

Peer Mediation in Refugee Shelters

What constitutes peer mediation from the participants' point of view?

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This dissertation is dedicated to my beloved
father who always believed in me.

Imprint

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Contents

1	Introduction	3
1.1	Context	3
1.2	Problem	6
1.3	Objective	9
1.4	Outline	10
2	Literature Review of Existing Peer Mediation Efforts	13
2.1	What is Peer Mediation?	13
2.2	Opportunities and Challenges of Peer Mediation	15
2.2.1	Opportunities	15
2.2.1.1	High Rate of Settlements	15
2.2.1.2	Empowerment and Skill Development	16
2.2.1.3	Improved Climate	17
2.2.1.4	Increased academic achievement	18
2.2.2	Challenges	19
2.3	Peer Mediation and Dispute Resolution Mechanisms with Migrants and Refugees	19
2.3.1	Differences and Specifics regarding Mediation Efforts with Refugees and Migrants	20
2.3.2	Concepts of Culture	20
2.3.3	Models of Cross-Cultural Mediation	25
2.3.4	Problem “Western mediation”	25
2.3.5	Cross-cultural mediation models	28
2.3.5.1	Meta Model of Mediation	29
2.3.5.2	Intercultural Mediation Model	29
2.3.5.3	Ethno-oriented Mediation Model	30
2.3.5.4	Cultural Synergetic Mediation Model	30
2.4	Status Quo of Mediation Efforts with Refugees and Migrants	32
2.5	Summary	36
3	Empirical Basis - Design of the Curriculum and Process of the Training and Peer Mediation Clinic	39

3.1	Conception of the Peer Mediation Training	40
3.1.1	Short Personal Note and Context	40
3.1.2	Introduction to the Empowerment-Focused Approach	42
3.2	Design and Implementation of the Peer Mediation Training	44
3.2.1	Acquisition of Participants and Organization of the Workshops	46
3.2.2	Getting Management on Board	46
3.2.3	Rights of Participation	48
3.2.4	Building Trust and Commitment	49
3.2.5	Overall Learning Goals of the Peer Mediation Workshop	50
3.2.6	Specific Objectives	50
3.2.7	General Approach and Attitude	51
3.2.7.1	Curiosity	52
3.2.7.2	Dignity	52
3.2.7.3	Authenticity	53
3.2.8	Detailed Content of the Training Curriculum	54
3.2.8.1	Overview and Purpose of Story-sharing	54
3.2.8.2	Detailed Outline of the Story-Sharing Session	55
3.2.8.3	Building Conflict Competences	61
3.2.8.4	Conflict Competences I	61
3.2.8.5	Conflict Competencies II	67
3.2.8.6	Introduction to Peer Mediation	78
3.2.8.7	Peer Mediation	80
3.2.8.8	Peer Mediation II	83
3.2.8.9	Setting up the Peer Mediation Clinic	84
3.2.8.10	Mentoring	86
3.3	Summary	86
4	Empirical Study	87
4.1	Choice of Method	87
4.1.1	Grounded Theory Method	88
4.1.2	The Tools of the Grounded Theory Method	90
4.1.2.1	Coding	90
4.1.2.2	Open Coding	91
4.1.2.3	Line-by-line Coding	91
4.1.2.4	Axial Coding	91
4.1.2.5	Selective Coding	92
4.2	Research Design and Process	92
4.2.1	Research Question and Research Aim	93
4.2.2	Data Collection	94
4.2.3	Approach	94
4.2.3.1	Objectivity in Qualitative Data is a Myth	94
4.2.3.2	Insider and Outsider Researcher	95

4.2.3.3	Problem of being the Co-Founder of the Organization	96
4.2.3.4	Problem of being also a Trainer	98
4.2.4	Data Collection Process	99
4.2.4.1	Data Collection Phase	100
4.2.4.2	Ethical Considerations	100
4.2.4.3	Mediums	101
4.2.4.4	Observations	101
4.2.4.5	Eavesdropping	102
4.2.4.6	Informal Conversations	102
4.2.4.7	Group Discussions	103
4.2.4.8	Intensive Interviews	104
4.2.4.9	Additional Survey for Residents	105
4.2.4.10	Notes & Reflections	105
4.2.4.11	Literature	105
4.2.4.12	Memos	106
4.2.4.12.1	Real Trust only among Family Members	106
4.2.4.12.2	Emphasize the Importance of Family	107
4.2.4.12.3	“Bonding” over Children	107
4.2.4.12.4	Arguing with Family under Stress, Managing Emotions	108
4.2.4.12.5	Privacy of the family	108
4.2.4.12.6	My Motivation for doing this Research Project	109
4.2.4.12.7	Retrieving Efficacy through Role-plays	109
4.2.4.12.8	Appeal to Humanity and Common Ground when Powerless	110
4.2.4.13	Open Coding	110
4.2.4.14	Theoretical Sampling	112
4.2.4.15	Axial Coding	112
4.2.4.16	Rethinking the Research Question	113
4.2.4.17	Axial Coding II	114
4.2.4.18	Selective coding, further Group Discussion, and Testimonials	114
4.3	Summary	115
5	Research Results	117
5.1	Summary of the Paradigm Model: Self-efficacy	118
5.2	Analysis	120
5.2.1	Contextual Condition	120

5.2.1.1	Excursus — My Impressions Visiting a Refugee Shelter for the first Time in my Life (taken from a memo)	120
5.2.1.2	Refugee Shelter	122
5.2.2	The Origin of the Core Category	127
5.2.3	The Meaning of Self-efficacy	128
5.2.4	Characteristics of the Core-Category: Empowering, Equal, Motivated	139
5.2.4.1	Empowering	139
5.2.4.2	Equal	144
5.2.4.3	Characteristics of Co-Trainers	144
5.2.4.4	Bi-cultural Co-Mediators	146
5.2.4.5	Motivated	147
5.2.4.6	Intrinsic Motivation	148
5.2.4.7	Extrinsic Motivation	150
5.2.5	Strategies	151
5.2.5.1	“To shape”	151
5.2.5.2	“Too much time, now better”	154
5.2.5.3	“Spread Charity”	157
5.2.5.4	To Gain Status	160
5.2.6	Consequence Self-confidence and Trustworthiness	163
5.2.7	Consequence Conflict-competences	169
5.3	Summary of the Research Results	173
6	Conclusion and Outlook	179
6.1	The “Success-Expectation-Challenges-Conundrum”	179
6.2	Creating Opportunities to foster Self-efficacy of Refugees	181
6.3	Reclaiming Meaning as a First Step to Self-efficacy	184
6.4	Adapting the Peer Mediation Program Moving Forward	187
6.5	From Grass-root Efforts to Policies	189
6.6	Call to Action and Key Message	190
	Bibliography	193

List of Figures

3.1	Drawings of Story-sharing by Participants	60
4.1	Paradigm Model: Recognition	113
5.1	Paradigm Model: The Core-Category—Self-efficacy	117
5.2	Contextual Condition Refugee Shelter	120
5.3	Main reasons for conflict	126
5.4	The circle of self-efficacy	129
5.5	The reinforcement of self-confidence	167

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1

Introduction

“We lost our home, which means the familiarity of daily life. We lost our occupation, which means the confidence that we are of some use in this world. We lost our language, which means the naturalness of reactions, the simplicity of gestures, the unaffected expression of feelings.”

– Hannah Arendt¹

This dissertation examines peer mediation training for refugees² in two refugee shelters³ in Germany. The purpose of this training is to empower refugees with the necessary skills to become peer mediators within their own communities, fostering a sense of agency and empowerment within a population that has faced adversity and displacement.

