PALGRAVE STUDIES IN CREATIVITY AND CULTURE

CULTIVATING CREATIVITY IN METHODOLOGY AND RESEARCH

In Praise of Detours

EDITED BY:
CHARLOTTE WEGENER, NINNA MEIER AND ELINA MASLO

Palgrave Studies in Creativity and Culture

Series editors
Vlad Petre Glăveanu
Department of Communication and Psychology
Aalborg University
Aalborg, Denmark

Brady Wagoner
Department of Communication and Psychology
Aalborg University
Aalborg, Denmark

Both creativity and culture are areas that have experienced a rapid growth in interest in recent years. Moreover, there is a growing interest today in understanding creativity as a socio-cultural phenomenon and culture as a transformative, dynamic process. Creativity has traditionally been considered an exceptional quality that only a few people (truly) possess, a cognitive or personality trait 'residing' inside the mind of the creative individual. Conversely, culture has often been seen as 'outside' the person and described as a set of 'things' such as norms, beliefs, values, objects, and so on. The current literature shows a trend towards a different understanding, which recognises the psycho-socio-cultural nature of creative expression and the creative quality of appropriating and participating in culture. Our new, interdisciplinary series Palgrave Studies in Creativity and Culture intends to advance our knowledge of both creativity and cultural studies from the forefront of theory and research within the emerging cultural psychology of creativity, and the intersection between psychology, anthropology, sociology, education, business, and cultural studies. Palgrave Studies in Creativity and Culture is accepting proposals for monographs, Palgrave Pivots and edited collections that bring together creativity and culture. The series has a broader focus than simply the cultural approach to creativity, and is unified by a basic set of premises about creativity and cultural phenomena.

More information about this series at
http://www.springer.com/series/14640

Charlotte Wegener • Ninna Meier
Elina Maslo
Editors

Cultivating Creativity in Methodology and Research

In Praise of Detours

palgrave
macmillan

Editors
Charlotte Wegener
Department of Communication and Psychology
Aalborg University
Aalborg, Denmark

Ninna Meier
Department of Sociology and Social Work
Aalborg University
Aalborg, Denmark

Elina Maslo
Danish School of Education,
Aarhus University
Copenhagen, Denmark

Palgrave Studies in Creativity and Culture
ISBN 978-3-319-60215-8 ISBN 978-3-319-60216-5 (eBook)
DOI 10.1007/978-3-319-60216-5

Library of Congress Control Number: 2017951770

© The Editor(s) (if applicable) and The Author(s) 2018
This work is subject to copyright. All rights are solely and exclusively licensed by the Publisher, whether the whole or part of the material is concerned, specifically the rights of translation, reprinting, reuse of illustrations, recitation, broadcasting, reproduction on microfilms or in any other physical way, and transmission or information storage and retrieval, electronic adaptation, computer software, or by similar or dissimilar methodology now known or hereafter developed.
The use of general descriptive names, registered names, trademarks, service marks, etc. in this publication does not imply, even in the absence of a specific statement, that such names are exempt from the relevant protective laws and regulations and therefore free for general use.
The publisher, the authors and the editors are safe to assume that the advice and information in this book are believed to be true and accurate at the date of publication. Neither the publisher nor the authors or the editors give a warranty, express or implied, with respect to the material contained herein or for any errors or omissions that may have been made. The publisher remains neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.

