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"To see a world in a grain of sand": Towards Future-Oriented *What-If* Analysis in Narrative Research

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Résumé de l'article

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NARRATIVE WORKS
Issues, Investigations, & Interventions

"To see a world in a grain of sand": Towards Future-Oriented *What-If* Analysis in Narrative Research

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In this article, I explore narrative building blocks for future-oriented *what-if* (i.e., possibilities-generating) analysis developed in a health promotion study. The aim of this study was to gain insight into future possibilities for good health among participants known for their poor health status. In narrative inquiry, imagining future possibilities and prospective temporal orientation are seldom regarded as interesting for their own sake, despite ample attention to the role of temporality. The methodological reflection in this article is complemented with a discussion of ethical issues (regarding authorship and representation) in the proposed method of analysis.

To see a world in a grain of sand,
And a heaven in a wild flower,
Hold infinity in the palm of your hand,
And eternity in an hour.
(Blake 1803/1966, p. 431)

My interest in the dilemmas of imagining future possibilities, and the role of narrative research in this process, intensified during my participation in the Aspiring to Healthy Living Project (AHL Project) several years ago. This health promotion study, aimed at gaining insight into possibilities to promote good health in the future, forms the basis of my exploration of two narrative building blocks for *future-oriented what-if* (i.e., future possibilities-generating) *analysis*.

The research question in the AHL project was driven by an empowerment agenda, which is in keeping with current initiatives for encouraging and maintaining healthy lifestyles and resilience as well as preventing and treating illness (Liebenberg & Ungar, 2009; Sools, 2010; Ungar & Lerner, 2008; Westerhof & Bohlmeijer, 2011; Westerhof & Keyes, 2008). The project took place in Rotterdam, The Netherlands, a

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city in which nearly 50% of the inhabitants are of non-western origin. The participant group consisted of Moroccan and Dutch men and women, aged between 45 and 75,[1] all from a low socio-economic background, and all with a low level of education. This project has been described more fully elsewhere (see Mens-Verhulst & Bavel, 2005; Sools, 2008, 2010). It might come as no surprise that it turned out to be quite a challenge with this group—known for its poor health status—to elicit good health talk. Rather, I found myself listening to relatively unhealthy and determined storylines (storylines with only one inescapable outcome) and unhealthy storylines, which made it difficult to actually *see* future possibilities, strength, and potential for good health.

Representing the dominant illness narratives and complaint stories seemed the appropriate response, so initially I wrote about the lack of health experienced by, and the often unsuccessful quest for a better life of, the Moroccan participants, in particular. Discussing the vulnerability of this group at a conference in Morocco drew unexpected media attention to the often harsh reality of migrants who in their home country are perceived (and who tend to present themselves) as successful. My unintended contribution to the exposure of Moroccan migrants not only demonstrated the performative effects of research results in a public context, but also complicated the issue of representation and authorship in narrative research. The issue of representation was complicated further by the request of one of the Moroccan women for "someone to stand beside me" in her quest for good health**.** Her words encouraged me to bridge the apparent gap between my research question regarding future possibilities for good health, and interview texts which defied easy access to good health. Her appeal to search for good health together turned a methodological challenge into a deeply ethical one.

It should be noted that good health, being more than the absence of illness, is known as a topic difficult to study, if only because of the taken-for-grantedness of the experience (Sools, 2012). Moreover, the

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[1] We aimed for the sociological age of transition between a life phase of work and children to a life phase of retirement and grandparenthood. Initially, we thought a biological age of 55 to 75 would match the required sociological age, but in the Moroccan-Dutch group it turned out to be hard to find "young elderly" over 60. In addition, many of the Moroccan guest labourers in the Netherlands are already grandparents in their mid-forties and retire from hard physical labour early on due to health problems. This is why we decided to lower the age range for the Moroccan group to 45.

quest for good health (as presence) becomes even more complicated in a culture in which deficit, complaints, and lack prevail (Gergen, 1994). Evidence of this cultural aspect in my study was the explicit anticipation of one of the interviewees of receiving money from government programmes based on being a member of a so-called vulnerable group. However, we were interested in moving away from a deficiency approach focused on removing obstacles towards one based more on strength and that focused on the promotion of good health, well-being, and resilience. The Netherlands Organisation for Health Research and Development, who funded the project, considered a narrative approach to be a promising way to achieve this goal.

One of the central assumptions in a narrative approach is that researchers *construct* rather than *find* meaning. That seeing future possibilities for good health is—at least partly—in the eye of the beholder is something I experienced vividly during a summer course at the Centre for Narrative Research in London. Women researchers from a cultural background more akin to the Moroccan women in my study (often grandmothers by the age of fifty) than myself (a young, Dutch, white woman without children) saw far greater potential in the same interview text than I did. They read hope, power, and connection, whereas I only saw despair. If the narrative analysis in my study is regarded (among other things) as a matter of *seeing* future possibilities, or in the words of William Blake, "see[ing] a world in a grain of sand," then what can narrative analysis offer when looking for grains of future health in a seemingly unhealthy present world?

