# Significant others in substance abusers' change talk during motivational interviewing sessions in the Finnish Probation Service

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ABSTRACT

AIMS – This article explores the meanings substance-abusing clients attach to family and friend-ships during motivational interviewing (MI) sessions in Probation Service. DATA – The analyses are based on videotaped and transcribed data consisting of 82 MI sessions. This database involves the first two counseling sessions of 41 client-counselor pairs. Sessions were videotaped in 12 Proba-tion Service offices in Finland between 2007 and 2009. METHODS – The analysis relies on coding of client's change talk utterances and qualitative semiotic framework. RESULTS – The meanings of the significant others were diverse from the point of view of the client's motivation: family ap-peared as a support for change, an aspiration, a sufferer, or an obstacle to change; and friendship appeared as an obstacle to change, a surmounted obstacle, a cause to change, or a support to change. CONCLUSIONS - Significant others and their quality are important and diverse factors that promote or hinder change in substance abuser' change talk. Thus, it is suggested that the mean-ing of significant others should not be overlooked in MI and other substance abuse treatment. KEY WORDS – significant others, substance abusers, motivational interviewing, change talk, pro-bation service, qualitative research

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## Introduction

The importance of social networks in the resolution of substance abuse problems is well-established in the addiction treatment literature. It has been shown that members of a substance abuser's social network are pivotal in the change process (De Civita, Dobkin, & Robertson, 2000; Ellis, Berni-chon, Yu, Roberts, & Herrell, 2004; Kasku-tas, Bond, & Humbreys, 2002; Longabaugh, Wirtz, Zywiak, & O'Malley, 2010; McCrady et al., 2006). Past studies have shown that especially family members and friendships may play an important role in the recovery from substance abuse. These significant others of a substance abuser can have both a positive and a negative impact on a sub-stance abuser's process of change. On the positive side, support from family mem-bers is associated with a substance abuser's treatment compliance, a positive treatment outcome, less relapse and more abstinent days (Beattie, 2001; Beattie & Longabaugh,

1997; Ellis et al., 2004; McCrady, Epstein, & Sell, 2003; McCrady, Hayaki, Epstein, & Hirsch, 2002; O'Farrel, Hooley, Fals-Stewart, & Cotter, 1998). It has also been shown that having more nondrinking friends, encouragement from friends for abstinence, and general social support from friends predict more positive treatment outcome (Beattie & Longabaugh, 1999; Mohr, Averna, Kenny, & Del Boca, 2001; Zywiak, Longabaugh, & Wirtz, 2002).

On the negative side, certain types of family responses to drinking (e.g. withdrawing from the drinker, tolerating drinking and avoiding dealing with drinking), family-related stressors (e.g. conflict, criticism and poor marital communication), marital dissatisfaction and certain negative behaviors by spousal are associated with a poor outcome, the likelihood of relapse and more drinking (Beattie, 2001; Ellis et al., 2004; Fals-Stewart, O'Farrell, & Hooley, 2001; McCrady et al., 2002; O'Farrel et al., 1998; Stevens, Estrada, Glider, & McGrath, 1998). Past studies have also shown that the more drinking friends in the network, the poorer the treatment outcome tends to be (Havassy, Hall, & Wasserman,1991; Mohr et al., 2001). Having even a single person in the social network who uses the same drug of abuse is predictive of poorer treatment outcome (Havassy et al., 1991; McCrady, 2004). Mohr et al. (2001) reported that changes in both friendship quality (e.g. subjective appraisals of value or adequacy of the relationship) and structure (e.g. quantity or frequency of interactions) would predict follow-up drinking level. Saarnio (2002) showed that greater number of contacts with problem users increased the breakdown of treatment for substance abusers.

Although several studies have examined the influence of significant others on a substance abuser's process of change, there is a paucity of research examining how substance abusers talk about meanings ascribed to significant others in the process of change. This article addresses this question by providing a qualitative analysis of the meanings that substance-abusing clients attach to family members and friends during motivational treatment sessions. In particular, the present study examines substance-abusing clients' talk about these significant others in the context of the motivational interviewing (MI) sessions.

MI is a clinical style that has spread all over the world and has become a well-recognized therapeutic method since its introduction by William R. Miller in 1983 (Lundahl, Kunz, Brownell, Tollefson, & Burke, 2010; Miller, 1983). MI has been defined as a collaborative, person-centered and goal oriented style of communication. It is designed to strengthen personal and intrinsic motivation to specific goal by exploring and eliciting the person's own reasons for change with particular attention to the language of change. The spirit of MI emphasizes the client-counselor partnership and the idea that the client inherently has what is needed to make changes in their lives (Miller & Rollnick, 2013).

