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TruthStory: A study of the empowering elements of a creative storytelling project for gender-diverse people

Abstract

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This master's thesis examines the empowering elements of a creative storytelling project for gender-diverse people. In this research we study which elements of creative activities, group dynamics and facilitation are essential to promote empowerment for gender-diverse people and how to describe and understand them. The research question is: In what ways can a creative project for gender-diverse people enhance participants' empowerment? The study is a multidisciplinary cooperation, and the researchers are professionals from social and cultural fields.

The *TruthStory* project was implemented in the spring of 2023, and it consisted of group meetings where the participants created their own stories the way they wanted to tell them. Audio-visual pieces were created from the stories which were presented to the public.

The conceptual framework of this study is based on the theory of empowerment as well as previous studies and theoretical knowledge of how empowerment has previously been promoted through art and various creative activities.

This research was carried out as a qualitative empirical study with a phenomenological-hermeneutic approach. Data was collected by focus group interview and systematic observation model and analysed by using in vivo coding and qualitative content analysis. In this study special attention was paid to research ethics.

According to the data analysis, the key elements for promoting empowerment were the creation of a safer space and encouraging group interaction. The activities of the facilitators were considered important for creating a safer space. Promoting elements for empowerment were also the importance of creative activities, becoming visible and creating representation and by that transforming discriminatory attitudes. The timeliness of the project in relation to the participant's internal process and the participant's personality were also significant elements in enabling empowerment.

Keywords: Creative activities, gender diversity, gender-diverse people, empowerment

Multidisciplinary co-creation in this study

In this multidisciplinary study we were able to make use of both the social and cultural expertise in a special way. Multidisciplinary co-creation made the project successful and brought real added value to it. Alone, neither of the researchers would have been able to implement the project in such a special way. Together the researchers planned the course of the project and its main features. Ågren's professionalism in social field enabled the creation of a safer space where creativity and empowerment could be realised. This was a really important point for both the participants and for the cooperation. The creation of the safer space was probably the most important element of success for this entire project. Ågren also played an important role in facilitating the meetings and planning the content and exercises. Suoninen's professionalism in culture and arts enabled the participants to fully throw themselves into the project and empowerment was possible when they could trust the quality of the result of the audio-visual pieces. Suoninen also played an important role in in making the shooting scripts, editing the pieces, and making sure that the creative visions of the participants could be realised into a concrete audio-visual pieces.

Tasks were divided so that Ågren facilitated more of those meetings where narrative work was done, and Suoninen facilitated the meetings related to the designing and creating the pieces. While the other researcher's focus was on facilitation, the other researcher made observations according to the systematic observation model. Data collection by focus group interview was executed in one session where both researchers were present, and the interview questions were prepared together beforehand. The gathered data was divided as two equal sections, one for both researcher, and transcribing and first round of analysing was executed according to those sections. Data analysis was executed first individually and then the researchers together. Writing tasks in this thesis was divided between researchers, all the time considering the texts written by the other researcher and making comments on those. Conclusions and findings were discussed and written together.

Table of Contents

Appendix 1: Examples of writing exercises, first meeting

Appendix 2: Examples of writing exercises, second meeting

Appendix 3: Shooting script template

Appendix 4: Filming permit sheet

Appendix 5: Advertisement for the project

Appendix 6: Participant research information sheet

Appendix 7: Participant research consent sheet

1 Introduction

This study examines the empowering elements of a creative storytelling project for gender-diverse people. Our interest is to research which elements of creative activity, group dynamics and facilitation are essential to promote empowerment for gender-diverse people and how to describe and understand them. We created and facilitated a project called *TruthStory*, where gender-diverse people had the opportunity to tell their stories the way they wanted to tell them and to create an audio-visual piece of the story. The participants were able to choose what kind of story they wanted to tell about themselves and there were no external restrictions placed on the story in terms of topic, genre or style. When the stories and the pieces were finished, a premiere took place where the audio-visual pieces were presented in a safe and respectful environment. In this thesis, we study elements that may have promoted wellbeing in the *TruthStory* project through analysing data that was collected with systematic observation of the group and with a focus group interview.

We chose gender-diverse people as participants for this study for various ethics-related reasons. Firstly, gender-diverse people are an important focus group whose wellbeing we want to promote because in our perspective people belonging to this group have not had full human rights in the Finnish society (Ihmisoikeusliitto 2020.) We also believe this topic needs more representation and visibility as gender-diverse people have been an under-represented and -acknowledged group in society, thus continue to be in a vulnerable position (e.g., Jaskari & Keski-Rahkonen 2021: 1787). The human rights perspective (Valtioneuvosto 2023) and reduction of intersectional discrimination and experienced minority stress (Jaskari & Keski-Rahkonen 2021: 1781–1785) on the wellbeing of gender minorities are important ethical perspectives for carrying out this study. We wanted to give a platform for the voices of the participants in the way they wanted to utilise it. In addition to the perspective of justice and the realisation of human rights, gender diversity and equality are important values for us researchers personally. The inner struggles of gender-diverse people close to

us and the resistance towards them by society have touched us deeply, and we want to increase the wellbeing of this group of people through our own actions.

According to Seta (a Finnish human rights and civil society organization founded in 1974), gender diversity includes both gender minorities and gender majorities, because gender is a multifaceted phenomenon that cannot be divided into two clearly distinguishable, opposite genders. In addition to male and female genders, a person can be something in between, both at the same time, something completely different or completely genderless. Gender expression is not only biological but is a multifaceted continuum consisting of genetic, social, hormonal, developmental, physiological, psychological, and cultural traits. Trans people are all those who do not define themselves as belonging only to the gender assigned to them at birth. They can be transgender, transvestite, genderless, gender-diverse or intersex. Cis-gender people are people who express their assigned gender at birth, and they form the gender majority. (Seta 2023.)

Gender diversity, its different expressions and experiences have been common in all times and in all cultures. It is part of being a human. Everyone should have the freedom to define their own gender identity and its expression in the way they want. (Sukupuolen moninaisuuden osaamiskeskus 2023.) In this study we refer to gender-diverse people as anyone who identifies as non-binary and consider themselves belonging to a gender minority. The participants have the right to self-determine their gender status in this project, as they should have a right to do in every part of their life too.

The revised Trans Law[1] entered into a force in Finland on April 3, 2023. In this law, the legal confirmation of gender is differentiated from medical treatments and examinations, so a person can be confirmed based on their own statement as belonging to a different gender than the one they were originally registered with in population information system. In the future, legal gender confirmation does

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[1] The revised law (https://www.finlex.fi/fi/laki/ajantasa/2023/20230295) enables an adult Finnish citizen to confirm their gender in the population information system by presenting a statement that they permanently feel that they belong to the gender to be confirmed. The repealed law (https://www.finlex.fi/fi/laki/ajantasa/kumotut/2002/20020563) required a medical report and a certificate of infertility for this.

not require a medical diagnosis or infertility. The purpose of the law is to strengthen the right to self-determination, non-discrimination, and personal integrity. (Valtioneuvosto 2023.) The late change of this law speaks volumes about the inequality that exists in the deep structures of the Finnish society and, above all, about the discriminatory attitudes towards the members of the gender minority.

Representation – i.e. the representation or presence of something in a place, the different characteristics and identities of people being visible – creates reality and that is how minorities become part of a norm. In the long run, this kind of action reduces discrimination and makes the reality in which we live visible. One of the important goals of our project was to enable the creation of gender-diverse representation and visibility through audio-visual pieces by reaching people belonging to the majority population. Awareness of intersectionality was a significant factor for us in our goals to bring the stories of gender minorities to light. According to the Institute of Health and Welfare, intersectionality refers to how a person's social status is simultaneously affected by their biological and social gender, as well as their other characteristics. These characteristics include, for example, social class, sexual orientation, age, origin, and ability to function. The interaction of these elements affects individual experiences of discrimination. Intersectionality means how these differences affect the position of people simultaneously and how they affect each other. (THL 2023.)

According to Jaskari and Keski-Rahkonen (2021) minority stress is defined as a chronic burden caused by social and structural conditions which are due to the hetero- and cis-normativity in society, with which minorities may experience discrimination and inferiority. Experiencing minority stress does not require everyone to have the same exposure to discrimination, it can also affect a person who has not personally been discriminated against or mistreated. Minority stress is one explanation for the health differences between LGBTIQ+ people and the general population: people belonging to sexual and gender minorities have a higher risk of physical or mental illness. In order for a person belonging to a gender minority to live a life according to their perceived gender, they often must come out in public. This can expose them to different experiences of

discrimination in society – such as gender markings in official documents. By influencing the causes of minority stress at the societal level and by supporting persons belonging to sexual and gender minorities, their wellbeing and health can be improved. (Jaskari & Keski-Rahkonen 2021: 1781–1785.) We hope the audio-visual pieces created and published as part of the *TruthStory* project would reach as many people as possible and offer representation and visibility for others who are reflecting their own gender identity. On a bigger scale we wish to bring awareness of the lives of gender-diverse people and reduce discrimination.

In Chapter 2 we describe in detail the practical implementation of the *TruthStory* project, reflecting on the reasons for the approaches we and the participants chose. In Chapter 3: Conceptual framework, we focus on the theory of empowerment that led the research and the implementation of the project, as well as previous studies on the use of creative methods as a promoter of empowerment and wellbeing. The fourth chapter deals with the actual implementation of the research, including the research task and question and methodological starting points. We also go through data collection and analysis methods and consider research ethics issues throughout the research and the implementation of the project. The fifth chapter opens the findings that we have obtained through data analysis. Finally, in the conclusion and discussion, we discuss the meaning of the key results, reflect on our choices throughout the study, and consider future directions for researching the topic.

2 The TruthStory project

As a part of this study, we planned and facilitated a creative storytelling project called *TruthStory* that was intended for gender-diverse people. The *TruthStory* project was built into a creative entity where the background of both researchers was utilised in the best possible way. The project consisted of meetings and making of audio-visual pieces. Suoninen's experience in the field of culture and arts enabled the empowerment of the participants and the concrete making of the audio-visual pieces. Ågren's experience in the social sector made it possible to facilitate the meetings and create a safer space, which also enabled empowerment. We as researchers created rules together with the participants and worked to make the project a safer space for everyone (Suomen YK-liitto). The overall purpose of the project was to use different kinds of creative approaches for enable empowerment, and the concrete outcome of the project are digital audio-visual pieces.

Our study involves creative activities: a group of gender-diverse people created their own stories and made representation of gender-diverse people through creative activities such as visual and performing arts. During the process the participants wrote a story they wanted to tell, it could have been either a true story or a fictional one. All participants chose to centre their stories around gender perspective. After the stories were finalised, audio-visual pieces were created in cooperation with the participants. It was an important value in our project that the participants could tell their stories without interference or editing.

In practice, the project was carried out within nine weeks. First there were four group meetings once a week, two and a half hours each. After four meetings there were filming and recording sessions with individual participants. After filming, there was a four-week editing, sonic design and composing break before a premiere for the pieces. After the premiere we met for the last time for feedback and held group interview to collect data for this research.

In the first meeting for the *TruthStory* project, we presented the project idea, constructed rules with the participants and went through the contracts needed. We discussed about the project's goals on both a general and a practical level and clarified that the goal is to create a safer space for everyone. We asked the participants to think and share what they need to feel safe and to participate to the best of their ability. Important values that we researcher-facilitators brought up were everyone's right to self-definition regarding gender and other characteristics, the right to talk about themselves only as much as they wanted and to respect others. The participants agreed on the rules for discussing about the meetings outside the project and the rules for commenting as follows: "You may not talk about the project's matters outside; you may only talk about your own process." Commenting in the meetings was hoped to be in the form of "I feel, that", so that it would be as sensitive as possible. Overall, the participants hoped for an interactive, good-spirited, and respectful discussion and giving encouraging feedback throughout the meetings. We agreed on the use of a "time out" sign that can be shown, and that it is allowed to leave the room if a situation or conversation triggers any trauma. We also agreed that if this were to happen, the possible situation would be resolved together so that no one would have an unpleasant experience.

We also wanted that, even though very tough and powerful things were shared during the project, these situations would always be resolved before the end of the individual meeting. In addition, it was made clear to the participants that they can always contact us researcher-facilitators and discuss topics or concerns that come to mind. Also, it would always be an option not to share the texts and other creative material made during the project with other participants. We also understood the fact that the participants would play a very important role themselves in creating a safer space, and that is something we cannot completely influence in advance.

Together, we went through the project step by step, and the participants had an opportunity to affect the project's schedule and implementation by asking the participants how they would like to carry out the actual working on the story: did they wish to work on it in the group meetings, or would they instead prefer there

to be various reflection exercises that stimulate storytelling in the meetings, and the participants could write the actual story at home? The participants unanimously decided that they wanted to write the story at home and use the time of the meetings for various creative exercises. Throughout the project, the participants were also free to choose which writing exercises and other creative activities they did and with what effort. The participants always had the opportunity to influence the implementation if they would not have been satisfied with it. When planning the project, we were prepared for the fact that the participants have the opportunity to influence the structure of the project. We had planned various alternative exercises and were ready to change the plan if that was desired. We had an introduction round where everyone could introduce themselves, after which we had reflection exercises that stimulated the narration of the story. They dealt with e.g., planning alternative futures and different concrete ways to work on the story (Appendix 1). The exercises given to the participants were planned in such a way that they were low-threshold exercises with open topics from which the participants could also get inspiration for other aspects in their lives, not only for the project. The most intriguing question for the participants seemed to be: What would you do if you were not afraid? At the end of the meeting, we held feedback round and asked what kind of thoughts this meeting had evoked.

We reminded everyone that at every stage of the project there is an opportunity to talk with the researcher-facilitators if any questions or concerns arise. We explained the data collection approaches for the projects, that entailed keeping a researcher's diary and observing group activities, as well as the focus group interview at the end. We specified that we aim to handle the data in a way that the participants cannot be recognised from the observations, but that we could not guarantee full anonymity (please see details regarding data collection in Subchapter 4.3).

In the second meeting we went through different ways to tell a story by doing creative exercises that promoted this (Appendix 2). The writing assignments, which served as an aid to writing their own story in this project, were reflective and some slightly therapeutic. Their purpose was to arouse thoughts towards

positivity and empowerment, what is good in life and what is possible. We used a lot of consideration when developing and choosing writing assignments, because the right kind of questions and exercises can have a significant thinking-shaping effect and as a result, they can promote wellbeing. Most participants had already started to plan their own story and shared about those ideas with each other. There was a lot of discussion among the participants that happened in an encouraging and empathetic way. The conversation sometimes went deep and into very personal and sensitive matters. The participants offered each other peer support when needed. There was a lot of reflection in the meetings about what they want to tell with their story: is it a political statement or can it be an empowering story just for themselves? As facilitators, we reminded the participants regularly of the empowering purpose of the project. We did different exercises that the participants wanted to read aloud and share with each other. We did not have time to finish all of them, so the participants wanted to do them at home. The general opinion seemed to be that they were excited about the project and the participants were fully on board.

In the third meeting the audio-visual pieces were planned. At first, we went through thoughts and feelings about the project so far and the conversation lasted longer than planned, because the topics were very serious, yet good spirited. We presented the basic idea and visualisation for the audio-visual pieces and discussed possibilities and limits that technology might bring. We wanted the pieces to have a consistent visual look, yet so that each piece/story would be its own, unique piece. After this, the other researcher-facilitator with a culture and arts background held a short discussion privately with each participant. This time was used to start a shooting script, where all technical, visual, and other details would be gathered. While the individual discussions were going on, the others, guided by the other researcher-facilitator, did vision board work on a large piece of cardboard by cutting pictures and text from magazines, painting, and drawing. The purpose of the vision board was to give a concrete opportunity to freely design a visual look that pleases them, from which they could possibly get inspiration for the realisation of the pieces as well.

The fourth meeting was entirely focused on planning the pieces, and it took place on the small stage of the Peacock theatre in Helsinki, which is a Linnanmäki amusement park's acknowledged venue. The audio-visual pieces were also filmed and recorded there. At first, we as a group talked about the project and the feelings it evoked, but we limited the time of the conversation so that we would have time to plan the filming. The participants individually discussed their personal plans, and everyone was allotted a longer slot to finalise plans and to create a shooting script (Appendix 3) for the filming day. Shooting script is written and visual representation in which the material to be filmed is presented in a cartoon-like manner. The shooting script is made so that the makers of the pieces can visualize the different scenes. The shooting script consisted for example the colours and lighting used in the scenes.

The participants' stories were already down to the last touch, so they wanted to practise reciting them on the stage and present their stories to each other out loud. In practice, when a participant was in the filming discussion, the others recited and shared their stories. The stories seemed to be very moving and powerful and provided a platform for identification and empowerment for the other participants. The participants expressed repeatedly and in different ways how the encouraging feedback received and given among the participants felt good and meaningful to them. In addition, the stories often provoked commentary and discussion and sometimes brought to the surface something that the author of the story had not even thought of.

Filming of the pieces took place on two consecutive days. Everyone was allotted two hours of shooting and recording time. Before the participants arrived at the scene, technology had been set up and the scenes was prepared according to the shooting scripts. First, the story was recorded on tape, after which we went through how it felt to read the story. The audio tape gave us both the duration for the piece itself and helped the participant interact with the story while filming. After recording the story, the visual part of the story was filmed while the recording was playing in the background. Finally, we signed the filming permits (Appendix 4) and analysed the atmosphere of the filming situation. Each participant had their own story and a vision of their own piece. Some had clearer plans than others,

but we all came to an end result that pleased them. The situations were sensitive, and the atmosphere was relaxed. We received a lot of praise from the participants for the project and without exception, feedback on its relevance to the participants.

The premiere for the pieces were held at the Peacock theatre. The participants had been able to invite their friends and relatives to the event, in addition there were other audience members through Metropolia UAS and those who helped with the project. We met with the participants before the event started and raised a toast to the joint project. More than 40 people participated in the event, and for security reasons, we decided on a name-on-a-list procedure. At the beginning of the event, we researchers presented the project to the audience and thanked the participants after which the audio-visual pieces were displayed. After the performance, the participants were invited to the stage, and they talked about their own experience participating in the *TruthStory* project. There was almost no end to the standing ovation, and the audience praised the touching pieces and the meaningful moments.