1.1 Context

In recent years, Germany has experienced a significant influx of refugees, with over 1.2 million refugees from mostly Syria and Afghanistan arriving between 2015 and 2021.⁴ This trend has continued in 2022, with the German Trade Union Confederation reporting over one million refugees arriving in Germany from Ukraine.⁵

¹Arendt, *The Jewish Writings, We Refugees*, p. 264.

²In this dissertation, the term “refugees” refers to both persons that arrive in Germany seeking asylum, as well as refugees who have sought and been granted refugee status by Germany.

³The “refugee shelters” referred to in this dissertation provide housing for both asylum seekers as well as refugees.

⁴Zahlen zu Asyl in Deutschland.

⁵Geflüchtete aus der Ukraine in Deutschland: Prekäre Beschäftigung vermeiden, in gute Arbeit vermitteln | DGB.

This influx has posed major challenges for the country, both in terms of providing humanitarian assistance and integrating refugees into society. Many of these refugees are young, with over two-thirds coming from Syria, Ukraine, Afghanistan, and Iraq.⁶ Refugees often bear the scars of violence and trauma, having endured inhumane conditions that can have lasting effects on their physical and mental health. These experiences can take a toll on their overall well-being and quality of life.⁷

The “European refugee crisis” is not only a political issue, but also a humanitarian one with far-reaching consequences. The influx of refugees has added to existing socioeconomic challenges, polarization, and has raised a multitude of legal, societal, and public health issues that remain unresolved. The repercussions of this crisis extend far beyond the realm of politics, affecting all aspects of society.⁸

People who flee from war long for a peaceful place to live. Despite a general desire to help refugees, conflicts between Germans and refugees, among refugees, as well as among Germany’s population often arise due to unconscious bias and stereotyping. These conflicts can make it difficult for refugees to find a peaceful place to call home, even in a country that is willing to provide them with refuge.⁹

From a humanitarian perspective, it is crucial to provide refugees with a dignified living environment and improved access to professional health care services. Such measures are necessary to address the significant burden of conflict and psychological trauma that many refugees carry with them. By focusing on the well-being and quality of life of these individuals, civil society can help them to heal and rebuild their lives in safety and with dignity.¹⁰

After arriving at an initial refugee reception center, refugees in Germany are typically placed in decentralized accommodation known as “Gemeinschaftsunterkunft”, being refugee shelters. These shelters are managed by the authorities of the German Federal States (Bundesländer) in collaboration with public or private organizations. The purpose of the refugee shelters is to

⁶Zahlen zu Asyl in Deutschland.

⁷Nesterko et al., “Prevalence of post-traumatic stress disorder, depression and somatisation in recently arrived refugees in Germany: an epidemiological study”; H. M. E. Winter et al., “Psychosocial peer mediation as sustainable method for conflict prevention and management among refugee communities in Germany”.

⁸ibid.

⁹Brackwehr, *Das Potenzial von Aufstellungsarbeit in der interkulturellen Mediationsarbeit mit Geflüchteten*, p. 97.

¹⁰Hajak et al., “A Systematic Review of Factors Affecting Mental Health and Well-Being of Asylum Seekers and Refugees in Germany”; H. M. E. Winter et al., “Psychosocial peer mediation as sustainable method for conflict prevention and management among refugee communities in Germany”.

provide long-term housing. Refugees from a variety of cultural backgrounds, genders, and ages are often housed together in these shelters, where they may stay for up to six years or longer before finding housing of their own.¹¹

Refugees living in shelters often face challenging conditions that can further lead to interpersonal conflict. These conflicts may be exacerbated by a variety of factors, including cramped living quarters, shared resources, language barriers, psychological trauma, lack of daily structure, cultural unfamiliarity, religious differences, and pre-existing ethnic tensions. These issues can be compounded by a lack of prospects for professional and personal growth, economic insecurity, and existential fears, creating a breeding ground for conflict within the shelter environment and its neighborhood.¹² In intercultural conflicts, various factors may further contribute to the creation of imbalances, such as gender, occupation, age, family status, minority group membership, language proficiency, and spiritual beliefs.¹³ Conflict, in particular, becomes more complex and multifaceted when dealing with potentially traumatized individuals from various cultural groups.¹⁴

The challenges can lead to feelings of alienation and displacement and/or a discrepancy between expectations and reality. These negative experiences can in turn be a catalyst for tension and conflict. The growing number of refugees arriving in Germany also presents a challenge for the host country. Successful integration and inclusion of refugees in German society requires both practical measures from the government and support and engagement from civil society.¹⁵ These integration measures place demands on governmental and civil resources, which can create friction between members of the host society and refugees, as well as conflicts between refugees. Intercultural mediation can play a crucial role in achieving successful and sustainable integration of refugees.¹⁶ As a result of these challenging conditions, it is common for conflicts to arise among the residents of refugee shelters or between refugees and members of the local community.¹⁷

¹¹ibid.

¹²Plich, Feststellung der Konfliktbereiche in drei Gemeinschaftsunterkünften zur Unterbringung von Flüchtlingen und Asylsuchenden sowie deren kommunaler Umgebung in Niedersachsen, Landespräventionsrat Niedersachsen; H. M. E. Winter et al., "Psychosocial peer mediation as sustainable method for conflict prevention and management among refugee communities in Germany".

¹³Mayer, Trainingshandbuch interkulturelle Mediation und Konfliktlösung didaktische Materialien zum Kompetenzerwerb, p. 147.

¹⁴Mahmoud, "'Conflict defines origins': Identity transformations of Sudanese refugees in Cairo", p. 264

¹⁵Brackwehr, Das Potenzial von Aufstellungsarbeit in der interkulturellen Mediationsarbeit mit Geflüchteten, p. 97.

¹⁶ibid.

¹⁷I. Bauer, Unterbringung von Flüchtlingen in deutschen Kommunen: Konfliktmediation und lokale Beteiligung.

Conflicts within refugee shelters often center around issues such as rule-breaking, substance abuse, food and hygiene habits, noise, and the use of common areas. These seemingly minor disputes can quickly escalate and take on ethnic or cultural overtones, leading to complex and often violent conflicts that differ from those typically encountered in other shared living situations.¹⁸

The continuous exposure to conflict-prone environments can significantly impact the quality of life of refugees and exacerbate existing mental health conditions. This can further complicate their efforts to integrate into their host communities and rebuild their lives.¹⁹ Conflicts occur on a daily basis, highlighting the need for effective conflict resolution strategies and support for refugees as they navigate their new environment. It is accordingly important to address these conflicts effectively in order to create a safe living environment for all.

1.2 Problem

Despite the significant and often severe nature of conflicts within refugee shelters and their surrounding communities, there has been little exploration into the systematic implementation of sustainable intercultural conflict resolution mechanisms, which will be outlined in depth in Chapter 2 and briefly introduced in the following paragraphs. Conflict resolution mechanisms in the refugee setting remain a largely under-explored issue that needs to be addressed in order to improve the psycho-social well-being and long-term prospects of refugees.²⁰

The majority of refugees coming to the European Union have experienced significant disruptions to their communities and family structures. This leads to a lack of social connections and a sense of powerlessness and low self-efficacy when it comes to participating in social change in their new communities.²¹ The sense of powerlessness can make refugees more passive and less able to influence the decisions that affect their own lives. This can have negative effects on their well-being and ability to integrate into their new communities.²²

In Germany, there is a lack of action being taken to address conflicts

¹⁸Plich, "Konflikte im Umfeld von Unterkünften, Analyse und Handlungsoptionen".

¹⁹Nickerson et al., "Emotion dysregulation mediates the relationship between trauma exposure, post-migration living difficulties and psychological outcomes in traumatized refugees", p. 173.