In a narrative approach, temporality plays an important role, but the future is seldom explicitly theorized or empirically investigated. Narrative inquiry tends to foreground past experiences (Labov, 1972); the importance of retrospectivity and hindsight in rewriting the self (Freeman, 1993, 2010); different narrative models of autobiographical time (Brockmeier, 2000); and continuity through the life-span (McAdams, 1997, 2008). Less attention has been paid to future selves, and to hypothetical and on-going events (Georgakopoulou, 2006b, 2007; Riessman, 1993). Paul Ricoeur, for instance, in his seminal work *Time and Narrative* (1984-1988), hardly mentions the future, although it does figure when he refers to the conditional tense in narrative (used to signal anticipated information). In this respect, the future remains a relatively empty notion, because anticipated information "only means that the

information is given prematurely in relation to the moment of its realization" (Ricoeur, 1984, Vol. 1, p. 74).[2]

To explore future possibilities from a narrative perspective, without a clear theoretical framework of future time, I then considered the so-called *subjunctive* or "what-if" function of narrative speech acts to be a useful candidate. Narrative speech acts function to support the construction of multiple, possible worlds by initiating and guiding "a search for meanings among a spectrum of possible meanings" (Bruner, 1986, p. 25). According to Bruner, good stories function to "subjunctivize reality" by highlighting "subjective states, attenuating circumstances, alternative possibilities" (Bruner, 1990, p. 53). Subjunctivizing narrative speech acts are "used to express a wish, command, exhortation, or a contingent, hypothetical, or prospective event" (Bruner, 1986, p. 25). The more subjunctive a narrative text, the more actions or states are portrayed as conceived (what-if) and not as a fact (what-is). The effect of being "in the subjunctive mode is, then, to be trafficking in human possibilities rather than in settled certainties" (Bruner, 1986, p. 25). Narrative in the subjunctive mode certainly does not refer to a static entity, but to *narrative on the move*, as indicated by the theme of this special issue.

It is important to note that Bruner connects the subjunctive mode with *good* story, implying that not all stories have the same level of subjunctivity. Texts have a "*relative* indeterminacy that allows a spectrum of actualizations" (Bruner, 1986, p. 25; emphasis added). It could be argued, therefore, that stories differ in their potential to initiate and guide a search for possible meanings, including future ones. Hermeneutically inspired narrative analysis starts from the assumption that we storytellers and writers mean "more than we say, or … something other than what we say (as in irony, for example), or … less than we say" (Bruner, 1986, p. 26). Because there is always space between the words and meaning,

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[2] Mark Freeman, who also writes intricately on temporal orientation and narrative (1993, 2009), seldom refers to the future. And when he does, it is either in the negative sense of "narrative foreclosure," indicating the end of story (Freeman, 2011), or as an empty space that yet has to acquire meaning when it becomes present: "So it is that we must often await the future in order to discern more fully the meaning and significance of what has gone on in the past" (Freeman, 2010, p. 24). As opposed to the full meaning and significance that only the past and present can acquire, the future appears in bits and pieces, in the form of hints of what might happen. The future has to become present before "an incident, its potential inchoate, becomes an episode; a narrative-to-be becomes a narrative" (Freeman, 2010, p. 60). From this point of view, a future narrative proper does not exist.

narrative researchers (like readers in general) bring different interpretations even to a relatively determined narrative text. However, narrative researchers in the social sciences have to conform to another hermeneutical principle: to take the text seriously. The process of enrichment is therefore necessarily limited to some extent, but even more so in texts low in subjunctivity. These are exactly the kinds of texts that figured in my study.

These interview texts were transcripts of open interviews, guided by a list consisting of topics which each provided a different way of eliciting good health (e.g., the meaning of good health for them personally; facilitators and obstacles; ideal and practice; expectations, hopes, and wishes; awareness and importance of good health in their life; a possible healthy world; a symbol to express good health). This procedure is in line with the multi-coloured interview (Maso, 1996) or the multi-vocal interview (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995). Researchers from the university, professionals from the National Centre of Expertise for Gender-specific Care and against Sexual Violence, and elderly Moroccan and Dutch peer researchers trained for this purpose conducted a total of 32 interviews. I used a modified version of Gee's (1991) linguistic transcription method[3] to highlight the immediacy and the dialogical nature of the interview conversations.[4] I analysed these interviews using a dialogical narrative analysis (Sools, 2010), which is a combination of storyline analysis using Burke's pentad (1969) and positioning analysis (Bamberg, 2003; Harré & Van Langenhove, 1999). So, while the method of analysis was partly narrative and partly discursive, the data collection method was not specifically narrative. Nevertheless, I would suggest that the resulting data comprise narrative elements.

