Author(s): Nykänen, Hanna; Asunta, Laura; Mikkola, Leena

Title: Discursive Strategies to Negotiate Power Relations in Disability Services Client Juries
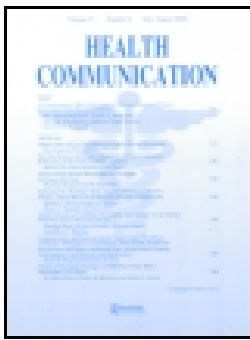
Year: 2022

Version: Published version

Please cite the original version:

Nykänen, H., Asunta, L., & Mikkola, L. (2022). Discursive Strategies to Negotiate Power Relations
in Disability Services Client Juries. Health Communication, 37(4), 457-466.
https://doi.org/10.1080/10410236.2020.1851455

Discursive Strategies to Negotiate Power Relations in Disability Services Client Juries

Hanna Nykänen , Laura Asunta & Leena Mikkola

Published online: 24 Nov 2020.

Submit your article to this journal ☐

View related articles ☐

View Crossmark data ☐

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

Discursive Strategies to Negotiate Power Relations in Disability Services Client Juries

Hanna Nykänen[a], Laura Asunta[b], and Leena Mikkola[a]

[a]Department of Language and Communication Studies, University of Jyväskylä; [b]School of Business and Economics, University of Jyväskylä

ABSTRACT

Collaboration with clients is an efficient way to develop social services. To strengthen the possibilities for clients to influence services, client juries are established. However, collaboration in the juries is perceived as difficult because of the power imbalance inherent in the client–social worker relationship. The aim of this study was to examine how the participants negotiated power relations in client jury meetings. The data consisted of four observed disability services client jury meetings. Analysis was performed using action-implicative discourse analysis, which aims to define different communicative problems, interactional strategies, and situated ideals of communicative practices. The results revealed the use of four main strategies to negotiate power relations in client jury meetings: avoiding conflicts with clients, trying to reveal injustice, taking responsibility, and widening the perspective. By studying the interactions within the disability services client juries, the methods for promoting the involvement of service users in developing social services can be improved.

Introduction

Collaboration with clients is seen as an efficient way to develop social services, but clients' experiences and ideas are still often left to the wayside when developing practical activities (Beresford & Croft, 2004). This collaboration is perceived as difficult partly because of the power imbalance inherent in the client–social worker relationship. The goals and institutional roles of clients and social service workers are guided by the power asymmetry of the relationship, which typically positions the social worker as powerful and the client as dependent (French & Swain, 2001; Uggerhøj, 2014). Sometimes, the clients' goals collide with social services organization, as clients may have expectations that the social service workers cannot fulfill, necessitating the use of authority to deny the application. Clients, on the other hand, may use power by resisting the control exerted by the social work institution. This is expressed by invoking topics or role identities that the institution prefers to avoid (Matarese & Nijnatten, 2015).

As in healthcare, service user involvement is a fundamental principle of social work values (Leung, 2011). To strengthen clients' influence and to tackle the structural power imbalance, client juries are utilized in developing their social services. Clients' experiential knowledge is vital for understanding their needs (Wilson & Beresford, 2000). The client jury is a peer-representative practice of participation consisting of social service workers and service users. Juries aim for client-oriented service development. We borrow the concept of a jury from the citizen jury because client juries conceptually resemble them, and studies or theoretical presentations of client juries in social work have not yet been published. Citizen juries empower citizens and pursue deliberative democracy (Street et al., 2014). They offer a platforms for interaction and a useful mechanism through which to engage the public, as, in the meetings, citizens may voice their informed views (Krinks et al., 2016).

This study focuses on disability services. Disability exists at the intersection of impairments as biological and physical condition and society's interpretation of that impairment (Altman, 2001). Thus, disability services can be seen in the interface of health and social services and many of the issues disabled people face require a holistic/integrated approach. In addition, both fields are traditionally characterized by the dependence of individuals in need of services and are challenged by the views of shared expertise, the empowerment of citizens, and a holistic approach to health and well-being. In Finland, municipal disability services provide client juries. Due to the meeting format, the client jury situation differs significantly from a normal encounter between a client and a social service worker. When aiming to develop a service not to focus on a specific client's situation, it is interesting to see if the acquired roles differ from normal meetings. The aim of this study is thereby to observe how power relations and acquired roles are negotiated in client–worker interactions and how they support or challenge client involvement.

In this study, power is seen as constituted in communication (Deetz & Mumby, 1990) within client–social worker interactions during social services' client jury meetings. Following the precept that power is constituted discursively, we utilize action-implicative discourse analysis (AIDA; Tracy, 1995). AIDA allows researchers to examine what kind of discourses occur in the interactions of client jury meetings and what the discursive strategies are to maintain and remodel them. Through this examination and analysis, we aim to build a grounded practical theory (GPT; Craig & Tracy, 1995) concerning the negotiation of power relations in client jury

meetings. The practical implications of developing interactions in these meetings will be discussed.

Power relations in social services

Power is a pervasive element in all forms of social interaction – especially in institutional settings such as in social work. In social services research, power relations have often been approached through the lens of institutional structures and positions and explained through the discretion of social workers (Lipsky, 1980). Street-level bureaucrats – the workers encountering the clients – wield significant power as gatekeepers (Lipsky, 1980). By applying the law, making decisions, and working in direct contact with clients, they play a crucial role in defining how the actual policy lines of social services are formulated in practice (Prior & Barnes, 2011). Due to this structural power, the client–worker relationship is often described as being dominated by the workers and dehumanizing or even abusive for the clients (see French & Swain, 2001). In contrast, the social service workers' position is contradictory; they are assumed to provide individualized services for clients' distinctive needs while their actions are simultaneously coordinated by the law and the regulations of the organization (Lipsky, 1980).

