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## Counsellors' interactional practices for facilitating group members' affiliative talk about personal experiences in group counselling

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**Abstract:** Affiliative talk about personal experiences, that is, talk that supports the person's affective stance towards the experience, is important in all types of counselling. Often, however, this is not the only or even the main goal of the counselling. We investigate what interactional practices counsellors use to facilitate group members' affiliative talk about their personal experiences in a problem focused, health promotion group counselling. The findings are based on a conversation analysis of 23 video-recorded group counselling sessions. We present four interactional practices by counsellors for facilitating participants' talk about their personal experiences in relation to other group members' experiences. We demonstrate that each interactional practice sets up a different space for telling about one's experiences in an affiliative way. Loosely designed questions about group members' thoughts at the end of an assignment seem to engender stretches of affiliative talk about personal experiences very efficiently. We suggest that even if the counselling is focused on solving group members' problems, it should include time for loosely structured discussions among group members to support affiliative talk.

**Keywords:** affiliation, conversation analysis, group counselling, health promotion, interaction, personal experience, problem solving

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# 1 Introduction

In health promotion settings, an important aim of counselling is to foster change in group members' health behaviour. Therefore, guiding group members towards a change is a central institutional goal for counsellors. This entails a focus on problem-solving, that is, providing advice and information when troubles are presented and engaging a group in discovering solutions for each other's problems. Yet, counselling research suggests that a key factor in successful counselling is that clients have an experience of "being heard". This means that clients have the possibility to talk about their personal experiences, and that their experiences are emphatically understood by their co-participants. We call this interactional phenomenon *affiliative talk about personal experiences*, where affiliation refers to actions whereby recipients of personal experiences (described in actions such as troubles-tellings, complaints or stories) show that they support the affective stance displayed in them (Lindström and Sorjonen 2013). Thus, counsellors' job in a group counselling setting is twofold: they need to engage a group in talk about personal experiences in ways that (1) provide possibilities for affiliative talk; and (2) maintain the relevance of the institutional goals which means facilitating problem-solving via advice.

In this study, we are interested in counsellors' practices of facilitating group members' talk about their personal experiences. In particular, we investigate how and to what extent the counsellors' practices facilitate group members talking about their personal experiences in relation to other group members' experiences and in this way, showing affiliation. We demonstrate how counsellors do this while at the same time striving towards the institutional goals of health promotion. We ask: (1) what kind of interactional practices counsellors use for facilitating group members' comments on each other's experiences; (2) what kind of group member participation these practices facilitate; and (3) what possibilities these practices afford for affiliative talk about personal experiences.

In what follows, we will outline relevant literature focusing on the interactional practices counsellors use to facilitate group members' affiliative talk about their personal experiences. We will then present the data and method, followed by our analysis which is divided into four subsections. Each section presents one practice that differed in terms of its interactional environment and how it facilitated affiliative talk about experiences among the group members. Finally, the analytic findings are discussed in relation to previous literature on counselling interaction.

## 2 Literature review

In research on dyadic counselling and psychotherapy, the importance of one's personal experiences being empathically understood has been studied as part of the so-called therapeutic alliance, i. e. the good working relationship that predicts successful treatment (Horvath 2001; Wampold 2001; Cooper and McLeod 2011). In group counselling interventions aiming to encourage people to take better care of their health and wellbeing, affiliative talk about personal experiences has been linked with the concept of peer support, i. e. support provided by those who are sharing the same life situation or problem (Simoni et al. 2011). Previous studies have highlighted that affiliative talk about personal experiences is essential, taking precedence over other goals a peer group may have (Kaufman and Whitehead 2016; Simoni et al. 2011).

Studies focusing on interaction in dyadic psychotherapy settings have described in detail counsellors' or psychotherapists' interactional practices that accomplish affiliative talk, such as formulations and other attuned responses (Duff and Bedi 2010; Voutilainen et al. 2010; Weiste and Peräkylä 2013; Weiste 2016). In group counselling settings, however, affiliative talk about personal experiences occurs not only between counsellors and clients, but also between group members. Thus, it matters whether group members have the opportunity to talk about their experiences, and how they respond to each other's experiences.

Group members' possibilities to talk about personal experiences are linked to two interactional elements. Firstly, group members need to have an opportunity to bring up their experiences in each other's presence and show their understandings of each other's experiences. This typically happens under the counsellor's direction and, in some cases, via turn-by-turn extensive monological turns (Arminen 2004; Halonen 2008). This exchange of experiences allows participants to compare their perspectives, identify similarities as well as differences, and gain a deeper insight into their experience through self-reflection. Even when group interaction is based on completely monological narrations without commentaries, as in 12-step meetings, the stories are shaped to benefit the group and the shared treatment ideology. For instance, in the context of meetings of the Alcoholic Anonymous, participants orient to each other's stories as a template into which they fit their own experiences. Halonen (2008) showed how the use of person references in which the agent of the talk is left unspecified enables group members to construct their experiences as something general to which others can relate. Responsive stories or second stories (Sacks 1992a) are also shown to function as a method that members use to display alignment and

identification with previous speakers. Second stories are produced to display a speaker's analysis and understanding of a first story (Arminen 2004). Thus, they are not only a procedure to engage in reciprocal revelations of personal problems, but also a means of redefining the meaning of experiences (Arminen 2004). The counsellor's task is to guarantee that each participant has a chance to share their experience and that the contributions are topically relevant and personal.