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[3] The transcription symbols used:

(.)	= indication of a pause
[Story story]	= overlapping utterances
(story)	= transcriptionist's description
story	= emphasis
sto;ry	= extension or prolongation of sound
!	= animated tone
?	= rise in intonation

[4] Readers should be aware that this procedure results in interview excerpts that stay relatively close to natural language, but that are not necessarily easily accessible, especially in the case of the Moroccan-Dutch language of the excerpts presented here.

Other narrative researchers have already pointed out the difficulties in demarcating narrative from non-narrative text (Riessman, 1993). The matter of defining narrative elements is complicated further when one takes into account the diverse definitions, uses, methodologies, and approaches covered under the umbrella term *narrative inquiry* (Sools, 2011; Squire, Andrews, & Tamboukou, 2008). Elsewhere, I took the distinction between big and small stories (Bamberg, 2006; Georgakopoulou, 2006a, 2006b, 2007)[5] to characterize the interview texts in my study as a hybrid genre called "naturalistic research interviews" (Sools, 2012). This genre consists of a mixture of big and small story characteristics. Put simply, big stories typically refer to research interviews with minimal interviewer interference in which a safe space is created for the telling of autobiographical (usually a few hour-long) stories. Small stories refer to on-going conversations in everyday interactions (Georgakopoulou, 2007), and are in this respect comparable with naturally occurring data gathered in ethnographic research. These data are not elicited for research purposes per se, but are records of *in vivo* interactions in local discourse contexts. The data gathered in our study, especially the peer-to-peer interviews, could be characterized as part big story (research-driven, focused on good health) and part small story (naturally occurring, resembling a conversation between equals).

In the remainder of this article, I am using more or less narrative texts (interview excerpts) to explore two narrative analytical strategies for engaging in future-oriented what-if analysis. First, I show how even in interview texts seemingly fraught with a lack of possibilities, subjunctivizing transformations can be analysed. Second, I theorize how listening for promising detail (e.g., particularities, irregularities, and exceptions), more than focusing on common narrative patterns and themes alone, could be particularly useful for engaging in future-oriented what-if analysis. I only present a few excerpts from my study, because the focus of the article is methodological rather than empirical. Third, I embroider on the ethical reflection on the issue of authorship and representation as touched upon in this introduction. Finally, I conclude by outlining some applications of the developed methodology, and by

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[5] The terms *big stories* and *small stories* were coined by Alexandra Georgakopoulou and Michael Bamberg, who base this distinction on the multidimensional approach to narrative developed in the book *Living Narrative* (Ochs & Capps, 2001).

situating the proposed methodology in the wider context of qualitative and narrative research.

Subjunctivizing Transformations Analysis

In this section, the starting point is an interview excerpt which was particularly challenging in terms of seeing grains of healthy sand. It is representative of interview texts, notably those of the Moroccan elderly, which can be positioned on the low end of the scale of subjunctivity of a text. These stories did show multiplicity, but of a very specific kind: towards different *unhealthy* outcomes at the expense of possible healthy outcomes. To some extent, these stories were thus open to "variant readings" and "subject to the vagaries of intentional states" (Bruner, 1990, p. 54), but they also resisted interpretations towards healthy outcomes. To allow closer analysis of the degree of subjunctivity of the text, and how storytellers subjunctivize reality, I draw on Bruner's adoption of Todorov's literary transformations that "transform the action of the verb from being a fait accompli to being psychologically in process, and as such contingent or subjunctive in our sense" (Bruner, 1986, pp. 29-30). There are at least six ways of transforming a simple, expository, highly factual phrase like "I live a healthy life" into a more subjunctive one:

Mode: the use of *must*, *might*, *could*, *would* and so on subjectifies the action (X *should* live a healthy life);

Intention: the act is directly embedded in its intention (X *plans* or *hopes* to, or *intends* to live a healthy life);

Result: the effect is both to presuppose intent and to raise but leave open the question of how it all came about (X *succeeds* in living a healthy life);

Manner: subjectifies the act and creates an attitude that modifies the action's intention (X is *keen* to live a healthy life);

Aspect: refers to a form of time marking that is related not to an abstract time marker like tense but to the progress of the task in which the action is occurring (X *is beginning* to live a healthy life);

Status: a transformation that opens the possibility that there was a wish to, a set of circumstances, or an accusation *that could have led to* living a healthy life. According to Bruner, negation is a powerful trigger of presuppositions about the possible: “I do *not* live a healthy life” opens a world of alternative perspectives on what life the protagonist actually lives.

