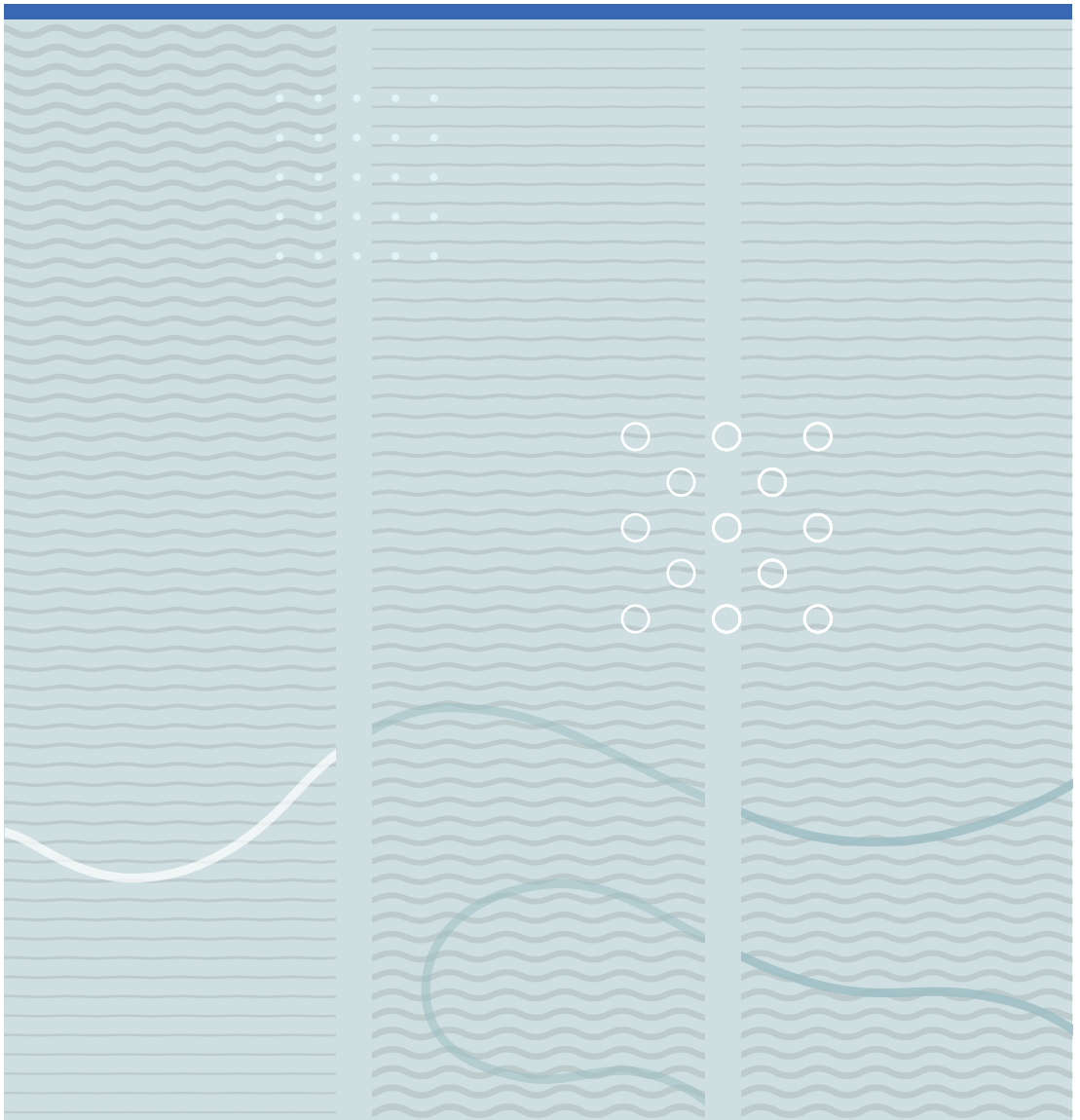


Mona Sommer

Support as Possibility

Lived experiences of support in the lives of young persons with mental health problems: A hermeneutic phenomenological study





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A hermeneutic phenomenological study

A PhD dissertation in
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Abstract

Support is at the core of social and welfare services for young persons with mental health problems who are partly or wholly out of school and work. In recent years, a variety of models and initiatives have been developed in order to support young persons with mental health problems to regain or maintain their footholds in school and work. However, these young persons do not always get the support they need, when they need it. Further, the ‘support’ they receive is not always experienced as supportive by the young persons themselves. While supportive models (e.g. supported employment, individual placement and support, and supported education) and their effects have been extensively examined and explored in literature, less attention has been given to the existential meanings of the experience of support. This PhD dissertation adds to the existing body of knowledge by exploring the meanings of support as a human experience, in order to contribute to a deeper and more nuanced understanding of support. Ultimately, the study’s purpose is to lead to more thoughtful and tactful support for young persons with mental health problems.

This study employed a hermeneutic phenomenological approach inspired by the Utrecht School, and in particular, Max van Manen’s phenomenology of practice. The study sample was young persons living in a small locality in Norway. The 14 participants were recruited from services for young persons in need of support. Individual interviews with the participants were conducted and formed the basis for the exploration. The study also included a competence group consisting of young persons and practitioners with personal and relevant experiences of the topic. The competence group contributed to the process of hermeneutic phenomenological exploration and creation of understanding through collaborative reflection and dialogue.

Three sub-studies evolved from the original research question. Each of these sub-studies resulted in an article exploring a previously unknown aspect of support that was uncovered during the research process. The insights from the sub-studies contributed significantly to understanding the overall research question and are briefly summarized here.

The first sub-study explored support as a relational phenomenon. Using a phenomenological approach to analyse two contrasting personal accounts, we examined how “support” is used in everyday language and how support is understood through a variety of ways of being together. This analysis implies that support is a relational phenomenon. The relationship holds the potential for support to take place. The experience of being supported seems to be connected to being noticed and attentively known by someone. This attentive knowing involves true presence and a sensitive not-knowing and non-judging attitude. The sub-study suggests that support, as an existential experience, is not guaranteed in pre-planned models, programmes or initiatives intended to support. Models and programmes are only potentially supportive, but not sufficient for true support to be given and received. The existential insights of this study invite professionals to trust uncertainty as a way of being open and to embrace an attitude of wonder as the “method” of support.

The second sub-study explored whether and how support and lived space might be related. It asked whether some ways of providing support might shape young persons’ sense of lived space. By adopting a hermeneutic phenomenological approach and moving reflectively between the experiential accounts and the methodological processes of epoché and reduction, the potential interrelatedness between space and support was explored. Three phenomenological themes evolved through the reflective hermeneutic process, and became aspects for further exploration: personal and shared space, the importance of a safe home, and the release from being enclosed in problems to become actively involved in one’s own future and in the community. The study implies that support and lived space are related in complex ways. Helpful support might create space to live in, room for nourishment and growth, and freedom to be and become. Helpful support seems to be anchored in care, autonomy and respect, while simultaneously being open to the everyday unpredictability and nonlinear realities of life.

The third sub-study explored the potential of “nourishing communion” as a possible aspect of support. Data were analysed using van Manen’s hermeneutic phenomenological approach to uncover possible meanings of nourishing communion in lived life. The analysis revealed that in the moment of nourishing communion there is a

feeling of trust and holding, a mutual participation, an acceptance in felt togetherness, a sense of being found and received, and a sense of attuned resonance. This sub-study suggests that “nourishing communion” can emerge in relationships and communities both within and outside professional services. This highlights the importance of everyday life as the orientation point for social and mental health support to young persons.

Based on an overall reflection and discussion combining the three sub-studies, this dissertation suggests that supporting young persons with mental health problems partly or wholly out of school and work needs an approach that resembles and resonates with life as the young themselves know it. Services to provide support need to focus on the experiences of the young persons and be based on an understanding of what support might mean for them. Support is a relational process that calls for mutual exploration with young persons to find out how they can be supported in their life situation. This encourages practitioners to embrace a wondering attitude in every encounter with a young person in need of support, refraining from assuming that they know what support *is*.

Keywords:

Support, young persons, mental health problems, school and work, lived experiences, hermeneutic phenomenology

List of papers

Article 1

Sommer, M. & Saevi, T. (2017). Beyond support: Exploring support as existential phenomenon in the context of young people and mental health. *Indo-Pacific Journal of Phenomenology*, 17(2), 1-11. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/20797222.2017.1370899>

Article 2

Sommer, M. & Saevi, T. (2018). Lived space and support as interrelated phenomena in the context of young people with mental health problems. *Phenomenology & Practice*, 12(1), 40-56.

Article 3

Sommer, M., Finlay, L., Ness, O., Borg, M., & Blank, A. (2019). 'Nourishing Communion': A less recognized dimension of support for young persons facing mental health challenges? *The Humanistic Psychologist*. Advance online publication. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/hum0000122>

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1 Introduction

The many ways that people experience their lives and how they make meaning out of these experiences has always fascinated me. I have learned that people experience life in a variety of ways and one way is not more 'true' or 'right' than another. Life, with all its richness, contradictions and complexity has immeasurable nuances and very few matters in life are absolutely one thing or another. I often find myself in a position of hesitation and doubt when exposed to different perspectives and understandings. I doubt that there is only one reality and that something *is* in a definite way. There is always more to see and understand. Sometimes, this position, or attitude, may appear as indecisive and tentative - even vague. However, I believe that my hesitation and doubt is anchored in a more existential motive: to achieve greater, deeper, and wider understanding. My assumption is that a deeper and wider understanding can only be possible when attempting to embrace ambiguity and complexity as intertwined and belonging to life itself, embedded in a person's everyday life context.

'Support' is a term frequently used in health and welfare services, as well as in our everyday living. As human beings, we give and receive support; we ask for it and hope for it. We cannot imagine life without support. We grow and develop together with fellow human beings in dialogues and social interactions (Wennerberg, 2011). Support can be given, received and experienced in highly individual and diverse ways because we are different people in different contexts (Klevan, 2017). What is experienced as support for one person is not necessarily experienced supportive for another.

In this dissertation, we explore the concept of support as an existential phenomenon, which has its origin in the concreteness of life and which stems from situations that are lived and real. It is a *lived* experience, rather than a theoretical abstraction distanced from its experiential source. The aim of this dissertation is to explore lived experiences of support, from the perspective of young persons with mental health problems who are wholly or partly out of school and work. We wonder what makes support supportive. In particular, what does support mean to young persons struggling with mental health challenges and participation in social settings such as school and work?

In asking: What are the lived experiences of support? I was not expecting to find one single answer to this question in my study. This reflects my attitude of assuming that there are always more questions to ask, and there is always more to learn and understand. I support the quote from Gregory Bateson (1979, p. 87): “Epistemology is always personal. The point of the probe is always in the heart of the explorer”. Qualitative inquiry is not about finding a ‘truth’; rather, it is about exploring ways of understanding and meaning (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). In this study, we aimed for deeper understandings of what support can be for young persons with mental health problems partly or wholly out of school and work. We also aimed to reveal some possible universal qualities belonging to the phenomenon of support.

One of the greatest challenges facing public health services in Nordic societies is the large number of young persons who suffer from mental health problems and are therefore out of school or work (Olsen, Hyggen, Tägtström, & Kolouh-Söderlund, 2017). Studies of support in mental health have focused mostly on identifying key characteristics of programmes that support people in achieving positive vocational and educational outcomes and participation in community life (Bejerholm et al., 2015; Bond, Drake & Becker, 2008; Schindler & Sauerwald, 2013). However, research on mental health recovery, focusing on service users’ experiences, has provided new knowledge about what individuals with mental health problems experience as helpful in their recovery process (Karlsson & Borg, 2017). A more limited amount of research explores *lived experiences* of support in the context of mental health and participation in school and work (Anvik & Gustavsen, 2012; Kierkegaard, 2016; Kinn, Holgersen, Aas, & Davidson, 2014, Sommer, Ness, & Borg, 2018). To our knowledge, no studies focus on the lived experiences of support among *young persons* with mental health problems in particular. In order to provide support that is experienced as supportive to young persons with mental health challenges, it is crucial to expand our understanding of support as lived experiences. My belief is that exploring support as a human phenomenon in specific contexts might offer new learnings and more in-depth knowledge about support. Hence, there is a need to explore the question: What does it mean to *experience* support?

The phenomenological approach of this study rests on onto-epistemological assumptions that meaning may ‘come into being’ in dialogical encounters at both subjective and

intersubjective levels (Gadamer, 2013). This means that insights of meaning may be created dialogically in human encounters and that they are always temporally connected to the specific situation or context from which they arose. Therefore, the encounter between a researcher and the phenomenon under exploration is always personal, contextual, and process-oriented and it must be regarded as preliminary. There will always be more to be seen, hidden aspects that we have not yet seen, not yet understood (van Manen, 2014). Based on my onto-epistemological stance in this study, there can be no final conclusion about what support means for these young persons. However, I believe some possible meanings of support can be illuminated, and that these meanings may have relevance wherever support is given and received.

According to van Manen (2014), there are always two aspects to a phenomenological interest: the meaning of the human phenomenon *and* the particular inner experience of the specific person or persons. Therefore, professionals who support young persons with mental health problems have to understand both the phenomenon of support itself and how young persons themselves experience it. Van Manen (2014) suggests that these two types of understanding are grasped together in concrete situations “and enacted in the present instant of each moment, as thoughtfulness and tact” (p. 282).

The purpose of this study is to contribute to a more nuanced, thoughtful, and in-depth understanding of support in order to increase the potential of support to young people with mental health problems in a way that is experienced as supportive by them. The overall research question is: *“What are the lived experiences of support in the lives of young persons with mental health problems who are wholly or partly out of school and work?”* Three sub-studies, asking more specific questions, emerged through the analysis process. These three sub-studies resulted in three published articles, each of which explores a different aspect of the phenomenon of support. The first article, “Beyond support: exploring support as existential phenomenon in the context of young people and mental health” (Sommer & Saevi, 2017), explores support as an everyday inter-human phenomenon with a variety of expressions in language and ways of relating. The second article, “Lived space and support as interrelated phenomena in the context of young people with mental health problems” (Sommer & Saevi, 2018), explores space and support as potentially related or interrelated phenomena. The third article, “Nourishing

Communion': A less recognized dimension of support for young persons facing mental health challenges?" (Sommer, Finlay, Ness, Borg, & Blank, 2018), explores and explicates friendship-like relationships. Friendship-like relationships include feeling nourished, and might be a neglected aspect of support.

1.1 Structure of the dissertation

This dissertation describes the research methodology and findings that resulted in the three articles mentioned above (See Appendices 1, 2 and 3 for the full text of each article). In Chapter 2, the background for the study is explained and a short description of current research in the field of support and mental health is presented. I also introduce relevant core concepts embedded in the study. Additionally, I reflect on related philosophical perspectives. Chapter 3 describes the study: its context, aims, and research questions. Chapter 4 presents the methodology and describes the methods used in the process of analysis. Chapter 5 describes the main findings or meaning insights that were revealed through the three sub-studies. In Chapter 6, the findings are organized into three overarching themes: 1) support as lived experience, 2) support as a relational experience and 3) support as a spatial experience. These themes are discussed in relation to relevant research and related bodies of knowledge. I also consider the research process in light of appropriate criteria for evaluating its trustworthiness and reflect on the methodological challenges that the study posed. Finally, I discuss the implications that our study might have for practice and identify possibilities for further research suggested by our findings.

1.2 The use of 'we' and 'I' – a clarification

A phenomenological device that might confuse the reader needs to be addressed. The use of 'we' and 'I' is common in phenomenology when referring to a possible common human experience. These terms do not refer to a particular group or professional (van Manen, 2014). The 'we' in phenomenology includes the writer and the readers. The phenomenological 'I' is part of the same function. "The use of 'we' and 'I' connects the

writer and the readers in a common world of possible experience” (Saevi, 2005, p. 12). It does not mean that all readers have the same experience; rather, it means that it might be possible to imagine the experience described.

In addition to the phenomenological ‘we’ and ‘I’, I will use these terms in an ordinary way; ‘I’ meaning myself, and ‘we’ meaning a particular group of people, e.g. the people included in the reflections and writings in this study. The difference between the use of these words in a phenomenological sense and in ordinary usage should be clear within the context of the text.

1.3 Lived experience(s), singular and plural

The phenomenological term ‘lived experience’, which will be explained in Chapter 4, is typically used in the singular form in literature (e.g. van Manen, 2014). The lived experience (of a phenomenon) indicates a subjective experience in a particular moment. In this synthesis I frequently use lived experiences, in the plural, to acknowledge that we often talk about the subjective experiences of support to more than one person, and also that the same person may have several different experiences of the phenomenon of support. It should be underlined that I am always referring to *subjective* experiences.

1.4 The term ‘existential’

In this dissertation, the term ‘existential’ is used in connection with other terms (e.g. experience, insights, aspects etc.). ‘Existential’ here is understood, in line with van Manen (2014) as immediately *lived*, and is related to our everyday life experiences, rather than explained or conceptualized. Congruent with van Manen, Hansen (2008) argues that the existence is not something we observe and describe from a third person perspective, and he is reluctant to define ‘existence’ and ‘the existential’. Existence is lived before it is reflected upon. As soon as we try to articulate the experience it is automatically put on a distance.

2 Background and philosophical considerations

This chapter presents the terms and the socio-political context relevant to a consideration of the population of concern chosen for this study: young persons with mental health problems who are partly or wholly out of school and work. I start with a clarification of terminology. I then identify issues related to young people with mental health problems, globally and, more specifically, in Nordic countries. The term ‘support’ is examined in this context. This chapter also considers the concept of person-centredness, the prevailing approach of person-centred healthcare in policy development, programme planning, research, and practice. Lastly, because support is a relational, and therefore, an ethical phenomenon the chapter briefly considers the existential and ethical qualities of relationships from the perspectives of three philosophers whose writings are particularly relevant.

2.1 Clarification of terms

Research literature (e.g. Kierkegaard, 2016; Sveinsdottir, Eriksen, Baste, Hetland, & Reme, 2018) and policy documents (e.g. WHO, 2013; Norwegian Ministry of Health and Social Affairs, 2017) use ‘young people’, ‘young persons’, ‘young adults’, ‘adolescents’, and ‘youths’ indistinctly, which reflects the lack of clarity about how to use these terms. The distinctions between categories such as childhood, youth, and adulthood are not clear. These terms are cultural and social constructions that are created and recreated in different contexts (Kierkegaard, 2016). Commonly, the term ‘young adults’ (or people/persons) includes people aged 16-29, but sometimes it means e.g. ages 16-24, 18-25 or 18-29, depending on the context (Olsen & Tägtström, 2013). However, in this study the use of the term ‘young persons’ seems to be the most congruent with the study’s person-centred values. Nevertheless, in places where it is linguistically clearer to use ‘young people’, I have done so.

‘NEETs’ is an acronym used for 15-29 year-olds who are ‘Not in Employment, Education or Training’. Young people who are NEETs represent a problem across Europe (Mawn et

al., 2017). Across the OECD (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development) countries, the average percentage of NEETs is 14%. In Norway, the figure is 9%, which corresponds to 86 000 young people (OECD, 2018). NEETs give rise to concern about the potential effects of unemployment on health and well-being (Paul & Moser, 2009).

To use expressions such as ‘young adults with mental health problems’ may contribute to the continued stigma of these young persons and lead to a focus on pathology instead of on the problems as identified by the people themselves and on the circumstances around them (Kierkegaard, 2016). Diagnoses are typically explained within the medical model according to symptom presentations. They do not give us information about the various circumstances leading to these diagnoses (Karlsson & Borg, 2013). The medical model, in which psychiatric diagnosis evolved, is criticized for being too dominant within mental health research and practice (Basaglia, 1987; Karlsson & Borg, 2017; Aarre, 2010). A contextual model, which includes understanding the person as embedded in, and never detached from, his or her historic, cultural and social context, has been suggested as a more appropriate alternative (Borg & Karlsson, 2017; Wampold & Imel, 2015). Hence, mental health problems should be understood within a social perspective (Tew, 2005). Critiques of the diagnostic culture emphasize that psychiatric diagnoses are understood within a biological frame of knowledge which is too limited. This leads to a strongly individualized focus where the mental health problem is solely understood as a problem ‘inside’ the person experiencing the symptoms (Ekeland, 2011; Joranger, 2009). Lian (2014) argues that when a person’s characteristics are redefined as psychiatric diagnoses, the person is transformed from healthy to diseased, and thoughts, viewpoints, actions and ways of being are transformed to symptoms of a disease. This biological and individualized perspective might camouflage sources of the mental distress that may originate in society (Brinkmann, Petersen, Kofod, & Birk, 2014; Prilleltensky, 2008). Ekeland (2011) states that a different epistemological and ontological knowledge base from the perspective of subjectivity and personal experiences is highly necessary within mental health practices and policy guidelines for mental health services. However, psychiatric diagnoses are also a part of a complex system of social rights in society. Diagnoses are needed to obtain benefits, such as exemption from work, rights to receiving sickness or disability benefits, and access to health services and treatment. As

such, diagnosis is an admission ticket to the welfare state's support and benefits (Ekeland, 2011).

The term 'mental health problems' may include both diagnosable symptoms and symptoms that do not quite meet diagnostic criteria and yet cause serious problems in the lives of people (Olsen & Tägtström, 2013). Furthermore, the expression 'young adults with mental health problems' is very broad, and it may give a false sense of a homogeneous group. On the contrary, young adults with mental health problems are as heterogeneous as young adults in general. They are a very diverse group of young persons in need of varying degrees of support. Nevertheless, in a study interviewing young people in Iceland, the Faroe Islands and Norway, Anvik and Waldahl (2017) found some common challenges among these young persons, which mainly began with issues in childhood and adolescence, such as difficult family relationships including abuse, difficulties with learning and concentration, experiences of bullying, loneliness, and experiences of being different and excluded. The experience of being different and feeling excluded is the hallmark of these common challenges. For the purposes of this study, 'mental health problems' should be understood as both certain diagnosable conditions such as depression and anxiety, but also as less easily diagnosable challenges to well-being as described above.

2.2 Support and related terms

The term 'support' is related to other terms frequently used in mental health services and the literature, such as 'help' and 'care'. Etymological sources confirm the relatedness among these terms (Klein, 1979). All three terms; *support*, *help*, and *care*, have meanings related to easing someone's pain or burden, doing good and giving assistance and succour, and are therefore meaningful terms to use in healthcare.

Klevan (2017) explores 'helpful help' in mental health crises and argues that help is contextual and process oriented, and it is best realized in contextual and collaborative practices. She further claims that helpful help is co-created in each unique case and context and is not based on a predefined understanding of help as something that *is*. She

does not differentiate 'help' from related terms, such as 'support' and 'care', but states that help is both something we *do* to or with someone and the result of these actions.

'Care' as a term and phenomenon has a strong position in nursing literature and nursing/caring science. Kari Martinsen from Norway and Katie Eriksson from Finland are among the Nordic nursing theorists who have strongly contributed to a development of caring science and of caring as a foundational concept in nursing (Bø, 1996). Martinsen (1989) states that care is a social relation and includes both community and solidarity. To care is to understand the other from the other's perspective. Care is always addressed towards the other and is characterized with an attitude of acknowledgement and compassion. Martinsen (2006) emphasizes kind-heartedness as the core of nursing, which should always be present together with factual and technical knowledge. Thus, Martinsen's caring philosophy calls attention to existential aspects of human life, such as vulnerability and dependency and nurses' responsibility to sensitively embrace these aspects of life in care for the other.

Care, as a relational phenomenon, depends on both the care-giver and the one receiving care. In Martinsen's philosophy of care, reciprocity in relationships is understood as *generalized reciprocity*, which can be explained as an altruistic reciprocity, where the nurse does not expect anything in return from the patient (Martinsen, 1989). Care is viewed as an unselfish and compassionate act where the needs of the particular other should take precedence over the interest of the carer (Pettersen & Hem, 2011). Eriksson's (1987) theory of caring has some similarities with Martinsen's ideas. However, Eriksson's theory of care has a health promoting purpose. Her understanding of care is founded on ideals rooted in Christian diaconal and humanistic values. Eriksson (1987) claims that love, understood as charity or neighbourly love and compassion, is a precondition for care, and this precondition constitutes a basis for nursing. Martinsen and Eriksson both represent an altruistic and compassionate understanding of care, which is described as the Nordic perspective of caring science, and includes concepts of ethics, caring, love, health, and suffering (Turkel, Watson, & Giovannoni, 2018).

An altruistic understanding of care has been criticized for its potential of being paternalistic and for having a motherly quality or educational approach (Oute, 2018;

Petterson & Hem, 2011; Vatne, 2006). Petterson & Hem (2011) argue for a replacement of an altruistic understanding of care to another understanding of care which they call 'mature care'. They underline that the altruistic understanding of care, where the cared-for is perceived as a passive receiver of care and treatment that the carer believes that this person needs, may conceal the uniqueness of the other and hamper the patient's possibility of autonomy and growth. Inspired by Gilligan's model of development of care, Petterson & Hem (2011) suggest conceptualizing care as relational and reciprocal taking into account the interest and perspective of both the carer and the cared-for. This understanding of care is an alternative to care seen as something either to be given or received. Reciprocity in a caring relationship is also a concern of the American philosopher Nel Noddings (1984). Noddings argues that caring is a relationship where the one-caring and the cared-for are reciprocal dependent. Further, she claims that care does not reach its completion until it is accepted and received by the cared-for.

'Care' as a theoretical concept is first and foremost a core concept within *nursing*, and the scientific exploration of the phenomenon of care has not had the same significance in the mental health field. That is not to say that care is not a relevant and useful concept and phenomenon in mental health practice and research. However, 'help' and 'support' seem to be more frequently used than 'care' in mental health literature. This may reflect a change in perspective from an altruistic view on care that may inhere a risk of oppressing the autonomy and emancipation of the one cared-for, towards the perspective of the other as an equal partner included in decisions on his or her own life (Oute, 2018). The latter perspective necessitates supporting the person's own processes and creating contexts that support the person's effort in finding his or her way of living a good life (Karlsson & Borg, 2017). From this perspective, instead of doing something *for*, professionals walk alongside, doing activities *with* the person in need of support (Ness, Borg, Semb, & Karlsson, 2014).

I have chosen the term 'support' in this study, because it is a much-used, but rarely explored, term in mental health literature and policy documents, as well as in evidence-based models such as supported employment, supported education, and supported housing. A deeper discussion about support and care as interrelated phenomena in mental health is provided in the Discussion-chapter.

2.3 Mental health problems and young persons: Global and Nordic concerns

Mental health problems are one of the top public health challenges in Europe, affecting 25% of the population every year (WHO, 2013). Participation in working life is considerably lower among persons with mental health problems than in the general population, and mental health issues constitute the single largest determinant of disability benefits for the OECD member nations (OECD, 2012). The fact that young persons experiencing mental health problems are at greater risk of being excluded from social settings such as school and work than others is one of the greatest challenges facing public health services in European societies (WHO, 2013). For most individuals, about 75%, mental health problems have developed by the age of 25 (McGorry & Goldstone, 2011). Because of the early age onset, mental health problems often have a negative impact on educational attainment and transition into employment (Kessler et al., 2007; Waghorn et al., 2012). Studies document low levels of secondary education attainment among persons with mental health problems, both internationally and in Norway (Anvik & Eide, 2011; Esch et al., 2011; Finning et al., 2018; Haynes, 2002; Markussen & Seland, 2012). This is of particular concern, since incomplete secondary education is one of the biggest risk factors for being permanently unemployed (Olsen & Tägtström, 2013).

Studies document a growing tendency towards mental health problems among young persons in Nordic and other European countries, as well as in Asia and the US (Bor, Dean, Najman, & Hayatbaksh, 2014; Collishaw 2015; Sletten & Bakken, 2016). In particular, internalizing mental health problems in which anxiety and symptoms of depression constitute the core seem to have increased (Bor et al., 2014). Ramsdal, Gjørnum, and Wynn (2018) found that internalizing mental health problems in combination with a lack of social support is strongly associated with dropping out from school and employment. Further, the authors found that comprehensive social support plays a major role in improving the ability of young students to cope with school and mental health problems. Other studies found that long periods out of school might decrease the possibility of re-engagement, because these students also have a higher risk of anxiety and depression (Bjelland et al., 2008; Chazelle et al., 2011; Wang, Smith, & Dewa, 2010). In a study

investigating social and health-related problems in a Norwegian sample of young adults at risk of early work disability and their self-perceived causes of illness, psychological distress was found to be the most prevalent health problem. The young adults in that sample perceived that the main causes of their illness were relational problems (Sveinsdottir et al., 2018).

The fact that many young persons with mental health problems experience interruptions in school and work participation is of increasing concern for the Nordic countries, as well as for the member countries of the EU (Wulf-Andersen, Follesø & Olsen, 2016). Collaboration between Nordic countries is encouraged as way to develop knowledge and initiatives that will support young persons at risk of ending up in vulnerable life situations (Kolouh-Söderlund, Lagercrantz, & Göransson, 2016). The Nordic collaboration focuses on the significance of young adults' possibilities to participate in a variety of settings, such as school and work, as well as to pursue interests and friendships, and the importance of being 'insiders' as opposed to 'outsiders' in socially valued contexts (Kierkegaard, 2016). Young persons aged 16-19 in the Nordic countries comprise nearly five million people, or 19-22 percent of the total population in each country¹. Most young persons in Nordic countries report that they are doing fine, and their subjective well-being is better than in the other European countries (Olsen, Hyggen, Tägtström, & Kolouh-Söderlund, 2016). At the same time, recent research has revealed an increase of mental health problems among young persons in the Nordic countries (Brage & Thune, 2015; Sletten & Bakken, 2016). Increased mental health problems are stated to be one of the main reasons for dropping out of upper secondary school (Anvik & Gustavsen, 2012; Markussen & Seland, 2012; OECD, 2018). The majority of young persons receiving incapacity-related benefits are granted those benefits for a mental disorder, and almost inevitably, this leads to social exclusion for the rest of their lives (Hultquist, 2015; Olsen & Tägtström, 2013).

Support to young people with mental health problems in the context of participation in school and work is a priority for the Norwegian welfare system, as well as for the other Nordic countries. It is therefore worrying that young persons who are neither studying

¹ According to the database of the Nordic Council of Ministers, January 2014.

nor employed and who suffer from mental health problems often experience the absence of the support they need (Anvik & Gustavsen, 2012; Kierkegaard, 2016; Ramsdal, Gjørnum, & Wynn, 2018). Research exploring mental health problems and school dropout calls for special attention to how society and health and social services can support these young persons, to enable them to remain in school, work, and other social settings, contributing to the communities in which they live.

The research project ‘Young people in the Nordic region – mental health, work, education’², led and organized by the Nordic Welfare Centre (NWC) from 2012-2016, examined initiatives that could support young persons with mental health problems with regard to participation in school and work. The study reports that initiatives recognized as supportive were open to multisectoral cooperation, where the needs of the young persons were the controlling factor (Kolouh-Söderlund, Lagercrantz, & Göransson, 2016). The study demonstrates a need for a major improvement in cooperation, coordination and flexibility among the organizations, sectors, and services involved. In particular, collaboration between schools, health services, social services, and the private sector are important. Further, it is crucial to simplify the bureaucracy that often resembles an impenetrable jungle to the young persons. Young persons in the study highlighted the importance of being listened to and treated with respect. They asked for initiatives to support them in finding a direction in life and to strengthen their belief in themselves and their own abilities.

In 2017, the NWC invited researchers, policy leaders, practitioners, and leaders and young people from youth organizations and civil society organizations to dialogue sessions to discuss how to improve mental health among young people and relevant services. The dialogue sessions were held in six Nordic cities. The summary of the dialogues reveals a need for a more positive and inclusive approach when helping young persons, especially in dealing with mental health issues³. The message from the young persons at the meetings can be summarized as follows: Young people want to be needed

² All the publications from this project can be found at <https://nordicwelfare.org>

³ The essence of the dialogues is presented in a video available at <https://nordicwelfare.org>

and to be part of a bigger picture. They want people around them who believe in them. They ask for close collaboration between schools and other sectors (health sector, social sector, and civil society). They need easily accessible support activities for young people who appear unwell but who are not ill enough to receive support from the healthcare system.

2.4 Support and mental health

The major social and professional changes and developments from the nineteen-fifties until the present time have transformed views on treatment and collaboration in mental health practice (Karlsson & Borg, 2013). Consequently, how support is understood in the context of mental health has also varied in recent decades, leading to a variety of initiatives in services that provide support for persons living with mental health problems. Relational, social, and contextual factors, reflecting humanistic and social perspectives, have been identified as significant factors for mental and social wellbeing (Tew et al., 2012; Topor & Denhov, 2012). The World Health Organization (WHO) (2013) has recognized the importance of social experiences of everyday life in families, schools, workplaces, and communities to the mental health of the individual. It advocates more person-centred and contextual health care. A stronger social perspective in mental health services has led to the development of a variety of services and interventions that are intended to provide support to the individual's participation and inclusion in social arenas, such as school and work (Karlsson & Borg, 2013).

Recovery, as a perspective, concept, and approach, has been increasingly acknowledged in mental health practice and research (Vatne, 2006). The recovery perspective is unique in that it is rooted in people's own experiences about what is helpful and significant in their recovery process (Borg & Topor, 2003; Davidson, Rakfeldt, & Strauss, 2010; Deegan, 1996). It is often underlined that the concept of 'recovery' does not refer to a particular treatment or intervention or to particular theories of caring. Neither can recovery be characterized as a 'theory'. Rather, recovery refers to what people with mental health problems do themselves to manage their challenges, supportive relationships, and

supportive social arenas (Borg & Karlsson, 2011). Recovery is more about processes in life than outcomes, and about what it requires to create a good life in spite of mental health problems (Rakfelt, Davidson, & Strauss, 2010; Karlsson & Borg, 2013). Recovery research and practice elucidate that relational, social, and contextual perspectives are central to the understanding of recovery processes in mental health (Karlsson & Borg, 2017).

During the past three decades, numerous interventions have been developed and evaluated to address the needs of persons with mental health problems for higher education and employment (Bond, Drake, & Becker, 2008). These interventions include programmes such as Supported Education (SEd), Supported Employment (SE), Individual Placement and Support (IPS), and occupational therapy programmes that incorporate principles of SE and SEd (Schindler & Sauerwald, 2013). Key supportive features of these programmes are: rapid school and work searches, no time limit for the duration of support, attention to consumers' preferences, follow-up support, integration with mental health services, and benefits counselling (Bond, Drake, & Becker, 2012). None of these evidence-based models are particularly oriented towards young persons.

Bond, Drake, and Campbell (2016) suggest that most principles from the IPS model are appropriate for young adults with severe mental health problems. However, most young persons with mental health problems do not have severe mental disorders; rather, they are struggling with challenges compatible with mild to moderate anxiety and depression. Frøyland (2016) asked whether the principles of IPS meet the needs of vulnerable youth and if there is a need for adjustments. He suggests the need for extra effort to stay in touch with and to establish a relationship with vulnerable youth in cases where they seem to isolate themselves. A particular focus on mastery, social inclusion, and natural support would also make the support more applicable for vulnerable youth. In another study, Frøyland (2017) found that the young people themselves wanted the helpers to be more like friends and family, because it felt more like an 'ordinary' relationship. 'Vulnerable youth' in these studies do not necessarily have diagnosable mental health problems, but a large proportion of them struggle with mental challenges (Frøyland, 2016).

In a review of the literature exploring subjective experiences of support for persons with mental health problems relative to participation in school and work, Sommer, Ness, and

Borg (2018) identified three overarching themes significant to the experience of support: (a) supportive interpersonal relationships, (b) integrating mental health and everyday life issues with education/employment support, and (c) person-centred support. Supportive interpersonal relationships included having regular conversations with providers, the notion of being trusted as a competent person with potential, and being valued as an equal person. In this kind of partnership, participants felt unconstrained and not judged. They felt they had been given the space to make their own decisions. Relationships reflecting equality and friendship constituted helpful support aimed at promoting participation in school and work, and this study thus supports the findings in Frøyland (2016), emphasizing 'ordinary' relationships. Further, integration of the help with the person's everyday life was highlighted as helpful support. Disconnection between help and everyday life was a barrier to feeling supported. Person-centred support included flexibility and a focus on the persons' preferences and functioning rather than routine guidance. Overall, the review suggests that helpful support is best given in collaborative and flexible services by providers who recognize the service user as a valuable human being with capabilities. Sommer, Ness, and Borg (2018) are also in line with Lauveng, Tveiten, Ekeland, and Ruud (2015) who found that relationships with health professionals and teachers are vital for recovery and personal development for adults with severe mental illness. Good, safe, stable, and mutual relationships with providers and teachers that cared about the person with mental health problems as an individual were crucial for achieving lasting changes and personal growth (Lauveng et al., 2015).

The significance of supportive relationships with professionals (Borg & Kristiansen, 2004; Davidson, 2003; Topor & Denhov, 2015) and with others (Topor, 2004) is highlighted in mental health research. Slade (2009) distinguishes between three major types of relationships: true relationships, distant relationships and partnerships. A true relationship is a relationship that is personal and genuine. In a true relationship, both parties can express who they really are. This type of relationship is more likely to be found outside mental health services in the context of private networks. Slade argues that distant relationships are common in mental health services. They are influenced by models and programmes and are a barrier to personal development and recovery. Slade suggests that the partnership model, which implies that the professional and the service

user work together and acknowledge each other as partners, is best suited for recovery-oriented practices.

The meaning of being acknowledged as an equal person in a professional-client-relationship, is deepened in the Norwegian psychologist Anne Lise Løvlie-Schibbye's theory of dialectic relational therapy. As a theoretical concept and as a phenomenon, acknowledgement includes modes of being together, and it is understood as a process rather than a state (Schibbye, 2009). To acknowledge is to give validity to the other person's experiences (Schibbye, 1996). According to Schibbye (2009), acknowledgement involves an immediate emotional presence and availability in the moment, as well as continuous discrimination about which emotions belong to the self and which belong to the other. Modes of being such as tuning in to the other, being empathetic, mirroring the other, intersubjective sharings, and emotional attachment, comprise acknowledgement and contribute to create a safe atmosphere (Schibbye, 2009).

A collaborative alliance and a feeling of being acknowledged and met as an equal and as a real person seem to be crucial to people with mental health problems in their recovery process (Topor, Borg, Girolamo, & Davidson, 2011). A robust research literature within collaborative and dialogical practices shows that the most important foundation for mental health practices is the relationship between the service users and the practitioners (Denhov & Topor, 2012; Ness, Borg, Semb, & Karlsson, 2014; Norcross & Lamber, 2011; Sweeney et al., 2014). Ness et al. (2014) states that the concept of collaboration conveys a sense of trust, partnership, teamwork, flexibility, cooperation, and working together towards shared goals. Anderson (2012) argues that at the core of the collaborative relationships are the partners' capability of listening, respecting each other's perspectives, and taking each other seriously.

Research in mental health suggests that support might also been seen as practical help (Ness, Kvello, Borg, Semb, & Davidson, 2017). Practical help can be help regarding access to good housing, meaningful activity, and assistance with finances (Andvig & Gonzalez, 2015; Mattsson, Topor, Cullberg, & Forsell, 2008; Topor, 2004; Topor, et al., 2011). Other studies highlight the importance of the 'small things': spontaneous gestures, actions, kind words, and seeming trivialities such as having a coffee with a friend. These small things

are not a part of a treatment procedure, but play a significant role in person's wellness and recovery (Ness, 2016; Topor, Bøe, & Larsen, 2018).

Research suggests that support can be experienced in a variety of ways. Current research on what is helpful in recovery has provided valuable knowledge from the perspective of the service users. These contributions have informed practice and policy makers about what kinds of support seem to be effective with regard to living a good life, even when that includes living *with* mental distress. Despite a growing body of research about support and what it might involve in mental health, we did not find any studies systematically exploring the *existential meanings* of the *phenomenon* of support, i.e. the lived experiences of support. The term 'lived experiences' has a particular meaning in phenomenology. It can be confused with the idea of a first-person narrative, often used in qualitative research. Lived experience means the moment of the experience before the reflection on it: the pre-reflective dimension. This dimension is often passed over in everyday life (van Manen, 2017). When a person is asked for the lived experience of a phenomenon, he or she is asked to be in that moment and describe how it was experienced in that moment. First-person narratives may contain reflections, opinions, comparisons, or any other of a myriad of cognitive conceptions. When research focuses on lived experience, it aims to uncover both the particularity of the subjective experience *and* the universal characteristics of the particular phenomenon (van Manen, 2014).

Recognizing the absence of an existential exploration of the phenomenon of support, our study moved from being a qualitative study of first-person experiences of support to a phenomenological inquiry into the meanings of the phenomenon of support.

2.5 Support and person-centred care

Person-centred care aims to keep the person at the centre of care and decision-making and is based in values such as respect, reciprocity, mutuality, and self-determination (McCormack & McCance, 2010). A person-centred approach has a holistic perspective of the person, and implies recognition of "...biological, social, psychological, cultural and

spiritual dimensions of each person, their families and communities” (McCormack, van Dulmen, Eide, Skovdahl, & Eide, 2017, p. 3).

This section describes and reflects upon support from a person-centred perspective. It includes person-centred care in policy, philosophical and political roots in person-centred care, and challenges addressed within person-centred practice and research.

2.5.1 Person-centred care in policy

How mental health is understood affects how support is understood and, consequently, what kind of support is regarded as helpful (Brinkmann, 2014; Klevan, 2017). Mental health is commonly understood as belonging to the overall experience of health and well-being. The WHO (2013) *European Mental Health Action Plan 2013-2020* describes mental health as a state of well-being in which every individual realizes his or her own potential, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to her or his community (p. 6). According to the WHO Action Plan and the Human Rights Council (2017), a ‘state of well-being’ includes a transition from social marginalization to full citizenship. The focus on personal growth, participation and contribution in the community advocates the need to move beyond the traditional medical model to a more holistic and person-centred approach to the support provided. For more than a decade, the WHO has pointed out the gap between rhetoric and reality in the field of mental health (Borg & Karlsson, 2017). In *People-Centred Health Care – A Policy Framework*, the WHO (2007) urged health care systems to move beyond traditional models of providing care. These traditional models were identified as biomedically oriented and disease focused, technology driven and expert driven. It suggested greater attention to “...patients, families, communities and society at large” (WHO, 2007, p. 6).