Secondly, it is relevant whether group members address talk to each other and select each other as speakers. Thus, the interaction is not only mediated by the counsellor's interventions but also by participants' direct interactions amongst themselves. Participants might affiliate with and evaluate each other's contributions, ask questions, give information and advice, or respond with topically connected stories of their own (Arminen 2004; Sacks 1992b). Furthermore, Logren et al. (2017) have demonstrated that self-reflective talk is one method of generating joint reflective processing, which makes a topic available for discussion by connecting details of counselling with individuals' experiences, thus enabling sharing.

### 3 Data and method

Our data were collected in a counselling setting which was organized within Women@Work project in the Finnish Institute of Occupational Health. The project was addressed to female small-scale entrepreneurs and it aimed to promote participants' work ability and wellbeing. The project was targeted at around 40 small-scale businesses (approximately 70 persons) in one county of Finland. As part of the project, web-based group counselling was organized. The counselling was advertised through entrepreneur networks and the participants volunteered to participate. The participation was free of charge. The counselling did not follow any particular method or theoretical framework but it was loosely based on the resource- and solution-focused approaches. The aims of the counselling were to increase communality among small-scale entrepreneurs through peer support networks and to promote healthy lifestyle and work-related wellbeing.

The project organised five group processes, each of which comprised five 90-minutes sessions. Our data consist of video-recordings of 35 hours of interaction. Regular meetings took place every second or third week. Two to six group members and two female counsellors were present in each session. The counsellors were an occupational health psychologist and two authorized nutritionists. Three processes were guided by the same counsellors (psychologist &

nutritionist), in the other two processes one meeting was guided by another nutritionist. While most of the group sessions were video-mediated, in three groups, the first session was conducted face-to-face. These face-to-face sessions were recorded with two cameras, located in opposite sides of the room. The video-mediated sessions utilized Skype for Business program. The counsellors and some of the participants had video-connection and were able to share their live picture with the others. Those who did not have video-connection were presented on the screen as standard human figures with their names below. These sessions were recorded by the program and one camera located behind the counsellor.

The counselling meetings were organized around solution-focused assignments on healthy lifestyle issues. These assignments involved, for instance, setting a goal to support one's wellbeing, listing pros and cons for changing one's behaviour towards the goal, choosing a problem that hinders achieving the goal and suggesting solutions for other group members' problems. The group members carried out some of the assignments during the sessions and the others between the sessions as their homework. The home assignments were discussed during the following session.

The counsellors initiated the discussions about the assignments by giving instructions (e. g. "Your homework was to think about a goal that would support your work-related wellbeing at this moment. Now, who would start and tell what kind of a goal you identified."). The counsellors' initiation was followed by each group member at a time telling their thoughts related to the assignment. After each group member's turn, the counsellors normally made some comments or posed further questions. Sometimes, but not very often, the group members volunteered comments on each other's talk. When everyone had told about their thoughts related to the assignment, the counsellors moved forward by summarizing and introducing the next assignment (e. g. "Okay, now everyone has told about their goal and I've written these up here. I'll show these to you and we can start to think about the pros and cons for achieving these goals"). Thus, the sessions were relatively structured and the counsellors continuously guided the participants' contributions.

Informed consent was obtained from all participants, and they were advised they could withdraw their consent at any point during the data collection. The anonymity of the participants has been carefully ensured by altering the participants' names and other identifying details in the text.

The data were analysed by means of institutional conversation analysis (CA) (e. g. Arminen 2005; Heritage and Clayman 2010). Conversation analysts investigate recordings of naturally occurring interactions inductively to uncover the practices of interaction through which the meanings of social actions are produced. According to the CA view, social actions are accomplished through

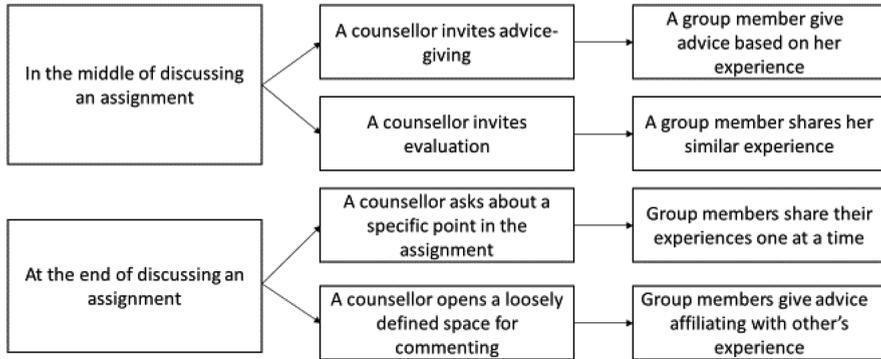
adjacent utterances: questions elicit answers, advising elicits confirming or rejecting, displaying an affective stance elicits affiliation. Institutional CA builds on this basic view and explicates how social actions contribute to carrying out the goals of the institution at hand (Arminen 2005; Heritage and Clayman 2010). In the analytic process, the recordings were watched several times and all sequences of talk in which the counsellor invites group members to comment on others' experiences were identified. From 35 hours of interaction, we found 31 such cases. We analysed this collection case-by-case to specify the nature and variation of practices the counsellors used, paying specific attention to their primary interactional function, sequential location and implications for social actions. We also analysed the group members' responsive turns. Based on the analysis, the cases were divided into four categories, distributed across five group processes (see Tiitinen et al. 2018 for a comparison between the groups). In the analysis section below, we present each of these four categories, providing one data extract of each. The extracts were chosen to present the "best-case scenarios" of how sharing one's experiences and affiliative talk becomes possible after the counsellors' interactional practices.