As an institutional relationship, the client–social worker relationship is asymmetrical. This asymmetry becomes visible in institutional talk in which certain actors are the objects of discussion; they risk their face (Goffman, 1955), as in individual's public self-image, by exposing their daily lives and personal backgrounds, thus becoming more vulnerable. While building a relationship requires self-disclosure (Derlega & Mathews, 2006), in the client–social worker relationship, it is not reciprocal – only one of the parties shares private information. In healthcare settings, clients sometimes struggle to achieve *interactional* control (Thompson et al., 2011), which links to active participation in the conversation. In social services, the submissive position is often dictated by status imbalances and the socially defined roles of the client and the professional (Uggerhøj, 2014). Thus, the asymmetry is reflected in both the contents and the dynamics of the interactions.

Power is neither an individual characteristic nor relationship-based; it is a structural quality of institutional life that is produced and reproduced in everyday communicative practices (Deetz & Mumby, 1990). From this perspective, power in social work should not be one person or group controlling the other but a process through which competing interests exist simultaneously and interdependently (see Baxter, 2011; Collinson, 2005). Power is extremely important in the meaning-making process, and it affects actors' ability to frame discursive practices within a system of meanings to become uniform with their own interests (Deetz & Mumby, 1990).

Furthermore, power is dialectical in nature, and control attempts always meet resistance (Collinson, 2005). For instance, when a social worker attempts to limit the available services, a client may engage in resistance by refusing to adjust to the decision. Often, it is described that clients' resistance divides clients and workers into confrontational camps (Juhila et al., 2014). Client insistence is resistance to the practitioner or the institution, which can be presented by insisting on the

client's own goals and maintaining the level of control usually expected of practitioners. Thus, power is not just something a social worker wields, leaving the client completely powerless; the client possesses power in the form of client insistence. (Matarese & Nijnatten, 2015.)

In this study, power is seen as constituted in communication (Deetz & Mumby, 1990), and it transpires in processes of influence (Collinson, 2005). Even when asymmetrical, power relationships are always bidirectional and interdependent. They are dynamic and are negotiated – both implicitly and explicitly – in social interactions among the actors. This means that the social worker is also dependent on the client, who retains some level of autonomy. The social construction of the power dynamics in client jury meetings is not purely characterized by the structural power inherent to the relationship but also by various discursive practices presented in the interaction. Within these practices, the participants are constantly struggling with meaning making and negotiating power relations through control and resistance. By analyzing how power relations are negotiated, we seek to describe the potential power imbalance and to understand how institutional roles support or hinder the possibilities for collaboration in the client jury meetings. The guiding question for this research is presented below.

RQ1: Which discursive strategies are used to negotiate power relations in client jury meetings?

The study

Case

In Finland, the health and wellbeing of people with disabilities and the protection of clients' livelihoods are the responsibilities of the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health. Various laws inform the design and provision of services. The three main principles guiding these policies comprise the rights to equality, participation, and necessary services and support. (The Ministry of Social Affairs and Health, n.d.) The aim is to support individual autonomy and the functionality of the clients through organizing and financing services, and support for everyday life. Social workers meet clients, map their needs, and provide a personal service plan for each client. They also make propositions and decisions regarding the required services, like sheltered housing, transportation services and personal assistance.

Finland has a population of 5.5 million and 125 557 of them are clients of disability services. Over 10 000 of those clients are persons with the need for special support, which means the client has difficulties in applying for and receiving the social and health services needed due to cognitive or mental disability or illness or the need for multiple support or other similar reasons, which are not related to old age. (Finnish Institute for Health and Welfare, 2020.) The assessment is based on finding out and describing functional limitations in the disabled person's own operating environment and on assessing the permanence required by the Disability Services Act. The assessment requires justification from both health and social care and the viewpoint of the client is considered. (Räty, 2010.) Disabled

people are more prone to chronic disease, for example, coronary heart disease and diabetes due to their impairments; they may be more vulnerable to certain health problems, which requires health monitoring and preventive measures. (DeJong & Basnett, 2001.) The mission of disability services is to provide services that maintain and support disabled peoples' health and functionality.

One aspiration in European social work is to increase clients' active roles in social services. Participation is supported by user involvement and the inclusion of persons at risk of being marginalized (Beresford & Croft, 2004; Matthies, 2014). Welfare services are expected to mitigate this marginalization, but extreme financial pressures simultaneously occur (Beddoe, 2017). Therefore, collaboration between social service workers and clients is crucial for service development (Beresford & Croft, 2004), but collaboration and client participation remain precarious. This may partly be due to the power relations and the ingrained roles within the institutional setting (Uggerhøj, 2014). The expected roles of 'powerful social worker' and 'dependent client' may be so conditioned that both parties reproduce them, even unconsciously.

Client juries provide possibilities for client inclusion and empowerment. They create the potential for collaboration in which clients can influence the services provided to them. However, empowerment may also be a form of political activity through which to address control rather than a means to include people with disabilities in decision making (French & Swain, 2001). Matthies (2014) stated that each attempt to enhance citizen participation could increase marginalization if this risk is not noted. Therefore, the salient question in this study is how the power relations and roles are negotiated in the interactions of the client jury and to what extent the meetings really enable service user involvement.

Data

The data was gathered by observing disability services' client jury meetings. We contacted different social and healthcare organizations in Finland asking if they had this kind of client-inclusive working group. The selected client juries focused on matters related to intellectually disabled children, and the clients were the parents or caregivers of intellectually disabled children. The children's ages varied from kindergarten to middle-aged. The jury meetings comprised round-table conversations, and the routines are not strictly ordered, as this is a new manner of working together. The organizational strategies differ depending on the city, but the aim is client-oriented service development.