Person-centred care is regarded as a preferred approach in health services, and is recognized in WHO policies as well as in national policies (Borg & Karlsson, 2017; McCormack et al., 2017). In line with the WHO statement, support should be provided to enable the person to participate as fully as possible in community life of his or her choosing. In the *Escalation Plan for Mental Health*, the Norwegian Ministry of Health and

Social Affairs (1999) draws attention to mental health as a social concern and emphasizes the importance of inclusive relationships and community. Other Norwegian policy guidelines and recommendations, such as *Mastering Together* (Norwegian Directorate of Health, 2014) and *Mastering the Whole Life Through* (Norwegian Ministry of Health and Social Affairs, 2017), are based on values congruent with holistic and person-centred support. These are values such as autonomy, independence, empowerment, user involvement, and the ability to live a good life in the community. These values are reflected in the recommendations for practices to support persons with mental health problems. In creating access to valued roles and valued arenas in society, the WHO and the national policies call for a social perspective and public interventions in person-centred mental health care. An individual approach is not sufficient. Borg and Karlsson (2017) state that a person-centred approach must also include a focus on barriers in the community to identifying core problems that may well be more related to the community than to the person.

2.5.2 Philosophical and political roots

Person-centredness as a concept has multiple origins. A person-centred approach is often associated with Carl Rogers (humanistic-existential oriented models) and Paulo Freire (critical pedagogy) who both paid tribute to human existence and the human capacity for growth and development (O'Hara, 2006). They considered authenticity as an essential aspect of full humanness. Person-centred approaches aim towards liberation from dehumanizing conditions, such as oppressive ideologies, institutions, technologies, beliefs and myths. Reflecting both humanistic and critical perspectives, person-centredness has philosophical as well as political roots.

Carl Rogers (1995), who is considered the founder of person-centredness as a therapeutic approach, was committed to supporting people in their process to become who they, in their deepest heart, know themselves to be; "... of becoming a person" (p. 123). While Rogers has an individualistic and egocentric concept of personhood, and sees the person as an individual distinct from society, Freire's (1972) view is much more sociocentric. He

considers a person to be closely connected to a social reality. In his view, to become an authentic self is to become aware of how our contexts affect us and to take a critical stance towards this to free ourselves from oppressive distortions (Freire, 1972; O'Hara, 2006). In line with Freire's humanistic approach, becoming a subject of one's own experiences and actions must be seen as an essential part of full humanness. To Rogers, on the other hand, authenticity is more a question of being free to come forth as a unique person in the world. Person-centeredness, as associated with the work of Rogers in particular, has been criticized for its individualistic and decontextualized approach. Jacobs, van Lieshout, Borg and Ness (2017) suggest that relational, contextual and political perspectives need to be included in person-centred approaches. A relational perspective is important since interaction between persons, e.g. service user and practitioner, is at the core of the provision of care and support. A relational perspective is necessary to shed light on the inherent power differential. Further, Jacobs et al. (2017) argue that contextual perspectives are needed to include the whole person, including one's nationality, gender, class, ideology and sexuality. Finally, political perspectives must be considered, because a person-centred approach challenges dominating ideologies and structures that might prevent the 'becoming of a person'.

Individual, relational, social, and political perspectives contribute to an understanding of person-centred care and to what promotes and hinders person-centredness. However, each perspective offers underlying notions that might be overlooked. For example, a social perspective might push particularity, as a part of what it means to be supported, into commonality (Saevi, 2005). On the other hand, the individual perspective insists on personal growth and empowerment, and perhaps an expectation of a strong self-determined individual. The aim of person-centred care is personal growth and flourishing (McCormack & McCance, 2010). Is it possible, then, to understand person-centred support, regardless of aims or underlying expectations, and regardless of social or relational concepts and explanations?

Both Rogers and Freire are concerned with the individual's personal experiences as the starting point for their work, despite their differences in views of the self and how to become a free and authentic person (Freire, 1972; O'Hara, 2006; Rogers, 1995). The

person as the starting point for care and support is a fundamental value in the person-centred approach in health care today. It is the unique person's subjective and particular experience of the situation and the person's values and preferences that should guide the care and support (Dewing, Eide, & McCormack, 2017). Defining person-centred support from an individual, relational, social or political perspective might be helpful for developing a framework for person-centredness in policy, practice and research. Nevertheless, this might have little in common with *being supported* from a unique and subjective perspective. What is person-centred for one person may not be for someone else. A hermeneutic phenomenological approach (van Manen, 2014) might be a contribution to person-centred care, because it aims to reveal the meanings of support regardless of aims and socially constructed perspectives. Hermeneutic phenomenology embraces the unique and particular, the concreteness of a lived experience, while at the same time searching for possible universal meanings of that lived experience (van Manen, 1997; van Manen 2014). Thus, a hermeneutic phenomenological approach might be a possible way of understanding experiences of person-centred support, as they are personally expressed.

2.5.3 Challenges in person-centred practice and research

A person-centred approach in policy making, practice, or research requires a social and contextual approach. From a phenomenological perspective, the world is inseparable from the subject and the subject is inseparable from the world; it is an I-world relation (Merleau-Ponty, 2012). Further, this intertwinedness between world and subject questions the idea of an 'inner' and 'outer' world. I cannot step outside of the world and judge it from an outside perspective, because I am always in it, and the world is always in me. From a phenomenological perspective, it is not possible to see a person as distinct from a context (Merleau-Ponty, 2012; van Manen, 2014). Hence, phenomenology supports the philosophical stance that a person-centred approach must include person and context as an intertwined whole, where the orientation point is the person's subjective experiences. However, barriers rooted in the dominant psychiatric culture challenge this holistic perspective (Borg & Karlsson, 2017). A holistic perspective is

hindered by a resistance to shifting from a biomedical orientated service to a humanistic, person-centred and socially oriented service and from professional control to service user orientation (Karlsson, Borg, & Kim, 2008). The biomedical orientation determines what counts as valid knowledge, and thus also the directions for priorities within research funding, where randomized controlled trials (RCT) are preferred at the expense of knowledge based on experiential information. Borg and Karlsson (2017) suggest expanding the narrow evidence base in which RCT reigns supreme to a recognition of practice-based evidence, derived from the lived experiences of service users, family members and practitioners.

2.6 Support and relationships: ethical considerations

Supportive initiatives and services in the welfare system have missions and goals on behalf of the persons they support and in order to fulfil their assignments from public authorities. The relationship between the person offering support and the person receiving support is initiated and defined by the system in terms of the purpose to achieve something specific, such as returning young persons with mental health challenges to school or work. In policy making, programme development, practice, and research, consideration of the ethics of these relationships highlights the importance of understanding how support as lived experiences for young persons with mental health challenges might be manifested.

Support, in the same way as care, occurs in relationships. In a context where professionals are responsible for another person's health or personal matters, when there are personal concerns at stake, support and care have an ethical and moral dimension (Martinsen, 2005). The following brief summary of ways to consider ethics in relationships is included to highlight the complexity of the moral dimension of relationships. The inclusion of these perspectives on ethics in relationships is an attempt to shed light on the complexities of relationships and to resist an oversimplification in which the existential qualities of relationships are overlooked in favour of factuality or expediency. The discussion of ethics in relationship is included to add a necessary, though somewhat neglected dimension to

the more fact-based descriptions of support. In addition, it will serve as a context for parts of the Discussion chapter. It is not, in any way, intended to be a full treatment of the writing on this subject by the philosophers I have chosen: Emmanuel Levinas, Knud E. Løgstrup, and Martin Buber. These three philosophers are particularly relevant as their writings have phenomenological qualities and explore lived experiences of relationships.

2.6.1 Relationships as ethical events

Interpersonal relationships, as the fulcrum for support, consist of being together with other persons, and this togetherness, according to Levinas, is inevitably ethical. In Levinas' approach, ethics begins with the experience of the Other (Levinas, 1969). He claims that responsibility for the Other is the *first event*, prior to knowing and more fundamental than any epistemological and ontological project. Levinas challenges the primacy of intentionality as the basis of our actions and movements and how we consciously relate to the world. Levinas claims that the Other is not constituted by my relation to the world, it is the Other who constitutes me. My being is usurped by the Other. It is as though the beginning of my existence was already *for* the Other, before any act of comprehension or understanding (Levinas, 1969). I am called by the Other, and I cannot help but feel responsible even before I may *want* to feel responsible. It is not something I have asked for or wanted, I am taken as a hostage and I know myself as a person responsible for this unique Other (Levinas, 1969). That is why Levinas notes that I am responsible to take care of myself so that I can act responsibly for the Other (van Manen, 2014).

What Levinas (1969) characterizes as command, in the face to face confrontation with the Other, has close affinities with what one of his contemporaries, Løgstrup (1997), speaks of as *the ethical demand*. Close to Levinas' understanding, Løgstrup sees the responsibility for the Other as prior to and independent of our own choices, what we want or desire, or of our relationship to the Other. It belongs to all human life in all times and all places under all conditions (Løgstrup, 1997). It is there, as a demand on us, prior to our reflection of the situation, independent of our response to it and conclusions about

it. The ethical demand belongs to existence, and the demand is spontaneously fulfilled in the realization of what Løgstrup calls 'sovereign expressions of life'. Sovereign expressions of life are spontaneous other-regarding modes of conduct such as trust, mercy and sincerity. They are 'sovereign' in the sense that they have declared to us what is good and bad before we consider or evaluate it for ourselves. The sovereign expressions of life have the ability to break through our selfishness and express themselves in our behaviour (Løgstrup, 2007). In realizing the expressions of life, by responding to the demand of the Other, a person is becoming himself or herself. While Løgstrup locates the ethical demand and the sovereign expressions of life to somewhere outside ourselves and outside the Other, Levinas claims that the command comes from the face of the Other, and he is thus offering a different model of subjectivity. However, both of them claim that the starting point of becoming a subject is to respond to the Other's appeal. The aim is not to become a subject, however, but to do good for the sake of the Other and not for any other purpose.

Both Levinas (1967) and Løgstrup (1997) see the responsibility for the Other as unlimited, in the way that it cannot be reduced to particular positions or offices. It is not possible to say in advance what may or not may be required of us. In the face to face confrontation with the Other, we discover both our own inadequacies and our unlimited responsibility (Levinas, 1969; Løgstrup, 1997). Hence, our responsibility is not founded upon conventional rules in society. Moral discussions or practical decision making in the ethical sphere of Levinas and Løgstrup have their source in the ethical experience of the Other and how we are addressed by the Other, rather than in reason or pre-defined rules.

However, Løgstrup (1997) recognizes the indispensable function of rules in human life, as standing between us and the ethical demand, protecting us from an unbearable burden of responding directly to the demand in every situation. Moreover, he acknowledges that we sometimes are unable to know what is required of us, but suggests what the demands require of us is that we do our best for the individual or individuals to whom we are responding (Løgstrup, 1997). Levinas (1969) also recognizes that we might be thrown into doubt about what is the best course of action. We might be thrown into unsolvable complex situations, or we might lack time, resources, and competencies

(Kunz, 2006). We can never know for sure what to do, but we must try, we must do our best. Neither Løgstrup (1997) nor Levinas (1967) give us a moral guide for how to act; rather, they try to convince us of the experience of lived relationships, and how this is first and foremost an ethical event.

In Buber's (1970) humanist manifesto *I and Thou*, ethics is to be understood as a way of being and encountering the Other, the You, rather than a set of rules for how to act and treat the Other. The meeting with the Other is one of immediacy, free from prior knowledge or judgements, and in this way, Buber (1970) is close to Løgstrup (1997) and Levinas (1967). Buber's starting point is from the I, and the I's need for engagement and dialogue to become an I. He says: "I require a You to become; becoming I, I say You. All actual life is encounter" (Buber, 1970, p. 62). According to Buber, the interhuman dimension manifests itself in the relational event, and for Buber the meaning of the interhuman "...is to be found neither in one of the two partners nor in both together, but in their dialogue itself..." (Buber, 1965, p. 75). The term dialogue does not refer to speech as such, rather to the fact that human existence is inherently relational (Hycner, 1991). It appears to Buber (1970) that *dialogue* and *mutuality* come first, while for Levinas (1967), *diakonia* (service) and the *Other* are the main elements (Bøe, 2016).

2.6.2 Ways of relating

While Levinas' (1976) focus is the Other, Buber (1970) emphasizes the I-You relationship, which is a reciprocal encounter between two subjects, person and person. Buber argues that most of the time we encounter other persons as objects, in an I-It relationship. To encounter another person as a *You* is a radically different experience from encountering another person as an object. In fact, Buber would not even call it an experience (*Erfahrung*), because this suggests that the other is an object to be experienced. He offers an alternative: to encounter the Other as *presence*. This way of being in a relationship does not allow itself to be reduced to a collection of characteristics (Buber, 1970).

To be in the mode of authentic meeting is to be here and now. As human beings, we cannot be there constantly, it would be exhausting, and the community would probably

collapse. We also need reason, evaluation, reflection and discussion. I find Hycner's (1991) reflections on Buber's dialogical philosophy helpful here. He suggests that an authentic meeting (or dialogue) "...can only emerge if both persons are willing to go beyond *only* an I-It attitude and truly value, accept, and *appreciate* the otherness of the other person" (Hycner, 1991, p. 7).

2.6.3 Equality and otherness

By otherness, Buber (1970) means the recognition of the uniqueness and distinct separateness from us of the other person. To celebrate the otherness that Buber emphasizes is to enter into the relationship with the Other with openness, a not-knowing attitude, free from judgements and preplanned content. While Buber emphasizes the openness to otherness in order to let an I-You relationship emerge, Levinas (1969) emphasizes valuing the otherness of the Other for the sake of the Other. To recognize the otherness of the Other is to come to them across the world of possessing, and to welcome them. It is this very welcoming that embraces the otherness of the Other. Levinas (1969) values the experience of the Other as an idea of infinity; the Other is not reducible to our ideas, but is always more than we can say about them. This is the meaning of the idea of infinity, according to Levinas (1969).

2.6.4 The relation as possibility

Levinas' (1967) responsibility for the Other, Løgstrup's (1997) sovereign expressions of life and Buber's (1970) I-You relationship all suggest the hidden presence of possibilities. They are existential qualities belonging to the realm of relationality, as possible possibilities. They have the quality of immediacy and spontaneity. We cannot cause them to occur, neither can we control them, plan them, or use them as means.

Buber (1970) says about the I-You meeting: "The You encounters me by grace - it cannot be found by seeking" (p. 62). The relation as contact between two subjects is a possibility that comes and goes, a world of relations to step into and out of again. Knowing the world

of relationship, I-It and I-You as two different realms of being together, creates the possibility and capacity for decision making. Buber asserts that this knowing supports the person to be free, unconfined and able to step in and out of the world of I-You.

3 Aim, research questions, and context of the study

This research project grew out of a project in a local authority where I was employed. There, I was responsible for establishing a support service for young persons in vulnerable situations who were at risk of being excluded from school and work. Part of my work was dedicated to developing a research project in collaboration with the University of South-Eastern Norway. The agreement with my employer was that the subject for the research should be useful for young persons in vulnerable life situations in need of support from welfare services. In order to find the particular focus for the research project, I had conversations with practitioners in different welfare services, young persons receiving support from such services, and researchers within the field of 'youth at risk'. I asked them what they saw as an important focus for research that would be useful for practice. These conversations revealed a need for more knowledge about how to support young persons with mental health problems who are partly or wholly out of school or work. A search of relevant literature on this topic supported this focus. Based on these conversations and the literature search, I submitted an application for funding of a PhD on this topic. The study was granted full financing by the Norwegian ExtraFoundation through the Norwegian Council for Mental Health.

3.1 Aim of the study and research questions

The aim of this study is to explore lived experiences of support from the perspective of young persons struggling with mental health problems who are partly or wholly out of school and work. The study attempts to describe and interpret the meanings of lived experiences of support to a certain degree of depth and richness, diversity and complexity, in order to lead to more thoughtful support to young persons with mental health problems.

The overarching research question is: "What are the lived experiences of support in the lives of young persons with mental health problems who are wholly or partly out of school and work?" Based on this overarching question, three related questions were developed that led to three substudies. These questions were:

1. How can the phenomenon of support be understood as lived experience?
2. What are possible interrelated connections between support and space for young persons with mental health problems?
3. How can friendship-like relations be understood as an aspect of support in the context of young persons with mental health problems?

3.2 The competence group

As part of a collaborative component in this research project, a competence group was planned and established. The group included three young persons with experience of mental health problems and being partly or wholly out of school or work and four practitioners with experience of supporting young persons with mental health problems. I invited these people to join the competence group because their experiences were profoundly close to life and practice and due to their local affiliation. The members of the competence group were not interviewed in the study. None of them had prior experience with research, but two of the young persons had previously shared their experiences at conferences and seminars. In addition to the invited members, my main supervisor (Ottar Ness) and I were members of the group.

The plan was that the group would meet four times annually for three years during the span of the PhD- project, but this could be modified if needed. The first meeting of the group was aimed at getting to know each other better by sharing our motivation for participating in the group. More information about the project was given, and all members signed an agreement of confidentiality. In the next meeting, the group was involved in creating the interview guide and reflecting on the interview situation. Further, for the rest of the research process, the group was given access to parts of the anonymous written data and the ongoing analysis, which I brought to the meetings for reflections and collaborating dialogues. The involvement of the competence group is described and reflected upon more deeply in Section 4.3 of the methodology chapter.

3.3 The participants: inclusion criteria and recruitment

The research participants were recruited through a local interdisciplinary team, 'Resource Team 15-24', which was the service I had previously established to provide support to young people aged 15-24 in vulnerable life situations. The team consisted of professionals from different services supporting young persons. Some of them worked full-time in the team, while others were employed in other services and came to the collaborative meetings once a week. It was not a criterion that the participants in the study should receive support from 'Resource Team 15-24'. However, it was practical to recruit through this team because it consisted of professionals working with young persons in various ways and in different services. I met with the team and informed them about the study and the target participants, hence the sample was chosen strategically.

The inclusion criteria were:

- Age 18-25
- Experience of mental health problems, diagnosed or non-diagnosed (self-reported)
- Experience of being partly or wholly out of school and/or work
- In contact with social or welfare services

Persons with a long history of substance abuse were excluded from the study.

Letters of invitation to participate with information about the study were handed out to each team member (see Appendix 4). They then gave these letters to people who met the criteria above, whom they considered potential participants for the study. Those young persons were verbally asked by members of the team if they were interested in participating in the study. I contacted those who wanted to participate to arrange a time and place for an interview. Although the participants lived in the local area where I worked, I had not been the contact person for any of them.

The participants accepted were nine females and five males, all between the ages of 18 and 25. Despite commonalities due to the inclusion criteria, the participants were a heterogeneous group. All of them were in contact with the Norwegian Labour and Welfare Administration (NAV), which provides social assistance to persons outside

education or employment. Most of the participants were or had been in contact with the specialist health service responsible for mental health assessments, diagnostic decisions and treatment. Based on information provided by the participants, it can be said that some had experienced good parenting and some had not. The latter were in child care until age of 18, or until 21 if they desired. Some of the participants had struggled at school to meet the expected skills attainment since primary school, while others had managed school without any special educational support. Most had had experiences with bullying at school in various ways and degrees of severity. All of them saw the connection between their mental health problems and their (non-) participation in school or work. All participants were ethnic Norwegian, although Norwegian ethnicity was not a criterion for participation in the study. Every young person in the study wanted to return to school or work and manage by themselves without support from welfare services. All of them had personal goals and dreams for their future and saw themselves in the future as contributing to society.

4 Methodology: a hermeneutic phenomenological approach

This chapter describes and explores the methodology of this study. It oscillates between onto-epistemological assumptions for the methodology, 'methods' implemented during the research process, and my reflections. I aim to guide the reader through the way this study has drawn on human science methods, philosophical methods and philological methods, within a hermeneutic phenomenological approach (van Manen, 2014), in order to explore the phenomenon of *support* in this study.

In light of my profound interest in what is helpful support from the perspective of service users, I directed my attention to explorative methods in research. I wanted to understand the lived experiences of support. A hermeneutic phenomenological approach was suggested as an appropriate method for the exploration (van Manen, 2014), but to what extent and to what effort was, at that point, not quite clear. During the first year of my PhD studies, I became increasingly conscious of a lack in research literature regarding existential concerns and the meaning of support. The literature mentions initiatives, actions, and attitudes that often have supportive effects (Areberg, Björkman, & Bejerholm, 2013; Davidson, 2005; Ness, Borg, & Davidson, 2014). However, trying to look beyond appearances to the *meaning* of support as a human experience, I came to understand that my interest was mainly existential, rather than factual. I was interested in the embodied relational, spatial, and temporal experience of being supported, the experiences which are *there* but not fully visible to us and often partly unspeakable. Embodied experiences are so close to us that we hardly see them or reflect upon them (Heidegger, 2010). My interest was to search for the very core of the human meaning of support and of being supported. This growing awareness and consciousness about what I wanted to do in my study led to a turning point. I moved from having some vague ideas of using a hermeneutic phenomenological framework to realizing the appropriateness and potential of the hermeneutic phenomenological method to explore the meanings of experiences of support (van Manen, 2014).

4.1 Exploring meaning

Meaning in phenomenology is 'lived meaning'. It refers to the way that a person experiences and understands his or her world as real and meaningful, according to van Manen (1997. P. 183): "Lived meanings describe those aspects of a situation as experienced by the person in it". Lived experiences of a phenomenon can include many aspects or characteristics of the phenomenon. A variety of aspects belonging to a phenomenon, expressed and understood in diverse ways, give the phenomenon its identity, its meaning. We may be able to grasp the aspects of a phenomenon, but its identity seems to be something we cannot grasp and hold or put before our eyes (Sokolowski, 2000). To discover the identity of a phenomenon, such as support, is not an all-or-nothing event, but a complex and constant interplay between showing and hiding. The experience of the unhidden must also involve the experience of the hidden in its hiddenness, according to Heidegger (2014). A phenomenon simultaneously shows itself and hides itself; we never see it fully, only in bits and pieces, in glimpses and flashes. I certainly experienced this showing-and-hiding nature of the phenomenon in my exploration. There were moments during my research when I thought: "Yes, *now* I can see it!" Then, all of a sudden, it disappeared from me again. Gone. Hiding in shadows and darkness.

An exploration of lived, or existential meanings, as in this study, does not search for 'correct' answers. Meaning is derived from how people interpret and understand their experiences within their lifeworld and life situations. Heidegger (2014) makes a distinction between two notions of truth: *veritas* and *aletheia*. *Veritas* is the Roman word for truth based on the idea of a clear distinction between true and false. Heidegger argues that in the Western world *veritas* represents the correspondence theory of truth, as it brings certainty and a sense of what is right. *Veritas* relies on controllable methods and instrumental procedures and has the implicit assumptions of truth as correctness (*Richtigkeit*). In contrast, *aletheia* is the ancient Greek term that means unhiddenness and openness; something true is unhidden, disclosed, unconcealed. Something that is already there, which was hidden and not visible to us, has shown itself to us as it is, free from its hiddenness.

This study attempts to describe and interpret meanings to a certain degree of depth and richness, through descriptions of *lived meaning*. It attempts to explore and go beyond the taken-for-granted everyday understanding of immediate experience to gain a deeper understanding of the phenomenon (van Manen, 2014). The phenomenological philosopher Gabriel Marcel (1950) asserts the following about what depth means: “I would say that a thought is felt to be deep, or a notion to be profound, if it debouches into a region beyond itself, whose whole vastness is more than the eye can grasp” (p. 192). Insight into phenomenological meaning, however, is not merely a cognitive process. It is distinctly existential, embodied, relational, and situational. It speaks directly to our embodied sense of being and deepens our understanding of what it is to be a human being. An openness to truth as meaning is like a sensitive attitude to life as lived. Phenomenology attempts to explicate meanings as we live them in our everyday life. Phenomenological questions are therefore meaning questions, and ask for the meaning and significance of the phenomenon. Meaning questions cannot be ‘solved’ or ‘correctly’ answered. “Meaning questions can be better or more deeply understood, so that, on the basis of this insight, I may be able to act more thoughtfully and more tactfully in certain situations” (van Manen, 1997, p. 23). Aiming at a deeper understanding of meaning and more thoughtful acting, the intention of phenomenological research is not primarily oriented towards theory development, but rather towards improvement in practice.

4.2 A variety of phenomenological approaches

Phenomenology is the study of appearances of human experiences and attempts to uncover and describe the meaning structures that belong to a particular lived experience (phenomenon). Heidegger (2010) presents his ontological formulation of the etymological meaning of the Greek word *phenomenology*. He points out that *phenomenon* means that which shows itself in itself and *logos* means to let something be seen, and is captured in this famous explanation: “Hence phenomenology means: to let what shows itself be seen from itself, just as it shows itself from itself. That is the formal meaning of the type of research that calls itself ‘phenomenology’” (p. 32).

There are a variety of phenomenological schools of thought, which have grown out of different traditions. Perhaps the most important distinction between different schools is whether they are based on a Husserlian descriptive tradition or a Heideggerian interpretative tradition, or whether they combine features of descriptive and interpretative phenomenology (Saevi, 2005). My PhD dissertation is based on hermeneutic (interpretative-descriptive) phenomenology. Hermeneutic phenomenology acknowledges that all experiences are always already meaningful experiences, and thus interpretations. Interpretation is a precondition to understanding, and there is no understanding without interpretation (Gadamer, 1986). This study is inspired by philosophers and phenomenologists such as Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, Levinas, Bollnow, and Løgstrup, and the hermeneutic philosopher Gadamer. It is also inspired by scholars from the Utrecht School, in particular Max van Manen (1997; 2014). The Utrecht School (also called the Dutch School) of phenomenology has a practical orientation toward practices in professional fields and to the personal and social practices of everyday living (van Manen, 2014). Van Manen (2014) renamed this phenomenological approach the “phenomenology of practice”, referring to the kind of inquiries that address and serve the practices of professional practitioners as well as practices of everyday life. For example, a thoughtful understanding of meaningful aspects of support and of being supported may be valuable to professional practitioners as well as to anyone involved in supportive relationships in everyday living. To quote van Manen (2014): “More specifically, this phenomenology of practice is meant to refer to the practice of phenomenological research and writing that reflects *on* and *in* practice, and prepares for practice” (p. 15). Further, van Manen (2014) sums up as follows:

Hermeneutic phenomenology is a method of “abstemious reflection” on the basic structures of the lived experiences of human existence. The term *method* refers to the way or attitude of approaching a phenomenon. *Abstemious* means that reflecting on experience aims to abstain from theoretical, polemical, suppositional, and emotional intoxications. *Hermeneutic* means that reflecting on experience must aim for discursive language and sensitive interpretive devices that make phenomenological analysis, explications, and description possible and intelligible. *Lived experience* means that phenomenology reflects on the

prereflective or pre-predicative life of human existence as living through it. (p. 26, my italics)

The phenomenology of practice resembles other phenomenological traditions in which epoché and reduction are essential (Husserl, 1970). A significant distinction from other traditions, especially those mentioned above, is that van Manen's phenomenology of practice is particularly oriented towards language and the vocative dimension, which van Manen (2014) describes as *philological* methods.

In the continuation of this synthesis, when I use the term 'phenomenology', it should be taken as hermeneutic or interpretative-descriptive phenomenology. This is done in order to avoid long and awkward phrases. Although hermeneutic phenomenology has seen a shift in interest away from description toward interpretation, it should be noted that all or much of phenomenology has hermeneutic elements (van Manen, 2014).

4.3 User involvement

In this hermeneutic phenomenological study I have involved users (young persons with experiences from the research topic and practitioners who provide support to young people) as collaborators. I did this by establishing a 'competence group'. The user involvement component in this study is a contribution to hermeneutic phenomenological research methodology. To include users as collaborators in this study was inspired by a collaborative research approach (Beresford & Carr, 2012). In such an approach, creating understanding and knowledge is best understood as a co-creative dialogical and relational process (Klevan, 2017). Meanings and insights that have emerged and developed throughout this study have been a dialogical co-creative collaboration with participants, supervisors, colleagues, co-authors, fellow PhD students, and the competence group. Through dialogical collaboration, reflections and discussions, preliminary understanding was transformed into new understanding. This has been done to ensure that the descriptions and reflections resonate with real life and are recognizable to relevant practitioners as possible human experiences (van Manen, 1991).

Dialogues create and re-create understanding and hold the potential to create and re-create ourselves as individuals, in a continuous transformation process (Anderson, 2007). A significant contribution to this transformation was the collaboration with the competence group. The group was involved throughout the study, from the development of the interview guide to the interpretation of the data.

4.3.1 User involvement in research

User involvement in research has gained increased attention in recent years, both internationally, nationally and locally (Beresford & Carr, 2012; Ministry of Health and Care Services, 2014; Mjø Sund et al., 2017; Tangvald-Pedersen & Bongaardt, 2016). Collaborating with service users, relatives and practitioners, with first-hand knowledge of the phenomena in focus in mental health research, has been argued to hold the potential of making studies more responsive to user needs (Davidson, Ridgway, Schmutte, & O'Connell, 2009; Rose, 2009; Veseth, Binder, Borg, & Davidson, 2017). Service users have tended to take a different view from traditional mainstream research, and they question the trustworthiness of the knowledge derived from RCTs as a sole evidence base for policy and practice (Beresford, 2007). Rose (2008) reveals that service users were dissatisfied with the medical model as an evidence base for mental health services and for research, because it does not take into account the contextual and social factors in service users' everyday lives. Experiential knowledge, i.e. knowledge based on first-hand experience, needs to be included as a form of knowledge with the same value as clinical expertise and RCT studies (Beresford, 2007). Knowledge *for* practice is primarily embedded in knowledge *in* practice, and thus, knowledge has to be generated through what occurs in practice (Borg, Karlsson, Hesook, & McCormack, 2012). User involvement in research reflects the stance that each individual is the expert on his or her own life and everyday living, and consequently, service users, relatives and practitioners should be involved in developing knowledge that informs practice and policy (Borg & Kristiansen, 2009). User involvement in research to enhance the outcome and justify the 'usefulness' has a pragmatic concern, in terms of producing better quality research and developing services more appropriate to user needs (Ives, Damery, & Redwod, 2013). Relevant for

this rationale is the discussion of what is valid knowledge, and in particular what is described as evidence-based knowledge. User involvement in research focuses more strongly on who decides what evidence is, or more precisely, whose version of evidence is given priority and legitimacy (Askheim & Borg, 2010).

In addition to improving the quality and ‘usefulness’ of the study, my choice of including a competence group was also inspired by values of democracy and human rights (Wallcraft, Schrank, & Amering, 2009; Ward et al., 2010). A commitment to a democratic ideal in research is underpinned by respect for autonomy. Hence, to do research *on* people as opposed to *with* people will be considered a breach of autonomy (Ives, Damery, & Redwod, 2012). This rationale is rooted in human and civil rights movements and the empowerment movement which emphasize social change and equalizing power imbalances. The democratic argument is explicitly political and is primarily concerned with improving people’s lives rather than solely with generating knowledge, and hence, the research *process* is in focus rather than the outcomes (Beresford, 2003).

User involvement in research is a broad term and includes a variety of approaches to engage people with experience relevant to the research field, with varying degrees of user participation. Using a competence group is a model of collaborative research applied in several other research projects in the field of mental health (Klevan, 2017; Krane, Ness, Holter-Sørensen, Karlsson, & Binder, 2016; Ness, Borg, Semb, & Karlsson, 2014; Sælør, 2016; Veseth, Binder, Borg, & Davidson, 2013). ‘Competence group’ is an ambiguous term with no clear formula for its composition. However, the studies I refer to all bring together people with relevant personal experience for collaborative dialogues about elements of the research process and how to understand the data.

From the outset, the inclusion of a competence group was motivated by values and beliefs; the voices of the persons affected should be given power in the research. The idea was based on values such as human rights and solidarity. I must admit, however, that there were some discrepancies between my ideals and how this worked out in real life. Participation of the members of the competence group was in reality limited to certain parts of the research process. I realized that a power differential was present in the collaboration with the group, in terms of who was setting the agenda and leading the

process. The process of collaborating with the competence group was guided by me as a researcher. I was the one who invited them to meetings and who selected the texts to bring in for the members of the group to reflect upon. Ideas of collaboration I had previous to the study (e.g. writing together and giving presentations together) were not feasible because of the time and financial restrictions of this PhD project. Nevertheless, I chose to focus on giving the group as much space as possible in those parts where it was involved. The collaborative dialogues in the group aimed to provide space for the members' reflections and to let them influence my further analysis. I moved towards a focus on how the competence group could contribute in a hermeneutic phenomenological exploration of the phenomenon of support, by involving their experiences that were close to life and practice. I did so, because I believed that their perspectives and understandings would challenge my pre-understanding and open up for new understanding.

4.3.2 Exploring meanings through dialogues in the competence group

Throughout the research process, I have had dialogues with my competence group that contributed to the hermeneutic phenomenological analysis. The group was involved in my reflections and interpretations. Including a competence group in developing knowledge in a hermeneutic phenomenological study is inspired by Merleau-Ponty (2012) and Gadamer (2013), who indicate that knowledge is interwoven with subjective experiences and is an intersubjective dialogical act. After having read the texts I brought in, the members of the group shared their experiences interwoven with their lives, professions and contexts to make meaning of the texts, while the texts also gave meaning to their experiences. In a movement of questioning and wonder between the data and our own experiences, and with a close orientation to the phenomenon, new understandings emerged. Heidegger (2010) explains that a 'hermeneutic circle' is involved when initial understanding is challenged by an openness to discover something we have not yet understood. The circle moves dialogically between implicit pre-understandings and explicit understandings, between the interpreted and the interpreter(s), and between understanding parts and the whole. This process of

interpretation and understanding is continuous, and was present throughout the analysis in my study, and not solely in the dialogues with the competence group.

In the meetings, the group discussed how the data could be interpreted and understood. From the beginning of the analysis, I presented to the group the preliminary thematic aspects that emerged from listening to the interviews and from the initial reflecting and writing. I presented five themes with short reflective texts. Two of them seemed to resonate with the group members' experiences: 'ways of being' and 'having a home'. Based on the competence group's response to the themes I presented, I chose to continue to explore 'ways of being' and 'having a home'. In our next meeting, I presented phenomenological narrative examples connected to these preliminary themes for joint reflection. In this way, I could examine the potential of the examples to create contact with the readers/listeners, which is the aim of a phenomenological text. The members' reflections were merged with my reflections and preliminary understandings. Thus, the dialogue with the group created possibilities for new understandings, for each member of the group and for myself. For example, I presented text with the aim of capturing meanings of support as a relational phenomenon. During our joint reflection, one of the young members of the group said: "This is about love and friendship". Her reflection resonated with the group's experiences. We had a fruitful dialogue about what love and friendship can mean and 'look like' in relationships with professionals in the context of support. The new understandings that emerged from the dialogue were included in my writings and further explorations of the existential meanings of support. Thus, involving diverse voices and perspectives holds a potential for seeing the phenomenon in more nuanced and complex ways. The collaborative dialogues enhanced understanding of the meanings of lived experiences of support.

4.4 Human science methods in the study: interviews

Phenomenology turns to social science methods (e.g. interviews and observation) to gain experiential data for the purpose of phenomenological reflection (van Manen, 2014). The data of human science research are human lived experiences. The main purpose of

gathering data in phenomenology is to explore examples and varieties of lived experiences (van Manen, 2014). Experiential accounts are a necessary basis for addressing meaning that can be reflected upon in a phenomenological manner. Phenomenological research ‘borrows’ from other people’s experiences, because this allows us to be informed and enriched by these experiences. From a phenomenological point of view, it is not how a certain person experiences or perceives something that is of primary interest; rather, it is “...to collect examples of possible human experiences in order to reflect on the meanings that may inhere in them” (van Manen, 2014, p. 313).

4.4.1 The interviews

In this study we have used interviews as the method for gathering experiential accounts. I interviewed 14 young persons twice each over a three-month period. I chose to have two interviews per participant because I assumed it would take some time just to feel comfortable in each other’s company. I also thought that more than one hour per interview might be too long for the participants, but insufficient to capture the different themes the interview guide suggested. The first interview covered two of the three themes in the interview guide. The first theme had the purpose of facilitating our understanding of the participants’ situation; the challenges they have with mental health and participation in school and work and what their everyday lives are like. This theme was not used directly in the analysis, but it facilitated my understanding of the participants’ descriptions about what support means in their own context and allowed me to empathetically tune into their lived experiences, which is crucial in phenomenological analysis. The other two themes, which addressed experiences of support and collaboration in the context of participation in school and work, produced rich data for the analysis. In the second interview, I was able to elaborate on the descriptions that the participant had shared in the first interview that had captured my interest and curiosity or on areas where I needed further clarification. In addition, the second interview covered the third theme in the interview guide. The interviews were held in different contexts; some were held in the participants’ homes and some were held in a meeting room in the council offices. The participants decided where to have the

interviews, because I wanted them to feel as secure and comfortable as possible. The interviews in their homes were different from those in the meeting room. When I came to their home, I was the guest, someone who stepped into their arena. When they came to 'my' meeting room, they were the guests. When I visited them in their homes, I saw more of them than I did of those who came to the offices to be interviewed. We small-talked about their homes, what the place was like, if they were happy there, etc. It was a different introduction, maybe more on their terms than the interviews in the meeting room.

Each interview lasted an average of about one hour, and all were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim. I used a semi-structured interview guide (see Appendix 5) covering themes related to *support*, the phenomenon I wanted to explore. The interview guide was developed in collaboration with the competence group, in order to ensure that the questions were understandable and relevant. The questions were open-ended, for guidance only and did not determine the direction of the interviews. Sometimes I chose to probe an area that was not planned, based on my intuition. It is often more productive to allow the conversation in the interview to be fluid and spontaneous (Finlay, 2011).

The interview guide was developed within a hermeneutic phenomenological framework, asking for first-person experiences with regard to support. But at the time of developing the interview guide and conducting the interviews, I was not entirely clear about the meaning of *pre-reflective* experiences and the difference between first-person experiences in general and phenomenological lived experiences. For that reason, parts of the descriptions from the participants are more explanatory and evaluative, describing their opinions and meanings, rather than descriptions of their actual experience of a particular situation, which is what we aim for in a phenomenological study. Fortunately, I received a sufficient number of meaningfully rich descriptions of experiences of support in specific situations that had qualities valuable for further hermeneutic-phenomenological exploration.

A qualitative research interview is not a situation where a person is passively reporting facts or opinions. It is better seen as an encounter where both the researcher and the participant are actively engaged in exploring meaning (Finlay, 2011). The participants also

have their agenda and things they want to say, and I tried to balance between letting them speak about what was important to them and leading them to the focus of this study: experiences of support.

Before the interviews, I had reflected upon the importance of having a dialogue and being present and attuned toward the young person. Finlay (2011) argues that a key ingredient in successfully engaging participants in data collection is the researcher's embodied empathetic presence. This is a way of being with, rather than a technical skill, and calls for the researcher's attentiveness to the situation.

4.5 Lived experience: the methodological focus in phenomenology

The starting point of phenomenological inquiry is lived experiences, and thus phenomenology invites us to focus on and dwell with the specific qualities of the world in which we live our lives; our *lifeworld*.

The concept of 'lived experience' is translated from the German *Erlebnis* which literally means 'living through something' and reveals the intent to explore directly the pre-reflective dimensions of human existence (van Manen, 2014). "The significance of the idea of lived experience is that we can ask: What is this (primal) experience like?" (van Manen, 2017, p. 811). To ask: What is it like to experience support? implies that to undergo an experience means that there is something that this experience *is like*, and that there must be some awareness of the experience itself (van Manen, 2017; Zahavi, 2005). It is the experience itself, prior to our reflecting on it or putting words to it, which is the core of phenomenological inquiry (van Manen, 2018).

Lived experience is in itself nothing extraordinary; rather, it refers to ordinary everyday life experiences (van Manen, 2017). It is not until we begin a phenomenological questioning and ask: What is this lived experience (phenomenon) like? that we are challenged by the phenomenality of the phenomenon. Interestingly, any ordinary experience tends to become quite extraordinary when we look at it with a phenomenological gaze (van Manen, 2017).

We cannot experience something without experiencing it ourselves. Thus, all experiences are subjective. Merleau-Ponty (2012) addresses this subjective access to the phenomena in our lifeworld when he says: “Everything that I know about the world, even through science, I know from a perspective that is my own or from an experience of the world without which scientific symbols would be meaningless” (p. xxiii). However, subjectivity includes intersubjectivity, since we are always with others in our communal world. The experience is given meaning within an interplay with other persons’ experiences and our shared world, and thus, Merleau-Ponty (2012) argues that the phenomenological world is inseparable from subjectivity and intersubjectivity.

4.5.1 The moment of lived experiences

Lived experience, as a pre-reflective and subjective experience, happens in a particular moment: the moment of the ‘*now*’. We do not think about or reflect on our experiences while we *live* them. We live in the instant moment of the now, and we cannot do otherwise. We are not reflexively conscious of our intentional relation to the world, and intentionality is only available to consciousness retrospectively (van Manen, 1997). In other words, it is not possible to experience something while reflecting on the experience. As soon as we name and reflect on certain experiential moments, we have already lost the pre-reflective moment. It is a paradox, then, that when trying to capture the living or the lived moment or the ‘*now*’ to reconnect to the origin of the experience, we are always too late. When we turn to reflect on an experience, the living moment is already gone, and the best we can do is retrospectively to try to recover the experience and then reflect on the originary qualities of how the experience was in that moment (van Manen, 2017).

4.6 Philosophical methods in the study: analysis

Phenomenological analysis includes various forms of the philosophical methods of reduction (described in 4.6.1 and 4.6.2). The basis for phenomenological analysis is experiential accounts upon which the reflection can be conducted. When starting to

immerse myself in the transcribed interviews, I repeatedly read each interview and made reflective notes on descriptions that captured my interest and curiosity. Preliminary themes emerged from this process. I started out with a thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) trying to systematize themes and sub-themes. That was when I reached a turning point in this research project. I asked myself the following question: What makes this analysis hermeneutic-phenomenological and not 'simply' a thematic analysis of qualitative data based on first-person experiences? Then, I started to read van Manen's books *Phenomenology of Practice* (2014) and *Researching Lived Experiences* (1990). From these readings, I came to understand that what I needed to do was a truly phenomenological exploration, not only a thematic analysis of qualitative data, in order to reach certain depths of existential meanings of the themes that I had reflected on so far. I decided that it was not sufficient to 'be inspired by' a hermeneutic phenomenological approach. I needed to *do phenomenology* to have any hope of getting closer to the embodied and lived meanings of the phenomenon of support. It was a moment of insight that was decisive for my research journey and for myself as a novice researcher.