## 4 Analysis

The counselling sessions were typically organized around discussing each group member's thoughts related to an assignment one at a time. The counsellors' interactional practices to facilitate the group members' talk about their experiences were dependent on the interactional environment. The counsellors facilitated the group members' talk about their experiences in relation to others' experiences either a) in the middle of discussing the assignment or b) at the end of discussing the assignment, using four different practices that resulted in different responses by the group (see Figure 1). In the following, we illustrate each of the practices with the group members' responses. We demonstrate that each practice sets up a different space for sharing one's experiences in an affiliative way.

### 4.1 Inviting advice from others in the middle of discussing an assignment

As the counselling followed a solution-focused approach, the counsellors often oriented towards solving the group members' problems by asking focused questions about the problem described by a group member and by giving advice. Further, one way to facilitate other group members' participation utilized



**Figure 1:** Four practices to facilitate group members' sharing their experiences.

by the counsellors was to invite them to give advice to each other when a group member had offered some problem-related talk as part of discussing an assignment. By inviting advice, the counsellor invokes an expectation to share information. In about half of these cases, the counsellor's elicitation failed to get a response, leaving one of the counsellors to provide the advice. In the rest of the cases, group members provided advice. Interestingly, they sometimes utilized this space also to share their experience by framing the piece of advice as based on their similar experience. This way, they showed understanding of the problem shared by the other group members. Extract 1 provides a case in point.

In Extract 1, the group is meeting for the third time and they are discussing a home assignment in which everyone has reflected upon the first steps towards their wellbeing related goal one at a time. Prior to the extract, a group member, Maari, reports her reflections on the assignment on her turn. Although she reports about some progress, she also mentions that the changes she has made have not affected her sleeping problems as her stress has lasted such a long time.

**Extract 1** (Group 2; session 3; 0:34–0:36; video-mediated: two counsellors, five group members)<sup>i</sup>

- 01 C1: *Minkälaisia ne sun univaikeudet on*  
What kind of sleeping problems you have
- 02 *että ni (0.8) herääk sä yöllä*  
so (0.8) do you wake up during the night
- 03 *vai et- etkö sä ↑saa illalla nukutuksi?*  
or don- don't you ↑get any sleep?

- 04 (0.6)
- 05 M: *No (0.6) mul on ollu sekä että mutta (.)*  
Well (0.6) I have had both but (.)
- 06 *pääsääntöisesti mä herään niinkö tyyliin*  
in general it is so that I wake up at
- 07 *kahelta (0.7) enkä saa enää nukut[tua].*  
two (0.7) and don't get to sleep ag[ain].
- 08 C1: [Okei?  
[Okay?
- 09 (0.8) ((M nods))
- 10 M: *Mm.* ((nods))
- 11 C1: *O- (0.4) ollenkaan et valvok [sää sit (.)*  
A- (0.4) at all so are you awake [then (.)
- 12 M: [En.  
[No.
- 13 C1: *aamuun asti,*  
until the morning,
- 14 M: *Joo.*  
Yes.
- 15 (2.6)
- 16 →C1: *.hh ↑Onks teillä (0.2) Maarille mitään vinkkejä*  
.hh ↑Do you have (0.2) any tips for Maari
- 17 *että mikä auttas sillon ku kahen aikaan*  
what would help when one wakes up at two o'clock
- 18 *yöllä herää eikä uni enää tuu,*  
at night and can't get to sleep anymore,
- 19 (4.2)
- 20 A: *No #mm-# mulla on sellanen että .shh ää jos mä*  
Well #mm# I have one .shh erm if I
- 21 *kahelta (.) herään tai mulla oikeestaan että jos yhen*  
wake up (.) at two or actually around one or

- 22            *kahen aikaan ja .hh pyörin niin mää meen keittiöön*  
two and .hh I toss so I go to the kitchen
- 23            *ja: otan lasillisen maitoa ja E syön näkki(h)leivän*  
and I take a glass of milk and E eat a crisp(h)bread
- 24            *ja luen vähän aikaa jotaki hullua lehteä(h)E.*  
and read for a little while some crazy magazine(h)E.
- 25            (5.5)
- 26 C1:      *Mm:?*

As Maari's report is a problem-disclosure, it would make possible an affiliation or an attempt to solve the problem (Jefferson 1988; Jefferson and Lee 1981; Lindström and Sorjonen 2013). The counsellor orients herself to the latter option by addressing more focused questions about the nature of the problem (lines 1, 11 and 13). She also treats Maari's problem as a serious one by using an extreme case formulation (Pomerantz 1986), *at all* (line 11). At this point, other group members treat Maari and the counsellor as the principal participants in the discussion by not self-selecting to take the turn after Maari's responses to the counsellor's questions (silences in lines 9 and 15).

In lines 16–18, the counsellor opens the floor to other group members by inviting them to provide advice for Maari. The counsellor uses the word “vinkki” (translated as *tip*), conveying some easy practical solutions to the problem. The counsellor first specifies the addressee of the advice and, after a gap, the problem that needs to be solved. In the description of the problem, the counsellor uses a vague person-reference (so-called zero-person construction in Finnish, translated as *one*) and this way frames an experience as general – as something that everyone can relate to (Halonen 2008).