Cover illustration: TAO Images Limited / Alamy Stock Photo

Printed on acid-free paper

This Palgrave Macmillan imprint is published by Springer Nature
The registered company is Springer International Publishing AG
The registered company address is: Gewerbestrasse 11, 6330 Cham, Switzerland

Contents

1 Editors' Introduction: The Power of 'Showing How It Happened' 1
Ninna Meier, Charlotte Wegener, and Elina Maslo

Part 1 Different Vantage Points, New Insights 9

2 The Wonder of Things as They Are: Theorizing Obesity and Family Life with Art 11
Lone Grøn

3 Into the Wild Time: Notes from a Traveller 29
Christina Berg Johansen

4 That's Responsibility 43
Chris Smissaert

Part 2 Research Life: Life and Research 55

5 In Between: Creative Spaces and Detours as Part of a Researcher's Life 57
Lene Tanggaard

6 An Unexpected Detour from Ivory Tower to Action Research 71
Jody Hoffer Gittell

7 Deliberate Detours as Paths to Emergent Knowledge Creation 79
Karen Ingerslev

8 Worth, Wonder and Worry in the Accelerated Academy 93
Rasmus Hoffmann Birk

9 There Is No Such Thing as a Journal Paper 103
Sarah Gilmore and Nancy Harding

Part 3 How We Know: Making Sense of Methods and Field Work 117

10 The Unanticipated Outcomes of Research: Learning and Development at Work 119
Stephen Billett

11 Knowing Across Time and Place 131
Ninna Meier

12 Staying on Topic: Doing Research Between Improvisation and Systematisation 143
Constance de Saint-Laurent

Part 4 Coping with Complexity: Writing to Understand What We Do 153

13 Metaphorical Structuring of Pattern Analysis 155
Camilla Kølsen Petersen

14 Telling Tales of the Unexpected 169
Elisabeth Willumsen

15 Writing My Way Home 181
Charlotte Wegener

16 Riding the Waves of Collaborative-Writing-as-Inquiry: Some Ontological Creative Detours 193
Ken Gale and Jonathan Wyatt

17 "Give It a Name and It Will Be Yours": How Opportunities to Reflect on Essential Questions Can Create Space for Learning 207
Elina Maslo

18 Confessions of a Procrastinator 219
Noomi Matthiesen

19 Epilogue or Why Creative Detours (Often) Have Happy Endings 231
Vlad Petre Glăveanu

Appendix 239

Index 241

List of Figures

Fig. 2.1, 2.2 and 2.3	Family and relatedness drawings from ethnographic fieldwork	20
Fig. 2.4	Conviction 6 by Maria Speyer	22
Fig. 2.5	Adherence 1 by Maria Speyer	23
Fig. 2.6	Red Sky 1 by Maria Speyer	24
Fig. 3.1	Oxygen. Copy of a milestone from a participant in Traveller's laboratory	32
Fig. 3.2, 3.3 and 3.4	Exploring ruins and goals and milestones in sensuous ways	38
Fig. 3.5	Time pod. Artistic-sonic device with temporal sounds, for subtle intervention in interviews with corporate managers	40
Fig. 4.1	A warm August 2016 afternoon in Amsterdam, Olivia and I are enjoying cold drinks on the terrace of the canal-side restaurant close to our home	46
Fig. 4.2	We decide to go for a little walk, and arrive at a playground a few minutes later, to conclude our talk	52
Fig. 7.1	Kristina Louise, founder, chairman of the board and manager, and Jens, board member and homeless, ready to recruit new volunteer students for Social Health	87

Fig. 13.1	Coaxing	159
Fig. 13.2	Tracking and meandering	161
Fig. 13.3	Trapping	163
Fig. 13.4	Trapping and filling	165
Fig. 13.5	Completed puzzle of the cathedral	166

List of Tables

Table 9.1 Deviations 104

1

Editors' Introduction: The Power of 'Showing How It Happened'

Ninna Meier, Charlotte Wegener, and Elina Maslo

Creativity in research is much in demand and always lauded. Every year, the top creative universities are ranked, and at all career stages, from student to experienced professor, academics want to—and are expected to—be creative. Most researchers have more or less explicit creative practices, but many do not know exactly how to cultivate creativity, let alone how to teach it. Based on a view of creativity as a socio-cultural *act* (Glăveanu 2014, 2015), with this book we wish to give space to fresh voices in the discussion of researcher creativity. The book introduces the idea that creativity in research is not *a method* or a set of techniques we