To explore how to see grains of healthy possibilities in a world of deficit, complaints, and lack, I take as an example the following excerpt from an interview between two Moroccan women: Karima (peer interviewer) and Aisja (peer interviewee). I analyse how literary transformations increase or decrease the subjunctivity of the text. To further evaluate the effects of these transformations on the construction of possible healthy selves and worlds, I supplement this literary analysis with an analysis of discursive strategies. While the subjunctivizing transformations analysis focuses on *how* the speaker conveys meaning, discursive analysis focuses on *why* the speaker speaks in this way. In this view of language, analysis moves from what the text is about (semantics) to what the speaker accomplishes (pragmatics) by talking in this way (syntax). Language is considered to be talk-in-interaction. From this point of view, talking is considered acting or doing, and these acts and doings have social effects (Edwards, 1997; Edwards & Potter, 1992; Potter & Wetherell, 1987).

Excerpt 1. Aisja Storying Unhealthy Life

1. KARIMA: What should you do then to live a healthy life?
2. AISJA: Look, I would love to, but health does not come back. I cannot buy.
3. That is not possible. One or the other. And I want everything, healthy food
4. and tasty food. Is not possible either (talks with ironic voice).
5. KARIMA: No (laughs)
6. AISJA: I have to follow a diet
7. KARIMA: Yes, unfortunately! (both laugh)
8. AISJA: I have to follow a diet, that is
9. KARIMA: a shame, yes
10. AISJA: that is a shame yes. I want health, to eat healthily, to eat tasty food,
11. to eat everything and so on. But (.) not allowed.
12. KARIMA: No
13. AISJA: Everything has to be careful
14. KARIMA: Yes
15. AISJA: that is not allowed. That is not eating healthily, is it?
16. KARIMA: No

17. AISJA: [...] You get sick whenever you eat. If you find something small
18. you would like to have, then you think I am going to try it.
19. But the next day you cannot get up anymore, sugar too high, ill for example
20. [...] Have to be careful. When you have a guest you make something separate
21. [...] you are always separate. That is not fun, not healthy, is it?

The interviewer's question about what *should* be done to live a healthy life is an example of the *modal* transformation. In response to this question, Aisja expresses *manner* (would love to) followed by a set of *negations* (cannot buy, is not possible). Because I only saw impossibility in the content of this excerpt, it is interesting to follow Bruner's counterintuitive suggestion that the use of negation opens a world of alternative possibilities. Aisja seems to be trying out different possibilities in the remainder of the excerpt. The subjunctivizing strategies she employs to accomplish this are expressing a wish (lines 3, 10), and plenty of negations that invite the reader to question what *is* healthy. In addition to these literary transformations, analysis of Aisja´s use of discursive strategies also makes visible how she invites multiplicity, openness, and critique. She constructs an "if...then" sentence (lines 17-18) to play out an undesired possibility. Questioning reality—"that is not fun, not healthy, is it?"—can be considered subjunctivizing, too, in the sense that it questions taken-for-granted reality and suggests that something else is fun and healthy. Also, she uses irony and laughter, which, according to Bakhtin, are features of the novelization (continuing renewal) of literary language. Novelization inserts "indeterminacy, a certain semantic open-endedness, a living contact with unfinished, still-evolving contemporary reality" (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 7).

To avoid a one-sided, overly optimistic picture of how Aisja conjures up possibilities, I also looked at how she closes down, and even undoes them. Aisja's use of amplifiers and extreme case formulations (Edwards, 2000)—e.g., always, all, or nothing—function to totalize her conclusion that healthy living is impossible, and to undo any subjunctivity. This way, the possibilities she brings to the fore are immediately devalued and rendered undesirable or unfeasible. The interviewer, Karima, fully follows and confirms Aisja's meaning making ("Yes"; "No"), even to the point of finishing a sentence started by Aisja (line 9), thereby co-constructing an all-or-nothing scenario that renders healthy living impossible. This all-or-nothing scenario is played out in the specific domain of eating healthy food. The desired storyline for Aisja, enjoying tasty food with others, causes physical illness due to her diabetes. In effect, the biomedical storyline of eating a healthy diet causes her to eat

separately from others, thereby diminishing her social well-being. In addition, Aisja evaluates this solution that involves being careful with everything she eats (lines 13, 20) as unhealthy. Her values of enjoying eating as a social event are not met in the biomedical storyline, and are resisted by her body. She does not see any possibilities of reconciling her own norms with her bodily needs and the biomedical norms. As a consequence, different scenarios all result in an unhealthy conclusion.

The effect of Aisja's use of subjunctivizing transformations and discursive strategies is that although she cooperates with the interviewer, at the same time she ridicules the research question. Aisja's ironic sense-making could be interpreted as a counterstory that ridicules the dominant health promotion narrative aimed at reducing health risks among a group known for high diabetes prevalence. Aisja's ironic attempts to try the dominant health promotion narrative on "for psychological size" (Bruner, 1990, p. 54) do not seem to be very fruitful, because her own values and preferences are not addressed. In her narrative performance, her own storyline and the health promotion storyline are positioned diametrically, seemingly without room for negotiation of alternatives.