The counsellor's invitation is followed by four seconds of silence, already implicating some interactional trouble potentially related to the delicacy of advice-giving (Heritage and Sefi 1992) and/or Maari's epistemic primacy to her experience (Heritage 2011). In line 20, a group member, Alma, starts to give some advice. She begins her response with *I have one*, implying compliance with the action invited by the counsellor, i. e. giving tips. However, she does not address Maari or comment on her experience directly but shares information based on her own experience by reporting what she does in this specific situation. By describing a similar experience to Maari's on waking up in the middle of the night, Alma shows access to Maari's situation. Alma also produces laughter particles interpolated within her words (lines 23 and 24). Being linked to the words that concretize the advised actions (*crispbread* and *crazy magazine*), the laughter particles can be

heard as downplaying them (see Potter and Hepburn 2010). After Alma's turn, a longish silence ensues and the counsellor responds with a minimal acknowledgement token (*mm*, line 26). Thus, we see that also Maari treats Alma's advice as given at a general level and not requiring her response. Then, the counsellor closes the action of solving the problem at this point in the meeting and postpones it to a later phase in the meeting (not shown in the extract).

In sum, when the counsellor invites advice for one of the group member's problematic experience in the middle of discussing an assignment, it opens quite a restricted space for other group members to comment on the experience. Extract 1 illustrates that in this type of a space, a potential way for other group members to affiliate is to put forward their similar experiences as the basis for the advice.

## 4.2 Evaluating and inviting evaluative comments in the middle of discussing an assignment

The second practice that the counsellors utilized in the middle of discussing an assignment included two parts: the counsellor first evaluates the plan or experience described by a group member and then elicits evaluations from others. In general, evaluating a group member's plan or experience seemed to be quite challenging for others because the descriptions of plans and experiences often included some troubles or challenges. Instead of evaluating, the other group members often utilised the space to affiliate with the first speaker by describing their similar experiences.

Extract 2 is a case in point. In this extract, the group is discussing an assignment to set a goal that would improve one's work ability. At the beginning of the extract, we see part of a group member's, Taru's, lengthy description and justification of her goal: to get a more balanced life.

**Extract 2** (Group 4; session 2; 0:04–0:11; video-mediated: two counsellors, two group members)

- 01 T: *se mikä niinkö välillä (.) tekee*  
what like sometimes (.) makes
- 02 *raskaaksi tai tuntuu niinku (1.0) syövän sitte*  
it hard or feels like (1.0) is eating
- 03 *sitä työkykyä ni on se että sitä*  
the work ability is that there aren't
- 04 *muuta ei oo tarpeeksi (0.2) että et pitäs saaha*  
enough of those other things (0.2) so that one should

- 05 *tosiaa mahtuu siihe elämää jotakkii muutaki ja*  
indeed include some other things in one's life and
- 06 *ja sit tuntuu niinkö semmoselle että et niinku (.) et*  
and then it feels you know like that (.) as
- 07 *ku mäki yksin elän ja asun niin kaikki kotihommat*  
I also live and dwell alone then all household tasks
- 08 *ja kaikki se semmonen muu arkeen liittyvä ni se*  
and all those kinds of things related to daily life
- 09 *on kaikki mun harteilla (0.4) sekä tehä että*  
are all that is on my shoulders (0.4) both to do and
- 10 *kantaa vastuusta kaikista asioista .hh ja*  
to bear the responsibility for all the things .hh and
- 11 *tota (0.3) #ää# <se minusta on> (0.2) tietyllä tavalla*  
e:rm (0.3) #ee# <I think it is> (0.2) kind of
- 12 *(.) vaikka toisaalta siitä ↑nauttiiki ni se on*  
(.) although on the other hand one ↑enjoys it it is
- 13 *aika raskastaki,*  
rather hard,

((Omitted two minutes of T elaborating; and one minute of C1 asking an additional question and T elaborating on a further problem with renovating her home.))

- 14 C1: *No onks se realistista ajatella et nii kauan ku sulla*  
Well is it realistic to think that as long as you
- 15 *se remontti siellä on kesken (0.3) että sä rupeat*  
have that renovation going on (0.3) that you start
- 16 *aikaas suurempina määrinä johonki muuhun käyttämään,*  
to use a lot of your time for something else,

((Omitted 8 lines: T agrees and clarifies that this is a long-term plan.))

- 25 C1: *Tai ehkä sitte nytki vaikka remontti on kesken*  
Or maybe even now although the renovation is
- 26 *ni voi niitä pieniä muutoksia tehä [ja*  
unfinished then one can make the little changes [and

- 27 T: [Niin = ↑*aivan*.  
[Yeah = ↑right.
- 28 (0.3)
- 29 T: *Mm*.
- 30 (1.0)
- 31 C1: *Joo*.  
Yes.
- 32 (1.8)
- 33 →C1: *No miltäs tämä (0.2) Tarun suunni- (0.4) suunnitelma*  
Well how does this (0.2) Taru's pla- (0.4) plan
- 34 *Karitan korvaan kuulosti,*  
sound to Karita's ear,
- 35 (1.6)
- 36 T: *Emh [hh hh£*
- 37 K: [£*No aika samalta eh heh he aika samalta.£*  
[£Well quite the same eh heh he quite the same.£
- 38 (0.7)
- 39 C1: *Okei?*  
Okay?
- 40 K: *tu jatkuva kiire (0.8) mä rakastan tota potilastyötä*  
that constant hurry (0.8) I love patient work
- 41 *ja (.) mä teen niitä varmaan (.) kakstoi-*  
and (.) I do that probably (.) twel-
- 42 *>kymmenen kakstoista< tuntia päivässä*  
>ten twelve< hours a day
- ((Omitted two minutes of K elaborating and C's brief comments.))
- 43 K: *et se on ihan järkyttävää koko ajan jotain*  
so it's really devastating all the time some
- 44 *velvollisuuksia koko ajan tulee uusi juttuja ja .hh*  
responsibilities all the time new things come and .hh