Realizing that phenomenology does not encourage a step-by-step procedure, or a fixed recipe for analysis, I collected all my sheets of paper and put them in a drawer and gave up the idea of systematizing them into neat and tidy categories of main themes and sub-themes. Thus, I abandoned my attempt of trying to systematize themes and sub-themes by using a rule-bound process and entered into a freer act of 'seeing' meaning driven by the epoché and reduction (van Manen, 1997). Instead, I attend to the text as a whole, informed by my recursive reading of the transcribed material, and following van Manen (2014, p. 320), I asked: "What is this text telling me? How can the eidetic, originary, or phenomenological meaning or main significance of the text as a whole be captured?" I then tried to express phenomenological meaning from the text as-a-whole by formulating thematic phrases, for example: 'Support as lived experience seems to be connected to modes of being and how we are relating to each other' and 'Support as lived experience seem to be connected to being able to act'. Moving from this holistic reading to a more selective reading approach (van Manen 2014), I listened to the recorded interviews and read the text several times again searching for statements or phrases that seemed

particularly essential or revealing about the experiences described by the participants. I highlighted these statements and tried to capture the meanings within them through reflective descriptive-interpretative paragraphs. Some phrases that were particularly evocative was used for developing and writing the phenomenological text which were structured and published as articles and which are the basis for the most meaningful findings of this study.

Experiential accounts that seemed to have a powerful potential for illuminating meaning were written. Some of these were eventually used in the articles. Experimental anecdotal writing was a fundamental and essential aspect of data analysis although not every anecdote that was used in the analysis process was included in a final article. Determining which anecdotes to use happened by the continuous analysis process. This process required reflective writing of each exemplar that alternated between expressing the particular and the transcendental, aiming for the possible experiences of the phenomenon of support that seemed to have eidetic qualities. With 'eidetic qualities' I mean structures of meaning that belong to this particular phenomenon and that transcend concrete contexts and groups of people (van Manen, 2014). Thus, data analysis using this method goes beyond cognitive processes to include sensory experiences that 'play' with the cognitive reflections while being attentive to that which moves or touches or somehow addresses us. In summary the exemplars that ultimately appeared in the published articles are those that best captured phenomenological meaning through both cognitive and sensory experience.

What is critical to understand with van Manen's approach is that the writing of the article and the analysis are *one and the same process*. Following van Manen's approach, we are not analysing the data and then writing the articles, which is a more usual way of doing it. The writing is the analysis and vice versa.

4.6.1 Entering a phenomenological attitude, through the epoché and reduction

The philosophical methods in phenomenology are *epoché* and *reduction*. Epoché in phenomenology refers to the bracketing or suspension of the various assumptions that may stand in the way of opening up access to the originary meaning of a phenomenon (Sokolowski, 2000; van Manen, 2014). In other words, epoché is meant to prevent us from making premature judgements, and it encourages us to dwell with and take a closer look at the phenomenon, allowing time for what is not yet seen to appear. The term *reduction* signifies the return to the originary experience of the phenomenon. Reduction is a withholding or a withdrawal of the natural taken-for-granted everyday world (Sokolowski, 2000). In this way, phenomenological *reduction* has nothing to do with reductionism, rather the opposite: to open up for the manifold of possible interpretations of a human experience.

Even though a phenomenological researcher aims at overcoming his or her assumptions and pre-understandings, phenomenology acknowledges that forgetting one's preunderstandings is not really possible (van Manen, 2014). Phenomenology claims an inseparable intertwinedness between person and world. The world, the 'whole' in which we are embedded, is not an external object from which we can free or distance ourselves (Gadamer, 2013). The scientific claim to rid ourselves of any pre-understandings or biases is, according to hermeneutic phenomenology, a meaningless and futile effort. What must be striven for in the research process, however, is to question and investigate one's pre-understandings. Even that is not fully possible, since our pre-understanding is so embedded in history and culture and thus not fully visible or thinkable to us.

Epoché and reduction are not easy to explain, nor to practice, maybe because they are not clear procedures, rather, they are fundamental ways of being in relation to the research process. The researcher goes back and forth between them. Thus, taken together they constitute the method. Reduction reflects a certain thoughtful attentiveness or a style of thinking, practised by the researcher in order to reach an understanding of the unique meaning and significance of something (Saevi, 2005; van Manen, 2014). To explain the reduction, Merleau-Ponty (2012) points to the formulation

of Eugen Fink, Husserl's assistant, who spoke of reduction as "'wonder' before the world" (p. xxvii), which celebrates the stepping back in order to see afresh, to be surprised at the unfamiliarity and strangeness in the everyday and well-known that we have not yet seen. When participants in a study share their experiences, they are usually speaking from *the natural attitude*, in a taken-for-granted way. Lived experience descriptions are material on which to work, and in phenomenology we move beyond the literal meaning of the concrete descriptions. The main challenge in phenomenology is to move beyond the basic data and focus on the existential meanings of the *phenomenon*. As phenomenological researchers, we do this by 'leaving behind' the natural attitude and entering into the 'phenomenological attitude' by means of epoché and reduction. The shift from the natural attitude into the phenomenological attitude is radical and comprehensive, since it questions in a reflective way everything in the natural attitude, including the underlying beliefs (Sokolowski, 2000). Adopting a phenomenological attitude requires an explicit and conscious shift between two worlds: the natural and the phenomenal. Phenomenology does not deny the natural attitude and our taken-for-grantedness of everyday thinking and acting; rather, it substitutes the phenomenological attitude in order to be able to return to the phenomenon itself (van Manen, 2014). The phenomenological attitude is thus an invitation to openness and wonder, to see things as if for the first time.

4.6.2 How epoché and reduction were practised in the analysis

In the following, I will describe and reflect upon how epoché and reduction were practised in the analysis. With a growing awareness of the meaning of openness and wondering, within the first year of my PhD studies, I encountered a new turning point in my research process. I understood that I needed to look at lived experiences of support independently from what support in this study was supposed to lead to, namely, a way to promote participation in school and work. The initial overall research question was: "What is helpful support to promote participation in school and work for young people with mental health problems?" Within this question there were underlying beliefs which I at that point did not realize: that participation in school and work is a goal, and that support is supposed to lead to this goal. In order to adopt an open and wondering

attitude, I needed to free myself from (or bracket) the purpose that was attached to the phenomenon, and to consider the phenomenon on its own terms. I had to avoid forcing my terms onto the phenomenon, which would only confine the phenomenon and close the entrances to the exploration of lived meaning. From that point, I aimed to see the phenomenon as it showed itself from itself, and to question and reflect upon the assumptions and preunderstanding I became aware of. This critical awareness also led to me to change the initial research question from “What is helpful to support to promote participation in school and work to young people with mental health problems?” to “What are the lived experiences of support in the lives of young persons with mental health problems who are wholly or partly out of school and work?” It was a profound and meaningful change that clarified my identity as a phenomenological researcher and the study as a phenomenological research study.

The methods of epoché and reduction are not something one can simply read about to ‘learn’. One has to *do* them in order to experience their vast complexity. I entered the methods of epoché and reduction by trying to practise them while also studying them in the literature. In doing so and reflecting on it, I realized that I had followed van Manen’s distinctive methodological moments of epoché and reduction. Studying the literature while simultaneously practicing the methods of epoché and reduction, supported the method’s distinctive rigor to stay disciplined and reflectively oriented to the phenomenon under exploration. There are five types of reduction used in this study, suggested by van Manen (1997): the heuristic, hermeneutic, experiential, eidetic, and methodological. These variants of reduction express increasing levels of complexity and nuance in the data analysis process.

Heuristic reduction

Heuristic reduction is the most basic level of reduction and consists of the attitude or mood of wonder in the face of the world (van Manen & Adams, 2010). This wondering attitude has something inherent which may be described as an empathetic and attuned dwelling. To *encounter* a phenomenon demands engagement and involvement, and is more than a cognitive, intellectual activity. This dimension of the reduction has followed

me throughout the study. In the beginning, I tried to empathize with the participants through repeatedly listening to each participant's description and trying to get a feel for their situation. I went on walks listening to the recorder and the participants' stories, many times. Then I lingered over passages from the data that especially caught my interest and curiosity, in order to begin to reflect upon what these could mean to the participant. I felt free to ignore passages that were not particularly relevant to my phenomenon in focus. There were moments when, by using my imagination, I exchanged my role as researcher for that of the participant; I even took the body posture (as I remembered it) of participants, in order to let their experience become a possible experience for myself. Lingis (1994) has contributed to our understanding of the body as a mode of access to the meaning of experience, whether our own or somebody else's.

In the writing process, I practised heuristic reduction by continually asking the data and the text: What does this mean? What is it about the experience of support that I have not yet seen? A concrete example of encountering the data with a sense of wonder as is necessary for this level of reduction can be drawn from article 1; "Beyond support: Exploring support as an existential phenomenon in the context of young people with mental health problems". During the analysis the co-author and I wrote reflectively about "support as being present in the presence" (Sommer & Saevi, 2017, p. 7). We tried to abstain from theoretical, suppositional and emotional 'intoxication' (van Manen, 2014) and went to etymological sources with an open attitude to elaborate the meaning of some specific words that had phenomenological potential. For example, the word 'stranger' drawn from one of the anecdotes was especially compelling. We wondered what it is like to feel like a stranger in that particular moment of being in an unfamiliar room with an unfamiliar therapist, that the participant Olivia described. Trying out different perspectives about the meaning of 'stranger', we came to wonder if there is an experiential connection between the experience of support and of being recognized. Still wondering, we asked what it was that disturbed Olivia's presence with the therapist, and this again led us into new reflections.

Each new aspect of the phenomenon, derived from the anecdotes that we elaborated, revealed that there are many possible ways of understanding the experience of support with a potential to lead us to a deeper understanding of the phenomenon. Implicit in the

data analysis process of reflective writing employing heuristic reduction is a critical questioning of our preliminary understandings while trying remain open and not reach for conclusions.

Heuristic reduction challenged me to keep alert and to be ready for surprises. It also interfered with my need to reach a final understanding, something settled once and for all. For me to stay in this attitude of wonder was a mode of always becoming, recognizing that how a phenomenon may appear is never finished, there is always more to come.

Even though I attempted to empathize with the participants' descriptions and to understand their experiences, I acknowledge that I can never fully understand how an experience is for another person. Schutz (1970) reminds us that no matter how much we try to use our imagination to understand another person, it will still always be from our own point of view and within our own meaning context, which is different from the other person's.

Hermeneutic reduction

Hermeneutic reduction challenges the researcher to reflect on his or her own pre-understandings, frameworks, and biases. Critical self-awareness needs to be practised in order to reveal one's own assumptions that prevent one from being as open as possible to the meanings of the phenomenon. However, forgetting one's pre-understanding is not really possible. To become aware of my own assumptions has been challenging because they are so embedded in my thinking and my values. The awareness of my boundaries about the purpose of support, as mentioned above, is an example of how I came to uncover something that had not been explicit to me. My experience, during the research process, is that this genuine openness is something that must be continuously practised. It was not sufficient to reflect upon my own assumptions in the beginning of the phenomenological inquiry, because I will always be influenced by my assumptions, even if they change. I am never outside my assumptions. According to van Manen (1997), the problem of phenomenological inquiry is not that we know too little, but that we know too much.

Experiential reduction

Experiential reduction requires a focus on being specific, avoiding abstraction, theorizing, and generalization. It is a call for the researcher to stay continually oriented to the experience as lived, in its concrete and non-abstract sense. It is at this level that I deeply experienced the inseparability of epoché and reduction as I was challenged throughout the analysis to stay close to the lived experience and the phenomenon and avoid the familiar strategies of abstraction, theorizing, and generalization. The main challenge, in my experience, was to stay with the lived experience through reflection and not rush too quickly into premature analysis and interpretation. I tried to take a step back, to think, with real interest, about what it meant to the participant to be in that particular situation. I tried to focus on the way the situation appeared to the participant. I recalled their body language as they were describing their experiences and was attentive to the variations in their voice and the silence between their words. To stay in touch with the lived experience and not be ‘driven away’ by my own meanings, feelings or pre-understanding, was an exercise in disciplining myself to always orient myself from the lived experience and back to it.

Experiential reduction in data analysis can be recognized in the vocative dimension of the reflective writing expressed in the text of the articles. The vocative dimension stresses the use of ordinary rather than abstract and traditional scientific language, recognizing that ordinary language brings us close to the phenomenon while abstract language distances us. An example illustrating the use of sensitive yet ordinary language can be drawn from article 2; “Lived space and support as interrelated phenomena in the context of young people with mental health problems” (Sommer & Saevi, 2018, p. 45):

“Simon reacts to his lived space differently under different conditions. Sometimes his sense of space is narrower and sometimes wider than the day before, as in this situation when he is feeling down and having a bad day. This particular morning space closes in around him. The space that yesterday gave him room to enjoy life has shrunk today. He painfully collides with the claims around him and for a while his space is limited to the size of his bed.”

In this example we abstained from theorizing or abstraction and focused on the concrete experience by using ordinary language sensitive to the existential meanings of the lived experience. In this way we aimed to capture the pre-reflective meaning of the phenomenon which is the purpose of this level of analysis.

Eidetic reduction

At the level of *eidetic reduction*, the researcher searches for the uniqueness of the experience being explored, and asks: What makes this experience different from other related experiences? For example, what makes the experience of *support* uniquely different from related phenomena such as help or care? In eidetic reduction, one needs to see past and through the particularity of the lived experience toward the universal essence of the experience. The idea of 'essence' does not refer to a generalization about human life, neither does 'universal' refer to an experience as generalizable, regardless of time, culture, or other circumstances. Eidetic reduction is concerned with how a text may resonate with our pre-reflective sensibilities, whether the text brings the experience into view, and whether the text evokes something unique about this human experience. In our reflective interpretation in the writing process, we moved between the particular (the concrete examples of lived experiences) and the universal (possible ways of understanding the experience that go beyond the concrete description). The eidetic level of epoché and reduction was for me a level of constant questioning: Does this aspect (quality) belong to the lived experiences of support? Could support be without this aspect and still be support? What does *not* belong to support as a unique human experience? Repeatedly asking these questions and reflecting on them in relation to the descriptions from the participants, a pattern of meanings and themes emerged.

Sævi (2019) describes that the eidetic reduction offers iconic images of the phenomenon, careful hints and suggestions of meaning. The anecdotes are such images. The eidetic reduction asks if the text makes room for the phenomenon to become visible and tangible, if a phrases or anecdotes within the text reverberate with our pre-reflective sense of the phenomenon, and if the examples of lived experiences evoke something unique about the phenomenon. For example, in the anecdotal examples about Olivia, the

eidetic reduction can be recognized in the existential meaning that transcends the individual perspective. In the data analysis, the search is for aspects of meaning beyond Olivia's description of a particular subjective experience. Through our reflective interpretations of the anecdotes, we moved between the particular (as articulated in the anecdote) and the universal (interpretations and understanding which give the phenomenon its invariant meaning).

Methodological reduction

Methodological reduction consists of bracketing conventional techniques from a research approach and seeking the most appropriate approach for the phenomenon under study. Van Manen (2014) warns that repeating past methodological approaches might prevent original thinking. It is the phenomenon that should lead the method or approach. The approach should make it possible "to return to the world as lived in an enriched and deepened fashion" (van Manen, 2014, p. 227). In this study I chose to have individual interviews, because I assumed that was the most appropriate way of collecting examples of subjective experiences of support. The texts (eventually the articles) were created in forms of writing and different ways of organization through a careful awareness of letting the phenomenon lead. This felt, at times, like being in a mode of uncertainty. I did not control the process, I only had to be attentively present with an acceptance that the method had to invent itself during the research process. It was challenging to be in this mode of lack of control over the process, and in particular not having control of the time it would take to finally have a strong phenomenological article. Looking at this retrospectively, I have learned how important it is to trust the process of letting the phenomenon lead, in order to maintain a sense of wonder about the phenomenon.

Even though we consciously make a shift in our way of approaching the world when we enter a phenomenological attitude and employ the methods of epoché-reduction, we cannot force insights to emerge. The insights are not derived or produced from strategies or procedures. Rather, "...phenomenological insights are encountered, discovered, given, found, or sometimes even stumbled upon" (van Manen, 2017, p. 820). Many times during this study I have reluctantly admitted I "just don't see it". The insight would not come.

Sometimes in those moments of surrender I gave up, at least for the time being and went to do something ordinary such as everyday chores or taking my dog for a walk. Sometimes, although not every time, I would then recognize a tantalizing glimpse of understanding. And I would wonder: Where did that come from? Van Manen (2018) explains these as unexpected glimpsing moments that appear and disappear without our effort and beyond our control.

4.7 The philological methods: writing the meaning

The vocative dimension of phenomenological methods is especially apparent in the process of phenomenological writing. My process of entering into the sphere of phenomenological writing has been inspired by van Manen (2014), who advocates the inclusion of an artistic dimension in the writing of phenomenological research. I started to write reflections about excerpts from the data that I found especially intriguing. In order to let the sensitive writing open up for hidden meanings and understandings of the lived experience, I tried to adopt a certain poetic or evocative style of writing. At first, it felt both very difficult and quite unfamiliar to write like this in the context of research. Eventually, after months of practising, I started to feel more comfortable with this kind of writing style, and I also experienced how it made a difference to my own entrance into insights and meanings about the phenomenon of support. Van Manen (2006) claims that it is in the act of reading and writing that insights emerge. He says: “to write is to measure the depth of things, as well as to come to a sense of one’s own depths” (van Manen, 1997, p. 127). Writing seeks to make external what is internal, and allows us to make the text our own in an intimate manner. At the same time, writing distances us from the lifeworld we seek to write about. Writing simultaneously creates distance and closeness (van Manen, 2014). The mode of reflective awareness which we seek in phenomenological writing holds the potential for insights to emerge.

4.7.1 Writing about my own experiences of support

To immerse myself in the participants' descriptions and to search for the implicit meaning of their experiences of being supported, I also drew upon personal descriptions of my own lived experiences of support. This parallel process was intended to make my own pre-understanding external in order to question it in the process of epoché and reduction. In addition, it was a discipline in writing to let something be *shown*, rather than explained. I tried to describe my experiences as much as possible in experiential terms, focusing on the situation itself and avoiding explanations and generalizations. One example of the many small texts I wrote during the analysis is a text about an experience of leaning against a stone:

I am waiting for someone I have never met before. We have agreed where to meet: in an open square, in a beautiful city. It is not my city. I am a visitor. I feel a little uncomfortable, as if I am taking up too much space. I look around me and I see a big stone in the outer area of the square and I move toward it. I lean my back against the stone. It is almost as tall as me, so it is really good to lean on to. I lay all my weight onto the stone. It is being warmed up by the sun, and I can feel this warmth being transmitted to my back. Not for a moment do I doubt its capacity to bear and tolerate my weight. It feels safe to have something to lean against. It reduces the feeling of taking up too much space. Both my body and my feeling are supported by the stone's appearance and solidity.

In the same way as the participants have their experiences, so does the researcher. Van Manen (1997) argues that an ego-logical starting point for phenomenological research is a natural consequence of the philosophical assumption of person-world intertwinedness. We can only experience something from within ourselves. No other experiences are as close to me as my own: "My own life experiences are immediately accessible to me in a way that no one else's are" (van Manen, 1997, p. 54). There is no guarantee, but rather a possibility, that the descriptions of my own experiences will help to open up the question of the meanings of support. Van Manen (1997) suggests that to be aware of one's own experience of a phenomenon may provide the researcher with clues for orienting oneself to the phenomenon. It was because *my* experience could be a possible

experience of others that I engaged in a further reflection on the experiential meanings. The many small texts that I wrote drawing on my own experiences of support gave me openings into possible meanings of the participants' descriptions.

What I searched for in my writing was to create contact, or a sense of resonance, initially between the text and myself, and then later with others. According to van Manen (2014), resonance means that the reader recognizes the experience in the text as a possibility, even though he or she has never personally had this particular kind of experience. This can be understood as the texts 'speaking' to us. Thus, we may feel emotionally and ethically addressed by the text. "Through lived experience descriptions, we may bring experiences vividly into presence, to fasten a hold on nearness" (van Manen, 2014, p. 242). A well-written example or anecdote may create an experience of presence and closeness between the text and the writer and the text and the reader.

4.7.2 Phenomenological examples

In my writings, I chose examples from the data which could support the reader's (and my own) possibility of a subjective experience of being supported. The examples were written in a vocative style, aimed at directing attention to the subjective aspects of the particular experience, rather than the 'objective' aspects (van Manen, 2014). Using a *phenomenological example* (often called an 'anecdote') usually requires editing or rewriting of the original account, and will therefore often be considerably shorter than the story as it was originally told. The purpose of the phenomenological example is to invite us to reflect and to search for the hidden meanings, the unspoken. We may be personally involved, touched, shaken or moved by the story. The phenomenological example serves the purpose of phenomenology: to draw us closer to the pre-reflective experience and to uncover possible meanings and insights belonging to the phenomenon.

It could be questioned whether editing and rewriting a description borrowed from a study participant is to change that person's words and therefore falsify the account, making it less true (van Manen, 2014). It would be falsifying data if the pre-edited text had ethnographic or factual relevance. However, a phenomenological example does not claim

to be factual, nor does it aim for generalizations, and should therefore not be valued for factual or generalizable reasons. In my writings, I have removed repetitions and language and information that is not relevant to the description of the experience or situation.

4.7.3 The writing process

Writing is the most essential process of data analysis using van Manen's (2014) approach. It should be emphasized that writing phenomenology is a process of co-writing and co-reflecting. So when I use the expression 'my writing' it should be acknowledged that it includes collaborations with co-authors. Further, the writing is far from a linear process. To write is to re-write. The extended comprehensive writing in this study includes a variety of different writing processes (described above in this chapter), for example; personal reflective writing, reflective writing to identify anecdotal examples, reflective writing to elaborate phenomenological meanings within the anecdotal examples, and etymological analysis. It is a systematic process of rethinking, reflecting and recognizing enabling the researcher to do justice to the fullness and ambiguity of the lifeworld (van Manen, 2014). In my writing and re-writing, I dwelled with the meaning of particular words, which included searching for their etymological meanings. I have searched in 'insight cultivators', such as poetry (e.g. Stein Mehren's poem *I Hold your Head*), fiction (e.g. *I Curse the River of Time* by Per Petterson), and philosophical literature (such as writings by Levinas and Løgstrup). The dwelling with words, the searching in additional sources for insights, and the going back and forth in my writings all had the purpose of generating new understandings.

To write in a second language is different from writing in one's own. My own language (Norwegian) is the one closest to my thoughts and reflections. To translate both the participants' descriptions and my own reflections into English requires a sensitivity and a mindful consideration of which words best serve the original description and its implicit and explicit meanings. It has been challenging to find the right words that are true to both the content and the atmosphere in the borrowed accounts. There is a risk of losing details that might have important values. It should not be ignored that to write research in a second language is like a 'double interpretation'. I probably chose other words than the

participants themselves and another researcher might have chosen. On the other hand, writing in a second language may also have ‘forced’ me to be even more thoughtful and attentive to the words and the language.

4.7.4 Three articles emerged

In the writing process, including all the aspects I have described above, three articles emerged as the result of data analysis. For the first article (Sommer & Saevi, 2017), we (my co-author and competence group) started out by exploring two preliminary themes: ‘ways of being’ and ‘having a home’. These gradually transformed into two existential aspects: support as relational and support as spatial. During the writing process we came to an understanding that the aspect of support as spatial was so rich that it required its own article. Hence, the second sub-study, published as article two (Sommer & Saevi, 2018), grew out of the writing of sub-study one (published as article one). In both sub-study one and sub-study two, there were relational aspects that called for a deeper exploration. The exploration of these relational aspects became the final sub-study, published as article three (Sommer, Finlay, Ness, Borg, & Blank, 2019).

4.8 Reflexivity

During the research process, I wondered about the value of reflexivity and whether reflexivity is really possible. All the strategies of reflexivity have myself as the point of departure. It is how *I* understand and interpret myself, how *I* see myself in relation to others, and how *I* reflect on other’s reflections on my current understanding that shape how I practise reflexivity in my study. Further, the social world I am a part of is so complex that it is not possible to gain a total overview of all the elements that affect me and how I understand things. What value does being transcendent about the research process have when the context is so complex and ‘messy’? Occasionally, during the research, I have thought: “What a mess this is!” The truth is that there is no escape from this messy reality. I give world meaning and the world ‘forces’ meanings upon me, in ways that are not always clear to me. However, as a novice researcher, I found that reflexivity holds an

opportunity to *show* the mess of this research process. Therefore, I include the following section on reflexivity, to make explicit how my reflections on who I am as a researcher and as a person might have affected the research process in my study. I acknowledge that this explicit reflection does not belong to hermeneutic phenomenology in the Utrecht tradition. A critical self-awareness of the researcher's prejudices and understandings is recognized through the methods of epoché and reduction, and a continuous critical self-awareness should be included in this process (van Manen, 2014). Some phenomenologists consider that a focus on the researcher's own critical self-awareness in a phenomenological text can draw the focus away from the phenomenon (Giorgi, 2010). I understand this point of view and I am ambivalent about how much reflexivity should be specifically highlighted. On the other hand, I also recognize that it is important to have a good understanding of who the researcher is, when the researcher is so embedded in the research process. Finlay (2011, 2012) has contributed to a body of knowledge about reflexivity in phenomenology and how to make it explicit. She defines reflexivity as "being thoughtfully and critically self-aware of personal/relational dynamics in the research and how these affect the research" (Finlay, 2016, p. 318). She argues that all research occurs in context. The researcher is a part of the social world that is studied. Therefore, who we are as researchers matters. The understanding that emerges during the exploration is a co-creation between the researcher, the participants and other persons involved in the interpretative process (Finlay, 2003). Consequently, researchers need to recognize their own situatedness within the research and that this position may affect the research process and outcome (Berger, 2013; Pillow, 2003). Further in this section, I include examples of how reflexivity was used to reflect upon how my personal experiences might have affected the research, the ambiguity of self-disclosure, and how taking a person-centred degree course influenced the questions I considered in the process of epoché and reduction.

4.8.1 Personal considerations

My pre-understanding of support is intertwined with my professional life as well as who I am as a person. It belongs to my lifeworld in a complex and not fully accessible way. In

the process of reflexivity, I examined my own interest and motivation for the topic of this study, which were to be found in both professional and personal experiences. I had been a teacher of pupils aged 13-16. Later on I became a mental health nurse, ultimately working with vulnerable young persons in need of support for a variety of reasons. They shared stories about support that had helped them, but also about support that had failed. I found this intriguing, because my interest was in supporting these young persons in a way that was truly helpful to them and their future. Facing young persons troubled with mental health problems, encountering their despair and pain, touched me deeply and increased my desire to support in a genuine way.

As a mother of three young adult daughters and a stepmother of a young woman and a young man, I have been close to the topic of this study. Additionally, particular family circumstances also led me deeply into the topic. In my family we have talked a great deal about what it means to be supported. Without this family experience, I would not have been able to see up close just how challenging it can be to be outside ordinary social settings such as school. I have experienced how challenging it can be to ask for support from public services. I have also experienced how crucial this support is when it is present. Hofmann and Barker (2017) suggest that having experiential knowledge of the research topic may enhance the researcher's empathy with the participants. The participants may find they can speak more freely, without interruptions to clarify points for the researcher.

4.8.2 Questioning self-disclosure

A possible dilemma in having experiential knowledge of the research process is whether to disclose one's own experiences. In some of the interviews I chose self-disclosure. I followed my intuition about when to disclose, but I cannot say for sure why I sometimes disclosed and why it sometimes felt right. What I can say is that self-disclosure created a connection between the participant and myself, which was manifested in greater openness and perceived presence in the dialogue. My role as a professional receded and the dialogue became more genuine. It may be questioned whether this observation is only my assumption and feeling, or whether perhaps the participants interpreted the situation differently than I did. I asked some of the participants what they felt about my

self-disclosure. They said that it made them feel more comfortable and that it was easier to open up. However, it might have been difficult for them to say that they did not like it and that they would have preferred me not to disclose.

Another possible risk when disclosing my own experiences is that the participant may feel that attention is drawn away from their own story. The agreement for the interview was that I was going to listen to *their* stories. To disclose one's own experiences, even if they are appropriate to the dialogue, requires the researcher to consider this possible ethical dilemma of drawing the attention away from the participant. That would be a very unfortunate situation. However, a careful and sensitive sharing of my own experiences, while keeping the focus on the participant's story, might enhance equality in the dialogue, or in other words, it might strengthen the dialogical qualities of the interview. Another ethical dilemma that should not be ignored is that I am the one who brings these experiences into written form, which means that *my* experiences from the interview situation are given authority. The participants' voices in this process are silent.

In the interview situations with the participants, my role as a researcher was different from that of a nurse. I needed to orient myself to this new role. Even though it was challenging not to enter a provider role and to keep from helping and advising, I experienced my new role as researcher as liberating. I found myself more able to really listen to the young persons and to be present for what they shared, without simultaneously reflecting on what to do to help. I was totally absorbed by their stories. I was amazed at how generously the participants shared their personal experiences, included painful experiences. It was thought-provoking that the dialogues in this context felt more genuine than those in the nurse-client relationship. I wonder if it had to do with my role as a 'listener', as one who is there to witness someone's story. All I focused on was their story. My attention was not on how I could help or on possible programmes, interventions and requirements. In addition, the participants came to the situation with an expectation of being heard. They did not come to be with someone who was there to *do* anything. This created a different relational dynamics that enhanced the dialogue.

4.8.3 Becoming a person-centred researcher

This research project was conducted in the world's first academic degree programme in person-centred healthcare and consequently, a reflection on person-centredness in relation to my study was included in the research process. My attention was drawn to a variety of questions within the person-centred approach, such as: What is a person and what does it mean to have a person-centred approach in healthcare and in research? Specifically, the core question for me in relation to person-centredness was: How can I meaningfully reflect upon person-centredness and include it in my study? Although this study employed a phenomenological approach, I aimed to remain open to these questions throughout the research process.

Buber, Løgstrup and Levinas describe a person-centred relationship as a dialogical relationship of I and the Other, with an imperative for action. The 'otherness' of the Other keeps me from defining and limiting the Other because I recognize the Other as more than I can ever capture in my understanding. In this way, a person-centred approach is ethical in its relational nature. Thus, to *be* a person-centred researcher may not be possible or even desirable, if we take the ideas of Buber, Levinas and Løgstrup seriously. Rather, a *becoming* of a person-centred researcher is my aspiration. In the mode of *becoming*, nothing is settled; there is no end. It is an open and ongoing process.

However, there are some crucial philosophical perspectives that underpin a person-centred framework in research; the unconditional recognition of personal experiences as the source of knowledge and meaning. Thus, I acknowledged the lived experiences of the participants and the lived experiences of the researcher as important sources for exploring meaning. In the dialogues between the participants and the researcher, both parties are active in exploring meaning and understanding, recognizing that there is no such thing as an endpoint of meaning. Inspired by the ideas of Buber, Levinas and Løgstrup, becoming a person-centred researcher is to welcome the otherness of the participants and to engage with them with openness and wonder.

4.9 Ethical considerations

The study was approved by the Norwegian National Committee for Medical and Health Research Ethics (2015/378) (see Appendix 6), and the formal ethical requirements have been followed to the best of my judgement. However, to meet the ethical requirements inherent in the approval from the committee is much more complex in real life than on paper. What does it mean to be an ethically responsible researcher? What does it mean to 'not harm' (the participants) in the context of research? I contemplated some dilemmas during my study related to procedural aspects, to my role as a researcher, and the 'use of' persons' stories and their trust, for the purpose of my study.

4.9.1 Contemplating informed consent

In this study, informed consent was gathered from all the participants prior to the interviews (see Appendix 4). Crucial aspects of informed consent are the power of free choice and to be so well informed as to know the possible risks and benefits (Walker, 2007). The participants in this study were recruited through a third party, i.e. practitioners who knew the young person who was invited. I cannot tell for sure whether or not the power balance involved influenced the participants' acceptance of the invitation or made it difficult to decline it. However, when I phoned the potential participants to give more information about the study, I had the impression that all of them wanted to participate. I offered them to send me an SMS to say that they had changed their mind and did not want to participate, but none of them did. I also informed them about their right to withdraw from the study, at any time, without any consequences. I also repeated this information after the first interview. What I found was that all the participants were more than willing to participate, also in the second interview, and some of them even offered to contribute more if I needed it. After the second and final interview, comments like: "Just let me know if you need me to tell you more!" were quite common. I understood these comments as an affirmation of the value of being listened to and of contributing to something good. These young participants all wanted to contribute to helping other young persons in difficult situations. Further, perhaps the fact that they were invited to contribute, and that someone asked for their

competence and was interested in what they had to tell, could be of greater importance and value that I realized prior to this study. I was struck by their willingness to share their stories with me, but also by the responsibility I had to treat them and their stories with respect and in an ethical manner. It is difficult if not impossible to predict ethical dilemmas that may occur during interviews (Miller & Bell, 2012). Informed consent should therefore be an ongoing process, something we check and talk about during the process of interviewing.

Informed consent includes information about what is going to happen to the participants' stories after the interviews. I informed them that what I wrote would be my interpretation and that there was no guarantee they would agree with my understanding. This seemed so uncomplicated when I explained it, but I found it challenging when I was working with the data and trying to be true to their experiences and simultaneously search for possible meanings and insights beyond the specific story. I repeatedly asked myself: What is this experience like to the person sharing it? How can I understand this young person's experience in that particular situation?

4.9.2 Contemplating confidentiality

The qualitative research interview probes human existence in detail. It provides access to subjective experiences and allows researchers to describe intimate aspects of people's lifeworlds (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). According to Birch, Miller, Mauthner, and Jessop (2002), ethical problems in qualitative research particularly arise because of the complexities of researching personal accounts and bringing these accounts to the public arena. The participants' anonymity was ensured by the use of pseudonyms and by omitting or changing details that could reveal the participants' identity. I needed to give this special attention when presenting excerpts from the data to the competence group. The group included three local practitioners who might have known some of the participants and their stories. This could give rise to a conflict, because sometimes the context and the participant's life situation would be crucial to understand the meaning of the experience. Another dilemma in ensuring anonymity in research is that it could be

an alibi for researchers to interpret the participants' utterances without being contradicted (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). While I underlined the principle of anonymity and my responsibility to ensure this, it did not seem to be of such importance for the participants. On the contrary, some of them even said that they did not mind being recognized. Retrospectively, I wonder if maybe some of them wanted to be acknowledged and credited by having their names mentioned. However, I was so determined to fulfil the ethical procedures that I was not responsive to this at the time of the interviews.

4.9.3 Contemplating empathy and openness

Being empathetically understanding and compassionate is easy, and almost inevitable, when meeting young persons who share painful life experiences. My empathy was deeply felt and honest. However, this is not unproblematic in an interview situation, where my intention is to access rich descriptions of the participants' lived experiences. Kvale and Brinkman (2009) call for attention to the danger of the warm and empathetic atmosphere which characterizes many qualitative interviews. The researcher's ability to listen attentively may encourage the participant to be more open than he or she planned to be and is comfortable with after the interview. It requires sensitivity and moral judgement from the researcher to know how far one should go or when to stop in the interviews, and how to deal with the data afterwards without offending the person. Fog (1984) points to the ethical dilemma when the researcher wants the interview to be as deep and probing as possible. On the one hand, there is a risk of intruding on the person. On the other hand, in being as respectful as possible to the interviewee, the researcher risks collecting shallow and superficial data. The focus on the interviews in my study was *support*, which was basically a positive focus. However, it was also to be expected that experiences of lack of support and 'support' that was not experienced as supportive would be shared. It was emphasized that the participants should not feel compelled to speak about anything they did not feel comfortable about sharing. In those situations where I could sense that the participant was uncomfortable or hesitating to continue to speak, I always checked whether the person was happy to continue or alternatively

wanted to stop or to change the subject. If a situation arose where emotional difficulties were experienced as a result of the interview, it could be followed up by the participant's contact in the local services. I also gave all the participants my mobile number, in case of any difficulties that needed to be followed up after the interviews. However, neither of these options turned out to be necessary, at least not to my knowledge.

5 ‘Findings’: meaning insights

The term ‘findings’ suggests results that can be grasped and held tightly, found once and for all, listed and presented in an orderly way as clear answers to the question of inquiry. In this dissertation, ‘findings’ are better understood as revelations that have shown themselves and as a bringing forth of diverse meanings and hidden understandings. We (I and the co-authors of the sub-study articles) allowed insights to appear, not in a mode of passive acceptance, but in an active mode of involvement in making meaning. These insights of meaning emerged out of vagueness through systematic scientific analysis. They should be understood as preliminary and open-ended. We never know everything about a phenomenon, and whatever appearances it may have presented to us, there are still others being held in reserve (Sokolowski, 2000).

This dissertation contains three sub-studies that explore the meaning of support from the perspective of young persons with mental health problems. By borrowing these lived experiences of support, different aspects of the phenomenon were explored and deepened through data analysis of the 14 interviews resulting in three published articles. Article 1 was published in the “Indo-Pacific Journal of Phenomenology”, Article 2 was published in “Phenomenology & Practice”. Article 3 was published in the “Journal of Humanistic Psychology”. All three articles are included in the appendix section of this synthesis. In this chapter, I present an overview of the aims, methodology, findings and concluding remarks of each article.

5.1 Sub-study 1: *Beyond Support – Exploring Support as Existential Phenomenon in the Context of Young People with Mental Health Problems*

This first study was an opening into understanding support as lived meaning. It aimed to explore support as an everyday interpersonal phenomenon going beyond the natural attitude, the usual taken-for-grantedness of our unconscious mode of experiencing support, and seeking the existential meanings of support as possible human experiences.

The title assumes that support, as an existential phenomenon, goes beyond success factors for participation in school and work and beyond statistics on which methods or interventions give the best results regarding school and work attainment. It goes beyond the focus on results and achievement and moves towards the meanings of what support may be and mean to us as human beings. Using a phenomenological approach, inspired by the Utrecht School (van Manen, 2014), and analysis of two contrasting personal accounts, we examined how 'support' is used in ordinary language and how support is seen in a variety of ways of being together.

Support, as a human phenomenon, is part of our everyday life and language. It is so close to us that it is only in its absence, when we need support and it is not there, that we become aware of it (Heidegger, 2010). A search for the etymological meanings of the word 'support', in order to put us in touch with the lived experiences from which the word originally arose, showed the closeness of support to life and indicated 'support' to be a relational and moral act towards someone. Allowing ourselves to be attentive to the meanings of the word 'support' created a reverberation with the lived meanings that might have become blurred or forgotten by an unconscious 'overuse' in healthcare and social services, educational settings, professional counselling, information technology support, etc. To discover possible meanings of support as something beyond our ordinary understanding may be of significance if we want to offer more thoughtful supportive acts.

The article presents two examples of lived experiences of professional support. The phenomenological exploration revealed that support seems to be inseparably connected to the qualities of the relationship between the person and the professional provider. The concrete relationship between the person and the professional seems to speak directly to the receiver of the support, whether it is intended or not. The relationship is the middle ground and holds a relational atmosphere with potential for support to happen. The relational atmosphere may be understood as the feeling of being with someone who cares and regards the receiver of support as someone of significance. The experience of being supported seems to be connected to being noticed and attentively known by someone. This attentive knowing encompasses a sensitive not-knowing and non-judging attitude that allows room for wonder. The opposite, the feeling of being judged and that the other's knowing is 'fixed', can make it difficult to recognize oneself in the other's gaze

and words, and may create the sense of being a stranger to the other and to oneself. True presence seems to be a significant quality in being supported, and it goes beyond joint physical presence. A supportive presence can be described as ‘communion’: an experience of togetherness. Being together in a felt togetherness may be interpreted as being existentially with and for the other. It is both an attitude and a way of acting. It is a way of being with the other where one is, at least for a short time, freed from one’s prejudices and self-awareness and absorbed by the other’s presence. This mode of being-with is not a persistent state, but rather a fluid present in which we move back and forth. It is only possible if we embrace an open and wondering attitude towards the other. In felt togetherness there resides the potential of a more equal power relationship where *how* we are together is more important than *who* we are together.

This sub-study implies that support is a relational phenomenon. It emerges as a spontaneous response to what the situation asks for in the very moment of true presence, and it orients beyond conventions and impersonal tasks. Support can be understood as what Løgstrup (2008) calls a ‘sovereign life expression’. It is related to what is right and good, rather than what is professionally correct. A sovereign life expression can be regarded as a gift: it claims nothing in return, no expectations of results, success, improvements or gratitude. Support as a gift can be welcomed or rejected. Thus, there is always a risk that support might not be experienced as supportive. Support does not let itself be used to promote specific outcomes, but exists as a free phenomenon, beyond our control. Support, as an existential experience, is not guaranteed in preplanned fixed models, programmes or initiatives of support. Models and programmes are only potentially supportive, but not sufficient for support to be given and received. The existential insights of this study invite professionals to trust uncertainty as a way of being open, embracing an attitude of wonder as the ‘method’ of support. The findings do not disregard models and programmes as valuable initiatives and measures in the context of supporting young persons with mental health problems. Rather, they point to the significance of a broader understanding of the possible human experiences of support which go beyond measurement and predictability and call for an openness towards what is still unknown about support.

5.2 Sub-study 2: *Lived Space and Support as Interrelated Phenomena in the Context of Young People with Mental Health Problems*

During the analysis with sub-study 1, the notion of lived space as an aspect related to support emerged and caught the authors' curiosity and interest. Descriptions by the participants where moments of support and space seemed to mutually influence each other became a starting point for a hermeneutic phenomenological exploration. Hence, the aim of sub-study 2 was to explore whether and how support and lived space were related, and whether some ways of providing support might shape the participants' sense of lived space.

The article questions spatial terms frequently used in research literature about young persons, such as 'outside' and 'inside' in order to describe their locations with regard to school or work. Exploring space from a phenomenological viewpoint, this article offers an alternative understanding to these socio-political and theoretical conceptualizations. As a human experience, being inside or outside of significant contexts and settings in life is sensed and lived. By adopting a hermeneutic phenomenological approach and moving reflectively between the experiential accounts and the methodological tools of epoché and reduction, the potential interrelatedness between space and support was explored. Hannah Arendt's (1958) understanding of activity and freedom and Otto Friedrich Bollnow's (2011) attention to human space were especially influential insight cultivators in this hermeneutic phenomenological analysis. In line with the tradition of the Utrecht School of phenomenology, this article's interest is primarily practical. It aims to provide a more insightful understanding of experiences of support and space as concrete human phenomena for the purpose of improving professional practice.

Three phenomenological themes evolved through the reflective hermeneutic process, and became aspects for further exploration: personal and shared space, the importance of a safe home, and the release from being enclosed in problems to become actively involved in one's own future and in the community.

The sense of personal space is influenced by changing circumstances and relationships. Since we always coexist with other human beings, other persons affect our lived space. The analysis revealed that being available for support that can exceed lived space seems to rest on the quality of the relationship. A caring relationship has the potential of transforming lived space. Care, as a relational phenomenon, is like a catalyst for support. Supportive actions seem to be more likely to be accepted and received when interpersonal care is involved. Caring relationships balance power differentials and allow for the receiver of support to act more freely to recover more space.