The fifth meeting took place less than a week after the premiere and the purpose of it was to organise a group interview, where we collected the interview data for this study. We offered the participants coffee and cake, during which we briefly exchanged information and discussed the emotions evoked by the premiere. The time was limited; therefore, we agreed that we would meet informally afterwards to continue the discussion. We carried out the interview by talking around the table and the interview was recorded for later analysis (details of the data collection are presented in Subchapter 4.3). Finally, we went through our traditional round about the mood of the moment, what we had done in the end of every meeting we had, where the participants and us researcher-facilitators shared our feelings about the gathering.

Out of the five participants who originally enrolled to participate in the *TruthStory* project, one dropped out and the remaining four were involved in the entire project from start to finish. All participants had signed up for this project voluntarily after seeing our advertisement (Appendix 5) for the project. The only criteria we set for

participation were the experience of belonging to a gender minority and Finnish language skills. The participants also had to be legally adults: 18 years or older. An important value for us was that participation in the project was not restricted by any external parties, such as an organisation but that anyone meeting the criteria would have the opportunity to participate if they wanted to, given that our advertisement had reached them. We did not want to produce a project for a ready-made group within of any organisation, because someone possibly might have had to participate against their will while at the same time, some external entity may have limited participation of a possible willing person.

In the *TruthStory* project, audio-visual pieces were planned to be created as part of the sessions, where the story created during the project would come to life through the experience of visuals, soundscape, language, and gender. Behind the pieces, in addition to feelings and emotions, there is a research-based science. According to Richardson et al. (2020) most of the time, sound is something that can be directly sensed, concretely heard, and physically felt. Voice has many tasks and roles in cultures, with which people can communicate not only with the phonetic characteristics and the tone of words and written texts, but also with talking about feelings and moods. (Richardson et al. 2020: 21.) In the pieces that we created during this project, the soundscape consisted of the story read aloud and the soundscape supporting the story in the background.

The visual material of the audio-visual pieces is an extension of the stories, an assistant to the sound and a reinforcement of the image. The idea is that the visual material should be small gestured but powerful, strongly supporting the story and not drawing attention away from it. With the framing, perspective, and dimensions of the image, roles are set for the subject, we can even say that we create a character for it. Kuusamo presents that the way in which the image is formed, for example with the help of video cuts and close-ups, the framing and hanging of a painting or the echo of the sounds of a spatial work in the exhibition space, is closely connected to how meanings are attached to it. The important point here is that these unique elements call into question the possibility that any image could be repeated exactly the same. (Kuusamo et al. 2020: 123.)

In the pieces, several different means of creative expression and methods of influence for example storytelling and image and sound are used in an overlapping manner to bring a powerful narrative message to the viewer. Lappalainen et al. (2020) propose that "Seeing different cultural practices and forms of communication equally as texts emphasised that all communication - including pictorial - is based on codes and conventions that require interpretation." (Lappalainen et al. 2020: 173.) In this project, the form of creative activities or art is a mixture of several different mediums, such as images, sounds, or texts. A medium can refer to the production process of creative activities or art, or the channels of its dissemination. (Hietala et al. 2020: 206.) Several mediums are used in the *TruthStory* project so that the participants' expression is flexible, more diverse, and different mediums enable different opportunities of interaction.

3 Conceptual framework

In this chapter we discuss the conceptual framework of the study. It is based on the theory of empowerment, which has guided our study, including the practical implementation of the *TruthStory* project. First, we cover empowerment theory comprehensively: what empowerment is and what elements may affect it. After that, through previous research and theoretical knowledge, we discuss how empowerment has previously been promoted through creative activities and various creative methods, as well as what these previous studies have revealed on the matter.

3.1 Empowerment theory

The conceptual framework that guides our research is largely based on the theory of empowerment that we connect with the elements of wellbeing-promotion in and through the *TruthStory* project. Based on pertaining research, achieving an inner sense of power is one significant condition for increasing wellbeing; therefore, empowerment is a central conceptual approach in this research. According to Siitonen (1999), empowerment is a process-like event: the main principle of which is that empowerment is a process that originates from the person themself and empowerment cannot be given to someone else. Empowerment can, however, be supported with various enabling approaches, and getting to know its definitions helps in planning these. Empowerment can be defined as an inner feeling of power that releases one's own resources. (Siitonen 1999: 61, 189.) It can entail for example, self-confidence of traumatised people or the promotion of sense of hope and creativity (Adams 2003: 184; Siitonen 1999: 61, 189).

Although, according to Siitonen (1999), empowerment cannot be delivered to another person, in practice, a context may facilitate an inner experience of empowerment, which means that empowerment is more likely to happen in a certain environment than in another. An enabling operating environment in which appreciation, freedom of choice and safety are realised promotes empowerment,

strengthening of self-image and permits both personal and organisational wellbeing. Freedom, responsibility, appreciation, trust, context, atmosphere, and positivity play a key role in achieving empowerment. These sections are interconnected and a significant deficiency in one of these can weaken or prevent the building of empowerment and its maintenance. (Siitonen 1999: 61, 93–97.) Although empowerment is first and foremost an internal process, it can be applied in practical work so that employees and other people can promote both their own development and that of others (Adams 2003: 182). In the *TruthStory* project, we strived to enable empowerment by paying attention to the attuning to the situation and planning of a safer space, as well as the selection of the creative activities themselves. We discussed the possibilities and risks of the filming situation as means to promote or hinder empowerment and we tried to consider problematic elements, such as the power relations of the filming situation. In the planning of the entire project, the conceptual framework based on the notion of empowerment, guided our choices.

Empowerment as a process is personal, yet social. The process is connected to trusting one's own possibilities, one's vision of oneself, one's own will and one's own goals. Empowerment is influenced by other people, social structures, and circumstances. The sub-processes that are discussed within empowerment theory can be connected to each other in a meaningful way, for example through the experience of acceptance and the strengthening of freedom of action. However, sub-processes are not shown through cause-and-effect relationships. (Siitonen 1999: 117–118.) When a person is empowered, their wellbeing can start to be built from their own starting point. It enables a real experience of wellbeing. For example, if the structures in people's work environment do not sufficiently support their empowerment, then in extreme cases human rights cannot be actualised. (Siitonen 1999: 189–190.) When planning the *TruthStory* project, we thought about the social aspect of the empowerment process, because we could not know what kind of members would apply for the project. When planning the creative activities, there is always a risk that the mutual interaction of the participants will not work despite high-quality facilitation, and at worst this could act as an element that negatively affects or even prevents empowerment. In planning the project, we discussed possible negative interaction situations and

planned different operating models for them. We planned various exercises for the meetings that promote teamwork and tried to limit the exercises so that they would at least not act as causes of conflict. Fortunately, empathic, and socially skilled people applied to the project, whose mutual interaction served as one of the biggest elements enabling empowerment.

According to Siitonen, the information provided by emotions is important in the empowerment process, because through them a person can construe safety, atmosphere, acceptance, and freedom of action. They also provide evaluative information about the interaction between people, and with this information a person forms an idea of their own abilities and other beliefs. If, through emotions, a person has assessed their own chances to succeed and achieve their goals as possible, they may strive towards them. Optimism and positive approach enable personal, psychological resources, and the achievement of the goal becomes possible. (Siitonen 1999: 151–152.)

Experiences of success are very important in terms of empowerment, they relate to self-image and building self-esteem. Success is strongly associated with building trust, acceptance, and an atmosphere. When a person has experiences of success, it can increase the courage to try out new things and take risks. With this, creativity and a person's own inner strengths can be released, as experiences of success increase courage and self-confidence. (Siitonen 1999: 154.) When planning the project, we considered it particularly important that the creative exercises and the structure of the meetings are planned in such a way that the possibility of failure is minimised. We wanted to enable many ways to realise creativity and gain experiences of success.

Elements preventing empowerment are naturally all dimensions that promote oppression and inequality, such as racism, sexism, ableism, and other forms of discrimination. Empowerment should therefore be based on anti-oppressive values and practices in all areas of activity. (Adams 2003: 67, 189.) Community empowerment can also be prevented by the prevailing culture, atmosphere and for example, legislation because communities and the society around them interact with each other. If society does not allow one's voice to be heard or the

opportunity to question prevailing practices, the possibility of empowerment is suppressed. (Järvinen 2009: 15.) When planning the project and research, we took serious consideration of discriminatory elements that could act as obstacles to empowerment and tried to avoid them by all means. We focused especially on creating a safer and permissive space and on the individual's freedom to decide how they participate in the creative activities. Each participant could always decide if they wanted to do the exercises that we gave as options. They could choose how much they invested in the exercises. Everyone also had the right not to do the exercises and it would not have affected on the participation in the project.

In practical work, at its worst, practices aiming for empowerment can be modified by professionals or those in a position or power, so that they fit neatly into professional frameworks and not actually change the professional practices, treatment or evaluation of the people receiving the services (Adams 2003: 4). According to Siitonen (1999), it is sometimes difficult to know what kind of conditions are optimal for enabling another person's self-determination and thereby empowerment. The challenge is also the reality of a person's freedom of choice; are the choices they themselves have made really in accordance with their own will or are they resulting from manipulative use of power. (Siitonen 1999: 125–127). The creative activities that promote empowerment must always take place at the participant's pace; a professional cannot force the empowerment process on a person. The person should always have the opportunity to participate and control the process and its pace. It is also important to note that empowerment takes time; thus, to allow a sufficiently long timeframe for the goals. The balance of power between those who help and those who are helped must tilt in favour of those who are helped. (Adams 2003: 187–190.)

Creating a safe atmosphere and confidentiality requires mutual acceptance of the parties and the experience of being welcomed and valued. It plays an important role in promoting empowerment. (Siitonen 1999: 144–145.) The empowerment of individuals and organisations is always influenced by the relationships between them because they always interact with their operating environment (Järvinen 2009: 16). The environment in this project was something we could

concretely influence with our actions as a promoter of empowerment. We consciously created an equal space with the participants by articulating our goals and giving them the opportunity to decide about the implementation of the project, within certain framework of the project. We wanted to implement the project independently without a partner organisation, so that we would be free from possible rules, norms, or principles that organisations sometimes must follow. It was also important to us that the participants could sign up for the project themselves, if such an activity was inviting to them, and that no one would have to come under compulsion or for someone's benefit. Participation with the right motivation has a positive effect on the atmosphere. Although empowerment can also occur in unfavourable environments (Järvinen 2009:15), our goal was to do our best to create the environmental framework in such a way that it would not be an obstacle to the process of empowerment.

Since empowerment is first and foremost a process that originates from the person themselves, defining and studying it is not without problems. It is possible to try to theoretically structure the sub-processes of empowerment or the meaning relationships between them, but it is difficult to demonstrate cause-and-effect relationships. Empowerment orientation should not be forcible but should be enabling. With subtle solutions, it is possible to support the empowerment of another; however, because of these subtle elements involved, analysing the empowerment process can be challenging. (Siitonen 1999: 91–93, 99, 118.)

An empowered person may have a variety of qualities generally regarded as positive, but due to the diversity of people, it is impossible to create a definition that could be used to measure or evaluate the qualities of an empowered person. A person's characteristics are also affected by the environment and the time. (Siitonen 1999: 93, 118, 155.) Measuring empowerment in communities is challenging because it is difficult to separate individual agency from the community's collective action (Järvinen 2009: 15). Although the study of empowerment is challenging, its principles can still be utilised when the aim is to find out the elements that enable empowerment in a certain context. It is also possible to study experiences that prevent empowerment. (Siitonen 1999: 187.)

When studying empowerment, perceptions of the impact of one's own activities on the environment and vice versa should also be analysed (Järvinen 2009: 16).

3.2 Empowerment in and through creative activities

The freedom to self-actualisation and creativity belongs to everyone, and it is important to ensure that cultural rights can be realised regardless of place of residence, health status, age, or gender experience. Creative activities can make it easier to deal with one's own emotions, open a channel for interaction, direct activities to new things such as hobbies, increase faith in the future and promote rehabilitation. (Huhtinen-Hildén et al. 2019.) Creative activities can also be used to create a safer space that strengthens connections between people through shared experience as well as the connection with oneself. Having fun and creating beautiful pieces of art is also important, and this experience can contribute to deepening the connections between people, even if they come from different backgrounds. (Corbin et al. 2021: 348–349.) In order for culture, art, and social and healthcare professionals to promote health and wellbeing, is to adopt new ways of thinking, working and to examine present attitudes. When one recognises the wellbeing-promoting meanings of creative activities they can promote it in their own work and activities. Through those activities one can express oneself through creativity and putting oneself in the role of others, telling a past, present, or future story related to one's gender and also showing another culture.

Based on our literature review, increasing research is being conducted around gender diversity, and creative approaches are used a lot in this context; however, this is a relatively new phenomenon. An interesting study is Laatikainen's master's thesis from the University of Lapland. In this research, Laatikainen studied what kinds of elements are needed to create a safer space in the workshop activities of young people belonging to gender minorities. Based on Laatikainen's analysis, a safer space consists of encounters, peer support, clear rules and breaking stereotypes made possible by creative activities." (Laatikainen, 2020: 2.) The operating environment of this research was the member organisation of Seta ry.

In their conclusion, Laatikainen says that the atmosphere of a safer space is built by the overlapping contribution of different things and that the most significant elements were making art, peer support, rules, and breaking stereotypes. In addition, they noted that all the workshops were different in tone depending on the participants' mutual relationships and topics. The facilitators actions also contributed to the creation of a safer space. Laatikainen also emphasises that it is impossible to predict the atmosphere of the workshops in advance, even if you have prepared the course of the workshop. (Laatikainen, 2020: 64.) We wanted to think and plan the content of our project carefully so that each time there were extra exercises that could be changed to other exercises or left undone depending on the situation. If, for some reason, an exercise seemed too difficult for some of the participants, we would offer alternative exercises or rethink the content of it. In addition, we asked the participants in the first meeting what type of exercises they would like to do, and whether they would prefer to work on their own story at home or together during the project. We wanted to take the wishes and needs of the participants into account as much as possible, but so that the project had a clear structure and schedule.

Based on Laatikainen's findings, creative activities may have a significant influence on the creation of a safer space in the background, and it gave perspectives to the participants and united the group. Another significant element was peer support and a space where conversations were confidential. Laatikainen's analysis also states that their interviewees found it good that the work was guided and free in the right ratio. (Laatikainen, 2020: 53, 64–65.) In the *TruthStory* project we wanted to create the right kind of environment for creative activities, and open possibilities for empowerment and wellbeing.

Another interesting study is Minna Lappalainen's thesis "Lupa näkyä, lupa puhua" (Permission to be visible, permission to speak up) which examines the artworks of Kris Grey, an American gender queer artist, during their residency in Kuopio in 2012. Grey uses ceramics, sculpture, sound, performance, and live art in their work. Through the analysis of Grey's work, Lappalainen explores the handling of the diversity of gender and sexuality through creative activities such as art, as well as the interfaces between art, and social and health care. (Lappalainen,

2012: 3–4.) Their research material also consists of interviews, questionnaires, and observations. Lappalainen partially cooperated with a youth group (people under 30) from Seta ry.

According to Lappalainen's analysis, Greys project affected both the community and its individuals by strengthening the community and creating new social relationships. The experience as a whole was significant. (Lappalainen, 2012.) From the results, we could conclude that participation in the project itself, interaction with other participants (community) and self-expression are themselves the catalysts of a meaningful experience, and the content of the exercises does not necessarily play a significant (main) role, but Lappalainen states that art that takes a stand is perceived as meaningful if it touches the creator's own world of experience. In Lappalainen's study, one of the participants doubted that speaking alone would not help to increase tolerance. They suggested that instead, for example, a book, a movie, or that someone would come and tell them about their own life. (Lappalainen 2020: 2, 73.) In this context, we can think that the *TruthStory* project can be important for creating representation and visibility to gender-diverse people. It could also have meanings through representation for others than those who participated in the project.

Lappalainen's research emphasises the personality of the artist, Grey, and their significant role in terms of the result of the entire project. Grey is described as an approachable and interesting person. (Lappalainen, 2012: 79.) From this we can conclude that our roles and personalities as facilitators also affect the creation of the meaning of the project and the safer space experienced by the participants. We thought a lot about how the project and the roles of us researcher-facilitators would be structured so that we could create the best possible space that enables creativity and trust.

Grey's artworks were partly performances (related to the ANTI-festival) in which random passers-by could also join in. In that respect, this study differs from our project. In our study, participants had to apply for the project and were therefore already aware of what they are getting into. In addition, they had time to think

about their own goals and desires regarding the project. This would hopefully reduce confusion even though the application notice for the project was rather short worded and did not reveal the deeper idea behind the audio-visual pieces.

The purpose of Grey's performance was to create a temporary community where everyone was welcome and where everyone is equal (Lappalainen 2012: 82). It was also important for us researcher-facilitators to create a space where no one would feel as an outsider, and which would enable good interaction and discussions and potentially great emotions. However, Grey's performance was in a public space, and we made our project private instead of public, so that there would be better opportunities for a safer space and community to emerge.

In their book "Essays on art, philosophy and politics", Teemu Mäki presents their vision of art as a holistic form of both philosophy and politics. According to Mäki, a piece of art should be therapeutic for its creator, so that it would also be therapeutic for the audience. They state that "subjectivity in arts is primarily in the material and the way of processing, but the end result is hoped for, if not generalisation, then at least a general touchingness." The artist's own reflection does not end when the piece is made and presented but is permanently unfinished. The public is invited to join in the common reflection. (Mäki 2005: 9, 150.) Art or creative activities can give forums for encounters that would not happen otherwise. Art is shareable and can be as therapeutic for the audience as it is for the creator. Accordingly, it is important to acknowledge that the *TruthStory* project was not about art therapy but a platform for the participants to express themselves. Mäki states that in therapy, the aim is to face problems honestly, while in therapeutic pursuits, such as hobbies, the aim is often to forget the problems (Mäki 2005: 150).