Based on this first exploration of subjunctivizing transformations and discursive strategies, I can only draw some tentative conclusions about this type of excerpt, which serves as an example of cases that at first seem of little or no value for researching possibilities. Surprisingly, I do see more possibilities than I did before a close inspection of the relative degree of subjunctivity. The analysis shows how Aisja narratively tries out different possibilities, only to reject all of them. Her ironic performance seems to function as a health-promotion critique. Although it brings to the fore Aisja's agency towards dominant healthy living storying, it defies the construction of a viable health promotion alternative. Health promotion was the goal of the larger research project in which I participated, in which data collection preceded data analysis in accordance with traditional research criteria. In this established context, I as a researcher, faced with the task of identifying possible healthy selves and worlds in relatively determined storylines, was left empty-handed. How to proceed from here?

What-If Listening and the Role of Promising Detail

In the case of an interview text such as the one described above, how can a narrative analyst responsibly imagine future possibilities while taking the limitations of the text seriously? The second analytical strategy

I developed in my study was to place centre stage narrative inquiry's interest in exceptions, breaches, and particularities (i.e, *details)*. In the following paragraph I continue to theorize the route I took, i.e., *to look for threads of text*[6] *that seem promising in terms of the development of possible selves and worlds, and that emerge from, yet transcend, current (experienced as unhealthy) patterns of meaning and action.* My preliminary definition of details relevant for what-if analysis is thus *promising threads of text*, which implies a selection criterion for which small items are relevant to pursue, in a way similar to Boje's (2001) antenarrative that "gives attention to the speculative, the ambiguity and guessing as to what is happening in the flow of experience" (p. 3). In the following, I unravel the elements assembled in the route described to explore criteria for deciding what counts as (relevant) detail and to reflect on how to follow up these details.

To theorize *which* details could be used for enrichment in future-oriented what-if analysis, I consider four takes on detail (level, scale, place, and story characteristics) to go beyond the obvious focus on parts (of wholes) characteristic for narrative inquiry in general. I derive the idea of *detail as level* from Bakhtin's description of different levels of utterances. He defines utterances as "links in the chain of speech communication, which give rise to unmediated responsive reactions and dialogic reverberations" (Bakhtin, 1986, p. 94). These links could be words connecting other words, but they could also be phrases, paragraphs, lectures, films, books, and so on. An utterance is a speech unit, of which the boundaries are based on its *use* of inviting responses, not on grammatical structure. Along similar lines, details relevant to future-oriented what-if analysis are thus those speech units that invite (emerging) new possibilities. In a qualitative study, it could be parts that differ from the overall pattern in the interview or those exceptional interviews differing from the overall pattern in the dataset as a whole. They might still be part of a larger whole, but now the focus is on a new, emerging whole of which only the seeds are immanent in the text.

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[6] The notion "threads of text" is derived from Roland Barthes (1989, p. 169), who traces the etymological origin of *texture* to the Latin word *textus*. Textus means *thing woven,* and offers a metaphor for how plurality is accomplished in text: not by layers upon layers but by threads which are interwoven.

The recently developed small story approach in narrative research offers three additional definitions of what counts as detail: small stories as *text sort* (literally, a short story), a *place* to look for stories, and an *analytical tool* for identifying non-canonical stories (Georgakopoulou, 2006b). First, an eye for relatively short stories could assist the search for new possibilities that—precisely because of their embryonic status and infrequency—might not be told as long, complete, fully-fledged stories. Second, a small story approach directs attention to "hidden, small, unofficial, fragmented practices either on the fringes of official *sites* or on unofficial *sites* away from carefully chosen cultural niches" (Georgakopoulou, 2007 p. 60; emphasis added). In future-oriented what-if analysis, these niches would be those with promise for the development of possible selves and worlds which transcend current or past patterns of action and meaning. Third, small stories as an analytical tool could be extremely valuable for future-oriented what-if analysis because they enable analysis of open-ended, possibly incoherent stories of ongoing, hypothetical, and future events instead of demanding completed, coherent accounts of past events (Georgakopoulou, 2006b, 2007). A small story approach thus creates space for "trafficking in possibilities rather than in settled certainties" (Bruner, 1986, p.26).

What would a detail thus theorized be in the interview between Karima and Aisja? Listening to the audio tape again, I now paid attention to *threads of text that seem promising in terms of the development of possible healthy selves and worlds, and that emerge from, yet transcend, current patterns of action and meaning*. I searched for the unexpected, the deviant, in terms of promising detail to follow up for health promotion purposes, in an interview that could largely be characterized as illness narrative rather than health narrative. A conversation between the two women that took place *after* the formal interview (with the tape recorder still on) seemed the most promising. In this "afterword," the two women talk as equals, and negotiate proper (healthy and morally acceptable) everyday behaviour for Moroccan women in Dutch society.