Themes for discussion were decided upon together in the jury. Usually, the theme was selected before meeting, and in some meetings, an external specialist was invited. The themes considered, for example, the communication of disability services, transport services, social welfare surveillance, trusteeship, and other topical news. One of the social service workers acted as a facilitator, guiding the conversation. The jury meetings began with social service workers or the invited specialist prefacing the subject at hand. Then, the presentation varied from a couple of minutes to

one hour. In some cases, the clients interrupted the presentation, and the conversations overruled the presentation.

The data consisted of four client jury meetings: two different client juries with two meetings each, totaling 7 hours and 47 minutes and yielding 125 pages of transcribed text. In the first session, there were 10 participants: six clients (four female, two male) and four representatives of social services (three female, one male). The second meeting also comprised six clients (four female, two male) and four representatives of social services (all female). The third meeting consisted of six representatives of social services (four females, two males) and eight clients (seven female, one male), and in the fourth meeting, the same group of clients was present, with four representatives of social services participating in the conversation.

The Ethical Council of University of Jyväskylä gave approval to the research plan. The ethical principles set by the Finnish National Board of Research Integrity (National Advisory Board on Research Ethics, 2009) were observed throughout the study. The participants were provided with extensive information about the study prior to the data collection, and all participants provided written consent to the researchers to use the data for research purposes.

A grounded practical theory and action-implicative discourse analysis

This study exploits grounded practical theory (GPT; Craig & Tracy, 1995). GPT is a metatheoretical and methodological framework for developing empirically grounded, normative, theoretical reconstructions of specific communication practices. GPT emphasizes not only the important technical role of communication in practice but also its ability to present complex problems that reflect society's norms and values.

GPT focuses on three theoretical levels in which communication practices are reconstructed (Craig & Tracy, 2014). At the *technical level*, the most concrete level, a practice can be reconstructed as a selection of different communicative strategies and techniques that are repeatedly used by participants. The *problem level* refers to tensions or conflicts that can occur in the communication practice. These dilemmas affect the use of different techniques. At the *philosophical level*, the most abstract level, the practice can be reconstructed by situated ideals as philosophical positions. These situated ideals guide the choices for managing problem-level dilemmas. Situated ideals are constructed through the participants' beliefs about how they should act within a practice. (Tracy, 2005.) They can be reconstructed by analyzing the discursive strategies that participants use to manage the problem (Black & Wiederhold, 2014).

The analysis was approached in pragmatist tradition by conducting AIDA (Tracy, 1995, 2005). The goal of AIDA is to define different communicative problems, interactional strategies, and situated ideals of communicative practices. AIDA is useful for studying interactions of people belonging to different institutional categories and criticizing communicative practices in society (1995). The most effective use of AIDA is analyzing conflicting situations, and AIDA encourages analysts to focus particularly on those moments when problems are

being displayed (Tracy, 2005). With AIDA, researchers can identify discursive practices that participants use for meaning making and to negotiate their identities and relationships.

Analysis

The analysis was completed using AIDA. All recorded client jury meetings were transcribed verbatim. The data was imported into the ATLAS.ti program for further coding. Then, the data was read carefully multiple times, and discussion among the authors supported the analysis process. The first author performed the analysis and discussed the interpretations with the second author, who had the advantage of reflecting on the analysis as a service user.

AIDA begins with the unitizing and naming of a practice (Tracy, 1995). In this method, a practice can be defined as communication forms that occur in an identifiable place among specific participants (Tracy, 2005). In this study, we understood collaborative interaction in client jury meetings as a form of practice. The aim of the meetings was to discuss and develop service in collaboration with clients (in this case, the caregivers of disabled children), and the themes discussed concerned services, the rights of disabled people, the position of caregivers, and the duties of workers. Clients often expressed dissatisfaction or confusion concerning these topics. At some points during the conversations, the participants were co-operating and developing things together, but at others, they were clearly positioned as opponents.

After naming the practice, we started to analyze at the problem level, focusing on the segments that seemed the most controversial – those in which the participants showed frustration and clearly separated themselves into insensitive 'us–them' juxtapositions. We coded what kind of strategies were used within these controversial moments, as in which actions took the participants further away from collaboration. This was achieved by analyzing different discursive strategies and studying how the flow of the interaction changed after different responses. Discursive strategies were analyzed by carefully coding different conversational techniques used when creating, maintaining, or modifying different discourses. In addition, we analyzed moments of integration, in which the participants expressed consensus and which actions took them closer to collaboration.

Findings

According to our findings, the challenges for collaboration originate from expectations for institutionally bound roles and actual behavior. Institutionally bound roles are linked to the client–worker relationship's power asymmetry in which the client is dependent, and the social service worker has power (Uggerhøj, 2014). The expectations foster the use of interactional strategies that seek to respond to the other party's role and to remodel one's own role, which affects the power relations created in the jury meeting. The findings are presented in Table 1 according to the different levels of AIDA.

Problem level: Contradiction between institutionally bound roles and behavior

The basic problem plaguing the interaction and challenging collaboration was the expectation for institutional-bound behavior. Clients expect to meet a distant and denying bureaucrat whose ideas they have to fight. They attempt to exert influence by presenting facts concerning their everyday lives and the services they use. They are also prepared to find flaws in the system and are ready to challenge social service workers' professional knowledge expertise in contrast to the clients' experiential expertise. Instead of collaborating, they may thereby end up negotiating whose expertise is to be trusted and trying to gain more interactional control. In contrast, social service workers expect to meet a disappointed client with unreasonable demands, which already puts them in defensive mode, trying to avoid all possible conflicts. Social service workers also try to hinder the role-based power they have. These institutional-bound expectations lead participants in roles that make collaboration difficult.

Table 1. Analysis Results.

Practice	Collaborative interaction in client jury meetings
Philosophical level	Discursive construction of power
Problem level	Contradiction between institutional-bound roles and behavior
Technical level	Strategy 1: Avoiding conflicts with the clients
	Strategy 2: Trying to reveal injustice
	Strategy 3: Taking responsibility
	Strategy 4: Widening the perspective

Table 2. Creation of power and collaboration through discursive strategies.

