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# Peer Work: Supporting and Facilitating the Empowerment of Sex Workers

How the peer work activities at Pro-tukipiste support and empower sex workers

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Helsinki Metropolia University of Applied Sciences

Bachelors of Social Services

Degree Program of Social Services

Thesis

March 2017

Author Title	Tanja Fairfax Peer Work: Supporting and Facilitating the Empowerment of Sex Workers
Number of Pages Date	39 pages + 3 appendices March 2017
Degree	Social Services
Degree Program	Social Services
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<p>Pro-tukipiste is an organization that supports sex workers in Finland. Established in 1990 and funded by the Finnish Slot Machine Association, RAY, Pro-tukipiste has been working with and supporting sex workers for over 20 years. They began offering peer work activities in 2012.</p> <p>Pro-tukipiste has a variety of communal activities, and once a week, offer a peer group. Using participant observation, an ethnographic study was conducted to comprehend how the peer work activities offered by Pro-tukipiste support and facilitate the empowerment and participation of sex workers in Helsinki. A total of five observations were conducted over the course of two months, in which feedback was collected from a multitude of clients representing different nationalities and ethnicities. During the peer groups, clients participated in the various activities, whilst the author observed and transcribed the activities. After, feedback was collected from the clients on the activity and their thoughts to either change or improve the activity.</p> <p>Participation was measured by observing which clients participate and engage in the activities actively. Empowerment was measured by analyzing the feedback collected after the peer group. The result of the study has proven that the clients of Pro-tukipiste find the peer group activities invaluable for education and communication. The main concern facing the peer activities is time management due to the fact that there was limited time for open discussion and questions. There also remains the concern of integration during the peer group activities, as many clients isolate themselves by ethnic groups.</p>	
Keywords	peer work, sex work, empowerment, participation, ethnography, participant observation

<p>Tekijä Otsikko</p> <p>Sivumäärä Aika</p>	<p>Tanja Fairfax Peer Work: Supporting and Facilitating the Empowerment of Sex Workers</p> <p>39 sivua + 3 liitettä Maaliskuu 2017</p>
<p>Koulutusohjelma</p>	<p>Social Services</p>
<p>Suuntautumisvaihtoehto</p>	<p>Social Services</p>
<p>Ohjaajat</p>	<p>Katja Ihamäki, ensisijainen ohjaaja Mai Salmenkangas, toissijainen ohjaaja</p>
<p>Pro-tukipiste on järjestö, joka on tukenut seksityöntekijöitä Suomessa jo 20 vuotta. Järjestö perustettiin 1990 ja saa rahoituksensa raha-automaattiyhdistys RAY:ltä. Vertaistukityö aloitettiin vuonna 2012.</p> <p>Pro-tukipiste järjestää yhteisöllisiä aktiviteetteja ja tarjoaa vertaistukiryhmiä kerran viikossa. Tämän etnografisen opinnäytetyön tavoitteena on selvittää, kuinka Pro-tukipisteen tarjoamat vertaistyyö tapahtumat voisivat tukea ja edesauttaa seksityöntekijöiden osallisuutta ja voimaantuuttamista Helsingissä. Aineisto kerättiin osallistuvaa havainnointia käyttäen. Kahden kuukauden aikana yhteensä viisi vertaistukiryhmän tapaamista havainnointiin. Lisäksi osallistujilta kerättiin palautetta. Osallistuvat asiakkaat edustivat eri kansallisuuksia ja etnisyyttä. Vertaistukiryhmien tapaamisilla asiakkaat osallistuivat erilaisiin aktiviteetteihin joita havainnointiin. Asiakkailta kerätty palaute liittyi heidän näkemyksiinsä suoritetusta aktiviteetista. Osallisuutta arvioitiin asiakkaiden osallistumisen ja aktiviteetteihin sitoutumisen kautta kun taas voimaantumista arvioitiin kerätystä palautteesta.</p> <p>Kerätyn aineiston perusteella voidaan päätellä, että Pro-tukipisteen asiakkaat hyötyvät vertaistukiryhmistä, koulutuksesta ja ryhmissä tapahtuvasta vuorovaikutuksesta. Haaste vertaistukiryhmissä oli ajanhallinta, koska monesti aika loppui kesken avoimen keskustelun ja kysymysten aikana. Tämän lisäksi myös vertaistukiryhmään sopeutuminen nähtiin huolenaiheena, sillä monet asiakkaat jakautuivat entisiin pienryhmiin. Pro-tukipisten vertaistuki on tarpeellista ja hyödyllistä seksityöntekijöille Helsingin alueella, vaikka ajanhallintaan ja integraatioimenpiteisiin tulisi kiinnittää enemmän huomiota.</p>	
<p>Aivan-sanat</p>	<p>vertaistyyö, seksityö, vahvistuminen, osallisuus, etnografia, osallistuva havainnointi</p>

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## 1 Introduction

Peer work has been utilized as a form of education, empowerment and support over the past several years, in various fields of work. Globally, peer work has been used in schools, hospitals, rehabilitation clinics, youth centers, and homes for the elderly, and many other areas where social interaction and development is a key focus point. (Cartwright, 2007). This thesis will strive to comprehend how peer work is used to support and empower those within a certain marginalized group in Helsinki, Finland. The target group will be sex workers in Helsinki. The aim of this thesis is to see how peer work supports and facilitates the empowerment of the clients of Pro-tukipiste ry, based in Helsinki, sex workers, by conducting an ethnographic study.

According to Finnish law, prostitution is seen as “engaging in sexual intercourse or associated acts sexual acts in exchange for reward” (Pro-tukipiste ry, 2016). Sex workers are a marginalized group existing in Finnish society, and therefore are considered vulnerable and in need of support. In 2014 alone, Pro-tukipiste had over 9000 client contacts (Pro-tukipiste ry, 2014, p. 7).

The initial plan, which was opened for further development with the assistance of Erja Aalto, the main coordinator of the peer work programs, was to observe the peer groups in action, while gathering feedback from the clients, which will be the main focus of the data. Using participant observation, feedback was collected from the clients after each peer group session that was observed. The questions asked, which facilitated further discussion, will be included in Appendix 1.

The observations that were conducted were done over a period of two months, from October 2016 to November 2016. There were five observations, along with questions afterward to gather feedback. Each peer group session that was observed took place in the lobby at Pro-tukipiste. It was decided, with the assis-

tance of employees at Pro-tukipiste that, observing and participating were considered the best methods for data collection, and that the feedback would be thematically analyzed in the thesis for Pro-tukipiste to utilize in order to develop their peer support program further.

The main interest in this is to gather opinions from the clientele on how peer group activities offered at Pro-tukipiste can be improved and/or developed to include a wider array of interests and activities.

Another important aspect of feedback would be to inquire into those who do not participate in the peer groups and ask why they do not. For example, do they not participate because of disinterest in the activities, potential fears of being around other sex workers, discrimination, or language barriers? In order for the peer group to become more inclusive, it would be pragmatic to inquire as to what sorts of activities the clients would be interested in.

There were also inquiries into why clients are involved in the Tuesday peer group, as opposed to the other communal activities Pro-tukipiste offers. For example, why are certain clients interested in the treenirhymä but others are not? What are the specifics of each communal based activity offered at Pro-tukipiste that clients like and/or dislike? What support are they getting and/or not getting from their peers. These questions were discussed in the final observation, conducted in March 2017.

As such, when discussing theory, the main theoretical points to include will involve peer work support, empowerment, and participation.

This thesis is meant to provide a more definitive look at how the peer group-based activities conducted at Pro-tukipiste support and empower their clientele, and to have this thesis be used as an instrumental product for further development when it involves peer work.

## 2 Pro-tukipiste ry

This thesis was done jointly, occurring at the same time as the author's third work placement; this gave the opportunity to observe a real working life environment, and what would be most applicable to Pro-tukipiste, as well as what would be considered most useful as a product concerning the end result of the thesis.

The working life partner that was chosen in conjunction with this thesis was Pro-tukipiste ry. Pro-tukipiste is an organization that currently has a monopoly on the service it provides in Finland, which is supporting and assisting sex workers across Finland either in their working life or everyday life. The Helsinki office has been in operation since 1991. The office in Tampere has been in operation since 2006, and their newly opened office in Turku was established in 2016. (Pro-tukipiste, n.d.).

Pro-tukipiste is an independent, non-profit organization, concerned primarily with the human rights and advocacy of sex workers, either currently working or who have worked in the sex industry in the past (Pro-tukipiste ry, 2016). Their funding is collected from Finnish Slot Machine Association (RAY), the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health, Helsinki City Social Services, and the European Commission's Daphne III program (Pro-tukipiste ry, 2016). Pro-tukipiste's ideology is that everyone has the right to equal and dignified treatment, that the rights of people living in vulnerable circumstances should be protected, and that services offered should be appropriate for everyone's needs (Pro-tukipiste, n.d.). As such, these same principles will be applied in the thesis.