Narrativity was chosen as the key approach in our study because it can be an approach for redefining oneself and processing issues. Narratives are personal and subjective, told to others in the form of stories (Gale et al 2003). Narrative can be used as an instrument by helping the individual shape a new kind of self-story. With helpful questions like "How would you like your life to change?" can be helped to visualise new possibilities. Narration and stories can also be used

in art and music therapies. (Hall & Powell 2011.) Narratives have long been used in all areas of health care, especially in psychiatry and psychotherapy, as they can be used to create new meanings and understanding (Gale et al. 2003). Previous research suggests that the use of narratives in mental health work can improve patients' quality of life, recovery, and independent coping. Through narratives, patients can connect past events and integrate them with, for example, previous traumas that manifest in the present. The stories may also provide significant information about the client and their support networks. (Hall & Powell 2011.) Although our creative activities were not therapy and the participants were not patients, the opportunities offered by stories in mental health work and the positive results obtained from them gave us the grounds to use storytelling as an approach for promoting empowerment. Sharing stories in a group can act as a therapeutic intervention, when other participants can encourage the development of one's own story – thereby one's change (Gale et al. 2003). According to Freeman, identity can be constructed again and again through communicative interaction. Through stories and the poetic world, there is an opportunity to open a wider truth about humanity and life and how one can try to approach them. (Freeman 2001: 290–297.)

Through the stories, our project also aimed to reach people belonging to the majority population and to be able to create connections and normalise gender diversity. Narrativity and stories are a culturally unifying way of understanding the experiences of others, as stories provide contextual details and reveal personality characteristics (Hall & Powell 2011). Our goal is that the audio-visual pieces could also be shown in contexts where they could reach people who are not familiar with gender diversity. The stories could touch the viewers and offer understanding and experiences of identification. Even if people come from very different starting points or share a very different world of values, there is often something in humanity that connects and touches and thereby promotes connections between people. According to Freeman (2001), the prerequisite for a story to be understood is that it touches something familiar in people in a significant way. What makes a story interesting is if it moves beyond the familiar and is in some way contrary to expectations. However, the story must remain close to the feeling of familiarity so that understanding is possible. (Freeman 2001: 288.)

No one's stories are solely their own but are deeply connected to the cultural world in which people live in. The relationship between personal identity and narrative is the result of various changes in history. (Freeman 2001: 284–287.) In addition to the fact that these stories could act as elements promoting empowerment and creating connection, they can also act as a comfort and peer support for other people who are pondering about their gender. The importance of representation in terms of wellbeing can be significant when you see other people experiencing something similar. The core of the *Truthstory* project starts from the narratives. The participants have the opportunity to tell their own truth and define both themselves and their identity from their own starting points, not guided by anyone else.

From the field of cultural wellbeing, we could highlight two themes: prevention of various mental and physical illnesses and exclusion, and promotion of wellbeing and health (Houni et al 2021: 19). The *TruthStory* project includes both perspectives: one purpose of this study is that this project would act as a creator of connections in many ways: that it would be possible for the participants to group together around creative activities and share common experiences. In addition, the purpose is that each meeting would provide an opportunity for meaningful experiences because that alone is a valuable and a wellbeing-promoting activity. The healing potential of creativity was the point of view we aimed to promote. One of our goals was to create connections with the finished audio-visual pieces: when reaching the public, the pieces could act as a means of creating a connection between both gender-diverse people and the mainstream population and serve as peer support for those processing their own gender.

4 Implementation of the study

In this chapter, we present our research task and question, followed by methodology and methods behind qualitative research. We then move on to explaining our data collection process, including the systematic observation of the group and focus group interview. The subchapter on data analysis reveals the models we used and how they are used in this study, as well as examples of codes and themes found in the data. We end the chapter by explaining the research ethics behind the practices and our research.

4.1 Research task and question

The purpose of this research is to implement a creative project promoting empowerment for gender-diverse people and study which elements influence the realisation of the project's goals. The aim is to describe and increase understanding of these elements and find out what their significance is for the participants' empowerment and wellbeing. Another important aspect is to give visibility and create representation for gender-diverse people. In this research, we study the wellbeing promoting elements from the perspective of empowerment theory. The application of empowerment theory guided both the implementation of the *TruthStory* project and the formulation of the research task and question.

The research aims to answer the question: In what ways can a creative project for gender-diverse people enhance participants' empowerment?

4.2 Methodological starting points

This master's thesis is a qualitative, empirical research study. The purpose of qualitative research is to understand subjective and individual experiences, as well as to gain in-depth information about the researched topic. Through them, it is possible to obtain information that is often difficult to express quantitatively or measure with numbers. (Jensen 2020: 10.) In qualitative research, the depth of meaning is valued, and the purpose is to produce descriptive data. These approaches are most often used in exploratory or descriptive research. (Leavy 2017: 124.) The advantage of qualitative methods is that there is an opportunity to focus on a small group of people or objects, so it is possible to delve into the topic properly. This allows the results to be multi-layered and contain different nuances. (Jensen 2020: 10.) The process of analysing and interpreting data in qualitative research answers the question of what the information in the data means and what its meaning is (Leavy 2017: 150).

The qualitative methodology is inductive, constructivist and interpretive, and by using such an approach, quality of research can be achieved (Jensen 2020: 10). The method usually works within two major paradigms: interpretive/constructivist and critical. Interpretive/constructivist focuses on interactions between people and their interpretation: the processes by which events and situations are given meaning. This paradigm includes a phenomenological approach to research, which examines how people experience the topic under study. The critical paradigm is strongly related to social justice and has been developed as a critique of unequal power relations. This category includes e.g. postmodernism, feminist, and queer studies. In these studies, power relations are at the centre, and they examine inequality at all levels. (Leavy 2017: 129–131) Our research approach is phenomenological and due to our participants, our research has features of critical paradigm. Although our research does not directly examine the power relations in society, they cannot be avoided when studying the experiences of gender-diverse people or any other minority. Power relations are present and part of the research in all studies related to minorities, and being aware of them is part of the ethical research procedure.

The topic of qualitative research must be clearly stated and the research on the topic must have meaning and value. The research topic must be based on previous studies and literature, and the research must show how they are linked to the researcher's understanding of the topic. The research questions are typically open, and the research approach is often holistic. (Leavy 2017: 127–127.) The purpose of this study is to find out in what ways can a creative project for gender-diverse people enhance participants' empowerment. Our theoretical framework is based on the theory of empowerment, the use of narrative approaches in promoting wellbeing, and previous studies on how wellbeing has been promoted through creative activities. The process of enhancing wellbeing is always holistic, so with it is also the approach of our research.

Qualitative methods include several different data collection and analysis methods, for example themed interviews, participant observation and focus group interviews (Jensen 2020: 10). In addition, the qualitative paradigm can be malleable: the methodology can be changed or checked in the middle of the research, if new information requires this. Because of this, qualitative research is very versatile both methodologically and theoretically, but its challenge is that it is not easy to create clear models for it. Each study is unique. (Leavy 2017: 124.)

Our approach in this study is phenomenological-hermeneutic, i.e., a person is both a researcher and an object to be studied. In this way, central concepts are experience, meaning and community. In other words, a person's relationship with their own reality. (Sarajärvi et al. 2017: 29–31.) According to current knowledge, it is thought that a learning event is more than a mental transfer of information, but a broader phenomenon that includes personality, emotions, senses, perceptions as well as other bodily, social, and cultural processes. Rouhiainen examines the basics of learning from the perspective of Merleau-Ponty's body phenomenology, which offers a suitable opportunity to structure artistic activity as an experiential, bodily and situational process. According to them, the artist should represent their own bodily perspective on the world, thus the artist improves their understanding of the sensory and perceptual nature of things,

events, and the environment, as well as the sensations of their own body and the possibilities of movement or expression. (Rouhiainen, 2011: 75, 77.)

Within the qualitative research setting of this study, we use hermeneutics as an approach because it allows us as researchers to interpret and understand the experiences and perspectives of individuals, their linguistic and cultural contexts, and the social structures that shape their identities. Vilkka presents, that hermeneutic as a method is used precisely to reveal meanings and that is why it is a common method in qualitative research (Vilkka 2015: 179). Using hermeneutics as an approach, we can analyse and interpret textual data such as interviews or personal narratives, identifying patterns and themes in individuals' experiences and perspectives. Vilkka says that in this approach the researcher enters into a dialogue with the research material and the goal of this dialogue is an open mind and an understanding of the otherness of the others (Vilkka 2015: 180). This approach can help us understand deeply the experiences of gender-diverse people and gain important insights into the challenges they face and the resources they need to be empowered. Hermeneutics is a very broad, versatile entity that includes several different trends. (Sarajärvi et al. 2017: 29-31) Hermeneutics emphasises the understanding and interpretation of entities with different meanings. Human action, which is pretty much always aimed towards something, and the result of it has different meanings, and by studying them, results are obtained from the research situation. (Koppa 2010) According to Vilkka, using hermeneutics as a method, the researcher goes around their research object in an ever-expanding circle and occasionally steps outside this circle to look at their research object with the help of other sources, phenomena, and things. The researcher considers themselves separate from their research object. (Vilkka 2015: 183.) Hermeneutics as a method enables a deeper understanding and interpretation of our focus group. It honours their experiences and allows them to share their stories in their own words rather than imposing preconceived prejudice.

In this methodology, it can be thought that gender identities are complex and variable and that individuals have unique experiences and perspectives on them. It can also be thought of the importance of language and discourse in shaping

attitudes about gender identity thus emphasising the need for a critical analysis of social norms and power structures.

The research results are produced by understanding the relationship between things and the connections and phenomena between them. Also understanding the meanings of phenomena to each other and to simultaneous phenomena and their development. These interpretations are often described as a hermeneutic circle: understanding is interpretation, and the basis of all understanding is previously understood. It is based on another key concept of hermeneutics, i.e., how the researched topic is understood in advance. (Sarajärvi et al. 2017: 31.)

Hermeneutical approach is used in this study for researching both textual data (interview) and other forms of communication, as in our opinion it allows for a deep understanding of the meanings and interpretations behind them. It involves interpreting the context, symbols and language used in the data. As researchers we believe that hermeneutics as an approach helps us to uncover multiple layers of meaning and can lead to a better understanding and appreciation of the collected information. In addition, it can help identify distortions or assumptions that may occur in the data or in the researcher's own interpretation. Our main data collection method was a group interview.

We also applied the principles of empowering photography in planning the implementation of the project. Miina Savolainen has developed this therapeutically oriented approach, the idea of which is to act as an enabler of the empowerment process of an individual or a group. The method has been used since the beginning of the 2000s, e.g., in the field of education and care and in work communities. In empowering photography projects, the condition for the use of photographs is the dismantling of the power structure of photography and the realisation of equality, as the concept of empowerment emphasises the individual's right to self-determination. (Savolainen 2009: 211–212.)

The method of empowering photography emphasises the interaction of the photographic situation. The power structure must be dismantled from it and used for dialogic interaction that is present on an emotional level. It is important that

the subject feels that they are going to be seen, specifically in a good way. The main thing in the filming process is the realisation of the person's own ideas and wishes, the photographer can help in realising these but must not influence the implementation. The method is based on visuality and the bodily power of the photograph. (Savolainen 2009: 219, 225.) We planned the filming situations carefully and tried our best to pay attention to our own actions so that the situation was as equal as possible.

A photograph can wound, it can value people and life differently, and its relationship to reality can be realistic or experiential. A photograph also can make a personal experience visible. Looking at a photograph is always also bodily: looking at it can cause a bodily memory or, alternatively a positive, approving feedback can unify. Photos can be used to share one's inner world and to be understood. (Savolainen 2009: 213–216, 227.) Because of this principle, it is especially important that in our project the participants were able to design the audio-visual pieces to be filmed. They were given full power to decide whether to appear in it themselves and if they do, in what way and with how much visibility. Based on this theory we considered it particularly important that, with the decision-making power, the participants had the opportunity to create an output that was truly their own and reflected their own truth. Since the body image or relationship for gender-diverse people is often not problem-free, it was important that the pieces acted as a healing or neutral instrument, not in any case harmful.

The *TruthStory* project was not intended to teach how to make art or guide the participants in a certain predetermined direction or goal, thus the meetings were more of a peer support activity or more of a creative dialogical space where there would be an opportunity to create meanings, even though each session and the actual shooting and recording situation was pre-planned.

Löytönen says that if art is understood, for example, as an entertainment, social criticism, a way of researching and knowing, or perhaps as therapy, it means for the artist and the recipient of the art a completely different relationship to art and the work of art. (Löytönen et al 2011: 100.) With the help of creative activities or art, we bring out personal experiences, and in the *TruthStory* project, those

experiences are brought out more widely in the form of a creative audio-visual pieces. For example, Löytönen expresses that when people examine their lives and experiences together, they find alternative interpretations of reality and create new interpretations of the world together and that can direct their activities to the future with new meanings. (Löytönen et al. 2011: 99)

4.3 Data collection

The data for this study was collected through observations and a focus group interview. We used observation, researchers' diaries and other information collected, for example, from the written feedback sent by the participants via email.

The participants of our study were recruited via purposeful sampling (Leavy 2017: 148), which aims to find the best suitable participants for the study. Participants were sought from social media channels, other researchers' own connections and from various gender-diverse groups. The only criteria for participating in this research were that the participants had to define themselves as gender-diverse, they had to be legally adults and fluent in the Finnish language. From the point of view of the study, it does not matter what the participant's biological or legal gender is, nor in what way they feel they belong to a gender minority. However, it is essential to identify as belonging to a gender minority. The requirement of adulthood was due to research-ethics related reasons, as researching minors has many more restrictions (TENK 2019). The Finnish language skill requirement was due to the nature of the project and the fact that there would be a lot of discussions of personal and sensitive matters, so in our opinion it was necessary that there are no misunderstandings due to language challenges.

Systematic observation of the group

The idea of Huhtinen-Hildén and Isola's (2021) observation model is the systematic observation of creative group activity from different perspectives. With its help, it is possible to make the effects of group activities and cultural wellbeing work visible. According to the model, observation pays attention to four different areas: 1) means and methods of creative activity, 2) group facilitation, 3) individual participants' means of being and doing and 4) group interaction. With the help of these, a comprehensive observation is possible, although of course it must be remembered that the observation only reaches the part that is transmitted to the outside, and not the whole truth. Documentation must be carried out accurately and concretely and interpretations must be avoided. (Huhtinen-Hildén & Isola 2021.) We wrote a researcher's diary in real time in most meetings and used Huhtinen-Hildén and Isola's model as a basis for observation as much as possible. We collected a total of 12 pages of data from the observation by using Microsoft Word, most of which were complete sentences and a smaller part of bullet points. We got more accurate data when one of us carried most of the group's facilitation responsibility and the other was able to focus largely on observation. In situations where the participants were divided or where both researcher-facilitators had guidance or other tasks, we could not record the same detailed observation. During filming and at the premiere, we did not write observations in real time, but wrote them immediately afterwards. We made sure that no one could be identified from our notes by avoiding personalisation of the observations and using codes if the identification of the person was necessary for us in the research sense.

When observing creative activities, attention must be paid to the flow of the process: how the activity begins, develops, and continues, how to move from different stages to others. Are goals set for the activity? What kind of tools and methods of operation are used in the situation? (Huhtinen-Hildén & Isola 2021.) During the meetings, one of the researcher-facilitators played the role of an observer and wrote down their observations. Some observations and thoughts were also added after the meetings. We observed and wrote down the course of the meetings each time. Although we had made detailed plans for the course of

each meeting, the detailed notes proved to be a good approach for evaluating the activities. We paid special attention to transitions, because since the participants were very conversational, we sometimes had difficulties staying on schedule and moving from one activity to the next. The notes and observations turned out to be particularly useful for examining these situations, and we were able to use these observations when adjusting the plans for the following times.

When observing group facilitation, it is good to pay attention to the activity of the facilitator as an enabler of creative activity. The facilitator's bodily expression and actions in interaction situations are essential issues in group activities. It is important to observe how the facilitator works in different stages of the process and what kind of pedagogical solutions have been considered in the structure of the activity. (Huhtinen-Hildén & Isola 2021.) In our observations, we especially paid attention to the way the participants were guided and how the researcher-facilitator met the participants and their feelings and reactions. We observed how the researcher-facilitator directed creative activities and how they managed to move situations and activities forward. Sometimes these succeeded well and naturally, and sometimes it was a challenge to stay on schedule, because the participant's important discussions were delaying the timetable. We also observed very concrete things: where the researcher-facilitator was seated, what kind of posture they had and how certain exercises were instructed or what kind of comment was used to react to something. The observation was especially eye-opening for the researcher-facilitators themself, as the other person could notice some mannerisms or reactions that they themselves did not necessarily pay attention to.

Individual participants' means of being and doing refers to the participants' reactions and emerging emotions to creative activities. In addition, it is necessary to observe what the creative activity enables for the participant. (Huhtinen-Hildén & Isola 2021.) Our project dealt with sensitive and potentially triggering issues, so it was to be expected that the creative activities and discussed themes could arouse strong reactions in the participants. We had spent a lot of time thinking in advance about how we act correctly in the event of these possible reactions. Therefore, in our observations, the individual's actions and behaviour certainly

received special attention in relation to other points. It was interesting to note from the observations that we could not always predict the reactions of the participants. Sometimes the exercises, which were not our favourites, were stimulating in the opinion of the participants. The participants could also react very differently to some situations or exercises. Some exercise may have been an unintentional trigger. The discussion, which in our opinion revolved around heavy themes, was empowering for the participants. Making observations without interpretation was sometimes challenging in these situations, as one's own assumptions and opinions had to be consciously kept in the background.

When observing participant interaction, the focus is on how exactly these people work with each other and whether different creative activities affect their mutual interaction. It is recommended to observe the gestures, facial expressions, and reactions of the participants, as well as whether there is any transmission of emotions. (Huhtinen-Hildén & Isola 2021.) We managed to observe the participant's interaction quite comprehensively, as the group was small enough. A larger group would have been more difficult to follow. It is always possible that when following a group, attention will not be paid equally to each participant, but the strength of our group was that each participant contributed to group situations.