Excerpt 2. Afterword

KARIMA: But look I, I for example I. I have a daughter. She goes out with her friends, for example, uh just to, for example have a drink an ice-cream or uh or uh or uh
AISJA: Yes
KARIMA: She can buy and eat a piece of chocolate
AISJA: Does not matter yeah

KARIMA: But I cannot do that. Then I say no! My daughter is not with me (.) Then I do no li; ke that coffee, then I do not [li;ke the ice-cream, then I want to enjoy with he;r
AISJA: No, no], no I do not
KARIMA: No? (high pitched voice)
AISJA: No. When I walk outside I feel like a coffee. I uh want a coffee. When I feel like a coffee I go sit somewhere else to drink coffee. Lo;vely just enjoying by myself
KARIMA: lovely
AISJA: And then I come back
KARIMA: Because that is good too
AISJA: Why not if she is not with me (with voice raised from here on), but only if she goes out to have fun with her own husband, me stay behind waiting? No. That's not how I do that
KARIMA: Is good
AISJA: When I am alo;ne I go and sit outside a bar or somewhere else or when I am tired or something. I think, yes, I go sit somewhere else. Just to have coffee or any kind of drink, mineral water for instance. I go and have a ni;ce drink, enjo;ying, ni;ce and quiet. Then am I from myself, I come back from the land of the living (.)

In this excerpt, I see an emerging storyline of possible health that was not visible during the rest of the interview. Previously, I analysed this storyline as negotiation of a viable alternative vis-à-vis both the dominant health promotion narrative and the dominant cultural narrative on proper moral behaviour (Sools, 2010). To summarize this negotiation process: enjoying yourself alone, out of the house, in a public space is made acceptable in dialogue with traditional cultural norms that Moroccan women should stay at home and only enter a public space under the guidance of a (preferably male) family companion. The seemingly small, mundane reference to just a coffee or mineral water, could be considered both a culturally acceptable drink (non-alcoholic, and in a decent place, i.e., not in a bar but in a coffee shop), and a healthy drink (again non-alcoholic, but also, at least in the case of the mineral water, low in sugar).

It would take more elaborate argumentation to adequately theorize how this alternative came about, but tentatively I would suggest that the changing roles between Aisja and Karima are key to this transformation. Karima becomes the storyteller, whose own perspective further confirms the totalized unhealthy storying of Aisja. Aisja responds by adopting a more active stance in relation to Karima, and becomes something like a role model for her by performing independence and difference ("Me stay behind waiting? No. That's not how I do that".) It might be exactly by playing out difference that a meeting with another or otherness can take place, which according to John Shotter (2000), is necessary for a new

whole to emerge from within a previous whole. The relative social proximity between peer interviewer and peer interviewee might have facilitated this process (see also Sools, 2008), as might the confrontation with an opposing view. A confrontational or antagonistic interview style was not intended in the study, but interestingly, this less common interview style is considered especially effective when trying to gain access to taken-for-granted knowledge (Kvale, 2007; Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009; Smaling, 1996).[7]

In their view on research interviews, Holstein and Gubrium (1995) proposed confrontational interviewing as active sites of knowledge production rather than passive, neutral sites for gathering information. This view is in line with the stance that interviews should be considered co-constructions (Mishler, 1986), performances with an audience in mind (Langellier & Peterson, 2004; Riessman, 2008), narratives-in-interaction (Georgakopoulou, 2006b), and a thoroughly dialogical activity (Sools, 2010). When the interview is not regarded as a mirror of reality but as a setting in which interviewer and interviewee co-construct meaning, then asking interviewees to talk about good health sets a process in motion of co-constructing the meaning of good health rather than extracting ready-made stories from the mind of interviewees. Dialogical narrative analyses accordingly focus on how the interviewer takes part in the co-constructed narrative.

However, dialogical narrative analysis of how interviewer and interviewee *actually* co-construct healthy selves and worlds might be insufficient for the purpose of future-oriented what-if analysis. A risk could be the reproduction of illness-generating stories at the expense of the more critical research aim of producing a story about healthy possibilities. Future-oriented what-if analysis becomes critical in the

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[7] According to Kvale (2007), "the utilization of confrontational interviews depends on the subjects interviewed" (p. 76).While they consider "confident respondents, such as elite interviewees" best suited to be interviewed with a confrontational interview style, in our study we found that interviewees with a low socio-economic background sometimes were better able to articulate their opinions in response to a clear positioning by the interviewer than to a non-intrusive interview style. The latter could make them feel, in fact, more uncomfortable and uncertain. Interestingly, a recent empirical study comparing answers to three different interview styles showed there were no differences in content and quality of interview answers (Moerman, 2010). This finding suggests that interviewees' answers are quite robust independent of interview style, although it should be noticed that an empathic, non-judgemental attitude was the basis of all these styles. Confrontation does not entail disrespect.

sense that it not so much seeks underlying psychological patterns contributing to unhealthy lives (as in psychoanalytically informed narrative analysis), or underlying structural inequalities (as in feminist or Foucauldian narrative analysis), but emerging patterns of possible healthy lives. One could add that a critical what-if analysis, by considering how storytellers "*might* have proceeded" (Bruner, 2004, p. 709) adds to a better understanding of current sense making, because "any story one may tell about anything is better understood by considering other possible ways in which it can be told" (p. 709). Therefore, what-if listening is both an analytical tool for enriching emerging plots as well as a tool to understand the present better.