Pro-tukipiste offers a number of services, however, the main service is the drop-in, which occurs every Monday and Thursday from 12-16, in which clients are able to retrieve condoms, as well as see a nurse or social worker and to interact with peers. Peer group activities vary widely, in that they can be educational or

informative of legal and social circumstances in Finland, or they can be trips, such as nature forages or museum outings. (Pro-tukipiste, n.d.).

### **3 Peer Work and Classification of Roles**

To begin, the first task is to look at the concept of peer work as a whole and how it has developed as a definition by looking at its background and history. Peer support includes individuals who have the same level of, or similar experiences in order to support others (Cartwright, 2007, p. 8). Peer support has been utilized in many areas, and while the context is not relevant to this thesis, the definition of peer support within an educational environment is: “using the knowledge, skills, and experience of children and young people in a planned and structured way to understand support, inform, and help develop the skills, understanding, confidence, and self-awareness of other children and young people with whom they have something in common” (Cartwright, 2007, p. 8). This definition was chosen, as opposed to definition of peer work stemming from mental health issues such as Gallagher and Halpin (2014) have defined peer work, is because Cartwright’s (2007) definition has a broader understanding to peer work. Gallagher and Halpin (2014) define peer work as people within these certain mental health roles to “use their common experience to support and inspire hope and recovery in others” (p. 6). This definition is targeted more towards the theory of harm reduction, which will be discussed later, and is not relevant for how peer work operates at Pro-tukipiste.

#### **3.1 Definition and Roles**

A peer is defined as “an equal in ability, standing, age, etc.” (Cartwright, 2007, p. 9). However, it is important to note that within peer work, there are various classifications to defining the peer’s role. Looking at the different roles in how peer work and peer support operates, gives clarification to each individual within that setting. For example, a *‘peer educator’* is a “person who belongs to a target

population and who, with respect to sex-related interventions, actually works as a sex worker or worked as a sex worker in the past” (INDOORS Project, 2014, p. 9). This term is used to “define sex workers who participate in specific trainings that provide them with the necessary skills to carry out educational actions with a group of peers” (INDOORS Project, 2014, p. 10). A *‘peer supporter’* is “a sex worker who offers support to their peers” (INDOORS Project, 2014, p. 10). While similar in definition to that of a peer educator, this role is meant to go beyond the confines of that title, with their main characteristic being in the “promotion of mutual support among sex workers in for the adoption of safer sex techniques, the defense of their rights, and improvement of working conditions... helps voice requests and enables the dissemination of information” (INDOORS Project, 2014, p. 10). Together, peer supporters and peer educators can “foster self-organization within sex worker communities, organize and lead actions or protests to claim the rights of sex workers and promote advocacy campaigns when possible” (INDOORS Project, 2014, p. 10).

### 3.2 Background and History on Peer Support

Given the historical context behind peer work, it is important to note the many influences previous peer work has had on today’s conceptualization of it as a whole. Peer support, as it is currently, spread rampantly across the world, beginning with North America in the 1960s (Cartwright, 2007, p. 11). It was meant to represent a “third force”, originating in humanistic psychology, to counter the then-present dominant areas of psychoanalysis and behaviorism, while also having evolved from group dynamics, existentialism, and secular humanism (Cartwright, 2007, p. 11).

Peer mentoring grew as a concept in the 1970s in the US and Canada, while Europe had peer counseling and mediation introduced well into the 1980s. These similar practices evolved and spread across the world and have been implemented primarily in schools, hospitals, community/recreation centers, unions, businesses, and corporations. With the adaption of these various peer-centered programs, many more programs were developed to cater to specific outlier or

target groups, including various ethnic and cultural groups, physical and mental health promotion, and other marginalized groups. (Cartwright, 2007, p. 12).

### 3.3 The Peer's Role and Training

While the basic understanding of a peer within peer support settings is focused on mutual support and understanding, it is necessary to disseminate exactly what peers should be involved in, as well as the significance of the role they are included in. To better comprehend exactly what that entails, we can look to the INDOORS Project (2014) guidelines for what a peer's role is:

1. Fulfilling their duties by understanding a wide spectrum of information related to health, social context, legal systems, intercultural elements and relational situations.
2. Intervention in various methodological contexts, such as health promotion, harm reduction, improvement of empowerment actions, et cetera.
3. Activities involving a network of different services, such as face-to-face intervention between service providers and users.
4. Involvement in planning, developing, analyzing, and evaluating projects they work in (experience and participation are beneficial).
5. Recognition as a team member, professional figure. They are well aware of the needs and hardships of the target group while having an understanding of the organization's structure, as well as the deep knowledge of reality through one's own experience. They should have the expertise to tackle complex and varied situations.
6. They should also actively be involved in defending the rights of sex workers by supporting and promoting advocacy campaigns. There is also the opportunity to act as a spokesperson, representatives in the media and public institutions, while promoting self-organization among peers.

*INDOORS Project, 2014, pp. 10-11.*

The training involved in educating peers to put these guidelines into practice is focused on three fundamental aspects, which include the re-evaluation of their experience as sex workers, which can be used as a strategic and valuable resource, the acquisition of knowledge that will be useful in the working context, including how to conduct interviews and group work, as well as the proper approach when working with people in the sex industry on issues such as health, legal, and social matters, and finally, the acquisition of expertise and know-how on building up their ability to self-organize, promote advocacy, defend their rights, and demand better working conditions (INDOORS Project, 2014, p. 11).

By implementing this training with sex workers in peer group settings, the organization (service provider) is able to cohesively determine the needs and wants of their target group, in this case, what sex workers are looking for in a peer support environment at Pro-tukipiste. To further this knowledge, the INDOORS Project has also outlined an effective means of peer education, basically stating that those who can successfully meet the following criteria, will be more effective as peer educators and peer supporters, which includes, belonging to the same community, being fully accepted as a peer by the target group, being highly motivated to maintain the role of a peer, be self-confident, have good communication skills (language proficiency), being able to accept different opinions, having a basic knowledge of specific matters (health, legal, and social), being able to organize activities, being able to work in a group, and being able to represent their peers (INDOORS Project, 2014, pp. 12-13).

### 3.4 Problems Associated with Peer Support

Due to the diverse nature of the clientele, it is nearly impossible to pinpoint exact numbers regarding nationality and ethnicity, because the clientele is forever changing (Pro-tukipiste, n.d.). Many clients remain constant, however, sex

workers in general tend to be a mobile population, meaning frequent changes of residence across borders within five years (European Commission, 2008. p. 1). Finland is one of the high mobility countries within Europe (European Commission, 2008, p. 5). Keeping this mobile population in mind, according to employees at Pro-tukipiste, there is rarely any time to establish any form of structured peer training. This is also in conjunction with little to no resources available for more extensive peer work and support. Knowing this, peer training in general at Pro-tukipiste requires more fine-tuning in order to be more useful for its clients. Pro-tukipiste has already begun this process by implementing its lobby worker position, which is only available for peers. The purpose of this position is to establish commonality between the workers and clients at Pro-tukipiste and to have past and incoming clients become more comfortable in the service environment of Pro-tukipiste. There is also the issue of peer work challenging the traditional roles of worker/client relationships, a role that many clients often find themselves unsure of in Pro-tukipiste peer work context. This has more to do with issues of power, according to employees. (Pro-tukipiste, n.d.).

According to employees at Pro-tukipiste, peer training and education is an extensive, often arduous process that can have little to no payout when considering the mobile population.

In this context, the INDOORS Project guidelines illustrate that most problems that arise in peer education can be contributed to the nature of the target group.

- ❖ Issues can arise if there is not a common understanding of peer education, which means it is necessary to keep dialogue open and continue education.
- ❖ Too much pressure and placing excessive expectations on a peer educator.
- ❖ Frustrating working conditions such as migration laws, penal code against sex work, et cetera can influence the effectiveness of a peer educator, so it is important for peers to mobilize and support their fellow sex workers.

- ❖ Difficult interaction between peers, particularly competition amongst sex workers.
- ❖ A multi-ethnic group, while beneficial for integration and multicultural competence, can create issues; especially since sex workers tend to congregate in separate ethnic groups in peer work settings (however, this can also be attributed to language proficiency and a need for translating).
- ❖ Mobility in the context of migration issues.
- ❖ Stigmatization. The stigma attached to sex work and sex workers is inordinately high.
- ❖ Financial compensation for peers is necessary, however many organizations lack the resources to compensate their peer educators.

*INDOORS Project, 2014, pp. 13-15.*

#### **4 Legality**

Given the fact that this thesis and this organization are all within the confines of Finland, it is necessary to provide the legal considerations involved with this client group, as well as how it affects various aspects of their person, for example, rigid migration policies or according to employees of Pro-tukipiste, the vague comprehension of the prostitution law in Finland.