To have a home, a safe place to go away from and return to, reflects human movement in the world. The participants described their experiences of having, or not having, a home of their own. A protected place could even be an assigned desk in the classroom, as was mentioned by one participant. Having a protected place unfolds lived space. On the contrary, to be deprived of a protected place of one's own interrupts the sense of a free space in which to live (*Lebensraum*). Lived space and place are complex experiential phenomena influenced by circumstances beyond our control. They cannot be explained by simple cause and effect. Rather, to acknowledge the complexity and the paradoxes of these human experiences might expand our way of understanding lived space as interrelated with support.

The analysis revealed that being anchored in the present while at the same time envisioning a potential future with possibilities for dreams and hopes to be realized opens up a sense of space for the young. Support therefore needs to be navigated in the terrain of the present and future. This includes a certain degree of attachment and commitment to the young in their everyday life, but at the same time, allows them the freedom to act and care for themselves.

The study implies that support and lived space are related in complex ways. Helpful support might create space to live in, room for nourishment and growth, and freedom to be and become. Helpful support seems to be anchored in care, autonomy and respect, and an openness to the everyday unpredictability and nonlinear realities of life. The study points to the need for support services to be more welcoming to alternative ways of

understanding the complex experiences of being inside and outside, and to expanding possible alternative ways of supporting young persons in recovering their lived space and hopes for the future. The study also reveals insights that challenge the ideal of progress and harmony as normal life, for young persons in particular. The human experience of lived space with all its interruptions and detours as related by the participants is recognizable in life as we know it.

5.3 Sub-study 3: *“Nourishing Communion”*: A less recognized dimension of support for young persons facing mental health challenges?

The aim of this sub-study was to explore and explicate the phenomenon of ‘nourishing communion’. The potential of ‘nourishing communion’ was discovered as a possible aspect of support in the analysis of sub-studies 1 and 2. This final sub-study considers this idea as it relates to support in more depth. We (the authors) wondered: How can we understand the profound qualities of supportive relationships? The phenomenon of ‘nourishing communion’ was not clear to us in the beginning of the analysis, but was slowly revealed and manifested through the reflective hermeneutic process as the actual phenomenon of interest. The data were analysed using van Manen’s (2014) hermeneutic phenomenological approach to uncover possible meanings of nourishing communion in lived life. In addition, in-depth reflexive dialogues between the first and second author were included in the analysis.

The analysis revealed that in the moment of nourishing communion there is a feeling of trust and holding, a mutual participation, an acceptance in felt togetherness, a sense of being found and received, and a sense of attuned resonance. These themes were anchored in situations of support shared by the participants. A commonality among the themes is that they seemed to nourish the participants’ lives in a variety of ways. The participants described instances of being nourished by the presence of the other in a trusting relationship. An unconditional acceptance might be understood as a bridge to

communion and as a way of being-with without evaluation and devaluation. In moments of nourishing communion, there is mutual disclosure and an experience of feeling felt by the other, of being cared for and taken in. Nourishing communion, as felt togetherness, was experienced and understood as a source of comfort and healing. We discovered that the merging of interpersonal worlds holds a possibility of unfolding each person's potential and of creating something greater than either person alone could achieve.

The sub-study suggests that 'nourishing communion' can emerge in relationships and communities both within and outside professional services. However, it seems more likely to take place outside professional services in contexts where young persons live their everyday lives. This highlights the importance of everyday life as the orientation point for social and mental health support to young persons. These insights suggest that practice in work with and on behalf of young persons should include resources beyond those available in the professional domain. The findings also encourage practitioners to emphasize relational qualities like trust, mutuality, acceptance and attunement. This involves a distancing from the traditional professional agenda of knowing, informing and advising, in favour of being-with. The sub-study offers an advanced understanding of the importance of nourishing supportive relationships for young persons with mental health problems. The term 'nourishing communion' may reflect healing possibilities. The findings challenge current practice by suggesting the need for a different approach to collaboration with young persons and their networks.

6 Discussion

The purpose of this study is to contribute to a more nuanced and thoughtful understanding of support in order to increase the possibilities of supporting young persons with mental health problems in a way that is *experienced* as supportive by them. We asked the following questions: How can the phenomenon of support be understood as lived experience? What are possible interrelated connections between support and space for young persons with mental health problems? How can friendship-like relations be understood as an aspect of support in the context of young persons with mental health problems? The three sub-studies revealed aspects and meanings of support as described in the previous chapter. In this discussion the findings have been organized into three overarching themes: 1) *support as lived experience*, 2) *support as a relational experience* and 3) *support as a spatial experience*. In this chapter, these themes are discussed in relation to relevant research, perspectives, and theories, and reflect on how our study is situated within the context of this related body of knowledge. In addition, I consider the research process in light of appropriate criteria for evaluating its trustworthiness and reflect on the methodological challenges posed by the study. Lastly, I discuss the implications that this study might have for practice and identify possibilities for further research suggested by the findings.

Overall, this study uncovers some aspects that has the potential to create a deeper understanding of possible existential meanings of support, with the intention that this understanding might contribute to more thoughtful and person-centred practice. At first glance, the meaning of support may seem obvious, because we often take for granted what is closest to life as it is lived. However, the phenomenon of support showed itself to be far more complex and ambiguous than I thought prior to the study. Embodying an attitude of wonder and curiosity throughout the phenomenological process revealed that what might have been seen as ordinary is really quite extraordinary. The study demonstrates that support, as lived experiences, goes beyond the good intentions of professionals and beyond programme and policy guidelines. The phenomenon of support, as revealed in this study, showed itself to be a fragile and vulnerable phenomenon because it is so deeply dependent on relational aspects, on personal and

contextual factors, on circumstances outside our control and sometimes our consciousness. Simultaneously, the phenomenon of support showed itself to be a powerful phenomenon, with the potential to change the persons' lived space and their ability to act and move towards a desired future. Support cannot be forced to happen, and appears only within the context of personal experiences. It is a possibility, rather than a guarantee. This study adds to existing knowledge about support and supportive relationships a deeper understanding of support as a relational phenomenon that has the potential for being simultaneously powerful and vulnerable; reflecting the complexity and ambiguity of the lived experiences of support.

As described in Chapter 2, previous studies have focused on describing support as an outcome of programmes or interventions, or have attempted to identify factors that contribute to support (Bejerholm et al., 2015; Bond, Drake, & Becker, 2008; Schindler & Sauerwald, 2013). However, as far as we are aware, no previous studies have examined support as lived experience phenomenologically. The assumption that preceded our study was that exploring lived experience of support phenomenologically might reveal new understandings of support as an existential phenomenon. Phenomenological research begins and ends in lived experiences (van Manen, 2014). In order for services to be person-centred, the desired approach for health and social services (McCormack et al., 2017), it is necessary to understand and acknowledge the lived experiences of the persons themselves.

6.1 Support as lived experiences: rhetoric and reality

In recent years, in both policy documents and mental health service delivery, there has been increased acknowledgement of the significance of the subjective experiences of people with mental health problems and the experiences of their family members (Norwegian Directorate of Health, 2014; Norwegian Ministry of Health and Social Affairs, 2009). In particular, recovery-oriented research and practice and the person-centred healthcare movement have spearheaded the valuing of users' experiences for research, policy making and service delivery (Borg & Karlsson, 2017). Grounded in humanistic

values, both the recovery movement and the person-centred healthcare movement aim to support people to reclaim and maintain control over their lives through informed decision making and the creation of partnerships between users, their families and the services (Borg & Karlsson, 2017; Davidsson, Rakfeldt, & Strauss, 2010; Lafferty & Davidsson, 2006). Nevertheless, in spite of this increased acknowledgement of the importance of personal experiences, there is still a gap between rhetoric and reality. People receiving support and healthcare continue to have mixed or poor experiences (Dewing, Eide, & McCormack, 2017).

Our study reveals that support is not supportive to a person until it is *experienced* as support by that person regardless of the good intentions of professionals and programmes. We can and must have supportive intentions. We can and must have systems and interventions based on humanistic values, such as respect for human dignity, autonomy, and equality. But these values are not necessarily supportive per se. Neither are services that aim to be recovery-oriented or person-centred a guarantee for support to be realized. The current system, employing models, planned pathways, and plans for treatment or attending school or work, is not necessarily wrong. From the perspective of our study, they are simply *insufficient* for an experience of support. We might say that support as lived experience is outside the scope of rules and models, standardized procedures, and systems. Support has something more to it: the nature of subjective experience.

6.1.1 Starting from the experiences of support

Because support is a personal and subjective experience, it cannot be systematized or instrumentalized in order to be guaranteed. Our study reveals that we have to start with the person's life experiences and the social context and not with outcomes, standardized support models, and abstract principles. As such, our study adds to the knowledge development of recovery research and to the perspective of subjective experiences as the starting point and the centre for all support (Karlsson & Borg, 2017). It emphasizes knowledge that is gained from subjective experiences and it orients towards the persons'

own values. This differs from evidence-based medical approaches orienting towards empirical evidence (Slade, 2012). In current practice, there is an increased emphasis on outcomes and standardized treatment driven by principles for organization and management encouraged by neoliberal ideas operationalized as new public management (NPM). This represents a marketplace ideology in the public sector (Ekeland, 2014). Karlsson and Borg (2017) state that the kind of knowledge that is valued by NPM is driven by a desire for increased effectiveness, the 'expert knows best' mentality, and the measurement of results. RCTs are the preferred research method. What counts is what can be counted, while individual and particular aspects are marginalized in healthcare (Martinsen, 2005). Consequently, the most influential and powerful knowledge base for national guidelines for treatment and support is drawn from RCT studies (Slade & Longden, 2015). Ekeland (1999) claims that the influence of NPM runs the risk of instrumentalization of services at the expense of humanistic values. My concern is that this strong faith in methods and 'best treatment' might mislead professionals to believe that they know what support *is*. Even more seriously, it might exclude persons that do not benefit from so-called best treatment. Young persons who do not respond as expected to the plan offered might even risk being judged as 'not motivated' or 'not available for treatment and support' (Sundet, 2004; Sundet et al., 2016). Our study emphasizes the need to make some detours from preplanned treatment pathways to focus on people's experiences and try to understand what support might mean for them. There is also a need to truly value the person's own plan and uncouple the person's life from preconceived notions of desirable outcomes determined by health and social services. Davidson, Tandora, and Ridgway (2015) state that life is not an outcome. Davidson et al. (2015) critically question the view of recovery as an outcome. With a focus on outcomes, the persons struggling with mental health problems risk their lives being placed on hold until their symptoms are reduced or have disappeared and they have 'recovered'. These authors further argue that recovery is, after all, a strategy of having a better life and that being in recovery is not a linear but a complex, multi-dimensional, and dynamic process. The perspective of personal and subjective experiences as fundamental in recovery, as a process, adds to our study a critical view of support as a tool to achieve participation in school and work. If support is only a tool towards a predetermined goal,

then support will be evaluated and measured by increased participation and not by the persons' experiences of what is supportive to *them*. Further, it will diminish the view of support as an ongoing, dynamic process. Considering our findings in the light of recovery perspectives, support is first and foremost, to support a person in actively pursuing the kind of life he or she wishes to lead. Human life is complex, and, for many people, overly complicated. Support to young persons calls for actions that embrace complexity and resist the oversimplification often found in predetermined plans and procedures. Our study is in line with Bøe and Thomassen (2017), who take an intersubjective and dialogical approach and suggest that we need to continuously try to develop new ways to help and support, starting from the person's experiences of his or her life situation, if we are to provide change in the person's life. This calls for a practice that starts from the experiences of the young persons and embraces their dreams and desires for what is a meaningful and pleasurable life.

Our study suggests that support as lived experiences does not belong to the sphere of the countable and generalizable. Therefore, I maintain that support as lived experience needs a different approach that resembles and resonates with life as we know it from our everyday living. It requires an approach that is not distorted with abstract concepts and general explanations that might mislead us to believe that we know what support is. What is needed is a phenomenological perspective, with the person's lifeworld as its focus (Hummelvoll, 2016). Thus, in terms of support to young persons, practice needs to get closer to their lives as they are lived, including the material and social contexts of those lives, using ordinary language which they can relate to and recognize. This personal and contextual approach is recognized in the recovery perspective. Personal recovery brings into light the unique, concrete, and lived life true recovery processes. Social recovery focuses on the everyday life and places the persons' contexts more in the foreground (Borg, 2007; Tew et al., 2012; Topor et al., 2011). Davidson et al. (2010) argue that from a recovery perspective, the person's everyday life should be the primary locus for support and care. People can deal with and manage their difficulties within the context of their ongoing lives, rather than placing the everyday life on hold until symptoms and difficulties have vanished or decreased. Recovery, as a social process, includes the dynamic relationship between the person and the environment.

The recovery perspective can offer a framework for understanding support as a personal and contextual phenomenon. Taking the recovery perspective, support does not only *start* from the subjective experiences, it is a continuous process of letting the person's own experiences lead the process of support. In line with phenomenology, a person's experiences can not be separated from the person's context (Merleau-Ponty, 2012). Recovery, as a central perspective in current mental health practice, can add to our study an established practice approach in which support can have the possibility for being realized as a lived experience. Considering that support is such a central term used in recovery research, the findings from our study can add richness to the body of knowledge within recovery research. Our study can offer a deeper understanding of support as a genuine lived experience reflecting aspects of meanings that seem to belong to support as a phenomenon.

6.1.2 Professionals' autonomy

Valuing lived experiences as the fundamental source of understanding, as revealed in our study, calls for professionals to embrace an attitude of wonder and curiosity in every encounter with a young person in need of support. It calls for mutual exploration together with young persons to find out how they can be supported in their particular life situation. Given that support is a possibility rather than a guarantee, and that it appears spontaneously within the relationship, professionals need to be able to be free to pursue that possibility. They cannot be restrained from this pursuit by requirements that are generated outside of the person's experiences. Drawing on Løgstrup (1997), professionals need to have the autonomy and the opportunity to let their actions be guided by what the particular situation calls for. Ekeland (2004) argues that the professional's autonomy is the core of the relationship with the person receiving support, and is, in fact, a precondition for the autonomy of the other person. I question to what extent this autonomy is possible within systems that are increasingly standardized. Løgstrup (1997) points to the danger of being governed by rules and applying the same norms in shifting realities and situations. He considers that doing this might lead to a violation, or at the very least an encroachment, upon the person's being. Following

Løgstrup, sensitivity for the unique person and what the unique situation calls for might counteract unethical dehumanizing actions. According to Buber (1970), Levinas (1969), and Løgstrup (1997), procedures or norms simply cannot be the basis for action in such contexts. From the perspective of our study, the basis for action must come from within a relationship embracing the autonomy of both the person receiving support and the person offering support.

6.2 Support as relational: complexity and ambiguity

The complex and ever-changing connections between support and relationships reveal that a relationship is not something that *is*. It is something that develops and happens. It is lived rather than understood. This calls for caution when it comes to how relationships are described and understood in our study. A certain humility is required. It must be acknowledged that there is more to understand about how support and relationships are connected.

6.2.1 Support in collaborative relationships

Support is a relational phenomenon that takes place within relationships. The findings of our study are congruent with a significant body of research emphasizing the relationship between users and service providers in mental health practice as the single most effective and helpful factor in service delivery (Lambert, 1992; Norcross, 2011; Topor & Denhov, 2015; Wampold & Imel, 2015). Wampold (2001) takes a relational-contextual focus and explains therapy as a process where the therapist and the client establish a trusting relationship and where both parties actively collaborate towards a common goal. The significant helpful factor is to be found in a collaborative relationship. The most applied definition of 'relationship' in mental health is found in psychotherapy research. It is described by Bordin (1979) and is not dependant on a particular theoretical orientation. Bordin argued that the therapeutic relationship or the 'working alliance' consists of three elements: a reciprocal agreement and understanding about the goal, a reciprocal agreement about the tasks in the process towards the goal, and an emotional bond

between the parties. Bordin (1979) stated that a good emotional bond includes warmth, mutual trust, and confidence between the practitioners (therapist) and the service user.

The participants in our study valued the collaborative relationships as the starting point of support, from which all other actions originated and proceeded. This concurs with the concept of the 'working alliance' and also with other studies emphasizing collaborative relationships in mental health services (Ness et al., 2017; Pathare & Shields, 2012). Collaborative relationships are the core of practices referred to as collaborative or dialogical practices (Andersen, 1987; Anderson, 2012; Ness et al., 2014). The collaborative process is described by Strong, Sutherland, & Ness (2011) as a 'negotiating dialogue' which includes reciprocal respect and shared decision making in an open and flexible interaction. Anderson (1999) even stated that everything we do as practitioners and fellow human beings is based upon collaboration. He suggested that a collaboration with individuals who want help and support expresses a wish for change. Change cannot be forced upon another person and must come from the person himself or herself. The practitioner's concern is to support and facilitate change in a collaboration with the other. Supporting young persons with mental health problems and weak connection to school or work can, according to the findings in our study, be understood in the light of a collaborative relationship as it is described in collaborative research and practices. To let the young persons be in the lead of the process towards the changes they want for themselves invites the practitioners to take a role as collaborator and facilitator. In light of our study, I suggest it can be helpful for practitioners to have theoretical and practical knowledge about collaborative practices when supporting young persons. However, support should always be anchored in the unique situation and relationship. This calls for openness and sensitivity for the particular situation and the particular collaborative relationship.

6.2.2 Support in genuine relationships – reciprocity and acknowledgement

What I find intriguing about our study is that the young persons were very clear about what kind of relationships were nourishing to them. They had a great capacity to find

them by themselves, and they could easily differentiate between supportive and non-supportive relationships. They knew, in an embodied and experiential way, which relationships were good for them and which were not. Supportive relationships, from the perspective of these young people, can be understood as 'genuine relationships' in which something happens to make both the professional and the young person become visible to each other as a unique person. This finding is consistent with the results from Topor and Denhov's (2015) study, which found that support is a person-to-person encounter that must be regarded as a contextual experience: an encounter between 'real' people who are not confined and reduced to the role of 'service provider' and 'service user'. The authors found that a relationship between the service user and helpful professionals went beyond the requirements for salaried employment and were characterized with expressions like "almost like a friend" (Topor & Denhov, 2015, p. 233). 'Almost like' indicates that the relationship is not an ordinary relationship between friends. It points to an awareness of a genuine relationship between *persons* that is also recognized as a quality of relationships between friends.

As a concept, 'genuine relationship' is one aspect of the therapeutic relationship. The two other concepts are 'working alliance' and 'transference/counter transference'. These concepts have grown out of psychoanalytic theory and understanding (Catty, 2004). I will not go into the psychoanalytic understanding of these concepts, though. Rather, I am interested in the content of 'genuine relationship' in a way that can shed light on how this aspect of support can be actualized in practice. This study suggests that support is more likely to be manifested within relationships that hold the potential for nourishing communion. In nourishing communion there is a feeling of reciprocity and a feeling of acceptance and being recognized as oneself. Nourishing communion is to be found in caring relationships with 'real' people, who are present as persons and not confined to their specified social role.

The concept of 'acknowledgement' has been extensively described by the Norwegian psychologist Anne Lise Løvlie Schibbye (1996). Her dialectic relational theory is oriented towards therapy, but her theoretical understanding of 'acknowledgment' is transferable to other contexts of helping relations, such as support to young persons with mental

health problems. Acknowledgment, or recognition, embrace both an attitude and way of being together (Schibbye, 1996). Inspired by existentialism, Schibbye (2009) emphasizes the dialectic aspects of acknowledgement and how we as human beings are dependent on each other to develop as autonomous and independent persons. It is through others that we develop and grow and understand ourselves. In an acknowledging relationship, according to Schibbye, both the one who supports and the one supported experience being acknowledged, in terms of reciprocity and mutual appreciation. Acknowledgement, in line with Schibbye, includes different modes of being in concrete situations at a practical level which is of particular interest for our study. These modes of being together are interlinked and are articulated as *listening, understanding, acceptance and tolerance, and confirmation* (Schibbye, 1996). *Listening* is active and focused. It requires receptiveness and willingness to let oneself be moved. *Understanding* means entering into the other person's world of experience. *Acceptance and tolerance* entail accepting the other person's right to his or her feelings and to tolerate these feelings. *Confirmation* legitimates the other person's experience and tries to understand them. Schibbye's comprehensive articulation of the theoretical concept 'acknowledgement' can provide a practical understanding of the elements of reciprocity, acceptance, and recognition in a nourishing communion as described in our study.

It is critical not to take Schibbye's understanding of acknowledgement as instrumental and procedural actions. In that case acknowledgement will be a reification, which is contradictory to Schibbye's understanding. Acknowledgement, as a lived experience, is complex and will vary in different situations. It can never be a thing we do to another person. Rather, acknowledgement is a way of being and how we *are* together, according to Schibbye's dialectical relational theory. This is congruent with our study's findings of support as a complex and ambiguous phenomenon. Support, as manifested in nourishing communion, can be seen as creating the opportunity for people to be and become more together than they could be alone. In this sense, nourishing communion has an aesthetic and co-creative quality in that it is a distinctive *being-with*, unique to the moment and to the persons involved and incapable of being recreated or revised (Gaydos, 2005).

6.2.3 An expanded view of professionalism

Support as a relational phenomenon characterized by the nourishing communion of authentic persons calls for an expanded view of what it means to be professional. It challenges the idea that to be personal is *unprofessional* and inappropriate in professional practice (Skau, 2017). Furthermore, it questions the idea of professional *distance* as an ideal in professionalism (Borg & Topor, 2003). Rather, this study reveals that being personal and close are essential qualities in professionalism. Being personal and close means that both parties should be allowed to bring their life experiences and personality into the relationship. On the basis of our study, I agree with Bøe and Thomassen (2017, p. 147) when they suggest that the relationship should be allowed to develop qualities which make words such as ‘friendship’ and ‘love’ relevant to include in professional practice. Davidson (2011) suggests that *love*, in the sense of being engaged and compassionate, is a required therapeutic stance in mental health services if they are to be person-centred. Professionals must be permitted to truly care about the persons they meet and support. In my experience from practice, this is a common occurrence. Professionals *do* often care about the persons they meet and support. They just do not talk about it much, as if there is an unspoken rule that this is ‘wrong’ and unprofessional. That professionals truly care about the persons they support is manifested in this study from the perspective of the young participants. Feeling cared for and that one matters to the professional provider is of vital importance for experiencing support.

The feeling of being cared for or of mattering to the professional may be demonstrated when professionals go beyond routine procedures and expected actions to do something that is truly helpful (Borg & Topor, 2003; Topor & Denhov, 2015). These ‘breaches’ in the system might make the person in need of support feel that he or she is seen as a unique person and not only as a patient or service user. Borg and Topor (2003) suggest this might be understood as taking a stand *for* the person instead of the system. Topor and Denhov (2015) do not deny the need for procedures and rules; however, to be received and treated as a unique person seems to be crucial to experiencing a relationship as helpful. They suggest a different professionalism that includes taking actions that recognize that persons in need of support are situated in their personal life stories with distinct

difficulties but also with distinct resources. In congruence with the findings of our study, this kind of professionalism implies a moral framework for action situated in authenticity that includes both openness and risk.

6.2.4 The ethics of support

Our study reveals that, paradoxically, relationships hold the potential for support while simultaneously also holding the potential for intrusion, and thus, to support someone is an ethical event. According to Buber (1970), Levinas (1969), and Løgstrup (1997), ethical actions are inseparably connected to a specific personal encounter with another. It is through the concrete presence with the other that good actions are to be found. Being personal and close requires sensitivity to the other person's integrity and personal space, in both a mental and physical sense (Martinsen, 2005). According to Løgstrup (1983), this untouchable space between people has two contrasting functions: to protect each person against invasion and violation and also to create space for personal human encounters. Most importantly, in professional contexts we must acknowledge that the relationship exists for the benefit of the person receiving support. Bøe and Thomassen (2017) suggest that it is the person who receives the support that should decide how the relationship is fulfilled: "The relationship can be a 'place' from where the people can search for their goals, a 'room' in which they can try to realize their projects" (p. 152, author's translation).

In her article, "Spirit breaking: when the helping professionals hurt", Patricia Deegan (2000) reminds us about the danger of identifying so much with the role of the professional that we forget who we are as people. She questions whether it is possible to be an authentic person in human services. This article was written almost two decades ago, but in my opinion, her reminders and questions are no less relevant today in the current health and social services setting. In the light of our findings of how crucial genuine relationships are for experiencing support, I find it necessary to restate Deegan's concern: Is it possible for the professional to be a real person in the current system? When professional knowledge, technical knowledge, and procedures and methods are

given a predominant role within a system allegedly created to provide support, there is a risk that the 'face of the Other' might disappear from our sight and awareness. The uniqueness and the otherness of the Other might get lost (Bøe & Thomassen, 2017). Losing sight of the person and his or her context is losing sight of the complexity that needs attention in support to young persons. There is a risk that premature decisions, not anchored in the person's life and context, may be made for the sake of expediency (Borg & Karlsson, 2017; Ness, Kvello, Borg, Semb, & Davidson, 2017). This possibility is especially alarming with regard to young persons who are struggling with mental health problems and attendance at school or work. One may wonder if it could lead to additional experiences of failure and disappointments and a repeated feeling of not meeting societal expectations.

The findings of our study argue that the unique and the particular must be given space to appear. To look for the uniqueness of another person, the otherness of the Other, presupposes an attitude of openness and wonder (Levinas, 1987). Based on our findings, it can be argued that this attitude of wonder embraces humanity and allows the individuals in the encounter to become persons, with their unique personalities, values, beliefs, life stories, relations, communities, and with their particular brand of humour, their joys and their sorrows. It also values a collaborative and dialogical partnership between the professional and the person in need of support which includes valuing that person's wisdom and expertise (Anderson, 2012). This does not mean that professionals should leave their knowledge behind, but that they must become comfortable with not knowing, with being uncertain. Anderson (2012) suggests that we need to learn to live with uncertainty. Living with uncertainty is an attitude of being prepared for the unforeseen, being open to respond to what the situation may require, and it differs greatly from being guided by predetermined and technical manuals (Anderson, 2007). Borg and Karlsson (2017) suggest that this way of being with a person stands in contrast to the belief in and power of professional expertise which is dominant in the biomedical environment that strongly influences current mental healthcare.

Within a system of rigidly goal-oriented management where effectiveness is measured in standardized checklists and the dominant ethic is reduction of the unique and particular

(Brinkman, 2017; Ekeland, 2014; Aarre, 2010), I am concerned that the value of the relationship will be taken for granted or ignored. A person-to-person encounter, or to use Buber's (1970) term, an 'I-Thou' encounter, where both the young person and the professional are regarded as persons, is at the core of support, according to our findings. On the other hand, acknowledging the relationship as the core of support might lead us into wrongly thinking of the relationship as a tool: something we can 'use' to achieve support. Drawing on the relational ethics from Buber (1970), Levinas (1969) and Løgstrup (1997), it must be emphasized that the relationship is not be used as a means to an end, but is in itself a desirable end. This can be argued to be contradictory in terms of practice where we want to achieve something together with the person in need of support. We are not there only for the purpose of being together, we want our support to 'work' and to be helpful for the person we are collaborating with. Based on our study, I propose that support can be understood as a purposeful supportive action and *simultaneously* as an experience of the relationship in itself. Support surely has a content. The content can be collaboration between the young person and a service provider about something the young person wants to achieve or it might be the nourishing communion of meaningful dialogues. It might also be the small things we do together in everyday life (Ness, 2016). A literature review on the significance of the small things that professionals do in the context of the relationship shows that these small things play an important role in improving the person's sense of self (Topor, Bøe, & Larsen, 2018), and shows that what we do and how we are together are intertwined.

6.3 Support as spatial: room to be and act

Space is an existential condition of life (van Manen, 2014). Nevertheless, I was amazed by the way that space kept surfacing as a key phenomenon in this study. The words of the young persons in the study clearly show that support-as-spatial has both physical and psychological meaning with especially important implications for service systems and practice.

Lived space contracts and expands in a variety of ways. It is a changing and shifting but always *there* experience. Support can create a sense of spaciousness: room to live and be nourished in and a space with the freedom to be and become. In spatial terms, support is paradoxical. It creates the safety of an anchor while at the same time providing the space for movement towards a future with hopes and prospects. Being anchored can mean feeling grounded and safe, as though one belongs and has a specific place to be without drifting. Movement is understood as having the room and the freedom to act in space. The space for movement and acting might be called the person's 'space to live', or what Bollnow (2011) refers to as *Lebensraum*. In our study, we discovered that being anchored while at the same time moving towards a new horizon are two essential, if paradoxical, qualities of lived space in the context of support.

6.3.1 Space as an anchor

Our study implies that being anchored can mean having whatever is necessary to make a person feel grounded in a personal place and a context that prevents a feeling of drifting and provides a feeling of belonging. Anvik and Gustavsen (2011) reveal how young people with mental health problems feel like they are drifting when they have nothing to attend to, such as school or work, and when each day is as empty as the next, with nothing to hold on to that gives the day routine and meaning. Their study is in line with ours in showing that having routines provides an anchor in everyday life. Previous studies suggest that having a job gives a sense of belonging (Blank, Harries, & Reynolds, 2014) and that having a home of one's own both provides a protected physical place and fosters moving on in an active life struggle towards a better future (Andvig & Gonzales, 2015). Although the need for the anchor of a personal space was evident in the words of several young persons, as a researcher and as a person, I was most deeply moved by Mia's story (sub-study 2), in which having her own desk in the classroom was absolutely crucial for her well-being, both physically and psychologically. A desk is such a small space, but when Mia's desk was assigned to someone else, her personal place and her space for action were taken away from her as well. She had no other space to call her own and this was devastating to her. She became unmoored and unable to act. Analysis of Mia's story in

the context of the words of the other young persons in our study clearly demonstrates that being deprived of one's particular physical space, one's anchor, can also deprive one of the ability to act and to move towards a better future.

6.3.2 Space as movement

Our study suggests that acting-as-movement starts from the person. This is not to say that the person alone is totally responsible for his or her potential for acting. Circumstances beyond people's control (e.g. social factors, finances, housing, illness, etc.), may impact their ability and capacity to act. For example, a considerable amount of research demonstrates that people with mental health problems are disadvantaged when it comes to education and employment, income, a place to live, and social networks and relationships (OECD, 2012). These complex circumstances outside a person's control affect his or her potential for acting. They affect how people live their lives, and thus also affect the space in which that life is lived. Interestingly, the connection between loss of space and space for freedom and action, is also found in a study exploring the lived experiences of losing a leg described by patients post-discharge (Norlyk, Martinsen, & Kjaer-Petersen, 2013). The study shows how the loss of mobility disrupted the patients' world and reduced their ability to act and their personal freedom, which can be understood as existential losses, as an exclusion from life itself. Consequently, the authors suggest that healthcare providers should not only facilitate patients' physical condition but facilitate an increased awareness of the psychosocial and existential challenges of loss of mobility. This study is in line with ours in the way that support should include the persons' lifeworld as a whole with a sensitivity towards existential dimensions.

In our study, support, given within caring and collaborative relationships, can encourage young people to act by acknowledging the need for action and creating a sense of readiness for the person to act. However, this is a matter of *possibilities* for acting, about invitations to act that may be welcomed or declined. The actual movement towards action must start from the person. Drawing on Arendt's (1958) understanding of human freedom and activity, if the acting is forced, it is not the person's own act of freedom and

the person's space to live will not be expanded. I suggest that the opposite will occur. When actions are forced upon us or controlled by others, it reduces our space to live.

'Everyone', such as policymakers, social service leaders, practitioners, researchers, and educators, wants young people struggling with mental health problems to regain good mental health and be able to successfully return to school and work. Put differently, there is a common desire and goal to expand the space for acting for the individual young person. This is argued from both a socio-economic perspective and from the perspective of what constitutes the common good for our society (Norwegian Ministry of Labour and Social Inclusion, 2006-2007). It is also argued from the humanistic perspective that everyone should have the opportunity to lead the life they want to lead and to participate in society and their local community according to their own choice (UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, 2015). However, although there is agreement about the goals (movement, activity, participation), in terms of support, there is, in my view, no such common understanding of what creates space to live and what supports movement and action that starts from the person.

Our findings reveal that lived space as being anchored and lived space as movement address contextual rather than individualized support. Hence, mental distress cannot be viewed as an inner matter without outer context. Being anchored is not solely an inner feeling, it is connected to material and social contexts. Likewise, support as facilitating movement and acting cannot be understood from an individualistic perspective. A social and a more 'outside-oriented' approach is needed (Klevan, 2017).

6.3.3 Support as invitation and co-creation

Our study's findings clearly demonstrate that *invitations* are much more important than presupposed solutions. Invitations are open initiatives, free to be accepted or not, free to be taken up and continued or not (Arendt, 1958). Solutions are defined and presented as *the* answer. My concern is that, in current services aiming to provide support, invitations as a way of meeting another person are hindered by instructions, requirements and/or 'hidden' or implied coercion or threats. By 'hidden or implied

coercion or threats', I refer to the fact that young persons do not have a real choice or option to act from their own volition if they are required to accept certain interventions or solutions to receive financial aid for their daily living. To put it even more clearly: young persons must either remain outside school or work (even though they want to be inside), or they must adapt to the solutions and instructions presented to them. The implicit message is: If you do not accept *this*, we will not give you *that*. In the light of our study, this 'logic' does not work if we want young people to experience support and be prepared to move and act on their own initiative. Instead, I advocate that we use a different approach and ask both figuratively and literally, "What *moves* this young person?" The system needs to have the ability (the freedom) to engage in young people's life situations, determining what matters to them and identifying the fears and anxieties that prevent them from acting and moving in a direction that is meaningful to them. Thus, support, as a spatial phenomenon, calls for a common exploration between the professional and the young person about what moves them. The professional walks alongside the young person and shares this journey of exploration (Ness, Borg, Semb, & Karlsson, 2014; Sommer, Strand, Borg, & Ness, 2013). Weingarten (2010) commends the supportive quality of people being together and working towards a preferred future. According to Weingarten, to accompany another person is a co-creative process. Support as *co-created* is something that we do together, and it creates a different kind of thinking than support as something I do *to* you (Gergen, 2009).

Given the nature of life as complex, diverse, and ambiguous and the fact that we are all different, there is no shortcut to knowing when an overture from the professional might be received as an invitation or as a requirement or instruction, i.e. when lived space will be expanded or when it will be constricted. However, holding the idea of the collaborative relationship as the room for a common exploration of what might be support has the potential for creating readiness for movement and action. Within the relationship, doubts and resistance from the person receiving support can be revealed to uncover possible pathways to action more in accordance with what the person needs. Weingarten (2010) captures the possibilities of the expansion of lived space within relationships: "It is because we can join with others, because creative communal synergies can happen,

because spontaneous actions do arise from collective commitments that an open future is full of possibilities” (p. 9).

To open up space to live for young persons who experience their potential for acting and moving as limited and confined and their future as limited and diminished, I suggest embracing the spatial dimension of the phenomenon of support. On the basis of our study, I recommend that support as a practice be recognized as having the potential to create the space for action and movement that arises out of young people’s own initiatives and moves them towards their own desires; support is not about meeting the system’s goals for them. In consideration of the existential meanings about support as a spatial phenomenon in our study, it is tempting to use a (slightly altered) well-known saying: It is the common journey, not the arrival that matters.

6.4 Support and care as interrelated concepts and phenomena

Care as a significant aspect of the lived experience of support is a strong finding in our study. Caring relationships are critical to the young persons’ experiences of support. In fact, when the *caring* is absent, the provided support runs the risk of being experienced as non-supportive. This finding in our study is not a new idea in the context of mental health or healthcare. Caring relationships have, as described in Chapter 2, a fundamental significance both in nursing science and in the mental health field. Therefore, it was not unexpected or surprising when care appeared to have a strong relatedness to the experience of support. However, the *extent* to which care and caring relationships revealed themselves as aspects of support was somehow beyond my prior expectations and preunderstanding. As described earlier, care as a concept and phenomenon is described from many perspectives in caring science. In the light of this finding in our study, it is interesting to discuss which perspective(s) of care might be the most meaningful to use in the context of support to young persons with mental health problems. It is not a ‘given’ that any particular perspective or understanding of care and a caring relationship is the most appropriate.

In unconditional and altruistic care the caring relationship is characterized with approaches resembling motherly care. It indicates that the motherliness of the nurse is a necessity for the existence and development of the one cared-for (Oute, 2017). This puts the one cared-for in a position of being weak and vulnerable and dependent on the carer. Vatne (2006) states this kind of paternalistic care in mental health practice is a problem because of its vague borders with the use of 'concealed' power. Our study's findings of supportive relationships as caring *and* reciprocal and collaborative indicate that the altruistic perspective of care and caring relationships is not suited for understanding care as an aspect of support. Rather, approaches to care that emphasize the reciprocal and collaborative ideals advocated by Noddins (1984) and Petterson & Hem (2011) are more appropriate. These approaches to care recognize a caring relationship as an encounter between equal human beings.

Although the altruistic understanding of care and caring relationships is not the preferred perspective of care in the context of support to young persons with mental health problems, I don't want to argue for a total rejection of this perspective. Based on my experiences and the young participants' stories in our study, it can be envisioned that young people *may* need support that sometimes has elements of 'motherly' or 'fatherly' care. The anecdotal examples in our study illustrate situations where this is appropriate. A preferred perspective to care cannot offer a rule-bound approach, and the actions of the carer must be varied with special regard to the situation (Noddings, 1984). It is still the particular situation and the particular relationship that must lead our actions. Pettersen & Hem (2011) advocate a contextual sensitivity arguing that carers must look at and listen to the responses of those cared-for.

Our study maintains that support provided is not really *support* until it is experienced as supportive to the person receiving it. This insight can be recognized in Noddings' (1984) theory of care. She defines care as a relationship and suggests that both parties in a caring relationship are reciprocally dependent. The provided care needs a recognition and response from the cared-for. The caring must somehow be completed and fulfilled in the other if the relationship is to be described as caring. This dialectic and reciprocal understanding of care can provide a theoretical perspective to deepen our study's finding

about support as a lived experience. Support, in the same way as care, is dependent on the response of the one supported. Support, as an existential phenomenon, is not fulfilled as support or a supportive relationship until it is received, accepted, and experienced as support.

6.5 Methodological considerations

Research has to be evaluated using the framework of the ontological and epistemological assumptions that underpin the methods used to generate the findings. Van Manen (2014) argues that “a common problem for phenomenological researchers is in defending their research in terms of frameworks that do not belong to the methodology of phenomenology” (p. 347). Spiegelberg (1982) stated nearly four decades ago that the challenge with phenomenology, as research method, is that there seem to be as many phenomenologies as there are phenomenologists. Almost three decades later, Norlyk & Harder (2010) conclude that there is still a considerable variation in how a phenomenological study is carried out. They claim that the variations and the apparent inconsistencies to methodological clarity and rigor make it unclear what defines a phenomenological study as phenomenological. Their analysis of 37 studies identified as phenomenological by the authors prove the need for phenomenological studies to include a minimum of scientific criteria such as the articulation of methodological keywords and of the investigated phenomenon and “(...) a description of how an open attitude was adopted throughout the research process” (p.429). In the following discussion on methodological considerations, I will address the critique of phenomenology as research method, from sources both external and internal to the tradition. Critique of van Manen’s approach will be emphasized. Further, I will discuss the question of validity in phenomenological research in general and in relation to van Manen’s approach in particular. I will discuss how the criteria of validity and quality are encountered in our study. Some specific methodological and ethical challenges will be reflected upon. Finally, I will address the idea of universality and generalization in phenomenological research methods.

6.5.1 External critique of phenomenology as research method

Within medicine and health science the positivist paradigm has been, and still is, the dominant ontology and epistemology for explaining, understanding, and predicting phenomena concerning human life (Malterud, 2017; Sousa, 2014). The positivist stance represents an ontological and epistemological perspective in which the world consists of stable phenomena that can be observed, measured, counted, and regarded as objective facts (Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2009). These assumptions are congruent with the natural sciences and quantitative research methods (Crotty, 2003). In medical and health sciences there are still many scientists and professionals that consider quantitative methods to be the best, even the *only* way, to scientific knowledge (Malterud, 2017). What counts as scientific and valuable knowledge and research is ranked in an evidence hierarchy, where the highest ranked knowledge is based on quantitative research with randomized controlled trials (Ekeland, 2004). Non-experimental descriptive studies are ranked at the lowest levels in the hierarchy (Ronnestad, 2008).

Based on the logic and the assumptions of positivism and the natural sciences, phenomenological research, which represents non-experimental descriptive research, fails to meet the claims for what is acknowledged as certain knowledge. On the other hand, Zahavi & Martini (2019) show how scientists within psychology and psychiatry have advocated phenomenological research methods for supplementing and expanding psychological and psychiatric knowledge. They argue that both natural science and phenomenology can profit and grow as a result of their interaction. With references to Petitmengin (2006) Zahavi & Martini (2019) show that the interest in integrating phenomenological philosophy with empirical study of the mind has led to the development of an influential technique called 'the micro-phenomenological interview' that combines qualitative interview, phenomenology, and cognitive science.

Interestingly, when searching for external critique on phenomenology as research method, I found that critique has, for the most part, been conducted by scientists within the explorative and descriptive paradigm (Bordieu, 1985; Grant, 2016; Noë, 2007). Phenomenology has been accused of being a subjectivistic method, which ignores the contextual factors of the persons lived experiences. For example, Throop & Murphy

(2002) examined Bourdieu's (1985) critical stance against phenomenology, which includes the critique that phenomenology does not take into account how lived experience is produced through a dialectic between internalization of previous externalized structures. Phenomenologists, both from the descriptive and interpretative tradition, would reject such a claim, because Husserl (1977) describes that a person's life experiences build on pre-given meanings passed down through generations and given to the person's consciousness. Merleau-Ponty (2012) claims the inseparability between the person and the world, and Gadamer (2013) highlights the persons' horizon of understanding that is influenced by social, historical, and cultural contexts, with all their hidden and visible aspects. I agree with Davidson (2018) who argues that we must understand the horizon of experience to be itself a constituted achievement, and that it is constituted not by me as an individual, but by others as well, and hence, it is a relational and contextual experience.

Phenomenology, and in particular descriptive phenomenology, has been criticized for being a realist modernist project where there is a belief in a fixed knowable world described as static with unchangeable essences and essential structures of the phenomena (Finlay, 2009; Moran, 2000). Social constructionists, in general, will be critical to the thought that there is anything that is fixed or 'a real world' that might be uncovered (Gergen, 1994; 2009). Social constructionists claim that knowledge and understanding about the world is nothing that can be downloaded from a natural world as something that, in fact, *is* (Lock & Strong, 2010). Phenomenologists from both the descriptive and interpretative traditions claim that this is a misunderstanding of the idea of essences in phenomenology that describes essences as relational, dynamic, fluid, and ambiguous (Giorgi, 2009; van Manen 2014). As Røseth (2013) reminds us, phenomenology initially evolved as an alternative to and a critique of modern natural human science. It opposes the idea that we can have objective knowledge of the world itself. All knowledge must go through consciousness and lived experience.