MI has strong empirical evidence for its efficacy and it is one of the leading evidence-based methods for helping people with substance abuse and other behavioral problems (Burke, Arkowitz, & Menchola, 2003; Hettema, Steele, &Miller, 2005; Project MATCH Research Group, 1998; UKATT Research team, 2005). However, the mechanisms through which MI exerts its effects are not yet fully understood (Apodaca & Longabaugh, 2009; Burke et

al., 2003; Lundahl et al., 2010; Miller & Rose, 2009). In recent years, several studies have focused on the client's language as a predictor of the MI outcome. These studies have shown that MI increases client's 'change talk' – talk that indicates the recognition of a reason, need, ability, desire, commitment or taking a step to change – and positive change talk predicts better outcomes, whereas negative change talk ('sustain talk' – language against change or in favor of continued substance use) predicts poorer outcomes after MI (Amrhein, Miller, Yahne, Palmer, & Fulcher, 2003; Bertholet, Faouzi, Gmel, Gaume, & Daeppen, 2010; Campbell, Adamson, & Carter, 2010; Moyers et al., 2007; Walker, Stephens, Rowland, & Roffman, 2011). In other words, its seems that substance-abusing clients' language during MI sessions predicts the outcome following MI.

The aim of this qualitative study is to expand on the current understanding of the significance of the client's change talk during MI sessions and to provide new insights into substance-abusing clients' talk about their significant others. There is an absence of qualitative research exploring aspects of the client's language during MI sessions. Moreover, only a very small number of studies have included significant others in MI sessions (Apodaca, Magill, Longabaugh, Jackson, & Monti, 2013). However, there is reason to believe that significant others play an important role in substance-abusing clients' motivation to change during MI. Two research questions guide the analyses: (a) What kind of meanings do the clients attach to family and friendships? (b) What significance does the family and the friendships have for the clients' motivation to change?

## Methods

The research was funded by the Academy of Finland and The Finnish Criminal Sanctions Agency. The approval for the study was obtained from the Finnish Criminal Sanctions Agency, and informed written consent was obtained from all participating clients and MI counselors. The data was gathered during the counseling sessions of the Finnish Probation Service. The Probation Service is a part of the criminal sanctions system of Finland. It is in charge of the enforcement of community sanctions and other activities related to sanctions served outside imprisonment. Community sanctions consist of the supervision of conditionally sentenced young offenders, juvenile punishment, community service, and the supervision of parolees. In community sanction work, particular attention is paid to evaluating substance abuse problems and in increasing the use of programs for substance abusers.

In 2007, a Swedish MI-based program called Beteende–Samtal–Förändring [BSF (Behavior–Interviewing–Change)] developed specifically for the needs of the Probation Service was also introduced in the Finnish Probation Service. The BSF program is a structured adaptation of MI where the employees of the Probation Service are expected to use the skills of MI to motivate clients to change with regards to offending and substance abuse. The employee acts as a counselor who helps clients to enhance their intrinsic motivation to change by working in a client-centered but directive manner. The BSF program is a semi-structured five-session MI-based intervention focusing on drug use and criminal behavior. During sessions, the client is encouraged to examine different stages of change, to see

the positive side of change, to elicit change talk, to explore the discrepancies between his/her values and current behavior, to map his/her social network, and to elicit the personal strengths of the client (Farbring & Berge, 2006; Farbring & Johnson, 2008). Even though the criminal justice context is perhaps not an ideal environment for MI due to its oppressive, directive and autonomy-limiting features (Ashton, 2005), the BSF program is designed to be as open as possible for client autonomy. The clients were volunteers in this particular program and the counselors were not required to report to legal authorities of any possible drug use revealed by the client. According to Farbring and Johnson (2008), the BSF programmatic adaptation of MI has achieved a positive reputation in the Swedish correctional service as an evidence-based method for talking to clients. It has made a considerable contribution in helping clients to consider change alternatives in Swedish probation programs.

