead to a feeling of *deterioration*, space taken away from them.

#### Interpretative Help from Bakhtin, Dastur, and Shotter

##### *Dimension 2: Before-Event of Anticipation—Event of Movement—After-Event of Experience (Ethical Time)*

The second dimension, *Ethical Time: Before-Event of Anticipation—Event of movement—After-Event of experience*, was articulated with help from some of the theoretical ideas and concepts presented above. We found that the concepts of “event,” “anticipation” (of the future in advance), and “experience” (of the past in delay) seemed to offer a possible understanding of how movements, and the experience of movements, were interrelated. These concepts were found in the writings of Bakhtin, Dastur, and Shotter, as briefly presented above. Following Bakhtin, the episodes, or events, that the respondents describe are about their participation in “being-as-event”, and what is at stake is their ongoing becoming through responsiveness to these events. Dastur (2000) points to a diachronicity in our becoming. Our experience is always in delay, in what we could name an *After-Event of experience*. In this After-Event, the adolescents relate to the movements of the event, their own and others. Furthermore, following Shotter (2005, 2012), their

movements seem to be formed from, or made possible (or not possible), by their *anticipations* of the future, their sense of the continuance of the movements of the event. This we could name, as a correlate to the After-Event of experience, as a *Before-Event of anticipation*.

This temporality of Before-Event—Event—After-Event seemed to articulate another essential dimension at the core of the adolescents' descriptions of their experiences. We conceptualized this as *Ethical Time* to capture the way that their sense of time seemed to have an ethical and relational quality. This Ethical Time, as an experiential reality, seemed to emerge from the valuing responses of others, experienced in the After-Event or anticipated in the Before-Event. To move and feel alive, they needed this life-giving time to be offered to them by others. Conversely, experience and anticipation of devaluing responses led to a feeling of *deterioration*, time taken away from them.

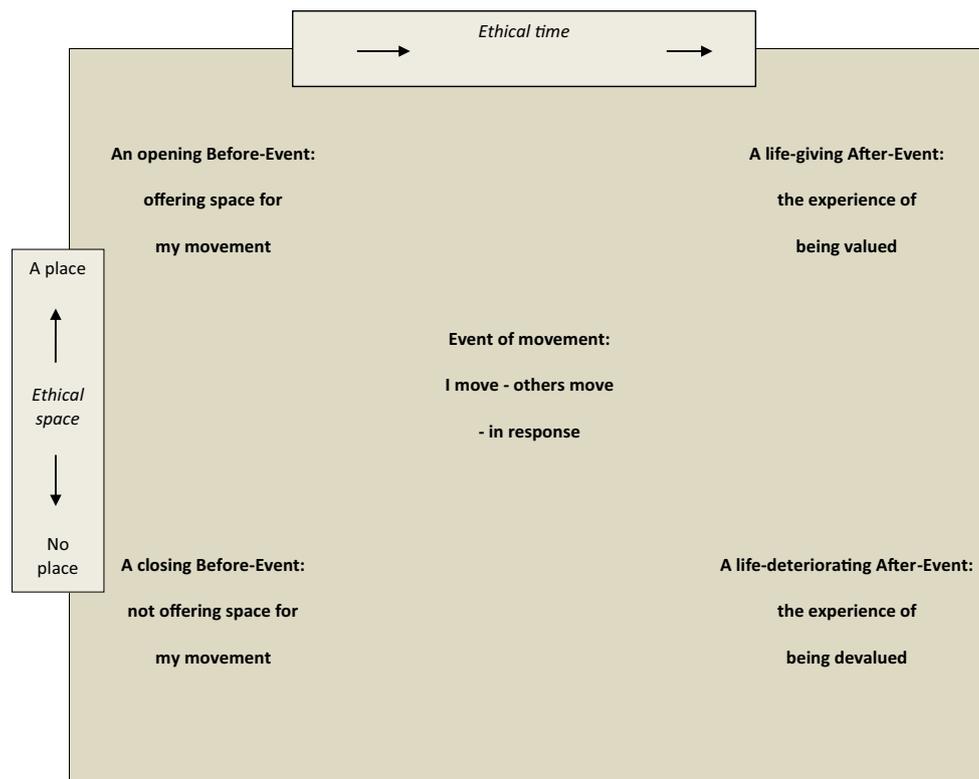
In the case of Phillip and the episode in the schoolyard, the *Before-Event of anticipation* is his sense of the situation that he is moving into, of the landscape that he enters, in a way prior to the event itself. He approaches the others in *anticipation* that he will be met and answered by them. This makes Phillip's steps toward the others possible. Then there is *the Event of movement* itself, his actual bodily steps in the schoolyard and the actual movement away by the other children. Then there is the *After-Event of experience*, in which Phillip is left with a difficult, hurtful feeling.