²⁰H. M. E. Winter et al., "Psychosocial peer mediation as sustainable method for conflict prevention and management among refugee communities in Germany".

²¹Paloma et al., "A peer support and peer mentoring approach to enhancing resilience and empowerment among refugees settled in southern Spain".

²²ibid.

occurring in refugee shelters and the surrounding communities in a comprehensive, legal, and sustainable way.²³ Many individuals and groups are calling on legislators to establish higher standards for the infrastructure and operational structures of refugee shelters. However, these efforts are currently hindered by the fact that the individual federal states of Germany have legislative authority over shelters located in their respective states, making it impossible to implement a nationwide standard.

While some initiatives have attempted to address conflicts through top-down or “outside in” approaches, such as bringing in external mediators (e.g. external social workers)²⁴ — or engaging in community building activities such as story-sharing or dialogue work, these efforts have largely focused on resolving individual conflicts *after* they arise, rather than preventing conflicts from occurring in the first place. For example other existing programs address low self-esteem and the ability to build mutual trust with other participants, rather than structurally promoting conflict management or training community members themselves to resolve existing problems or disputes.²⁵

There is a need for more proactive approaches to conflict management, such as training neutral third parties to address disputes and/or implementing structural changes within the refugee shelters and surrounding communities which promote conflict prevention. Individual voices in the literature stress the importance for refugees to have control over decision-making when it comes to conflicts, but there are currently no clear recommendations for how to achieve this goal.²⁶

Internationally, refugee health and social inclusion have been the focus of many initiatives that aim to improve the well-being of refugees in their communities. One approach that has been shown to be effective is the use of mutual learning and advocacy, where refugees and community members

²³Wendel, Unterbringung von Geflüchteten in Deutschland, Regelung und Praxis der Bundesländer im Vergleich.

²⁴Splinter et al., “Mediation und Dialog in Unterkünften und in deren Umfeld – bisherige Erfahrungen und weitere Überlegungen”; Grünes Netz Mediation; Spohr, “Konfliktfeld Gemeinschaftsunterkünfte -Mediative Moderation als Instrument zum wirkungsvollen Konfliktmanagement”.

²⁵Goethe Institut Istanbul; Digital Storytelling; Project LISTEN; Bühne für Menschenrechte; In der Storytelling Arena der Schottin Rachel Clarke erzählen Geflüchtete ihre eigenen Geschichten. Storytelling with refugee women.

²⁶Splinter et al., “Mediation und Dialog in Unterkünften und in deren Umfeld – bisherige Erfahrungen und weitere Überlegungen”; Grünes Netz Mediation; Hutter, “Machtlosigkeit als bestimmendes Lebensgefühl”, p. 239; Plich, Feststellung der Konfliktbereiche in drei Gemeinschaftsunterkünften zur Unterbringung von Flüchtlingen und Asylsuchenden sowie deren kommunaler Umgebung in Niedersachsen, Landespräventionsrat Niedersachsen; I. Bauer, Unterbringung von Flüchtlingen in deutschen Kommunen: Konfliktmediation und lokale Beteiligung.

work together to identify and address health and social issues.²⁷

Peer-led community health workshops can also be effective, as they provide refugees with the opportunity to learn from and support each other.²⁸ Peer-support programs, where refugees are trained to provide support and guidance to others in their community, can also be beneficial.²⁹ In addition, initiatives such as community gardens can provide refugees with a sense of belonging and can help to improve their physical and mental health.³⁰ Overall, these initiatives aim to provide refugees with the long-term, sustainable support and resources they need to thrive in their new communities.

However, as stated above, there are very few interventions specifically designed to increase resilience and empowerment among refugees in the places they have migrated to, which address the conflict-prone environment they live in.³¹ It is important to create community-based interventions that can help refugees actively and positively develop the skills that they need to successfully integrate into their post-migration communities. These interventions should carefully consider the best approach for supporting refugees in this way.³²

Given the current lack of effective strategies for addressing conflicts in refugee shelters, it is necessary to explore and assess new concepts that use bottom-up approaches such as peer mediation. The Berlin-based nonprofit organization, R3SOLUTE, which I co-founded in 2018, is dedicated to empowering refugees and their neighbors residing in refugee shelters with the skills of peer mediation-based alternative dispute resolution (ADR) and mental health literacy (MHL). By teaching these skills, R3SOLUTE aims to enable refugees to effectively manage and prevent conflicts within their communities as psychosocial peer mediators. This participatory, bottom-up approach encourages mutual learning and trust through intercultural dialogue in a supportive environment.³³ Over the past 5 years, R3SOLUTE has trained hundreds of peer mediators in refugee shelters in Germany.

²⁷Goodkind, “Effectiveness of a Community-Based Advocacy and Learning Program for Hmong Refugees”; Hess et al., “Reducing Mental Health Disparities Through Transformative Learning: A Social Change Model With Refugees and Students”.

²⁸Im, “Constructing health capital in ecological systems: A qualitative evaluation of community-based health workshops in the refugee community”.

²⁹Badali et al., “From passive recipient to community advocate: Reflections on peer-based resettlement programs for Arabic-speaking refugees in Canada”.

³⁰Hartwig et al., “Community Gardens for Refugee and Immigrant Communities as a Means of Health Promotion”.

³¹Khamphakdy-Brown et al., “The Empowerment Program: An Application of an Outreach Program for Refugee and Immigrant Women”.

³²Paloma et al., “A peer support and peer mentoring approach to enhancing resilience and empowerment among refugees settled in southern Spain”.

³³R3SOLUTE, R3SOLUTE - About Us.

1.3 Objective

This dissertation aims to contribute to this effort by examining a peer mediation training program that was implemented and evaluated in 2 refugee shelters in Berlin, Germany by R3SOLUTE. The aim of this research project is to better understand the potential and purpose of peer mediation as a means of mitigating and preventing conflicts in these settings, as well as promoting agency. The main objective of this training program was to provide a safe and supportive space for participants to learn about mediation techniques, while empowering them to take ownership of their own learning process. The goal was to instill a sense of responsibility and agency in the participants, as well as to create an environment conducive to learning and personal growth.

This dissertation presents the exploratory study of the R3SOLUTE training program and implementation of peer mediation efforts from the participants' point of view in order to be able to scientifically observe the practical implementation of the peer mediation concept and to more thoroughly understand its effectiveness in refugee conflict resolution contexts. The research design is based on the Grounded Theory Methodology (GTM) in the modification of Strauss and Corbin with elements of Charmaz (see Chapter 4).

What is noteworthy about this research project is the approach that I am researching my own work as a concept creator, founder, and trainer. Therefore, I am critically reflecting upon potential biases and what this means for the data collection phase, my role as a researcher, and the research process itself in Chapter 4.

As furthermore outlined in detail in Chapter 4, the research process involves repeating a series of steps in a circular fashion, starting with data collection and continuing until the conclusion of the research report. Under this approach, as the investigation progresses, the research question may evolve. This is because the process involves discovering new theoretical concepts and verifying their validity through examination of the collected data. In other words, the research question is not set at the beginning of the process, but rather emerges and is refined as the research progresses.³⁴ Accordingly, an initial research question only provides an entry point into the research and its change is an opportunity for emerging theory.³⁵ This occurred during the course of my research. I initially asked about changes that the peer mediation training triggered: To what extent does the peer mediation trigger change? Why do refugees participate in peer mediation training? What is their motivation? What are their hopes and expectations?

³⁴Hildenbrandt, Anselm Strauss, p. 33.

³⁵Corbin et al., Grundlagen qualitativer Sozialforschung.