N. Meier (✉)
Department of Sociology and Social Work, Aalborg University, Aalborg, Denmark

C. Wegener
Department of Communication and Psychology, Aalborg University, Aalborg, Denmark

E. Maslo
Danish School of Education, Aarhus University, Copenhagen, Denmark

© The Author(s) 2018
C. Wegener et al. (eds.), *Cultivating Creativity in Methodology and Research*, Palgrave Studies in Creativity and Culture, DOI 10.1007/978-3-319-60216-5_1

apply to our work. Manuals on creativity and innovation often report the creative processes in terms of stages (Wegener 2016) or as the ability to perform divergent thinking (Glăveanu et al. 2016). A creative research practice springs from a curious, sensitive and playful life as a human being. Plans are fine. However, if we are preoccupied with how things were supposed to play out, we may not see and take in the inspirational sources right in front of us (Meier and Wegener 2017). We may think that we need to clean up the mess, get a grip and get back on track before we can proceed with the (tidy) research. We may even think that other researchers are much more successful in this respect. They are not.

Recipes for creativity rarely take into account the learning potential in other people's actual practices, messy and unfinished as they may be (Tanggaard and Wegener 2016). Accordingly, this is not a recipe book but a book of stories. The book offers a collection of personal, theorised essays about the unplanned, accidental and even obstructive events that are often erased from traditional representations of research methods. Reading over "Method" sections, it seems that epistemological struggle is something to be solved, with only the outcome worth reporting. To follow the traditional format for presenting method and analysis, scholars may feel they have to create a certain type of narrative about the research process in which some things are included and others left out. A tidy, edited account feels safer because the story of what 'really' happened may seem too intuitive, messy or serendipitous and thus at risk of being discarded as unscientific or irrelevant, or too personal. However, as Weick (1995) famously suggests, sense-making occurs retrospectively and is tied to action:

How can I know what I think until I see what I say?

This often-cited quote is fascinating because it reverses some taken-for-granted premises for scientific work. If we need to *see* what we *say* in order to know what we think, then we must act first and then understand. We must *do* things and then find out what we have been doing—because the sense we make of what we did (or of what happened) depends on how we word it. Yet, these utterances will rarely be final, conclusive and exhaustive. As researchers (and as human beings), we are in a continual process of voicing in order to *see* our thoughts and find out

more about our research topic (and about life). When we tell this kind of story, we slightly alter our understanding of what scholarly work may look like, how this work may be practised and to what end. Therefore, we need stories of the routes we did not plan, the messy things we did and the results of it all—which we may not fully understand.

Paraphrasing Weick, this book poses the rhetorical question:

How can I know what I did until I see where I am?

The 'detour' metaphor is a spatial expression referring to the iterations of thinking–acting–wording in academic work. We *go* somewhere, and we *think* of this path as the straight road towards a goal or as a not-so-straight road—a detour. We think of ourselves as focused or distracted. We think of our research as progressing or digressing, or even regressing. Yet, how can we know, unless we say or write what we did …? If we judge too soon, we risk missing important information or inspiration from unanticipated sources. The book zooms in on the creative potential of detours in academic work and in life: on the potential of not always following a recipe, of giving up what we think we *should* be doing or of realising retrospectively that what looked like a detour or even procrastination might be just the path we came to value.

The kinds of creative detour in academic work that take place in data analysis are already subject to much attention (Agee 2009). We carry out our academic work with a 'guiding research question', hoping to be surprised, to wonder and to find something we did not even know we were looking for, as we struggle to make sense of our data. Likewise, within anthropology, amazement is saluted (Hastrup 1992). This book adds to this attentiveness to the unanticipated, the detours in academic work that may originate from or spill over into our lives outside academia.