It was important that the participants were able to express their creativity as they wanted on a topic that is important to them. They always had the power and freedom to reveal or not their own identity. We wanted each participant to get approaches for self-expression from the project and for the creative activities to be very low threshold exercises without any specific goal. In this way, the result of the project could be as meaningful as possible for both the creator and the viewer. In filming situations, the participants were allowed to decide on all activities and the other researcher-facilitator, who is a lighting designer, only gave practical tips and suggestions in that event, if the participant did not have an opinion or information about it themself. Everything that was possible to implement within the framework of technical limitations was implemented. The participants found it confident to be filmed by a professional in the visual field when they could trust the quality of the result. The other researcher-facilitator, who has experience in therapeutic work, acted as a practical assistant during the

filming and at the end of the day had a discussion about the atmosphere of the shooting day with the participant. In filming situations, we used the principles of Miina Savolainen's empowering photography method, as mentioned in Subchapter 3.2, to make the situations as pleasant for the participants as possible.

Focus group interview

We conducted one focus group interview organised after when the meetings, filming and premiere were all executed. Focus group interview is one interview method of qualitative research. It means interviewing several participants in a group at the same time. (Leavy 2017: 139.) People use speech to communicate, so this method is easily approachable even if the interview situation itself is not natural for them. According to Sarajärvi et al. (2017: 62), time and location of the interview needs to be arranged well in advance and the interview permission must be agreed upon prior the interview situation. We discussed with the participants whether they wanted to hold an interview right after the premiere or whether they wanted some time to process their own feelings about the project and the whole process. The participants chose the second option, and the interview took place the week after the premiere.

The interview was conducted face-to-face at the same space where the meetings were held. All participants were able to attend. We sent them the questions in advance so that they could, according to their own schedules, familiarise themselves with the questions in advance. We had previously also discussed in general what the interview would contain and what type of questions we would ask. For us researchers getting to know the material as a whole already started when collecting the data - during the interview.

We decided to interview those four people who were involved in the project until the end. Sarajärvi et al. (2017) state that it is ethically justified to tell the participants what topics the interview concerns (Sarajärvi et al. 2017: 62). This was done to ensure that even a part of the participants was familiarised themselves with the questions and thought about the answers in advance. We

sent the questions beforehand by email to the participants, so that they could familiarise with them. The interview was recorded with three different devices and transcribed after the interview. The questions were formed in that way so that they were open ended, therefore the interviewees were not let in any way. We had discussed beforehand among the researchers and concluded that non-response was not a problem in this study, and the material would not end up being too scarce.

In the actual interview situation, one of the researcher-facilitator asked the questions out loud, after which all participants had one minute to write down their thoughts and personal notes about the question. After that minute, there was an oral answer round, as well as an additional and a comment round if there were any time left. Due to the number of questions and the limited timeframe, each question was given ten minutes. In this way we ensured that we were able to go through all the questions. We agreed together with the participants that the first turn to answer the questions would change from one participant to the next, so that everyone could be the first answerer in turn. Another researcher-facilitator took care of the schedule and timed the situation. Researcher-facilitators did not comment or react to the questions or answers in the interview situation.

All interview questions were open ended and not a simple yes or no questions. In that way, the participants could use their own language to give an answer and choose how long and detailed their answer is. We prepared a list with four themes and supplementary questions which we would use if we had some time left at the end of the interview.

Our themes are:

1. Structure, content, and methods used in the project.

2. Group dynamics

3. The role of instructions

4. Wider meanings of the project

5. Supplementary questions

In total we had eleven questions in these five themes. We discussed in advance that we would also ask clarifying questions during the interview if needed. We wanted to ask all the participants the same questions in the same order. We also wanted them to be able to reflect on others' answers. We did a repetition round after everyone had answered. The questions partially overlapped, and it is possible that the same answers would be repeated. We wanted to approach the same themes from several different angles.

When the interview was held, we had already spent the last two months with the participants, so the actual interview situation was a safe, relaxed space and everyone was familiar with each other. We concluded that we do not need any tricks to get the discussion going forward. We agreed to a hand gesture to indicate time we had left for that specific question. We had five- and two-minute marks. We had only 1,5 hours to complete the interview, so we limited the time to ten minutes per question. We did not want to interrupt the participants until they had completed their response, so we used hand gestures, and we were prepared to lead the conversation back to the interview, in case the conversation would go astray. The advantage of the interview situation is also that the interviewer can act as an observer in the situation and can interpret how things were said and not just what is said (Sarajärvi et al. 2017: 62).

4.4 Data analysis

After collecting the data, the interview material was first gathered and organised into separate files that were stored and kept on an external hard drive. After anonymisation, the files were stored in the researchers' shared Google Drive folder for easy access. Informed consent forms were stored on the same external hard drive and were protected by a separate password. All the material was prepared for analysis by transcribing the data for easy processing. The group interview was transcribed on a total of 17 pages using Microsoft Word.

After the transcription was done, the data was organised with colours and codes in such a manner that it is easily accessible. When organising, the participants were colour coded. In addition, the researchers' diary material was compiled into their own files for each meeting. We used both colour and letter codes, for different purposes. During transcribing, we also reduced and prioritised the data, so that the material that would not answer our research question is left out at this stage. The remaining material would answer our research question. While transcribing the interview and writing down the answers, we started to visualise the material as a whole. We had received verbal feedback from the participants throughout the project, so we already had a good idea of what kind of results we would get.

We found the qualitative content analysis to suit best our study and our research question. Before the actual content analysis, we aimed towards an overall understanding of the data. We listened to the group interview and read the diaries before starting the systematic analysis. In addition, we discussed the material among the researchers. Leavy points out that it is easy to forget the big picture of the research, so delving into the material as a whole help to get to the centre of the data (Leavy 2023: 150). While familiarising ourselves with the material, we collected notes and perspectives that can be revised during the analysis process. We examined the material in several separate sections, the interview, the researcher's diary, and the observations we made during the project.

We analysed the data through coding by hand without using computer-aided programs due to the small amount of material. We chose, due to the purpose of the research and the research question, the In vivo coding strategy, which allows us to use the interviewees' own language and the codes develop organically. (Leavy, 2017: 151.) According to Leavy (2017), after coding the data, it is important to look for similarities and repetitive sequences and group them into themes. Codes are short and a theme can be a phrase that expresses a wider meaning or a group of codes. During this process, the analysis often run cyclically, so as researchers we are involved in reviewing and exploring and systematically writing about the data at the same time. These notes about the data are a link between the codes and our interpretations, and they tell impressions, thoughts, and from there comes understanding. (Leavy 2017: 151–152.)

After the coding of the data was completed, we examined the themes, patterns and relationships with the codes found. Similar codes are assembled into themes emerging from the material. We did three rounds of coding by hand. In the first round, we familiarized ourselves with the material and found codes about for example interaction, body experiences, overcoming fears, gender experience (both researcher-facilitators and participants) and own internal process. We compiled these codes into themes in the next round, for example, meanings, beliefs, group dynamics, peer support and interaction. At first, we themed the codes very loosely, and finally we compiled the codes into these themes:

1. Interaction between participants or between participants and researcher-facilitators
2. Feeling of togetherness
3. Transforming discriminatory attitudes
4. Meanings to the internal process
5. The processes that promoted empowerment in the project

After the theming, we examined the material as a whole and as overlapping in relation to each other. This brought up new perspectives and forced us to look at the results we have already made from different perspectives. In this phase, we

also compared the findings of both researchers to each other and examined the different themes, codes, and findings. Theming process makes the processing of the findings and collected material easy as similar codes and results are then under the same category. Throughout the analysis process, we kept closely in mind the theories behind the research, the most central of which is the empowerment theory, and we took notes while analysing. The conceptual framework served as a value base and guided the planning and implementation of the project itself, as well as the meetings, which facilitated the interpretation of the results.

According to Leavy (2017), the following questions are asked in the analysis process:

What are the relationships between categories, themes, and concepts?

What patterns emerge?

What is visible in the data? What's the point?

What do I learn when I put the data in the context of previous literature?

What do I learn when I consider looking at data through a different theoretical framework?

Using everything I learned, how would I answer my research question?

(Leavy 2017:154)

Since this research is a multidisciplinary cooperation conducted by two researchers who study and analyse the same data, we used the investigator triangulation which means, according to Vilkka, that there are two (or more) researchers studying the same topic and comparing their results (Vilkka 2015: 71). Together we viewed at both consistent and contradictory findings and combined everything into a one entity.

4.5 Research ethics

According to the Finnish Advisory Board on Research Integrity, research should be conducted in the manner required by good scientific practice if it is to be ethically acceptable and its results credible. Accuracy, care, and honesty must be observed in the research, the data collection methods must be ethically sustainable and in accordance with the criteria, and the results must be transparent. Previous studies on the subject must be considered and referenced appropriately. (TENK 2012: 6.) The data collection and analysis methods we use, as well as the project plan, have been approved by our thesis supervisors before the practical implementation. We consulted the research ethics support person of the Metropolia University of Applied Sciences on the ethical aspects related to the project and especially on the copyrights of the use of audio-visual pieces. Ethical pre-assessment was not necessary since the participants for our research were legally adults. Throughout the project and research, we emphasised the participants' right to participate as they wish and the possibility to interrupt the research without consequences. The TENK 2019 report states that when the subject of research is a human being, the researcher must absolutely respect the human rights and right to self-determination of the persons participating in the research. The research must not cause risk, damage or harm to the people or communities being researched. (TENK 2019: 7–8.)

According to Jensen, it is typical that people in a vulnerable position often participate in cultural wellbeing projects, which is why it is necessary to carefully consider whether participation will cause harm or discomfort to the participants. (Jensen 2020: 10.) Our participants are gender-diverse people who often have experiences of minority stress and discrimination. We were especially careful in our actions not to cause any harm to the participants. In the project, we agreed together on the rules of a safer space and operating models for possible difficult situations. In addition, the participants also had the opportunity to talk with us outside the meetings and filming, if something aroused unpleasant feelings. We were particularly careful about where the pieces were presented and who could see them. We wanted to make sure that the occasions where the pieces are

shown are controlled and as safe as possible. Such spaces can be, for example, events that are not open to everyone but whose participants are limited in different ways. In our opinion, presenting the pieces essentially involves introducing the project and the experiences of the participants. We were positively surprised by how bravely the participants wanted to present their pieces in public. We researcher-facilitators were perhaps too careful and protective towards them in relation to the performance of the pieces.

The researcher must familiarise themself with the culture and history of the research participants and the community they represent, so as not to harm them with the researcher's activities or the research itself. This is especially true when the research method is observation or interview. (TENK 2019: 8.) Due to our educational background, other researcher had professional knowledge and experience of gender-diverse people and working with them through training as a Specialist in Sexological Counselling and gender studies. In addition to this, the topic was also familiar to both of us researchers through our personal lives. Before starting the research, we familiarised ourselves with up-to-date information related to gender-diverse people and previously conducted studies to make sure of the ethical starting points for our actions.

It is important to be aware of the value systems behind the project and to think about the social or political value of the research and the project. If the study focuses on a group that is underrepresented in such studies, it is good to know why this is so. The project and study should be timely and should also have a reason and purpose in practice. The researcher's own values should be considered in these situations, and it is important to be careful about how the researcher uses their own value and belief system in the project. Although the intention may be good, it must be ensured that it truly is that for the participants, so as not to objectify or exploit them. (Leavy 2017: 127, 132.) The implementation of the *TruthStory* project is guided by a sincere desire to enable an increase in wellbeing and empowerment both for the participants and, through the audio-visual pieces also for a wider group of people. The goal is that the stories would normalise gender diversity for the mainstream population and bring comfort to those who are still reflecting their own gender.

In all research, the researcher's relationship with the participants must be examined from an ethical point of view. It is necessary to think in advance, what kind of relationship can be built with the participants and how it can develop, what kind the cooperation will be and how it will possibly affect the research. Is the relationship professional or can it develop into a friendship? What kind of limits are set and how are they explained to the participants? Will we keep in touch after the study and in what capacity? As a researcher, one must also be aware of the characteristics that are uniform and that are differentiating and what their potential impact is on the project and research. (Leavy 2017: 135, 149.) It was important for us to create a safer and confidential atmosphere in the project, so that the participants would have the opportunity to become empowered. In a small group, a naturally warm atmosphere can be created, which we influenced both as researcher-facilitators and as individuals. We did not make precise rules about what kind of relationship we can form with the participants, but in our mutual discussions as researcher-facilitators it was clear that during the project and the research, the relationship is mainly professional. We would not share our own experiences in the project like peers, but we would be in the roles of facilitators and researchers in the project, so that the project would serve the needs of the participants and give their experiences the necessary space. However, a possible friendship with the research subjects would presumably not be harmful to the research, as it would hardly affect the research results. On the contrary, a closer relationship could perhaps enable the courage to give critical feedback in an interview situation. The issues discussed among the participants were naturally conducive for friendships to develop. The participants were allowed to contact the researcher-facilitators outside of the meetings as well, if they needed to discuss some of the feelings evoked by the project or issues related to the research. We also agreed to keep in touch after the actual project, when the participants participate in future presentations of the pieces.

Participation in a study must be voluntary and refusal to participate must be possible. This is especially important when the subject has a dependency relationship with the investigating organisation. (TENK 2019: 8.) Due to the aforementioned reason, it was particularly important for us to carry out both this

research and the *TruthStory* project independently without a separate cooperation organisation. We wanted the participants to apply to the project and with it to the research based on their own interests, because doing it reluctantly could not contribute to the participant's empowerment. We did not want anyone to participate in the project under pressure or hoping it would bring some external benefit. We also wanted the opportunity to design our own version of the project and make sure of its ethical starting points. The cooperative organisation could have brought with it rules and restrictions that we could not have accepted.

The participant's consent must be documented. They must have the right to interrupt their participation without any reason and without negative consequences for themselves. The participants must also have the right to withdraw their consent to participate in the research at any time and it must happen as easily as consenting to it. It is also important that information about the content of the research, the practical implementation and the processing of personal data is given in an understandable way. (TENK 2019: 8–9.) At the first meeting of the project, we went through the goals of the project and research, practical issues, and their rights as participants. We went through the participant information sheet (Appendix 6) point by point, and the participants had the opportunity to ask questions about it. The document comprehensively reviews the information of the research and mentions e.g., the participant's possibility to interrupt their participation at any stage of the study. We recorded the conversation with the permission of the participants, so that we could return to it if necessary. The participants then signed a consent form document (Appendix 7) in which they stated that they had received the necessary information about the research and that they voluntarily agreed to participate in it.

From the standpoint of ethics-in-practice, it is important to be aware that creative approaches have the possibility of evoking negative feelings or memories. Although creative approaches often have a positive effect on participants, facilitators using them should also be prepared for other kinds of reactions. The facilitators must be ready to face and deal with possible negative outcomes and, if necessary, make changes to the plans of the project. The risk of negative reactions is particularly high when dealing with sensitive topics and populations.

(Corbin et al.2021: 350.) In this project, we were especially aware of this possibility, because going through one's own story and working on it can be a trigger for people who belong to a minority and who have faced mistreatment because of it. We kept this in mind when planning the group's activities. The meetings and creative activities were planned in such a way that it was possible to change the plans so that there would always be alternative exercises. At the very beginning, we agreed with the participants on the rules of the project and emphasised that there is no need to do any exercise if it feels uncomfortable. We also agreed on an operating model for handling and resolving potential triggering situations. At the beginning of each meeting, we held a reflecting session where everyone shared about their current thoughts and feelings. Also, at the end of each meeting, we reflected on what kind of atmosphere the meeting and its activities had evoked. One of us researcher-facilitators had experience in both psychosocial discussion work and working with gender minorities. Participants were given the opportunity to call this researcher-facilitator if they felt the need for a one-on-one discussion. We received feedback from the participants that, in their opinion, this aspect was considered particularly well in the planning, and they felt safe as a result.

The personal data of the research participants must be processed systematically, responsibly and in accordance with the law throughout the life cycle of the research. In addition to the legislation, the data protection guidelines of one's own organisation must be followed. All decisions related to the processing of personal data must be documented and justified. Later, if necessary, it must be possible to check all these decisions by the authorities. Personal data must be deleted from the material when they are no longer needed. If information must be stored, it must be kept separate from other material and only those persons who have a valid basis for this must have access to it. Participants must be informed about all this in an understandable way. (TENK 2019: 11.) All material from research design, implementation and data must be stored in a manner that is required by the requirements of scientific information. The necessary research permits, and ethical pre-assessments must be made before the research is carried out. At the same time, the rights, responsibilities, and obligations of the parties as well as possible copyright issues must also be agreed upon. (TENK 2012: 6.) Only the

name and signature in the consent form document and the shooting permit were collected from the participants in this research. These documents were scanned onto an external hard drive, which is behind a password and to which only we researchers have access to. The paper versions that remained with the researchers were destroyed. The participants are aware of this procedure and have accepted it. We had a comprehensive discussion about the use of audio-visual pieces and the rights related to them.

The privacy of the researched persons must be protected, and this must be taken into account in the research publication. Full anonymity should not be promised if it is not feasible. (TENK 2019: 12–13.) We discussed this with the participants several times, as we wanted to make sure that they understood the possible risks that could result from participating in the study. Even if all material is pseudonymised, it is possible that someone can connect the answer and the person. Some of the subjects have appeared in the pieces with their own faces and each of them with their own voice. Although we did our best in the analysis of the research material in terms of not identifying anyone, we cannot promise full anonymity to the participants with complete certainty.

It is important to think about ethics also in situations where the pieces made by participants are used in evaluation or dissemination of results and to ensure that consent has been obtained for this (Jensen 2020: 10). After the filming, the participants signed filming permits (Appendix 4), in which we agreed on the use of the audio-visual pieces. We agreed that we researcher-facilitators may show these pieces to outsiders in appropriate contexts. Participants can also publish their own pieces on social media by mentioning the *TruthStory* project and its implementers. We also agreed that we researcher-facilitators will not get any financial benefit from the pieces and all possible rewards will be directed to charity. Although we got the rights to present the pieces freely due to the filming permits, we made an ethical principled decision that the participants can prohibit the presentation of their own piece at any stage, either in a certain event or completely.