It is at this point that we would like to summarize and organize conceptualizations of ethical time and ethical space that we have so far used in making sense of Phillip's and Monica's experiences:

Main theme: change is an event of becoming through movement in Ethical Time and Ethical Space. Two dimensions: (1) A place for me—No place for me: Ethical Space, and (2) Before-Event of anticipation—Event of movement—After-Event of experience: Ethical Time. Within these two dimensions, we suggested four aspects: (1) an opening Before-Event—offering space for my movement, (2) a closing After-Event—not offering space for my movement, (3) a life-giving Before-Event—the experience of being valued, and (4) a life-deteriorating After-Event—the experience of being devalued.

This could be displayed as a multifaceted “event of becoming through movement”, as in the following diagram<sup>4</sup> (Fig. 1).

<sup>4</sup> We present such a diagram with hesitation. Life and experience cannot be captured in any diagram. As said in a meeting with the adolescent-group when we presented a version of this diagram: “Life isn't just this, it's always so much more”. Still the youths participating in this meeting related many of their own experiences to the display of the diagram. Our hope is that it may reveal, or point to, aspects of living, despite the fact that it may hide other aspects of living.



**Fig. 1** Event of becoming through movement

This diagram offer a possible way to display the many aspects involved in “the event of becoming through movement” in which the dynamics and processes of change happen. It is not a model that shows the dynamics by identifying a certain process of change with a starting point and an end point. Rather, it displays the multifaceted nature of the ongoing event of becoming in the sense that the adolescents are always in movement, always in the After-Event of what (just) happened *and* always in the Before-Event of what is about to happen—all at the same time. Its meaning is to show the way that this event of becoming through movement is constituted at the threshold between past and future, at the threshold between “me” and others, and at the threshold between what happens and my relation to what happens.

We have already met Philip and Monica. We now turn to Katherine to explore these findings further by pointing to the possible dynamics of change in the girl’s movements into, and out of, her difficulties.

### Meeting Katherine

#### *The Way they Said My Name—I was Frozen Out—I Became a Zombie*

A primordial line of becoming in human living may be found in the way that we are welcomed by others in the

world and through this are called and allowed to move; as an *opening Before-Event*—*offering space for movement*. In a way, we see this in what Katherine tells us. When she was a child, she says, “I could just walk around and talk to people.” Her movements *find space* within her anticipation of being offered space (opening Before-Event) and the experience of being responded to and valued (life-giving After-Event), but then, something happens that she does not quite understand. The other children at school *look* at her, *speak* to her, and *move in a way* that she, at first, does not understand. She remembers this as follows.

[C]ruel looks and mocking words and me walking past the row of boys in the class, who quickly jerk away when they see me... Their faces twisted in disgust. (*From diary note*)

“It hurt,” she says; it was “like being frozen out...,” but I couldn’t tell anyone, because, in a way, it wasn’t anything.” This may be identified as *A closing Before-Event: not offering space for my movement*. In this episode, we see the way that it starts from the bodily way that the others respond to her approach (movement). The future, and her space to move in, gradually closes through the voice, the gaze and the movement of others. She is left with an experience (of what she now names as bullying) that was obscure but hurtful, and we may say that it was an experience of being devalued, *A life-deteriorating After-Event*:

*the experience of being devalued.* The vital conditions for moving and feeling alive were deteriorated, taken away from her.

She said, “I withdraw to my own world” and “I stopped talking to them, because if I did, my last hope that they might like me could be lost.” She withdraws somewhat from the threshold of *senses* and *relations* to others and into her own secluded *imagination* to protect herself. At school, she is a “Zombie,” she says, one of the living dead.