Discursive strategies	Interactional techniques	Power	Effect on collaboration
1. Avoiding conflicts with the clients (Workers)	Falling silent Dodging Using humor	Powerless social service worker	Distribution
2. Trying to reveal injustice (Clients)	Questioning Emphasizing experiential expertise	Powerful client	Distribution
3. Taking responsibility (Workers)	Being responsive Being supportive	Shared interactional control	Integration
4. Widening the perspective (Clients)	Problem solving Sense-making	Shared interactional control	Integration

Technical level: Discursive strategies to negotiate power relations

The power relations are negotiated through the use of four main strategies: (1) avoiding conflicts with the clients, (2) trying to reveal injustice, (3) taking responsibility, and (4) widening the perspective. Table 2 describes what kind of inter-actional techniques were used in different discursive strategies. Social service workers' usage of *avoiding conflicts with clients* mainly included techniques such as falling silent, dodging, and using humor. The clients' strategy of *trying to reveal injustice* consisted of techniques such as questioning and emphasizing experiential expertise. Social service workers' strategy of *taking responsibility* built on social service workers' active, answerable, and supporting role, whereas *widening the perspective* involved techniques such as problem solving and sense-making, in which clients did not just live through their own experiences but could take a wider, developmental approach to the conversation.

Strategies reinforcing distribution

These strategies reinforced the distribution and shifted the balance of power relations, which produced challenges for collaboration creating moments of distribution (referring to the distributive interests and competition). In the conversations, clients exposed how the societal system constricts the everyday life of disabled people and their caregivers and how they felt they were missing out on information, services, and aid that belong to them. Social service workers did not accept the critique; instead, they dodged these themes, leaving clients to discuss them with each other. The conversation did not proceed, and shared understanding was not reached.

Social service workers' strategy: Avoiding conflicts with the clients. The strategy of avoiding conflicts with the clients consisted of techniques such as falling silent, dodging, and using humor. Silence was shown by the absence of the worker's voice in the conversation. In many situations, the workers let the clients discuss things troubling them. The clients had a large amount of time to bring up bad experiences and ponder how some services should work. By doing this without the worker interrupting them, the clients became carried away, discussing things by themselves even though the workers could have given them an answer or explained how something should work. The disagreements and attempts to influence shifted from the client–worker relationship among the clients, and they ended up arguing, as in the example below. Before the following excerpt, they were discussing information that was mainly found on the city's website. In the excerpts the participants are coded C: Client, W: Worker and F: Facilitator.

C10: But what if we do not have internet?
C15: Surely, it would be in some magazine.
C10: So, in which magazine?
C15: Well, for example, some [C14: That is just the problem: that we do not get the information.] X (magazine name), I say we have those social service magazines. These that city is distributing and then it has probably been in -

C10: [No we do not have [C14: We do not.]
C15: Yes, we have.
C14: Your child is still living at home, ours don't.
C15: Yes.
C10: The information does not reach us.
C15: Well, I can't do anything for that [C10: Yes, but …] if the magazine is not distributed to you, but not the whole life -
C11: [Well, we didn't even ask from you.
C15: Well, I am glad you did not.
C10: Yes, the city is here to answer our questions.

Here, the clients were pondering together where they could find the information in question. The quarreling ended with them noticing that the answers should come from the social service workers, who had remained silent throughout the entire conversation, although they were all sitting around the same table.

Next, dodging could be divided into not giving straight answers or guiding the conversation elsewhere. In some cases, the workers were more active, but they did not necessarily answer the questions directly, the worker acknowledged the predicament and promised to take the feedback further, but did not give any reason for the current situation. In the example below, the worker does not respond to the client's provocative claim regarding the lack of planning but instead presents the original material she planned to present. Thus, the worker bypasses the client's comment and keeps going.

C8: Well, all right. Anyway, we know that this is difficult. Surely you in the disability services know how many, or is it that you just live in hope that you know how many intellectually disabled children are graduating and you just live in hope and wish that they get in to some school? Although we know that they won't because they do not have enough credits. Then we have, in the autumn, this bunch (of disabled children that do not have opportunity to go to school).
W2: This is something that Worker X (another social service worker) gave, because she could not make it here, that in the spring we have … (starts explaining a different thing while not answering the client's question).

In some cases, the conversation was guided in other directions, and questions posed were left unanswered, like in the example below concerning a question about the rules of the transportation service.

C9: [And what if there is a combination restriction?
W10: Well, hm, anyway there is, although you have the restriction, the order time stays. Just for everybody to go through the same procedure.
C9: Could it be changed?
F3: Client 15 had something. (Gives the floor to C15, and C9's question is left unanswered.)

In this example, the conversation is guided elsewhere by giving the floor to another participant. This kind of dodging happened multiple times, and the questions were left unanswered. In some cases, when persistent enough, the client

received an answer after all. In these cases, the answer was not always pleasant; thereby, by guiding the conversation elsewhere, the workers were trying to avoid conflict.

Humor was also used to dodge questions. In the example below, humor via laughter was used to deflect the client's issue, but in the end, the liability is pointed elsewhere.

W7: Yes, you can apply. Just send (laughing) the application.
C9: Does it also get approved? (amused)
W7: Well, I am not the decision maker. [C14: At least via administrative court, it has been possible.] A social worker decides it individually and checks the client's situation.

Within these strategies, social service workers are represented as powerless, which creates a contradiction with the set institutional role and does not support developmental aims.

Clients' strategy: Trying to reveal injustice. The most common strategy clients used during the conversations was trying to reveal injustice – or actions through which clients pointed out flaws and shortcomings in the services. The strategy was divided into techniques of challenging and emphasizing experiential expertise. The technique of challenging concerns the clients' marginal position; they must challenge the ruling system to secure the service that belongs to them. They aim to influence the system by adding knowledge and understanding of the reality in which they live.