In times where we are not able to 'see what we say' or 'see where we are', a new or expanded notion of mastery may be needed. Barnacle and Dall'Alba (2014) suggest that mastery is often understood as achieving command or grasping something so there is no longer uncertainty about how it is done or what it involves. In times of uncertainty and confusion, it may seem reasonable to struggle even harder to analyse, categorise and plan. Speaking about writing, Becker (2007, p. 134) puts it this way:

'What if we cannot, just *cannot,* make order out of that chaos? I don't know about other people, but beginning a new paper gives me anxiety's classical physical symptoms'. One supposedly anxiety-reducing strategy is to try to tidy up (one's data, one's knowledge, one's research plan or even one's life) with the goal of being able to do tidy research and write tidy texts! This strategy can, however, turn out to be unproductive, demotivating and even restrictive of creativity.

It is often said that we *acquire* knowledge, *gain* insight and *make* new discoveries (Wegener and Aakjær 2016). Rarely do we hear of scientific work being discussed in terms of *dropping something*, *letting go* or *getting lost,* although the creative potential in obstructions of different kinds is well known across genres. Lather (2007, p. 136) argues that we should cultivate the ability to engage with 'not knowing' and to move towards a 'vacillation of knowing and not knowing'. Based on Pitt and Britzman (2003), Lather calls it 'lovely knowledge' and 'difficult knowledge' (Lather 2007, p. 13). Lovely knowledge reinforces what we think we want, while difficult knowledge includes breakdowns and not knowing, which becomes the very force of creative research. Wandering and getting lost thus become creative methodological practices, although, in an increasingly individualistic and competitive academia, such practices are also potentially risky strategies if only recognised by individual scholars. Sharing is crucial if we want to expand the playground of research.

The stories in this book include reflections on the role of space, place, materiality and the body, and support the idea that *where* we are physically in time and space, and mentally in our research process, as well as in life, matters for the work we do and how we come to make sense of it. The stories are personal narratives on incidents and processes that inspired or forced the contributors to act or think differently in research, or detours that they have taken or are still on, presented with reflections on what these detours might mean or entail for the author. They are stories of taking detours and the creative potential therein, but they are also untidy texts inasmuch as they do not all have 'happy endings' where the researcher, through serendipity, found a new and better method, solved the problem or ended his or her struggle.

Happy endings or not, it is our hope that these personal records will provide for resonance (Wikan, 2012) "not by telling how to do it, but by

showing how it happened" (Cerwonka and Malkki 2008, p. 186). Resonance, as we see it, is an experience that provides the power of creative production in its light (Meier and Wegener 2016). We hope one or more of these stories will make you feel like writing. By writing–sharing–reading–writing, we can inspire a research culture in which 'accountable' research methodologies involve adventurousness and not-being-so-sure.

The contributors are a mix of early-career and experienced researchers in the fields of education, healthcare, business, creativity and social work, among others. Some are part-time and others full-time researchers; some have engaged in research late in life and others have embarked on doctoral studies right after their master's degrees. They are all genuinely curious researchers who interact creatively with life circumstances, obstacles and opportunities and are bold enough to share. We are grateful to you all for detouring with us. Thank you for showing how it happened! Last but not least, special thanks to Vlad Glăveanu and Brady Wagoner, the series editors, for setting off with us, and to Vlad for rounding off the trip with some final reflections on detours in methodology and research.

References

Agee, J. (2009). Developing qualitative research questions: A reflective process. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education, 22*(4), 431–447.

Barnacle, R., & Dall'Alba, G. (2014). Beyond skills: Embodying writerly practices through the doctorate. *Studies in Higher Education, 39*(7), 1139–1149.

Becker, H. S. (2007). *Writing for social scientists: How to start and finish your thesis, book, or article* (2nd ed.). London: University of Chicago Press.

Cerwonka, A., & Malkki, L. H. (2008). *Improvising theory: Process and temporality in ethnographic fieldwork*. London: University of Chicago Press.

Glăveanu, V. P. (2014). *Distributed creativity: Thinking outside the box of the creative individual*. London: Springer.