Finland, although this was considered after much debate in Parliament, does not follow the Swedish model concerning the prostitution law. The Swedish model was implemented in January of 1999 and “prohibits the purchase of sexual services” and “is officially acknowledged as a form of male sexual violence against women and children” (Ekberg, pp. 1-2). Not only is this definition of the Swedish law sexist and discriminatory, it severely limits the capacity of sex workers in Sweden, and other countries that follow the Swedish model, to move

freely and safely without the fear of persecution, and further drives them underground and into more unsafe working environments. (Pro-tukipiste, n.d.).

Finland's penal code regarding prostitution is purposefully vague according to employees at Pro-tukipiste, leaving much of it up to the interpretation of sex workers, those that provide services to sex workers, and the police.

For example, chapter 2, section 7 of the Public Order Act, which prohibits the "purchase of sexual services or the offer of sexual services against payment in a public place". Sexual services is defined as follows:

*"Sexual intercourse* refers to the sexual penetration of the body to another, by a sex organ or directed at a sex organ or anal passage, or to the insertion of the sex organ of another into the body of the offender. A *sexual act* refers to an act which, with consideration to the offender, the person at whom the act was directed and the circumstances of commission, is sexually significant."

*Public Order Act, Section 10:  
Definitions*

Another significant aspect of the Finnish penal code refers to the act of pandering, or pimping in the common vernacular. Based on chapter 20, section 9 of the penal code, pandering is defined as "a person who, in order to seek financial benefit for themselves or another person provides a room or facilities where sexual intercourse or comparable sex act or a manifestly sexual offensive act performed by a child below the age of 18 are offered for remuneration; as an established part of their business provides accommodation for a person engaging in such an act and thereby substantially promotes such an act; provides contact information of or otherwise markets another person engaging in such an act knowing that their actions substantially promote the performance of such an act; and tempts another person to engage in such an act".

Due to this vague and opaque wording of the penal code, many sex workers who have migrated to Finland are unaware of the nature of the law; thereby

making it so they are unaware of their rights as sex workers and as people. (Pro-tukipiste, n.d.).

#### 4.1 Criticisms of the Sex Work Policy in Finland

As stated previously, the wording and unclear nature of the Finnish penal code regarding prostitution in Finland, can cause more issues than it helps to alleviate, especially in the context of sex workers who are also migrants, and in relation to the Finnish police. (Pro-tukipiste, n.d.).

A report that was conducted on the legislation regarding sex work, migration, and health in Europe, provides further indication as to what the main criticisms of the sex work policy in Finland are. For example, one of the main concerns is that the description of crime is too broad, making it nearly indistinctive to its counterparts. Another area of concern lies in the fact that this policy of “general criminalization” can lead to the “restriction of self-determination in cases where it is a consensual agreement between two adults”. (TAMPEP, 2009).

The Swedish model, mentioned previously, has resulted in findings that are considered “debatable and controversial”, causing the Finnish Parliament to hold numerous Legal Affairs Committees, resulting in a limited version of the Swedish model. This vague policy also coincides with the Aliens Act, a piece of legislation regarding migrants coming to Finland. In this Act, there is a specific notation that those suspected of selling sexual services can be refused entry into Finland, or can be deported for this same suspicion, although this cannot be determined on appearance alone due to the risk of racial profiling and discrimination. (TAMPEP, 2009).

## 5 Theory

As stated earlier, there are a number of theories from which peer support has derived itself, such as the humanistic psychology theory from before. The fol-

lowing theoretical points were chosen, as they most fit the narrative of the thesis and were most related to the topic. It is important to note that according to Cartwright, the most fundamental theory that encompasses peer support, particularly peer support involving emotional connections, is the theory that “human beings are essentially altruistic and therefore the practice of peers supporting each other is part of human nature” (Cartwright, 2007, p. 26). However, this statement does not specify exact scientific theory to support such a claim. Cartwright delves further into this by stating that there are many theories to support the “altruistic motivations and cooperative activities of peer supporters” (Cartwright, 2007, p. 26), however, she does not delve deeper into these theories or concepts.

### 5.1 Harm Reduction in the Context of Sex Workers

Harm reduction has been a theory that prevails primarily in the community of substance and alcohol abusers (Tatarsky, 2002). Much research has been done detailing its usefulness regarding psychotherapy, in particular. The theory of harm reduction will be utilized in this thesis as a means to ascribe the notion of sex work and its surroundings.

As mentioned, harm reduction has been used primarily in the context of substance and alcohol abusers. As such, the resource that is provided will be in the context of substance abuse, but then applied to the ideology of sex work. According to Tatarsky (2002), harm reduction “rejects the presumption that abstinence is the best or only acceptable goal for all drug and alcohol users. Harm reduction sees substance use varying on a continuum of harmful consequences to the user and their community. In doing so, harm reduction accepts small, incremental steps in the direction of reduced harm with the goal being to facilitate the greatest reduction in harm for a given person at this point in time” (p. 2). With this in mind, more emphasis ends up being placed on the client to have the capacity of change, along with the strength to do so involving their ‘treatment’, or in this case, their decision-making and regards to safety in the context of sex

workers. As stated by Tatarsky (2002), much of these views align with the “psychodynamic and behavioral models of drug misuse” (p. 2).

Sex work, in many societal circumstances, has been seen as a problematic behavior, worthy of rectifying. However, given Pro-tukipiste’s principles regarding sex work and that it constitutes as a form of work, equal to any other profession, sex work is not seen as a problem that needs to be fixed, but rather as an area of marginalized individuals who should seek to be as aware and safe as possible. In this context, we can look to harm reduction relating to sex work as a way to reduce the potential harm associated with the troubled areas of sex work, such as, HIV/STI concerns, pregnancy, condom usage, possibility of abuse/rape from clients, as well as possible drug use. The purpose of the support activities at Pro-tukipiste is not to end someone’s career as a sex worker, but to provide them with the information and services necessary for them to lead fulfilling lives. By establishing this initial contact with a client, that the goal is not to end sex work but rather to help the individual prosper, the theory of harm reduction is realized. (Pro-tukipiste, n.d.).

## 5.2 Participation

In order to examine more in-depth the concept of how the observations conducted were utilized, it is necessary to understand different formats of participation and how they coincide with the practical application.

To begin, it is necessary to define participation, which entails “forms of involvement where people play a more active part, have greater choice, exercise more power and contribute significantly to decision-making and management” (Adams, 2008, p. xvi).

When considering the observation that was applied during this practice, the model of democratic participation was utilized. This model regards the “individual service user as an equal citizen with other members of the general public,

who, through greater participation, is able to gain power and more control over their life and contribute to the development of better services” (Adams, 2008, p. 35). The democratic model is able to cohesively work with aspects of empowerment in order to provide further comprehension. This democratic model directly counteracts the consumerist model, which regards the service user as “no more than a consumer, who is able to make choices in the marketplace of available goods and services that influence what is made available” (Adams, 2008, p. 35). In order for the model to be democratic, the aspect of empowerment has to be realized. The two main aspects include the identity of the person using the service and the role they play; in this case, in order for the democratic model to work, there needs to be an active citizen to assume the identity and their role needs to be as an empowered contributor (Adams, 2008, p. 36).

While this model provides a more narrow focus to a larger social pedagogical concept, analyzing the specific orientation of its premise can reduce it even further. While there are four orientations geared toward participation, the one that is the main focus of this study would be the orientation of social justice. The characteristics of social justice include promoting human and democratic rights, achieving power shifts/empowerment, achieving equity, and enhancing citizenship (Adams, 2008, p. 36).

### 5.3 Empowerment

Empowerment can be defined as “the capacity of individuals, groups and/or communities to take control of their circumstances, exercise power and achieve their own goals, and the process by which, individually and collectively, they are able to help themselves and others to maximize the quality of their lives” (Adams, 2008, p. xvi). In the context of sex workers, peer education as a methodology has been shown to have a “known efficacy in the empowerment of sex workers” (INDOORS Project, 2014, p. 8).

In order to distinguish the data, it is crucial to have empowerment and participation viewed as one joint concept that is working together. Empowerment in the

context of the peer groups, is not given by the employees but facilitated so as to have the clients empower themselves within the peer groups. By having these empowered individuals discussing topics that interest them, either for hobbies or to further their education, they are able to have an impact on others around them, for example, their peers, and continue the cycle of empowerment. (Adams, 2003).