When challenging and emphasizing experiential expertise, the clients took advantage of a situation in which their voices could be heard. The ultimate purpose of these techniques was to set the record straight and to increase workers' understanding of the clients' reality. Challenging was manifested in interrupting workers' presentations and pointing out the flaws in their service and plans. In the excerpt below, the social service workers tried to explain how they planned to compile their bulletin, but the clients interrupted the social service worker instead of listening to what the social service worker has to say.

W7: Yes, and as we said in our bulletin … it has been timetabled already. In autumn comes this summary, where we have these stakeholder bulletins, and we try to get it as wide as–
C11: [Mhm, what about the summer times?
C12: How you are going to tell them?
F3: Well, hmm, summer times were in the newsletter, broader notice than before, based on the feedback, and the service hours are also on the internet, and we tend to inform of them in social media later.
C12: There should have been a letter.

When emphasizing experiential expertise, the clients strongly presented their own opinions and experiences. They tried to prove to the workers that they knew which kind of actions function effectively and which kinds do not because they are the ones living the life. When emphasizing their own expertise,

they shared their own experiences, trying to demonstrate how the service works in real life. The experiences were expressed through emotional appeals. They also used phrases that made it clear that they were expressing their own opinions and how they felt in those situations.

Within these strategies, the representation of the client was more powerful than typical. However, although clients seemed to gain more interactional power, their actions caused the social service workers to recede. That combination created challenges for collaboration, and does not create power to affect services.

Strategies supporting integration

The usage of these strategies created shared interactional control, which supported collaboration by creating moments of integration (referring to shared interests and collaboration), in which the participants of the jury reached a mutual understanding and the aims were shared and integrated. Clients were ready to negotiate and develop, as they did not have to waste their time in the client jury trying to convince the workers of the flaws in the system. Instead, the participants agreed on the current situation and had a basis from which to move forward and find better solutions for the future. Furthermore, the social service workers did not dodge their responsibilities or the critique but responsively took part in the conversation and tried to advance the development of the matters at hand.

Social service workers' strategy: Taking responsibility. In taking responsibility, we mean a more active response from the social service workers. This strategy consisted of techniques such as being responsive and supportive. By being responsive as social service workers and answering clients spontaneously (compared to, for example, dodging), they took a stand on the shortcomings and flaws of the services and were ready to explain and justify decisions made. They did not provide indirect answers but truthfully answered the clients' demands and reasoning. In the example here, the social service worker did not dodge the possible conflict-sensitive matter but admitted to the client that the city was unwilling to invest in the service the client desires.

C3: Yes, but they cost (response to worker's explanation of sports possibilities) -
W2: [But we all have to pay for sports.
C3: Yes, but not in Espoo, and I think that those 67-year-olds (who get sports possibilities for free) are much wealthier, and could pay, compared to our intellectually disabled.
W2: Of course, it depends on the aim and how the city sees it. However, it is a normal principle that we all pay when using sports services and others, when we use the bus, etc. Intellectual disability is not a reason to get it for free. But of course, the system has to –
C3: [But it could be a reason. It is possible, it depends on the city's viewpoint.
W2: Well, that is what I said: it depends on the aim.

Thereby, the social service worker invoked parity, according to which everybody pays for exercise services, and stated that intellectual disability is not a reason to get special treatment in this area. If the city were to grant this kind of service, it would be extra and based on good will.

As mentioned above, silence and passiveness were common among workers. Nevertheless, there were also moments in which workers offered to explain the situation unprompted. In the next example, Worker 5 spoke up and was willing to sort out the situation.

> C4: But are they coming here? Because that is one thing, I am wondering: what was this decision anyway? That here in the city, great place, the school places are taking them and moving them somewhere in the middle of the forest. Who wants to send their 16-year-old, intellectually disabled child into a forest when I am not sending my healthy 16-year-old child 50 kilometers away for school? I do not understand this, and it feels like back and forth, that first we do this and then we turn it around, half a year this and half a year that.
> F1: I cannot say. I have not been in touch with that school.
> W5: I can explain this. (Continues by explaining the situation)

In some cases, social service workers' active participation required another worker to encourage them. This excerpt below originates from the dialogue, which started with clients accusing workers of purposefully trying to delay the clientship to save money. The worker honestly admits that clientships are sometimes delayed but that it is truly based on the rush and the large number of clients. After the concession, the clients expressed understanding of the situation.

> C9: It saves a lot if they can postpone the clientship for a year, two, or five. In addition, I have felt that the city does it on purpose. The less contacts for potential clients – more savings.
> C12: It is only saving regarding the disabled child [C9: Short-sighted.], but not regarding the parents.
> (Clients discussing together.)
> F3: Well, [name of the worker], is it likely that the clientship is aimed to be postponed?
> W7: Well, I would say that it is not on purpose, that I do not want to believe it. But it could be the work pressures which postpone it.
> C12: Yeah, no, we don't believe that either – that it's intentional – but it's just probably because of the work pressure [FM5: Mm, yeah.] what you have there, so that it isn't easy.
> C11: Yes.
> C9: My experience is twenty years' from now (the experience of delaying the clientship) so I don't know.
> [–]
> C9: Don't, like, take the blame for yourselves.

Responding to the clients' accusations required the courage to face the facts, which is known to be unpleasant for clients. Telling the facts may sometimes appear harsh, but it actually

moves the conversation forward and does not leave empty space, which gives the opportunity for the situation to escalate, setting the stage for bad experiences and for the dialogue to stray from the original theme. In the next excerpt, the social service worker did not try to avoid the possible conflict but stood behind their systems' idea of the outdoor activities for clients living in sheltered housing.