Glăveanu, V. P. (2015). Creativity as a sociocultural act. *The Journal of Creative Behavior*, e-pub ahea doi: 10.1002/jocb.94

Glăveanu, V. P., Tanggaard, L., & Wegener, C. (Eds.). (2016). *Creativity: A new vocabulary*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.

Hastrup, K. (1992). *Det antropologiske projekt – om forbløffelse*. Copenhagen: Gyldendal.

Lather, P. A. (2007). *Getting lost: Feminist efforts toward a double(d) science*. New York: State University of New York.
Meier, N., & Wegener, C. (2016). Writing with resonance. *Journal of Management Inquiry*. Ahead-of-print 1056492616673911.
Meier, N., & Wegener, C. (2017). *The open book: Stories of academic life and writing or where we know things*. Boston: Sense Publishers.
Pitt, A., & Britzman, D. (2003). Speculations on qualities of difficult knowledge in teaching and learning: An experiment in psychoanalytic research. *Qualitative Studies in Education, 16*(6), 755–776.
Tanggaard, L., & Wegener, C. (2016). *A survival kit for doctoral students and their supervisors: Traveling the landscape of research*. Los Angeles: Sage Publications.
Wegener, C. (2016). Driving forces of welfare innovation – Explaining interrelations between innovation and professional development. In S. Billett, D. Stephen, & C. Darryl (Eds.), *Supporting learning across working life: Models, processes and practices*. Cham: Springer.
Wegener, C., & Aakjær, M. K. (2016). Kicked out and let down: Breakdown-driven organizational research. *Qualitative Research in Organizations and Management: An International Journal, 11*(1), 67–83.
Weick, K. E. (1995). *Sensemaking in organizations*. Thousand Oaks: Sage.
Wikan, U. (2012). *Resonance. Beyond the words*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Ninna Meier is an associate professor at the Department of Sociology and Social Work at Aalborg University, Denmark, where she teaches and supervises students in organisational sociology. She has carried out qualitative field studies of organisation and management of healthcare work since 2009, first focusing on the managerial work of clinical managers in the front line of hospital wards and then focusing on the leadership and coordination practices inherent in making healthcare work coherent across geographical, organizational and professional boundaries. She is particularly interested in how researchers may facilitate impact of their work in practice, especially the role of writing herein; a topic she has blogged about on LSE. Her latest book with Charlotte Wegener is called *The Open Book: Stories of Academic Life and Writing* or *Where We Know Things*—a book they did not know they were writing until one day it was done. Currently, they are developing both 'Open Writing' and 'resonance' conceptually and as a field of research, a method of inquiry and community of academics across disciplines and countries.

Charlotte Wegener is an associate professor at the Department of Communication and Psychology, Aalborg University, Denmark. Her work concerns innovation with a specific focus on education, workplace learning and research methodology. Charlotte runs writing workshops for doctoral and master students, faculty and practitioners. She is passionate about writing and has explored the art and craft of writing in several ways. She seeks to expand academic writing as both process and product by involving fiction, music, dreams and everyday life experiences. She has published blog posts on the London School of Economics Impactblog and Review of Books. She is also the co-author of *The Open Book: Stories of Academic Life and Writing* or *Where We Know Things*. Together with her long-time writing friend, Ninna Meier, she has developed the concept of "Open Writing"—a project devoted to the creation of a new research field and joyful writing practice.

Elina Maslo is an associate professor at the Danish School of Education, Aarhus University, where she mainly teaches second language learning and teaching courses at the Masters Programme for teachers of Danish as a second and foreign language. She conducted her PhD project at the Institute for Pedagogy and Psychology at the University of Latvia (2003). After almost ten years in the field of learning languages in and outside the formal educational system, exploring successful learning spaces in practice, she is now devoting herself to discovering and theorizing transformative dimensions of learning spaces. Her main research interests are learning spaces—multiple, diverse, changing, fluid, complex, always in construction—in and outside the school and at the workplace. Elina is an active member and European co-coordinator of the ASEM LLL Hub research network on workplace learning.