6.5.2 Internal critique and current debate

From internal scholars in different phenomenological traditions there have been ongoing debates for decades and the debates are still extant (e.g. Crotty, 1996; Paley, 1997; 2017; Zahavi & Martini, 2019). It would be too ambitious to cover all these different debates here, and I will, therefore, briefly mention some that I consider of current interest. The debate about whether or not Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009) is to be understood as phenomenology will not be included in my discussion. One ongoing debate is about phenomenology and nursing studies, introduced by Crotty (1996) with his book *Phenomenology and nursing research*, which criticized nurse researchers' interpretation of the methodology and their use of phenomenology as a method for undertaking qualitative nursing research. He claims that the phenomenological research conducted by nurses is not pure phenomenology as espoused by its founding philosophers. He accused nursing studies of being only descriptive, subjectivistic, and individualistic, focusing on ordinary subjective experiences and not the *phenomenon* in itself. Congruent with Crotty, John Paley (1997) accuses nurses of mostly misinterpreting the philosophical ideas of classical phenomenology. While Crotty (1996) urged nurses to pay more attention to phenomenological philosophy, Paley's (2005) recommendation has been that nurses should abandon their phenomenological research altogether and find another philosophy and method. Paley (2017) has also critiqued phenomenological methods as practiced by Giorgi, van Manen, and Smith. Paley's primary critique is that these methods fail to deliver clear and unambiguous meanings from texts. One might rightly and phenomenologically question Paley's requirement for unambiguous meanings since phenomenology is a method for disclosing and *embracing* ambiguity and complexity as we find it in our life world. Zahavi & Martiny (2019) argue against Paley's recommendation that nurses abandon phenomenology. They recommend nurses to look beyond the accounts offered by Giorgi, Smith, and van Manen and consider other resources that offer examples of applications of phenomenology.

The main internal debate and disagreement has been about whether phenomenology is best understood as descriptive or interpretative (Finlay, 2011). Since this study adheres

to hermeneutic phenomenology, it is mainly inspired by Heidegger and Gadamer who acknowledge that individuals are inevitably influenced by the world they live in and that there is no such thing as an un-interpreted phenomenon. Rather than fixating on description *versus* interpretation, I think we should consider description *and* interpretation as a continuum, where both perspectives are present with varying strengths in different phases of the research process. Finlay (2011), who advocates a flexible and dynamic attitude to phenomenological approaches, sees it as ironic that phenomenologists, who champion the non-dualist cause, are often pushed to line up to either the descriptive or the hermeneutic ‘camps’.

The internal critique of phenomenology as research method is complex and sometimes difficult to grasp and to follow it thoroughly can be challenging. I understand the main features to encompass tensions between phenomenology as a philosophical discipline and phenomenology as applied to science and research, the understanding and interpretations of essential key concepts in phenomenology, and applied phenomenology’s relatedness to phenomenological philosophy (Saevi, 2014). My main interest in phenomenology, though, is in line with van Manen’s phenomenological purpose. This purpose emphasizes the rewards of phenomenology as meaningful insights that might contribute to our thoughtfulness and tact in professional practice and in ordinary life (van Manen, 2019).

6.5.3 Critique of van Manen’s approach

Van Manen’s approach to research has been criticized for not having a set of procedures or a set of steps for the analysis and for having an under-specified method for how to get from text to meaning (Paley, 2017). Giorgi (2009), who represents the tradition of descriptive phenomenology, argues that methodological criteria demand that every step of the analysis must be presented as explicitly as possible so that the critical other can follow the analysis as closely as possible. He claims that its transparency to the critical other is part of what makes his descriptive phenomenological psychological method scientific. Giorgi (2010) and Røseth (2013) warn that not having specifically stated methodological steps may be a threat to the scientific quality and may support the idea

that ‘anything goes’. Norlyk & Harder (2010) warn against a flexible and open version of phenomenology and claim that certain criteria need to be followed in order to qualify both as phenomenology and science. I believe that van Manen (1990; 2014), would not disagree with the claim for certain criteria to be followed for a phenomenological study to qualify both as phenomenology and science (these criteria are specified below).

The rigor of van Manen’s method is not concretized in a specified linear procedure. The rigor must be understood as comprising the various aspects of epoché and reduction, the vocative dimension, and the relatedness to the phenomenological philosophy. As a consequence of van Manen’s approach to method as writing, it is only in the final text that the philosophical methods of epoché and reduction and the philological methods can be recognized. In his article *From meaning to method*, van Manen (1997) describes how phenomenological texts ‘come to be’, by using the final result as the starting point. He argues that the problem of phenomenology is not how to get from text to meaning but how to get from meaning to text. It is clearly a different approach than that of descriptive phenomenology, such as Giorgi’s method. Thus, it is understandable that researchers not familiar with this way of thinking and practicing phenomenology find it challenging to follow the methodological way from meaning to text. Most approaches focus on the opposite; how to go from text to meaning. Phenomenology, as a practice of writing that goes from meaning to text is practiced and discussed in two studies by Saevi (2005; 2019). Saevi (2019) describes in methodological terms and by altering between methodological reflections and concrete texts, how a phenomenological article comes to be by taking the final ‘result’ as a starting point. Her understanding has directed me in this study especially in the process of co-writing that was published as articles 1 and 2.

It is true that any method can be abused and practiced shallowly including van Manen’s hermeneutic phenomenological method. I acknowledge and respect that there are different views and different approaches, and my agenda is not to claim that one method is the ‘right method’. However, I will argue that if one takes van Manen’s approach as an ‘anything goes- method’, then his methodological writings has not been thoroughly studied and understood.

Correct rules of science has followed very diverse routes. To understand the rationale of van Manen's approach, it is helpful to look at the history and the methodological underpinnings of the Utrecht School of phenomenology. Dehue (1995) discusses the history and identity of the Utrecht School in her book "Changing the rules". Her discussion focuses on the methodological changes that occurred in the history of Dutch psychology where the Utrecht School had its origins. However, the members that associated themselves with this approach did not think of themselves as a 'school' although they had a strong awareness of an identity distanced from the nonphenomenological psychologists. Dehue (1995) describes that by the 1980s, the Utrecht School was accused of not making it clear what phenomenological research is and is not while simultaneously protesting against the empirical-analytical assumptions and the detailed rules that were characterized by other psychologists as the only approach to scientific inquiry. In this approach there are rules for formulating hypotheses, setting up experiments, calculating results, and for drawing conclusions, and so on (Dehue, 1995). The Utrecht School refused the objectifying attitude of naturalistic scientific psychology and was interested in the value of immediate experience and exploring the relationship of the human being to his or her world (van Manen, 2014).

The Utrecht School agreed that one does not become a phenomenological psychologist (or any other professional) with the help of manuals on methods and techniques. Therefore, even today, there is little agreement about how phenomenological studies should be approached and conducted (Dehue, 1995). Giorgi (1970; 2009) developed a scientific methodological basis for doing phenomenological research that could fit within the disciplinary and procedural data analysis constraints of North American scientific psychology. In contrast, van Manen (1997; 2014) developed a hermeneutic phenomenological method (Phenomenology of Practice) strongly inspired by scholars associated with the Utrecht School, sensitive to the practice of professionals and the practice of everyday life, and critical of shallow insights the rule-bound methods might produce.

6.5.4 Validity in phenomenological research

The question of how to access knowledge and how valid knowledge is produced is as old as the history of ideas, and the criteria for the validation of qualitative research are still open for discussion. The assessment of scientific knowledge involves three major concepts; validation, reliability, and generalization (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). However, there seems to be an agreement among qualitative methodologists that these concepts need a different content and a different basis in qualitative research compared to the content and the basis in quantitative research which is rooted in positivism (Creswell, 2013). In quantitative studies the reliability of a study depends on instrument construction and raises questions of the repeatability of the study. The test is reliable if it produces the same result each time the study is conducted. The researcher is distanced and the preferred stance is objectivity. In qualitative studies the researcher is part of the method and validity and reliability are intertwined. The value of reliability and validity in qualitative studies is better expressed by broader terms such as credibility, trustworthiness, and rigor (Kvale, 1996). Consequently, evaluation of the methodological quality of qualitative research often addresses reflexivity and subjectivity within the research process (Kvale, 1996). The question as to whether the method of epoché and reduction is in itself sufficient to reflexively address the researchers' subjectivity is reflected upon in the methodology chapter, and will not be further discussed here.

To validate research there needs to be some criteria that legitimate the quality of a study. There have been many attempts to establish general criteria for quality control of qualitative research across the different methods and scientific perspectives (Sousa, 2014; Stige, Malterud, & Midtgarden, 2009). Røseth (2013) makes a good point that the danger in generating and advocating such checklists is that they may favor one qualitative method at the cost of others. Van Manen (2014) states that it is necessary to allow different scientific perspectives to define scientific quality from within their own epistemological and ontological frameworks. An interesting view is Kvernbekk's (2014) suggestion that there are three criteria that can be constitutional for science in general; truth, objectivity, and rationality. She argues for an understanding of these three criteria that is essential for all scientific research across the paradigms. Leaning on Scheffler

(2009) Kvernbekk argues that truth is not absolute certainty because none of us have direct access to truth. Scheffler (2009) states that truth is not the same as certainty, and that we need to differentiate between 'truth' and 'to keep something true'. The former is definite, and the latter is potentially fallible and related to time and person. Objectivity, according to Kvernbekk (2014), points to a commitment of opening one's assertions, claims, and arguments for critique and evaluation. Finally, rationality is closely related to objectivity and argues that assertions are rational if they are based on relevant evidence and if they have been critically evaluated by others. This study can be considered in the light of Kvernbekk's suggested criteria and, as far as I can see, it complies with these. The study aims for truth as meaning and realizes that meaning is not infinite but potentially changeable over time and contexts. Preliminary understandings of the data source material were discussed with the competence group, supervisors, and other researchers during the process of the analysis. Also, the three articles arising from within the study have been critically evaluated by fellow research reviewers and accepted for publication in respected peer-reviewed journals. Kvernbekk's criteria are, in my view, relevant for validation of a qualitative research study on an overarching level, although they are not fully sufficient to appraise the quality of a phenomenological study.

Drawing on van Manen (2014), appropriate criteria for evaluating the validity of a phenomenological study must be addressed from the assumptions of phenomenology. The challenge is that within phenomenology there are different views about how to get access to knowledge and meanings which is the main reason that there are different approaches to phenomenological research. This dissertation adheres to interpretive phenomenology, as defined by van Manen (2014), hence, evaluation of the study must adhere to criteria suitable for this approach. Van Manen (2014) suggests that validity in phenomenological inquiry can be addressed by asking: (a) if the study is based on a phenomenological question, (b) if the analysis was performed on experientially descriptive accounts, (c) if the study is rooted in primary scholarly phenomenological literature, and (d) if the study avoids trying to legitimize itself with criteria derived from non-phenomenological methodologies. Van Manen (2014, p. 355-356) further suggests selected criteria to evaluate the phenomenological quality addressing the question of what deep insights have been gained through the study. These criteria are the following:

heuristic questioning that addresses the sense of contemplative wonder and attentiveness, descriptive richness that evaluates if the text contains rich and recognizable experiential material, interpretive depth that searches for reflective insights that go beyond the taken-for-granted everyday understanding, distinctive rigor that addresses a constantly self-critical questioning, strong and 'addressive' meaning that points to how the text 'speaks' to our sense of embodied meaning, experiential awakening that addresses the text's potential to create contact with prereflective experience. Finally, inceptual epiphany, which refers to a sudden perception or intuitive grasp of meaning, demonstrates if the study offers us the possibility of deeper and original insights. In the following discussion, I will address elements in this study that I see as the most pressing with regards to the evaluation of validity and the phenomenological quality in this study. The suggested criteria from van Manen work as the context for my discussion.

6.5.5 Considering the research question and the experiential accounts

This study has an overall phenomenological question about a phenomenon as it is lived. It asks what the human experience of support is like. Interviews with young persons with mental health concerns who had problems attending work or school generated empirical material through their descriptive accounts. However, the interviews were guided by questions that were not purely phenomenological, and thus, some of the interview material also consists of reflections, opinions, beliefs, views, etc. This is because at the time I conducted the interviews, I did not have a clear understanding that a phenomenological question is distinct from a general qualitative research question that asks for people's subjective experiences. I did not fully realize the difference between first person experiences as used in human science research and the very distinct idea of lived experiences as it is understood in phenomenology. One could say that I might have belonged to the category of nurses that Crotty (1996) and Paley (2017) criticize for trying to do phenomenological research without the necessary phenomenological understanding. Despite my initial limitation as a phenomenological researcher, I *did* ask the participants to describe situations where they had experienced support and being

supported. Hence, the empirical material still appeared to consist of a substantial amount of experientially descriptive accounts suitable for phenomenological exploration. However, it must be noted that the knowledge I had at the time of the interviews is likely to have affected the responses from the participants. I would probably have obtained additional rich descriptions if I had been more truly phenomenologically-oriented from the start.

6.5.6 Considering the number of participants and the use of the data material

With regard to the number of participants, a phenomenological study does not rely on a certain number of examples of concrete experiential descriptions in order to explore the phenomenological meanings of a particular phenomenon (van Manen, 2014). Englander (2019) suggests that the most frequently asked critical question that most qualitative researchers dread, is the question: “How many participants did you interview?” (p. 1). This is, according to Englander (2019), because most of us tend to associate representativeness in population research with general knowledge claims, such as the ability of results to be generalized in empirical research. Van Manen (2014) claims that the more important question to ask is: “How many examples of concrete experiential descriptions would be appropriate for this study in order to explore the phenomenal meanings of this or that phenomenon” (p. 353). This does not depend on statistical criteria or some formula of data saturation. Data saturation aims at collecting data until the analyses do not reveal anything new or different about a group of people. Phenomenology does not look for sameness or repetitive patterns. It looks for that instant when an insight arises, which may be totally unique to a certain example of a lived experience description (van Manen, 2014). Giorgi (2009) argues that at least three subjects should be included in a phenomenological inquiry. The reason for this, according to Giorgi (2009), is that else it might be difficult to make the distinction between what belongs to the individual and what belongs to the phenomenon. He claims that at least three subjects are required when we are seeking the structure of a phenomenon, not the individualized experience of the phenomenon.

Van Manen (2014) argues that it is not the number of subjects included but the richness and potential in the descriptions that matter. In my view, which is in line with van Manen, it is eventually how the phenomenon shows itself through the text that will 'decide' how many subjects and examples that are sufficient to bring forth structures of meaning with a dimension of depth. Looking critically at the numbers of participants in this study, it is reasonable to think that a smaller number would have been sufficient. But, again, there is no clear answer to the question of the 'right' number of participants. Actually, some of the last interviews in the empirical part of the study provided very rich experiential accounts that were used as anecdotes or examples that helped to create a reflective phenomenological text. Nevertheless, at some point the researcher has to stop gathering data. Van Manen (2014) suggests that this decision depends on the nature of each phenomenological study.

From a phenomenological perspective, it is the phenomenon that should lead the exploration, so anything that draws the attention away from the phenomenon may disturb this focus. The Utrecht tradition demonstrates this emphasis of focusing exclusively on the phenomena rather on the elements such as explanatory descriptions of the methodology (instead of letting the methodology display itself implicitly throughout the whole text) or in-depth supplementary information about the participants. Further, the number of examples used in a text is normally limited to a few (sometimes only one) which are, then, deeply elaborated. Van Manen (2014) argues that including too many experiential examples in a study has the potential to lead shallow reflection.

The data analysis process of eidetic reduction that aims at searching for invariant meaning drove the selection of two anecdotes for publication in Article 1 (Sommer & Saevi, 2017) and four anecdotes in Article 2 (Sommer & Saevi, 2018), although an in-depth data analysis as described in Chapter 4 (including the facets of epoché and reduction) was conducted on all of the sources relevant to our analysis. Thus, descriptions from many different participants influenced our interpretation as presented in the anecdotes. The anecdotes that we chose to consider for further phenomenological reflection were particularly rich and expressed in pointed examples of the lived

experiences of support that several participants also expressed, but perhaps less richly. The anecdotal examples, thus, had the qualities that demonstrated the criteria van Manen (2014) suggests for gaining a dimension of depth in a phenomenological text. That is, they had the particular qualities necessary for heuristic questioning, for recognition, for reflective insight and for addressing our embodied sense of being. In summary, the anecdotes in Article 1 and 2 grew out of the reflective writing process that characterizes the data analysis methods of van Manen's approach. Therefore, we did not predetermine the specific numbers of anecdotal examples. We chose the ones that were the most relevant to the insights that emerged from the data analysis.

From the perspective of the determining the validity of a phenomenological study and of determining the quality of a phenomenological text, the number of participants and examples is not relevant in itself. Nevertheless, I felt an ethical responsibility to pay tribute to the sensitive and difficult stories shared with me regardless of their strictly phenomenological qualities. In other words, I wanted to give voice to as many of the young persons' stories as possible while staying true to the phenomenological method of van Manen. Including as many voices as possible while maintaining the integrity of the method was a constant consideration, even a balancing act, and often a dilemma, during the data analysis process. Thus, in Article 3 I intentionally included experiential examples from participants that were not included in the first two articles. I acknowledge that this inclusion of a larger number of participants is not required from a phenomenological perspective, and that the decision is not connected to considerations of the validity of a phenomenological study as a whole. This inclusion of more voices in the third article should be understood from an ethical perspective; as dictated by my conscience and my feelings of gratitude and being personally obligated to the young persons who shared their stories with me. The empirical material for this study is so rich, that at least two more articles are planned based on the same data source material ensuring that even more of the data collected will be analysed and disseminated.

6.5.7 Considering the change in the analysis approach

The process of analysis started out with a thematic analysis inspired by Braun & Clarke (2006), which is a theoretically flexible approach. However, during this analysis I discovered the need for and the relevance of doing a truly phenomenological exploration of the phenomenon of support. As described in the methodology chapter, I questioned the phenomenological quality of this approach concerned that it would serve my intention of doing a phenomenological exploration rather than a thematic analysis of qualitative data within a hermeneutic-phenomenologically oriented framework. The risk, from a strictly phenomenological perspective, was that the thematic approach might not result in the depth and complexity of analysis required by phenomenological methods. Thematic types of statements communicate primarily conceptual meaning and conceptual meaning does not need to involve a felt or deeply-sensed understanding (van Manen, 1990). In a phenomenological study congruent with van Manen's (2014) approach, themes are just tools for further thoughtful reflections and exploration, not outcomes, in and of, themselves. Thus, I decided to move towards a more explicitly phenomenological analysis, and I chose to use van Manen's hermeneutic-phenomenological approach (van Manen 1990; 2014). While thematic analysis looks for repeated patterns of meanings across the data set and uses coding as part of the analysis process to search for conceptual formulations or categorical statements, phenomenological analysis is driven by epoché and reduction to disclose structures of experience and meanings before they are conceptualized or theorized (van Manen, 1990).

The decision to do a phenomenological analysis and not a thematic analysis within a phenomenological inspired approach, led to a deeper exploration of those aspects contained in the data that had the potential to reveal phenomenological meanings. Conceivably, a thematic analysis would have a stronger horizontal perspective, looking for patterns across the data, (Braun & Clarke, 2006) and would, most likely, lead to a more explicit use of data in publications for dissemination. This characteristic of thematic analysis is an argument for consideration of its application to the collected data in this study and may be something we consider in the future.

6.5.8 Considering the collaborative dialogues in a phenomenological analysis

For this study, excerpts from the writing process, such as anecdotes and experiential examples and excerpts from our preliminary analysis were presented for the members of the competence group and other researchers. This had two main purposes: firstly, to see if the text reverberated with the listeners/readers and if it was recognizable from their own lived experiences and their experiences from practice, and secondly, to open up reflective dialogues that could further deepen the exploration of the phenomenon. In particular, the competence group played an important role in terms of recognizing the relevance of this study for practice. Including a competence group is not a particular requirement from a phenomenological perspective. However, because the ultimate aim of this study is to contribute to a transformation of practice, including both the young persons and professional service providers was intended to enhance its usefulness and relevance in actual practice.

Including collaborative dialogues in a study reflects a philosophical position that opening up for many voices and perspectives may enable deeper and more diverse reflections and interpretations (Borg et al., 2012). Dialogues within collaborative relationships in our study (competence group, supervisors, research colleagues, co-authors) developed and transformed meanings and understandings in a co-creative process. Van Manen (2017) argues that the inceptual meaning of a phenomenon should not be confused with a creative act. In a creative act, the subject is the creator. Moments of inceptual insights are more to be seen as a gift, as an event that cannot be planned or foreseen. I agree with van Manen that insights cannot be forced to come, and in that way, they are a gift more than something we can guarantee by specific approaches. Andersson (2012) suggests that knowledge is a contextualized social, cultural, historical and communal process. I believe that insights, even as a gift, are contextual and relational. Therefore, the inclusion of a competence group contextualized knowledge towards the transformation of practice. Furthermore, the possibility of new insights and perspectives among the members of the group was enhanced by the relational aspect of collaboration (Andersson, 2012). In summary, the inclusion of a competence group had the following

advantages: it provided the valuable perspectives of young persons and professionals with experience of the topic of inquiry, it revealed knowledge of the practice context to deepen our understanding of support, and it enabled new insights and attitudes for all the group members.

6.5.9 Experiential writing

Phenomenology is primarily a philosophic method for *questioning*, not a method for explication, answering, or drawing determinate conclusions (van Manen, 2014). In this questioning there exists possibilities and potentials for experiencing openings and understandings of the meaning of the phenomena. The experiential writing style is more literary and aesthetic, even poetic, and it may include open questions in the text, for the purpose of inviting the reader into the reflection and into a state of wonder. This kind of writing (and reading) might seem unfamiliar and may be considered a style that does not belong to science from a quantitative perspective or even from the perspective of many qualitative approaches. However, from a phenomenological perspective, the evocative dimension is interwoven with the purpose of phenomenology: to bring lived experiences and original existential meanings into nearness. Thus, the anecdotes in this study are meant to be evocative. They are meant to bring both the writers and the readers into vivid awareness of and close contact with the complex, multi-layered meanings of support.

Phenomenological texts, of the type that would be of interest to professional practitioners, differs in certain respects from other social science texts, and for this the Utrecht School has been criticized. Strasser (1974) accused Sartre of getting carried away with literary and artistic style in his famous account of the objectifying look. The same literary and artistic style of writing was used to bring phenomenology down to earth by practitioners and phenomenologists associated with the Utrecht School; the psychiatrist van den Berg, educationists such as Langeveld and Bollnow, medical doctors such as Buytendijk and Beets, and clinical psychologists such as van Lennep and Linschoten (van Manen, 1997). They all wrote practical studies that were meant to speak to our everyday

experience, as well as to the lifeworld of the professional practitioner. According to van Manen (2014), a phenomenological text is most successful when readers feel addressed by it. Finlay (2009) values the communicative power of research that challenges, unsettles, and reverberates with our everyday experience of life and which resonates and evokes the ambivalence and ambiguity of lived experience. She says: “In my view, phenomenology achieves this best when it can turn to aesthetic, literary forms turning the reading of research into an experience itself” (p. 29).

Articles 1 and 2 are written in a style of the Utrecht School, and are, thus, a contribution to that tradition. Article 3 was *inspired* by this tradition and data analysis was accomplished through epoché and reduction and evocative methods. However, it is not congruent with the Utrecht tradition in that it is organized in the traditional format of a scientific article. It adheres to van Manen’s phenomenology of practice, but also includes literature and sources from other phenomenological traditions and is, thus, more eclectic. This third article intentionally included a larger number of participants (for reasons discussed previously) and gave additional information about their life situations as is expected in a traditional scientific article. From a phenomenological perspective, this is not an argument for credibility since we are studying a phenomenon and not a population. Phenomenology does not focus on a particular social group and their social context. However, in my view, including additional information about the person behind the experiential accounts presented in a phenomenological text may help to enhance empathetic engagement and contact between the text and the reader (or listener).

6.5.10 Considering generalization and universality in phenomenological research

One implication of using qualitative methods is that one cannot make statistic generalization based on the results which is a crucial purpose in quantitative research. Generalization in quantitative research is an empirical generalization that draws conclusions of validity from a sample of a population to the general population. While empirical or quantitative generalizations are important in the social and human sciences,

these kinds of general knowledge claims cannot be drawn from phenomenological studies, nor from qualitative studies (Englander, 2018; van Manen, 2014). Empirical data gathered in qualitative research are not actualities that constitute general knowledge claims in the usual empirical sense (van Manen; 2014). Phenomenology is not against empiricism, but it is broader than empirical philosophy because it studies phenomena which are not reducible to facts (Giorgi, 2006). Giorgi (2009) and van Manen (2014) agree that the term 'general' is a way to point to how the findings or the structures of meanings in phenomenological studies can extend to other similar contexts. Hence, generalization in a phenomenological context is related to what is 'general' to the phenomenon, not the population.

The kind of generalization phenomenology is concerned with is the eidetic or essential type of understanding (van Manen, 2014). Phenomenologists are interested in the structure of the phenomenon; what is universal or essential about a phenomenon in an existential sense, regardless of who the individuals are. Obviously, individual experiences are required in order for the phenomenon to exist, but we aim for insights of meaning that belong to a certain phenomenon, not to the individualized experience. Van Manen (2014) identifies this as the universal meaning of a phenomenon. Universal, in van Manen's understanding, points to the structures of existential meanings that belong to the phenomenon and differentiate it from other phenomena. Universal meanings can be recognized as the plausibility of an experience, even if it has never been personally experienced in the same kind of situation (van Manen, 2014). Giorgi (2000) argues that the meanings are *general*, not universal, because they are so strongly context-dependent. Perhaps Giorgi and van Manen are actually speaking about the same thing, but using different language when it comes to generalization and universality. They are both addressing the aim in phenomenology to search for insights and knowledge that reach beyond subjective experiences and particular contexts. In the present study, we strive for insights and knowledge that are relevant beyond the study's context by using the systematic approach defined by van Manen (2014).

6.6 Implications for practice and further research

This study revealed that support is a complex and diverse phenomenon with multiple challenges and possibilities for practice. According to van Manen (2014), phenomenology does not make things easier, but rather more difficult. Exploring support in a phenomenological manner has revealed the complexity, diversity, and ambiguity of the phenomenon of support. This study thus contradicts the assumption that we can ground our practices in something certain and absolute. However, the knowledge developed through this study makes it possible to suggest some thoughtful recommendations for practice and further research.

6.6.1 Implications for practice

Our study reveals that young persons with mental health problems often *do* feel supported by service providers, teachers, and others who intend to support them. They often *do* find supportive relationships, both inside and outside public services. It is encouraging and hopeful that professionals are doing a great deal to relate to young persons in need of support in ways that make them feel supported and cared for. Nevertheless, our study also reveals that support as an experiential, relational and spatial phenomenon encounters some barriers in current practice. These barriers need to be addressed in order to make the necessary changes to practice suggested by our study.

First, we need to realize that following standardized checklists, manualized treatment, or care pathways is insufficient for providing support. Support is, first and foremost, a subjective experience and requires a focus on the person, allowing the person whose particular life experience is situated in a specific context to lead the direction. This calls for continuous joint explorations and negotiations between the professional and the young person about what is needed for support to be experienced. Thus, practitioners also need to involve young persons in a search for the factors that facilitate and encourage movement and action in their lives and expand their space and freedom for movement, while at the same time creating a sense of stability and belonging. Recognizing that support cannot be forced but must arise within the relationships in the

context of the young person's life might challenge professionals to 'do' support outside offices, to meet young persons in their own settings. Perhaps most importantly, as practitioners, service leaders and policy makers, we need to embrace the position that it is not the young person that needs to adjust to services, but that services need to adjust to the realities of the young person's life situation and context.

Adopting a wondering attitude and an openness for the unforeseen as well as developing a tolerance for uncertainty might enhance professionals' awareness of the possibilities for support and the young person's readiness for acting. This does not mean that the professional should never be the one to lead or give advice or suggestions. That would just make a new 'standard' and such a stance is quite contradictory to our findings. Rather, it requires an awareness of what the unique situation calls for. Beyond awareness, professionals need to have the freedom and autonomy to be attentive to the uniqueness of the young person and his or her life situation and to be able to act on that attentiveness. Further, professionals should be given the opportunity and support to be and act authentically, making it easier for the young person to be and act authentically with them. We need to expand and encourage our ideas of professionalism to include qualities like friendship and love, so that they may flourish within the relationships between professionals and young persons in need of support.

Research shows that facilitative organizational leadership can generate and sustain change and provide conditions for practitioners to create change (McCormack et al., 2010). Organizational leaders need to create the possibilities for support to be practised in more person-centred ways, including the understanding of support as a subjective experience that dwells in relationships. They need to realize that supportive and nourishing relationships can create space for the young person to move and act. In order for support to young persons to be sustained as person-centred over time, it cannot take place in a random manner. The conditions that foster support must be anchored in forms of organizational leadership that are conducive to creating those conditions.

In supporting young persons in a person-centred way, policy makers must close the gap between rhetoric and reality to enable support to lead to real changes in people's lives. The language of current mental health policy supports a philosophy that is person-centred but also conducive to standardization and uniformity. There must be radical change from the belief in and power of expertise to practices based on collaboration and dialogue (Anderson, 2012; Borg & Karlsson, 2017; Pathare & Shields, 2012). Collaboration and guidance must become the *processes* of practice, replacing the *methods* of preplanned pathways and procedures. Although unintended, fixed pathways and procedures can actually become barriers to achieving what they are meant to produce, the successful reintegration of young persons into society. Our study reveals that support as lived experience is complex and diverse, and calls for flexibility and uniqueness in the development of pathways and interventions for young people struggling with mental health problems and attendance at school and work. Policy makers need to call for flexible, collaborative approaches that recognize young persons as autonomous and contextually complex. Professionals should be supported and encouraged to let their relationships with the young persons determine the most appropriate pathway and procedure for each individual. Thus, the preferred measures and approaches, in the light of our study, are dialogical, collaborative, and contextual and arise out of the particular circumstances of the individual; policies and practices must be truly person-centred.

6.6.2 Implications for further research

Our study has explored the phenomenon of support from the perspective of young persons receiving support. However, the experience of support in this context also belongs to the practitioners, the givers of support. Their experiences as providers have the potential to capture a deeper understanding of support from a totally different perspective. Insights from these two perspectives may lead to a deeper understanding of the phenomenon that can provide insights useful to practitioners, service delivery leaders, and policy makers. Additionally, our study confirms already existing knowledge about the significance of relationships in mental health services (Norcross, 2011; Topor & Denhov, 2015; Wampold & Imel, 2015). However, our study also adds to this body of

knowledge by revealing the deeper insights of the existential meanings of support as relational and spatial. Both meanings call for further exploration. There is a particular need to develop more knowledge about the relational aspect of nourishing communion, how nourishing relationships can be acknowledged and implemented in professional practice, and how such relationships *outside* public services might be included in young persons' recovery. Further, support as a spatial experience is an unusual finding that would benefit from further research. The relevance of both physical and mental space to support has received scant attention apart from the incipient understanding revealed by our study. Furthermore, the *temporal* aspects of support need to be included in a phenomenological exploration of support. To explore how time is experienced in relation to support would deepen our insights into the existential meanings of support.

7 Concluding remarks

The aim of this dissertation was to explore lived experiences of support from the perspective of young persons with mental health problems who are partly or wholly out of school and work. The study has shed light on the existential dimensions of the phenomenon of support and revealed some of its complexity and ambiguity. It revealed that support has multiple meanings for young persons with mental health problems that are interwoven with their everyday lives and contexts. Some universal aspects that seem to belong to the phenomenon of support are suggested. Support is, first and foremost, a subjective experience. Hence, support is not supportive until it is experienced as support. Good intentions, 'supportive' programmes and models are not a guarantee for support to be realized. Rather, support as lived experience is a *possibility* that might appear within caring relationships, in which the individuals involved can be and become who they are as persons. Relationships with a sense of nourishing communion can be seen as enabling persons to be and become more together than they could be alone. Lived experiences of support can create a sense of spaciousness: room to live and be nourished in, with the freedom to be and become. Support, in spatial terms, can be understood as being anchored while at the same time moving toward a future with hopes and prospects.

Preplanned pathways and standardized models and treatment aiming to support young persons to regain a foothold in school and work are not always adjustable to the individual young person or to his or her context. This dissertation suggests that supporting young persons with mental health problems partly or wholly out of school and work needs an approach that resembles and resonates with life as the young themselves know it. Services to provide support need to focus on the experiences of the young persons and be based on an understanding of what support might mean for them. Support is a relational process that calls for mutual exploration with young persons to find out how they can be supported in their life situation and context. This encourages practitioners to embrace a wondering attitude in every encounter with a young person in need of support, refraining from assuming that they know what support *is*.

This dissertation argues that offering invitations is more important than presenting solutions. Invitations are free to be accepted or rejected, and respect the young person's freedom to act from her or his own position. The actual movement must start from the person herself or himself. Services and practitioners need to adjust to young persons, not vice versa. This means that practitioners must be prepared for uncertainty and possibilities rather than relying on formulas, prescriptions, and professional distance.

The insights revealed in our study are a contribution to person-centred care. In addition, our study is a contribution to recovery research and practice, for and with young persons with mental health problems. Some significant aspects of lived experiences of support have been revealed, while other aspects are still hidden. Our study acknowledges that the understandings derived from this exploration are preliminary and subject to change. There is yet more to be seen to enrich our understanding of the everyday life experiences of support.

In conclusion, support, as an existential phenomenon, is complex and paradoxical; both powerful and vulnerable. It has the power to nourish and to expand a person's lived space making room for the freedom to move and act; to be and become. And yet, it is also vulnerable, dependent on the response of the one supported and influenced by contextual circumstances beyond our control. Thus, support that are experienced as support by young persons with mental health problems who are out of school and work requires an increased sensitivity and awareness by practitioners and policy makers of its complexity and both its power and vulnerability if it is to fully realize its existential potential.

8 References

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9 Appendix

Appendices 1-3 accepted/published papers:

1: Beyond support. Sommer & Saevi 2017

2: Lived Space and Support. Sommer & Saevi 2018

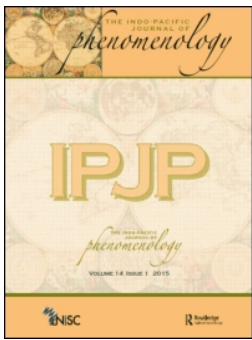
3: Nourishing communion. Sommer, Finlay, Ness, Borg & Blank 2019*

4: Information and informed consent

5: Interviewguide

6: REK approval

*Article omitted from the electronic dissertation



Beyond Support: Exploring Support as Existential Phenomenon in the Context of Young People and Mental Health

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Beyond Support: Exploring Support as Existential Phenomenon in the Context of Young People and Mental Health

by Mona Sommer and Tone Saevi

Abstract

Support in different modes, expressions and actions is at the core of the public welfare culture. In this paper, support is examined as an everyday interpersonal phenomenon with a variety of expressions in language and ways of relating, and its essential meaning is explored. The fulcrum for reflection is the lived experience shared by a young woman with mental health problems of her respective encounters with two professionals in mental health facilities. A phenomenological analysis of the contrasting accounts suggests that, when the professional relationship includes openness and risk, a certain degree of freedom of action is possible for both parties involved in the inevitably asymmetrical relationship. Support as “given” eludes controllable and measurable objectives, but imposes itself on the lived experiences of both the giver and the receiver as subject to readiness for acceptance. By not making assumptions about what support is, we open ourselves to the possibility of reciprocally experiencing moments revealing the essential meaning of support as lived.

Lived Support

The increasing rate of mental health problems among young people is one of the greatest challenges facing public health services in the Nordic societies. Young people who are neither studying nor employed and who suffer from mental health problems often experience the absence of the support they need (Anvik & Gustavsen, 2012; Kierkegaard, 2016). The term “support” is at the very core of mental health services, and a considerable amount of research has been devoted to exploring initiatives and programmes intended to support persons with mental health problems in their everyday lives (Bejerholm, Areberg, Hofgren, Sandlund, & Rinaldi, 2015; Gonzalez & Anvik, 2015; Schindler & Sauerwald, 2013). Provision such as “supported employment”, “supported education” and “supported housing” is aimed at increasing the community engagement of persons with mental health problems (Davidson et al., 2001).

Quantitative studies identify the key characteristics of programmes that support individuals in gaining positive vocational and educational outcomes and participation in community life, such as follow-along support, one-on-one mentoring, professionals’ availability, integrated mental health service and rapid school/work search (Bejerholm et al., 2015; Bond, Drake, & Becker, 2008; Schindler & Sauerwald, 2013). These characteristics are significant determinants at a population level, but they do not necessarily determine what support is or what support means to the individuals receiving it. Findings of qualitative studies exploring first-person experiences of support suggest that relationship qualities, flexibility, practical help and collaboration are conducive to the experience of being supported (Anvik & Gustavsen, 2012; Kierkegaard, 2016; Kinn, Holgersen, Aas, & Davidson, 2014). The question remains, however, whether we can come closer to what support is and to how young people with mental health issues experience the support provided.

We (practitioners, policy-makers, researchers) may think that we know the meaning of support because of our established interventions and programmes intended to provide support and the availability of evidence-based knowledge of successful key characteristics. We might trust that knowledge, experience and the right method or approach ensure effective supportive practices. User evaluations reveal satisfied or less satisfied patients, and efforts are made to improve programmes and practices. We know from practice, however, that practice itself brings about experiences that are not always measurable or evident in evaluation reports. This paper is aimed at contributing to the existing body of knowledge about support and moving beyond the aforementioned research by exploring the lived experience of support in a phenomenological manner. We want to know about how support is sensed in the moment of experience – before the person reflects on or evaluates it. Are there experiential qualities – like sensations, sense of body, glance, self, time, space, relation – that can help us understand what support is and how it is lived in practice? What is the actual lived experience of support? What qualities give the supportive act its validity?

This paper is a sub-study of a PhD project exploring the phenomenon of support in the lifeworld of young people with mental health problems who are fully or partially out of the educational and employment contexts. The research project consists of three sub-studies exploring lived experiences of support from different angles.

Ready-to-Hand

Support is a human phenomenon that is part of our everyday language and experienced in a variety of ways in both formal and informal relationships. The dictionary definition of the verb “support” points to its general meaning as being actively to “bear the weight of”, “prop up” or “back”, and as such to “stand by”, something or someone in a precarious position or condition in order to “strengthen the position of” the other and so “forestall sinking or falling back”. Terms such as sustain, bolster, buttress, brace are “comparable when they mean to hold up either literally or figuratively, although they vary greatly in their specific senses and in the range of their applicability” (Merriam-Webster, 1992, pp. 800-801). Similarly, terms related to a further sense of “support” such as uphold, advocate, back, or champion are only “comparable when they mean to favour actively and in some concrete manner a person or thing that meets opposition”.¹ In both senses, “support” may thus be interpreted as meaning to act in favour of someone or something in a circumstantially vulnerable position. The word itself is nevertheless not explicit about the exact nature of the action implied. The prefix “sup”, as the assimilated form of *sub*, means “up from under” and the

¹ *The Merriam-Webster Dictionary of Synonyms and Antonyms*. (1992). Springfield, MA: Merriam-Webster.

Latin root *portare* means “to carry”.² In its original meaning, to support someone thus literally meant to lift up or carry someone upward from a condition of below. The closeness of support to life as lived and language as spoken “carries a moral force”, van Manen says (1990/1997, p. 12). Its moral and relational potency is recognized in its multiple synonyms that signify the term “support” as a moral act toward someone or something, and the designation of a specific act, position or state of existence. Both the verb and the noun “support” connote potentials that reinforce our understanding of the complexity of meanings and interpretations of the word in contemporary mental health services. For “to support” also carries etymological denotations such as “to endure and tolerate”, “to furnish sustenance for”, “to keep from failing” (Onions, 1966, p. 888), and “to enable something to fulfil its function and remain in operation”.² The qualitative potential of support is, thus, immediately connectable to our experiential sense and to the ideals and the aims of good human and professional practice, even if these might be taken for granted or even forgotten in the natural disarray of everyday practices.

Like most everyday relational (and moral) phenomena, support is a ready-to-hand entity in our lifeworld – a “thing” that is there in order “to do” something useful or suitable (Heidegger, 1926/1962). Support is so close to us that it is only in its secondary mode, when it is not functioning or loses its usefulness for us, that it stands apart and becomes a concern. We give, receive, expect, hope for, and have legal or rightful claims to support in personal as well as professional relationships in health services, education and the legal system. We perform support with a view to desired outcomes, and not until support becomes a problem – is obtrusive or obdurate – do we become aware of it and reflect on how to mend it and make it work again. The following accounts of support as lived experience exemplify the “taken-for-granted” or “ready-to-hand” quality that characterizes our being inattentively involved with the naturalness of daily doing and acting.

Karen is embracing her daughter in farewell. Her daughter leans into her. Karen’s arms are around her daughter’s body, like so many times before. She slackens her grip carefully, moves her hands to her daughter’s arms, holds her a moment, lets go, and the girl turns around and walks away.

In the Book of Psalms, David poetically proclaims his confident trust in God as support in his fear of being defeated and exterminated by his enemies. He says, “Surely God is my help; the Lord is the one who sustains me” (Psalm 54:4; New International Version).

² [www.etymonline.com / support](http://www.etymonline.com/support)

John looks through the window from his seat in the restaurant. He is waiting for a friend. Then suddenly he sees him on the crowded pavement. People pass by him, rushing ahead. To them walking seems easy. John's friend moves slowly. Every step is taken with the utmost care and effort. He has multiple sclerosis. A pair of crutches supports his steps.

Acceptance of the world *as is*, our taken-for-granted and natural attitude to what happens, stands in contrast to the phenomenological attitude that questions what we take for real and actively explores the possible human experience of things and situations (Sokolowski, 2000). The persons in the accounts above experience support in the course of living their lives. By exploring support in a phenomenological manner, we move from our position "within the situation" – from the natural attitude of taking for granted, knowing and mastering actions, bodies and intentions. We then are no longer in the situation of just providing and experiencing support, and we can no longer take for granted that we know the meaning of what support is or use the word carelessly. Supportive professional and personal actions no longer come about without consideration of alternatives to what we are doing. We are compelled to reflect on the greater complexity of the phenomenon. In a sense, a phenomenologist knows that s/he is both inside and outside of the situation and that thus s/he should dwell attentively and be alert to potential ruptures in meanings and practices (Saevi, 2013b). A phenomenologist always is in a position of not knowing exactly, and therefore must ask what this phenomenon actually is. As Merleau-Ponty (1948/1997) asserts, the human being "is made of the same flesh as the world" (p. 248) and is shared and reflected by the world. This interconnectedness creates a "pregnancy for possibilities" (p. 249), which allows for a complexity of interpretations and understandings of phenomena in life. Whilst no researcher can wring from any phenomenon what it in reality is, "our" own phenomenon, support, has ceased to be simply a familiar and taken-for-granted part of life and now is a complex question. We are now attentively aware that we do not know the exact answer. This deconstructive practice "is an ethic-sensitive openness toward that which comes into being *as it comes into being*, and a practice of writing that intends responsibly to respond to the possibility of the otherness of the phenomenon and of the other" (Saevi, 2013b, p. 7).