> C7: Yes, we hear that, in four years, they have not gotten out. Even animals have rights.
> W1: In X, we investigated outdoor activities; once a week, everyone who wants and is able gets out.
> (Whispers: once a week.)
> C7: [I would freak out, if only once in a week.
> W1: Yes, but we have to consider that they are sleeping in beds and do not have functioning legs.
> C7: Well, yes, but if you are otherwise healthy, you can take them out with a wheelchair. Of course, not if the condition prevents.
> W1: There seem to be relatives, who take them to market and running errands, but it cannot be only sheltered housing's duty. Even a housing this big (refers to sheltered housing X) takes them out this often.

Social service workers also expressed support and appreciation for the clients. They pointed out the essential knowledge that clients possess and how their opinions are needed and highly valued. They also showed that they were aware of the flaws in the system and society, which complicate the clients' ability to influence on the services.

Clients' strategy: Widening the perspective. Widening the perspective consisted of techniques such as problem solving and sense-making. In the problem-solving technique, clients shaped their doubts in a polite way, and the tone of the question was not confrontational or negative. They used straightforward questions to learn more about unclear matters and handled them with a problem-solving perspective rather than in a pessimistic or cynical attitude. The goal of this strategy was not to increase workers' understanding of their own situation but to dispel their own uncertainty and develop the service further instead.

> C6: Could you explain a bit what is meant by this structural staffing, staffing error, what was it on the slide?
> W1: Well, at the end of the year, we have this midweek holiday. In December, during Christmas, we have three of them. (Continues explaining.)

When the clients straightforwardly asked something instead of trying to question the services, the social service workers tended to be more active and answer thoroughly. This approach seems to be more fruitful in furthering the conversation toward finding the developmental points in the services. The clients also displayed an understanding of the workload and pressures the workers face. They demonstrated that they realized the city's budget could not cover everything they would like, which shows that they could comprehend the system in its totality and not just according to their personal needs.

Philosophical level: Discursive construction of power

The power relations are negotiated in the client jury's conversations; that is, power is discursively constructed in the interaction. In the client jury, the negotiation of power relations crystallizes how meanings are negotiated – in other words, which discourses are in power and which discourses are marginalized or absent. These meanings, which emphasize the social worker's role as a controller and relegate disabled people to a subordinate position, presumably arise from experiences of societal marginalization; experiences of bad and unfair service, discrimination, and lack of understanding produce marginalization. These experiences of marginalization, in which the social service workers are seen to be in situational control, manifest in the client jury conversations through clients seeking interactional control. The clients tried to influence social service workers by explaining the reality in which the clients live by challenging the services and demonstrating how the services work in practice. In so doing, they attempted to usurp the control of the social service workers.

Situated ideals. Situated ideals comprise participants' ideals of how they ought to act within the practice (Tracy, 1995). Based on the strategies used, clients' situated ideals could include acting as advocates for the rights of disabled people, whereby they aim for disabled people to be heard and for their reality to become accepted. If they presupposed that this situated ideal may be hard to reach, they offered challenging strategies to influence workers and fight their way toward comprehension. The social service workers, on the other hand, wanted to actualize their professional behavior, which they did by listening, avoiding being provoked.

In terms of the client jury's objectives, the espoused ideals of the participants could be influencing, co-operating, and/or developing services. Nevertheless, it seems that the asymmetry of the power relationship and how the roles of the participants were experienced hindered collaboration. Moreover, mitigating the asymmetry, social service workers tried to avoid conflicts through withdrawing from their expected roles as powerful bureaucrats; instead, clients aimed for interactional control by challenging the social service workers' professionalism. However, these actions did not support the jury's developmental aim.

Discussion

Our findings describe how power relations are negotiated during client jury meetings in the interactions through four different strategies, which outline the mismatch of institutional-bound roles and actual behavior. Discursive strategies (see Table 2) used that reinforced the asymmetry of power and distribution included avoiding conflicts with the clients (workers) and trying to reveal injustice (clients). Further, the strategies employed that enforced shared power and integration comprised taking responsibility (workers) and widening the perspective (clients). Therefore, we suggest a GPT in which power relations are also negotiated in the actual interaction through these different discursive strategies.

Power and power asymmetry are natural parts of the client–worker relationship in social services, and power relations have often been approached through the lenses of institutional structures and positions (Lipsky, 1980). In our study, the context of the relationship and the asymmetry of the relationship build a framework in which the social workers are in control and the clients attempt to resist their control by pursuing interactional control in client jury meetings. Uggerhøj (2014) stated that power relation roles, in which the social service worker is powerful and the client is dependent, are so strong that participants possess and support them even unconsciously, and clients may naturally fall into a submissive role.

Our findings show that this power relation-related dependent role leads the participant trying to deny these roles. The clients strive to move away from this submissive role by pursuing more interactional control, relegating the social service workers to the listening role. In previous research (e.g., Matarese & Nijnatten, 2015), social service workers' power has been shown to be manifested through deciding on the number of questions, initiating topics, and guiding or controlling the discussion. However, in our data, it was the clients who spoke more than the workers, asking many questions, interrupting workers, challenging them, and, in some cases, accusing them. Thus, the clients seemed to take a more powerful position. In addition, the clients emphasized their roles as mothers and fathers instead of just clients, which are identities outside of the institutional setting (Matarese & Nijnatten, 2015). However, this makes it more difficult to see the discussed themes according to merit.

Usually, asymmetrical self-disclosure is seen as supporting a social worker's power; for instance, in terms of politeness, the object of the talk is in a vulnerable position, risking face (Goffman, 1955). In client jury meetings, this viewpoint positions social workers in a less powerful role, since in this context social service workers may withdraw from their roles by dodging and falling silent, almost fearing to exert the power that belongs to their job (cf. Broer et al., 2012). Moreover, clients expect that social service workers have the power to be influential (to help or deny the help), and when workers dodge the power, they also deny their expected role as a potential helper. By taking responsibility, the social service workers validate the institutional role the clients expect.