With this in mind, it is possible to look at group dynamics of empowerment and the characteristics of such. When analyzing what groups can achieve, there are examples of providing support for an individual, reducing the risk of isolation, and offering a context in which personal skills can be developed and practiced (Adams, 2003, pg. 77). In the context of Pro-tukipiste and their peer groups conducted on Tuesdays, they are defined as a user-led group (Adams, 2003). Adams (2003, p. 80) defines this as a two stage process in which “group members are supported in the early stages, the workers building the group with users as partners... subsequently, users may move repeatedly through the sequence of clarifying problems and goals and taking action and they take charge of the process with growing confidence... users can take over the group to the extent that the workers move into the background”. While Pro-tukipiste encourages client-led peer groups, the workers are there to facilitate subject matter, whilst remaining in the background to permit clients to engage in discussion and ask questions. Of the observations conducted, only one was client-led. Certain benefits of having empowering groups are the therapeutic benefits for an individual, social benefits of interacting with peers, educational benefits of learning a new topic or subject, as well as prompting community action, in this case, initiating discussion to do with the rights of sex workers (Adams, 2003, pp. 84-85).

#### 5.4 Aspects of Multicultural Counseling

Due to the fact that Pro-tukipiste is a multinational, multicultural environment, it is important to note the various aspects of multicultural counseling and how they relate to the peer groups (Pro-tukipiste, n.d.). To begin, existential phenomenol-

ogy is “examining the fundamental ideas and assumptions of human existence” and therefore “acknowledges that both the therapist and client have differing worldviews” (Eleftheriadou, pp. 31-32). This implies that the counselor is not the apex of information and therefore, is not always considered correct. When dealing with a multicultural group, it is important for the counselor to understand that not all perspectives are inherently global. (Eleftheriadou, 2002).

There is also the phenomenon of eclectic and integrative counseling to consider. What this entails is a “therapeutic process using ideas from different therapies to meet the needs of a heterogeneous, multi-ethnic, multi-racial, and multicultural group of people” (Lago & Moodley, 2002, p. 45). Each process is reformulated to fit the client and their needs. As Lago and Moodley (2002) explain, “a genuine eclectic and integrative approach where the process is altered, modified, and reformulated to encompass cultural uniqueness and is conducted within the cultural norms and origins of the client’s culture fits the ‘cultural fit’ conceptualization” (p. 45). This process explains that not every client will benefit from the same form of counseling and it is pertinent to have this ‘cultural fit’ in order to better encourage the client in their endeavors. This form of counseling has an emphasis on “individual autonomy and on the process of attaining self-actualization” (p. 46) and therefore, is easily utilized to coincide with Pro-tukipiste’s clients and their efforts in empowerment. Eclectic and integrative counseling also is able to “engage alongside the socio-political” (p. 54) which is one example of participation and empowerment that was discussed previously.

It is also important to consider the importance of ethnic matching in counseling, and how it benefits the client in their needs. Alladin (2002) explains, “When counselor and client share the same cultural background, empathic understanding and self-disclosure are more easily facilitated. However, most counselors and counselor trainers are white, middle-class people whose values and communication styles may differ from those of ethnic minority clients, especially those in lower socio-economic status” (p. 175). This is easily seen in the relation of Pro-tukipiste’s clients, as most are not of Finnish origin, and often experience the concept of double marginalization, i.e., being marginalized as sex workers,

and then being marginalized as non-white, lower class, et cetera (Pro-tukipiste, n.d.). However, Alladin (2002) maintains that not every problem is necessarily race or ethnicity based, “If race or ethnicity is relevant to the client’s problem, then a racially or ethnically similar counselor who is perceived as expert and trustworthy will exercise greater influence on the client’s attitudes, but how does one ascertain whether race or ethnicity is relevant to a particular client’s problem?” (p. 179). While ethnic matching can be seen as beneficial if an organization has the resources to cater to each ethnicity or race, it is often that resources are limited, and experts in the field, especially in Finland, will not always share the client’s ethnicity or race (Pro-tukipiste, n.d.).

## **6 Methodology**

### **6.1 Ethnography vis-à-vis Naturalism**

The modus operandi utilized in this thesis’ data collection would be ethnographic methodology. This methodology was chosen due to the way the data would be collected and analyzed, and ethnography better fit the narrative of the thesis. Ethnography can be defined as the ethnographer “participating, overtly or covertly, in people’s daily lives for an extended period of time, watching what happens, listening to what is said, asking questions, ... collecting whatever data are available to throw light on the issues that are the focus of the research” (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995, p. 1). According to Hammersley and Atkinson (1995, p.1), this definition exists as too broad, and maintains the assumption that all social researchers can be described as “participant observers”. With this in mind, it is important to delve further into the definition of ethnography, and that regarding qualitative research, the term of ‘naturalism’ should be ascribed. Naturalism, a definition meant to counter positivism, “proposes that the natural world should be studied in its ‘natural’ state, undisturbed by the researcher; hence ‘natural’ not ‘artificial’ settings, like experiments or formal interviews, should be the primary source of data” (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995, p. 6),

further making a point to be “sensitive to the nature of the setting... describe what happens in the setting, how the people involved see their own actions and those of others, and the contexts in which the action takes place” (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995, p. 6).

Hammersley and Atkinson (1995, p.8) go on to further explain naturalism, as it applies to the ‘participant observer’ and the method of data collection, “...in order to understand people’s behavior we must use an approach that gives us access to the meanings that guide that behavior. As participant observers we can learn the culture or subculture of the people we are studying”.

## 6.2 Qualitative Methods: Semi-structured Interviews

Qualitative research was found to be the primary method of collecting and analyzing the data that was collected during these observations. With the assistance of employees at Pro-tukipiste, collecting feedback and being a participant observer during the peer group sessions proved to be most effective in terms of conducting an ethnographic study. However, some of these feedback sessions developed into semi-structured interviews where feedback was provided, but a more in-depth understanding of how the clients view the peer group, as well Pro-tukipiste in general, came to light.

Qualitative research is a method of collecting data to “understand a given research problem from the perspectives of the local population it involves” (Family Health International, 2001, p. 1). In general, qualitative research seeks to “explore phenomena” while “instruments use a more flexible, iterative style of eliciting and categorizing responses to questions” (Family Health International, 2001, p. 3). In its analysis, qualitative research “describes variations, individual experiences, group norms, and explains relationships” (Family Health International, 2001, p. 3).

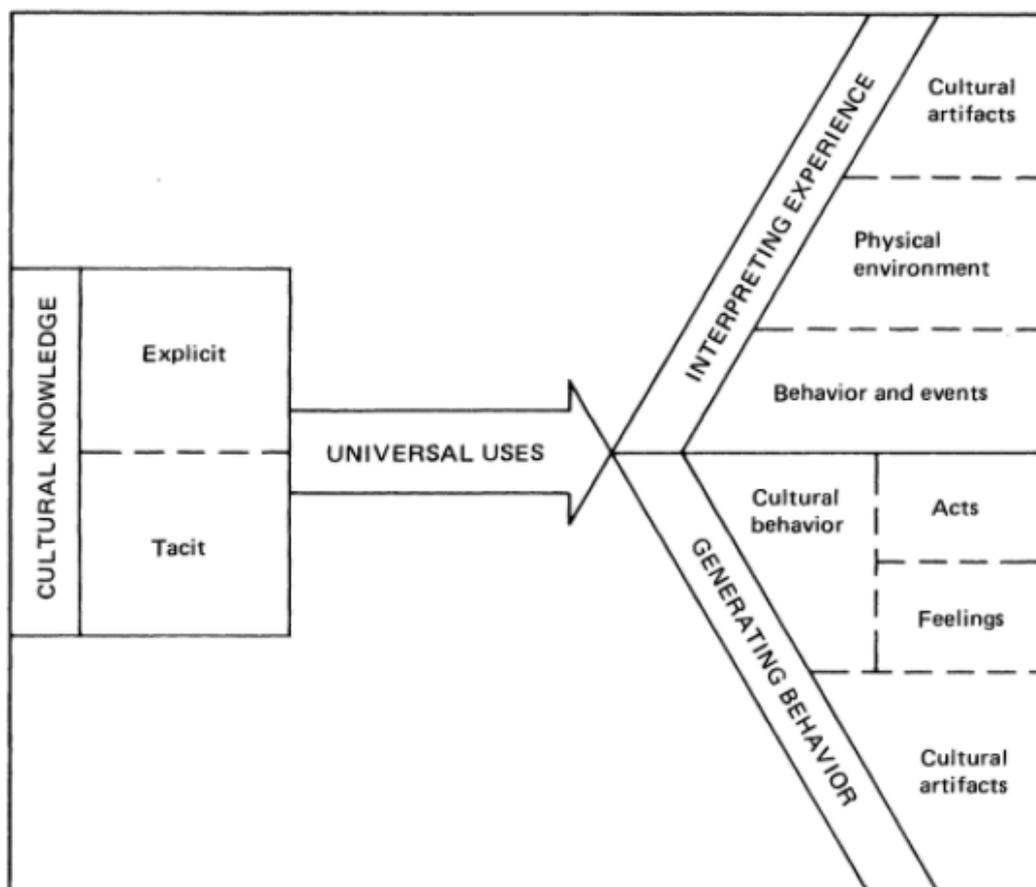
As the method of collecting feedback from the clients was extremely informal, the semi-structured interviews ended up being in this same casual style as well.