I couldn't say a word. I feel excluded and alone. I feel that I am in a completely wrong world. I don't belong at all. Everything in me turns inwards. Nothing in me manages to go outward to meet other people. As if I am behind walls of glass that shut out all air, colors, light. I promise myself never to become visible again, never to speak if no one asks me to, never to look into the eyes of others, never to attract any attention, never to hope, 'cause it just hurts if you fall. (*From Diary note*)

In seeing and hearing and being seen and heard, she may lose her existence through the devaluing gazes, voices, and gestures of others; still, in *not* seeing and hearing and *not* being seen and heard, she also may lose her existence through the lack of valuing responses. She is on the verge of life, on the verge of falling out of the movements of life.

#### *She Asked Me to Go With Her—I was About to Say No—But I Said Yes*

Katherine describes her need of, and search for, a way out of this withdrawal to her imaginative “preferred world.” She wants to take the steps into a living in which she again manages and dares to meet others. She says, “I wish I didn't need any of them,” but she realizes that she does. In terms of our findings, she is searching for *An opening Before-Event: offering space for her movement* and hoping for a *life-giving After-Event: the experience of being valued*. As a kind of turning point, Katherine describes an episode when she walked over to a new girl at school and started to talk with her. “Suddenly, I just did it” in a “bang” as she says, somewhat despite herself. What happened? She found, perhaps, a kind of invitation coming from this girl; she sensed hints of possibilities in the way that the girl moved and expressed herself, and these inviting hints perhaps played along with a readiness in Katherine. She now could respond in a way that was previously impossible when her decision was to withdraw totally from the world of others. Her attention now was more open to others, and she was able to discriminate between invitations and absence of invitations in others' demeanor. It seemed to happen, in terms of our findings, as an ethical event of becoming, located on the threshold

between her and the other girl, constituted by moving and sensing. Change in a way originated in the other girl, or on the threshold between them. An invitation was given, an opening was offered, and Katherine noticed and was ready to say “Yes”.

And it is questions like that I look for, that they would take the initiative so that I dare to go with them. And some days later, another girl asked me and then, kind of, again I was about to say “No,” I felt that but managed, kind of, *not* to do it, and actually to say “Yes.”

To move and to be visible became a possibility. The world, as a future, as a place—also for her—is again offered, and she enters it.

## Discussion

The findings of this study seem to be in accordance with other studies based on lived experience by the way that they point to the significance of social aspects (e.g., Mezzina et al. 2006; Tew et al. 2012; see also the ‘[Introduction](#)’). When we ask the adolescents to describe their difficulties and their ways into and out of these difficulties, they tell us about happenings and experiences in relation to others in various social arenas. Based on their descriptions, we have presented a possible elaboration of what these social aspects are “about” by describing a “landscape of becoming” in which experience, movement, time, space, relations, and ethics interrelate. Although the adolescents do not necessarily use these words, it seems that their hurt and joy, hope and hopelessness, shame and pride, fear and safety, trust and mistrust, regret, anxiety, self-condemnation, guilt, sense of belonging, sense of meaning, love, and suffering..., all seem to emerge within this interplay, on this threshold between the themselves and others in the events of life. In this multifaceted ongoing event of becoming, their “movement-generated experience of aliveness” (Sheets-Johnstone 2011, p. 124) may arise—or not arise, we might add, as we have seen in the adolescents' experiences of “being a zombie,” “being beaten to death,” and “having nowhere to go.” Perhaps what we refer to as mental health could best be described and understood in terms of the way that feelings and experiences appear in the life-deteriorating or life-giving qualities of this interplay.

In our study, we found how profoundly movements of the body were present in the adolescents' descriptions. This is in accordance with other studies pointing to the way that human existence perhaps is best described in terms of bodily responsiveness (Gallagher 2012; Quillman 2012; Sheets-Johnstone 2008, 2009). Sheets-Johnstone, through her studies, shows how human movement should be

considered to be “our mother tongue” (2008, p. 213) and explored as *language*, because movements are expressive, semantically laden, gestures directed toward an addressee (2009, p. 223). This implies that movements are relational and meaningful. What we *feel*, and even what we *believe* and *value*, have a dynamics congruent to the dynamics of movement in this domain of intercorporeality. “[I]t is not only *that* one moves, but *how* one moves that is doxically and axiologically meaningful, for others as for oneself” (Sheets-Johnstone 2008, p. 212). What we corporeally express in our movements, Sheets-Johnstone says, is authenticated and affirmed through the responsivity or lack of responsivity of the addressee of the movement (2009, p. 231). Bodily movements are evaluative vis-à-vis others and in that sense ethical.