Throughout the project, we wanted to highlight and remind the participants that all activities are voluntary and even though we hoped that the results would be presented on a wider scale, there was always, at any point in the project, the possibility to refuse to present the piece or to leave the project. In this way, we wanted to guarantee that the participants feel safe to create the story and audio-visual piece safely into a piece of their own. Stories are one way to convey experiences and information to other members of society. In this context, however, different situations in which stories could be presented must be considered. For some people, and in some situations, you can present certain experiences, while in other situations, you cannot. This is also where the responsibility of us researchers arise: we needed to think carefully if the stories are presented in public, and in what context this would happen. We concluded that, at least for the time being, we will only present the pieces at events that feel safe and to people who know what they are coming to see. The participants have and will always have the right to decide whether they want their pieces to be presented at the event in question.

5 Findings

In this chapter, we present the findings of this study based on the data analysis. We processed the material as a whole, however, following the answers of individual participants in the analysis phase. There are also comments from the participants in their own words. The findings are presented in the following eight categories; 1. Preconceptions about the project, 2. Multidisciplinary cooperation and researcher-facilitators, 3. The importance of creative activities for empowerment, 4. The meaning of a safe space, 5. Feeling of togetherness, 6. Timing of the project and the personality of the participant, 7. Transforming discriminatory attitudes and 8. Meaning for internal process.

5.1 Preconceptions about the project

In this study, we researcher-facilitators have come from outside to the community of gender-diverse people. We did not raise this issue any more than the situation required. Was a common world of experience needed for the project to be successful? Based on the results, it was not necessary to have shared experiences if the researcher-facilitators acted respectfully and had familiarised theirselves to the correct language for example.

The participants brought up the fact that they had preconceived thoughts and concerns about the project, but still wanted to come to the first meeting to see what the project is about and what the researcher-facilitators are like. According to the participants, when dealing with gender minorities, there is also the possibility of misuse of power. One mentioned the possibility of even the risk of violence in extreme cases if the information ends up in the wrong place.

We researcher-facilitators strived to bring out our desire to create a safer space where creativity and self-expression could flourish. In addition, we emphasised that it is not necessary to have experience in creative activities, but we would help them throughout the project. As Laatikainen's analysis show, a safer space

consists of encounters, peer support, clear rules and breaking stereotypes made possible by creative activities. (Laatikainen 2020:2.)

In the first meeting it was clear that everyone, including us researcher-facilitators, were very nervous. The participants described being very nervous before the project started and during the first meeting. Participant D stated that the tension was aroused by, for example, the fact that they had previous bad experiences in peer support groups, because disagreements and lack of understanding may also arise within the minority groups.

However, the tension seemed to decrease quickly. According to the participants, part of this was helped by the fact that we researcher-facilitators went through the content of the project in more detail and thought about goals and creative activities together. The participants felt relieved that there were familiar or semi-familiar faces and that the boundaries and rules of the safer space were reviewed together.

One participant had prepared in advance to be a pioneer in the discussions but was happy when all the participants were sharing their experiences freely and they did not have to take on that role. Another participant described that the group felt safe from the beginning.

As a conclusion, although at the beginning of the *TruthStory* project both the participants and the researcher-facilitators were nervous and the participants had doubts about the project at beforehand, they still participated because the space felt safe, and the facilitators seemed to be professionals.

5.2 Multidisciplinary cooperation and researcher-facilitators

The results clearly conveyed the importance of multidisciplinary cooperation for the success of the project. The participants agreed that the expertise of both social and cultural fields complemented each other and played a significant role in the implementation of the project. Effective cooperation made it possible for

the project to really progress. Instead, whether the researcher-facilitators belonged to gender minority or not, was not considered meaningful, the most important thing was the characters and good will of the facilitators.

Professionalism in the field of social work and sexology created, above all, a starting point for a sense of security in the project, which helped in working and daring. The participants considered it important that the starting point of the project was one that understood people. The professionalism of the culture and arts field enabled the participants to have confidence that the artistic output will be of high quality and that it will be realised in the desired way. Being able to rely on the professionals made personal empowerment possible. Participant B stated that: "After all, this is the kind of cross-pollination and multidisciplinary that we want, so of course it really works, and I think it works pretty well with this concept." In the answers, however, the participants mentioned that what matters more to professionalism is what kind of person the facilitator is: do they have good will and a suitable attitude. Mere technical know-how does not create security or sensitivity.

With our creative activities, we tried to minimise possible blocking elements for empowerment, we jointly agreed with the participants on the principles of a safer space by discussing what everyone needs to be able to fulfil themselves in the project in a safe and wellbeing-promoting way. We had acquired information about gender diversity in a multidisciplinary way, both through previous studies and by familiarising ourselves with current information. As we alluded to in Subchapter 3.1, according to Adams all forms of discrimination prevent empowerment thus all activities should be based on anti-oppressive values (Adams 2003: 67, 189).

The participants said that they found the facilitating effective and successful. They felt that there was a constant sense of security and support available. The participants appreciated the fact that the opportunity for discussion outside the project meetings was also actively offered. The experience was that there were no power structures and no use of power, but that the participants were met as genuine equals. The participants also felt that the facilitators had enough

information about the gender-diverse people, so no one had to teach or act as a source of information, which would have been emotionally burdensome. Participant B said:

> "We have somehow really acted in the spirit of equality. Of course, you are doing your own work, that you facilitated this activity, but somehow you have succeeded so well that somehow everything worked really well. So, I want to make this comment: thank you for your facilitating work."

As we mentioned in the Subchapter 3.1, empowerment cannot be directly produced to another person, but it can be helped by creating an encouraging, safe, and accepting operating environment and atmosphere where a person feels freedom of choice and experiences of success in their actions (Siitonen 1999: 61, 93–97). As researcher-facilitators, we strive to help this happen in every way. Judging by the participants answers, we have succeeded in our goal. As Siitonen mentions, it is sometimes difficult to know what kind of conditions are optimal for a person's empowerment, because every person is different (Siitonen 1999: 125–127). This brought its own challenge to facilitation and group planning, but fortunately we had prepared in advance with many contingency plans. According to Adams (2003) activities that promote empowerment must happen at the pace of the participant, and the participant must have control over both the process and its pace. You also must be aware that empowerment takes time, and results may not be obtained quickly. (Adams 2003: 187–190.) The participants considered it important that they could participate as much or as little in the exercises of this project as they wished. It must therefore be stated that by choosing this way we managed to act in accordance with the principles of empowerment. It was important for us not to make the mistake mentioned by Adams (2003), that we, as professionals, implement a project whose principles theoretically fit the framework of empowerment, but in reality, do not. It was particularly important for us to really develop the project's exercises to promote the empowerment and wellbeing of the participants. (Adams 2003: 4.)

Regarding the meaning of the common gender background, we particularly considered whether the participants would find it meaningful whether us researcher-facilitators identify as belonging to gender minority or not. However,

the participants agreed that a safe space is more important than the gender of the facilitators and that gender does not play a role in creating a safe space. Even if the facilitator would belong to the same minority, it is possible that their personality or professional skills might be lacking in relation to the facilitation of the project. Participant D said: "I didn't pay any attention to the gender of the facilitators. The whole time it was like a very safe atmosphere that the facilitators were able to create, so that was what mattered."

On one hand, the participants also saw good aspects in a possible common background, both as a unifying element and to prevent the participants from having to so-called to the position of trainer, whose responsibility would be to educate the researcher-facilitators about minority issues. However, it was found that the facilitator can make up for the lack of personal experience of belonging to the minority in question by acquiring information, learning to use the correct terms and with general sensitivity. The fact that we researcher-facilitators did not mention our own gender experience in the project gave one of the participants a safe experience and the feeling that everyone is free from definition. Participant D stated: "It just made me feel safe, that I felt that you can't know [the gender of the facilitators], that there was always an atmosphere like that, that no one assumes anything from anyone, so I felt safe."

In conclusion, we can state that multidisciplinary cooperation was considered a meaningful starting point for enabling empowerment. The areas of expertise of both researcher-facilitators complemented each other and enabled the smooth progress of the project as well as a safer space for the participants to immerse themselves into creativity. The gender of the facilitators was not relevant to the participants, because the facilitators had enough knowledge about gender-diverse people.

5.3 The importance of creative activities for empowerment

In this study, we wanted to find out the importance of creative activities in terms of empowerment and which elements influence this goal. Our findings show that

the reflections and discussions during the meetings were perceived as relevant to the end result, even more so than the creative activities themselves. The creative activities were meaningful to the participants and gave perspective and encouraged reflection. There was the freedom to choose to do what they wanted, different options to do the exercises and the freedom not to show their own work to anyone, these things were felt to promote empowerment and self-confidence and self-image. The reflection discussions we held at the beginning and at the end of the meetings were liked among the participants. At first, we went through feelings and the participants brought up what kind of starting point each one comes to the meeting from. These conversations were perceived as important, meaningful, and wonderful.

In the first meeting, we wanted to ask the participants what they hope and expect from the project. Would they prefer to do the writing work at home or during the meetings? They all wished for exercises that would help with their writing, so that they could write at home but get approaches from the meetings to help them to do that. In the interview, one participant said that this was pleasant and that it was good that we had clear frames, but within them there is room for one's own interpretation: Participant B stated:

> "The concept and assignment were open ended, and it was great to do what you wanted. The frames also felt both safe and liberating. The wishes of the participants were listened to and the exercises for the next sessions were thought about accordingly".

A significant element in the planning of the project was freedom: the freedom of the participants to choose how they participated in the project. They had full power to decide their own story, as well as the implementation and content of the audio-visual pieces within technical limitations. In exercises carried out in the meetings, we usually offered more than one option, and the implementation method was also free form. The participants also had the right to withdraw from the project at any time if they wished, and there would be no sanction for doing so. They also had and still have permission to prohibit the showing of the piece if they wish. According to Siitonen, freedom has an important connection with empowerment and its structure. When you can make independent decisions and

set your own goals, it increases the appreciation and trust between the parties, this also affects the person's commitment, because the person is most likely to try their best in such a situation. Freedom enables a confidential and positive charge and, with it, taking responsibility when it is shown to a person that they have real freedom and independence to promote their own goals. (Siitonen 1999: 124–125.)

The participants' common experience was that you could take liberties in the project, and as researcher-facilitators we did not limit the participants' expression. The participants felt that the project had clear frames within which there was room to breathe and let child-like creativity run wild. According to the participants, the skilfully created safer space made it possible to let go. The clear frames made it possible that the artistic output could not be honed endlessly but could be "let go". The participants said that they felt good about the time limit of the piece, which also forced the participants to focus on the essentials, and the limited number of meetings, which forced them to lower the bar in terms of their own output. According to the participants, they had the freedom to implement their ideas as they wished within the technical limits, and us researcher-facilitators did not control how their output could be implemented. This made it possible to truly realise one's own vision. Participant A said:

> "I feel that I was free to implement my own idea. Of course, if that idea had been completely impossible to implement, then maybe I would have had to make compromises. But now that my own idea was so simple that it was very doable – They just asked 'What is your idea here? What is your vision, what kind of piece do you want to make?' And I was very free to implement it."

Laatikainen's analysis says the same thing, their interviewees found it good that the work was guided and free in the right ratio (Laatikainen 2020: 53). The *TruthStory* project was a physical space and a sort of piece of its own, and the metaphorical meaning of the pieces seems to be even stronger. What is important is not what is done, but how it is done - how a space was created for creativity and people to interact.

As mentioned in Subchapter 3.1, Siitonen points out that experiences of success are important for empowerment in building self-esteem and self-image (Siitonen 1999: 154). In the implementation of the project and the planning of the exercises, we strived to ensure that the experiences of success are possible for everyone, so that empowerment is possible. In practice, this meant that the exercises carried out in the group were low-threshold reflection type of exercises, which everyone could carry out in their own style. There was no right or wrong, no worse or better way to do them. The completed exercises did not have to be shown to others, but many in the group still wanted to share them. They found sharing them and the encouraging feedback they received empowering and inspiring.

Writing assignments were considered good and they gave new perspectives, which provoked reflections from one's inner self. The participants thought it was important that they could always choose for themselves how intensively they did the exercises or whether they did it at all. One of the participants describes how the main benefit of the project is related to writing and producing the content of the piece, which, after initial doubt, led to the experience of satisfaction and success in their own vision and what they did. Participant B said:

> "The exercises offered and done at the meetings were good. The best thing for me was that I could define myself how much I would immerse myself in completing the exercise, or whether I would do it with a light touch. The exercises also gave me new perspectives to consider, even digging into my own inner self, even though I actively practice it anyway."

The length of the project, as a whole, was thought to be good and suitable. The participants had previously been in peer support groups where they spent only for that one short moment, and they felt that the good thing about this project was that they could be with the same group of people for many special moments or a longer period of time. One participant noticed that it could have been a longer process, and that what a big change one can go through in such a short time.

The end of the project evoked many different thoughts on the participants. On the one hand, there was sadness and longing that structured meetings would disappear from life, and there would no longer be regular meetings. However, the

participants found it liberating that it is possible to let go of the project. The clear structure and decision seemed to make it easier, instead of an eternal project that would be left hanging. It was felt that the end of the project also enables distance and later analysis of what was experienced in the project and what its effect on oneself has been. The overriding feeling, however, seemed to be the collective joy of the joint project and the hope that we would meet again in the future in different ways. The participants were also enthusiastic about the possible further development of the project. Participant B said:

> "I also feel happy that we have completed this project. It has been a great project, and then there is also hope for the future, maybe we will keep in touch and there will be some further developments of this project."

Different creative activities seemed to enable discussion, created a more relaxed atmosphere, and gave room for encounters. One participant stated that in the project was a great power of self-expression. The fact that one could choose how they wanted to express themself was meaningful. Also filming the piece seemed to be of great importance to the participants, especially when they could appear with their own face and voice - this was felt to be empowering. The filming situation was an exciting situation but a safe environment to also face their own fears.

Mäki (2005) says that the difference between therapeutic activities, i.e., making art, and clinical therapy, is in shareability. In clinical therapy, the interaction takes place only between the patient and the therapist. The indirect positive interaction of making art, if it becomes public distribution, may extend socially. (Mäki 2005: 150.) According to Corbin et al. creative activities can deepen both a person's own experiences and connections with other people (Corbin et al. 2021: 348–349). Both writing and making the pieces were perceived as an important way to deal with gender diversity. The frames in the project were wide enough so that the participants could themselves choose topics that were important to them to deal with.

According to Mäki, a piece of art should be therapeutic for its creator, so that it would also be therapeutic for the audience. He states that "subjectivity in art is

primarily in the material and the way of processing, but the end result is hoped for, if not generalisation, then at least a general touchingness." The artist's own reflection does not end when the piece is made and presented but is permanently unfinished. The public is invited to join in the common reflection. (Mäki 2005: 150.) However, this project is not about art therapy, although based on the results, there could also be therapeutic meanings for the participants.

As presented in Subchapter 3.2, it is clear from Lappalainen's research that participation and group dynamics play a central role in creating a meaningful experience and that the exercises performed are not necessarily in a central role. We can also find similar results in our own research. Also, Lappalainen's observations that the personalities of the researcher-facilitators affect the relevance of the project, and the creation of a safer space are parallel to our observations. (Lappalainen 2012: 2,79.)

As a conclusion, reflections and discussions were perhaps the most relevant elements in terms of empowerment. The exercises and the freedom of choice with them, as well as the free form but still structured project felt pleasant. In addition, the fact that the pieces could be realised in the way the participants wanted was felt to be meaningful.

5.4 The meaning of a safer space

Based on previous studies and the theory of empowerment, we assumed that creating a safer space is a significant factor in promoting empowerment and wellbeing. We put a lot of effort into the project to create the conditions of a safer space and maintained its principles throughout the operations. The importance of a safer space and a sense of security has been emphasised in almost every answer we received in the interview. Its meaning cuts through the entire process and all its elements. The answers showed that the researcher-facilitators created a safer space both with their own actions and sensitivity, and by creating concrete rules together as a group. The rules of the safer space were created together,

they were discussed, and their compliance was a prerequisite for participating in the project. A permissive, accepting, and open atmosphere was important for safety.

In creating a safer space, the principle mentioned by Siitonen (1999) in Subchapter 3.1, that empowerment is more likely to occur in an enabling operating environment where appreciation, freedom of choice and safety are realised (Siitonen 1999: 61, 93–97). We made a special effort to create such an operating environment and maintained it by acquiring information, becoming aware of our own actions, and reflecting on events both with the participants and us as facilitators. According to Adams (2003), the elements that prevent empowerment are all dimensions that promote oppression and discrimination, so empowerment must be based on anti-oppressive values in all areas of the activities (Adams 2003: 67, 189). We drew attention to the fact that all the activities were really based on anti-oppressive values, and we also asked the participants to point out if there were any problems. Although according to Järvinen (2009), empowerment is possible even in non-ideal environments (Järvinen 2009:15), we felt that the environment is, in this project, something that we could concretely influence with our actions. That's why we wanted to see a special effort to create a safer space where empowerment would be possible.

The rules of safer space that we created together formed the basis of the meetings. According to Laatikainen, the participants felt the rules were an important part of the creation of a safer space experience, moreover, commitment to them can be stronger if they were made together with the group and there was an opportunity to influence them. (Laatikainen, 2020: 65.) At the first meeting of our project, we compiled the common rules for the project, which were repeated in later meetings. We had prepared proposals for them and went through them together with the participants. After that we created and wrote down our own safer space rules as a group which everyone agreed to follow. All the participants had their part to influence the content and tell what would feel safe to them or what might be unnecessary. We wanted to make the rules together with the participants so that all participants could stand behind them and feel safe during the meetings and throughout the project.

Own rules were created as the basis of a safer space, on which trust would be built on. The data suggests that we succeeded in creating a safer space and the participants felt good and relaxed about throwing themselves into the project. The creation of a safer space seemed to be influenced by a clear structure and framework, the group cohesion, and the feeling that the facilitators know what they are doing. According to Siitonen, the approval of each party is required for a safer atmosphere. It is also important that the person feels valued and welcomed. In a safer space, it is possible to take risks without the fear of failure. (Siitonen 1999: 144–145, 154.)