However, over the course of the research, the following question developed:

What constitutes peer mediation from the participant's point of view?

1.4 Outline

In the following paragraphs, I provide a summary of the individual chapters of this thesis:

Chapter 2 is devoted to providing the contextual background and framework for the research topic. It examines the use of peer mediation as a tool for resolving conflicts and promoting social cohesion within communities. Peer mediation involves a structured process in which trained, impartial peers facilitate dialogue and negotiations between disputing parties in order to reach an agreement. This type of peer mediation has previously been implemented in schools, prisons, and other community settings, as well as in companies and public authorities, and has been shown to have positive effects on conflict resolution skills, communication skills, empowerment, and relationships between individuals in those settings. However, there are also challenges to implementing peer mediation, including the need for trained mediators, the potential for power imbalances between the disputing parties, and the potential for mediators to be influenced by personal biases. In addition to these already observed challenges, transcultural contexts may present additional obstacles for peer mediation in refugee communities. For example, participants in peer mediation in refugee communities often have different cultural and linguistic backgrounds. Mediators may accordingly need to be aware of potential cultural differences in communication styles and conflict resolution approaches. In the light of transcultural influences involved in peer mediation in refugee communities, Chapter 2 discusses the opportunities and challenges of peer mediation in this context, and examines the evidence for its effectiveness in working with refugees. One of the main findings of Chapter 2 is that peer mediation can be an effective tool for addressing conflicts and promoting social cohesion within refugee communities. It has the potential to empower individuals to take control of their own disputes and resolve them peacefully, while also promoting values such as mutual respect and understanding. It also looks at studies investigating factors that contribute to the success or failure of peer mediation programs in this context and discusses the implications for future research and practice.

Chapter 3 focuses on the practical basis of the dissertation, specifically examining the development and design of the curriculum and training process for a peer mediation clinic in a refugee shelter. The curriculum adopted in this research project was developed and implemented by drawing on my experience as an intercultural mediator, as well as input from R3SOLUTE

colleagues and co-facilitators who themselves are refugees. The peer mediation training examined in this study used a role play-based approach and was co-facilitated by me and a trained facilitator from a refugee community from Syria. This purpose of the role play-based approach is to build trust and credibility with the participants. Chapter 3 also provides a detailed examination of the motivation, target population, and goals of the peer mediation training program. The structure, content, and methods used when the training was implemented, in practice, are also described. Finally, Chapter 3 describes the training that took place, including the methods used to collect data and the analysis of the data. The design and implementation of the training program influenced the data collection and analysis for the dissertation.

In Chapter 4, the focus is on the empirical study conducted as part of the research project. The method chosen for the study was qualitative research, specifically the Grounded Theory Method (GTM), due to its ability to capture the complexity of exploring the establishment of peer mediation mechanisms in refugee shelters and its focus on developing a theory that can be applied to a real-life context. GTM is a circular research method that allows for flexibility and adaptability, in order to respond to changes as they occur in practice. The data collection and analysis for my dissertation followed the GTM process, including open and axial coding, memoing, and constant comparison. The study was conducted in two refugee shelters in Berlin and involved interviews and group discussions with mediators, staff, and residents, as well as observations of mediation sessions.

Chapter 5 focuses on the findings of the empirical study conducted as part of the research project. The chapter begins with a summary of the findings and presents the paradigm model surrounding the core category, and showing the relationships between the core phenomenon, causal conditions, contextual conditions, and strategies. The central core category, or central phenomenon, is “self-efficacy”, which refers to the participants’ belief in their ability to influence events that affect their lives. Based on the data, the core phenomenon is illustrated by the characteristics of “empowering”, “equal”, and “motivating” qualities and has consequences including increased self-confidence and trustworthiness, as well as self-reported increased conflict competencies. The refugee shelter serves as the contextual condition, influencing the central phenomenon through its impact on the participants’ basic needs and living conditions. Strategies that influence and are influenced by the core phenomenon include shaping role-plays based on real-life conflicts, gaining purpose through the peer mediation task, spreading charity, and gaining status in the community. The chapter also discusses the implications of the findings for practice and future research.

Chapter 6 provides a conclusion and an outlook in which peer mediation

with refugees is endorsed as a path to self-efficacy. Furthermore, I highlight potential and achieved policy recommendations, as well as how the peer mediation concept could be further improved. This chapter deals with the challenges faced by refugees who spend an extended period in shelters or camps, which can lead to a loss of hope and exclusion from broader society. It is important to provide resources and support to help refugees rebuild their lives and regain self-efficacy, and to prioritize human rights in refugee shelters, including the right to peaceful co-existence, the right to participate in decision-making processes and the right to establish a home. Peer mediation fosters self-efficacy and has been reported in reducing the need for outside intervention through security personnel and may have a preventive character, helping to prevent conflicts from escalating (which can lead to criminal charges). The implementation of peer mediation in refugee shelters could serve as a model for other organizations and promote access to justice, self-efficacy, and peaceful conflict resolution across a variety of contexts.

2

Literature Review of Existing Peer Mediation Efforts

2.1 What is Peer Mediation?

In the 1980s, the United States experienced a range of social and political changes that led to the growth of peer mediation in schools. In particular, as student conflicts and violence increased, educators looked for outside help and found that peer mediation was a useful tool to add to their existing conflict management strategies. At the time, only a few peer mediation programs existed, but now there are thousands in schools across every state in the US. The use of peer mediation has also spread to other countries and continents, including Canada, Australia, New Zealand and Europe.³⁶

“Peer mediation constitutes a structured process, whereby one or two trained, impartial peers — belonging to the same status and group as the conflict parties — help facilitate dialog between disputants to assist negotiating and, ideally, reaching an agreement.”³⁷ During peer mediation, peers involved in a disagreement are given the opportunity to express their side of the conflict to one another. Ground rules are established by the peer mediator and once the parties have shared their stories, potential resolutions are discussed and agreed upon. Peer mediators are educated to act as facilitators of the process, utilizing abilities such as active listening, paraphrasing and reframing to uncover the underlying interests in the disputants’ positions.³⁸

³⁶Cremin, Peer Mediation: citizenship in social inclusion revisited, pp. 29,30.

³⁷R3SOLUTE, R3SOLUTE - About Us; H. M. E. Winter et al., “Psychosocial peer mediation as sustainable method for conflict prevention and management among refugee communities in Germany”.

³⁸Gilhooley, Using peer mediation in classrooms and schools: strategies for teachers, counselors, and administrators, p. 3.

A written agreement is the desired outcome.³⁹ Peer mediation provides conflicting parties with opportunities to appreciate diversity and handle their disputes in a peaceful manner. Mediation allows peers to resolve their conflicts without external interference and empowers them to take control of the situation. This is because the process is focused on enabling individuals to take matters into their own hands, which reduces feelings of helplessness. Given the peer mediation approach relies on impartial peers (i.e. people who are the participants' social "equals") to act as the facilitator, there is no influence exerted from outsiders. This allows the participants to experience a higher level of agency. The goal is for the parties to come to an agreement based on mutual respect and understanding, ideally resulting in a win-win situation.⁴⁰ This community-strengthening process is designed to promote values that enhance the ability of local communities to resolve their own disputes.⁴¹

In addition to the school context⁴², the implementation of peer mediation programs has also been tried in prisons and has been shown to effectively reduce and prevent conflicts in this setting.⁴³ The adoption of this approach by Kaufer et al., as part of the Prison of Peace program, has been particularly successful in five Californian prisons. Empowering community members to act as peer mediators allowed for an innate understanding of the community's unique structures and a higher level of trust in the peer mediator. According to this study, the effectiveness of peer mediation in prisons highlights the usefulness of this method in community settings of involuntary nature - analog the refugee shelter - where psychological trauma as well as difficulty with empathy and effective communication are common.⁴⁴

Peer mediation in the form of in-house mediation has also been established in companies. This means that a mediator pool consisting of trained employees is introduced and established for in-house conflicts in order to systematically deal with conflicts among members of the company. For example, companies like SAP, E.ON, Deutsche Bahn, Deutsche Bank, Bombardier, and E-Plus have established conflict resolution systems involving in-house

³⁹Gilhooley, *Using peer mediation in classrooms and schools: strategies for teachers, counselors, and administrators*, p. 3.