Our study revealed how the descriptions of movement included various aspects and modalities: movement is the *movement of the body (mine and others) directed toward or away from something/someone*, as indicated by the respondents in “He moved toward me” or “I wanted to flee.” Further movement is *the body’s expressiveness, such as tone of voice, facial expression, gestures, and posture*, as indicated in “The way she said ‘Hey’” or “The way they looked at me.” Movement also is *a physical activity, like heartbeat, sweating, and bodily tension and so on*, as in “I felt sick,” “My heart thumped,” or “I felt a rush in my body.” All these aspects and modalities were involved in “the event of becoming through movement” as described by the respondents. We also find the significance of these various aspects of movement, and the way that they are interwoven in communication, in studies from therapeutic settings. Quillman (2012) pointed to the way that aspects like the tone and pitch of our voice, facial expressions, and the posture of our body, seems to be of more importance in therapy than the content of what is said. We respond to our sense of these bodily appearances of others through our own bodily responses, “as in the rumble of panic in the belly when we feel dropped by another or the flush of pleasure in the chest when we feel seen, accepted, loved” (Quillman 2012, p. 5). This seems to be in line with the way that our study revealed not only the relation between movement and change but also the way that there is ethicality (“feel dropped,” “feel seen”) in the midst of significant events of movement.

We also found that *metaphors* deriving from the domain of bodily movement were important in many of the descriptions of the respondents (although the line between literal and metaphorical meaning often could appear blurry), as in “They froze me out” or “Everything in me goes inward, nothing goes outward,” and even the experience of space, as in “A place for me—No place for me,” focused on in this study, could be identified as having both literal and metaphorical meanings. This indicates that

experiences that we can identify as social or existential are given meaning through everyday language related to bodily experiences (see also Bøe et al. 2013). Furthermore, this may also indicate that the connection between our bodily living and what we identify as social or existential aspects of living are more interwoven than is usually thought.

If we again turn to Bakhtin (as presented by Sullivan 2007) he expresses precisely this fundamental dependence on others. Social and existential aspects are inherent in the bodily event of the encounter: We “find ourselves” through the “emotional–volitional tones of others” (p. 112) and only these tones of the voice, the look, the gestures, the movements of others “can’ vivify’ or give life to the self from outside the self. This cannot be done alone” (p. 113).

Philip, cut to the bone, expresses it as follows.

Now I can go to them, they say ‘Yes’, they don’t say ‘No’. So now I’m much better.

### Strengths and Limitations

It seems that the participation of the coresearchers, and the way that they used their personal experience, facilitated a focus on the most significant aspects of the lives of the respondents, both during interviews and in reading the material. We also invited other adolescents and practitioners to share their thoughts related to presentations of preliminary ideas in our interpretative process of analysis. This, we suggest, may have contributed to valid and useful findings, and to keeping close to practice and lived experience. Our study made use of certain theoretical perspectives that revealed certain aspects of the material but probably concealed others.

### Conclusion

What may be the implications for practice? Perhaps we again could turn to Shotter. He suggests that research is not about “‘seeing’ finished patterns existing objectively in the world” but rather is about finding possible articulations of “unfinished processes still open to many different kinds of *expressive* realizations” (Shotter 2014, p. 4). In this way, research can offer, in Shotter’s terms, a kind of “showing sayings” from which we can re-relate, re-orient and “see” “possibilities previously unnoticed” (pp. 4–5). The findings presented in this study—deriving from the language of the adolescents and molded by us in a further dialogue with theoretical perspectives—perhaps may show possibilities previous unnoticed in the lives of people in psychosocial crisis as well as within the initiatives of the practitioners. We could point out that this study indicates the importance of developing initiatives with a network orientation where

people from within the social arenas of the client are included. The significance of what happens in various social arenas should be recognized. The study also indicates that attention should be given to bodily aspects, expressiveness and responsiveness, within the encounters facilitated by the services. Through our bodily expressiveness, we may offer an Ethical Time and Space—a place and a future—that may be life-giving to those we meet.

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