The analyses presented here are based on viewing 98 videotaped BSF sessions, and studying the transcripts of these sessions. This database involves the first two counseling sessions of 49 client–counselor pairs. Sessions were videotaped in 12 Probation Services offices in Finland between 2007 and 2009. All clients who participated in this study had either an alcohol or a drug abuse problem. In this article the focus is on the analysis of clients' talk about their family relationships and friendships. There were 41 clients (out of a total of 49) whose change talk utterances concern the influence of family members and/or friends on their substance use. The data from the 41 clients was elicited in both of the taped sessions. Thus, the data source is 82 sessions.

The average age of these clients was 36 years (range: 19–62 years), and they were predominantly male (39; 95 percent).

The procedure used to analyze the data involved several steps. The first step consisted of identifying the client's goal with regard to their use of alcohol and drugs (e.g. to quit or cut down the use of alcohol, cannabis or other drugs). Identifying the goal was fairly easy because it was usually discussed at the beginning of the videotaped sessions. The second step was to search for sequences that are central from the point of view of this goal, and to code the client's change talk in these central sequences. For guides to coding change talk I relied on two coding manuals (Amrhein, 2007; Miller, Moyers, Ernst, & Amrhein, 2008). After some experimentation with the videotaped and transcribed data, I combined the core ideas of these manuals by focusing on the following categories of clients' change talk utterances. The first one is, however, a new category that was not included in either of the reference manuals:

- *Problem recognition*. The client shows that he/she is aware or unaware of the problem, or that he/she considers or does not consider the problem.
- *Reasons*. The client states a particular motive, rationale, basis or incentive to change or not to change.
- *Need*. The client indicates a necessity, urgency or requirement to change or not to change.
- *Desire*. The client indicates wanting, wishing and willing to change or not to change.
- *Ability*. The client indicates his/her personal perceptions of capability or incapability of change.

- *Commitment*. The client implies an agreement, intention or obligation to change or not change.
- *Taking steps*. The client states that he/she has taken specific behavioral steps toward or away from change in the recent past.

In positive change talk utterances, the client moves towards change, while in negative change talk utterances he/she talks about his/her intention to maintain the status quo.

The coding of the client's change talk sequences was carried out by first watching the videotaped BSF session and making preliminary notes on the transcription at any utterances representing change talk. After this, these utterances were examined in more detail and labeled with the above-mentioned categories.

The third step was to search for all the utterances about family and family members (real or idealized family in general, spouses, children, parents, other relatives) and friendships (friends in general or a particular friend from the client's circle of friends) from the sequences of the client's change talk. The clients' change talk utterances about these significant others were then analyzed using a semiotic framework. By applying Charles S. Peirce's semiotic theory of signs, I explored clients' utterances about family and friends as a symbolic sign. According to Peirce, the action of signs (semiosis), is a triadic process whose components include sign, object and interpretant:

> A *Sign*, or *Representamen*, is a First which stands in such a genuine triadic relation to a Second, called its *Object*, as to be capable of determining a Third, called its *Interpretant*, to assume the same triadic relation to its Object in which it stands itself to the same Object. (Peirce, 1965 CP 2.274)

Therefore, any sign is in a triadic relation with an object and an interpretant. The first division focuses on the sign as such. Peirce calls this division into *Qualisigns*, *Sinsigns*, and *Legisigns*. The second division focuses the reference of signs to objects. Peirce calls this division into *Icons*, *Indexes*, and *Symbols*. The third division focuses on the interpretation of signs or on the effects of signs on interpreters. Peirce calls this division into *Rhemes*, *Dicents*, and *Arguments*. (Peirce, 1965 CP 2.243–2.250; Liszka 1996; Short 2007.)

The second division of signs is relevant from the viewpoint of this study because it concerns the sign's relation to its object. Icons refer to their object by means of similarity (e.g. an image, a diagram or a metaphor); indexes refer by means of contiguity, causality or by some other actual connection (e.g. smoke as the sign for fire); symbols refer by means of a habit, convention, disposition or law (e.g. words and numbers) (Peirce, 1965 CP 2.247–2.249, 2.292–2.307; Liszka, 1996; Short, 2007). In this article, I concentrate on symbols by investigating the utterances about family and friends as a symbolic sign. I explore the utterance about family and friends as a symbol (sign), and analyze what kind of habits and conventions (objects) concerning substance use the clients attach to it.

## Results

All in all, there were 41 clients (n = 49) who mentioned the family (33 clients) or

the friendships (35 clients) in their change talk utterances. The situations in which the clients talked about significant others varied from session to session. In some sessions, the counselors first asked about the significance of the family or friends; in others, the clients brought the topic to the discussion.