⁴⁰Ay et al., "Examining the Effects of Negotiation and Peer Mediation on Students' Conflict Resolution and Problem-Solving Skills".

⁴¹Pugh et al., "Adapting Community Mediation for Colombian Forced Migrants in Ecuador".

⁴²Burrell et al., "Evaluating peer mediation outcomes in educational settings: A meta-analytic review"; Devoogd et al., "Direct Instruction and Guided Practice Matter in Conflict Resolution and Social-Emotional Learning"; Harris, "Unlocking the learning potential in peer mediation: An evaluation of peer mediator modeling and disputant learning"; Hessler et al., "Peer mediation: A qualitative study of youthful frames of power and influence".

⁴³Kaufer et al., "Prisoner Facilitated Mediation: Bringing Peace to Prisons and Communities".

⁴⁴ibid.

mediators, peer mediators, and ombuds.⁴⁵ For example, in the case of SAP, mediation evolved as an offer from employees for employees. The first mediations were conducted in co-mediation with external experienced mediators.⁴⁶ The mediators are SAP employees with the appropriate additional qualifications who carry out mediation in addition to their actual work.⁴⁷ Subsequently, the pool of mediators was embedded in the preexisting structures of conflict resolution such that a functioning conflict resolution system evolved over time.⁴⁸ Another example is E-Plus, where an ombudsperson was established who then trained interested employees as contact persons in the case of conflict.⁴⁹ In summary, peer mediation efforts have also been developed in the context of companies and are typically incorporated into a larger system of conflict resolution.

2.2 Opportunities and Challenges of Peer Mediation

2.2.1 Opportunities

The empowerment of communities through peer mediation has been shown to have a range of positive effects, both in terms of social skills and in terms of discipline and conflict resolution. The following sections outline these effects looking predominately at studies done in schools as the research is most developed in this particular context.

2.2.1.1 High Rate of Settlements

In schools, studies on the effectiveness of peer mediation programs have been analyzed in depth, demonstrating high rates of success, with rates of participants reaching an agreed resolution ranging from 89 percent⁵⁰ to 94.9 percent.⁵¹ For example, a two-year study in a Turkish high school found that 94.9 percent of mediated conflicts were resolved through the use of a Conflict Resolution and Peer Mediation training program.⁵² In a meta-analysis of several studies on the topic, the average success rate was 93 percent, with 88 percent of students expressing satisfaction with the

⁴⁵Gläßer et al., *Konfliktmanagement in der Wirtschaft: Bestandsaufnahme und Entwicklungen*, p. 17.

⁴⁶Briem, "Professionelles Konfliktmanagement für innerbetriebliche Konflikte", p. 146.

⁴⁷ibid., p. 147.

⁴⁸ibid., 147.

⁴⁹Küchler, "Ombudsstelle und Konfliktlotsen als Beitrag zur Konfliktkultur bei der E-Plus Gruppe", p. 18

⁵⁰Harris, "Unlocking the learning potential in peer mediation: An evaluation of peer mediator modeling and disputant learning".

⁵¹Turnuklu et al., "Does peer-mediation really work? effects of conflict resolution and peer-mediation training on high school students' conflicts".

⁵²ibid., p. 636.

agreements reached. Overall, these findings suggest that peer mediation is a highly effective way of resolving conflicts in a school setting.⁵³

2.2.1.2 Empowerment and Skill Development

Studies found that students who were trained as peer mediators demonstrated significantly reduced discipline problems after participating in mediation, and reported high levels of satisfaction with the mediation process. This suggests that being a peer mediator can not only help students to resolve conflicts but can also have a positive impact on their personal development and well-being.⁵⁴ Moreover, participation in peer mediation has been shown to have a positive impact on students' attitudes toward conflict. It was found that students who were trained as peer mediators demonstrated significantly improved attitudes toward conflict and conflict resolution. These students reported high levels of satisfaction with the mediation process, and were able to successfully apply their mediation training in other conflict situations.⁵⁵ In Germany and Austria, the evaluation of peer mediation programs in schools is still in its infancy. However, several sources report an increase of conflict competences among peer mediators and significant multiplying effects among mere participants of peer mediation programs, as well as an improvement of the school climate.⁵⁶

In addition to the direct benefits of being a peer mediator, participating in the process can also help students to develop important life skills such as communication, collaboration, and problem-solving. These skills can be useful not only in the school environment, but also in other settings such as their personal lives. For example, in a study by Harris et al., peer mediators reported that their main goals included creating a safe and respectful mediation environment, helping disputants have a constructive and meaningful conversation, and helping disputants come up with solutions that resolved the conflict. These goals reflect a desire to not only help others, but also to learn valuable communication skills.⁵⁷ A common term/method in the context of peer mediation is modeling. It refers to the process of demonstrating

⁵³Burrell et al., "Evaluating peer mediation outcomes in educational settings: A meta-analytic review".

⁵⁴Harris, "Unlocking the learning potential in peer mediation: An evaluation of peer mediator modeling and disputant learning"; Turnuklu et al., "Does peer-mediation really work? effects of conflict resolution and peer-mediation training on high school students' conflicts".

⁵⁵Harris, "Unlocking the learning potential in peer mediation: An evaluation of peer mediator modeling and disputant learning".

⁵⁶Behn et al., p. 50; Bechtold, Peer Mediation - Kooperative Konfliktbewältigung an österreichischen Schulen; Simsa, Mediation in Schulen: Schulrechtliche und pädagogische Aspekte, p. 29.

⁵⁷Harris, "Unlocking the learning potential in peer mediation: An evaluation of peer mediator modeling and disputant learning", pp. 148,149.

positive behaviors, such as communication and problem-solving skills, to the parties involved in resolving a conflict. For example, modeling in the context of training peer mediators refers to the act of providing students with the opportunity to observe and learn from other skilled peer mediators.⁵⁸ Modeling can also be done by the peer mediator during the conflict resolution process, where the peer mediator serves as a role model for the disputants. Through modeling, the peer mediator may aim to establish a positive and respectful atmosphere, encourage active listening, and promote effective communication. The mediator may also demonstrate techniques for identifying solutions, common interests, and negotiating mutually beneficial outcomes. The goal of modeling in peer mediation is to provide a framework for constructive dialogue and problem-solving that can be applied by the parties in future conflicts. In a study by Hessler et al., it was found that the more modeling of positive behaviors that disputants remembered, the more learning they reported. This suggests that by providing students with the opportunity to observe and learn from skilled peer mediators, schools can help to create an environment in which students are better equipped to handle conflicts and build positive relationships with their peers.⁵⁹

Overall, the evidence suggests that peer mediation is a valuable tool for empowering students and promoting social and communication skills. By providing students with the opportunity to participate in mediation, schools can help to create a positive and supportive learning environment and equip students with the skills and confidence they need to navigate conflicts and build positive relationships.⁶⁰

2.2.1.3 Improved Climate

The implementation of peer mediation programs in schools has been shown to improve the overall climate in educational settings. A meta-analysis of several studies on the effectiveness of peer mediation programs demonstrated that school climates improved with the implementation of these programs. This was observed not only by students, who reported perceiving a more constructive environment, but also by teachers and other administrators, who noted a reduction in conflict.⁶¹

In addition to improving the overall climate in schools, the implementation of peer mediation programs has also been associated with a reduction in expulsion rates and disciplinary actions. For example, after implementing

⁵⁸see also Bandura, Psychological modeling; conflicting theories.