All interactions were recorded and transcribed for further analysis. Semi-structured interviews can be defined as conversations without the need for rigid questioning, but rather imply certain topics that should be covered regarding the research question (Fylan, 2005, p. 65). They differ greatly from structured interviews, where the possibility for further discussion from a specific question is not encouraged, in order to have each participant answer the same question in the same order (Fylan, 2005, p. 66).

### 6.3 Participant Observation

Participant observation, as mentioned previously, is the method that was adopted in order to collect data during the peer group sessions. Anthropologically, observation is defined as “the systematic description of events, behaviors, and artifacts in the social setting chosen for the study” (Kawulich, 2005). Specifically, participant observation is utilized while conducting “fieldwork, which involves active looking, improving memory, informal interviewing, writing detailed field notes, and perhaps, most importantly, patience” (Kawulich, 2005). Participant observation is the “process enabling researchers to learn about the people under study in the natural setting through observing and participating in those activities” (Kawulich, 2005). Thus, by participating in the aforementioned peer group sessions as an observer, as well as a participant, the author was able to collect data through feedback and utilize participant observation.

It is also important to note that while using participant observation, an examination of tacit and explicit knowledge is also pertinent. As displayed in the table below, cultural knowledge is tacit or explicit, defined by what we know subconsciously or explicitly. When conducting ethnographic research, understanding this subtext is key (Spradley, 2016, pp. 5-8).



**FIGURE 1. The Two Levels of Cultural Knowledge**

Spradley, 2016, p. 8

#### 6.4 Ethics

The ethics involved in this thesis is an important section to cover, given the vulnerable nature of the clientele represented, as well as a need to protect identities and preserve anonymity. In the beginning of the work placement that the author was involved in, a confidentiality agreement was signed, stating that under no circumstances was the author to disclose personal information or client's identities, save the bare minimum needed to separate individuals regarding the thesis or other essays written during the internship period. (Pro-tukupiste, n.d.).

Ethical considerations to be undertaken should include the principles of informed consent, as well as minimizing harm; in the context of this group, and this thesis, this means, "ensuring that potential and actual participants are made aware of the purpose... and the likely activities and processes involved before they agree or consent to join" (McDermott, 2002, pg. 112).

Firstly, all individuals that have been interviewed, and that feedback has been collected from for the purposes of this thesis will remain completely anonymous. The only indication given will refer to the nationality of the client. There is no intention to reveal names, gender, age, or current status as a sex worker. All those that have been interviewed and collected feedback from were made aware of these clauses, as well as the fact that all recordings and notes taken during the discussion would be destroyed after the thesis was completed.

Because this will be a product for Pro-tukipiste to utilize in their future endeavors regarding peer work, the author has also discussed with the clients that the thesis will be readily available for them to read and review before it would be handed in, so that they can determine if their anonymity has remained intact. There will also be a peer group in the spring dedicated to the discussion of the thesis, once it is completed, for the clients to give further feedback on their concerns of anonymity, if there are any. The results of that feedback session will be included in the observation section of the thesis.

## **7 Data**

As mentioned in the introduction, there were a total of five observations, in which feedback was collected from each session. To reiterate, no identities will be revealed and clients will remain anonymous in the context of these observations. The only identifier used will be nationality, in order to maintain and establish the diversity of the peer groups, as well as entailing clearer data analysis.

### **8.1 First Observation**

The first peer session that was observed was client-led by a Finnish client. The subject was sex work in various cultures. From this point on, they will be referred to as the group leader for the day. They were excited about the fact that this thesis was being conducted, and to quote, "I'm happy this place exists, they're doing good work here, and your topic will help this place to continue to do good." The group leader is also responsible for the peer groups that are conducted in Finnish on Thursdays at Pro-tukipiste.

Participants for this peer session included seven Thai clients and five Russian clients. The discussion began with the group leader asking participants how they came into contact with Pro-tukipiste; many Thai clients stated that they became aware of Pro-tukipiste's services through the massage parlors where they worked and through the outreach work Pro-tukipiste performs. The group leader discussed their personal experience with Pro-tukipiste, which enabled another Thai client to state that they required help with services but that Finland has limited access to Thai interpreters. The Thai clients emphasized that their culture and language were important to them and Pro-tukipiste facilitated that connection. The group leader went on to discuss more personal things about themselves such as who would pay for sexual services, their own sexuality and then went on to offer a Finnish perspective to sexuality. At this point, the Thai clients stated that sexuality and shame went hand in hand in their culture and offered the differing viewpoint to the group leader. At this point in time, the Russian clients were not active and did not discuss until confronted directly with a question. When asked about sex work and stigma, the Russian clients maintained distance from the subject, stating that, "(sex work) is okay for yourself, but don't tell anyone about it", then going on to discuss the concept of double life.

When asked about the differences in the culture regarding sex work, the Russian clients were emphatic that the topic was inappropriate and not something that they wanted to discuss. One client quoted as saying, "this is a trustworthy place, but I don't want to discuss private things concerning sex work, there is a reason it's a double life, there are kids, and family, and school, for instance I'm interested in becoming a social worker, not embracing being a sex worker." An-

other client quoted as saying, “many are interested in pursuing something other than sex work, there remains (a) double life for a reason. Relatives and friends shouldn’t have to be made aware, we come here to speak about them (family/friends), not sex work. This place is convenient for that. We don’t like sharing various stuff about our lives.” When asked if they felt marginalized, the Russian clients again asked why their private lives were being questioned.

### 7.1.2 First Observation Feedback

This was the only peer session in which negative feedback was given. Feedback was collected from one Russian client, who again will remain anonymous. The group leader during our feedback session came to apologize to the Russian client since the Russian group had emphasized distaste for the subject matter of the peer session. The client explained that it was a matter of different cultures and that the theme and subject was “too difficult and too intense”. When asked about the subject being negative, the client said that they felt the group leader “needed to see a psychiatrist”, as the majority of the peer session was the group leader detailing private and personal matters. The client stated that they often visited the peer group and that this was the first time they were giving negative feedback, as the subject matter was too “invasive and personal”. As to what could be changed about the peer session, the client stated that having this kind of topic is too personal and something that needs to be discussed privately with one of the workers at Pro-tukipiste.

## 7.2 Second Observation

This peer session involved the Finnish Police coming to the peer group to answer questions about legal concerns and rights that the clients have.

During the morning meeting, there were a number of concerns voiced by the workers of Pro-tukipiste. There were worries about the number of people expected to attend, given the subject matter, how the translation process would

work considering the expected number of people, how would the question/answer process be organized, and what sorts of time constraints there were, given the number of questions expected. There were eight Pro-tukipiste workers present, either for observation or interpreting, and two police officers, one lieutenant (male) and one patrol officer (female). The participants included seven Thai clients, five Russian clients, and two Finnish clients. The beginning of the session is set aside for the description of the Finnish police and what it entails regarding uniform, education requirements, and organizational jargon. The female officer is present due to her familiarity in working with the section of police dedicated to multicultural and multilingual work.

While there was a long list of questions, the officers only had a set amount of time and thus, were only able to work on certain subjects and themes rather than specific questions. There will be a transcript included in the appendix with more specific answers to the specific questions. Most of the questions asked centered around police detainment, asking for identification, search policies, rights as a citizen and as a police officer, discrimination issues, domestic abuse allegations, sex advertisement in Finland, and using condoms as legal evidence in court cases against sex workers (see appendix 2).

### 7.2.2 Second Observation Feedback

While collecting feedback, it became obvious that numerous clients wanted an opportunity for more discussion, but the time was just not there. One Russian client mentioned that for the future, they would have preferred a paper with the questions so that they could share the information with their peers who could not attend. They also mentioned a desire to have a paper with the questions to make notes to remember the information later on for themselves. Another Russian client mentioned that having the police in the lobby for a discussion was a good starting point, but that “more work needed to be done”. They noted that many people did not attend the peer group session because there is still distrust between sex workers and the police and this is more evident in the foreign cli-

ents. A Thai client explained that they had been coming to Pro-tukipiste for many years and had frequently attended these peer group sessions. Overall, their experience for this session was positive, however, there were still the complaints about the time limit as well as the language barrier issues. These two issues coincided with those who required translation, and often, longer explanations required double the time requirement due to the translation necessity.

### 7.3 Third Observation

This peer session centered around sexual rights, presented by a student from Metropolia, who volunteers at Väestöliitto and is an advocate for disabled youth. The participants for today include six Thai clients, two African clients, five Russian clients, and three Eastern-European clients.