The phenomenological attitude of heuristic wonder about concrete meaning is pointed to by Merleau-Ponty (1945/2002) as, paradoxically, an attempt to avoid a one-sided cognitive knowing, balanced by an awareness of the sensational and bodily way of experiential knowing. Ultimately, thus, "The world is not what I think, but what I live through" (Merleau-Ponty, 1945/2002, pp. xvi-xvii). We recognize support in the moment of pre-reflective experience, and thus somehow unknowingly

"know" what support is. We know experientially and can distinguish support from what is not in the moment it is lived. This immediate embodied and sensational experience of support is what constitutes the starting point for our inquiry, reflection and interpretation.

To Explore Experience

The attempt to explicate the meaning of things, events and actions as we live them, rather than as we "know" or conceptualize them, evolves from the insight that to understand is to experience existence rather than to explain or rationalize reality in an epistemological manner (Levinas, 1987/1993). The way the researcher understands the phenomenon under investigation is a kind of practical experience *of* the world and of him- or herself *in* the world. Van Manen (1990/1997, p. 25) defines phenomenology as "on the one hand, description of the lived-through quality of lived experience, and on the other hand, description of meaning *of the expressions of lived experience*". Description of the lived-through experience inheres immediately in the living of the experience in the moment, while description of the meaning of the expression of the lived experience is mediated by the symbolic form, the words, we use to describe the situation. In other words, the experience of support as lived-through is prior to an interpretation of the meaning of support in practice and reflection about practice. However, the immediate lived-through moment is not accessible beyond the moment when it was lived-through. Thus, when a person retrospectively describes an experience, she or he recalls the immediateness of the moment in the encounter between memory and language, an encounter that of necessity is partly obscure.

Instances of support in practice – support as experienced within human relationships – might support our understanding of what support is. While subjective experience may inhere in the researcher's prior access to the phenomenon, lived experience descriptions are the alpha and omega of phenomenological investigations. Merleau-Ponty's (1945/2002) "as it is" ranks any science secondary to human experience. He says: "looking for the world's essence is not looking for what it is as an idea once it has been reduced to a theme of discourse; it is looking for what it is as a fact for us, before any thematization" (p. xvii). The simple fact of support evident in practice is that support is not necessarily experienced as supportive. The situation might hold the potential of support, but the potential is not always realized, and the experience of support, therefore, is not the only possible consequence of a supportive act. The experience of being supported or not is different from the experience (or intent) of providing support. How effectively what is intended as support achieves its intent is closely related to the receiver's experience of the situation. This insight challenges professionals' use of procedures that are believed to be supportive, but that may, in fact, not be perceived as such by the receiver.

The lived experience of support seems to be inextricably connected to the qualities of the relationship of support, and it embeds possibilities for a variety of alternative actions. The relation as middle ground – meeting place, forum, *even fulcrum* – is where those comprising the relationship address and are addressed by actions, ideas, events and interests initiated in or by the situation. The relationship is the spatial distance or nearness between persons, but the space is not neutral ground in terms of how potential relational qualities unfold. All kinds of relationships can happen: close or distant, authoritative or managerial, open or controlled, caring or uncaring, encouraging or dispiriting, and so on. How the parties involved experience the relationship in the moment, and in particular the one most conditioned by or subject to the influence of the relationship itself, is at the very centre of our interest. Are some ways of relating more supportive than others?

Because the beginning and end of phenomenological inquiry is the lived experience of the phenomenon under investigation, we asked young people with mental health problems what it is like to be supported. The personal views or opinions of the participants are not our concern. Rather, our focus is on the participants' articulation of concrete examples of support that allow for exploration of the phenomenon and the uncovering of structures that constitute the lived meaning of support. We present two examples of the lived experience of professional support recounted by a young woman and explore their singular and transcendent meanings.

Support as Lived Relationality

In the first example, Olivia³, one of the participants in our study, meets with a therapist in a mental health outpatient unit. At the point of their meeting Olivia has been out of school for two years, and had recently attempted to commit suicide. She says:

I was sitting in her office – an unfamiliar place. I felt like a stranger. She was looking in my journal continually. She was reading about me. Then she said, still looking in the journal, “So, you’ve had a suicidal attempt. You are severely depressed and you have a moderate level of anxiety. I see that you have dropped out of school.” At that moment, I mentally cut off. She went on talking about depression scales and symptoms and consequences. I felt like a category. Someone outside of myself. A not me. She was the one knowing things, and she told me about me. I was just supposed to listen.

We immediately sense that this is not a good situation for Olivia. She feels objectified, disengaged, and bad about both herself and the situation. The relationship is

³ “Olivia” is a pseudonym.

professional and factually asymmetric (see Skjervheim, 1992). The uneven power balance between the parties preconditions the relationship, and the asymmetry can be levelled only in the moment of action. This does not happen for Olivia with the therapist. As readers, we might feel upset by the therapist's focus on medical facts and her lack of involvement in the present relation with her young patient. The uneven power relationship indicates a moral and relational dilemma as long as the professional does not responsibly respond to the power inequality. The relational situation as it appears does not provide room for support to happen.

A few weeks later, Olivia meets Ann, a mental health worker in a community service for young people. She describes their encounter as follows:

Ann and I went to a café, and she bought coffee and sandwiches for us. She was just so nice to me. We talked about normal things, such as what I like to do. She also told me a little about herself. She watched me gently, and attentively leant toward me across the table when I talked, as if she did not want to miss a word. I felt that she cared about me. I could see it in her eyes. I told her things that I normally feel bad talking about. However, with her it was easy to tell things. It felt like being with a caring friend. She made me feel like a normal person rather than a problem.

The two situations reflect very different ways of being together and a different awareness of the asymmetry of the relationship. The second situation might have greater appeal to our positive feelings about how a young person in need of support should be met with care by professionals. Some of us might immediately associate with Ann's real interest in Olivia as a person, and instinctively identify with Olivia's expressions of being more comfortable in an ordinary environment like a café rather than in a professional office. Olivia's experience in both of these situations, undoubtedly, is true as subjective experience. She describes the relationship with Ann as supportive, in contrast to the event at the therapist's office, which she senses as not supportive. But can we trust her experiences? The question hits to the core of phenomenology and the status of subjective experience in research (van Manen, 2014). In phenomenology, subjective experience is true as experience, but it cannot claim to be generalizable. Phenomenology never generalizes. It systematically thematizes the multitude of diverse human experiences of the phenomenon under investigation in order to identify its invariable structure. A phenomenological exploration attempts to uncover in richly vivid detail the lived experience of a phenomenon in order to identify meanings that belong explicitly to this particular phenomenon, in this case, “support”. “Support” shows itself to human experience in real life situations, although in bits and pieces, always partly hidden like the Greek hint at with their

term “Aletheia”. The paradox is that our access to the phenomena of the world is possible only through an interpretation of experience, reflection and language. The link between the two examples is that some kind of support is intended from the professionals in both situations. The subjective experiences of this young woman present potential access to her lifeworld and to her ways of expressing how these relationships are experienced. The obvious thought is that, in the concrete relationship between the person and the professional, the very relationship seems to “speak” directly to the receiver of support (as also to the writers and readers of this text), whether the professional intends this or not.

Support Speaks in the Relationship

The therapist presents things about her as if she actually knows her, Olivia says: “*She was the one knowing things, and she told me about me*”. The therapist acts according to her prescribed role and accomplishes the diagnostic assessment, evaluates the results, and suggests appropriate treatment. Nevertheless, young people like Olivia, as well as others, need to be noticed. Interestingly, to be “noticed” derives from the Latin *notitia*, and means to “be known” or “acquainted” (Onions, 1966, p. 615). To be attentively known by the other is what people tend to hope for when they meet others, including professionals, and, consequently, what they most want when it is missing. In the same way as seeing at times may see too little, like when it is blinded or oblivious and does not see the other in ways that he or she needs, seeing might also at times be too “seeingly” (Saevi, 2005). Professional seeing, which is more than the physical exercise of the eyes, may see too much. In Olivia’s case, the therapist sees more than is experienced as appropriate, and the young woman feels that the look penetrates her. The experience of the look is painful. The description discloses that the therapist sees Olivia with a diagnostic lens in order to classify her. The word *diagnosis* derives from the Greek word meaning “to discern”, and the root *gnosis* means “a knowing”.⁴ The therapist discerningly comes to know Olivia through her diagnostic lens. The young woman’s mental state is fixed and presented in a diagnosis. This is a different knowing than the experience of being known or acquainted with someone – the experience that Olivia misses in the first situation but senses in the second. A diagnostic knowing sees too much – it screens the other, almost like an x-ray – and when someone or something is seen through, there is no need for wonder. The peculiar thing is that the moment of seeing too much also might entail seeing too little. Olivia needs to be seen as a normal person – not as a problem or a diagnosis. However, this time she is disappointed. The therapist’s “knowing” glance sees only her problem and misses Olivia.

We learn from Levinas (1947/1987, Pt. IV) that, despite

⁴ www.etymonline.com/diagnosis

the separation between self and other, there can be no relation to the other that is not at the same time a relation to the self. This apparent paradox calls into question the very complex event of being present as oneself and simultaneously being present to the other. Large (2015, p. 23) clarifies this as follows: “The two terms of the relation, self and other, relate to one another and at the same time are separate from one another”. There is no shortcut to escape this complex and contradictory challenge in professional practice. Sartre claims that, when I am fully absorbed in something, I am conscious only of the moment and not of myself (Sartre, 1943/1956, p. 348). In moments of absorbed attention, my presence, while not sensed by me, may still be sensed by the other person who is sharing the moment with me. I am somehow present to the other, but not to myself. This is so with Olivia and the therapist, as well as with the health care worker. In moments of absorbed attention, they lose themselves to the Other. In the present absorbedness, they do not make judgments about the Other, but are lost, each into the Other. The Other, however, sees their presence, and might pass judgment on them. How are Olivia and the professionals seeing each other’s presences and are they judging each other? The therapist diagnoses Olivia, which infers judgment. Olivia, in turn, feels that she is not being treated in an acceptable way. She feels judged, and she judges the therapist (in her heart) as a non-supportive person; in contrast, she judges Ann as being a supportive person.

Although Olivia did not explicitly ask for support, it is to be assumed that something in her might be oriented toward wanting to be supported. It therefore seems as if, by explaining symptoms and diagnostic features, the therapist puts her faith in Olivia’s reasoning. Rationality, however, is not always the basic motivation for change and development, and nor for the experience of support. Examining the educational experience, Bollnow (1962/1989) notes that there has to be something present in the young person that is oriented toward development and that somehow asks for support. Young people, like Olivia, have to be ready for support and ready to learn something new about themselves in order to be not only open to, but susceptible to, the professional’s advice. Of course, this existential readiness is seldom in the consciousness of the young person, and often not even in the consciousness of the professional. Moreover, being ready for learning might be less of a cognitive question than a question of relational tone and climate. Bollnow (1962/1989) puts it like this:

Readiness to be educated is definitely not rooted in the intellect; rather it is founded on the deeper and therefore much more securely progressive spirit of a morning-like atmosphere. Accordingly, education must take this notion as its starting point: it should orient itself to the perfection of this spirit by guarding it and rebuilding it time and again when it is being destroyed. (p. 21)

Even though the therapist might have good intentions, just as the situation has the potential to be supportive, Olivia does not feel supported. What was not present in the situation was the “morning-like” atmosphere of hope and relief, as well as space for mutual openness to the possibilities of her present life opportunities. The therapist did not see the significance of the relational atmosphere and the young woman’s need for the sensed presence of no judgment or the freedom of a more equal power balance, and thus the moment lost its supportive potential.

In the other professional encounter, Olivia experiences the good atmosphere of “*being with a caring friend*”. Ann’s tone, how she speaks, how her body is oriented toward Olivia, the look in her eyes, the exchange of questions and responses, the rhythm of the conversation, all seem to resonate with Olivia. She senses herself as a normal person, not as a person with problems, and she feels supported. How can we understand Olivia’s different experiences in terms of support or not support?

Support as Latent Possibility

Recalling that the word “support” originates from the Latin *supportare* – sub + portare – “to carry up from under”, again brings the asymmetry of a relationship of support to the fore. All the same, the meaning still is consistent with the connotations of support mentioned initially, and with our sense that the professional in an asymmetric relationship is responsible for his or her responsibility for how power is exercised in his or her practice (Saevi, 2015; Skjervheim, 1992). If we look at equivalents for the word support, however, dilemmas arise that are worthy of closer attention. To start with, the noun “support” bears the meaning of “protection” and a sense of “bearing of expense”. To protect someone from something and to carry the costs of something for someone are responsible acts that include the risk of failure, not only for the one supported, but also for the supporter. Care of another from that which threatens might cost effort, will and persistence. Does this address the encounter between Olivia and her two counsellors?

Every relation between persons implies a multitude of potential actions and intentions. The “alternatives are connected to the values we find important in our lives” (Saevi, 2013a, p. 237) and these values inevitably seep into our practice. Due to the complexity of values and the temporal and experiential dimensions of life, our values evade our full conscious control, and are often so close to our way of life that we fail to see them. In this regard, Heidegger (1942-43/1992) says:

Because the closest is the most familiar, it needs no special appropriation. We do not think about it. . . . The closest appears therefore as if it were nothing. We see first, strictly speaking, never the closest but always the next closest. (p. 135)

What is closest to us thus tends to be that which we overlook and forget. The values that constitute our life are often not reflectively willed or planned. Existence and language need no special appropriation, Heidegger claims, but are passed over in silence, as if they were “nothing”. Existential values underlying the responses to Olivia in the two situations described are not fully accessible to the two professionals, and nor to us as authors and readers. Nevertheless, we have no reason not to assume that both intended to give some kind of support to the young woman, even though the intentions are not fully reflected in the examples presented.

Weil (1990) offers a moral supplement to Sartre’s observation by addressing the human potential to be attentive to others rather than to judge his or her actions. “Warmth, kind-heartedness and compassion are not enough” (p. 77), she says:

The thought must first be hesitatingly expectant, empty, not searching for anything, but ready to be given to the object as it appears in its naked truth. (p. 75) [authors’ translation]

Attention without judgment is required to do the other person justice. To give support or to sustain carries the synonymous meaning of the verb “to suffer” or “endure”. It is logical that the one who is in need of support endures suffering in some form. We believe that Olivia suffers and is deprived of the life she desires. At least she did. That is why she is in her present situation. To sustain someone, however, has to do with seeing this person’s pain. The provider of support is supposed to see the pain of the other and to do something to ease it. Judgment is replaced by attention to the exposedness of the other and to how the moment might ease his or her suffering. We might, however, be too eager to fill the moment with rational meaning. We might endeavour to explicate who the Other is in order to explain why help is required. This leaves us with judgments and thoughts rather than with attention to the present moment and the attempt to ease suffering (Weil, 1990).

Levinas (1947/1987) introduces yet another paradoxical aspect to our reflection. He claims that the attitude of not knowing the other, recognizing the other as unknowable, is the most radical foundation of any relationship: “We recognize the other as resembling us, but exterior to us; the relationship with the other is a relationship with a Mystery” (p. 75). The insight that the other is as me, and yet radically different from me, addresses the aspect of the freedom of both. The freedom of not knowing (*agnosis*) frees from judgment. Not knowing keeps open the possibilities and allows room for wonder. We nevertheless cannot not know forever. At some point in a relationship, we do know what we did not know before. How then do we act? Our exploration of possible meanings from Olivia’s experience suggests that a supportive act inheres in both knowing and not knowing.

Knowing as a passive activity; a knowing that is open to not knowing; a knowing that knows the limitation of knowing and the potential of not knowing. We might say that the paradox of knowing and not knowing indicates the openness of a new “method”.

Support as Being Present in Presence

The obvious, but not always considered, basis of human experience is that every human being experiences life-situations differently. This is true both for the person providing and for the person receiving support. Both experience themselves, the other’s way of being and behaving, and the situation as such, immediately and pre-reflectively, and these experiences are simultaneous and interwoven (Merleau-Ponty, 1945/2002). To the professionals as well as to the young woman, Olivia, sensations, feelings and impressions are evoked in the mutual encounter *before* there is time for conscious reflection. They both sense the present situation bodily and emotionally. Heidegger’s term “*Befindlichkeit*” – how I “find myself” – indicates our pre-reflective sense of self in the particular moment of experience. Gendlin (1978-1979) suggests that to “find oneself” in the present is not a clear-cut and rational reflection, but a stumbling attempt to describe the situation as it really was. At a particular moment during the encounter with the therapist, an alien sense of self comes over Olivia, and she says, “*I felt like a stranger*”. The adjective “strange” connotes the words “separate” and “distant”.⁵ The noun “stranger” is synonymous with “unknown”. Translated to our context, Olivia seems to feel that she is not connected, she is distant, even unknown to the therapist in spite of the fact that the therapist presents relevant information from her treatment journal, and they are present in the same room sitting directly opposite one another. The experience of being known to someone has to do with a sense of being recognized or remembered – of being called to mind or acknowledged by someone. There would seem to be an experiential connection between the experience of support and the experience of being recognized. The therapist relates to Olivia, talks to her and, through this, she somehow acknowledges her presence. Olivia, however, states that she feels strange in the situation. Somehow, the presence of the professional does not make itself felt to Olivia. Their joint presence is present to Olivia in a non-present way. Being jointly physically present is not enough to convey the true presence. For Olivia, real presence is absent from the presence with the therapist. Marcel (1950) observes that we very rarely experience presence in itself as presence, but rather as something else present or absent. If something intrudes upon our ordinary habits, such as pain or illness, our everyday taken-for-granted sense of being is interrupted. The lived absence of wellbeing and non-pain disturbs our present. What is it that disturbs Olivia’s presence with the

therapist? Marcel (1950) relates the experience of non-presence to the subject’s sense of being alienated from him-or herself. He says:

One might say that what we have with this person, who is in the same room, but somehow not really present to us, is communication without communion: unreal communication, in a word. He understands what I say to him, but he does not understand me: I may even have the extremely disagreeable feeling that my own words, as he repeats them to me, as he reflects them back at me, have become unrecognizable. ... this stranger interposes himself between me and my own reality, he makes me in some sense also a stranger to myself; I am not really myself while I am with him. (p. 205)

Perhaps Olivia’s journal and her diagnosis are taking up the space between Olivia and the therapist. The therapist communicates with Olivia using professional language and tools. This does not necessarily have to be a problem. Sometimes a computer screen or a treatment journal does not disturb the communication, but supports it as some kind of catalyst enhancing their shared focus. In this particular setting, however, Olivia’s experience of reality does not coincide with the therapist’s professional orientation. The potential for either fellowship or trustful communion between them is thus literally reduced to professionally prescribed forms. There is no communion in the communication. The word “communion” derives from the Latin prefix *com-*, “with or together”, + *unus*, “oneness or union”. Communion literally means the experience of oneness or togetherness. What then is the connection between the experience of togetherness and the experience of being present? According to Marcel (1950), presence is not real before the communication is communion. In terms of support, one possibility is that support makes itself possible when I recognize myself as myself in communion with the other.

In all encounters, we are faced with the challenge to see the person beyond the role. Lingis (1994) notes that we tend to feel that to know someone is to relate to their representative features, like gender, culture, education, class, and, we might add, diagnosis. Encounters often tend to be “detoured into efforts, even more evidently fragmentary and superficial, to know all these layers”, (Lingis, 1994, p. viii). Ann, the mental health worker, cuts through the conventions and the superficialities of diagnoses, professional role and differences, and sees Olivia as a person. She speaks to Olivia personally. We sense that, before she is physically and mentally with Olivia in the café, she is existentially *for* her. Support as a possibility arises in the presence of the situation, and orients beyond conventions and impersonal tasks (Saevi & Eikeland, 2012). The therapist, on the other hand, is trapped in conventional language, tools, roles, professional judgments and past problems. Her effort

⁵ www.etymonline.com / strange

is to know all these layers, present them to Olivia, and start from there. However, Olivia is not there any more. Her presence is in the present, and her life is lived in continuously new moments where presence is what is asked for. Because support is lived in interpersonal relationships made up of no more and no less than my spontaneous response to the other person's need present to me in the immediate moment, what is asked for is an immediate attentive response to ease the other's pain as it presents itself in the moment.

Support as a Future Gift

Considering the basic terms of Løgstrup (2008), support might be seen as a "sovereign expression of life" (p. 50). He says: "The sovereign expression of life draws its content from the specific situation and the relation to the other, which is to say, from my conception of that situation and relation, of their actual circumstances and history" (p. 52). Support, as a spontaneous response to what the situation asks for, emerges in the very moment of joint presence. Support exists only in the context of the relationship. It is a potential in practice that is characterized by embodied-being-in-the-world, and in the relationship and in action, rather than being explicitly known or formalized as concept or preplanned practice (van Manen, 1999). Support, as a sovereign life expression, is related to what is right and good in the present situation, rather than to what is reasonable and professionally correct. "The expression of life cannot be applied, but can only be realized, as I realize myself in it" (Løgstrup, 2008, p. 53). Support, then, is a gift given with no ulterior motive or expectation of reciprocity or services in return. No thankfulness or enthusiasm is presupposed. Not even the willingness of the other to improve, get well or succeed. What is given is a gift and belongs to the other, the receiver, and cannot be taken back or reclaimed. Literally, the word *gift* means "that which is given", and in Old Norse a gift given means "good luck" in life. Support, also professional support, can be regarded, in a sense, as a personal gift given by the supporter, but belonging to the receiver as a future gift. Olivia recognizes Ann's

support as a gift, and accepts it. The gift is receivable and merges into Olivia's self and lifeworld as a welcome possibility that she acknowledges as such.

As relational human beings who have the opportunity to give and receive support, there is always a risk that support might not be experienced as supportive. The giver of support might fail to recognize the kind of support that the situation asks for, the receiver does not get the support s/he needs, or the receiver might not be ready to receive that which is given. Support as gift is not an object to be transferred between a giver and a receiver, because the objectification of support would disqualify it as gift (Marion, 1997/2002).

Concluding Remarks

Examining support as an everyday interpersonal, and thus moral, phenomenon, revealed existential meanings of support that may be useful for practice. By bringing embodied experiences into the foreground, support shows itself as a phenomenon that does not let itself be used to promote specific outcomes. Support exists as a free phenomenon, given or not given, accepted or ignored, and experienced as good or not good in the concrete situations where it is present. Support is not manifest or determined, and cannot be offered as a settlement for results, better mental health, or increased participation in school or work. Preplanned models, programmes or agreements of support should be recognized as, in themselves, potentially supportive, but not sufficient as such for support in fact to be given.

On the basis of our analysis, we would argue that some ways of relating are more supportive than others. To be attentively known by the giver of the support, and knowing with an open and non-judgmental attitude, holds the potential for support to be both given and received. This existential insight invites professionals to bring themselves into the encounters as authentic persons, disclosing their vulnerability, and to trust uncertainty as a way of being open to the Other and to what the situation calls for.

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Lived Space and Support as Interrelated Phenomena in the Context of Young People with Mental Health Problems

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“Every change ‘in’ the human being entails a change to his lived space” (Bollnow, 2011, p. 21).

Abstract

The Norwegian welfare system due to human rights is in charge of providing necessary support of life to every citizen in terms of a safe place to live, the opportunity to education or employment and meaningful life accomplishments. We explore how public sustenance is experienced by a group of young receivers of public support. The article is one of three sub-studies drawing on empirical material from in-depth interviews with 14 young adults with mental health challenges and experiences from being partly or fully out of school or work. The interviews reveal that in particular three aspects of support are significant to the young. These are personal and shared space (e.g., supportive personal and professional relationships), the opportunity of a safe home, and the prospect of not being trapped for a lengthy time in their problems (an effective ‘standstill’ or suspension of agency of life), but be part of the “world out there.” Could public support provide some temporary or permanent help with regard to these basic aspects of life? We explore in this article the potential interrelatedness between space and support in a hermeneutic phenomenological manner with basis in experiences from four of the young in the study. David, Mia, Oda and Simon (all pseudonyms) each in their way, describe moments where support and space seem to be existentially and experientially interconnected. We wonder if analysis of the two phenomena can inform our understanding of the qualities that characterize what we might call a ‘supportive’ environment within public welfare.

Keywords: Lived space, support, existence, phenomenology, mental health, inside, outside, relationship, freedom.

Introduction

The fact that many young people with mental health problems experience interruptions of school and work participation is of great concern to society. Feelings of ‘outsiderness’ among young people, due to being disengaged from education and work, is of increasing concern for within Nordic countries, as well as for the member countries of the European Union (European Commission, 2014; Wulf-Andersen, Follesø & Olsen, 2016). A particular understanding of this group of young people considers them to constitute a socio-economic problem; a threat to a sustainable welfare state. Although the majority of young people with mental health issues are regular students or employees (Strand & Nielsen, 2015), an increasing number is at risk of not finishing basic education or having permanent work and thus they tend to remain outside of the social arenas considered economically productive (Kierkegaard, 2016). Debates on social participation (being *inside*) and marginalization (being *outside*), dominate the welfare agenda in many European countries. A variety of reports discuss the distance between being inside and being outside in education and employment, and new ways to secure participation and inclusion of young people with mental health problems (e.g., Strand & Nielsen, 2015; Kierkegaard, 2016). In addition, improvement of school-to-work transition is emphasized in ‘The EU Youth Guarantee’ (European Commission, 2014). Belonging within a social setting is central to human existence and culture and to the experience of a good life (Malone, Pillow, & Osman, 2012). For the target group of this study, to be ‘inside’ and feel connected and to belong to social and interpersonal settings like work and school is found to be critical in recovery from mental distress (Tew et al., 2012). The terms “outsiderness,” and its opposite, “insiderness,” direct our theoretical and empirical attention toward (young) people’s possibility of connecting to positive aspects of social life, or remaining on the outside, at the margins. These phenomena, discussed in mental health literature, are intertwined with emotional issues and identity processes, social networks, sociocultural discourses and processes of social inclusion and exclusion (Wulf-Andersen, Follesø, & Olsen, 2016).

Being inside or outside of a situation, event or life circumstance as a physical and literal condition might be compared to being inside or outside of a room or a building. In the latter, a person can intentionally move from outside to inside, or from inside to outside, and by doing so change their current actual and physical position. However, a change of social or mental life condition is not so simple. The social exclusion/inclusion mechanisms that constitute and control human relationships as well as social systems and institutions, are well known phenomena in sociological and psychological literature. While belonging to a particular society provides the right to be on the inside (for instance the right to be under consideration for job or education), not all young people are facilitated or motivated to exercise that right. In a certain sense, being at the outside of “society,” if the majority of the citizens one’s age are inside, is experienced as a problem, a disability or even a failure. This is particularly so if the person is at an age where he or she is expected to be in school, or after mandatory school, is expected to continue studying or start working. The young people in this study are out of school or work, and in addition they suffer from mental health problems. Because of their general life condition, they are more likely to be considered “high risk people” by social and public systems due to the fact that they more often than others remain outside of education and employment, and are disadvantaged with regard to economy, housing and social relationships (Karlsson & Borg, 2017). Outsiders are wanted “in” for a variety of reasons; for instance for life quality reasons, and because they are considered expensive for society. Therefore, high-cost efforts are made to include them in society. Such programs are not always efficient, effective or equitable. The outside – inside dichotomy is the point of orientation of the welfare system, and inclusion (e.g., “moving” the person from the outside to the inside) is the overall aim. With regard to being at

the inside or at the outside, as is the terminology of the welfare state, the classic phenomenological geographer Edward Relph (1976) addresses the same problem in a phenomenological manner oriented to the human experience of being outside or inside. He sees inside(r)ness as the existential core place experience for human beings. He argues that the “existential relationship between *insideness* and its experiential opposite *outsideness* is a fundamental dialectic in human experience” (Relph, 1976, as cited in Seamon, 2008, p. 3) (Italics in original). The experience for a person of being at the inside of a group is the mode of experience where place or location is experienced “without any directed or self-conscious attention yet is laden with significance that are tacit and unnoticed unless the place is changed in some way” (Relph, 1976, p. 55 as cited in Seamon, 2008, p. 4). This unspoken unawareness can generate a tension related to change in spatial as well as social circumstances. This is exactly the problem for the young informants in this project. Spatial terms, such as outside, inside, far away from (education or work), on the edge of (society)¹, are frequently used in order to describe young people’s location in social arenas. The dichotomy is a political conceptualization of a socio-political condition understood as theoretical conceptualizations with actual meaning. To the human being existence is a genuine endeavor and reality includes real life experiences that might come also with the signs reversed. The human condition of being inside or outside of significant settings in life is existentially sensed and lived when it becomes a problem to the person, and thus is a complex and context related experience. The philosophical phenomenologists Casey (1993), Mugerauer (1994) and Stephanovic (2000) argue that “being-in-place remains a non-contingent necessity for people because having a place is an integral, inescapable part of who and what we are as human beings” (as cited in Seamon, 2008, p.11).

Hermeneutic Phenomenology

In this paper we explore what we consider existential core aspects of lived space and lived support in a hermeneutic phenomenological way. These existential phenomenological meaning structures (van Manen, 2014) orient to experiences of life as lived and lived through, rather than to sociological labels of political welfare system terminology. Seamon (2017) provides a helpful distinction between phenomenology and hermeneutics by saying: “For phenomenology the aim is a more accurate, comprehensive knowledge of human *experience*; for hermeneutics, the aim is a more accurate, comprehensive knowledge of human *meaning* (p. 67) (Our Italics). He continues: “What the two approaches have in common is, first, an emphasis on qualitative description and interpretation; and second, a recognition that knowledge of experience and meaning is inexhaustible” (p. 67). To us, in the context of this article, the young people describe their lived experiences of space in encounters with representatives for the public support system in which they are enrolled. The direct and original contact, as Merleau-Ponty (2002) emphasizes, can be experienced only as moments of lived meaning or meaningfulness; as understanding or comprehension of those particular experiences, both as individual and group phenomena. The phenomenological reduction as method is meant to surface essential aspects of meaning that belong to the phenomena of our lifeworld; e.g., the distinctive qualities of the phenomenon that we decide to direct our attention to. This of course is not fully attainable, as the moment of the experience is ‘always’ gone before the time of reflection, and it can only be incompletely regained in memory and language. The researcher is not socially and culturally in the same circumstances as the participant, hence this ‘remove’ also impacts on the validity and completeness of interpretation. However, rather than trying to conceptualize or theorize about a situation, the method of reduction aims at regaining the experience as closely as possible to how it was in

the moment of experience, for the person/people having that experience. Thus the encounter between the young and their professional helper has to be described and the description has to be interpreted, although insufficiently and incompletely, as Seamon (2017) asserts. Each encounter is contextually bound to a situation loaded with supportive possibilities although always potential and not yet offering positive answers or results. Our focus is how the experiential encounters might be understood from the perspective of the young.

Space and Place

Space and place - two related but different phenomena - are often confused or mentioned in the same breath in daily speech. Our lives are so place-oriented and saturated with place that we cannot imagine what it would be like to live without a place (Casey, 2009). We live our lives in places, and we cannot escape the place in which we find ourselves. But according to Seamon (2008), we can “learn from that place and thereby decide whether and in what way [we] will offer that place commitment or not” (p. 1). Nevertheless, *topos*, the Greek term for place, as in topography – landscape - refers to the human body as the subject of experienced distance and position (up/down, front/behind, left/right) in relation to where the person is. According to Bollnow (2011), place refers to a particular point that I can indicate with my finger. Place depends on my position and thus differs according to how and where I move. Places are in a sense neutral, or “lie side by side” (p. 31) with other places, inherent in nature. Place is bound to a particular “somewhere” which I position myself according to and can move to and from. On the other hand, places in a person’s world are profound centers of meanings, symbols and experience, and, as such, lie at the core of human existence (Godkin, 2015). Places might be characterized as the “focus of meanings or intention, either culturally or individually defined” (Relph, 1976, p. 55). Godkin (2015) defines place as “a discrete, temporally and perceptually bounded unit of psychologically meaningful material space” (p.73). The relation between places and identity-development are acknowledged in literature concerning sense of place (Buttimer, 2015; Casey, 2009; Tuan, 2014). Both people’s personal and cultural identity are intimately bound up with place identity.

There is an extensive literature regarding a phenomenological approach to place, including recent edited books on the topic with chapters by leading researchers (e.g., Donohoe (Ed.), 2017; Janz (Ed.), 2017). Key contributions relevant to this study emphasize how conceptualizations of place are influenced phenomenologically not only by the physical nature of the landscape, be it urban, rural or wild, but also by the language spoken, the daily activities of people dwelling there and their culture (including spirituality). Each of these factors interact, thus it is impossible to comprehensively understand the impact of place without considering the relevant spatio-socio-cultural framework, which holistically impacts on landscape conceptualization (Turk, 2016). This applies especially to understanding of the role of place in the lifeworld of marginalized peoples, including alienated youth.

In this paper we focus on the *experience* of human space. *Chora*, the Greek term for *space*, is less concrete than place and means to give room, to shrink back or to have room to receive something (Bollnow, 2011, p. 30). “There is no empty space,” Bollnow asserts (p. 31). While I can move to and from a place, I move in space and might also move space. Space is always filled up with something and does not extend further than its content. Unlike a place, which always has a location - *is* somewhere - space is everywhere and fills itself up. While place is something that is at our disposal, space is “part of the transcendental condition of man,” Bollnow says (2011, p. 43).

Oda, one of the young participants of the study, talks of space like this: “If I have to plan weeks ahead then I feel that my head explodes. It does not work. I can just as well stay in

bed and sleep.” Her experience is that some thinking and planning “take up” more space than she contains. At the point of the interviews, future planning exceeds her capacity. There is no room in her to receive more thoughts and plans. Space exists only for humans as lived, and as a human experience, lived space is about room for movement and action. Bollnow even says that “[s]pace [...] is not already in existence, but is created only by human activity” (p. 34). Oda describes her space as limited or even filled up. Her experience of packed space gives no room for movement or action. Human activity, if it were in this situation a supportive act, what would it be like if it should ease her sense of overload of capacity, and give her room for movement, space, openness, and perhaps even a sense of freedom?

A considerable amount of spatial studies have been accomplished in the humanities and social sciences during the last twenty years (Casey, 2009). For the purpose of this paper we concentrate on the work of Otto Friedrich Bollnow because of his phenomenological attention to human space in several of his numerous publications (e.g., Bollnow 1941, 1955, 1966, 1989) that despite of being of age still are relevant and in frequent use in Germany and other European countries. His perspectives on lived space is fully developed in his book *Mensch und Raum* from 1963, that was revised in a number of new editions in the 1970’s and 80’s and most recently in 2010. *Mensch und Raum* was translated into English as *Human Space* in 2011 by Christine Shuttleworth, edited and with an afterword by Joseph Kohlmaier. Apart from in the introduction, we build on the work of Bollnow as educator and phenomenologist. With regard to lived space as what Heidegger (1962) called “existentialia” or existential; conditioning human life, as discussed by Hannah Arendt, Arendt’s understanding of activity and freedom, discussed in her books from 1958 and 1968, is influential in this project.

This said, little, if anything, has been written explicitly about how spatiality is woven into the experience of support services for marginalized people, at least not in the context of existentially challenged persons like the young people in our study. In order to uncover some key aspects of the role of space in support services, we move reflectively between the experiential examples told by the young participants and the methodological qualities of epoché and reduction. Throughout the reflective hermeneutic process between experience and meaning, three phenomenological themes evolved indicating how space and support services might give and add meaning to each other. These themes will be presented and discussed successively throughout the paper. The themes address the real experiences of the young and ways that spatial experiences are intertwined with life as lived, rather than of life as an ideal or predefined desirable condition.

Personal Space and the Space of Coexistence

I am *in* space, and I *experience* space. The experience of space is subjective and oriented to my sense of the situation I am in. My experience as it is, always is related and directed to something – it is an experience of *something*, as Merleau-Ponty (1997) suggests. I sense space but my sense is always directed toward something else external or other to my sensation or thought. What then is this “other” that my sense of space relates to? It could be a variety of “things” (material, mental and social; existing and non-existing, except as assumptions or fears) – as a matter of fact “everything.” In this context however, we will try to identify this “some-thing” as the experience of support. Support services/activities always happen within a relationship (Sommer & Saevi, 2017). Because human life is a condition that takes place in plurality (Arendt, 1958), our coexistence with others is formed in a variety of relationships to family members, friends, lovers, spouses, colleagues, service providers and a variety of strangers. Some relationships are long-lasting or ‘scheduled’ as part of a formal process, while others are occasional and accidental encounters. The space of coexistence has all kinds of qualities from

non-violent and quiet where space is open and given to the individual, to a mutual struggle for space and room to live and act. In love relationships, Bollnow (2011) observes, space can expand without the sense of space lost for any of the parts. The sense is that there are “no places or positions at all, and therefore no dispute over them,” Bollnow asserts (p. 242). To human experience, love is space-creating while envy or hostility is space-limiting. Being truly loved by someone can be a refuge or a home for a person. Another human being can make space available and meaningful by caring and sharing his or her personal space with me. I might see myself in the act of the other and such potential freedom might open, or I might leave the other out of play and close the opportunity for his or her freedom. Space is experienced in all kinds of manners, and as relational phenomena, space as well as freedom are actualized only in the concrete and direct spontaneous occurrence of the relationship (Arendt, 1958). This means, in the context of this paper, that “the very relationship seems to ‘speak’ directly to the receiver of support” (Sommer & Saevi, 2017, p. 9), whether the other intends it or not. Because human plurality is our common condition (Arendt, 1958), and we are dependent on if, and how, our initiative for establishing a relationship is taken up by the other person, the consequences of the relationship (perhaps an enhanced sense of freedom) are, at least initially, potential rather than real. Everything except my “I” can be shared, Levinas writes (1998), and our dependency on other people’s reception of what we do and say reveals our shared exposure to the indeterminability of life. How do we respond to the exposure of the human being in relationships where supportive professional practice and reflection is intended? How can a productive response by the recipient be facilitated by the attitudes and actions of the service provider?

Creating Space in Shared Relationship

The sense of any place as lived space is not uniform and unchanging, but is influenced by the person’s experience of his or her surroundings and their practical circumstances, social relationships, habits and moods. The same room, may feel bright and spacy one day and dark and cramped another, and other people influence – little or much - our sense of lived space. One of this study’s participants, Simon, shares his experience of days when it is hard to even get out of bed:

I really want to go to school. But my anxiety sometimes makes it hard to get out of the house. Yesterday, I woke up and knew immediately it was “one of those days.” I had this well-known heavy lump in my stomach and couldn’t manage to get out of bed. Martin, my service provider, phoned me and asked if I was out of bed and ready for school. I told him I was not feeling well and that I was too late for the bus. He offered to pop in to see how I was and to drive me to school. Feeling some pressure, but knowing that he wants the best for me, I accepted his offer.

Simon reacts to his lived space differently under different conditions. Sometimes his sense of space is narrower and sometimes wider than the day before, as in this situation when he is feeling down and has a bad day. This particular morning space closes in around him. The space that yesterday “gave” him room to enjoy life has shrunk today. He painfully collides with the claims around him and for a while his space is limited to the size of his bed. A psychological explanation might be that action, or the lack thereof, is caused by his anxiety problem. In a phenomenological understanding, however, nothing is generically primary or secondary, cause or effect, since subject and object are sensed as a unity. Anxiety, as in its original derivation

(from German: ‘Angst’) denotes a sense of narrowness around the heart. A narrowness of heart is a constriction of world and heaven, and conversely, the constriction of world and heaven is anxiety of our hearts (Bollnow, 2011). The felt lump in Simon’s stomach may be understood as a tightness of heart and consequently, space narrows too. Distance to school is extended, even the door of the house that in other situations supports his dealing with the world, today seems out of reach. Space encloses him, and the objects around him become more distant. What is usually at hand requires the utmost exertion to reach, and today familiar movements become unattainable.

In this situation Martin calls him and offers support. From experience we know that not all support is felt as supportive by the one receiving it (Sommer & Saevi, 2017). Still, Simon accepts Martin’s offer to pick him up and drive him to school despite the pressure he also feels. But what is this combination of offer and pressure, and how or in what sense might pressure be sensed as something good? The term ‘pressure’ has two different meanings varying from *coercion* and *persuasion*, to the act of *weighting down* and *shaping* or *forming* someone or somethingⁱⁱ. Experientially, pressure and resistance are what Løgstrup (2007) calls joint antagonists: opposites, and without the other each of them loses their full meaning. Simon feels some pressure from his service provider to go beyond his sense of a “bad day experience.” If we relate Løgstrup’s understanding of joint antagonists to this situation, we might see the sense of pressure that Simon feels as a certain resistance. Without resistance, Martin’s offer would not have been experienced as pressure. The significant thing here, however, is not to pursue how pressure and resistance are related, but how pressure can be something positive and good in some situations and not in others. What constitutes the potential difference? We might think that the very relationship between Simon and Martin is of importance. If it is, could the relationship be of a quality that supports Simon to endure the pressure?

Simon and Martin are both adults and in this respect the power differential between them is equal. The professional relationship however, complicates the question of power and makes it factually asymmetric in favor of the professional— a starting point which leaves it to the professional to be responsible for how the power is practiced in the particular relationship between them (Skjervheim, 1992; Saevi, 2015). If we presume that a certain mild pressure is exercised – pressure as an attempt to shape the bad-day-experience into a potential school-day experience – how can we interpret Simon’s accepting response?

Simon did not ask explicitly for support this morning, but he might have experienced it earlier in similar situations when Martin has intervened in his bad days in ways that he can accept. Simon thus might in a certain sense be prepared for a phone call and a supportive suggestion that could alter his present situation. He might be oriented toward wanting to be supported (Sommer & Saevi, 2017). His orientation toward support however, does not mean an immediate readiness for change and intervention. To be prepared for support is more a question of the quality of the relationship, which might not so much be based on rationality as on a deeper sense of togetherness (Bollnow, 1989). Simon senses that Martin cares about him, a sense reflected in his words: “Feeling some pressure, but *knowing he wants the best for me (...)*”. Simon understands that he is recognized and not judged, and the relational qualities support his courage to surpass the barriers of acting. In Simon’s description we sense that Simon also cares for Martin. In a caring relationship, care might go both ways and honor the persons as mutual (Tomkins & Eatough, 2013). This mutual care seems to strengthen Simon’s will to recover his lost space. We may say that their shared relationship holds the potential of a transformation of lived space. Simon embraces Martin’s initiative, and thus a possibility of a new beginning opens to him.