⁵⁹Hessler et al., "Peer mediation: A qualitative study of youthful frames of power and influence".

⁶⁰ibid.

⁶¹Burrell et al., "Evaluating peer mediation outcomes in educational settings: A meta-analytic review", p. 17.

a peer mediation program, a school experienced a significant decrease in the number of disciplinary actions and expulsions. This suggests that by providing students with the opportunity to participate in mediation, schools can not only improve the overall climate, but can also create a more positive and supportive learning environment.⁶²

Overall, the evidence suggests that peer mediation is an effective strategy for mitigating conflict and improving collegiality within school communities. By providing community members with the opportunity to participate in the process, communities can not only help students to learn important conflict resolution skills, but can also create a more positive and supportive social environment, which can have a range of positive effects on community well-being.

2.2.1.4 Increased academic achievement

The implementation of peer mediation programs in schools has also been shown to have a positive impact on students' academic achievement. In a study by DeVoogd, Lane-Garon, and Kralowec (2016), seven schools located in an economically challenged area of an urban school district in central California implemented mentored peer mediation programs under the guidance of a university-K-12 partnership project.⁶³ The individual student outcomes for social-cognitive dispositions, perceptions of school climate, conflict strategy choices, and standardized testing results in language subjects were analyzed by using assessments administered after one year of program implementation and compared to pretest values generated by student mediators and non-mediators.⁶⁴ The study found that students who participated in the peer mediation program as peer mediators demonstrated improved academic achievement compared to the control group. This implies that by providing students with the opportunity to participate in peer mediation, schools can not only help students to learn important conflict resolution skills, but can also support their academic development.⁶⁵ This finding is supported by a study by Whiteside (2016), who also demonstrated that students who participated in peer mediation programs displayed improved academic performance and attendance rates.⁶⁶ By providing students with the opportunity to participate in the peer mediation process, schools can not only help members to learn important conflict resolution skills, but can also support academic advancement, such as linguistic development.

⁶²Burrell et al., "Evaluating peer mediation outcomes in educational settings: A meta-analytic review", p. 17.

⁶³Devoogd et al., "Direct Instruction and Guided Practice Matter in Conflict Resolution and Social-Emotional Learning".

⁶⁴ibid.

⁶⁵ibid.

⁶⁶Whiteside, "Peer Mediation as a Viable Option for School Conflict Resolution Programs".

2.2.2 Challenges

One challenge of peer mediation is the potential for mediators to exhibit biased or non-neutral behavior during the mediation process. This can be influenced by the mediators' own personal beliefs, values, and experiences, as well as by the cultural context in which the mediation is taking place. In order to effectively mediate conflicts, mediators must strive to remain impartial and unbiased in order to avoid influencing the outcome of the mediation in favor of one party over the other. This can be difficult to achieve, especially in cases where the mediator may have strong personal opinions about the conflict or the parties involved.⁶⁷ Training for peer mediators typically includes skills such as active listening. It is important for peer mediators to receive ongoing training and supervision to address these challenges and improve their mediation skills. Moreover, the presence of cultural differences and power imbalances between the parties involved in the conflict can also make it difficult for mediators to remain neutral.⁶⁸ Therefore, cultural diversity can be a challenge in the peer mediation setting as it can considerably influence and shape the decision-making and agreement-making process.

2.3 Peer Mediation and Dispute Resolution Mechanisms with Migrants and Refugees

It is worth mentioning that refugees and migrants, like prisoners, often experience psychological and social issues such as a lack of control and future prospects, and challenges with acclimating to a new environment.⁶⁹ For these reasons, peer mediation with refugees is a potential chance to foster agency through pursuing a meaningful task.

The Grüne Netz Mediation network is a group of mediators established in response to the refugee crisis in Germany. The network was founded by the Fernuniversität in Hagen and includes over 400 trained mediators from its international alumni network. The goal of the network is to make mediation accessible in the context of the refugee crisis, by using a nationwide network of mediators. In 2016, the network established six working groups to focus on various aspects of the crisis, such as intercultural issues and public outreach.⁷⁰

One potential challenge in involving outside mediators rather than peer mediators in conflicts surrounding refugees is that outside mediators may

⁶⁷Hale et al., "Achieving neutrality and impartiality: The ultimate communication challenge for peer mediators", p. 345.

⁶⁸ibid., p. 345.

⁶⁹H. M. E. Winter et al., "Psychosocial peer mediation as sustainable method for conflict prevention and management among refugee communities in Germany".

⁷⁰Hermann et al., "Das Grüne Netz Mediation - Eine (erste) Bestandsaufnahme".

not have the same level of cultural understanding and empathy for the individuals involved in the conflict. Peer mediators, on the other hand, may have a better understanding of the cultural and social context of the conflict and may be better able to facilitate a resolution. An advantage of outside mediators might be that they are professionally trained to be mediators and might have more experience than peer mediators. It is important for mediators to have a deep understanding of the culture and context of the conflict in order to effectively mediate a resolution. The following section will outline the concept of culture applied in this dissertation and discuss specifics and different models with respect to intercultural mediation with migrants.

2.3.1 Differences and Specifics regarding Mediation Efforts with Refugees and Migrants

The following section explores differences and specifics when working with refugees in a peer mediation setting.

2.3.2 Concepts of Culture

If there are certain attributes to the term culture, then it would be the common conception that this term cannot be defined. Someone still trying to define it only shows that he or she is not up for it.

– Dirk Baecker⁷¹

In order to understand the role of culture in the context of working with refugees, it is important to classify culture conceptually. There are many different theories as to what culture encompasses and how it can be defined. In the following paragraphs, I will give a short overview of the development of concepts of culture throughout history and introduce different understandings of culture. Based on these findings, I will choose a theory and a suitable concept of culture for the purpose of this dissertation. Additionally, I will address the cultural origins of mediation and introduce the concept of cross-cultural mediation in the light of this research project.

What are the roots and origins of culture? The term “culture” stems from the Latin verb *colere*, which has two different meanings: 1) to care, to cultivate and 2) to worship, to adore. In Roman heritage, the activities “agriculture” and “the worship of gods” were distinct activities that differentiated human beings from animals. Culture was regarded as the potential and expression to create science and the arts going beyond the fulfillment of basic human

⁷¹Baecker, Wozu Kultur?, p. 33.

needs.⁷² Colloquially, someone who “has culture” is cultivated, in contrast to uncultivated, primitive, raw or barbaric.⁷³ Even Plato described culture primarily as “the education of the guardians”. A guardian is a person who understands, and thus becomes a consciously acting philosopher through development and learning.⁷⁴

Overall, the concept of culture can be viewed through both a narrow and a broad lens. The narrower understanding of culture evolved in the 17th to 19th centuries and encompasses an understanding of culture in terms of civilization in contrast to nature.⁷⁵ For example, in the mid-17th century the natural law teacher Samuel von Pufendorf, who described “culture” for the first time in the German-speaking world, saw culture as a source of human happiness that raised the lives of human beings above the plight of animals.⁷⁶ The broader term of culture also includes all other levels of meaning of *colere* and refers to the entire human environment, be it language, religion, ethics, technology or educational systems.

There are two different perspectives within this expanded concept of culture: the closed and the open concept of culture.