The discussion begins by asking about sexual rights in the context of Finland. This includes how rights are written into law, how they work in practice and specifically, how they operate when it comes to sex workers. Sexual rights go hand-in-hand with human rights, in that one cannot exist without the other. This is closely related to the economy, and it is noted that in poorer countries, there is less accessibility to sexual rights causes, and many cannot afford preventative measures when it comes to their sexuality. There are different expectations concerning sexual rights based on the country's cultural background and laws, however, it is pertinent to note that there is no utopia for sexual rights anywhere, that those disproportionately affected by sexual rights issues are often women, and then including minorities and the disabled. The exact list of questions pertaining to sexual rights from Väestöliitto will be included in the Appendix (see appendix 3).

To summarize, most of the rights explained through Väestöliitto during the discussion are used in comparison with Finland and another country, usually a country where a client from that nation is present. The beginning of the conversation is used to determine opinions on what is okay regarding sexuality and

gender in the respective countries, Finland included. When moving on to the second point about rights to knowledge and sexual information, the Russian and Thai clients were in agreement that there was not enough education in their respective countries, and in Thailand, it is frowned upon to ask any questions concerning sexuality; while in Russia, there is almost no education concerning the community of LGBTQI+. The discussion continues onward to the right to protection and on how Finland has a high rate of sexual violence in the EU. This prompts inquiries into how accurate that is, and if police corruption and low reporting in less secure countries in the EU is responsible for the high number.

Whilst discussing sexual health services, most of the discussion is focused on Finland, as this is the country of residence for most of the clients now, and they require this information currently. The discussion focuses on how everyone is entitled to STI testing, HIV treatment, and abortions, and that all healthcare services are bound by confidentiality. Currently, there are motions in Parliament for contraception to be free, regardless of economic situation, for those in the Metropolitan area. When the conversation shifts to rights about equality and discrimination, an interesting point is brought up concerning the disabled and assisted sex. In many countries, sex workers have been trained specifically for assisted sex, essentially an assistant to a person who is disabled to participate in sexual activities. Many of the Thai clients expressed a desire for wanting this form of training for themselves, so that they could advertise that they specialize in assisted sex and bring in more clients for themselves. Even though the point of right to privacy is brought up, it is not focused on for more than a few moments, just to emphasize that in Finland, your sexuality is your own.

The final point from Västoliitto that is discussed is the right to influence and advocate. The conversation flows from having a right to express personal views in writing, protests, etc. Many of the clients present are emphatic about this point, as they have had to deal with corruption amongst their own government and police force back in their original countries. As they said during the discussion, in many countries, police will not accept complaints from sex workers of being raped, because in their opinion sex workers cannot be raped. The clients

also stated that after police raids, they often require mandatory HIV testing, which goes against their own country's views of human rights.

### 7.3.1 Third Observation Feedback

When collecting feedback for this discussion, the mood and atmosphere of the peer group was overall positive for having learned something new about their rights and specifically, their rights in Finland. One client stated that the speaker had a better perspective on certain aspects of the subject because they had a disability. Another Russian client made mention that this peer group was very informative for them and that they had no desire to change the format. As for opinions on the speaker, feedback was positive and even though the time had to be shortened for this peer group session, the speaker went through each subject quickly and efficiently, while also giving ample time for short descriptions of each right and to have short discussions on each one and what was relevant for whose country. The feedback taken through recording shows that more information is needed for those that grew up in less secure and developing countries, and that in Finland, more education is needed for this vulnerable and marginalized group specifically on their rights.

### 7.4 Fourth Observation

This peer group session was quite small for this day, likely due to weather as well as the anticipated subject matter. What originally was supposed to be a jewelry and beauty theme had to be changed at the last minute due to a cancellation of the speaker. The program was changed to art flash cards from Ateneum to practice Finnish, and to essentially hype up the trip to Ateneum that was planned later on. The participants include two Thai clients, two Russian clients, and one Eastern European client. An employee at Pro-tukipiste came up with the theme and what would be happening with the cards. The clients were to choose from a random assortment of art cards on the table and to concoct a story using the card they had chosen. This was done also in preparation of a

future peer group, which would be done at the story theatre conducted at Metropolia. For some clients, they were unable to come up with specific stories, so they were asked what feelings or emotions they experienced when looking at the art. For one client, they felt so strongly about a certain art piece with a mother and child that they cried when talking about their feelings with it. Subjects concerning loneliness, children, the seasons, and other art forms were brought up during this peer session.

#### 7.4.1 Fourth Observation Feedback

The clients present were positive about this peer group. Even though it was a quiet day due to the amount of clients, they felt it still passed quickly due to the discussion and “closeness” of the group. The clients felt that it was a good discussion and heralded an opportunity to practice Finnish in a non-judgmental environment. The group also was able to take in stride the sudden change to the program and adapt to the new activity. One Thai client expressed that they would not change anything about the program, as they consider themselves to be friends with the others and that whatever they do during the peer groups is “okay for them”. For them being with friends works as a “stress release”. Another Russian client stated that what they did during peer groups was “very important”, especially when they were learning about new things or discussing things like art, as was the case for this peer group.

#### 7.5 Fifth Observation

This peer group session tends to lean towards a more serious subject matter than the others. This session is dedicated to the discussion of human rights and self-determination and the speakers are two employees of Pro-tukipiste who specialize in the subject, Eva and Essi. Their work is focused on the recognition of human trafficking and supporting the victims of human trafficking. In order to

entice more people to join the discussion, there are personal alarms to be given to the clients after the discussion. The participants for today include five Russian clients, four Thai clients, one Finnish client, three African clients, and two Eastern European clients.

Pro-tukipiste has made an animated video in Finnish to talk about human trafficking and the support available for victims of trafficking. The video is used as a training tool for recognizing the signs of human trafficking and how to recognize human trafficking in a sex work setting.

The discussion begins with people from different cultures discussing what freedom entails and how we can all work together using these different perspectives. After this, there is a brief introduction to sex work law in Finland and how it coincides with the human trafficking law. This includes pimping legislation and advertisement of sexual services. The African clients maintain a good discussion with an employee of Pro-tukipiste concerning human trafficking. Many of them have personal experience with the immigration laws and having someone help you move from one country to another, and then being in debt to that person. There is talk about control over people and the disproportionate power balance and manipulation. One African client states “not everyone has the same chances as a Finnish person. We come from a poor country and do not have the same education as women. We also have poor families and lots of kids”. The client emphasizes that people take advantage of the assistance programs provided by Finland and tell stories to get money, as “trafficking is so common, it is easy to believe”. This is proven by Essi and Eva stating that each year in Finland, there are approximately 55-150 cases involving victims of human trafficking, and having the need to place them in housing, assisted programs and therapy.

Essi continues the discussion on human trafficking by comparing it to sex work and that the main difference between the two is that those selling sex are happier in their situation because they are not forced. At this point, the African clients and the Russian clients express distaste at this statement. The African cli-

ents maintaining that they are “not happy”, and that they’d rather be with their families, “it is a way to support ourselves but it doesn’t mean we are satisfied”. They also assert that police should make proper investigations into sex workers who are arrested instead of directly going to deportation. Most everyone in the room agrees that the police just don’t have enough training and knowledge about trafficking to be able to handle each situation properly.

Concerning the client’s thoughts on the video, they felt there was helpful information and that the pictures used were “good and useful” to initiate conversation. When asked about their thoughts on freedom, many clients took that to mean their thoughts on shame and other connotations of sex work. Many disclosed they would not want their families to know their occupation and that it is something to “hide and not talk about”. The African clients emphasized that it is a hard situation to have to “hide a part of yourself”.

The clients also mention situations where their clients (Finnish) will ask them to keep the money they give them to themselves because they want to keep trafficking and pimping to a minimum. It is a phenomenon that many clients are astounded by. As the discussion closes, a client asks what to do in a situation where they think a person has been/is being trafficked? Eva and Essi are affirmative in that if one thinks they can help, then to go to Pro-tukipiste for advice on the situation; it is always up to the person what they want to tell about themselves or reveal.

#### 7.5.1 Fifth Observation Feedback

The overall consensus for this peer group session was that it was “informative” and useful for the clients. They expressed positive critiques for the two speakers, however as was the case with the other peer sessions, the time constraints for discussing everything the clients wanted was severely limited. There was also an overall positive consensus amongst the peer group participants for the personal alarms they received as a gift for participating in this particular peer group session. Many expressed feelings of gratitude for having the opportunity

to increase their own measures of personal safety while they were out working. More extensive feedback was collected from the three African clients who had participated.