We do not know Martin’s inner professional or personal motives for the favor he offered Simon, or if he envisioned a particular effect. What we know is Simon’s response. Simon received the support as a possibility to get to school on this particular day. Martin acknowledges

Simon's free will to accept or not accept his offer. To Martin the positive response from Simon was not a certainty but included the risk of rejection. One might say that Martin's offer is a gift that Simon is free to take or leave. Their relationship though, does not depend on Simon's response, but seems to be strong enough to stand up to rejection and difference in opinion. The acknowledging and non-judgmental relationship gives room or space for difference and risk because it does not insist on defined positions and power. Martin's supportive suggestion – although exerting some mild pressure on Simon – is a response to what Martin sees as the young man's need in the very moment of the phone call. Support – in this context and in other contexts like this – might not have been sensed as supportive without the quality of a caring relationship. Simon and Martin's relationship allows the other to act freely on a respectful basis of care. Lived space to act reduces the inherent power differential between the person supporting and the one supported. The situation calls upon professionals to give special attention to how caring relationships might evolve with the persons they support. The relationship is essential, and care as phenomenon balances the power. To Hannah Arendt, human freedom is to be able to act at one's own initiative; to have effective agency, even if the option of acting is not taken up, which is in itself is a type of act. We are free as long as we act – in the act of acting - neither before nor after: "... to be free and to act is the same" (Arendt, 2006, p. 151). Simon's response to Martin's suggestion is an act that opens the possibility of a new beginning to him. What this new beginning might entail, is not given, not even as imagination or as an object of cognition, and is not yet known to any of the two.

Home as the Base of Action

Home is situated in a place, a particular spot, as a centre of the surrounding environment to which it is connected in a wide variety of ways, because there is not in actuality an impervious spatial 'horizon.' Home can be wherever a person disposes a space of his or her own that offers a reliable shelter against outer threats; a place for 'dwelling.' The words we use for people without a home, 'the homeless,' or for people searching for a home, 'the refugees,' indicate that the meaning of 'home' implied here is a protected space of one's own. However this is only one sense of 'home.' The word refugee, which today means 'one fleeing from home' originally in French meant 'to take shelter or protect.' This double meaning of the word is interesting as tension in our exploration of place, because it indicates the foundational meaning of a place we call home. Being away from home is possible because you also are at-home somewhere. Home, however, is not only a place in space but also a place in time. Because human life is tossed between past, now and future (Arendt, 1958), what we call home tends more to address atmosphere and mood than the time we actually spend at home. Just think of how home is recaptured in our memories; how we recall persons, episodes, rooms, places, the sense of personal and joint space in ways that confuse and blur time and space, body and relationality. The refugee is fleeing from his previous home (probably hoping to return one day), but is also desperate for a protected place to live now, a place she/he can call 'home,' at least temporarily. This is also the case of the protagonist in Robert Frost's poem "Death of the hired man" (Frost, 1914) who in reality has no home of his own, but needs a place to do his last act, dying. Frost describes a home in these words:

Home is the place, when you have to go there,
they have to take you in.
I should have called it
something you somehow haven't to deserve.

My home belongs to me in the sense that I cannot be denied accessⁱⁱⁱ. I am not a guest to invite in or someone that can be excluded, but an obvious dweller. Even the dying man in Frost's poem had the right to die in the place he called his home. Home can be wherever a person has a space of his or her own that offers a reliable shelter against outer threats. Our home is more than a house within which to live, rather it is a safe place – a shelter, “a soul activity to be retrieved from the numbness of the world of modern objects” (Sardello as quoted in Lawlor, 1994, p. 29). It is the concrete center of our world, the place we move from and return to after acting in the world. To go away and to return, is true to experience, Bollnow (2011) observes, and as such these to and fro moves are a basic dynamic of human life. Our always repeating rhythm of going away and returning to the space where we move around freely is, in principle, the whole world in all its expanse. Some people explore the possibility of free and unlimited movement by travelling. But going away and returning require somewhere to start from and return to, if these movements are not to be aimless rambling and roaming. We need an orientation point where we are rooted in space and to which all our relationships in space refer – we need a place (Bollnow, 2011). Being sheltered and leaving the shelter reflect the completeness of human movements in the world. In a variety of ways we advance into the public space, and perhaps the private space of others - before we return to home base. The act of moving is what Arendt (2006) understands as the “free man's status, which enabled him to move, to get away from home, to go into the world and meet other people in deed and word” (p. 147). What does having a place that belongs to you mean to young people in the context of space and support? Drawing on the experiences of three participants in our study, Oda, Simon and Mia, we explore the meanings of going and returning and of sheltered space.

At Home in the World

Having a place to withdraw, rest and be with ourselves, seems to be a basic need for human beings. We need a secure and intimate sphere, as, elsewhere, “an inner subversion of the individual is unavoidable” (Bollnow, 2011, p. 130). Even stronger, Bollnow asserts that the human process of becoming oneself has spatial prerequisites: “Only as a dweller, only in possession of a house, only in having at one's disposal such a private domain separated from public life can man fulfil his nature and be fully human” (p. 130).^{iv} We need a place for inner dwelling to be able to dwell in ourselves in the external world, or in Heidegger's words: “The relationship between man and space is none other than dwelling, strictly thought and spoken” (Heidegger, 2001, p. 155). Bollnow (2011) claims that home is the intimate place that “educates the heart and mind” [...] “we are guided back to ourselves in the atmosphere of its intimacy,” (p. 146). The intimacy – this inner relationship with the home enables us to be with ourselves and for the dwelling-place to fulfill its purpose of providing the security we need. A dwelling is more than merely a location. The intimate sphere we refer to is an embodied connection between ourselves and our home, a place with a rhythm familiar to us. Lingis (2007) observes how there is a certain pace and repeated structure to body movements which synchronizes with the environment:

Our home base is not set before us as a spectacle; it is a rhythm of rooms passing, each with its own chromatic tone and hue and intensity of light. [...] We move back and forth with the staccato of the morning light or the continuo of its afternoon gloom. (p. 14)

We may not give any thought in our daily life to the protocols and shifts of rhythm which are part of being at home. The sense is just *there* in our natural way of being in our home. We might

recognize in a knowing way that we are *at-home* if we have been away for a while and are coming back. Then it might be like returning to a long-known dear friend and without effort, we fall into each other's rhythm. Of course, some people have no home of their own. Oda is one of them. She says:

Not knowing where to live the next week is very stressful. I cannot manage to think about getting a job if I have nowhere to live.

Not having a home is stressful to Oda. She considers a home more basic than a job. We tend to associate stress with the psychological state of being under pressure, or exposed to a time squeeze. The original meaning, however, is *narrowness* or *oppression* (from English *distress* / French: *estrece*).^v The etymological roots of stress emphasize its moral dimension. Someone or something makes my life narrow and oppressed. The words 'narrow' and 'oppressed' allude partly to space – limited and restricted space. To Oda the stressful situation of not having a permanent home delimits her sense of space, and her options for action, physically and emotionally.

Simon, who recently got his own place to live, values the freedom that comes with having a home. He says:

To have my own place to live is a freedom for me. I can withdraw from exhausting surroundings. It gives room for my own life, a possibility to stand on my own.

Dwelling, the intimate connection between ourselves and our home, holds the potentiality for freedom. To have room, place, literally makes space for action. Space for action^{vi} in Bollnow's terms is "the space occupied by man when engaged in meaningful activity, working or resting, [and] dwelling in it in the widest sense," (Bollnow, 2011, p. 193). For Simon to have his own place, a home, opens up space. His space to live literally expands. His outer circumstances are changed – he has a home – and thus the space within himself is also changed. Bollnow asserts: "Every change 'in' the human being entails a change to his lived space" (p. 21). For Oda not to have a stable place to live, not knowing where to stay a week ahead, makes her inner and outer world narrow and limited. Not to have somewhere to start from and return to disturbs her movement in space. Her space is less purposeful and comprehensible, and her ability to manoeuvre in life is narrowed. The relationship with self, others and the world must be situated from somewhere, and to Oda and Simon a home is this place.

Place as Space

A home as phenomenon is a sheltered place where the persons who live there share space in a variety of ways. What the inhabitants of a home have in common according to Robert Frost is that they cannot be denied access^{vii}. In schools the situation is slightly different. Although children and young people are pupils and therefore formally have access to the school and to a particular class or group, the experience of a secure and indisputable space is not always an obvious experience^{viii}. Mia, one of the young participants of the study suffers from an anxiety that to her makes feeling secure and welcome in her class especially challenging. She says:

When I started in this class, I got my own desk in the classroom. It made me feel more secure as I knew that this desk belonged to me. But, because I had

low attendance I was not entitled to keep my own desk. I had to sit at vacant desks every time.

For Mia to have her own desk gives her the sense of safe space. Initially, she had a place which she could arrive, act, move and finally leave when the school day ended. Her desk was her protected space in the classroom. The frequent times when Mia was not in school she still had a desk, and her desk made her absence visible to the others. When she did not fulfill the regulations of the school for keeping her desk, however, she became not only without her desk but actually without a place to be. Mia became a refugee. The double meaning of the word ‘refugee’ is interesting as a tension between fleeing from and taking shelter in a place. Being *away* is possible because you also are *at-home* somewhere. When Mia was deprived of the place she was comfortable with, she lost the place to be away from and to be at-home in, and she lost aspects of her lived space to act and move.

To have space - having-space - is different from being-in-space. As human beings we are fated to be in space, as space is the transcendental life-condition of all man. To have (possess) space refers to a specific human relationship with space, and the way we live and sense space in various modes as open, restricted, refreshing, narrow and so on. To have space (or not), whether personal or shared, is the experiential basis of human spatiality. However, space can be taken away from us – either by interruption or by accident. The verb to *interrupt* from Latin means to “interfere with a legal right” or to “break apart.”^{ix} To Mia the rules of the school disrupted her sense of safety and left her without a personal place to move to and from. Her need for a place collided with rules and regulations and hence her space was interrupted, as part of the breakdown of her relationship with the school.

Bollnow (2011) refers to the possibility of space as beyond the sense of mere spatial-physical movement. What we talk about is the person’s ‘space to live’ (*Lebensraum*), a phenomenon that also captures space to move forward in life. My ‘*Lebensraum*’ can be threatened by disturbances, like illness, economic living circumstances, social factors, formal regulation of space, other people’s needs and desires and so forth. Therefore humans must secure their freedom to move, claim his or her space, and defend^x and protect it (Bollnow, 2011). But sometimes the person does not possess the means to claim, defend or protect. For example, where is the freedom to move forward in life for Oda, who is dependent on other people’s hospitality or on the welfare system’s short time crisis accommodation solutions? How does it feel to be accommodated temporarily and depend on other people’s goodwill and sense of responsibility? Or for Mia, how does she establish a secure place when she is at school, and how does it feel to be without such an anchor. The experience of being a stranger, an intruder, or even a guest, is different from being in your own legitimate place, even if it is shared with family or friends.

For Simon living in his own place - a home - opens up space. His ‘*Lebensraum*’ literally expands. In his case, space is something specific that is determined by his new life situation. He factually lives in his space and forms a relationship with his place. In a certain understanding, it is not truly possible to differentiate between the person and his or her space; they form a unity (Bollnow, 2011). Simon moves from one place to another, in which his life takes place; and his life moves as well. His life unfolds in space, and life unfolds differently in new living places. For Simon, having a concrete space is freeing him from exhausting surroundings. Even though the new place may be smaller in measurable terms, it is more spacious in terms of the life that takes place there. His place gives room for his own life to unfold differently and supports his effort to stand on his own feet. Mia attached her life to a desk in the classroom and then suffered a lack of space for action when she lost her permanent desk. Oda feels she cannot attach to a job without first having a stable home. Simon enjoys his freedom to act from the basis of a home, even though it is also true that to him some days his

home turns to a narrow and inescapable trap. How do we extract the meaning of lived space and place out of these complex and paradoxical experiences? What does in fact freedom to act and move mean to humans?

Anchored while Orientated to the Horizon

David, another of the young participants in the study, is without a job or school opportunities and spends most of his time at home without particular responsibilities and routines. He says that this situation makes him feel that he has *lost his bearings*, a nautical spatial expression indicating the loss of an orientation point, direction or horizon. “I have nothing to attach myself to,” he says. The well-known moorings of activities and plans that secured him in his life have slipped and he feels adrift. Being attached to routine practices and personal commitments keeps David attached and anchored to his life. Without this attachment David feels unmoored and directionless.^{xi} The root of the word *attach* used by David, originates from Old French and interestingly has “to support” as one of its meanings^{xii}. The sense of attachment that David misses involves the experience of responsibilities, habits and tasks to undertake, over which he has agency.

Plans and dreams that once oriented him in his lived space have faded and consequently, the future he visualized and moved towards has also vanished. In Bollnow’s words (2011), David’s horizon has become invisible to him. Life, as he once knew it now lies outside the horizon of his existence. Horizon, as a geographical term is the line where the vault of heaven seems to rest upon the surface of the earth. As long as it is not obscured by some object, the horizon line in itself limits the view. To the Greek *horizon* means “that which bounds or limits” (Bollnow, 2011, p. 72), and thus as the borderline between sky and earth, the horizon is a paradoxical phenomenon. Horizon both denotes a boundary and a possibility. It describes a limit although at the same time it opens to limitless space and to the not yet known. The dialectic between boundary and openness gives meaning to how we find a direction and might orient toward something ahead of us.^{xiii}

While looking toward the horizon – factually or literally - our vision might open to imagination and possible futures. When the horizon is unclear or invisible to us, we feel a loss of functional space that leaves us unprotected and closed in. The future is disconnected with the present. David says: “*I was stuck, I couldn’t get anywhere, my future became uncertain, I just couldn’t see it.*” He no longer has part in the life he used to live. His spatial world has shrunk and is now so tight that he can no longer move. This standstill of life is not his wish but is forced upon him by circumstances beyond his control. When we are hindered in life and forced to a standstill, such as when we become physically or mentally ill, the present cannot escape. Under ordinary circumstances we typically orient to the future. We literally move through a present that supports the future. When we are at a standstill however, the present is saturated with itself and no longer serves the future. Being in the present for the sake of the present feels useless and directionless^{xiv}. Waiting for the future to come is a very different and most often an unwanted experience of life than moving toward an open future. The condition might be compared to being in a boat at sea in a dead calm with no possibility to move and no prospect of when or how the circumstances will change; when might the wind rise and set us back on course. David responds with the sense of being blocked, stuck, frozen, and of being unable to move or act. The freedom to act might be related to our capacity to orient ourselves to our circumstances and hence be more able to care for ourselves. The care of self, as Foucault (1996) sees it, is “an exercise of the self on the self” (p. 433). Knowing oneself includes familiarity with and acceptance of social norms and regulations and to consider them relevant

for oneself. To be engaged with knowing and caring for oneself this is to lead a life that to a certain degree is attached and at the same time free.

In David's situation, he received effective support services that eased his sense of being frozen and unfree (Sommer & Saevi, 2017). The support he received anchored him to his life through everyday routines and regular interactions with other people. His days were again attached to life through a tangible structure of direction and his horizon of a future again became visible to him. He says:

I am no longer in that enclosed and shadowed place. I have moved on. The support I was given opened up a new direction and hope for the possibility of something good to come.

Being anchored in the present prevents a person from drifting and opens a possibility to orient toward what lies ahead. By envisioning a potential future a person can act and care for him or herself. Acting, by caring for oneself is a way for the person to be anchored as well as open to change, like the poet, Maya Angelou, writes in her poem "On the Pulse of Morning" (2015, p. 266):

*The horizon leans forward,
Offering you space
To place new steps of change.*

How can we support young people to be moored in their lives while at the same time helping them to look ahead so that they can move out of a stuck place or a dead calm? Support needs to successfully navigate the paradoxical tension of being in the present while envisioning a possible future.

Discontinuity of Life and Interruption of Lived Space

The way we think about interruptions in school and work is influenced by numerous descriptions of the lack of desirable consecutive and harmonious paths of life for young people. We might start looking at young people's lives and see lack of progress, unproductivity and stagnation. We might think that interruption and discontinuity are abnormal life conditions for people - especially for young people - and something that we should clear away and replace with continuity and harmony. The focus on the correlation between mental health problems and 'outsiderness' might also constitute a risk that we reach generalizations and prejudices about young people who do not appear to be complying with social standards for acceptable behavior. But is that not to pull the wool over the eyes of life – to confuse real life with ideal life?

"Life lay ahead of me. Nothing was settled" (Pettersen, 2010, p. 151). These are the words of young Arvid, the protagonist of Per Petterson's novel *I curse the river of time*. He says that life lies open before him, undetermined, not yet made out. To the reader, his situation at this point in his life seems to be at its most difficult and we expect it to fall apart at any moment. In reality, the future is a condition where nothing is settled. But the future is also a 'lived experience' additional to a 'factual condition.' Future is defined as that which "is yet to be,"^{xv} and thus the future is hidden and concealed from the now, although we tend to see our future as a certain continuation of the present (at least when the present is satisfying and to our liking). When the continuation between present and future is interrupted by something negative, and becomes uncertain and undesired, we respond with surprise, anger and a sense of being

treated unjustly. The common expectation to life – and more so the less old we are - is that the (hopefully positive) future lies open ahead of us. The word ‘open’ in many Indio-European languages is the opposite of to be closed or shut, and the etymological meaning of ‘open’ includes space for sight and movement being physically ‘unobstructed’ or ‘unencumbered.’ The adjective “open” has synonyms like ‘accessible, clear, wide, expanded, unbarred, unsealed, airy, passable and navigable.’ Such synonyms indicate how we understand what it means to have an open future, with openness always indicating new possibilities. Thus, the future is not only time that will come, but also space filled with potential activities and movements.

The future however, never happens. What happens is in the present. But my expectations of what is going to happen in the future, my hopes or fears, accompany my present. If I am expecting someone to come to visit, I prepare the event that I expect will come. While doing the preparation I might think of the person and the moments that will come. What I expect to happen, the happiness (or worry, angst, etc.) I feel about the coming visit, shapes the present. The future somehow is mixed with my present being. ”When that which I expect is realized, it will no longer be the future, but the present,” Berger writes (1967, p. 192). Van den Berg (1972) describes how a bottle of wine symbolizes a feeling of loneliness when a friend he is expecting calls and cancels the visit. The bottle of wine that he has opened with expectation now turns to disappointment and loneliness. Our sense of self speaks in the interaction with things around us, like Simon and his home, Mia and her desk or David who lacks routines and things to do.

‘Future’ as a concept is an abstract construction. But my *lived experience* of the future is happening now and manifests in my interactions with the world in the present. Tuan (2014) notes that open space is an image of hopeful time imagined in the present. He continues: “Open space is cone-shaped: it opens up from the point where one stands, to the broad horizon that separates from the sky,” (p. 123). The open space, or the open future begins from where I stand. To Arvid as to David, Simon, Mia and Oda, their future starts from now, despite that the now is difficult and perhaps not so promising. To Arvid in the novel, the year is 1989 and the Berlin Wall collapses, his mother is dying from cancer - each in their way existential changes for him - and from this present his future begins. In the lives of David, Simon, Oda and Mia, and the lives of many others, due to their present life circumstances, their future prospects seem to be built on sand.

Concluding Remarks

To support someone who is working on his or her (problematic and paradoxical) life has to include the recognition that every person has a future that is open and unknown. Effective support services might benefit from being more open and available in alternatives ways, involving optional action paths. Those might include futures that we did not have in mind before we entered the situation (Saevi, 2015). The relation between action and freedom in fact is a paradoxical possibility for the one who provides support and the one who is supported. Arendt (1958) contends: “The fact that man is capable of action means that the unexpected can be expected by him, that he is able to perform that which is infinitely improbable” (p. 158). How do we in concrete situations operationalize an attitude like this?

The starting point for the article, and the phenomenological exploration it entailed, was our wonder about whether, and how, support and space were related, and if some ways of providing support might influence and shape the participants sense of lived space. We see that support and lived space indeed are related in nuanced and complex ways. Both seem to unveil

insights and reflective understanding to us in moments of clarity, before connections and insights escape and hide from attention. Effective support might open, for the supported person, a sense of spaciousness, room to live and be nourish in, and freedom to be and become. There seem to be ways of support that open up space and sustain hope for the present and the future of the young. But the opposite might be true as well. Real support seems to be anchored in care, autonomy and respect for the supported person's own ability and preparedness to live a good life in ways that are open to undetermined changes.

Our study might add a new dimension to the current discourse about young people with mental health challenges, in the context of school and work, by offering a critical view on how the social constructed terms "outside" and "inside," and related terms, could stigmatize some young people and inhibit a deeper understanding of their life situation. The experiential descriptions of the participant's actions and words reveal that lived space may enclose and expand in a variety of modes in school or at home. This can involve the young person being alone or with others. As a quality of professional and personal support the sense of lived space is a non-static, shifting, but always a *there* experience. A phenomenological reflective and interpretive approach to the young participants' lived experiences reveals insights that disturb the common view of what it means to be out of school and/or unemployed. It provides a set of 'abnormal interruptions' that represent discontinuity and stagnation, inconsistent with the ideal of progress and harmony of 'normal' life. The experiences of the young, however, are contextual but not extraordinary. They are not unrecognizable to us as a common human experience of present or future life. Rather, the young people's descriptions depict recognizable human experiences to the ordinary non-linear mode of life as we know it. Life makes detours and unexpected and unwanted turns. Space opens and closes, moves and returns, we live and address the present, past and future and they reflect a basic rhythm of life; like breathing in and out. This rhythm, *expansion* and *contraction*, is life itself. To the young people of this study, as well as to all of us, the horizon of life leans forward and sometimes sustains our moves and actions, and at other times the future is veiled and keeps us blocked and hopeless. This might be the time when discontinuous space of change and interruption might disclose new possibilities.

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ⁱ See also: Casey, E. S. (2017) Being on the Edge: Body, Place, Climate. In: Janz, B. (Ed.) *Place, Space and Hermeneutics*. Springer. pp. 451-463.

ⁱⁱ www.etymologyonline.com/pressure

ⁱⁱⁱ This may (or may not) apply to a house as 'home' but definitely may not apply to a country or a region which you think of as home but from which you have been 'ethnic cleansed' or excluded from by invaders/colonisers.

^{iv} We are aware of the period in history, culture and class assumptions inherent in this quote, and think of 'travellers' («gypsies») in say Ireland or England at that time, and today of refugees and people fleeing from war and persecution.

^v www.etymonline.com/ / stress

^{vi} Such spaces may not be conventional homes for marginalised young people – in fact home may be somewhere they don't like because it is where disagreeable parents live – pseudo homes are share-houses with friends or even parks, video parlours, abandoned buildings, etc. Social programs can provide more suitable pseudo-homes, not just low-cost housing.

^{vii} We are aware that home as a social realistic place in society is not always safe and good. Here home is a spatial phenomenon and we explore this phenomenon for its spatial phenomenological qualities relevant for the focus of the article.

^{viii} Some homes are insecure and dangerous to children and young people, and some schools are experienced by young people to be better and more secure than others. Here the examples direct our attention to how space and support interrelate and how lived support and lived space are conditioning our sense of self, others and the world.

^{ix} www.etymonline.com/ / interrupt

^x By light of the situation in many parts of the world today, we might think that to share (our wealth and properties) would be a better word than to protect our home.

^{xi} It is not the lack of a 'home' as such, but of a place where he feels at home and a sense of purpose, which could well be a place other than a traditional home – a work place or a youth centre or a community garden.

^{xii} www.etymonline.com/ /attach

^{xiii} Even this physical usage of horizon is deceptive for it depends on whether you lie down, stand up or climb a tree or a mountain. You are an agent with respect to the horizon and you can see (e.g. smoke from a fire) and remember, or imagine, things that are over that so-called horizon.

^{xiv} The experience of being stuck in the present as a useless and directionless condition might be different for some persons, in particular for small children. Van den Berg's description of the child living in the pure present is an example of how time is sensed differently for adult and children. See: van den Berg, J.H. (1970). *Things—four metabletic reflections*. Pittsburgh, PA: Duquesne University Press.

^{xv} www.etymonline.com/ / future

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**“Nourishing Communion”: A less recognized dimension of support for young persons
facing mental health challenges?**

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Abstract

This study, the third in a series of three, draws on a broader Norwegian research project exploring the phenomenon of support for young persons with mental health issues. The aim was to explore and explicate the sense of “nourishing communion”, as a somewhat neglected aspect of support. Fourteen Norwegian young adults, aged 18-25, were interviewed about their experiences of support. Data was analyzed using van Manen’s hermeneutic-phenomenological approach to open up possible meanings of how nourishing communion is concretely lived. Analysis was supplemented by in-depth reflexive dialogues between the first and second author, which fostered a nourishing communion akin to the processes and dimensions of our phenomenon of interest. Findings highlight five intertwined existential themes: a) trusting the other to hold vulnerability safely; b) flourishing in mutual participation; c) acceptance in a felt togetherness; d) feeling found and received; and e) feeling an attuned resonance. The notion of “nourishing communion” as a significant but neglected element of support challenges current practice, suggesting the need for a different approach to collaboration with young persons and their networks. From the perspectives both of individual professional engagement and of policy making, there is a need for further

exploration of how young persons might be supported to create and maintain a broader range of nourishing relationships.

Keywords: support, communion, phenomenology, young adults, mental health

Introduction

Being with my friend makes me feel uplifted....more vital...I am filled with something good. She is my best friend and supporter (Peter, a participant).

This article draws on findings from a broader Norwegian research project exploring the phenomenon of support for young people with mental health in terms of what qualities make support supportive. It is the third of three sub-studies drawing on the same empirical material: in-depth descriptions by young persons recruited from different services supporting young persons in vulnerable life situations, in a small municipality in the southeast of Norway. The first study in this series suggested that support is a relational phenomenon, with certain ways of relating (for example, being open, present and non-judgmental) being more supportive than others (Sommer & Saevi, 2017). The study explored two situations founded on service, where the reciprocity in the relationships were influenced by an inherent power differential. The experience of being supported seemed to be more likely to happen when the power differential was diminished by the professional's attitude of wonder and openness towards the Other, entering a not-knowing-position. A supportive relationship, even when one of the parties is a professional service provider, had some qualities recognized in friendship, such as trust, being cared for, awareness and commitment. The second study explored the complex ways in which support and lived space are connected. It found that while some relationships tend to make our lived space narrower, constricting and diminishing our opportunities to fulfill our potential, other relationships provide the room we need to grow and flourish (Sommer & Saevi, 2018). In both studies, participants (young adults) described their search for friendship-like relationships, ones that made them feel, as Peter puts it in the introductory quote, "filled with something good."

This quest gave us food for thought. What were young persons' experiences of developing these friendship-like relationships? Could their experiences of close relationships

with others offer insights of relevance to professional practice? In a bid to respond to such questions, this article reports on the third study which identifies and analyzes further the elements that constitute supportive relationships, together with the meanings associated with them, towards the goal of providing better, more focused support for young persons confronting mental health problems.

The starting point for this third exploration involved our reflecting on how to describe a relationship experienced as more than just “being together”. A Norwegian word, “fellesskap”, appeared to capture the essence of that experience. Difficult to capture in English translation, this term combines notions of “community”, “fellowship”, and “communion”. After careful consideration of the etymological meanings of these terms, we finally opted for the English word “communion”, which we saw as conveying a relationship that is at once fulfilling and supportive. The term “communion” derives from the Latin word *communio*. Here, the prefix *com* (with, together) is conjoined with *unus* (oneness, union), to convey a sense of fellowship, mutual participation, sharing. These etymological meanings speak to the intimacy, togetherness and closeness that emerge as essential qualities in the supportive relationships described by the participants in our research project. As we saw it, the mutuality and oneness implicit in the word, “communion” captured a deeper connection between persons than that conveyed by such terms as “fellowship” or “mutual participation”. At the same time, the term “communion” did not entirely capture the sense of being “filled”, as described by Peter and other participants in the study. Further reflection on this word led us to recognize that feeling filled implies feeling nourished, even “full-filled”. All living beings need nourishment if they are to grow and flourish. In view of the fact that professional practice aims to support young persons with mental health problems to grow and flourish, we thought this phenomenon required further investigation.

Background

The value of supportive relationships for mental health is backed by a considerable body of research (Sommer, Ness, & Borg, 2018; Topor, Borg, Di Girolamo, & Davidson, 2011). Relational, social and contextual factors have been identified as significant factors for mental and social wellbeing (Tew et al., 2012; Topor & Denhov, 2012), while the World Health Organization (WHO) (2013, 2017) has recognized the importance for mental health of individual and social experiences of everyday life in families, schools, workplaces and communities.

The first-person accounts of persons with mental health problems emphasize the significance of living a meaningful life within a local community, including participation in social arenas (Karlsson & Borg, 2017). Studies of young persons with mental health issues suggest that living with anxiety or depression over long periods tends to curtail social contact with family and friends (Kolouh-Söderlund, Lagercrantz, & Göransson, 2016). When young persons once again participate in these arenas, they often replace isolation with a sense of involvement and community. Being with others, doing things together, sharing, laughing with others, eating with others, going for a walk: all bring meaning to life (Kolouh-Söderlund, Lagercrantz, & Göransson, 2016). Such findings are in line with research by Borg (2007) and Glovers (2002) on environments that encourage and nurture recovery: for example, supportive work places, pleasurable home environments, pleasant local surroundings, and welcoming social organisations.

Although family relationships are important for young persons, so too are relationships with friends, fellow students and colleagues (Arnett, 2004). In a study of wellbeing among young persons with mental health problems, Honey, Coniglio, & Hancock (2015) found that having good relationships with others contributed considerably to whether participants saw

themselves as successful or accepted. Other research suggests that the amount of time young persons spend with friends at school is linked to their sense of belonging (Morrow, 2001). The desire to belong has been defined as feeling valued and respected within relationships founded on shared beliefs and experiences (Mahar, et al., 2013). Research suggests that feeling connected to others is achieved through working with other persons (Wilcock, 2007) and through experiences of social interaction, mutual support and friendship (Rebeiro, 2001).

The meaning of ‘nourishing communion’ does not seem to have been described or explored outside a spiritual/religious context. The literature we examined on “communion” tended to relate to religious understandings of the term: for example, the importance of being in communion with God and supported by a faith community. In Christian religious terms, the spiritual “food” of Holy Communion is seen as representative of how God’s living presence nourishes the soul (Lindvall, 2007). While the language of “nourishing communion” has not been applied thus far to mental health, concepts such as “connectedness”, “relationship” and “reciprocity” have received some attention from researchers.

Connectedness appears to play a critical role in recovery from mental distress. As Tew et al (2012) underline, people do not recover in isolation. Participation in the community is essential (Borg & Davidson, 2008; Davidson, 2011). In one particular project, young persons spoke about the need to break patterns of isolation, build relationships, and feel supported not only by family, friends, and health workers but also by those who had been through similar experiences (Mental Health Coordinating Council/MHCC, 2014). In the same project, parents of young persons with mental health problems characterized connectedness as interaction with others within a range of meaningful activities: for example, being part of one’s community, making friends, and being able to function well in society and relationships. The literature review conducted as part of the project suggested that connectedness was especially important in the case of young persons, given their developmental need to define and redefine

themselves via their relationships with others (MHCC, 2014). Slade, Williams, Bird, Leamy, & Le Boutillier (2012) argue that connectedness relates not only to an individual's connections and relationships with other persons but also to their links with the wider community and with society as a whole. Connectedness therefore embraces peer support, support from professionals and support from the community, family and friends.

Research underlines the importance to persons with mental health problems of supportive relationships with their health professionals (Borg & Kristiansen, 2004). Denhov & Topor (2011) identified three main components in such supportive relationships: interpersonal continuity, emotional climate, and social interaction. Other research has focused on issues of reciprocity: for example, the extent to which the professional is perceived as 'walking alongside' the person in need of support (Ness, Borg, Semb, & Karlsson, 2014, p. 3). In a review of the literature on support conducive to participation in education and work, Sommer, Ness, & Borg (2018) found such support to be linked to relationships where the professional valued the person receiving support as an equal and as someone with potential and competences. The finding that a caring relationship provides the ground for helpful support is borne out by other studies (Andersson, 2016; Sommer & Saevi, 2017). In contrast, relationships conducted by professionals in a more impersonal way are found to be less helpful, providing little space for collaboration, personal growth or a feeling of being nourished by the other (Ljungberg, Denhov, & Topor, 2015). The most important ingredient in relational work, it would appear, is being as "present as a person meeting the person of the other" (Yontef, 1993, p. 24). The relationship works when it is an evolving, co-created, collaborative, dialogical partnership, rather than a top-down transmission where the powerful yet distant therapist imparts information and makes interpretations (Anderson, 2012).

Methodology

[Phenomenological description] must stick close to experience, and yet not limit itself to the empirical but restore to each experience the ontological cipher which marks it internally. (Merleau-Ponty, 1960/1964, p.157)

The aim of this research was to explore and explicate the experience of “communion” as an aspect of support and being supported. The meaning of being filled or nourished in a relationship as a somewhat neglected aspect of support, was explored from the perspective of young adults facing mental health problems. A hermeneutic-phenomenological approach was employed to open up possible meanings and capture the way a sense of nourishing communion is concretely lived in an embodied, relational, and contextual way. Lived experience is the starting point and the end point of phenomenological research. The term “lived experience” is derived from the German *Erlebnis*, the active-passive living through of experience within the flow of life (Heidegger, 1927/2010).

While hermeneutic phenomenology prioritizes rich description, it also acknowledges the inevitable role of interpretation (van Manen, 1997, 2014). As Heidegger (1927/2010) put it, the act of description always involves prior interpretation. Interpretation is a precondition for all understanding, and understanding is inseparable from life and experience.

Gathering empirical material

Descriptions of lived experience, from which underlying patterns and structures of meaning might be drawn (van Manen, 1997), were derived from in-depth interviews with 14 young adults (9 women and 5 men) aged 18-25. All participants had had experiences of mental health problems and of being partly or fully out of education or employment as a result. They were all ethnic Norwegian but differed in terms of socio-economic background

and the degree to which social welfare services had been involved in their lives. While some lived with their parents, others lived with foster parents or on their own.

Experiences of support were elicited by the interviews, which aimed to explore experiential narrative material (van Manen, 1997). The interviews were semi-structured, in that guiding questions were loosely prepared in advance to enable a focused approach towards understanding the meaning of everyday-life experiences from the perspective of the interviewee (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). The aim was to stay close to the topic being explored while at the same time maintain a sense of an ordinary conversation, reflecting a back and forth dialogic movement, sometimes in an unstructured way. The interviews were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim.

Dwelling

We did not go straight from the data - the participants' descriptions of support experiences - to the phenomenon of "nourishing communion". The phenomenon slowly manifested itself to us through patient phenomenological reflections, which includes an open attitude of wonder and a dwelling with horizons of implicit meaning (Finlay, 2012). It lay buried, initially invisible, and our role was to excavate the meanings. We had an intuition there was something "more" in the data, something ineffable in the depth of the situations where support was arising, that we wanted to pull out. Through dwelling with the data, out of a waiting silence, we listened for something deeper; we resonated with the "more" of what the participants' descriptions were pointing to and of our moment-to-moment experiencing. Put simply, the participants were speaking about support and this phenomenal description functioned as a medium through which the latent meanings of nourishing communion came to the fore.

Churchill (2018) explains this process with reference to the Heideggerian (1927/1962, p. 24) concepts of *Befragte* (the “object”; what is being interrogated) and *Gefragte* (the “subject”; what is being pointed to). We were working with the data about the “object” (support situations) which illuminated the “subject” (nourishing communion) of a phenomenological study:

The research phenomenon itself is something that we cannot know quite so clearly at the beginning of an investigation; it is easier to talk about the *situation*, that is, the “lived experience” that we wish to have described for us. It is this experience – communicated to us by the informant’s descriptive testimony – that is the “object” of our study, whereas the “subject” of our study is often something that only slowly reveals itself to us. (Churchill, 2018)

Dwelling with the participants’ descriptions, we asked ourselves: What possibilities of meanings of support are not yet seen and understood? We searched the individual contexts - the idiographic dimension - probing each person’s “project to-be” (what the person aims for, dreams for, wants for his or her life) and their lived relationships as a backdrop for our phenomenological analysis. Here, each participant’s particular situation gave the research its deepest, most evocative existential meanings. Highlighting this context supported us to remain faithful to the participants’ lifeworld, and not get lost in philosophical abstractions. Over time, the idea of ‘communion’ as a phenomenon emerged. Yet, this too, did not quite capture what we were sensing. It took continued dwelling, and dialogue between first and second authors, before the phenomenon of “nourishing communion” came into sharper focus. Churchill (2018) points to the Latin term *capta*, to refer to what we take or capture from the data. In this process from *data* to *capta*, there must be a transformation. We are always transforming *data* into *capta* in our analysis. While reflecting upon the data about support, the research phenomenon gradually emerged.

Engaging a hermeneutic process

Attempting to stay faithful to the phenomenological process, we engaged the “epoche” and “reduction”, taking up an attitude of openness, wonder, engaging a radical, reflective attentiveness to the way in which the participants - and ourselves - experience the world (Merleau-Ponty, 1945/1962; Finlay, 2008).

The wonder of that thing takes us in, and renders us momentarily speechless . . . From this moment of wonder, a question may emerge that addresses us and that is addressed by us. It should animate one’s questioning of the meaning of some aspect of lived experience. It also should challenge the researcher to write in such a way that the reader of the phenomenological text is similarly stirred to the same sense of wondering attentiveness to the topic under investigation. (van Manen, 2002b)

However, in this reduction, we needed to go beyond our predilections which would prevent us from seeing and listening to the deeper meanings to be found. van Manen (2017) explains the couplet of the epoché-reduction like this:

It is a method of reflection on the unique meaning of the phenomenon that one is studying to gain an eidetic grasp, fundamental understanding, or inceptual insight into the phenomenological meaning of human experience (moment or event). (p.819)

Inceptual thinking contrasts from conceptual thinking, and involves coming upon an inceptual thought. Van Manen (2014, pp. 235-238) highlights how Heidegger in his *Contributions to Philosophy* (1999) makes a distinction between *Begriff* and *Inbegriff*. While, *Begriff* can be straightforwardly translated as concept, *Inbegriff* is more opaque. Various translations of Heidegger’s work suggest “in-grasping” and “incept” are equivalent English terms for *Inbegriff* (van Manen, 2014, p. 237). With inceptual insight or thinking, there is an initial

“covered-up-ness” which is eventually disclosed through the hermeneutic investigation. Once revealed in a meaningful moment, meaning insights have to be wrestled with to gain depth and clarity, and their complexity often requires further insights (van Manen, 2014). They are not grasped once and for all but are in a constant interplay between self-showing and concealment. Here they comply with the ancient Greek term for truth “Aletheia”, meaning disclosure, unconcealment, withdrawal, and openness as Heidegger (1988/ 2013) explained in his 1931-2 lectures.

Phenomenological enquiry involves a method of leading back (*reducere*) to the way the phenomenon is experienced before the experience is conceptualized or theorized (van Manen, 2014, p. 220). But pre-reflective experience in the moment of “now” is already gone. To investigate the meanings of “nourishing communion”, we encountered this moment retrospectively through the participants descriptions of support but also through linking back to our own understandings, experience, imaginings, sensings and memories. We were present as researchers (Churchill, 2018) and so had impact on the direction of the analysis in that our own interpretations inevitably played their role. In other words, hermeneutic principles come into play more deeply when we try to sense and make sense of the meanings within. For Heidegger interpretation is not an additional procedure, it constitutes an inevitable and foundational structure of our being-in-the-world (Finlay, 2003). Instead of setting our preunderstanding and prior knowledge aside, which we see as not possible, we are following Heidegger’s (1927/2010, p. 144) recognition that all understanding has the structure of “something as something” – that is, prior interpreted understanding. These fore-structures of prior understanding can be seen as a circle of understanding, where new understanding arises from and is nurtured by what is already understood. Rather than freeing ourselves from our preunderstanding or fore-structures, and risk that they are given to us by chance, we used

them partly as a lens to reflect on them critically and let them inform and motivate our inquiry (Churchill, 2018).

As we dwelt with and probed the sense of nourishing communion, new insights and interpretations emerged which had not been apparent previously; as we proceeded on the basis of this new understanding, yet another interpretation evolved. Our process can be understood as a cycle of: having a fore-understanding...meeting a “resistance” when interrogating experience... an interpretative revision of the fore-understanding...and so on. At each stage we searched, sensed and made sense; we moved between reviewing, resonating and reasoning. Throughout we recognized our part in actively co-creating our knowledge through the back and forth dialectic between (pre-reflective) experiences and awareness (Finlay, 2003, 2011).

Although the aim of phenomenological research is to better understand a particular phenomenon, it should be acknowledged that such research is always tentative and incomplete; there will always be more to be seen. Understanding is always open to further description and interpretation. The language used to describe is only a substitute for meaning and cannot fully capture the experience as it is lived in its entirety. Nor can it describe how all people will experience the particular phenomenon (van Manen, 2014).

Reflexive explorative dialogues

Following preliminary insights gained from encountering the experiential material with openness (van Manen, 2014, p. 224), the first author (Mona) adopted a wondering attitude, asking: What is the lived experience of communion? And how is communion related to support? She oriented to the phenomenon by tuning into her own lived experience of communion and reflecting on her experiences. She returned iteratively to the empirical data, looking for patterns of meaning and stories that seemed to reveal meanings of communion. As

participants' descriptions began to resonate with the researcher's own experience and understanding, they functioned as a springboard to latent meanings, (Churchill, 2018).

These early reflections became the starting point for deep reflexive (i.e. critically self-aware meta-analysis) explorative dialogues in face-to-face meetings between Mona and Linda (second author). The use of reflexivity (Finlay, 2017) was central to our approach – not least because we were partly using ourselves and our experience for exploring the meanings. This involved continual evaluation of subjective responses, intersubjective dynamics, and the research process itself. We engaged “reflexive dialogue” (Finlay & McFerran, *Pending*) over the course of two days. The point of engaging reflexivity is to examine how our own subjectivity as researchers was inextricably intertwined with interpretations made (Churchill, in press). By reflecting on our experience as researchers, alongside the phenomenon being studied, we moved “beyond the partiality and investments of our previous understandings” (Finlay, 2003, p.108).