In the closed concept, the cultural products (language, religion etc.) are assigned to a territory, a nation or certain periods, and are defined by determining borders (e.g. based on national borders). For instance, Johann Gottfried Herder still shapes Western thinking with his concept of culture: “Every nation has its center of happiness in itself, like every sphere its centroid.”⁷⁷ According to Herder, culture is the distinctive substance of a nation which develops its character out of itself and in contrast to other cultures.⁷⁸ Thus, the closed concept of culture meets the need for objective description and uniqueness by isolating different cultures from each other, labeling them and thus structuring them. These boundaries are helpful for orientation, but they do not do justice to reality and can potentially favor the development of unconscious bias, stereotypes and prejudices.⁷⁹ In the early 20th century culture was, and is partly still today, defined as the lack of

⁷²Treichel et al., Lehrbuch Kultur: Lehr- und Lernmaterialien zur Vermittlung kultureller Kompetenzen, p. 19.

⁷³ibid., p. 19.

⁷⁴Baecker, “Die Form der Kultur Begriff ohne Gegenbegriff?”, p. 15; Treichel et al., Lehrbuch Kultur: Lehr- und Lernmaterialien zur Vermittlung kultureller Kompetenzen, p. 18.

⁷⁵ibid., p. 19.

⁷⁶Pufendorf, Über die Pflicht des Menschen und des Bürgers nach dem Gesetz der Natur.

⁷⁷Herder, Auch eine Philosophie der Geschichte zur Bildung der Menschheit; Treichel et al., Lehrbuch Kultur: Lehr- und Lernmaterialien zur Vermittlung kultureller Kompetenzen, p. 19.

⁷⁸ibid., p. 20.

⁷⁹Contact, Kultur - Eine Begriffsdefinition.

economic necessity and emphasis on rituals.⁸⁰ In principle, “culture” was thus, understood as a constructive triad of art, religion and science that educates people, civilizes them and makes them better social and, or moral beings.⁸¹

According to the open concept of culture, cultures are large collectives (encompassing nation states to an internet community) that are navigated through communication and are not isolated.⁸² The open concept of culture reflects the fact that cultures are in constant change and in mutual intercultural exchange.⁸³ In contrast, to expand on the idea of the open concept of culture, Herder viewed cultures ideally as spheres, each of which should be internally homogeneous and clearly externally definable.⁸⁴ However, cultures that are understood as spheres cannot really communicate with each other — rather they repel and fight each other.⁸⁵ Therefore, today’s cultures no longer meet the requirements of the traditional closed concept of culture, they are more fluid and open mixtures, and thus open.⁸⁶ Contemporary cultures are extremely interconnected and intertwined. Therefore, the open concept of culture in the form of transculturality has the mission of offering an adequate concept for today’s conditions.⁸⁷

According to the idea of transculturality, contemporary cultures are characterized by hybridization. This is mainly a result of quickly evolving global communication systems as well as capitalism. Such developments and innovations have not only been invented by humans, but have also been imposed by economic dependence, unequal distribution, and resulting migration.⁸⁸ Consequently, the distinction between native and foreign culture decreases more and more.⁸⁹ Therefore, “the cultural differences now tend to be as big within nations as between them.”⁹⁰

On an individual level, people are increasingly influenced by multiple cultural origins and experience life as cultural hybrids. Since adolescents are, increasingly, exposed to more cultural patterns than their parents’ gen-

⁸⁰Treichel et al., Lehrbuch Kultur: Lehr- und Lernmaterialien zur Vermittlung kultureller Kompetenzen, p. 21.

⁸¹ibid., p. 21.

⁸²Contact, Kultur - Eine Begriffsdefinition.

⁸³ibid.

⁸⁴Treichel et al., Lehrbuch Kultur: Lehr- und Lernmaterialien zur Vermittlung kultureller Kompetenzen, p. 149.

⁸⁵ibid., p. 150; Herder, Auch eine Philosophie der Geschichte zur Bildung der Menschheit, p. 44.

⁸⁶Treichel et al., Lehrbuch Kultur: Lehr- und Lernmaterialien zur Vermittlung kultureller Kompetenzen, p. 150.

⁸⁷ibid., p. 150.

⁸⁸ibid., p. 151.

⁸⁹ibid., p. 151.

⁹⁰Hannerz, Cultural Complexity - Studies in the Social Organization of Meaning, p. 231.

eration, they are naturally using various elements of different cultures when forming their own individual cultural identity.⁹¹

To understand the essence of transculturality, the concept needs to be conceptionally differentiated from multiculturalism and interculturalism:

Multiculturalism still sees individual cultures within a society as spheres that are co-existing. Therefore, a strong argument against multiculturalism is that it might promote ghettoization.⁹²

Interculturality also sees cultures as spheres. However, in contrast to multiculturalism, it tries to establish a dialogue and consequently connections between the spheres. It also assumes that cultures are fundamentally different and limited, “resulting in the ambiguity that the wanted mutual understanding is contradictory to the starting point.”⁹³

Nonetheless, transculturality should not be regarded as an exclusive movement. The main objection against transculturality, on one hand, is the fear that it could transform to uniformization.⁹⁴ On the other hand, developments in technology could also lead to the revival of local traditions and reflection on origin, because individuals use some common, but also several different sources to build their identity.⁹⁵ Therefore, transculturality favors peaceful co-existence over conflict because losses in cultural diversity are accepted and considered.⁹⁶

Having introduced some of the most important methods and concepts of understanding culture, I am going to choose an open, transcultural, and hybrid concept of culture for the purpose of this research project. People are increasingly shaped and influenced by multiple cultural origins and patterns and are therefore cultural hybrids. Today’s youth are exposed to a wider range of cultural influences than their parents were when they were growing up. As a result, when defining their own cultural identities, they naturally incorporate elements from the various cultural influences — beyond nationality and ethnicity — they have encountered throughout their lives. As mentioned previously, phenomena like technology, migration and resulting globalization are causing people to grow up in a world full of different cultural influences. This is particularly evident in the case of refugees who encounter many different ways of living during their flight to another country, staying in a refugee shelter, as well as learning about and experiencing a “new and unfamiliar culture” in the host country. Fur-

⁹¹Treichel et al., *Lehrbuch Kultur: Lehr- und Lernmaterialien zur Vermittlung kultureller Kompetenzen*, p. 151.

⁹²*ibid.*, p. 153.

⁹³*ibid.*, p. 154.

⁹⁴*ibid.*, pp. 154, 155.

⁹⁵*ibid.*, pp. 154, 155.

⁹⁶*ibid.*, p. 155.

thermore, undergoing the experience of fleeing a country of origin and/or suffering from war and violence shapes refugees' cultural identities in many different ways. Thus, I argue that a refugee's cultural identity is even more shaped by various and diverse cultural patterns than the average person, and can in my opinion be considered as a cultural hybrid.

Busch, a German cultural scientist, points out an important example regarding cultural identities with respect to refugees. He stresses that there was hardly any media talk about cultural identities during the refugee crisis of the past few years. Instead, according to Busch, extremely right-wing political parties took and are still taking advantage of a simplified and stereotyped concept of culture.⁹⁷ Refugees were and often are stigmatized in a way that allows for prejudice and hatred to emerge easily.

This example also demonstrates how important it is to (a) first discuss and identify the different concepts of culture; (b) secondly be aware of the shortcomings of simplified concepts of culture; and (c) thirdly to mindfully choose a hybrid concept of culture as a researcher and cultural scientist. Like Busch, I believe that we must argue against a simplification of culture and cannot allow the concept of culture to be used to draw artificial boundaries. Busch argues further, that when researching and writing about culture and cultural identities, we have to clarify that culture and cultural identities are multiple, dynamic and changeable.⁹⁸ Therefore, in my opinion, a transcultural and open understanding of culture allows for these elements to be included.