To give some background, it is not often that those of African descent participate in the peer groups. African clients tend to come to drop-in frequently, but often feel isolated from their peers, either due to racial issues or the cultural differences. Being able to collect their feedback was a rare opportunity. These clients stated that this was their first peer group they had attended, even though they had been coming to the Pro-tukipiste offices for quite some time. They expressed strong feelings of enjoyment concerning the subject and that “they would attend again” given the valuable discussion they had during the session. While they were happy with the content, they did not express a desire to have the information passed along to their peers. They found the information useful and they were happy to be able to “contribute to the conversation” on such a serious topic. This held especially true since during the peer session, there were discussions of real life exploitation that some clients had experienced. The African clients were also contributing snippets of how corruption works within a country and people trafficked from poorer areas into Europe; this coincided with their information regarding forced marriage, when children and youth are sold within the countryside and urban areas of particular African countries. The African client’s feedback and information was also supported by some of the Thai client’s information, where they discussed the similar issue of having to “pay a debt” to the person that helps you come to Finland.

## 7.6 Final Observation

While this observation was not part of the data collection and analysis, it was pertinent to include it. This observation was conducted in March of 2017, and its main purpose was to collect feedback from the clients concerning the thesis and what it entailed. This peer group session was dedicated to discussing the themes of the thesis with the clients so that they could ascertain if the infor-

mation included in the thesis would benefit them in the long run, as well as to assure their anonymity was kept intact with regards to the thesis.

The participants for this peer session were four Thai clients, three Russian clients, two Eastern European clients, and one African client. Mainly, the group discussed the observations that had been conducted, as well as certain theoretical elements that had been utilized while collecting the feedback. When this section of the peer group session was finished, the author asked why many of the clients chose to participate in the Tuesday groups as opposed to the other communal activities that Pro-tukipiste offers. The author received much feedback from this question alone. Many clients emphasized that on Tuesday, the communication is better; people can share their experiences without being judged and it's more suitable for their needs: "Interesting people come and talk, we also can see old friends we haven't seen for ten years or more." There was also the mention of time management for the clients. One client shared with the group that people are just busy and they have to choose what they participate in: "We come Tuesday, because we don't have time to come other times during the week." Most of the clients agreed with this client's sentiment concerning time management. Other clients also gave feedback that on Tuesday, there were always interesting themes, as well as food made by other clients that they could all share.

Concerning the feedback given on the actual thesis, many clients were pleased with the result. They felt that the information and feedback that had been collected would be very beneficial to improving Pro-tukipiste's already quite successful peer work. They also expressed gratitude that their answers and identities had been protected, and that they remained anonymous.

## **8 Analysis**

Thematic analysis and phenomenology was utilized in order to comprehend the findings for this data. Thematic analysis' primary goal is to "describe and understand how people feel, think, and behave within a particular context relative to a

specific research question. In this way, applied thematic analysis is similar to phenomenology, which seeks to understand the meanings that people give to their lived experiences and social reality” (Guest, MacQueen, & Namey, 2012, p. 13).

With this thematic analysis in mind, the themes that will be analyzed are the negative feelings from the feedback, as well as the positive feelings from the feedback and ways that Pro-tukipiste can improve upon their peer work. It is clear from the first observation, the session that was client-led and focused on sex work in various cultures, that when conducting client-led peer groups, there is a need for more regulation regarding the group leaders. For the future, when peers are peer leaders, it would be pertinent to thoroughly vet what their subject matter of the peer group session would entail. Feedback collected during the March observation concluded that many clients were worried the peer group leader would be using their answers for something, which was why many were concerned and fearful that such personal questions were being asked.

To eradicate that fear, it is important for Pro-tukipiste to educate their peer group leaders on what sorts of questions are acceptable to ask if they want to facilitate further discussion. It was also discussed in the March observation that after hearing the feedback from this first observation, that this sort of theme would work better with a closed group and clients who often frequent the peer group. There was also discussion that in the future, due to this past peer session and the data that I provided for it, an upcoming theme would be about what to tell your children or relatives if they find out you’re a sex worker.

The remaining peer group sessions yielded positive responses and feedback from the clientele. Clients typically enjoy the activities that Pro-tukipiste organizes. Many of them expressed their happiness with the activities and how they like the variety that is presented.

It is important to note that when observing these sessions, the clients and employees both shared concerns of time management, as peer groups sessions

are only two hours long, but that the employees also expressed concerns about the issue of integration during the peer groups. Because many of the clients separate themselves based on language, it often becomes an issue where the clients remain in these isolated ethnic groups, even when the peer groups are not in session. Many employees at Pro-tukipiste have noted that it is often when, for example, the Russian clients make snide comments towards the African clients. Discrimination is something that the employees at Pro-tukipiste do not tolerate, however, there are many clients, and often the language barriers prevent the workers from knowing all the time when this type of interaction occurs. Eradicating this type of interaction will prove difficult for Pro-tukipiste because the clients do not share a common language and still require translation during peer group sessions.

Number of Observations	Peer Group Topic	Number of Participants by Nationality	Nature of Feedback
1 <sup>st</sup> Observation	Sex work in various cultures	5 Russian and 7 Thai clients	Mostly negative due to the feelings of privacy invasion
2 <sup>nd</sup> Observation	Finnish police answer questions	7 Thai, 5 Russian, and 2 Finnish clients	Mixed feedback; questions unanswered, time management was a major issue
3 <sup>rd</sup> Observation	Sexual Rights by Väestöliitto	6 Thai, 2 African, 5 Russian, and 3 Eastern-European clients	Positive; concerns about time management.
4 <sup>th</sup> Observation	Analyzing art with open discussion	2 Thai, 2 Russian, and 1 Eastern-European clients	Positive; open emotional discussion was encour-

			aged
5 <sup>th</sup> Observation	Human rights and self-determination concerning human trafficking	5 Russian, 4 Thai, 1 Finnish, 3 African, and 2 Eastern-European clients	Positive; concerns about time management, but the serious topic was discussed openly
6 <sup>th</sup> Observation	Final observation to collect feedback about thesis from clients	4 Thai, 3 Russian, 1 African, 2 Eastern-European clients	Positive; clients were excited about the thesis and felt they attributed to continued improvement of peer groups

## 9 Reflection

The author found the entire study to be an invigorating experience. Being able to work with such a diverse clientele, especially in the area that the author is interested in, was truly rewarding and significantly impacted the author's professional growth.

When reflecting on participation, it is possible to better understand the study that was undertaken. Clients at Pro-tukipiste are able to further their own means of participation by being active users of the service provided by Pro-tukipiste, as well as being empowered through the means in which they facilitate peer groups and peer discussion. These means are further extended by encompassing the characteristics displayed by the social justice orientation of participation, therein that as sex workers, they are able to advocate and promote their rights as sex workers in Finland, as well as facilitating their empowerment when it comes to their rights to achieve equality in Finland. These peer groups and the

continued education and discussion that it entails, vastly improve this equality, and therefore the reduction of stigma.

Concerning the first observation with the peer as a peer group leader, it did seem on the nose, and that there would be no particular reason to discuss sex work so flagrantly just because the service point caters to sex workers. The topic seemed like a high school level discussion. While this topic is difficult to speak about, and is better suited for a one on one discussion, Finland has the advantage of being an open country, where one is not penalized for having these sorts of discussions. As the group leader stated, as well as the clients present, different cultures warrant different reactions, however, both of these parties implied them on a drastically different scale.

With the police peer group, there was much that went unanswered and not discussed. Many clients expressed the need for longer time to have a more involved discussion about their rights and issues with the police. Certain questions went unanswered as the two officers either had no idea how to answer the specific question, or the question was something out of their realm of reality. An example of this was one client mentioning a police officer entering their home with a key and the two officers seemed baffled at this, as it is illegal and therein, uncommon. In the future, this sort of activity should be dedicated a longer time slot to go further into detail about certain aspects of the law and the legalities as they relate to sex work. The discussions should also not be limited to ethnic groups, as they were during this session, to provide a more integrated and involved discussion amongst all the peers present.

After the March observation, Pro-tukipiste stated that they would arrange another police session, but would have language groups instead, to better ensure that clients were getting questions answered and to further the discussion. During the police peer group, it was evident how far behind some clients were in the discussion. An example of this was the Thai clients in particular, who struggled to keep up with the police discussion, then the translation, and then wanting to ask questions, but kept having to wait for the translations and so on. It

became a complicated and frustrating circle for them, so the language groups would be very beneficial for them. Some clients were able to schedule appointments to have further questions answered by the police. Concerning this peer group in particular, a path was opened to have a more established connection with the police, as well as providing the clients an opportunity to be more open and trusting towards the police when they have concerns or questions.

With regards to the third and fourth observations, it is important to reflect on the activities and how Pro-tukipiste can improve upon them. While many clients were in favor of the Väestöliitto discussion and the only criticism was time, as per usual, there were a couple of things that could be utilized to improve the discussion. For example, because there were a number of rights to go through, and most clients had something to say about each one, to better facilitate an integrated discussion, the clients could have been put into groups to discuss their assigned right, such as the right to privacy for example. In these small groups, they could have discussed certain elements of the right, and been able to share their own experiences. After that, they could have shared what was discussed with the group. This would have been easier on the time management and the speaker, so that the discussion was not rushed.