((omitted two lines of K elaborating))

- 47 K: *tuntuu että niit ei koskaan ees hyödynnetä missään*  
one feels that they are never even utilized anywhere
- 48 *mut pakko vaan pitää koko ajan vääntää niitä.*  
but one just has to commit to them all the time.
- 49 (0.4)
- 50 C1: *Mm (1.0) jos hypätään tähä- teil o vähä niinku hh*  
Mm (1.0) if we jump into thi- you have like hh
- 51 *saman asian (0.6) kääntöpuolet ni mites*  
the flip sides (0.6) of the same thing so how about
- 52 *Taru sulla (0.2) kuinka pitkiä työviikkoja sää teet,*  
you Taru (0.2) how long is your working week,

Like Maari's turn in Extract 1, Taru's turn here is a problem-disclosure. The turn design highlights the report's nature as troubles-telling: First, Taru justifies her goal by describing her current situation in quite severe terms: the lack of balance between work and other things is *hard* (lines 2, 13) and *feels like is eating then the work ability* (lines 2–3). Second, she repeats and emphasizes the extreme case formulation (Pomerantz 1986) *all* when describing her workload in relation to household tasks (lines 7–10). The problem-disclosure thus evokes an affiliation or an attempt to solve the problem as potential next actions (Jefferson 1988; Jefferson and Lee 1981; Lindström and Sorjonen 2013). The counsellor orients again to the latter option of solving the problem by taking an evaluative stance towards Taru's plan. First, the question in lines 14–16 addresses the realism of the plan and this way challenges it. Second, in lines 25–26 the counsellor gives an advice explicitly stating her view towards the plan.

Like in Extract 1, the other group members treat Taru and the counsellor as the principal participants in the discussion at this point by not self-selecting to take the turn after Taru's responses to the counsellor's questions (silences in lines 30 and 32). In line 33, the counsellor begins with the particle "*no*" (translated as *well*) which marks the transition (Hakulinen et al. 2004: 1036) in the participation framework. She invites the other group member, Karita, to evaluate Taru's plan by utilizing the verb "*kuulostaa*" (translated as *sound*) (Hakulinen et al. 2004: 488).

The longish silence after the question (line 35) and laughter first by Taru (line 36) and then by Karita (line 37) indicate that the group members consider the invitation to evaluate the plan a delicate action (see Potter

and Hepburn 2010). Indeed, in her response, Karita does not actually evaluate Taru's plan, but first acknowledges the similarity of their situations (line 37). The silence (line 38) after Karita's first turn and the counsellor's *okay* with rising intonation (line 39) indicate that the response is treated as news (e. g. Wilkinson and Kitzinger 2006). Karita starts to elaborate her own situation (line 40), bringing out similar challenges with time management, as Taru did earlier. She shares the same troubles-telling stance as Taru and describes her situation as equivalent to Taru's, also using negative observations and extreme case formulations (*it's really devastating, all the time, never even utilized*, lines 43–48). Thus, Karita displays an understanding of Taru's problems. Finally, the counsellor returns the focus to Taru, whose plan they were initially discussing in relation to the assignment (lines 50–52). With further questions about Taru's situation, the counsellor orients to solving Taru's problem.

In sum, when the counsellors evaluate a group member's experiences or plans and invite other group members' evaluations of them, the group members were able to express their similar experiences in an affiliative way instead of evaluating. However, affiliative sharing was treated as a somewhat misplaced action in these cases and the group members had to do some interactional work to be able to be affiliative with each other.

### 4.3 Inviting others' perspectives about a specified point at the end of discussing an assignment

The counsellor can also facilitate the group members' participation at the end of discussing the whole assignment or at a relevant point of closing a part of the discussion of the assignment. Next, we show an extract in which the counsellor invites others' perspectives about a specified point related to the assignment. Extract 3 illustrates that after this type of a practice, the group members can share their experiences one after another and that they only minimally link their experiences to those shared in the previous turns of talk.

Prior to Extract 3, the group members have been listing the aspects of 'a good life' on the virtual whiteboard as part of an assignment. Each group member has told about the things she finds important in a good life. The other group members have concluded that things are all well in their lives but one group member, Essi, has displayed strong affective stance and told that she wishes things were better. She has described, for example, her lack of hobbies and feelings of loneliness. Counsellor 1 has also asked how the aspects of a good life are connected to the group members' goals. At this point, one group member

has left. The extract begins when the counsellor focusses back to the group discussion.