This research contributes to power relation research in the fields of communication and social services. It describes the dialectics of power relations, which emerge from interactional control, and the strategies used in negotiation. The balance of the interactional control is crucial for successful collaboration; it should not be centered on the social worker or the client. Instead, the control should be shared. In other healthcare settings, shared control has shown positive outcomes. For example, in patient-centered communication (Epstein et al., 2005) and shared decision making, the shared mind is highlighted as an important control concern (Epstein & Peter, 2009). Additionally, the chosen analysis method brings a different viewpoint to conversation analysis research. AIDA proved very suitable for this topic because its primary focus is seeking and describing challenges and discomforts in the interaction (Tracy, 1995).

Limitations

This study supported that communication studies have much to offer to power research in social service work. Reflecting on

Tracy's (2010) criteria for qualitative research, we consider that this study makes a significant theoretical contribution by showing how power relations are constructed in communication, bringing communication studies to the field of social services, and vice versa. Furthermore, all efforts made to promote the inclusion of disabled clients are important.

Naturally occurring data is simultaneously this study's strength and weakness. Client jury meetings create naturalistic data of what happens when the worker and the client interact with each other. However, the presence of researchers and audio-recorders may have influenced the jury's conversations. We attempted to strengthen credibility (Tracy, 2010) by presenting multiple excerpts from the transcribed data. We noticed that the data was heterogeneous, as client juries are a new form of interaction, and each jury functions in its own way. To improve sincerity (Tracy, 2010), the transparency of the research is emphasized by a precise description of how the analysis was conducted. The challenge was that the communication strategies and AIDA in general assume that actors deliberately choose to use the strategies in question but observational data alone cannot be used to confirm this.

We recommend further study of the situated ideals. To fully reveal the situated ideals of the parties, it would be necessary to conduct an interview concerning how they ought to act within this practice. It is also important to learn if the strategies found in this study are also visible in interactions within which social workers meet their clients one-on-one.

Practical implications

Client juries are platforms for interactions between clients and social service workers. They create a significant arena for inclusion, but poorly organized meetings can strengthen otherness. Our findings demonstrate that clients seem to acquire interactional control in client jury meetings, but the power is only valid in the interaction itself; therefore, we do not know whether participating in the jury will actually make any difference in the current services discussed. Furthermore, there is always a concern regarding whether the jury's genuine aim was to find solutions together or just to create pseudo-integration (see French & Swain, 2001). To truly include clients in developing services, they should cover themes for which the potential to exert influence is real. This demands that the aim for inclusion be integrated into the whole organization and not just within a small group of workers.

For the client jury to be successful, all participants should be introduced to the functions of the jury, and they should reach consensus on the aims and activities of these meetings. Participants' interests ought to be exposed to successfully integrate them. For clients, the client jury appears to be a good arena of influence in which they can share their opinions face-to-face with the workers. It is truly important to give a voice to the clients, but the workers should also be more responsive, and the discussion should be led by the workers or by an independent facilitator to keep the conversation on track. The facilitator should also be trained for the task. In this situation, the topics covered should remain ones that can be answered by those in the jury, and the discussions' priorities should not be sidetracked. The formation of the client jury should also be considered thematically to answer the questions as comprehensively as possible. This type of orderliness encourages the jury to be more than just a feedback channel.

On the relational side, it is important for both groups to show understanding of the other's situation. Demonstrating support and expressing it aloud helps to keep the discussion neutral and negotiation focused. If one side feels that the other does not understand it, the tone quickly becomes offensive; compelling the other side to dodge, and the discussion never makes progress. The key to this is the active involvement of the workers in leading the discussion, providing emotional support and participating in the discussion. Increasing and maintaining understanding is at the heart of collaboration. Thus, the management of the discussion keeps the focus on relevant themes, the demonstration of emotional support makes the party easily approachable and active, and the informative excerpts from the conversation reduce the uncertainty of the other party. Whether there is a chosen facilitator for the jury, all the participating workers should learn to manage their emotions to be responsive to the proposed critiques instead of dodging criticism for fear of conflict.

Conclusion

According to this study, the client–worker power relation is a dialectical one that is negotiated within actual interaction. According to our findings, the balance of interactional control is crucial for successful collaboration among clients and workers. Furthermore, studying interaction in social services is important because all the meanings related to the client–worker relationship are created and renegotiated in interaction. Therefore, we must realize the importance of client encounters and service user involvement in social services. The findings are also applicable to other health and social services workgroups consisting of professionals and service users who tackle the reconciliation of subjective health, well-being, and institutional rules.

Acknowledgments

Authors' note

We confirm that this is an original manuscript. It has not been published before, and it is not currently being considered for publication elsewhere. We declare no conflicts of interest. All authors approved the manuscript.

References

Altman, B. M. (2001). Disability definitions, models, classification schemes, and applications. In G. L. Albrecht, K. D. Seelman, & M. Bury (Eds.), *Handbook of disability studies* (pp. 97–122). Sage.
Baxter, L. A. (2011). *Voicing relationships: A dialogic perspective*. Sage.

Beddoe, L. (2017). Field, capital and professional identity: Social work in health care. In S. Webb (Ed.), *Professional identity in social work* (pp. 122–135). Routledge.