As we searched for meaningful insights about the experience of relationships that have this quality of nourishment, we moved between experiential *reflexive* closeness and analytic *reflective* distance (Finlay, 2008); between our own experiences and the participants' experience of communion, and the possible layered meaning within the experiences. We also explicitly explored the intersubjective process going on between us, opening up ourselves for moments of communion to appear in our relation. In a moment of mutual disclosure and shared vulnerability, an embodied experience of communion was manifested between us and within us. In this process we recognized the specific version of the communion experienced as nourishing and healing, rather than simply about a being-with connection. As Finlay (2011) claims:

The depth of personal introspection and the dialogical journey involved [laid] the ground...for research that has deep personal significance and this helps to ensure its evocative resonance and relevance. (p.166)

During the writing process, Mona also had explorative dialogues with what we've called a 'competence group'. This group has accompanied the researcher all through the research process with reflections and discussions at different stages of the research. The group consisted of four professionals working with vulnerable youths and three young adults with experiences of mental health problems and dropping out of school. The members were invited into the group by the researcher, because of their valuable competence related to the research topic. Drafts of the analysis were presented and reviewed with the group for two reasons: to enhance the researcher's understanding of the themes and to ensure the descriptions and reflections resonated with lived life and opened up for instant moments of recognition, an experience of: "yes, this is how it is, I know this". Explorative dialogues were also carried out with the other co-authors.

Writing the meaning

The writing process passed through numerous iterations and dialogues between the different authors. At a pragmatic level, thematic statements were formulated as "units of meaning" in concert with the analytic-reflective methods described above, to help point to the unique and invariant aspects of meaning that belong to the phenomenon (van Manen, 1997). These thematic statements were used to structure the research texts. Anecdotes were constructed from the interview material and refined to attend to the subjective aspects of experience, to assist the researchers and to evoke for the readers of the research a sense of what 'nourishing communion' means (van Manen, 1989). We made no effort to verify

whether a description of a situation was in keeping with the way things actually happened, as the aim was to arrive at plausible descriptions of human experiences.

This iterative writing-up process became an embodied lived experience in itself. Hermeneutic phenomenology is a textual form of qualitative inquiry where writing is closely fused to the research process (van Manen, 1997). It is an artful *reflexive activity* itself. The ambition of phenomenological writing is contact; to touch the lived meaning of a phenomenon and to be able to be touched by it. In the process of writing and rewriting, a space that belongs to the unsayable is created, and further it may evoke immediate understandings that otherwise lie beyond their reach (van Manen, 2002, 2014). “To write means to write myself, not in a narcissistic way but in a deep collective sense. To write phenomenologically is the untiring effort to author a sensitive grasp of being itself” (van Manen, 1997, p. 132).

We searched for, and savoured, words as we ourselves engaged in an intriguing parallel process of a togetherness which included a sense of nourishing communion (particularly in our reflexive dialogues), resonating with and responding to each other. We played with our words and drew on our bodily felt sense to tell us if the words we had chosen were a good enough fit. As we explicated the over-arching phenomenon of nourishing communion, various themes emerged which became the intermediate reflective tools for further phenomenological inquiry and reflective writing, eventually coalescing into the five existential themes explicated below.

Ethics

Permission to conduct this study was approved by the National Committee for Medical Health and Research Ethics. Strategies to diminish the possibility of participant identification included use of pseudonyms, careful selection of anecdotal examples and alteration of specific

recognizable information. It was emphasized that participants should not feel compelled to speak about themes with which they were uncomfortable. Possible emotional difficulties from interviews could be followed up in the ongoing care initiatives. To avoid conflict of interest, the first writer, who conducted the research interviews, did not interview young adults with whom she had worked in practice.

Findings

By drawing on our own experiences of communion that give a sense of nourishment, mirrored and refracted in the light of the participants' experiences, we came to identify five overarching intertwined existential themes: a) trusting the other to hold vulnerability safely; b) flourishing in mutual participation; c) acceptance in a felt togetherness; d) feeling found and received; and e) feeling an attuned resonance.

Trusting the other to hold vulnerability safely

I hold your head

I hold your head

in my hands, as you hold

my heart in your affection

as everything holds and is

held by something other than itself

As the sea lifts a stone

to its strands, as the tree

holds the ripe fruit of autumn, as

the world is lifted through worlds and space

So are we both held by something and lifted

to where mystery holds mystery in its hand

Stein Mehren (1964)

[originally in Norwegian: “Jeg holder ditt hode”. Translation by Elizabeth Rokka]

Moments of experiencing a sense of nourishing communion seem to rest upon trusting the other. These are moments in which participants dare to come forward, lay themselves open before another, and allow themselves to be held. The etymology of “holding” (“the act of holding” or “that which is held”) embraces verbs that include “support”, “keep” and “protect”, suggesting a dialectical relationship between the one who holds and that which is held. We hold, and we are being held, literary and figuratively, physically and emotionally. We are always in this “holding” in one way or another. In Mehren’s poem, to hold something and to be held draws our attention to the human conditions of dependence and interdependence. It underlines how the holder is also held. We are, to a large extent, dependent upon one another. Through the holding by another our sense of ourselves grows. As psychotherapist DeYoung (2003) notes, “A child’s experience becomes a sense of coherent self only within the consistent, affirming, holding presence of responsive others” (p.125).

The power of holding

The power of holding is well illustrated by Kathrin, a participant suffering from muscle pain in addition to mental health problems. Here she shares her experience of seeing a physical therapist in a mental health unit and of how the physical and emotional holding offered by this therapist made a difference to how she felt about herself:

I remember how she cared for my physical body, helping me to relax by her gentle strokes with her caring hands. She helped me to find a comfortable position, tucked me in with a warm blanket. It felt so good: healing and refreshing. (*Kathrin*)

For Kathrin, a physical and emotional space is created by holding. The holding where she let herself be held by another person, changes something about how she feels about the situation and herself. The reduction of distance between the person holding and the person being held enlarges the space around them. New space is created in the act of physical and emotional holding: a space between the two and the rest of the world. Kathrin trusted the therapist to care for her suffering body. What we metaphorically hold of another person's life, or what we ourselves deliver to another from our life, may vary greatly, from the smallest amount to something of immense significance. In the moment of holding and being held, there are possibilities of healing and of being renewed.

Trust as a moment of letting go

Over a ten year period, Ida, who suffered from depression and anxiety, encountered a range of professionals in the fields of mental health, child protection, and social services. She was resistant to trusting others, finding it difficult to place her faith in another person's capacity to bear the weight of her traumatic life experiences, distress, dreams and desires. Then she received support from a follow-up team for vulnerable youths. Here she describes what happened to enable her to experience trust:

I build a wall around me and I put on a mask, to protect myself. I need to find out if the other person is trustworthy, if it is someone who will tolerate me as I am. Often I find that I cannot trust another person, and I resist opening up. My service provider in the follow-up team must have done something right, because already in the second encounter with her my wall sank lower and my mask fell off. I felt safe enough to show her my tears, my naked face. *(Ida)*

To lay one's burden in another person's hands is an act of trust. Trust is a premise for this delivery to happen. However, where does trust come from? Trusting to be held is not simply a

product of our own making; as we sense in Mehren's poem, it is part of human existence, As Løgstrup (1956/1997, p.18) notes, "Our life is so constituted that it cannot be lived except as one person lays him or herself open to another person and puts her or himself into that person's hands either by showing or claiming trust." Through our act of trusting, we expect the other to accept our surrender, although there is no guarantee that the other will protect what has been placed in their hands. As a rule, we trust one another with some reservation. Even in situations where we desperately need help we do not trust unconditionally (Løgstrup, 1956/1997). Trust demands courage, even more so when the "givenness" of trust is challenged by repeated ruptures of trust, as in the lives of the young people in this study. For them trust is not something that goes without saying. Ida needed to "find out" if the other person was trustworthy. When she found this to be the case, and felt safe as a result, she was able to lay herself open and reveal her vulnerability, her "naked face". We can liken this moment to a deep exhalation: a letting go, a release of tension.

Holding as a shared experience

Unlike a mother holding her newborn baby, holding is not generally something we *do* to someone. We cannot just decide to "hold" another person or to be held. The other person has to accept, give and receive the holding (Finlay, 2016). The other also offers holding in return. We hold as we are held. To hold is a shared experience of the one who holds and the one who is being held. This shared experience may create a sense of togetherness and communion. Trust and openness lay the groundwork for a readiness to reach out, make contact, and find one another. Following Edith Stein's (1916/1989) example, Merleau-Ponty (1945/1962) likens this to the action of pressing our hands together:

When I press my two hands together, it is not a matter of two sensations felt together...placed side by side, but an ambiguous set-up in which both hands can alternate the role of 'touching' and being 'touched'. (p. 93)

While touching and being touched never fully coincide, they are intertwined in an interdependent sentient-sensible relationship of mutual encroachment. This notion of mutuality is explicated further in the next theme.

Flourishing in mutual participation

A shared experience of communion by definition involves the participation of at least two parties. The verb “participate” means to take part in, join in, share, and actively involve oneself. While participation may not necessarily produce a sense of nourishing communion, it has the potential for this. Jonathan, Sofia and Benjamin share their experiences where participation has a quality of mutuality and lay the ground for personal growth and flourishing. An experience of this sort seems to involve mutual respect and disclosure, along with a sense of being present for the other, thereby opening the possibility for each participant to flourish in the enabling presence of another.

Mutual respect

I feel like I’m taken into account, that I’m worth listening to. The way my service provider always includes me and asks for my views makes me feel respected. He is more like a companion who walks beside me. I’m not sure if it’s him or me who takes the next step -- it feels like we’re in it together. Although there’s a difference between us, both in roles and age, I feel comfortable with him. (*Jonathan*)

Jonathan has been unable to attend school because of a physical illness, and at times he is feeling overwhelmed by dark thoughts and a sense of hopelessness. However, meetings with his service provider provided him with companionship and enabled him to feel perceived as an equal. With mutual respect comes a feeling of being appreciated and valued, an ever-present dimension rather than something one needs to be vigilant about maintaining. The space between and around widens, while at the same time we are brought closer together by a

sense of companionship. Jonathan's lived experience provides an illustration of this process. Mutuality is not necessarily symmetrical and does not imply equality in the sense of "sameness". Rather, it acknowledges that two (or more) people are mutually participating in sharing and disclosing themselves as persons.

Mutual disclosure

It is as though I know her, even though I don't know much about her private life. She seems so genuine, and the sharing of thoughts between us makes her visible to me as a person. It makes a big difference for me, that she's open like that. It feels like real contact, and it's easier for me to open up. (*Sofia*)

A mutual disclosure embraces a sharing of reflections, wonder and engagement. Through mutual disclosure, Sofia gains a sense of knowing her service provider as a person. Mutuality reveals itself as sensed, lived, and true to the individuals involved. It embraces a willingness to disclose oneself as a person. Such disclosure "makes a big difference" to Sofia, as if the appearance of the "who" gives the act of support existential meaning. As Arendt (1958/1998, p. 181) notes, "Action without a name, a 'who' attached to it, is meaningless, whereas an art work retains its relevance whether or not we know the master's name".

Flourishing as possibility

Benjamin has struggled with anxiety since his early teenage years and this has affected his social life and interrupted his education. At the time of the interview, he was attending an alternative school for young persons who have dropped out of the ordinary school system. He also received support from a community team to remain in this alternative school, and to get supported with housing and economy. Both the staff at school and his service provider are nurturing his self-confidence and affect how he looks at himself:

Their (the staff at school) thoughts about me, their confidence in me and my capability...in the beginning I couldn't take it in. But over the months I started to adapt it. Their recognition opened up my future, in a way... It felt like a transformation, from being no one to being someone with possibilities. (*Benjamin*)

Sometimes he (the service provider) gives me a gentle push, to support me to do the things I want to do, but feel anxious about. It feels like he's giving me a hand. I can take it, or not. It's there as a possibility, even when I'm not with him. His companionship makes me become more than I thought I could be. (*Benjamin*)

A possibility for flourishing involves a sense of being given space and of being nurtured by the other's recognition and affirmation. Participation grows beyond a focus on tangible, day-to-day affairs towards more transformative possibilities, and may open up an enduring sense of possibility, beyond time, space and physical body. Being accompanied in a sphere of mutuality seems to enhance the Other's ability to embrace the invitation for action. Arendt (1958/1998) sees invitations as new beginnings. The beginning is not the beginning of *something* but of *somebody*. In a realm of latent possibilities, we can require the other's willingness to enter into such a relationship with us, but it is beyond our will and control. It is a moment of grace (Buber, 1923/1958). **Acceptance in felt togetherness**

The young persons in this study often take the initiative to be with others. They seek out persons to be with: persons who make them feel good. Feeling good being with another involves acceptance and felt togetherness. An embodied experience of unconditional acceptance as a bridge to communion appeared in several participants' stories of support.

Acceptance that releases one from self-criticism

Following a difficult upbringing, including violence at the hands of caregivers, Markus has difficulty concentrating and suffers from anxiety. His life has been marked by

instability, whether in relation to caregivers, homes, school attendance or employment. He wants to work and enjoys using his practical skills. Here he tells of the importance of being with his friends, who make him feel valued as the person he actually is:

I went to school to meet my friends. My friends were the only reason I stayed in school. I'd rather go to school and see my friends than stay at home and be alone. We hung out together in the breaks and after school; we played computer games. When I'm with my friends, I don't think about my problems. I'm not so caught up with what they think of me if I say or do something stupid. I feel good when I'm with them.

(Markus)

In an accepting environment we feel sure of our value as a person in relationship with others. We feel liberated from intrusive self-consciousness and self-criticism, both of which might otherwise block out experiences of communion. Being acknowledged by another helps us let go; it releases us from concerns about how other people may evaluate us; it tends to enhance our very being. Inspired by Levinas, Kunz (2006, p. 248) expresses the idea thus: "I find myself by being taken away from myself by the Other". There is no real "being-with" without mutual acceptance.

Being-with as felt togetherness

In moments of felt togetherness, we become truly present to the reality that to be a person is to be in the world with others. Alma, suffering from depression and unable to attend school, shares her experience of felt togetherness with a close friend:

I have a friend who understands me. I can be myself with her. When we meet, we don't have to do so much really. We are just together, being with each other, or we are talking. It helps just to be with another person. Sometimes she just holds my hand or

gives me a hug. I can sometimes be together with others without feeling I am *together* with them. Being with my friend, really feels to be *with someone*. (Alma)

In being-with as felt togetherness, we are nourished by the presence of the other and the relationship. We are never outside “being with”, just within it in different registers or degrees of intensity (Heidegger, 1927/2010, pp.114-122). Moments when we are absorbed by the presence of togetherness may only be fleeting ones, as in Alma’s description of instants when she really feels herself to be “*with someone*”. Such moments stand in contrast to the indifference of everydayness, where moments come and go without catching our attention. In such fleeting moments, the person(s) I am with is not just any other, but stands out from the crowd before me, pronounced and perceptible, as someone I feel *together with*.

Felt togetherness may be seen as a fountain of ease and healing. For Nora, who has been in mental health treatment for an extended period, her relationship with a particularly close friend has the effect of easing her pain:

I was talking to my friend on the phone... she felt so near to me. I was filled with gratefulness; of knowing her, and to have a friend like her in my life. Being with her is my best medicine. (Nora)

Through the pleasure gained by being with another, our healing can begin. When we are called away from ourselves, we are open, and thus, vulnerable to the other person. We put our weakness at stake. Paradoxically, our “weakness” has this powerful effect calling us to be responsive.

Feeling found and received

Small children love playing hide-and-seek. The hiding is exciting, and so is the being searched for. The “seeker” is supposed to search in many places before getting nearer and nearer to the actual hiding-place (which is probably known from the beginning), swelling the

delight of the little child waiting in suspense. The Norwegian psychologist and author; Guro Øiestad, describes her three-year-old's response the moment she is discovered:

I hug her while she beams with joyfulness and released tension. And then: “One more time, mummy!” And precisely the same procedure repeats itself, with as much joy as before. (Øiestad, 2004, p.18, authors' translation)

The most joyful moment of this playful event is when one is *found and received*. Winnicott (1965, p. 186) captures the existential significance of this moment when he writes: “It is joy to be hidden, and disaster not to be found”. To be called, searched for, found and received is an existential need we never grow out of. It signifies being held in mind and actively sought by someone. It means that we matter to someone. For the participants in our study, being found and received manifests itself in moments of feeling noticed and significant. At such times, participants describe feeling cared for and being seen and taken in.

Feeling welcomed as significant to the Other

For Kristin, a 20-year-old woman battling depression and fatigue, such moments occurred during visits to a friend's home. Kristin had felt alienated in the foster family she had lived with since early childhood until recently. Now she experienced something altogether different:

I went with a friend to her house every day after school, even if it was just for a few minutes. Her mother always talked to me...it was so nice just to be there with them. I remember I felt welcome, taken under her wing. It was this warmth... I really felt it. Sometimes I think her warmth saved me. (*Kristin*)

In the context of a caring atmosphere, the experience of being taken in and having a sense of being significant to an Other may open a door to oneself. Being warmed by another person's caring concern is a vital source of nourishment, even of survival as a person. Buber

(1947/1965, p.168) puts it like this: “Man can become whole not in virtue of a relation to himself but only in virtue of a relation to another self”. To feel seen and understood can unfold as a subtle realization in long-term relationships as well as sudden insights within shorter encounters. It encompasses an experience of being known and of recognizing oneself in the Other’s gaze. There is a sense of “coming home”, of being welcomed by someone who truly knows you.

Feeling witnessed

Tuva, a 19-year old, whose family was struck by tragedy when she was 7 years old, struggled with depression and suicidal thoughts. Following the tragedy, she had been largely left to her own devices, tending parents who had sought refuge in drugs and were not able to be there for her. Then one of her teachers enabled her to feel seen and understood:

He just listened calmly and patiently. He didn’t go into hysterics when I told him about my suicidal thoughts... just tolerantly accepted them. It was this atmosphere between us...free from judgement. Simultaneously softness and solidity... he showed me that he *would* and *could* be there for me. I felt safe... and free in a way, with him.

(Tuva)

To have a witness to what matters to us validates our very existence. It gives us space to be. In the embodied being-with another, we are no longer an object for another, exposed to their evaluation or devaluation. It is a way of being-with that “sees” what is, as it is, and appreciates whatever it “is” for its own sake without “why” or “for the sake of”, or “in order to” (DuBose, 2015). It is like a smooth landing in existence itself. Tuva also spoke of her efforts to draw attention to the neglect she suffered as a child:

I tried to tell other adults, also Child Protection, but they didn’t believe me. So they did nothing. I withdrew into myself... felt alone and sad. Then I met this health

visitor... I told her my story, and she believed me. Just like that. To be believed felt like coming to a restful place. My world changed... suddenly there was room for me. She saw me. *(Tuva)*

Here the attitude of the health visitor helped make Tuva's world brighter, richer and more secure; Tuva experienced a sense of being understood. A shared moment of finding and being found is a moment of freedom in which both parties feel open to being touched and claimed by the other. It is also a moment of receiving and being received. This powerful experience goes beyond the moment it is lived; both are affirmed as existing and as valuable persons to each other even when not together.

Feeling an attuned resonance

When we experience an attuned resonance, we sense that the other has empathically attuned to us. We feel felt as the other gently tunes into us, resonating with our experience. We borrow the shared experience from Benjamin, Susanna and Emma to try to capture the sensitivity in these moments of deeply felt contact.

Tuned to the same frequency

Benjamin describes his experience of gaining support from an attuned other:

I have met several psychologists, but there was one with whom I felt a special contact and bond. She somewhat intuitively knew what kind of support I needed, before I said so...as if she felt my feelings... She felt nearer to me, in a way, than other psychologists I have seen. The connection I felt with her...I have never had that since.

She left a void when she moved to another job. *(Benjamin)*

Benjamin here seeks to describe the connection he felt with his attuned psychologist, who was able to sense and "feel" him. To attune means to adjust to another in sympathetic, synchronous relationship, to bring into harmony. Musical terms such as resonance, rhythm,

duet and chorus come to mind when describing an attuned relationship (perhaps unsurprisingly so, given the “tune” in attune). The process of being “in sync” with another involves an attunement that mediates emotion and responds to the emotional tone of the other (Finlay, 2016). It is like two violins in a room: when the strings on one are plucked, the other also vibrates, if tuned to the same frequency (Rowan & Jacobs, 2002).

Feeling touched in connecting with another

Susanna recalls a moment of a deeply felt sense of communion, when both she and the one listening to her were mutually touched:

That was the moment for me when I thought: “Yeah, she really gets this. She gets me.” And that was the moment for me when I really felt seen and understood.

(Susanna)

This deeply felt sense of communion is an experience of mutual understanding: I feel-that you feel-that I feel. In this shared moment of being touched we honor one another’s vulnerability. We can be in the presence of others without feeling connected with them. We can distinguish connection from *disconnection* or a more neutral presence that passes over us in silence, as if unnoticeable. We cannot really tell *how* connection happens, but it is deeply sensed *within* our living body as really *there* – in the ‘between’, as a nearness to oneself and to the other, to us. Shared nearness comes with the sense of *feeling felt* by the other. An attuned awareness of the relationship and the between may sometimes come as a feeling of oneness, a joining at the multiple levels of mind, body and soul (Finlay & Eatough, 2012). It is like being on the same page, and to see the other beyond what is immediately apparent. Empathic attunement opens the possibility for such moments, when one can sense the unsaid and reveal the unspoken. “I listen to the tune being sung by the other. I try to connect with a deeper song – the song of contact, meeting, connectedness, longing” (Finlay & Evans, 2009, p.125).

Resonating with the Other

When one person's tune harmonizes with another, there is an experience of resonance and becoming absorbed with the Other's world. Emma shares one such experience:

I was struck by the intensity in our encounter, a communion on a deep level, a nearness balancing on the limit of what I could possibly bear. There were moments of almost confluence...the words she said could have been mine... they merged together. I was so *in* it...time and place disappeared from my consciousness. Afterwards I needed time in solitude, to dwell with it, to digest it. I felt enriched...I was filled with something bigger than myself. (*Emma*)

In the moment of feeling in tune with (and attuned to) another we can feel a merging in which we become absorbed in the Other's world and somehow lose sight of our own. "To the extent that I understand," Merleau-Ponty (1960/1964, p.97) writes, "I no longer know who is speaking and who is listening." In this embodied intersubjectivity, there is a mutual openness toward another, one that discloses the Other (Merleau-Ponty, 1960/1964). As our attention turns toward the other, and we lose our focus on our own needs, we feel nourished and enriched. The merging of interpersonal worlds holds a possibility of unfolding each person's potential, of creating something greater than either person alone could achieve. In the wake of this, we may experience both reverence and humbleness. We may feel blessed by a wondrous and ineffable mystery.

Discussion

The aim of this article was to explicate layered meanings of "nourishing communion" as an aspect of support to young persons with mental health problems. As the concept of

nourishing communion has not been previously addressed in this specific, non-secular, way, we argue that our study makes a distinct, new contribution.

In the moment of nourishing communion, there is a feeling of trust and holding, of being present and mutually participating, of acceptance in felt togetherness, of being found and received, and of attuned resonance. These dimensions of “nourishing communion” expand the general point concerning the importance of support and relationship for persons with mental health challenges. They highlight relational qualities that are a source of pleasure in life, help strengthen oneself to cope with challenges, and impart a sense of faith in oneself as a valuable person who is significant for others. The experience of nourishing communion may also enhance connectedness to broader contexts, such as schools, workplaces and places of worship, as well as to contexts related to interests such as music, art or sport (Karlsson & Borg, 2017).

Our study suggests that a sense of “nourishing communion” can emerge in relationships and communities both *within* and *outside* professional services, and we would recommend that service providers include both contexts in the support they offer young people. Although a nourishing communion can be found between a professional and a young person in need of support, it seems more likely to happen outside professional services, in contexts where the young persons live their everyday lives. It can blossom within the family, or in the company of friends; it can take place at school, at the workplace, in places of worship and during participation in other activities. This confirms the importance of everyday life as the orientation point for social and mental health support (Karlsson & Borg, 2017; Schön, Denhov, & Topor, 2009; Ness, Kvello, Borg, Semb, & Davidson, 2017). Indeed, it would seem particularly crucial in the case of young persons (MHCC, 2014). This finding suggests that practitioners should be encouraged to make use of resources beyond their own

professional context and domain when working with and on behalf of young persons (Ness et al., 2014).

The findings of our research suggest the need for health and social services to encourage professionals supporting young persons with mental health problems to pay attention to their clients' interests and skills and emphasize relational qualities of trust, mutuality, acceptance, and attunement. This would involve putting aside the traditional professional agenda of knowing, informing and advising in favor of a more intimate encounter based on *being-with*. From our research, we would suggest that professionals could usefully enquire about the young person's own agenda and life goals and then collaborate toward these goals (even when such goals are at variance with the service provider's own preferences) (Kolouh-Söderlund, Lagercrantz, & Göransson, 2016).

The young persons in our study seem more than capable of searching out relationships that are important and inherently nourishing. Services and practitioners need to recognize this agentic competence and involve the young persons themselves in the processes of identifying and defining where and how they might create this kind of relationship (Kierkegaard, 2016).

Although young persons are able to search for relationships and communities of their own choice, opportunities to do so may be restricted in situations where mental health problems limit or prevent access to social arenas, such as school and work (MHCC, 2014). Professionals therefore need to facilitate opportunities for young persons to establish and maintain broader networks and nourishing social relations. This may involve service transformation and different collaborative partnerships and organizational structures. Perhaps professionals could do more to create hybrid services that include other partners such as volunteers, peers, public players, and actors from the local community (Kierkegaard, 2016). User organizations might also prove important collaborative partners, given the emphasis they place on service users' rights to be treated as equal citizens (Karlsson & Borg, 2017).

Professionals should also be encouraged and supported to establish networks and collaborative partnerships with any arena where young persons connect meaningfully with others: clubs, schools, work settings, places of worship, and so on. For health and welfare policy to facilitate such networks and partnerships, much work needs to be done to operationalize the findings and values discussed above.

Methodological considerations and further research

The strength of phenomenological research lies in its potential to evoke and capture the richness of lived experiences and to deepen the understanding of a phenomenon through descriptions from daily living. This is an especially valuable research approach when little is known about a topic (as is the case of the phenomenon of nourishing communion).

While the findings of this study may apply to other target groups, we see the findings as of immediate relevance to the field of mental health provision for young persons even if we cannot strictly generalize them. Rather than maintaining a rigid adherence to traditional criterion of generalizability favoured by positivists and quantitative research, phenomenology values the uncovering of possible meanings and deeper, more humanized empathic understandings of the phenomenon of interest (van Manen, 2014). It is not to say a nomothetic focus and generalizability is not important and not a dominant interest in phenomenology as it is (for instance, as seen in the work of Giorgi, 2009 and Wertz, 1985). But we want to acknowledge the hermeneutics of facticity (Heidegger, 1923/1999, p.12; see Churchill, 2013 for an elaboration), acknowledging the importance of *texture* as well as structure. Particular poetic depth and richness can be found at an idiographic level and this may not be generalizable – this is the “texture” (Keen, 2003, p. 18) we have tried to open up.

The first author invited the young persons attending the study to participate in open dialogues about support which revealed experiences suitable for further exploration for this

research. We recognize that deeper descriptive accounts of the experience of nourishing communion would probably have resulted had we focused initially on this angle with the participants. There were numerous points in the interviews when the interviewer might have gone in a different direction, perhaps exploring embodied experience of nourishing communion more deeply. However, our emergent process of discovery fits our hermeneutic approach and demonstrates an appropriately non-judgmental, open phenomenological attitude. Future research might usefully attend more deeply to embodied lifeworld meanings. It might also seek to embrace different age groups and include participants of non-Norwegian ethnicity.

One unresolved and potentially problematic methodological issue concerns our decision to work through two languages. We acknowledge that the process of translating the young persons' words from Norwegian to English was always going to be tricky. In addition, the various authors involved in iteratively writing this article had to negotiate meanings between the two languages. That our reflexive dialogues were engaged in English, the first author's second language, meant our communications were not always smooth. We recognize that some meanings slipped away or shape-shifted through the process. We accept that reflection on meaning always "miscarries at the last moment" (Merleau-Ponty, 1964/1968, p. 9).

It could be argued that our attuned attentiveness to language is a strength of this research, for it meant that we appreciated and addressed multiple ambiguous meanings. Certainly, in our commitment to embrace van Manen's artful hermeneutic phenomenological approach to writing, we remained concerned to find just the "right" word to evoke the phenomenon. This meant that we took our time dwelling with the iterations and this led us to explicate the themes more deeply.

Although we adopted the somewhat unusual approach of supplementing interview data with reflexive processing, the reflexive dialogues (between first and second authors) proved rich and inspiring. We found ourselves awed by the depth of contact and the way that deeper meanings fluidly emerged in our own nourishing communion. We are clear that our dialogue took us further and deeper than we would have gone had we just reflected individually. For this reason, we would argue that this research offers a further contribution in the shape of its relatively novel methodology which may suggest an interesting way forward for other research teams. We suggest that this method of reflexive dialogue (see also Finlay & McFerran, *Pending*) can be used as a sensitizing exercise to explore one's fore-structures, as part of the dwelling-analysis process, and also as data itself.

We acknowledge that our findings remain tentative and partial, since we cannot possibly capture a given experience in its entirety nor describe how all people will experience it. We therefore present our emergent thematic aspects as a starting point. We invite you as readers both to experience your own nourishing communion and to engage reflexive dialogues to further explore the phenomenon.

Conclusion

This study has sought to advance understanding of the importance of nourishing supportive relationships for young persons with mental health problems. It has shed light on the many facets of the experience of being nurtured in a relationship as a significant quality of support and of being supported. The meaning structures that were revealed through our phenomenological analysis may be seen as a phenomenon of "nourishing communion". A sense of nourishing communion embraces: feelings of trust and holding; flourishing in mutual participation; being found and received; acceptance in felt togetherness; and awareness of attuned resonance. In the context of young persons who are struggling with mental health challenges, or even just to grow up – which can be quite challenging in itself, the term

“nourishing communion” as we have explored it in this article, may reflect healing possibilities in an early stage of life. The notion of “nourishing communion” as a particular type of support challenges current practice by suggesting the need for a different approach to collaboration with young persons and their networks. From the perspective of individual professional engagement, and at the level of policy making, there is a need for further exploration of how young persons might be supported in creating, establishing and maintaining contexts and relationships that hold the qualities of nourishing communion.

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The Humanistic Psychologist

“Nourishing Communion”: A Less Recognized Dimension of Support for Young Persons Facing Mental Health Challenges?

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Forespørsel om deltakelse i individuelle intervjuer i forskningsprosjektet:

«UNG OG INKLUDERT Hva fremmer deltakelse i utdanning og arbeidsliv for unge med psykiske helseproblemer?»

DEL A

Bakgrunn og hensikt

Denne forespørselen gjelder deltagelse i 2 individuelle intervjuer der hensikten er utforske erfaringer om med hva som kan fremme deltakelse i utdanning og arbeidsliv for unge som strever med psykiske vansker. De psykiske vanskene kan være en hovedårsak eller en viktig medvirkende årsak til at det er vanskelig å stå i utdanning og arbeid. Målet er å lære mer om og å bidra til større forståelse av hvordan denne situasjonen oppleves for unge med psykiske vansker og hva som er god hjelp og støtte for å komme tilbake til deltakelse i utdanning eller arbeid. Spørsmålene vi vil samtale om i intervjuene dreier seg om hvordan hverdagslivet erfares, hvilke faktorer og tiltak som er særlig betydningsfulle for å styrke sin deltakelse i utdanning eller arbeidsliv, samt erfaringer med samarbeid med helse- og velferdstjenesten.

De som forespørres skal være mellom 18 og 25 år, ha erfaring med psykiske problemer og erfaringer med å ha svak tilknytning til utdanning og arbeidsliv.

Hva innebærer studien?

For å få belyst erfaringene ønsker vi å gjennomføre 2 individuelle intervjuer med 15 personer. Dersom du godkjenner det, tas intervjuet opp på bånd for så å bli skrevet ut. Intervjuene gjennomføres i perioden september 2013- desember 2013. I tillegg til individuelle intervjuer, vil du også bli bedt om å svare på en spørreundersøkelse som deles ut til deg ved det første intervjuet. Prosjektleder for studien er PhD stipendiat Mona Sommer, Høgskolen i Buskerud og Vestfold, Fakultet for Helsevitenskap.

Hva skjer med informasjonen om deg

Alle data vil bli behandlet konfidensielt og på en forsvarlig måte i henhold til Personopplysningsloven og etter retningslinjer gitt av Datatilsynet. Dette innebærer at forskerne vil ha taushetsplikt overfor alle personopplysninger som samles inn. Datamaterialet vil bli anonymisert og slettet når forskningsprosjektet er avsluttet, senest 01.08. 2018. Forskningsresultatene vil bli publisert i nasjonale og internasjonale fagtidsskrifter og på fagkonferanser.

Frivillig deltakelse

Det er frivillig å delta i studien. Du kan når som helst og uten å oppgi noen grunn trekke ditt samtykke til å delta i studien. Dersom du ønsker å delta, undertegner du samtykkeerklæringen på siste side. Om du nå sier ja til å delta, kan du senere trekke tilbake ditt samtykke uten at det påvirker din øvrige behandling. Dersom du senere ønsker å trekke deg eller har spørsmål til studien, eller generelt ønsker mer informasjon om forskningsprosjektet kan du kontakte Mona Sommer, Høgskolen i Buskerud og Vestfold, tlf. 32 20 64 00 eller epost: mona.sommer@hbv.no

DEL B

Personvern

Informasjonen som lagres om deg skal kun brukes slik som beskrevet i hensikten med studien. Alle opplysningene vil bli behandlet uten navn og fødselsnummer eller andre direkte gjenkjennerende opplysninger.

Dekan ved Høgskolen i Buskerud og Vestfold, fakultet for helsevitenskap, er databehandlingsansvarlig.

Regionale Komiteer for medisinsk og samfunnsfaglig forskningsetikk har godkjent studien.

Utlevering av materiale og opplysninger til andre

Det er kun undertegnede som har adgang til informasjonen og som kan finne tilbake til deg. Det vil ikke være mulig å identifisere deg i resultatene av studien når disse publiseres.

Rett til innsyn og sletting av opplysninger om deg

Hvis du sier ja til å delta i studien, har du rett til å få innsyn i hvilke opplysninger som er registrert om deg. Du har videre rett til å få korrigert eventuelle feil i de opplysningene vi har registrert. Dersom du trekker deg fra studien, kan du kreve å få slettet innsamlede opplysninger, med mindre opplysningene allerede er inngått i analyser eller brukt i vitenskapelige publikasjoner.

Økonomi

Studien er finansiert gjennom forskningsmidler fra Extrastiftelsen.

Informasjon om utfallet av studien

Du har som informant rett til å få tilgang til utfall av studien.

Dersom du ønsker å delta, ber vi deg om å underskrive samtykkeerklæringen.

Vennlig hilsen

Mona Sommer
PhD stipendiat
Høgskolen i Buskerud og Vestfold

Drammen.....

Samtykke til deltakelse i studien

Jeg er villig til å delta i studien

(Signert av prosjektdeltaker, dato)

Jeg bekrefter å ha gitt informasjon om studien

(Signert, rolle i studien, dato)



Forskningsprosjekt «UNG OG INKLUDERT – Hva fremmer deltakelse i utdanning og arbeidsliv for unge med psykiske helseproblemer?»

TEMAGUIDE

Temaområde 1: Hverdagsliv og psykiske helseproblemer

- Kan du fortelle litt om hvordan hverdagen din ser ut? (hva liker du/ hva føler du at du mestrer i hverdagen)
- Hva legger du i «psykiske helseproblemer/vansker», hva betyr det for deg?
- På hvilken måte opplever du at psykiske vansker påvirker din hverdag?
- Beskriv en god dag, slik du ønsker at den skal være? (Hvordan ser drømmehverdagen ut?)

Innledningsspørsmål til temaområde 2 og 3:

- Er utdanning og arbeid viktig for deg, nå i fremtiden? Fortell hvorfor/ hvorfor ikke.

Temaområde 2: Erfaringer med hva som bidrar til deltakelse i utdanning og arbeidsliv

- Når det gjelder utdanning/skole og/eller arbeid; hva synes du selv at du har mestret/ fått til? Hvilke ressurser hos deg selv opplever du å ha for å ta utdanning/være i arbeid? Opplever du at den støtten du får hjelper deg til å bruke dine egne ressurser? Hvordan?
- Hva har du opplevd som god støtte og hjelp for å greie å komme tilbake til/ være i utdanning eller arbeid?
 - Hva slags støtte, fra hvem, hvordan ble støtten gitt
- Hvordan virker den støtten du har fått inn i forhold til det du ønsker å få til?
- Hva slags støtte tror du kunne hjulpet deg på en best mulig måte?

- Hva kjennetegner god støtte og hjelp for deg?

Temaområde 3: Erfaringer med samarbeid med skole, helse- og velferdstjenestene (de tjenestene du får hjelp fra)

- Hvilke tjenester har du kontakt med/får du hjelpe av?
- Hvordan foregår samarbeidet/kontakten du har med tjenester og systemer?
- Opplever du dette som et godt samarbeid? Eller dårlig? På hvilken måte? Fortell.
- Hvordan opplever du at skole, helse- og velferdstjenestene samarbeider med hverandre?
- Kan du fortelle om/ gi et eller flere eksempler på godt samarbeid? Hva var det ved dette som var bra?
- (Hva kjennetegner et krevende og vanskelig samarbeid for deg?)

Region: REK sør-øst	Saksbehandler: Hege Holde Andersson	Telefon: 22845514	Vår dato: 27.04.2015	Vår referanse: 2015/378/REK sør-øst B
			Deres dato: 24.02.2015	Deres referanse:

Vår referanse må oppgis ved alle henvendelser

Mona Sommer
Høgskolen i Buskerud og Vestfold

2015/378 Ung og inkludert

Forskningsansvarlig: Høgskolen i Buskerud og Vestfold
Prosjektleder: Mona Sommer

Vi viser til søknad om forhåndsgodkjenning av ovennevnte forskningsprosjekt. Søknaden ble behandlet av Regional komité for medisinsk og helsefaglig forskningsetikk (REK sør-øst) i møtet 25.03.2015. Vurderingen er gjort med hjemmel i helseforskningsloven (hfl.) § 10, jf. forskningsetikkloven § 4.

Prosjektleders prosjekttale

"En stadig voksende gruppe unge innvilges uførepensjon på grunn av psykiske helseproblemer. Formålet med denne studien er å utvikle forskningsbasert kunnskap om hva som er god støtte for å fremme deltakelse i utdanning og arbeidsliv hos unge voksne med psykiske helseproblemer. Målgruppen for studien er unge voksne mellom 18 og 25 år med psykiske helseproblemer, som er uførehetsutsatte og risikerer ekskludering. Følgende forskningsspørsmål vil bli undersøkt: 1. Hvordan beskriver de unge med psykiske helseproblemer hverdagslivet sitt? 2. Hvilke erfaringer har de unge med hva som bidrar til deltakelse i utdanning og arbeidsliv? 3. Hvilke erfaringer har de unge med samarbeidet med helse- og velferdstjenestene? Det vil bli gjennomført intervjuer med 15 informanter, to intervjuer på hver, til sammen 30 intervjuer. I tillegg skal informantene besvare en spørreundersøkelse. De transkriberte dybdeintervjuene vil bli analysert ved hjelp av en fenomenologisk- hermeneutisk analysemodell."

Komiteens vurdering

Komiteen har ingen forskningsetiske innvendinger til at prosjektet gjennomføres.

Komiteen har imidlertid en merknad til prosjektets organisering. I henhold til forskrift om organisering av medisinsk og helsefaglig forskning § 5 skal prosjektleder skal ha slik faglig og vitenskapelig kompetanse som det aktuelle forskningsprosjektet krever for en forsvarlig gjennomføring. I dette prosjektet er PhD stipendiaten oppført som prosjektleder. Som hovedregel skal en prosjektleder ha doktorgradskompetanse eller tilsvarende, og normalt er det en students veileder som skal være prosjektleder. Komiteen ber derfor om at prosjektlederansvaret overføres til veileder.

Ut fra dette setter komiteen følgende vilkår for prosjektet:

- 1) Prosjektlederansvaret overføres til veileder. Dette må sendes REK som en endringsmelding.

Vedtak

Komiteen godkjenner prosjektet i henhold til helseforskningsloven § 9 og § 33 under forutsetning av at ovennevnte vilkår oppfylles.

I tillegg til ovennevnte vilkår, er godkjenningen gitt under forutsetning av at prosjektet gjennomføres slik det er beskrevet i søknaden.

Tillatelsen gjelder til 28.02.2018. Av dokumentasjonshensyn skal opplysningene likevel bevares inntil 28.02.2023. Opplysningene skal lagres avidentifisert, dvs. atskilt i en nøkkel- og en opplysningsfil. Opplysningene skal deretter slettes eller anonymiseres, senest innen et halvt år fra denne dato.

Forskningsprosjektets data skal oppbevares forsvarlig, se personopplysningsforskriften kapittel 2, og Helsedirektoratets veileder "*Personvern og informasjonssikkerhet i forskningsprosjekter innenfor helse- og omsorgssektoren*"

Sluttmelding og søknad om prosjektendring

Dersom det skal gjøres endringer i prosjektet i forhold til de opplysninger som er gitt i søknaden, må prosjektleder sende endringsmelding til REK. Prosjektet skal sende sluttmelding på eget skjema, se helseforskningsloven § 12, senest et halvt år etter prosjektslutt.

Klageadgang

Du kan klage på komiteens vedtak, jf. forvaltningslovens § 28 flg. Klagen sendes til REK sør-øst B. Klagefristen er tre uker fra du mottar dette brevet. Dersom vedtaket opprettholdes av REK sør-øst B, sendes klagen videre til Den nasjonale forskningsetiske komité for medisin og helsefag for endelig vurdering.

Komiteens avgjørelse var enstemmig.

Med vennlig hilsen

Grete Dyb
førsteamanuensis dr. med.
leder REK sør-øst B

Hege Holde Andersson
komitésekretær

Kopi til:

*Dekan Heidi Kapstad, Høgskolen i Buskerud og Vestfold
Høgskolen i Buskerud og Vestfold ved øverste administrative ledelse*

Vår ref. nr.: 2015/378 B

Hei!

Vi viser til mottatt prosjektendring datert 28.04.2015. Komiteen skrev følgende i vedtaksbrev datert 27.04.2015:

*"Ut fra dette setter komiteen følgende vilkår for prosjektet:
1) Prosjektlederansvaret overføres til veileder Dette må sendes REK som en endringsmelding."*

Komiteen anser vilkårene som oppfylt.

Med vennlig hilsen

Harsha Gajjar Mikkelsen

Seniorkonsulent

post@helseforskning.etikkom.no

T: 22845513

**Regional komité for medisinsk og helsefaglig
forskningsetikk REK sør-øst-Norge (REK sør-øst)**
<http://helseforskning.etikkom.no>



Doctoral dissertation no. 43

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**Support as Possibility: Lived experiences of support in the
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A hermeneutic phenomenological study**

Dissertation for the degree of PhD

Mona Sommer

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