In by far the majority of cases, the client's utterance about family occurs in the change talk category of *Reasons*: the client usually mentioned the family or family member when he/she stated a particular motive, rationale or incentive to change (27 clients) or not change (2 clients).

In most cases, the client's utterance about friendships occurs in the change talk categories of *Reasons* and *Taking steps*: the client usually mentioned the friendship when he/she stated a particular motive, rationale or incentive to change (15 clients) or not change (6 clients) or when he/she stated that he/she has taken specific behavioral steps toward change (18 clients).

On the basis of the change talk coding and the semiotic analysis, it seems that the clients do attach various meanings to family and friendships. An examination of these meanings with illustrative examples from the data corpus is presented in the following sections. The quotations are translated from original Finnish data. The translations are as exact as possible but the sentence structure of the spoken language has been edited to a more comprehensible form.

### The meanings of family

The meanings of family in the clients' change talk utterances can be divided into four headings in which "family" as a symbolic sign can stands for:

○ Support (21 clients)
○ Aspiration (14 clients)
○ Sufferer (14 clients)
○ Obstacle or threat (4 clients)

In most cases (21 clients) "family" as a symbolic sign stands for *support* to change. In these cases, the family in general and spouses, children, parents and other relatives in particular appear as important and motivating factors in the resolution of substance abuse problems. The forms of family support vary between clients. The support encourages the change but is also controlling, preventing and restricting the substance use. An example of a change talk where the "parents" as a symbolic sign stands for a support for change appears in Extract 1. It involves a client with a goal of reducing his cannabis use who reflects on his addiction in response to a counselor's request. The client brings up the role of his parents. In the client's change talk, the parents appear to symbolize his ability and capability to change. In certain situations, the parents make him restrict the use of cannabis. The client gained support from the parents by their placing strict limits on cannabis use during visits to their home.

*Extract 1*
Yes, I think that I am dependent on cannabis, even though there are no withdrawal symptoms from it. However, I am dependent on cannabis in such a way that it is really difficult to refuse when it is offered. But there have also been situations in which I have been able to refuse it. My parents have banned me visiting them when I've been smoking. If you have been offered cannabis when you have been

about to go to your parents' house, you are able to say "no." So, I am still able to refuse to smoke. Perhaps I'm not totally addicted [to cannabis] (Client #1, aged 25, male).

In many cases (14 clients) the meaning of the family is constructed as an *aspiration*, a significant part of the good life, which the client would be able to enjoy with the resolution of substance abuse problems. In these cases, finding a spouse, starting a family, having children and good family relationships appear to be desirable and motivating factors. An example of a change talk where "family" as a symbolic sign stands for an aspiration appears in Extract 2. In this extract a client's utterances indicate that he has several reasons, motives and incentives to change. The goal of this client is to reduce his drinking and quit using drugs. He has already managed to cut down his drinking and quit drugs. The change appears as an opportunity to enhance family relationships that are important to him.

*Extract 2*
My personal relationships have often broken up because of my substance use. But now I've stopped using drugs and reduced alcohol use. My health and mood have improved. And my parents and my child have been happy; I now have a new connection with them. It certainly made it easier for them and for my father in particular. My personal relationship also works better now (Client #24, aged 27, male).

A number of clients (14) also talked about the suffering of their family members. In these cases children, spouses, parents and the family in general appear as significant others who are neglected and mistreated because of the client's substance use. The suffering of the family members and children in particular seems to be the motivating factor in the resolution of substance abuse problems. An example of a change talk where "family" as a symbolic sign stands for a *sufferer* appears in Extract 3. It involves a client with a goal of reducing her drinking, who has said in the session that her own daughter is her reason to avoid drinking, and this has spurred her toward change.

*Extract 3*
She [the daughter] is to me something of an incentive because she immediately notices if I slip, it is seen from her behavior … Before, I thought that [drinking] could be hidden from small children but now I understand that nothing can be hidden from them. When I feel better, my daughter feels better … Before, I did not understand that I myself have done the most harm to my children by drinking (Client #22, aged 52, female).

The "family" may also symbolize a factor that does not motivate change. Some clients (4) reported that the family or a particular family member is a reason to drink: the family appears as an *obstacle* or a *threat* to change. The client in Extract 4 with a goal of reducing his drinking says that he has taken steps toward change, but the external setting is not ideal from the point of view of reaching the goal. It is difficult for the client to reduce his drinking because his circle of acquaintances drinks plenty

of alcohol. The family's drinking habits, particularly those of the father and uncle, exposes the client to the risk of a relapse. In this case, the family seems to be a threat to change even if the client also gets support from his father.