The project had the right of non-determination, which means that each participant (including the researcher-facilitators) could choose for themselves whether to define their own gender identity or not. In this way, everyone was seen and heard on their own without preconceived expectations from others. According to the participants, the creation of a safer space was influenced by the fact that everyone was given space. There was also a concrete rule in the background that everyone can define themselves or not.

Based on Laatikainen's analysis, one significant element for the creation of a safer space was peer support and the fact that the conversations were confidential (Laatikainen, 2020: 64–65). According to the analysis of this study, a significant element for the creation of a safer space and engaging in creative activities was also felt to be peer support and trust that things said in the workshop will not be shared with outsiders. During the meetings, the room exuded empathy and the atmosphere was deeply interactive - an experience that brings security and a feel of community. Within the group, others listened to and encouraged each other. The participants did find common things and experiences from each other's stories, and this seemed to increase group dynamics and trust. The experience that the other members of the group are able to support themselves, and no one has to support others, also created security for the participants. Very quickly it was clear that a safer space has been created and all participants were excited about the project.

The importance of a safer space as an enabler of empowerment was also brought up in relation to the fact that in the writing exercises and creating an audio-visual pieces there was an opportunity to trust and throw yourself into creativity. We wanted the participants to be able to tell the story they want, real or fictional, and to do it in a safer, trusting space. In Subchapter 3.2, we mentioned that according to Corbin et al. (2021) creative activities can also create a safer space and strengthen connections between people through shared experiences. These activities can also deepen the connections between people. (Corbin et al. 2021: 348–349.) From the research results, we can conclude that we succeeded in creating a safer space.

In the whole project, one of the rules of the safer space was that the matters discussed there were not shared with outsiders. That is why we have decided that all personal speech, that is not relevant for the research, has been removed from the material and will not be used in the findings of this study. We consider this particularly important for the trust of the participants. From the point of view of the research and the results, it would have been very interesting to open these discussions as well, but the important things from the point of view of the research question will be revealed in other answers. We consider it particularly important to follow the mutually agreed safer space rules both during the analysis phase and throughout the study. Participant B said that: "As a comment on the work of the facilitators, this project was excellently pulled off. You skilfully created such a safe atmosphere and therefore we participants had so much space for ourselves."

In conclusion, we can state that the meaning of a safer space was real for the project and its participants. The importance of it was emphasised in all responses as an enabler of both empowerment and the implementation of the project. The rules created together, and the actions of the researcher-facilitators enabled the realisation of a safer space.

5.5 Feeling of togetherness

We assumed that group dynamics play a role as an enabler of empowerment or, in the worst case, as an obstacle. From the participants answers, it can be concluded that the importance of the group dynamics as a element promoting wellbeing and empowerment in the project has been vast. Feelings of togetherness and solidarity have enabled a safer space where empowerment has been possible. Although some of the discussions have been heavy, the strengthening effect of the group has clearly been particularly meaningful.

In creating group dynamics, we researcher-facilitators had a limited number of possibilities in advance. The participants felt that this project had just the right people in it, and it created security to share things about themselves. They felt that the atmosphere was trusting, safe, accepting, permissive and inclusive and there was no experience of being an outsider in this group, as it might have been in some previous similar situations. We wanted to assemble a group around the same minority, so the initial situation already created a certain cohesion. In addition, the fact that people already knew each other to some extent in advance made it easier to form a united group.

In Subchapter 3.1, it is mentioned that although empowerment is a personal process, it is also a social one, because it is influenced by other people, circumstances, and social structures (Siitonen 1999: 117–118). Because of this, group dynamics and feeling of togetherness are important elements enabling empowerment. The researcher-facilitators observation from the first meeting says a lot:

> "Everyone seems to feel safe and have a good feeling about the project. The group is like a peer support group without being one. The participants understand that it is not a group therapy or a peer support group where you can throw yourself in for the support of others. Participants say that there is always permission to lighten up, but you should listen to your own limits."

The participants stated that the significance of group dynamics is important, because they must feel safe, and they have to be able to trust each other. In the interview, it becomes clear that the group felt safe and good from the beginning. The participants found other people's interpretations of their own pictures and texts exciting. The fact that the participants were partly familiar with each other and that everyone was very open by nature contributed to a lot of discussion. The discussions were considered both rewarding and tough. Sometimes the discussions went very deep and one of the participants said that they had experienced feelings of inadequacy in supporting others, on the other hand they also gained many new perspectives for themself from these discussions. However, the participants said that there was a feeling in the group that people knew how to support themselves and keep themselves safe. This also increased the feeling of security.

We considered it important to enable a permissive emotional atmosphere, as the participants worked on their own stories. We anticipated it could cause different emotional reactions. Allowing emotions and encouraging them seemed essential as an enabler of the empowerment process. According to Siitonen emotions can provide important information about the empowerment process by interpreting safety and acceptance for a person (Siitonen 1999: 152). In Subchapter 3.2, it was mentioned that sharing stories in a group can even serve as a therapeutic intervention, as other participants encourage the person's own story and at the same time change themselves (Gale et al. 2003). According to Freeman, it is also possible to open up a greater truth about humanity and life through stories, and identity is formed again and again through communicative interaction (Freeman 2001: 290–297).

In conclusion, we can state that the feeling of togetherness and solidarity acted as a significant promoter of wellbeing. Fortunately, the project included people who supported each other and whose mutual interaction was encouraging. Although some of the discussions were heavy, the mutual dynamics of the group was considered important and meaningful. In the beginning, the participants seemed to be a group of individual people, and after the project was finished, it seemed like a unified group, a certain kind of community even.

5.6 Timing of the project and the personality of the participant

Perhaps a little surprisingly, the participants gave great importance to the personality of the participants and the timeliness of the project in relation to the empowering effect of the project. They agreed that a person who engages in this kind of project, should be someone who enjoys this kind of creative activity and should consider themselves to be in the right situation in order for empowerment to be possible in the best way.

As mentioned earlier, empowerment is both a personal and a social process, for which confidence in one's own abilities and self-view is important (Siitonen 1999: 117–118). The personality of the participant plays a large role in relation to how they see and experience themself in relation to this kind of activity and group activities. The importance of personality can also be seen in how similar activities can promote empowerment for one person and hinder empowerment for another.

The participants thought it was clear that certain types of people who have something to say and want to share themselves and their story with others apply for such a project, people who are already interested in this kind of creative activity. The participants estimate that such a project may not reach those who are not enthusiastic about creative methods. They also agreed that this kind of activity is not suitable for everyone, and the project cannot be a substitute for therapy.

Optimism and positive experiences contribute to the discovery of one's own abilities and encourage towards achieving goals. Experiences of success are important in building self-esteem and self-image. Through the experiences of success, new things can be tried, and creativity can flourish. (Siitonen 1999: 151–154.) If a person's personality is such that they find creative activity pleasant or at least not repulsive, it is more likely that this type of activity is pleasant for them and that the experiences of success are realised more easily.

The importance of the timing of the project was brought up by everyone. The participants agreed that the empowering effect of such a project requires that the participant be able to assess for themself whether they are mentally capable of such a project. A person has to be healthy enough and have enough resources to be able to deal with such things and get wellbeing from it. If a person is in a difficult place mentally with their gender process, this kind of activity can be triggering, even if the purpose of the activity is good. A person must have basic security within their own gender process, because in the sensitive phase of building an identity, even a small thing can hurt a person significantly. The participants also agreed that it is important that no one needs a supporter, because it can burden others in the group.

An interesting point in the participants responses was that everyone felt that the project's timing was just right in relation to their own process, even though everyone was at a different point in their process. The participants felt that the project gave them the opportunity to process their own experiences, thoughts, and feelings. One described that they were able to take a weight off their shoulders. According to Siitonen (1999), it is impossible to define the characteristics of an empowered person due to the diversity of people. The environment and time also affect a person's characteristics. (Siitonen 1999: 93, 118, 155.) This supports our result whether a project is timely for oneself is a subjective experience and cannot be defined from the outside.
Participant A said that:

> "For me, this project came at just the right time and somehow it ended my own personal process. Now that at this stage of my life, those stages have all been achieved and the post process phase is gradually at hand, it somehow feels that in this project I got the tools and the opportunity to deal with the process and the related experiences, thoughts, and feelings. And that you could structure them into a story and make that story visible, somehow it felt important, and it feels like the job is done and now you can get on with life."

In conclusion, we can state that the meaning of the participant's personality is more important for the empowerment than we had assumed. Based on the

answers, the participants believed that a person needs to find creative activities pleasant for it to promote wellbeing. Timeliness of the project in relation to one's own process was also considered a significant prerequisite for empowerment. An interesting observation was that the timeliness of a project is, however, a very subjective experience thus cannot be defined by another person.

5.7 Transforming discriminatory attitudes

As stated in Subchapter 3.2 that one of our goals for this project was to create pieces that could be presented to people who are not familiar with gender diversity and also the pieces could serve as peer support. While planning this project and research, we had the thought that changing preconceptions could be important for a person belonging to a minority. The results support this assumption. The participants considered the opportunity to create representation and become visible through the means of creative activities to be particularly important, and the fact that they themselves can break the culture of shame. The importance of all this to outsiders was also understood and, for example, the feedback received by the participant at the premiere supported this observation.

Working in the project highlighted the themes of gender experience and made people talk about them. Creative activities were an important and mind-opening way to deal with the experience of gender. As stated in the Subchapter 3.2, the freedom of creativity belongs to everyone and it can facilitate the processing of emotions, create interaction and direct people's actions in a new way. (Huhtinen-Hildén et al. 2019.)

The making of the pieces sparked a lot of discussion along the way. The others had a strong need to change the world and maybe even felt pressure to use this opportunity to educate cis-people about gender-diverse people. However, the participants finally experienced and felt that this is a moment for themselves, for their own expression and giving their own voice to their peers. Participant B said: "The most important thing is that this project was empowering for me, so I conclude that it can be that for others as well. There is a surface of identification."

Participant B said that the premiere was the moment when they realised for the first time that this project can be important to others besides them, who had done it. Participant A felt that the premiere was the highlight of the whole project. It was also felt that the pieces helped to clarify the topic for the viewers to understand and that this project was a good way and method to make those belonging to the minority visible - If the output is to be distributed publicly. According to Hall and Powell (2011), narrative and stories are a way of culturally connecting the experiences of others (Hall & Powell 2011). These pieces were a way for the audience to relate to the participants experiences.

According to Freeman (2001), human stories are deeply connected to the cultural world in which we live, so no one's stories are theirs alone. In order for the story to be understandable, it must touch something familiar inside the person in a meaningful way. What makes a story interesting is that it moves beyond the familiar, contrary to expectations. However, the story must remain close to a sense of familiarity in order to be understood. (Freeman 2001: 284–288.) These stories can act as way of creating connections between the majority of people and gender-diverse people and simultaneously offer peer support for others reflecting about their gender. These stories can offer understanding about gender diversity and offer experiences of identification.

The participants felt that the project had a wider meaning, especially with the representation, and everyone had a wish for a wider distribution of the pieces. They felt that making matters and themselves visible was important and believed that it offers a platform for identification for others who are reflecting about their gender as well. They felt that representation can offer new ways of seeing oneself on the big screen, which can break down prejudices and normalise gender diversity and minorities. The participants felt that the stories were touching and believed in their meaning for others as well. With representation, we also became aware of the risk that someone could react in an unpleasant way. Participant C said: "Spaces and projects like this, which in practice give minorities the opportunity to express themselves, are extremely important." Participant A continued that: "We actually did create representation in this project."

In their stories, the interviewees refer, for example, stereotypes directed at trans people, especially in relation to appearance. They emphasise the image that a (trans)person should appear either masculine or feminine. This project was felt to function as a form of communication of many kinds: loud and less loud activism. However, the greatest experience seemed to be the experience of becoming visible, which seemed to be of great importance to the participants. It was also felt that this is an opportunity to break the norms.

Becoming visible was important to the participants and they had experiences of being invisible. The experience of becoming visible was collective and unique to everyone. One felt that they became visible without defences, the other with their painful experiences. It was also considered scary to bring up painful things in one's own life. We had given the participants the opportunity to tell their stories also anonymously, there would have been ways to do this if necessary. The participants thought the alternative was good, but that it told a sad story about our society. However, the participants agreed that becoming visible increases wellbeing. Participant B stated: "I agree with others that the possibility of empowerment, to become visible as one's own self does indeed increase wellbeing." The findings from the data are in line with previous studies: dealing with the topic is important so that talking about different gender identities becomes common and acceptance of differences grows and becomes normalised. Dealing with gender diversity is not necessarily easy for the creators themselves, or for the viewers of the pieces.

The participants considered it important that they themselves, as a minority, produce cultural content thus break the culture of shame. According to the participants, this kind of wellbeing is a collective matter and does not concern only minorities. This was confirmed by the experience of one participant, when they received feedback from someone in the audience at the premiere about how they felt the participant's piece was meaningful to them. One participant felt that they found it meaningful to observe how individual everyone's stories are, even if they belong to the same minority group. This helps to see the process of your own community from the inside as well.

Participant B said:

> "Now we are producing the cultural content ourselves and it has become really important for our minority. If we are doing this kind of breaking the culture of shame, then it means more wellbeing for all people, whether they are from our minority or not — because of this, I can clearly see that it is a collective issue, even if we want to understand it as a minority issue."

In Lappalainen's study, one of the respondents doubted that speaking alone would not help to increase tolerance. They suggested, for example, a book, a movie, or that someone would come and tell them about their own life. (Lappalainen 2020: 73.) Based on our findings, some of the participants had a strong need to change the world and create representation, and thoughts about whether to articulate their own experience in this project or to articulate an external one as well. It was thought that representation creates norms and what kind of norms would like to be created or broken in this project. The fact that we ended up making the pieces was experienced to be empowering and meaningful. The pieces were felt to help make gender diversity more understandable for the viewers. Participant C said: "I see a very special value in this project in that it reaches beyond these invisible social boundaries and spills out our own world."

We can conclude that breaking preconceptions related to gender diversity was an important motivator for the participants in addition for them to become visible. Presenting the pieces to other people was seen as meaningful through the fact that the participants felt they could help others in the same situation.

5.8 Meaning for internal process

In our findings, we consider whether the project must be relevant to the individual's internal process in order to promote wellbeing. It was noticeable in the answers that there was a difference in whether the project was specifically relevant to the gender process or not. However, the project was meaningful, as it offered the participants a way of self-expression.

Participant B said:

> "In the last few months, I have had a strong need to express myself again since for a long time. The *TruthStory* project jumped right out of the box to offer a pretty much perfect format to shape my experience into text. - I haven't had the chance to make a video (audio-visual piece) before, where I could somehow use my own emotional work or the expression of emotions, and now an opportunity suddenly presented itself."

The participants disagreed among themselves as to whether the *TruthStory* project was relevant specifically to their gender process. One was able to summarise their own gender process through the project, for the other it was an important part of the process, especially through a safe body relationship. For the third, the project was not significant in terms of the gender process, because they had already gone processed that in the past. The fact that the situation was not acute, and that distress and suffering were not present enabled them to have the resources for this type of project. As stated in the Subchapter 3.2, narrativity can be an approach for redefining oneself and process own issues but they are personal and subjective (Gale et al. 2003).

As mentioned in the Chapter 3.1 on empowerment, according to Siitonen (1999), empowerment is a process that originates from the person themself, so it is natural that a project that promotes wellbeing has meaning for an internal process (Siitonen 1999: 61, 189). Internal process can mean various subjectively defined things. Although the participants answers emphasised the gender process, the opportunity for self-expression, working with emotions or dealing with the body relationship was considered just as important to the internal process.

One of the participants said that the project offered a body-sensitive experience. As mentioned in the Subchapter 3.1, when an individual is empowered, their sense of wellbeing can originate from their own unique foundation. This empowerment facilitates an authentic experience of wellbeing. (Siitonen 1999: 189-190.) Participant D stated that:

> "For me, this project was really important in terms of my own process. One very special thing for myself here was bringing my own body-safety into

my own self. And that means the way I allow me to be myself in my own body. I have hated and hurt and mistreated and shamed my own body in the past. Nowadays I know how to tell myself and my body, about tenderness and treat it good."

The results showed that this project could also have wider meanings to the participants. Based on data analysis, we can conclude that the presentation of the pieces, encouraging feedback on them, and good experiences during the entire project had wider meaning to the participants through the audience viewing and reflecting on the pieces. On one hand, some risks were also seen, and the presentation of the pieces evoked some feelings of fear.

Participant A pointed out that personal stories create conversation and that it felt good at the premiere when one's own story had a festive setting – this emphasised the importance of one's own story and made it special. In addition, the fact that loved ones and outsiders could see their story and that they received praises and good feedback from the pieces was felt to be meaningful and it made the feelings of fear disappear. On one hand, for one participant, showing the pieces brought up traumas and fears, and the whole event felt like a risk in advance. However, the fact that there were safe people at the premiere gave them the experience that this project and the pieces could have a wider meaning than just the meaning to the creators. Therefore, the premiere felt good and safe in the end.

We can conclude that the participants felt the project was meaningful as a means of self-expression, but they had different opinions about its impact on the gender process. The results show that empowerment depends a lot on the participant's own personal stage of their internal process.

6 Conclusions and discussion

In this study, we implemented a creative project promoting empowerment for gender-diverse people and studied the elements that influence realisation of it. The purpose of this study was to describe and increase understanding of these elements and find out what their significance is for empowerment and wellbeing. We studied the wellbeing promoting elements from the perspective of empowerment theory, which guided the implementation of the *TruthStory* project. The research aims to answer the question: In what ways can a creative project for gender-diverse people enhance participants' empowerment? The goal of the project was primarily to create a safer space where it is possible to be creative and tell your own story the way you want to tell it. Another important point of view was to enable the creation of representation for gender diversity and to increase visibility. In this chapter, we review the key results of the study and their significance, as well as examine the quality of the study and the reliability of the results. Finally, we consider possible topics for further research.