My proposal to move narrative analysis from construction of what happened to consideration of what *might* happen requires active engagement with anticipatory talk, concerning anticipations "as to what-next might happen to us," and "as to what-next we might do" (Shotter & Katz, 2004).[8] In anticipatory talk, a notion derived from a Bakhtinian dialogical perspective on language, words are always responsive to other words, i.e., they always anticipate other words. The analytical lens then shifts from identifying *what-is* to *what-if*. Central to Shotter and Katz's dialogical concept of responsive listening is attentiveness to emerging new wholes from within these patterns. It does not entail that the listener imposes his/her own theories about what might happen or criticises interviewees' stories. The question of how details should be pursued in what-if analysis can now be articulated as following the threads towards promising possibilities by sensitizing oneself to anticipations of what-next-might happen implicit in current patterns of meaning and action.

By following promising details, what-if listening offers a new perspective for analysing the afterword presented above. The changing roles of Karima as active interviewer and Aisja as role model is one example of what the proposed change might entail. The narrative performance of difference afforded by their role reversal can now be thought of as a performance of what-next-might happen. This narrative performance allows both performer (Aisja) and audience (Karima) to try on "for psychological size" (Bruner, 1990, p. 54) a possible self and

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[8] Alternatively, when what-if methodology is directed at exploring possibilities in the past rather than the future, relevant what-if questions in narrative interviewing are: "What-next might have happened?" and "What-next might we have done?"

world, and perhaps even encourages them to live out the imagined scenario in their daily lives.

Ethical Reflection

Readers might feel uncomfortable about engaging in future-oriented what-if analysis because of ethical concerns. Or to put it more strongly, one might view looking for multiple possibilities and health against the dominant meaning making (illness narratives) as an act of violence. I do believe, however, that the opposite could be argued as well. Are we not engaging in violence when we fail to recognize potential in the other but sooner reinforce appropriated forms of oppression? This view—in which ethics not only includes the negative aspect of not causing harm, but also the positive aspect of striving for beneficial effects —can be situated within the larger discussion in narrative inquiry on representation. What does adequate representation mean in future-oriented what-if analysis? And who has authority over the text?

Different positions vis-à-vis the issues of representation and authorship originate in different hermeneutical positions within narrative inquiry, aimed to give voice to participants (*representation* of participant views), and aimed to construct stories as a form of cultural critique (*presenting* alternative stories). While the first position adheres to a hermeneutics of restoration, the second operates within a hermeneutics of demystification (Josselson, 2004). Profound differences between these two hermeneutic positions come to the fore in terminology used to designate interviewees as participants or subjects, and in methodological choices such as how much the researcher writes herself into the research text.

The distinction between representing participant views versus presenting alternative (critical) views in the two hermeneutical traditions is blurred in future-oriented what-if analysis. The voice of expertise and the voice of experience (Josselson, 2011) are joined in dialogue to create a new story of emerging possibilities. My proposal does not entail reading something that is not there at all, which would invoke the criticism of "ascriptivism, " i.e., imposing theoretical frameworks not relevant to participants (Josselson, 2004). Rather, like Murdoch, I would add that this type of research calls especially upon the imagination of listeners that "builds detail, adds colour, conjures up possibilities" (Murdoch, 1997, p. 198) immanent in the text. I take this to mean that it requires considerable work, skill, attention, and willingness of listeners (in this case narrative analysts) to see a world of possibilities through grains of healthy sand.

Dialogical interchange in my study was largely restricted to a dialogue with the text, not with the person. However, it is conceivable that in other studies using what-if listening, alternative readings are not the end point but rather function as a point of departure for further dialogue with participants or other audiences. This procedure allows for *in vivo* dialogical interchange between the two voices. An example can be found in a recent book project (Wertz et al., 2011) in which the two hermeneutics are brought together by inviting an interviewee (Emily) to write a response to five different qualitative analyses of her story (referred to as "Theresa's story"). In her keynote speech at the Narrative Matters conference in 2010, Josselson (2011) reflects on this project. The distinction she makes between the actual, living person Emily and the constructed text of her (Theresa) allows her to theorize the value of both the voice of authority and the voice of expertise. In doing so, Josselson (2011) pushes the issue of the authority of the text beyond an either (participant-driven) authority of experience or (researcher-driven) authority of expertise position.