Part 1

Different Vantage Points, New Insights

2

The Wonder of Things as They Are: Theorizing Obesity and Family Life with Art

Lone Grøn

> My impression is that philosophers nowadays tend to associate the experience of wonder with the explanation of science rather than, as in Wittgenstein and Austin, with our relationship to things as they are, the perception of the extraordinariness of what we find ordinary (for example, beauty) and the ordinariness of what we find extraordinary (for example, violence). (Cavell 2005, 34)

> To me, the attraction of the line has to do with its kinship with pointing. There is no pretense in the line that it will render anything with optical correctness. Rather a line allows me to closely examine something, I tend to use the line almost like a sculptural modeling tool, and when I draw, I feel like I am running my fingers across the landscape of figures and faces. (Speyer 2011, 11)

L. Grøn (✉)
VIVE The Danish Centre of Applied Social Science,
Copenhagen, Denmark

© The Author(s) 2018

C. Wegener et al. (eds.), *Cultivating Creativity in Methodology and Research*, Palgrave Studies in Creativity and Culture, DOI 10.1007/978-3-319-60216-5_2

For a long time I did not have a theoretical framework with which to make sense of my ethnographic fieldwork on the obesity epidemic, kinship, and relatedness. I did have a point of departure, a phenomenological orientation, which guided how I went about the doing of the fieldwork. I also had a hope that taking an experience-near approach to a large-scale phenomenon like epidemics would yield something interesting. Yet, for a long time, I did not know how to put what I found into words or how to find concepts that could help me single out that which was most important in my data. But I did have something. I had a novel, *The Virgin Suicides*, by Jeffrey Eugenides. I had drawings by a Sydney-based Danish artist, Maria Speyer.

Both captured, pointed to, and showed, what was the most compelling—and yet to my academic understanding and language somehow elusive—aspects of exploring obesity experientially in the context of family life. Since then I have found my analytical toolkit, but what remains intriguing is the way the initial story and images—which, for a long time, remained my sole analytical guiding stars—portray the main insights more directly. One feels the experiential truth of the image or the story right there and then, at the very moment the lines or words touch one's eyes, ears, and heart. The theoretical framework that I have since then come to rely on, the German philosopher Bernhard Waldenfels' *Phenomenology of the Alien* (Waldenfels 2007, 2011), also captures the aspects that were highlighted in the pictures and the novel, but it remains abstract and difficult to understand. I have devoted considerable time and energy to bringing Waldenfels' concepts like the alien, responsivity, affect, and time-lag into conversation with the concrete everyday settings and events of family homes, kitchen, and relations (see Grøn 2017a, b, c); yet, I am often met with questions and demands for clarification by readers, colleagues, and reviewers. Many years ago the anthropologist Paul Stoller remarked, that "recent writing on the body tends to be articulated in a curiously disembodied language." (Stoller 1997, xiv) In a similar vein, one could say that phenomenological theory tends to be articulated in a curiously dis-experienced language, while the story and the drawings are not. They speak directly to and from experience. With force. As Speyer writes there is no pretense that her line will render anything with optical correctness, yet, when she draws, she feels like she is running her fingers "across the landscape of figures and faces" (Speyer 2011, 11).

I praise, thus, the opportunity given to me in this chapter of taking a detour back to the detour: to explore what it is that the drawings and the novel made possible. Before embarking on this journey back, I want to clarify that the fact that what we as anthropologists want to express is often elusive, that the arguments are complicated, is not what I am after here. Furthermore, I am not reflecting here on art as a way to represent research findings that might be more evocative or engaging than traditional academic writings—or on art as empirical examples in the style of many of my favorite philosophers. Rather, I want to reflect on art, often perceived as imprecise and elusive when compared to science, as a theoretical framework in its own right, as a way of thinking and philosophizing, which, to paraphrase Cavell, stays close to our "relationship to things as they are." I will do this in three steps. First, I will present data from the ethnographic fieldwork; then I will introduce my use of the novel and the drawings; finally, I end with some reflections on art as a mode of thinking about data, that is, as theory.