**Extract 3** (Group 3; session 4; 0:29–0:45; video-mediated: two counsellors, four group members)

- 01 →C2: *No huomasko muut sitte samoja asioita mitä Essi*  
Well did the others notice the same things that
- 02 *esimerkiks (1.5) tossa mainitsi tai mitä Heidi*  
for example Essi (1.5) mentioned or Heidi ((C1))
- 03 *kysy (0.5) äskön?*  
asked (0.5) a while ago?
- 04 (12.5)
- 05 C1: *Siis että miten ne omat tavoitteet liittyy näihin*  
So that's how your own goals are connected to these  
(aspects of the good life listed on the whiteboard))
- 06 *tai näkyy näissä (.) tarkotatko Mea sitä?*  
or can be seen in these (.) you mean that Mea ((C2))?
- 07 C2: *Joo hhh*  
Yes hhh
- 08 A: *No omalta osalta ainakin se nimenomaan se omasta (0.2)*  
Well from my view at least that precisely that (0.2)
- 09 *niinkun kokonaisvaltasesta hyvinvoinnista fyysisestä*  
taking care of like holistically one's own wellbeing
- 10 *ja henkisestä huolehtiminen ni kyllähä se mahdollistaa*  
physically and mentally so it does enable
- 11 *se tukkee tota terveyttä ja sitte sitä että pystyy*  
it supports health and also that one is able
- 12 *kaikista näistä asioista jatkossakin (0.8) nauttimaan*  
to enjoy all these things also in the future (0.8)
- 13 *jaksaa tehdä työtä (.) harrastaa ja tota niitä asioita*  
has enough strength to work (.) have hobbies and erm
- 14 *rakentaa ja viii etteenpäin.*  
build and develop these things.

- 15 (4.5)
- 16 C2: *Joo (0.5) et jos (0.2) terveys menee niin sitte*  
Yes (0.5) so if (0.2) one loses his/her health then
- 17 *sitte ei välttämättä jaksa jaksa töissä tai*  
then necessarily one hasn't the strength to work or
- 18 *(.) tai tuota (0.2) tai se vaikuttaa muihi asioihi.*  
(.) erm (0.2) or it affects other things.
- 19 (3.0)
- 20 U: *No mul oli taas sit se työstä irtautuminen tai*  
Well I on the other hand had that time off work or
- 21 *tämä että (0.2) oli se tavote tai joku tällanen mutta*  
that (0.2) was the goal or something like that but
- 22 *kyllä mun mielestä nuoki nyt sillä lailla että ne*  
I do think that those are also so that they
- 23 *kaikki (0.2) kaikki tukee toisiaan ja mä panin*  
all (0.2) all support each other and I put here  
(on the whiteboard))
- 24 *tässähän mä laitoin mul on tää niinku miinuksena että*  
this negative marking because
- 25 *tarpeeksi aikaa pitäis olla enemmän aikaa ni sitte*  
one should have more time to be able to
- 26 *kerkeäis irtautua töistäki*  
take time off
- 27 *[heh heh jos aika loppuu kesken nii ei kerkee.*  
[heh heh if time runs out one just can't.
- 28 C1: *[Nii joo.*  
[Right yes.
- 29 C1: *Nii se taitaa olla hankala tehtävä että sais*  
Yes that might be a challenging task to have
- 30 *kalenteriin lisää sitä aikaa,*  
more time in a calendar,

((Omitted five lines of U's agreement and C1's elaboration))

36 E: *Mullahan on sen ajan kans vähän hankalaa (0.2) kun*  
I have some difficulties with the time you know (0.2)

37 *mulla on kaksikytkaus päivää vuodessa niin että ei*  
as I have twenty-six days in a year that I don't

38 *tarvi tehdä töitä ja*  
have to work and

((omitted four lines of E elaborating on her  
situation and C1's minimal response))

44 E: *ja menemiset [sillä tavalla.*  
and all goings [like that.

45 C2: *[Miten ne vapaat sulla sitte ajottuu,*  
[How are your days off arranged then,

In line 1, Counsellor 2 returns the focus to the assignment and asks if the other group members have noticed the same things that Essi has told. By inviting the group members to pay attention to the similarities, the counsellor seems to be opening the floor for affiliating through telling similar experiences – a practice often seen in mutual help groups (Arminen 2004). However, before leaving a slot for responding, Counsellor 2 continues and elicits a different type of responses by referring to a question that Counsellor 1, Heidi, has asked previously, namely, how the group members' goals are connected to the aspects of a good life. There is a remarkably long silence in line 12. Counsellor 1 treats this as indicating a need for clarifying the question by repeating her previous question and asking Counsellor 2 to confirm if that was the question to which she referred. This understanding check narrows Counsellor 2's previous invitation to a specified point in the assignment.

The understanding check elicits a response from a group member, Arja, who explains how her goal (exercising more) is connected to the aspects listed on the whiteboard (lines 8–14). A long silence follows, after which the counsellor agrees and reformulates Arja's explanation (lines 16–18). Another group member, Ursula, continues by telling about her experience (lines 20–27). She frames her turn as differing from Arja's turn with *I on the other hand had*. In her description she relates her personal goal to the points on the whiteboard, complaining about the difficulty of achieving the goal. In lines 29–30, the counsellor responds by recognising Ursula's difficulty.

Then, Essi (the one who has previously talked about loneliness and lack of hobbies) takes a turn and shares her thoughts concerning the topic ‘lack of time’. She describes her personal situation without making reference to the preceding speaker’s viewpoints. Rather, the clitic particle ‘*mullahan*’ (line 36, translated as *you know*) connects her description to something she has herself already shared with the group. Finally, the counsellor asks for more information and this way orients to solving the problem (line 45).

To conclude, the counsellors’ questions that elicit others’ perspectives about a specified point in the assignment enabled the group members to share their experiences individually one at a time. There were some topical connections, but the group members only loosely connected their experiences to those of others.

#### 4.4 Inviting thoughts that might come up at the end of discussing the assignment

The counsellors in our data also invited the group members’ thoughts regarding an assignment when the group was either at the end of discussing the assignment or at a relevant point of closing a part of the discussion of the assignment. We show that the unspecified questions such as, *Is there something else you would like to share concerning these things?* or *Would you like to comment on what you’ve heard, what others have told?*, facilitate the group members to link affiliating with each other’s experiences and giving advice based on their experiences.