Josselson (2011) chooses to give the final word to Emily, who reflects on the constructed text of Theresa. "I see now that so much can be ascertained from one experience that several different readings of a story, with an aim to understand what has been lived in it, can often bring about crucial insights about the human condition" (p. 49). Here, Emily not only shows that she is capable of facing different readings of her story, but also that she is capable of responding to and of learning from them. My suggestion would be to encourage readers, whether participants, researchers, or others who, like Emily, are willing to do so, to try on "for psychological size" (Bruner, 1990, p. 54) the constructed narrative what-if scenarios to develop their own scenarios. This proposal brings relationality and imagination into the heart of narrative inquiry. While what-if analysis *starts* from an attempt at understanding a particular story, it eventually transcends the particular to become an *invitation* to perceive narratives as "a treasury … into which we can enter" (Bruner, 1990, p. 54). Giving back future-oriented what-if constructed stories to participants, when done in an ethically responsible way, could contribute to the experience that researchers are standing beside them as they look for health. Standing beside one another could even become a reciprocal activity if researchers allow themselves, in reverse, to be affected by the stories participants tell, like Aisja (the interviewee) who became the one who stood beside Karima (the interviewer).

Conclusions and Discussion

In this article I explored narrative building blocks for future-oriented what-if analysis. The first building block, subjunctivizing transformations analysis, brings literary theory explicitly into narrative methods in the social sciences, and thereby follows Bruner's (1986, 1990) initiative. A close reading of subjunctivizing transformations resulted in seeing more possibilities which at first remain unnoticed. In addition, attention to the relative degree of subjunctivity supports seeing pluriformity and dynamics in storytelling, and thus assists going beyond the identification of interviews as either illness or health stories, pluriform or singular, open or closed. More generally, attention to subjunctive transformations places the proposed methodology firmly in line with the recent shift in narrative inquiry from narrative (as product) to narration (as process).

Importing subjunctivizing transformations analysis into narrative inquiry allows for a more systematic analysis of subjunctivity in interviews and potentially in other media relevant to social scientific research as well. A possible application of this methodology is to develop automatic search tools to map the relative subjunctivity of interview texts. This way patterns of more or less subjunctive, future-oriented talk could be identified in, for instance, therapeutic, counselling, or health promotion practices. Study of these patterns provides insight into transformations to more-or-less subjunctive stories and the role of counsellors in developing these transformations. The transformation from telling a less to a more subjunctive story is one of the supposed working principles of narrative therapy, aimed at transforming so-called thin stories with one determined storyline to open, multiple storylines (White & Epston, 1990).

The second building block, listening for promising detail (e.g., particularities, irregularities, and exceptions) is a recognition of one of the principles in qualitative research that attending to the few has no more or less value than attending to the many (Maso, 1987). It is also a more radical pursuit of narrative inquiry's eye for the particular in the sense that the parts are not evaluated only as parts of an existing whole but also as signals of an emerging whole. Underlying what-if listening to detail—by focusing not only on what is said (current whole) but on what the words said *respond* to (emerging whole)—is a thoroughly dialogical approach in narrative inquiry. This procedure is also dialogical in the

sense that it requires imaginative researcher involvement when listening for what-if narration, and thus recognition of the co-construction between researcher and participant.

I reflected on some ethical implications of narrative analysis defined as (co-)construction of alternative future possibilities. If the argument were to be transposed to the interview context as well, especially if the taken-for-granted experience of health requires more active interview strategies, additional ethical considerations come into play. These ethical considerations should, from a strength-based perspective, not only include warrants and risks but also possible benefits. Although research interviews are generally not intended for therapeutic purposes, life story interviewing can have both personal and social benefits to participants who tell and share stories, such as bringing greater meaning to one's life, gaining self-esteem, sharing experiences, joy, satisfaction, inner peace etc. (Atkinson, 2007). If, for whom, and under which conditions future-oriented what-if research has the same or other benefits as life story research would be an interesting question to explore in future research.

I presented future-oriented what-if listening in this article as an analytical tool for enriching emerging plots as well as a tool with which to understand the present better. Participating in future-oriented what-if interviewing could consequently be a prospective, reflective tool. Imagining who we might become informs us who we are now and how we want to proceed from here. Formulated this way, future and present time are considered mutually informing. As much as looking back on how we became who we are can aid reflection on the present, looking forward can aid reflection by making us aware of what we hold dear, and where we want our lives to go (Mooren, 2011). By narratively imagining the future—whether coming to us as a gift (see Squire, 2012) in the course of storytelling, or as part of a process of conscious goal-setting—storytellers make present (see Schiff, 2012) the future, which thus acquires meaning more fully.

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