Beresford, P., & Croft, S. (2004). Service users and practitioners united: The key component for social work reform. *British Journal of Social Work*, 35(1), 53–68. https://doi.org/10.1093/bjsw/bch005

Black, L., & Wiederhold, A. (2014). Discursive strategies of civil disagreement in public dialogue groups. *Journal of Applied Communication Research*, 42(3), 285–306. https://doi.org/10.1080/00909882.2014.911938

Broer, T., Nieboer, A. P., & Bal, R. (2012). Mutual powerlessness in client participation practices in mental health care. *Health Expectations*, 17(2), 208–219. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1369-7625.2011.00748.x

Collinson, D. (2005). Dialectics of leadership. *Human Relations*, 58(11), 1419–1442. https://doi.org/10.1177/0018726705060902

Craig, R. T., & Tracy, K. (1995). Grounded practical theory: The case of intellectual discussion. *Communication Theory*, 5(3), 248–272. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2885.1995.tb00108.x

Craig, R. T., & Tracy, K. (2014). Building grounded practical theory in applied communication research: Introduction to the special issue. *Journal of Applied Communication Research*, 42(3), 229–243. https://doi.org/10.1080/00909882.2014.916410

Deetz, S., & Mumby, D. (1990). Power, discourse, and the workplace: Reclaiming the critical tradition. *Annals of the International Communication Association*, 13(1), 18–47. https://doi.org/10.1080/23808985.1990.11678743

DeJong, G., & Basnett, I. (2001). Disability and health policy: The role of markets in the delivery of health services. In G. L. Albrecht, K. D. Seelman, & M. Bury (Eds.), *Handbook of disability studies* (pp. 610–632). Sage.

Derlega, G. K., & Mathews, V. J. (2006). Self-disclosure in personal relationships. In A. L. Vangelisti & D. Perlman (Eds.), *The Cambridge handbook of personal relationships* (pp. 409–427). Cambridge University Press.

Epstein, R. M., Franks, O., Sheilds, C. G., Melkdrum, S. C., Miller, K. N., Campbell, T. L., & Fiscella, K. (2005). Patient-centered communication and diagnostic testing. *Annals of Family Medicine*, 3(5), 415–421. https://doi.org/10.1370/afm.348

Epstein, R. M., & Peter, E. (2009). Beyond information: Exploring patients' preferences. *JAMA*, 302(2), 195–197. https://doi.org/10.1001/jama.2009.984

Finnish Institute for Health and Welfare (2020). *Vammaispalvelut 2019: Kuntakyselyn osaraportti [Disability Services 2019: Partial report of the municipal survey]*. https://www.julkari.fi/bitstream/handle/10024/140576/Tr37_20.pdf?sequence=6&isAllowed=y

French, S., & Swain, I. (2001). The relationship between disabled people and health and welfare professionals. In G. L. Albrecht, K. Seelman, & M. Bury (Eds.), *Handbook of disability studies* (pp. 734–753). Sage.

Goffman, E. (1955). On face-work. *Psychiatry*, 18(3), 213–231. https://doi.org/10.1080/00332747.1955.11023008

Juhila, K., Caswel, D., & Raitakari, S. (2014). Resistance. In C. Hall, K. Juhila, M. Matarese, & C. V. Nijnatten (Eds.), *Analysing social work communication: Discourse in practice* (pp. 117–135). Routledge.

Krinks, R., Kendal, E., Whitty, J. A., & Scuffham, P. A. (2016). Do consumer voices in health-care citizens' juries matter? *Health Expect*, 19(5), 1015–1022. https://doi.org/10.1111/hex.12397

Leung, T. T. F. (2011). Client participation in managing social work service—An unfinished quest. *Social Work*, 56(1), 43–52. https://doi.org/10.1093/sw/56.1.43

Lipsky, M. (1980). *Street-level bureaucracy: Dilemmas of the individual in public services*. Russell Sage Foundation.

Matarese, M. T., & Nijnatten, C. (2015). Making a case for client insistence in social work interaction. *Discourse Processes*, 52(8), 670–688. https://doi.org/10.1080/0163853X.2014.979974

Matthies, A.-L. (2014). How participation, marginalization and welfare services are connected. In A. L. Matthies & L. Uggerhøj (Eds.), *Participation, marginalisation and welfare services: Concepts, politics and practices across European countries* (pp. 3–18). Ashgate.

The Ministry of Social Affairs and Health (n.d.). *Services and support for people with disabilities*. https://stm.fi/en/disability-services

National Advisory Board on Research Ethics (2009). *Ethical principles of research in the humanities and social and behavioural sciences and proposals for ethical review*. http://www.tenk.fi/sites/tenk.fi/files/ethical principles.pdf

Prior, D., & Barnes, M. (2011). Subverting social policy on the front line: Agencies of resistance in the delivery of services. *Social Policy and Administration*, 45(3), 264–279. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9515.2011.00768.x

Räty, T. (2010). *Vammaispalvelut: Vammaispalvelujen soveltamiskäytäntö. [Disability services: Disability services' application policy]*. Kynnys ry.

Street, J., Duszynski, K., Krawczyk, S., & Braunack-Mayer, A. (2014). The use of citizens' juries in health policy decision-making: A systematic review. *Social Science & Medicine*, 109(May), 1–9. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.socscimed.2014.03.005

Thompson, T. L., Robinson, J. D., & Brashers, D. E. (2011). Interpersonal communication and health care. In J. A. Daly & M. L. Knapp (Eds.), *The Sage handbook of interpersonal communication* (4th ed., pp. 633–678). Sage.

Tracy, K. (1995). Action-implicative discourse analysis. *Journal of Language and Social Psychology*, 14(1–2), 195–215. https://doi.org/10.1177/0261927X95141011

Tracy, K. (2005). Reconstructing communicative practices: Action-implicative discourse analysis. In K. L. Fitch & R. E. Sanders (Eds.), *Handbook of language and social interaction* (pp. 301–319). Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Tracy, S. J. (2010). Qualitative quality: Eight "big-tent" criteria for excellent qualitative research. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 16(10), 837–851. https://doi.org/10.1177/1077800410383121

Uggerhøj, L. (2014). The powerful meeting between social workers and service users: Needs, barriers, possibilities in participation processes in agency settings. In A. L. Matthies & L. Uggerhøj (Eds.), *Participation, marginalisation and welfare services: Concepts, politics and practices across European countries* (pp. 201–2018). Ashgate.

Wilson, A. P., & Beresford, P. (2000). "Anti-oppressive practice": Emancipation or appropriation? *The British Journal of Social Work*, 30(5), 553–573. https://doi.org/10.1093/bjsw/30.5.553