Consider Extract 4. As in Extract 3, the group members have been listing the aspects of a good life on the whiteboard. Each group member in turn has told about things she finds important in a good life. One group member, Alli, was the last to share her views and the counsellor concluded the discussion with a statement related to Alli’s view. Alli confirms (line 1) and a lengthy silence follows.

**Extract 4** (Group 1; session 4; 1:07–1:11; video-mediated: two counsellors, three group members)

- 01 A: *Kyllä.*  
Yes.
- 02 (6.5)
- 03 →C2: *Joo no tuleeko vielä näihin asioihin jotaki mielee*  
Well is there something else concerning these things
- 04 *mitä haluaisitte kommentoija.*  
you would want to comment on.

- 05 S: *No mä: haluaisin Karitalta kysyy ku Alli tossa sano*  
Well I would like to ask Karita that when Alli said
- 06 *jossain vaihees et @sitte ku ei oo tätä kehitettävää*  
a while ago that @then when I don't have these things
- 07: *ja avajaisia ja sitte@.*  
to be developed and opening ceremonies and then@.
- 08 A: *he [he heh heh*
- 09 S: *[heh nii musta tuntuu että aina jos mä jotaki*  
[heh so I feel that every time I complete something
- 10 *saan ni mä keksin tähä yritykseen jonku uuen jutun*  
I invent some new thing to this business
- 11 *jota mä kehitän ja joka tarvii panostusta ja*  
that I develop and that needs investing and
- 12 *markkinointia jotaki (0.2) ni Karita ku on ollu jo*  
marketing (0.2) so as Karita has been
- 13 *pitkään yrittäjä ni tulleeeko sitä*  
an entrepreneur for a long time so will there be that
- 14 *hetkee vai pitääkö luopua siitä ajatuksesta*  
kind of a moment or should one let go of the thought
- 15 *et @sitten kun@.*  
that @after this@.
- 16 K: *Joo kannattaa luopua siitä aja(h)tuk(h)sesta heh heh*  
Yes one should let go of that tho(h)ugh(h)t heh heh
- 17 S: *heh [heh heh*
- 18 A: *[heh heh heh heh*
- 19 K: *Kun on tuommonen aktiivinen yrittäjänainen (.) siellä*  
When one is an active entrepreneur woman (.) there
- 20 *kaks semmosta on niin (0.2) voi luopua*  
are two of such there so (0.2) one can let go of
- 21 *ajatuksesta=ainaha sitä keksii sen uuden projektin ja*  
that thought=one always invents the new project and

- 22 *on on paljon annettavaa tälle maailmalle ja (.) ei se*  
there is is much to offer to this world and (.) the
- 23 *maailma pärjää ilman sun uusia ideoita (0.2) senko*  
world doesn't manage without your new ideas (0.2)
- 24 *hyväksyy vaan että aina sieltä löydät kyllä sen uuden*  
when one accepts the fact that you'll always find the
- 25 *projektin et (.) saattaaha siinä olla välillä semmone*  
new project that (.) there might be occasionally like
- 26 *niinkö seesteinen vaihe nyt ku ne on ne*  
erm a more peaceful period when you have had those
- 27 *avajaiset ni vähä aikaa keskityt itseesi ja*  
opening ceremonies so concentrate on yourself and
- 28 *hoidat sitä painoa ja ravintoa ja perhettä ja ynnä*  
take care of the weight and nutrition and family plus
- 29 *muuta mutta kyllä sää sitte viimeistään jo syksyllä*  
other things but at the latest in the autumn
- 30 *rupeat kehittää jonku projektin siihe.*  
you'll develop some project.
- 31 A: *Nii sitte pitäis verkkokauppa saaha seuraavaks kyllä*  
Yeah indeed I should get the online store next
- 32 S: *heh he, heh heh [heh hehh ehhh*
- 33 K: *[No(h) nii(h) tuliha se.*  
*[Well(h) you(h) said that.*

With the verb “kommentoija” (translated here as *to comment on*) and its object “these things”, the counsellor defines the expected next action very loosely compared to the practices presented previously. We see that this practice engenders a long stretch of exchanging experiences during which the group members both give advice and affiliate with the previous speakers. First, Sirkku asks for experience-based advice from another group member, Karita, whom she describes as a long-standing entrepreneur (lines 5–15). Sirkku first connects her turn to what the third group member, Alli, has previously said about her constant plans for developing the business and then describes her own similar situation. Sirkku marks Alli’s previous speech with an altered tone of voice, ironizing the problem known to many entrepreneurs, lack of time (line 6–7). Alli recognizes the irony with her laughter at line 8.

Karita, to whom the question is directed, adopts a similar kind of ironic stance and responds curtly that one should let go of the thought that there would ever be a moment when an entrepreneur would have time to concentrate on oneself. This engenders a shared laughter between the participants (lines 16–18). Adopting a similar affective stance that is expressed by joint laughter constitutes a mutually shared affiliative moment. Considering the counselling goal of providing participants experiences of “being heard”, these types of moments are of great importance.

After this affiliative moment, Karita continues by offering advice to Alli and Sirkku based on her experience but at the same time she continues to describe the shared ironic stance and shows detailed knowledge of a similar situation to that of Alli and Sirkku (lines 19–30). In this way, she offers support to the other two group members. Alli and Sirkku strongly affiliate with Karita’s description: Alli first states that she has exactly the kind of plans for expanding her business as Karita anticipated (line 31) and they laugh together. Finally, Karita confirms their shared experience on being an entrepreneur (*you said that*, line 33).