The overall consensus from the fourth observation was just how pleased clients were. It is significant to note that the clients were able to adapt easily to the change in program, and in fact prospered from the more intimate discussion. Reflecting on this, the author believes this is one of the more important peer group sessions they were able to attend and observe. It showcased a more complex relationship between the clients and employees at Pro-tukipiste and how fewer attendees does not necessarily equate to a less significant peer group. Moving forward, when faced with the prospect of last-minute theme changes or fewer clients, this sort of activity was found to be just as fulfilling emotionally to the clients, as other peer group sessions when more serious matters were discussed.

The final peer group observation was the most informative for the author, as it entailed more personal accounts of clients who had firsthand experience with trafficking and exploitation. While the session itself and people's experiences were excellent, the author felt that the structure of the session was lacking, and this was made note of by the client's feedback as well. There have been consistent issues with time management for the peer groups where more serious issues are discussed, i.e., the Västöliitto rights, police question and answer, and the human trafficking session. To improve on this particular peer session, it is recommended that more structure be put into the schedule, rather than having the freeform questions/topics to be discussed as a timetable.

## **10 Conclusion**

Pro-tukipiste is an organization in Finland that caters to the needs of a marginalized group, sex workers. By providing their clients with an opportunity to express themselves and learn new things through their communal activities, Pro-tukipiste showcases themselves as an organization willing to listen to and encourage their clientele. The peer group conducted on Tuesdays is one example of this willingness to encourage their clientele by having suggestions made on what they would like to do and learn. By having this thesis made to collect feedback on how the clients feel about their peer group, Pro-tukipiste is also showing initiative in their desire to maintain a relationship with their clients to further support them in their individual endeavors. The feedback collected in this thesis will be utilized by Pro-tukipiste to further improve their peer program and have it be an example to other organizations that offer peer support to sex workers.

However, it is also important to note some criticisms of the peer groups. The main concern has always been, and will likely continue to be time management. Translations and feedback take time, and as a result, the speakers often feel rushed and discussion is hurried, rather than diverse. To improve upon this as a whole, it is important for there to be discussions amongst the employees and

clients at Pro-tukipiste to better organize scheduling for the peer groups. There also needs to be a conversation between the employees and the future speakers of the peer groups on how to handle the time management issues, as well as what is considered appropriate for the group to discuss, and also how to handle the timing that is translation and waiting. Pro-tukipiste also needs to address the issue that is racism and integration issues that still preside during the peer group sessions. While it is understandable that the various ethnic groups separate themselves on the basis of necessary translation, it becomes evident, usually from Russian clients to the African clients, that racism still persists. In the future, Pro-tukipiste might find it useful to hold more sessions or meetings concerning discrimination and integration for their clients and employees, not only to keep the employees up to date on new and evolving practices concerning racism and integration, but also to educate their clients.

Based on the research question and the findings, it can be concluded that the communal activities offered at Pro-tukipiste support their clientele and help to facilitate their empowerment. This has also showcased how the author was able to follow the ideology of Pro-tukipiste, by implementing those same principles during the study. Overall, Pro-tukipiste proves itself as a unique organization in Finland that is shown to actively listen to their clientele and encourage discussion amongst their peers. From the feedback collected, it is obvious that the clients feel strongly about the peer group and would like it to continue so that they can learn and experience new things. The Tuesday group is a place where they can feel safe to discuss any topic, free of judgment. By bettering the program and continuing collection of feedback, the clients will feel empowered in their inclusiveness of what occurs in the peer groups. Their participation will facilitate further participation from their peers and what they feel they can accomplish.

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## Appendix 1

### i. Questions

1. What did you enjoy about the activity?
2. What didn't you enjoy?
3. Do you have ideas for development/ what would you change about the activity?
4. What language barriers/issues did you encounter during the activity?
5. Other opinions or ideas for further peer work/support?

## ii. Questions: Police

- a. If you're standing in the street, can police ask for your papers: yes and no. Specific reasons: like suspicion of a crime → can't if you're just standing there (red capped robbery) → can always ask why they need to see papers. They can't ask just because.
  - i. Ethnic profiling is an issue → can be reported.
  - ii. When asking for papers: give henkilötunnus and name → if none, give birthdate, name, nationality and place to reach you → if unable to give, they can detain you for 24 hours.
- b. What rights do I have with the police: get their ID info.
  - i. Finnish police: not typically corrupt, i.e., asking for sex for free in exchange for not getting arrested. Every basket has a few bad apples → if they do wrong, they are punished.
  - ii. Every person in Finland has the right to give feedback to the police.
  - iii. If someone feels slighted by police, wronged → can file a formal complaint: hallinto → administration
    1. 2 different officials: state rights and minority section
    2. person can be prosecuted.
    3. Prosecutor leads the indictment so the police cannot investigate another officer.
- c. Where do police have the right to search my bag? If I'm suspected of selling sex, do they have a reason to search my bag?
  - i. Police have the right to investigate the bag if they're caught, or transfer to a police car → safety check (for the police)
  - ii. Police cannot search you, your car or home, without an official reason (warrant).
  - iii. Can't do anything based on your clothes.
- d. What are the organized police's rights?
  - i. 7000 police in Finland
  - ii. Different languages spoken in Finland → need people in the police force who speak these various languages.
- e. Why do the police count condoms in your bag?
  - i. It's a reason for the suspicion of selling sex → for example, if you're from outside the EU and have a number of condoms: can be a reason for deportation but not the only one.
    1. Number of condoms is irrelevant.
    2. The person suspected of selling sex can also bring evidence to prove their own point.
    3. Selling sex isn't a crime in Finland → usually used in wanting someone deported → racist and discriminatory?

- f. Discrimination if denied entrance to a restaurant based on skin color
  - Is it a police issue? Can be reported to the police → can complain to yhdenvertaisuusvaltuutetta. → Non-Discrimination Ombudsman
- g. It is illegal for a police officer to go undercover and proposition a sex worker → undercover work does happen but usually for drugs, rarely sex work → need permission from courts and everything has to be heavily documented.
- h. If you're married in Finland and your fiancé is violent (sexual) can you get a divorce and obtain an asylum passport?
  - i. Tell a police officer about it and make an official report of the violence. Immigration office can make a report for asylum, even if you are no longer married due to the violent behavior of the spouse.
  - ii. Long process to get divorced → due to complications: spouse won't allow divorce, need to go to a safe house, etc.
- i. If you can buy and sell sex in Finland, why is advertisement (on the internet for example) forbidden?
  - i. Couldn't quite answer; there is a disconnect in how the entire operation works in Finland. Outdated policies, while most of the sex law in Finland focuses on human trafficking offenses and victims + pimping laws are vague, opaque.
- j. Using condoms as evidence → can it result in sex workers carrying less condoms thus increasing HIV rate among sex workers?
  - i. The police can correct and moderate their behavior and no longer count condoms.
    - 1. One Russian: it is anti-human right to have this condom issue in Finland.

### iii. Väestöliitto: Sexual Rights

#### 1. Oikeus omaan seksuaalisuuteen – rights about my own sexuality & gender:

Who gets to enjoy sex? Should it be certain (tietynlainen) that you can enjoy your own gender? What does it feel like to live in a country where sexual minorities are forbidden?

#### 2. Oikeus tietoon seksuaalisuudesta – right to know information about sexuality:

What was life like in a country, where young people are not offered any answers about sexuality? How can sexuality answers be given/reached (tavoittaa), when you didn't/don't go to school? Can anyone receive this information about sexuality, as well as minorities and disabled?

#### 3. Oikeus suojella itseään ja tulla suojelluksi – rights to protect yourself and to be protected:

Why are many girls married underage? What does genital mutilation mean? What is sexual harassment? Is it verbal violence?

#### 4. Oikeus seksuaaliterveyspalveluihin – rights to sexual health services:

What constitutes a good doctor? What does confidentiality mean? How can I make certain the birth control is what I want/good for me? What happens if abortions are illegal in the country I'm in?

#### 5. Oikeus tasa-arvoon ja syrjimättömyyteen – rights about equality and discrimination:

Whose voice can be heard? Where do you find the courage to speak about inequality? Can I influence through art/politics?

#### 6. Oikeus yksityisyyteen – rights about privacy:

Who can decide what you say about your sexuality? What things can be known about my relatives? What if I need help due to daily issues with disability? What support can I get for net posts?

#### 7. Oikeus vaikuttaa – right to advocate/influence:

Are you scared to walk alone on the street if you're a girl? What if you look different from others? Can people do illegal things? What sorts of couples are allowed in this country?