The duration of the *TruthStory* project was relatively short, just over two and a half months. We understand that this time might be relatively short for the realisation of empowerment, and we did not define any specific empowerment goals. The goal of the project was to enhance wellbeing, and this can mean different things to different people and happen at a very individual pace. It was important to allow the individual process of the participants to be self-paced within the given time frames, as well as to enable the promotion of wellbeing. Through the research and the results, we have noticed that several overlapping elements are needed in advancing empowerment, both in the entire project and in individual meetings. These elements include multidisciplinary cooperation, creative activities, the creation of a safer space, feeling of togetherness, one's own internal process and its timing, making representation and becoming visible, and the opportunity to break stereotypes. The analysis of the data shows that the most significant elements for enhancing empowerment were peer support, safer space, rules, creative activities and creating representation.

The formation of a safer space had a significant impact on the outcome, and it was achieved through the rules created together, and the mutual relations between the participants, and the dynamics between the researcher-facilitators and the participants. Some exercises also promoted the creation of a safer space and enabled discussions. The importance of a safer space cut through all the project's functions and proved to be the most significant element enabling empowerment, because without the feeling of a safer space, other elements promoting empowerment would not have been realised, at least in the extent that they were now.

During the project, it became apparent that it is possible to promote but impossible to predict the emergence of a safer space in advance. The course of a groups activity cannot be completely predicted beforehand, even if the preparations have been made as well as possible. It was visible in the findings; the importance of the participant's personality is significant in relation to how this type of activity is perceived. It is also might be difficult to predict which things or exercises might act as triggers for others. In planning the project, one of the most important principles was to make it truly promote the wellbeing of the participants and enable changes to our plans according to their wishes. We decided that we can modify the plans radically during the process, if that was the participants' wish and we prepared for different scenarios regarding to this. When planning the meetings, we realised that we must humble ourselves before the wishes of the participants, because a process that enables genuine empowerment cannot be implemented from the top down. For the reason mentioned above, we wanted to be prepared for possible needs for change during the facilitation process. We are satisfied with this activity and consider it to be a successful method of operation and a good example of how our professionalism was utilised in the planning of the project.

Based on the findings, we see creative activities as a significant element in the process of empowerment. Creativity gave the participants new perspectives on their own stories and processes, as well as perspectives of the experiences of other participants. It also united the group of participants. As it was possible to carry out the exercises with a very small threshold and without any experience in

creative activities, it enabled throwing themselves into the project and discussions, which in turn enabled a relaxed atmosphere and gave room for encounters. When a project is planned by professionals without the participation of the participants there is always a risk of planning the wrong kind of activity. We did not know what kind of people would apply to the project because we did not implement the project for any existing group. Participants could sign up for the project themselves, guided by their own motivation, because we wanted people who feel that this kind of activity is inviting them to join. Otherwise, empowerment might not be possible.

Reflective discussions served as the starting and ending point of the meetings, which enabled a natural orientation from the outside world to the project and vice versa. Based on the analysis, these moments were important and contributed to the creation of a safer space, encounter, and discussion, as well as the transition to creative activities both in meetings and outside of them. During the project we noticed that more time should have been reserved for these discussions. Of course, this was a point that was difficult to assess in advance because with a different group of people the situation could have been completely different.

In addition to research, we wanted the project also to give the participants approaches for creative everyday activities and for reflecting also on other areas of life. Based on the results, we succeeded in this goal. In this way, the project has wider meanings in the lives of the participants than just the internal meanings of the project in matters related to the processing of gender identity and empowerment.

In addition to empowerment, the intention of this project is to help others reflecting their gender identity through representation and to normalise gender diversity. The participants in the project could therefore act as role models for other gender-diverse people. As mentioned in Subchapter 3.2, Grey feels that they themself lived without role models, and now they make art from their own life to bring the diversity of gender and sexuality visible and they also want to act as a role model through their artwork (Lappalainen 2012: 87). We did not want to define the

gender experience of the participants in advance, but let the participants define themselves, or leave it undefined if they wanted.

Based on the findings, peer support was a significant element for empowerment. During the project, the participants were able to discuss issues related to gender diversity with their peers, and it was considered meaningful that the discussions during the project were always confidential. It was felt that during the meetings, the participants could be truly themselves and open up even painful things about their own life and experiences, and they could get peer support for these feelings. All this enabled an empowering experience during the project. The atmosphere during the meetings felt safe and natural from the beginning. The group dynamics seemed to be working from the beginning and getting stronger after each meeting. As can be seen from the results, it was the group dynamics that were one of the most significant elements for the creation of a safer space thus for creativity and the creation of the participants' own stories. The rules of the project were created right from the start together with the participants, which was perceived as a meaningful matter. Each participant had the opportunity to influence the rules, which was felt to be important. Previous studies showed that commitment to rules can be stronger if they are created together and everyone could thus stand behind the agreed rules.

The timeliness of the project and the importance of the participant's personality in terms of the process were also emphasised in the fact that one of the people who initially participated in the project stopped the project of their own accord after the third group meeting. In the closing discussion, they said that creative work felt challenging and not natural to them at the moment. The person may not have felt this type of creative activity as a natural way of self-expression. Our interpretation, which was also supported by the results of the study, was that a person should also be in the right situation with their own internal process (of any issue) so that this type of activity can be empowering and pleasant. What is important is the observation that the right kind of situation is a subjective experience and cannot be defined from the outside.

As mentioned in Subchapter 3.1, according to Siitonen the sub-processes of empowerment are not necessarily shown through cause-and-effect relationships. Empowerment is influenced by circumstances and other people and the sub-processes can be connected to each other for example through the experience of acceptance. (Siitonen 1999: 117–118.) Although because of this, it can be challenging to show the cause-and-effect relationships of the elements that influenced the participants' perceived empowerment, we can still trust the participants' subjective experience that the project and its meaning have been empowering and wellbeing-promoting for them. The reasons for this are partly common and partly individual for the participants. However, the systematic observations, the direct feedback given by the participants and the data obtained from the interview indicate that real empowerment has taken place.

In Seta's blog post" Ei-binääristen päivä 2021: näkymättömyyden kokemuksista unelmien yhteiskunnan haaveiluun" (Non-binary day 2021: from the experiences of invisibility to the dreaming of a dream society) the experiences of gender-diverse people have been collected through a survey. The second part of the survey mapped out the experiences of invisibility in societal and social spaces, and the answers repeated the same themes that emerged in our project. The feeling that society does not support or even recognise the existence or gender diversity. Fear of not being taken seriously, numerous experiences of invisibility. It was felt that there is not enough representation for non-binary people on various media platforms, and if there is representation, it is usually of a young person. A wish for a wide variety of representation: different ages and different family forms, and especially a wish that non-binary people would create this representation themselves. It was also considered important that there is representation in media whose target group is the majority population instead of the gender minority. (Seta 2021.) Our project meets this need in many respects. In this project, gender-diverse people were able to create a representation from their own starting points. In addition, the presentation of audio-visual pieces also reaches people belonging to the mainstream population.

In Seta's news" Transihmisyyden normalisointi vielä puolitiessä" (The normalization of trans humanity is still halfway), Seta's vice president Alia Dannenberg says the following about the same topic:

> "There are very few strong and empowering trans characters in the public eye or in fictional literature and cinema. The prevailing stereotype is definitely not the whole truth about trans people. I hope that the social normalisation of trans people would gradually reach a new level."

Dannenberg also considers the neutral and positive visibility of trans people to be important for social normalisation, and with their own activism, they strive to show what trans hatred is. The social position of trans people is worrying despite the change in the trans law, and the experience is that discrimination in the structures of society would decrease, and the status and health of trans people would improve if more trans role models were visible. (Seta 2022.) Dannenberg talks about trans people in this blog post, but we can equally think that the same problems and challenges also affect other gender-diverse people and that the importance of positive representation is greater than has been thought.

In the blog text "Väsyttää olla rohkea" (It's tiring to be brave), Henrietta Pihlaja writes about the exhaustion of the sexual and gender minorities have towards the attitude that one should be silent, and where every pride march and rainbow flag waving is too loud and too visible for someone, even though in reality a large part of the persons belonging to sexual and gender minorities are not visible at all. It's exhausting to calculate where you can be yourself. Henrietta says: "Courage is not fearlessness but acting in spite of fear. The courage of the gender and sexual minorities has changed the world, and it is needed to change the world further." It is also felt necessary to try to change those who oppose the minority people and to be brave also for those who are unable to do so. (Pihlaja 2022.) Similar experiences also emerged during this project and from the data of our research. Such experiences show that for a creative activity like the *TruthStory* project, in which members of the minority are allowed to fulfil themselves safely and become empowered by the activity, are very meaningful.

The audio-visual pieces of the *TruthStory* project have strong, rough, and possibly triggering stories, but they still leave a hopeful and comforting feeling in the end. The participants themselves are proud of their pieces and stand behind the representation they created. How opinionated, critical, and questioning pieces they wanted to make under this project was completely up to our participants and their desire. But the fact that the topic of the project is personally important and close to the heart for all participants, according to research and our results, makes the project more meaningful and relevant for them. It is important that the participants themselves have been fully responsible for the representation they have created, and there has been no attempt to influence it or restrict what can be done from the outside. The result is authentic representation.

During the *TruthStory* project, strong stereotypes created by cis-people came to the fore. Breaking these stereotypes was a very important and meaningful issue that we wanted to influence within this project. As the project progressed, this became an important goal for many participants. Of course, we researcher-facilitators had also thought about this in advance and taken it as one of the project's goals, but its importance grew larger during the project. This would be a very important topic to research and explore with in future creative projects.

Several bad experiences with the healthcare industry and other people who work with gender-diverse people also came up during this project. Teaching them to meet gender-diverse people in a respectful and appreciative manner would be meaningful both for the participants and, in a broader picture, also for other people in the same situation. During the discussions in the project, these encounters often came up in a negative sense. The introduction states that through representation, the minority slowly becomes a part of the norm. This was a powerful motivation for some participants to participate in this project and thereby create visibility and peer support for the topic. The first thought for some of the participants was that they should "educate" cis-people about gender diversity, but this changed during the project. In the end, the participants wanted to use this opportunity to reflect their own process and use it for their own empowerment.

We hope that the project has a long-term significance in reducing minority stress both for the people who participated in the project and for those people who see the audio-visual pieces and are reflecting their own gender. We were able to notice the touching effect of the pieces at the premiere when outsiders were able to see them for the first time. By creating representation and thereby slowly normalising gender diversity at the grassroots level, it is possible to change some people's attitude towards minorities. The project can increase wellbeing through representation, when others belonging to the same minority increasingly see people like themselves in various public contexts.

The results of this study show that when you act in accordance with the principles of empowerment theory, it is possible to implement a high-quality project that can withstand ethical scrutiny. The principles of empowerment theory guided all our activities down to the detail, and we can proudly stand behind the implementation of the project. We knew how to consider the individual elements that enable empowerment in the planning of creative activities and promote the possibility of empowerment with our activities. We were also lucky that those elements that we could not influence in advance succeeded beyond expectations. Our group had people with wonderful personalities who enjoyed this kind of activity and whose personal chemistry worked well together. The audience's reaction at the premiere was also moving.

Narrativity seemed like a successful method for promoting empowerment. Because through narrative it is possible to shape a new kind of story about oneself (Hall & Powell 2011), it enables a variety of ways to deal with matters that are meaningful or difficult for oneself. With it, you can make visible something that you want to face or something that didn't seem possible before. Narratives and stories can also act as elements that unite people. According to Freeman, the story must touch something inside us in a meaningful way in order for it to be understood. What makes a story interesting is that it moves beyond the familiar, contrary to expectations. However, the story must remain close to familiarity in order to be able to understand it. (Freeman 2001:288)

While doing this research and planning the project, we became familiar with various theories that guided our actions, such as the theory of empowerment, which has served as an ethical guideline for everything we did in this project. In addition, we went through a wide variety of research based on creative methods, from which we gained a perspective for the *TruthStory* project. We received concrete instructions and methods from previous studies to implement the project with high quality and in the best possible way in terms of achieving the goals.

The data collection has been carried out according to our best quality and the obtained material is comprehensive in quality. However, an external observer would have been needed for the implementation of the systematic observation in the final meetings. We researcher-facilitators were not able to do this in a pedantic way when we facilitated the creative activities, because our focus was on the practicalities. However, the observations written afterwards about these situations were also included in the analysed material and they turned out to be valuable data. The model of systematic observation worked for us and with its help we got enough high-quality material.

The questions of the focus group interview had been well thought out beforehand and approved by the thesis advisor. Other materials used were the feedback sent by the participants via e-mail, the researchers' systematic written observations and diaries. The data was well organised, and it was stored in a safe place. The data was thoroughly familiarised before starting the analysis and three rounds of analysis were carried out, initially by the researchers separately and finally together. In vivo coding was the most effective and the most suitable method we knew of for our data analysis. We went through the findings together and reached a unanimous conclusion, which was supported by the results of previous studies.

The ethical starting points of the research had been carefully considered and discussed throughout the planning and implementation of the project. The results of our research are reliable and transparent. The starting point of the research has been a genuine desire to promote the wellbeing of gender-diverse people, and all creative activities have been based on that. We became aware of the power system behind the research and its political value, and we claim that the

research is timely, because gender minorities are still not in a completely equal position in our society. One of the goals of this study is to positively influence the attitudes of the general population. We paid special attention to the fact that the research would not have negative effects on the people who participated in it, nor on other people belonging to the same minority. All the necessary documents and consent forms have been duly completed and their purpose has been explained to the participants. We have protected the privacy of the participants in our research in the best possible way and strived for as much anonymity as possible when analysing the data. We could not promise our participants full anonymity because of the audio-visual pieces.

The researcher-facilitators actions involve power structure, even though we wanted to make the workshop more conversational and peer-to-peer activity. We made our operations transparent and took the wishes and concerns of the participants into account. We also told them that all the comments we write down can be viewed and read through if they wish. Since we researcher-facilitators did not belong to gender minority, the project required us to acquire up-to-date information and be sensitive, and according to the feedback, we succeeded in this. The results showed that it was important for the participants that a professional from both the social and cultural fields was involved in the project, in order to feel safe throwing themselves into the project and creating pieces whose quality can be trusted. We see the fact that we researcher-facilitators were from different fields as very special and meaningful. In this way, both social and artistic competence was obtained for the project. The skills of our researcher-facilitators overlapped nicely. One participant stated that they felt safe when the facilitator knew what they were doing. So, we have succeeded in bringing our own know-how to the fore and creating a safer and confident atmosphere.

We decided to exclude sexual minorities from the study, after first considering including them in order to reach a larger group, but we felt this option was too broad, so we decided to focus on gender-diverse people in this study. Focusing on gender minorities enabled us to obtain high-quality information about this very diverse group and promoted the participants' sense of belonging. We feel that the decision was right. In addition, we initially planned the project to be more long-

term, but then suspected that we would face challenges in the participants' ability to commit to the project. After consideration we estimated that it is easier to commit to a project with a shorter duration, and we received praise from the participants that the project was clear and did not go on for too long.

Several previous studies have focused on investigating the creation of a safer space, but we could not find another study quite similar in which a creative, narrative project was carried out with gender-diverse people. Since the creation of a safer space has been studied a lot and its creation is already well recognised, the next detailed study could be the meaning of a brave space and possible differences in their function, effect and meaning.

Miriam Attias writes in her YLE column "Onko turvallisen tilan säännöillä järjestetty keskustelu vain mukavan tilan keskustelu?" (Is a conversation organised by the rules of a safe space just a conversation in a comfortable space?) about the shortcomings of a safer space in relation to a brave space and ponders whether courage or safety is required to change the world. Attias says that they have met people who feel that the principles of a safer space prevent free discussion, thus people who are not included in the equality discourse cannot be heard. Attias also mentions that the feeling of safety is sometimes confused with the feeling of comfort, and changing the world does not happen from the comfort zone. In the brave space, one goes towards a scary thing, but the awkwardness of the subject is not considered the opposite of safety. According to the principles of a brave space, everyone is responsible for their actions and their impact, and the conversation should start by clarifying what respect means to the participants. In addition, it is agreed not to attack the other. (Attias 2023.) In this project, we saw a safer space as an important element, and according to the results, it was. In some other projects or situations, brave space may be a more suitable option and it would be interesting to study the differences between these two modes.

Another interesting research topic could be different creative processes and their effects on empowerment and promoting wellbeing. For example, is creative writing a more effective method from the point of view of empowerment than

performing arts, or the other way around, and what elements affect it, and how presenting these art forms affects its creator. In the future, a creative workshop could also be implemented, where material is produced for educational purposes, which can then be used by various organisations and other educational entities. This study revealed a strong will of the participants to help and gain more visibility for this topic. Another topic that was repeated throughout the project was educating of cis people, but this project was still intended to be self-empowering and did not set out to make any material for educational purposes. However, we feel that there is a great need for such material.

Representation is an important and good way to reduce preconceived notions about gender diversity, but there is a possibility that the subjects are put under critical scrutiny and that can thereby negatively affect to health and wellbeing. However, in this study, the participants considered the importance of representation and its wellbeing-promoting effect to be greater than the risk. The participants stated several times that they choose not to live in fear and are ready to face possible negative reactions as well.

During the research, we learned to understand a lot more about what kind of needs gender-diverse people have in terms of a safer space. We also learned to better understand different gender experiences and the challenges associated with them. We are aware that some of the effects of this project may only appear over a longer period, even years. We may never be able to know these. However, we can get information about many immediate short-term effects. We are very happy that we chose this topic for our research. We feel that with this research we had an opportunity, and an obligation to promote human rights and equality. In this project we have managed to take a small step towards that.

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Appendices

Appendix 1. Examples of writing exercises, first meeting.

Kerro kymmenellä lauseella kuka olet.

(Tell me who you are in ten sentences)

Mitä kokemuksiasi haluaisit tuoda näkyväksi?

(What experiences would you like to make visible?)

Kerro elämästäsi eri jaksoissa (esim. 5 v, 3v) tapahtumien kautta.

(Tell about your life in different periods (e.g. 5 years, 3 years) through events.)

Mitä haluaisit muistokirjoituksessasi sanottavan? Mikä elämässäsi on tärkeää?

(What would you like your obituary to say? What is important in your life?)

Mitä tekisit, jos et pelkäisi?