The Fieldwork

The fieldwork on obesity, kinship, and relatedness was carried out with four families in 2014–2015, whom I had met initially during my Ph.D. fieldwork in 2001–2003. I know these families very well, and they appear in this fieldwork not solely as informants or interlocutors, but as frontline researchers, helping me reflect on the obesity epidemic from within their own lived experience. The following conversation is taken from a family interview. We are sitting around Susanne's kitchen table: Susanne, her sister Bente, and Bente's children Bo, a young man aged 25, and Marie, his half-sister, aged 15. I ask Bo and Marie what they think caused their obesity. After a short pause, Bente responds:

Bente: Well, she's sitting right here (pointing to herself and following up in an insistent voice): None of them can be blamed for becoming obese! It can only be traced back to me!

Susanne:	No, there was a father too.
Bente:	Yes. Yes. But clearly ... the food that was served and … what was available in the home. I am saying that none or my children are culpable of their overweight
Marie:	I don't think so, because it happened when I was being bullied and I myself went to …
Bente (interrupts):	Marie, if the things hadn't been there, if you didn't serve the brown gravy
Marie (interrupts):	But it was my own money!
Bente (in an insisting voice):	But Marie … if you didn't serve the gravy, if you didn't buy the pizza, the coke … it's not the children, you cannot be held responsible for your own obesity. It lies right here! In the same way, I do not blame my parents for the obesity, but that is where I can trace it to. (…) You can say, yes, Bo is grown up today, he makes his own choices. But the foundation (in Danish "grund stenen," the foundation stone) of Bo's obesity – it's in the genes, that's for sure, I am certain that something comes from your genes, but it is also the food one has served them!
Bo:	Yes. But well my father, he is thin and also my elder brothers. And well, I feel they have just taken in whatever (…) I mean, my impression is that we actually eat the same, or in fact they might eat a bit more.
Bente:	You have double genes! Both from your mother and from your father's side. Genes from your paternal grandmother.
Susanne:	And your elder brother was big …
Bente:	Yes. He also was overweight as …
Susanne:	… as a child. But then he got away from home, you can say. Already after the confirmation at a boarding school or something.
Lone:	Did he lose weight there?
Susanne:	Yes.

Bo (interrupts): Well the thinking goes that because it is my mother, I got it from there. But if I had been the son of one of the other sisters, then I think that is kind of the same, and I would have been big there too.

I pause shortly to give you a bit more of the family history. Over the course of one year, Susanne and her two sisters all had gastric bypass surgeries; while all the sisters have lost a lot of weight, between 130 and 160 pounds, Bente has changed the most: she wears tighter clothes, has divorced Marie's father and found a new boyfriend. Furthermore—and to me the most remarkable in the course of events—the sisters' cutting of their intestines affects Bente's daughter Marie, who, after a long, painful process of feeling excluded, having to carry all the too many kilos by herself, starts losing weight. This is where we re-enter the family conversation.

Marie: It is up to 40 pounds now. It was … the start of the summer vacation. I don't know what happened, but I just know that that was when apparently I got the motivation (…) I don't understand it myself. (…) I have tried so many times saying: "On Monday. I will start on Monday" and then … Monday night: "Oops" then something happened.

I ask what has brought about the weight loss. After rejecting several possible causes, Marie replies: Well this sounds crazy, but I use Christoffer. Everybody laugh. Christoffer is a blond curly hair and blue-eyed pop star who has teenage girls screaming at his arrival. Wondering about the scope of her transformation, I ask about cravings, if she sometimes feels like eating an entire bag of candy.

She replies: No. Not at all. Not at all like before.

Her family chips in:

Bo: There was a time when we locked the cupboards.
Bente: Marie constantly had a hole in her stomach. You had to be filled up with food.