To conclude, the counsellors’ loosely designed questions about the group members’ thoughts at the end of an assignment were at its best able to engender long stretches of exchanges of experiences between the participants. In these kinds of open slots, group members were able to ask questions from other participants that were relevant to themselves. When sharing their thoughts, advising was intertwined with descriptions of the group members’ experiences and responses contained a strong mutual affiliation.

## 5 Discussion and conclusion

In this paper, we have studied counselling in a structured, problem-solving oriented health promotion setting, in which affiliative talk is not the prominent goal of the counselling interaction. We have described the interactional practices the counsellors use in this type of a setting to facilitate affiliative talk about personal experiences. What we have showed is that the counsellors’ four different practices make talking about one’s experiences relevant, but each practice sets up a different space for doing so in an affiliative way.

The counsellors’ practices were typically linked to solving the group members’ problems. Inviting advice from other group members engaged the group in constructing solutions for each other’s problems. However, drawing upon the analysis, in about half of these cases, the counsellors’ invitations failed to get a response, leaving one of the counsellors to give advice. In our cases, the group members utilized the space provided by the counsellor’s invitation to share their

experiences by framing the piece of advice as based on their similar experiences. By showing that they have access to similar experiences, the group members treated as relevant the aspect of displaying understanding towards the previous speaker's experience (see Ruusuvuori 2005). A similar type of trajectory was opened by the counsellors' evaluative turns, followed by invitations for group members to evaluate their peer's experience or plan in the middle of an assignment. Instead of evaluating, the other group members often utilised the space to affiliate with the first speaker by describing their similar experiences.

The counsellors facilitated the group members' advice-giving and evaluations in the middle of discussing an assignment. Another place for inviting the group members' experiences in relation to other's experiences was at the end of each assignment. At this point, the counsellors asked about a specific point in the assignment or about the group members' general thoughts concerning the assignment. Eliciting others' perspectives about a specified point in the assignment facilitated the group members to talk about their experiences one at a time. There were some topical connections, but the group members only loosely connected their experiences to those of others. Instead, the counsellors' practice of asking loosely designed questions about the group members' thoughts was at its best able to engender long stretches of exchanges of experiences between the participants. In these kinds of open slots, the group members were able to request others information or advice that were relevant to themselves. When sharing their thoughts, giving advice was intertwined with the descriptions of the group members' experiences and the responses contained a strong mutual affiliation.

In relation to the counselling's dual goal to provide possibilities for both affiliative talk about personal experiences and problem-solving via advice, our findings suggest that focusing mainly on problem-solving may restrict the relevance of affiliative talk (Ruusuvuori 2005). Additionally, our findings also show that when there is a place for the group members to raise their own concerns, affiliative talk about experiences may integrate with problem-solving. Thus, based on our analysis, we suggest that if the counsellors aim to facilitate the group members' affiliative talk, it would be advisable to open up a "free slot" for the group members to raise questions relevant to themselves. In our data, loosely designed questions about the group members' thoughts at the end of an assignment (as we saw in Extract 4) seem to engender stretches of exchange of experiences and mutual affiliation more efficiently. These findings have important practical implications in the light of previous studies which have shown that advice-recipients are readier to implement advice if they have also experienced emotional support (e. g. Feng 2014).

Our findings suggest that the counsellors' role in facilitating affiliative talk between the group members seems to be highly significant. This finding might

be partly pronounced because of the video-mediated setting of the counselling. In face-to-face interactions, the participants are able to use multiple resources to negotiate who takes the next turn, and gaps between turns are typically short (e. g. Vatanen 2014). In video-mediated settings, however, the participants are unable to use, for example, gaze direction in allocating the turns as easily (see Hjulstad 2016), and the lag time makes it more difficult to interpret the possible place for taking the turn (Olbertz-Siitonen 2015). This kind of uneven situation might highlight the counsellors' role in allocating the turns to participants.

The findings also highlight the importance of the flexibility of the counselling session's overall structure and timetable. If the counsellors have planned to go through many assignments and information contents during the restricted time slot, there might not be much time to allow discussion about concerns the participants find relevant. Thus, even if the counselling in our study focused on solving the group members' problems, it should include time for more free discussions among the group members.

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## Appendix

### Transcription symbols

[ ]	Overlapping talk
(.)	A pause of less than 0.2 seconds
(0.0)	Pause: silence measured in seconds and tenths of a second
WORD	Talk louder volume than the surrounding talk
<u>word</u>	Accented sound or syllable
.hh	An in breath
hh	An out breath
£word£	Spoken in a smiley voice
@word@	Spoken in an animated voice
#word#	Spoken in a creaky voice
wo(h)rd	Laugh particle inserted within a word
((word))	Transcriber's comments
-	Abrupt cut-off of preceding sound
>word<	Talk faster than the surrounding talk
<word>	Talk slower than the surrounding talk
↑	Rise in pitch

- ? Final rising intonation
- ,
- .

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**Notes:** In all extracts, C1 and C2 refer to the counsellors, and other identifiers use the first letter of the group members’ pseudonym. The first line presents the talk in Finnish and the second line an idiomatic translation in English. To present a detailed CA-analysis of turn-taking would require a morpheme-by-morpheme translation. However, our analysis does not address turn-taking in such detail. Transcription symbols are presented in the Appendix.

## Bionotes

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Jaana Laitinen, Adjunct Professor, is specialised in health promotion at workplaces. She has planned, executed and led several health promotion projects that used counselling to promote change in lifestyle and enhance work ability among different target groups.