(What would you do if you weren't afraid?)

(Harjoitusten alkuperä ei tiedossa)

(The origin of the exercises is unknown)

Appendix 2. Examples of writing exercises, second meeting.

Elämäni elokuva

Jos elämästäsi tehtäisiin elokuva, millainen se olisi? Keitä hahmoja elokuvassa olisi ja millaisissa rooleissa? Kuka hahmoista on sellainen, ketä et ole vielä oikeasti tavannut? Mikä olisi elokuvan tyylilaji? Erään teorian mukaan ihmisen identiteetti muodostuu niistä sitoumuksista, joita teemme. Näitä ovat esimerkiksi ihmissuhteet. Osa tulee meille annettuina, osan saamme valita. Mitä mietit tästä?

The movie of my life

If your life was made into a movie, what would it be like? Which characters would be in the film and in what roles? Which of the characters is someone you haven't met yet? What would be the genre of the film? According to one theory, a person's identity is formed by the commitments we make. These include, for example, human relationships. Some are given to us, some we get to choose. What do you think about this?

(Juha Petterson)

Avainkokemus

Tilanne, hetki tai keskustelu, jolloin ymmärsit jotain oleellista itsestäsi ja jonka merkitys on pysynyt. Tämä voi olla ulkoisesti hyvin pieni asia, mutta sisäinen järistys on ollut suuri.

Key experience

That situation, moment or conversation when you understood something essential about yourself and whose meaning has remained. This may be a very small thing on the outside, but the upheaval on the inside has been significant.

(Eva Havo)

Lapsuusmuisto

Preesensissä ilman aikuisen minän tulkintaa.

A childhood memory

In the present without the interpretation of the adult self.

(Eva Havo)

Appendix 3: Shooting script template.

Kuvaussuunnitelma   Teoksen nimi ja tekijä
(Shooting script)   (Name of the piece and the
                                            creator)

Tarinan teema (Theme of the story)

Kuka esiintyy teoksessa (Who appears in the piece)

Mitä saa/ei saa näkyä (What can/can't be seen)

Mitä tunteita haluat tuoda esiin? (What emotions do you want to present)

Valaisu (Lighting)

Kuvakoko (Appropriate shot)

Käsikirjoitus (Script)

Tausta (Backgroud)

Rekvisiitta ja tarpeisto (Props)

Stailaus (Styling)

Kuvaustiimi (Shooting team)

Tarvitaan: (What is needed)

Kohtaukset (Scenes):
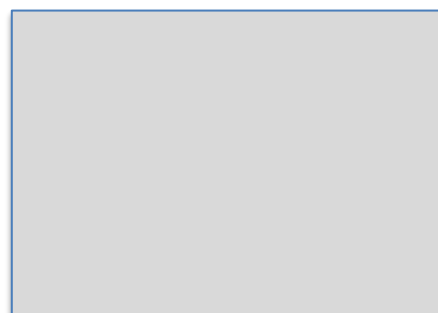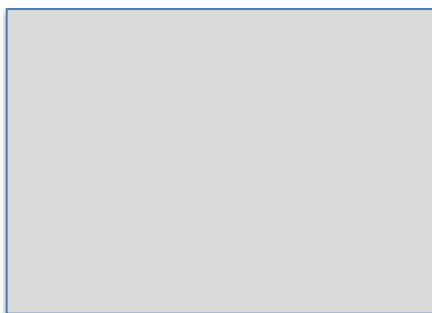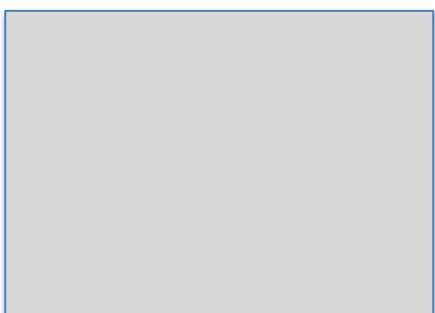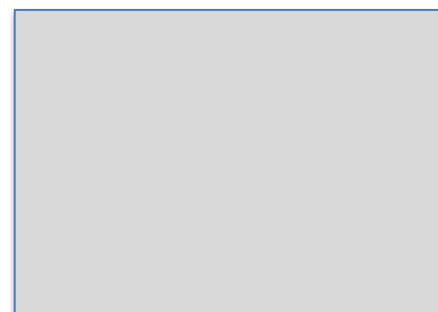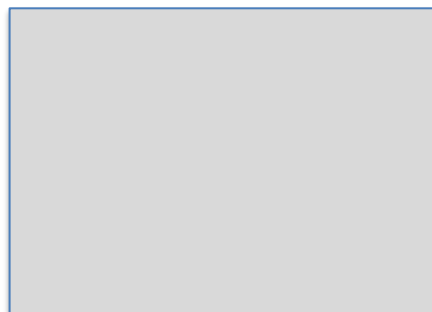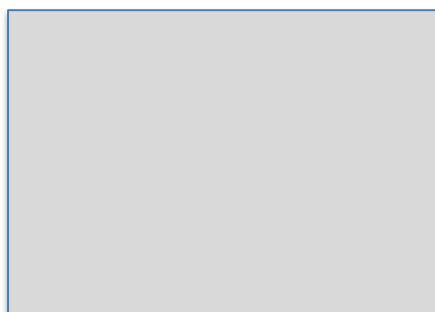
Appendix 4. Filming permit sheet.

Tutkimuksen nimi:
TruthStory – Stories about the life of gender minorities

Tutkimuksen toteuttaja:
Metropolia ammattikorkeakoulu
Creativity and Arts in Social and Health Fields - YAMK koulutusohjelma
(contact details of researchers)
(contact details of instructors)

Minua   on pyydetty osallistumaan yllämainittuun tutkimukseen, jonka tarkoituksena on tutkia TruthStory - projektin toteutuksen kautta, millä tavoin voimauttavalla tarinallisella taideprojektilla on hyvinvointia edistävä vaikutus.

Olen saanut tiedotteen tutkimuksesta ja ymmärtänyt sen. Tiedotteesta olen saanut riittävän selvityksen tutkimuksesta, sen tarkoituksesta ja toteutuksesta, oikeuksistani sekä tutkimuksen mahdollisesti liittyvistä hyödyistä ja riskeistä. Minulla on ollut mahdollisuus esittää kysymyksiä ja olen saanut riittävän vastauksen kaikkiin tutkimusta koskeviin kysymyksiin.

Olen saanut tiedot tutkimukseen mahdollisesti liittyvästä henkilötietojen keräämisestä, käsittelystä ja luovuttamisesta ja minun on ollut mahdollista tutustua tutkimuksen tietosuojaselosteeseen.

Osallistun tutkimukseen vapaaehtoisesti. Minua ei ole painostettu eikä houkuteltu osallistumaan tutkimukseen.

Minulla on ollut riittävästi aikaa harkita osallistumistani tutkimukseen.

Ymmärrän, että osallistumiseni on vapaaehtoista ja että voin peruuttaa tämän suostumukseni koska tahansa syytä ilmoittamatta. Olen tietoinen siitä, että mikäli keskeytän tutkimuksen tai peruutan suostumuksen, minusta keskeyttämiseen ja suostumuksen peruuttamiseen mennessä kerättyjä tietoja ja näytteitä voidaan käyttää osana tutkimusaineistoa.

Allekirjoituksellani vahvistan osallistumiseni tähän tutkimukseen.

Jos tutkimukseen liittyvien henkilötietojen käsittelyperusteena on suostumus, vahvistan allekirjoituksellani suostumukseni myös henkilötietojeni käsittelyyn. Minulla on oikeus peruuttaa suostumukseni tietosuojaselosteessa kuvatulla tavalla.

Helsingissä   ____ . ____. _____

Allekirjoitus: _____

Nimenselvennys: _____

Alkuperäinen allekirjoitettu tutkittavan suostumus sekä kopio tutkimustiedotteesta liitteineen jäävät tutkijan arkistoon. Tutkimustiedote liitteineen ja kopio allekirjoitetusta suostumuksesta annetaan tutkittavalle.

Appendix 5. Advertisement for the project.

Appendix 6. Participant research information sheet.

TruthStory – Stories about the life of gender minorities

Pyyntö osallistua tutkimukseen

      Teitä pyydetään mukaan tutkimukseen, jossa tutkitaan TruthStory - projektin toteutuksen kautta, millä tavoin voimauttavalla tarinallisella taideprojektilla on hyvinvointia edistävä vaikutus. Olemme arvioineet, että sovellutte tutkimukseen, koska olette täysi-ikäinen, sukupuolivähemmistöön identifioituva henkilö. Tämä tiedote kuvaa tutkimusta ja teidän osuuttanne siinä. Perehdyttyänne tähän tiedotteeseen teille järjestetään mahdollisuus esittää kysymyksiä tutkimuksesta, jonka jälkeen teiltä pyydetään suostumus tutkimukseen osallistumisesta.

Vapaaehtoisuus

      Tutkimukseen osallistuminen on täysin vapaaehtoista. Voitte myös keskeyttää tutkimuksen koska tahansa syytä ilmoittamatta. Mikäli keskeytätte tutkimuksen tai peruutatte suostumuksen, teistä keskeyttämiseen ja suostumuksen peruuttamiseen mennessä kerättyjä tietoja ja näytteitä voidaan käyttää osana tutkimusaineistoa.

Tutkimuksen tarkoitus

      Tämän tutkimuksen tarkoituksena on tutkia, millä tavoin voimauttavalla tarinallisella taideprojektilla on hyvinvointia edistävä vaikutus ja mitkä asiat siihen vaikuttavat. Tutkimuksessa toteutetaan TruthStory-niminen taideprojekti, jossa osallistujat saavat kertoa tarinansa ja siitä toteutetaan audiovisuaalinen taideteos, joka esitetään järjestämässämme ensi-illassa sekä mahdollisesti myös muissa kuvaussopimuksessa mainituissa yhteyksissä. Projektin jälkeen haastattelemme osallistujia heidän kokemuksistaan.

Tutkimuksen toteuttajat

      Tutkimuksen toteuttajat ovat Heli Suoninen ja Minttu Ågren, Metropolia ammattikorkeakoulun YAMK-tutkinnon opiskelijat CRASH-tutkintolinjasta (Creativity and Arts in Social and Health Fields). Tutkimusta ei toteuteta minkään järjestön tai organisaation kanssa yhteistyössä. Tutkimuksen ohjaajat ovat Kaija Matinheikki ja Sanna Kivijärvi Metropolia ammattikorkeakoulusta.

Tutkimusmenetelmät ja toimenpiteet

      Tutkittava osallistuu TruthStory workshopiin, joka käsittää neljä ryhmätapaamista (13.3., 20.3., 27.3. ja 3.4. klo:17.30–20, Helsingissä), yhden kuvauspäivän (n.2h, huhtikuussa Helsingissä), viimeisen ryhmätapaamisen sekä ensi-illan (4.5. Helsingissä). Projektin toteutuksen jälkeen tutkittava osallistuu haastatteluun.

      Tutkimus toteutetaan siten, että projektin jälkeen jokainen tutkittava haastatellaan ja haastatteluvastaukset analysoidaan nimettöminä lopputyössä.

Kustannukset ja niiden korvaaminen

      Tutkimukseen osallistuminen ei maksa teille mitään. Osallistumisesta ei myöskään makseta erillistä korvausta.

Tutkittavien vakuutusturva

Tutkittavia ei ole vakuutettu tutkijoiden toimesta.

Tutkimustuloksista tiedottaminen

Tutkimus on opinnäytetyö, joka julkaistaan avoimesti Theseus-tietokannassa.

Tutkimuksen päättyminen

Myös tutkimuksen suorittaja voi keskeyttää tutkimuksen. Tutkimus päättyy viimeistään vuoden 2024 lopussa.

Lisätiedot

Pyydämme teitä tarvittaessa esittämään tutkimukseen liittyviä kysymyksiä tutkijalle/tutkimuksesta vastaavalle henkilölle.

Tutkijoiden yhteystiedot (contact details of researchers)

Tutkimuksen tietosuojaseloste: Henkilötietojen käsittely tutkimuksessa

Tässä tutkimuksessa käsitellään teitä koskevia henkilötietoja voimassa olevan tietosuojalainsäädännön (EU:n yleinen tietosuoja-asetus, 679/2016, ja voimassa oleva kansallinen lainsäädäntö) mukaisesti. Seuraavassa kuvataan henkilötietojen käsittelyyn liittyvät asiat.

Tutkimuksen rekisterinpitäjä
Rekisterinpitäjällä tarkoitetaan tahoa, joka yksin tai yhdessä toisten kanssa määrittelee henkilötietojen käsittelyn tarkoitukset ja keinot. Rekisterinpitäjä voi olla korkeakoulu, toimeksiantaja, muu yhteistyötaho, opinnäytetyöntekijä tai jotkut edellä mainituista yhdessä (esim. korkeakoulu ja opinnäytetyöntekijä yhdessä).

Tässä tutkimuksessa henkilötietojen rekisterinpitäjä on:

Korkeakoulu (Metropolia ammattikorkeakoulu)
Opinnäytetyöntekijät

Voitte kysyä lisätietoja henkilötietojenne käsittelystä rekisteripitäjän yhteyshenkilöltä

Rekisterinpitäjän yhteyshenkilön nimi: Heli Suoninen ja Minttu Ågren
Organisaatio: Metropolia ammattikorkeakoulu
Puh.
Sähköposti: email addresses here

Tutkimuksessa teistä kerätään seuraavia henkilötietoja
Henkilötietojen käsittely on oikeutettua ainoastaan silloin, kun se on tutkimukselle välttämätöntä. Kerättävät henkilötiedot on minimoitava, niitä ei saa kerätä tarpeettomasti tai varmuuden vuoksi.

Nimet ja henkilötiedot tietosuojalomakkeessa, kuvaa ja ääntä videossa sekä haastattelunauhoituksessa.

Teillä ei ole sopimukseen tai lakisääteiseen tehtävään perustuvaa velvollisuutta toimittaa henkilötietojanne vaan osallistuminen on täysin vapaaehtoista.

Tutkimuksessa ei kerätä henkilötietojanne muista lähteistä.

Henkilötietojenne suojausperiaatteet
Tiedot säilytetään suojatusti ulkoisella kovalevyllä. Paperiversiot hävitetään asianmukaisesti. Kuva- ja äänimateriaalia kerätään tutkimuksen puitteissa audiovisuaalista taideteosta varten, mutta sitä ei käytetä tutkimusraportissa. Kuva- ja äänimateriaalin keräykseen on asianmukainen lupa. Mihinkään dokumentteihin ei pääse käsiksi ilman salasanaa.

Henkilötietojenne käsittelyn tarkoitus
Henkilötietojenne käsittelyn tarkoitus on tutkimukseen osallistuminen.

Tämän tutkimuksen tarkoituksena on tutkia, millä tavoin voimauttavalla tarinallisella taideprojektilla on hyvinvointia edistävä vaikutus ja mitkä asiat siihen vaikuttavat.

Henkilötietojenne käsittelyperuste
Suostumus

Tutkimuksen kestoaika (henkilötietojenne käsittelyaika)
Viimeistään vuoden 2024 loppuun mennessä.

Mitä henkilötiedoillenne tapahtuu tutkimuksen päätyttyä?
Henkilötiedot hävitetään, poislukien audiovisuaalinen taideteos.

Tietojen luovuttaminen tutkimusrekiseristä
Tietoja ei luovuteta.

Rekisteröitynä teillä on oikeus
Koska henkilötietojanne käsitellään tässä tutkimuksessa, niin olette rekisteröity tutkimuksen aikana muodostuvassa henkilörekisterissä. Rekisteröitynä teillä on oikeus:

- saada informaatiota henkilötietojen käsittelystä
- tarkastaa itseänne koskevat tiedot
- oikaista tietojanne
- poistaa tietonne (esim. jos peruutatte antamanne suostumuksen)
- peruuttaa antamanne henkilötietojen käsittelyä koskeva suostumus
- rajoittaa tietojenne käsittelyä
- rekisterinpitäjän ilmoitusvelvollisuus henkilötietojen oikaisusta, poistosta tai käsittelyn rajoittamisesta
- tehdä valitus tietosuojavaltuutetun toimistoon, jos katsotte, että henkilötietojanne on käsitelty tietosuojalainsäädännön vastaisesti

Jos henkilötietojen käsittely tutkimuksessa ei edellytä rekisteröidyn tunnistamista ilman lisätietoja eikä rekisterinpitäjä pysty tunnistamaan rekisteröityä, niin oikeutta tietojen tarkastamiseen, oikaisuun, poistoon, käsittelyn rajoittamiseen, ilmoitusvelvollisuuteen ja siirtämiseen ei sovelleta.

Voitte käyttää oikeuksianne ottamalla yhteyttä rekisterinpitäjään.

Tutkimuksessa kerättyjä henkilötietoja ei käytetä profilointiin tai automaattiseen päätöksentekoon

Henkilötietojen käsittely aineistoa analysoitaessa ja tutkimuksen tuloksia raportoitaessa

Haastatteluaineisto pseudonymisoidaan.

Teistä kerättyä tietoa ja tutkimusaineistoa käsitellään luottamuksellisesti lainsäädännön edellyttämällä tavalla. Aineisto analysoidaan ja tulokset raportoidaan ryhmätasolla. Tietoja ei anneta tutkimuksen ulkopuolisille henkilöille. Lopulliset tutkimustulokset raportoidaan ryhmätasolla.

Appendix 7. Participant research consent sheet.

Tutkimuksen nimi:
TruthStory – Stories about the life of gender minorities

Tutkimuksen toteuttaja:
Metropolia ammattikorkeakoulu
Creativity and Arts in Social and Health Fields - YAMK koulutusohjelma

Researchers contact details here

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Helsingissä   ____. ____. _____

Allekirjoitus: _____

Nimenselvennys: _____

Alkuperäinen allekirjoitettu tutkittavan suostumus sekä kopio tutkimustiedotteesta liitteineen jäävät tutkijan arkistoon. Tutkimustiedote liitteineen ja kopio allekirjoitetusta suostumuksesta annetaan tutkittavalle.