> *Extract 4*
> Although progress has been achieved, the drinking problem is not completely gone . . . Sometimes [I] also drink too much because there is drinking in my social circle. It seems that my uncle also has quite a serious drinking problem. My father has some kind of drinking problem but we have helped each other. But sometimes we have relapsed together too (Client #48, aged 29, male).

*The meanings of friendship*

On the basis of the change talk coding and the semiotic analysis, it seems that "friendship" as a symbolic sign can stands for:

- Obstacle or threat (19 clients)
- Surmounted obstacle (16 clients)
- Cause (11 clients)
- Support (10 clients)

In most cases (19 clients) the meaning of the friendship is constructed as an *obstacle* or a *threat* to change in the clients' talk. An example of this appears in Extract 5. The goal of the client is to quit using amphetamines. The counselor has risen in the session the topic of the disadvantages of change ("If you would make this change decision and would imagine a life without drugs, so what disadvantages would there be in it?"). The client says that leaving the friendships would be difficult. His group of friends seems to be a barrier to change

because he is not ready to leave the drug-using friends. Here friendship is a particular reason not to change: it is a symbolic sign that refers to an obstacle to change.

> *Extract 5*
> Well, relationships are one such a thing. All the drug users have to be cut out from my circle of friends. And this circle consists solely of users . . . It [leaving the group of friends behind] has always been a little difficult (Client #17, aged 35, male).

Even though friends are often found in the clients' talk as an obstacle to change, they also appear in many cases (16 clients) as a *surmounted obstacle*. The overcoming of the obstacle is revealed by the fact that the client has changed his groups of friends and is no longer dealing with substance users or the client spends time with substance using friends but does not use drugs anymore. Extract 6 illustrates the latter case and it is taken from a session with a client with a reduced drinking goal. The client has stated that he has already managed to cut down his drinking. At the end of the session he gives an example of how the change manifests itself. The client's utterances indicate that he has taken steps toward change. He can still visit his alcohol-using friends and spend time with them but he does not drink any more himself. In this case, the friend appears as a sign that refers to surmounted obstacle.

> *Extract 6*
> In some cases you can tell yourself that you have gone much further. When I go to visit a particular friend's house, he is there always with a beer bottle in his

hand. But I have never asked for beer for myself, I prefer coffee. It has turned to a habit already. Even if the other one drinks beer, you do not have to drink it (Client #10, aged 38, male).

A friend may also be the *cause* why the client feels that it is necessary to change his/her substance use behavior (11 clients). Extract 7 shows a case where the client with a goal of reducing his drinking mentions friendships as an important cause why he should change his drinking habits. The client's change talk utterances show that he has a particular moral and psychological cause and motive to change. He regrets that he betrayed his friends' trust.

*Extract 7*
If you have promised something to a friend, for example, to go to the city with him tomorrow at two o'clock, or to come to help him lift a bookshelf tomorrow, or something. And then you are not able to go because you are so drunk or you have so bad a hangover . . . Well, of course, it doesn't always feel very good even to me afterwards. And it surely has not felt good to those friends either because they have trusted in me. Then when you are sober you will think what the hell (Client #35, aged 27, male).

In some cases (10 clients) the client's friend seems to be an important factor with the help of which the client has come closer to his/her goal. An example of a change talk where friendship as a symbolic sign stands for a *support* to change appears in Extract 8. It involves a client with a goal of abstinence who has told in the session that

he is aware of his drinking problem and he has already managed to cut down his drinking. The counselor has asked in the session how the change has been achieved. The client mentions the significance of his friend's role in the change of his drinking habits. The client has taken steps toward change with his support. The friend often contacts the client and arranges activities for him to keep him away from drinking.

*Extract 8*
Well, I have that one friend . . . we spend quite much time together . . .
Also this morning, we spoke with each other on the phone. He often calls me and asks if I would like to go with him to the city and things like this (Client #31, aged 51, male).

## Discussion

This study of the meanings of the significant others finds that family and friends were referenced frequently in substance-abusing clients' change talk during MI sessions in the Probation Service, and that when they were referenced the clients usually mentioned this topic when they stated a particular reason to change or when they stated that they have taken specific steps toward change. Yet it seems that the meanings of these significant others was diverse from the point of view of the client's motivation. A more exact semiotic analysis showed that these meanings were divided into the categories, which were defined the family as follows: a support for change, an aspiration, a sufferer, or an obstacle/threat to change; and the friendship as follows: an obstacle/threat to change, a surmounted obstacle, a cause to change, or a support to change.

This study suggests that both family rela-

tionships and friendships and their quality played an important role in the clients' motivation to change. Most often the family in general or the particular family members appear as the motivating factor in the resolution of substance abuse problems. Whenever the "family" symbolized support for change, an aspiration, or a sufferer in the clients' change talk, it appeared as the motivating factor. In those few cases where the meaning of the family was constructed as an obstacle or a threat to change, the family appeared as the factor that did not motivate to change. In contrast to the family, the friends appear more often as the factor that does not motivate change. Whenever the "friendship" symbolized a support or a cause for change, it appeared as the motivating factor. However, there are many cases where the meaning of the friendship was constructed as an obstacle or a threat, and in these cases it appeared as the factor that did not motivate to change.

So, in addition to the intrinsic motivation, significant others and their quality seem to be an important factor that promotes or hinders change. This study demonstrates that the role of social factors can be at least as crucial as the client's intrinsic motivation to change. If in the substance abuse treatment it is too strongly emphasized that motivation is an issue that relates to the client's internal world, then the significance of social factors such as family relationships and friendships will receive too little attention. So, the focus on internal and intrinsic motivation should not neglect external and social factors supporting the change. Rather, internal motivation should be interpreted as in invitation for the client to consider the meaning and value of significant others and other external factors to the client's goals in life.

Thus, it is suggested that social networks, especially those consisting of family members and friends, should not be overlooked during MI and other substance abuse treatment. The contextual meaning of significant others is one factor among others that contributes to substance-abusing clients' motivation to change. Moreover, recent studies have shown that there is a link between supporting social networks and outcomes of substance abuse treatment (Ellis et al., 2004; Hunter-Reel, McCrady, & Hildebrandt, 2009; Longabaugh et al., 2010). In addition, my findings support the suggestion by Longabaugh and colleagues (Longabaugh et al., 2010) that it is important when planning substance abuse treatment to assess the client's social network to estimate how it may be supportive or not in achieving treatment goals. The findings of my research are also consistent with the suggestion made by McCrady (2004) that counselors should harness the potential positive contribution of the social network, including the client's family members and friends, for successful change. However, there is a need for more analysis of the relationships between the client's internal motivation to change and his/her social network. For instance, it may be valuable for future analyses to address how social networks are related to internal motives for change. The sample of this study was predominantly male clients. It would also be beneficial to study the significance of gender differences with regard to social networks and motivation to change in MI context.

## Conclusion

This study has provided new insights into

substance-abusing clients' change talk during MI sessions. My findings demonstrate that by analyzing the semiotic aspect of the client's change talk, we can find the significant features and meanings of the client's talk that relate to his/her motivation to change. Therefore, paying attention to the symbols and other semiotic signs in the analysis of the client's change talk during treatment sessions would be recommended. In other words, I suggest that it is not only the *forms* of the client's change talk (problem recognition, reasons, need, desire, ability, commitment and taking steps) that can serve as predictors of change or sustaining the status quo but also the *personal meanings* attached to the client's utterances. In my previous articles, I have tried to demonstrate the same by analyzing the role of metaphors and counselors' interpretation in the interaction between clients and counselors (Sarpavaara, 2010; Sarpavaara, 2013; Sarpavaara & Koski-Jännes, 2013).

*Possible limitations of the study*

The present study is a qualitative exploratory attempt to apply a semiotic approach to the analysis of a client's change talk during MI sessions. It is also possible that other events in those sessions are more decisive for the outcome. Thus the results are tentative but highlight the significance of the family and friends for change. This study, as with qualitative research in general, seeks in-depth information from a relatively small sample size to clarify the meanings that people attach to their lives and the world (Rhodes & Coomber, 2010). The value of this study is not, therefore, in its quantitative substantiation, but rather in bringing forth a potentially important new perspective on the focus and methods of exploring the significant features in the client's change talk not only in MI interventions but also more generally in any motivational intervention with substance abusers. Finally, I believe that the findings of this study would benefit from further development of the professional theories and practices of motivational interaction in probation services and in other institutional contexts.

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