One important aspect of culture that cannot be overlooked is its connection to conflict.

In his book "Preparing for Peace", Lederach discusses the idea that social conflict is "a natural and common experience present in all relationships and cultures."⁹⁹ The writer suggests that conflict is a socially constructed cultural event that emerges through an interactive process based on "the search for and creation of shared meaning".¹⁰⁰ This process is rooted in "people's perceptions, interpretations, expressions, and intentions, which are based on their common sense knowledge and accumulated experiences".¹⁰¹ He also asserts that culture is based on "shared knowledge and schemes used by a group of people to perceive, interpret, express, and respond to social realities".¹⁰² Therefore, understanding the connection between social conflict

⁹⁷Busch and Kanis, "Kann Mediation interkulturell sein? Gegenstand und Grenzen des Mediationsansatzes. Dominic Busch und Steffen Kanis im Gespräch", p. 16.

⁹⁸ibid., p. 16.

⁹⁹Lederach, *Preparing for peace: conflict transformation across cultures*, p. 9.

¹⁰⁰ibid.

¹⁰¹ibid., p. 9.

¹⁰²ibid., p. 9.

and culture requires exploring and understanding the “accumulated shared knowledge common to a particular group of people”.¹⁰³ He further argues that creating and developing appropriate models and training for handling conflict must be primarily rooted in and respect the cultural knowledge of a particular group of people.¹⁰⁴ Therefore, he experiments with having the participants design their own mediation model that is rooted in their cultural context and understanding of resolving disputes. Rather than training his participants in pre-existing mediation models, Lederach encourages his trainees to creatively develop their own model.¹⁰⁵ This approach not only fosters the sustainability of mediation models as they are rooted in the participants’ cultural understanding but also centers the users and their cultural knowledge on dispute resolution as the creator of a system.

Both Busch and Lederach recognize the importance of understanding culture and its role in shaping our experiences and interactions with others. While Busch emphasizes the need to resist the simplification of culture and recognize its multiple, dynamic nature, Lederach highlights the influence of culture on social conflict and the importance of considering cultural knowledge in the process of resolving conflict such as in mediation.

2.3.3 Models of Cross-Cultural Mediation

However, as we delve deeper into the role of culture in conflict resolution, we must also consider the potential ethical implications of applying certain methods or approaches of conflict mediation.

2.3.4 Problem “Western mediation”

Ethically problematic is that the mediation process assumes ideal forms of desirable conflict management that arise from a Western context, which is why a non-adapted mediation process can be criticized from a neocolonialist point of view.¹⁰⁶ In the Western context mediation is understood as a process of dispute resolution, in which a third, impartial party, the mediator helps the disputing parties to negotiate an agreement. The mediator provides the framework, leads the process, and helps facilitate an acceptable solution to the dispute at hand.¹⁰⁷

These conventional mediation methods have been criticized in the literature in particular for solely reflecting Western values and norms, e.g. giving a high priority to formal written agreements and verbal confrontation. For

¹⁰³ibid., p. 10.

¹⁰⁴ibid., p. 10.

¹⁰⁵ibid., pp. 85.

¹⁰⁶Busch, “Formen interkultureller Mediation und ihre Vermittlung durch Trainings”, p. 2.

¹⁰⁷Mayer, “Das kultur-synergetische Modell interkultureller Mediation”, p. 24.

example, the Western approach of mediation does not give enough space and importance to non-verbal communication, as well as social and cultural implications.¹⁰⁸

Although there is a difference between international peace mediation and peer mediation of diverse groups in one country, the following studies on both examples stress the importance of involving locals in conflict resolution processes.

The significance of cultural implications of conflict can be influenced by the mediators' and parties' cultural backgrounds, as demonstrated in the study by Lee et al. where the cultural values of Western interveners and national warring factions had significant effects on the outcome of peace negotiations in Cambodia and Angola. Lee showed that intercultural differences and a lack of consideration for local customs and needs can lead to negotiation failures when international actors are involved. The use of mediation in collectivistic cultural contexts that have traditionally subscribed to hierarchical systems can be problematic due to the value-laden principles underlying the process.¹⁰⁹

In their study, Noel et al. faced a number of challenges related to culture in peer mediation. One challenge was the potential mismatch between the individualistic values common in Western versions of peer mediation and the traditional values of Indonesian culture. For example, in Western models of peer mediation, conflicts are viewed as natural and constructive, and individuals are encouraged to assert themselves and communicate effectively. In contrast, the teacher-centered Indonesian educational system does not encourage student independence and discourages teachers from relinquishing their role as disciplinarians. This poses a conceptual dilemma for the implementation of peer mediation in Indonesia.¹¹⁰

Another challenge related to culture is the hierarchical distribution of power in Indonesian society, which can affect the selection, respect, and perceived effectiveness of mediators. For example, in Indonesian culture, nonverbal and paralinguistic cues are used to convey meaning and signal differences in power status. This can create misunderstandings and difficulties in communication between individuals of different social status in a mediation setting.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁸Mayer, "Das kultur-synergetische Modell interkultureller Mediation", p. 138.; Noel et al., "Conflict resolution in a non-western context: Conversations with Indonesian scholars and practitioners", p. 427; Alexander, "Von Fischen im Wasser und andere Mediationserzählungen", p. 312.

¹⁰⁹S. Y. Lee, "The Limit of Ethnocentric Perceptions in Civil War Peace Negotiations".

¹¹⁰Noel et al., "Conflict resolution in a non-western context: Conversations with Indonesian scholars and practitioners".

¹¹¹ibid.

Furthermore, linguistic differences can also pose challenges in peer mediation. In Indonesia, many traditional languages have multiple levels that are used depending on the social status of the individuals involved in a conversation. This can complicate communication and understanding in a peer mediation setting, where individuals of different ages, socio-economic backgrounds, and educational levels may be involved.¹¹² As a result of the described challenges, the researchers used a bottom-up approach in order to account for cultural differences by conducting interactive workshops with teachers and students involved in teacher education, as well as scholars and community leaders who are indirectly involved in education programs.

Overall, these cultural specifics highlight the importance of considering and discussing cultural values and norms before implementing peer mediation programs more broadly, and adapting these programs to better fit the local context.¹¹³ The idea that individualistic self-determination is necessary for conflict resolution and that mediator neutrality and outsider status are essential for maintaining the trust of both parties is a Western assumption that may be problematic.

It is important to stress the significance of intercultural competences, which are the skills and abilities necessary for successful intercultural communication and interaction — and they include a range of knowledge and abilities, such as expertise in fields like social work and volunteering, individual motivations, empathy, strategic thinking, and language and rhetorical abilities¹¹⁴ — they might not be enough to understand specific cultural groups.

In collectivistic and “high-context” cultures, those that rely heavily on context and therefore communicate more indirectly than directly, a respected and knowledgeable mediator who is invested in restoring harmony within the community and has a personal connection to the parties may be more trusted and better able to understand the unspoken dynamics of the conflict than an outsider with intercultural competence but no connection to the parties involved.¹¹⁵

In an international study on root-causes of conflict conducted in 24 countries, Moore et al. identified five causes of conflict, which he considered to have a universal influence: relationship, facts, interests, values, and structural conditions.¹¹⁶ However, especially in an intercultural setting, in-

¹¹²ibid.

¹¹³ibid.

¹¹⁴Mayer, “Kulturspezifische Perspektiven auf interkulturelle und mediative Kompetenzen in der Arbeit mit Geflüchteten aus Syrien und dem Irak”; Bolten, *Interkulturelle Kompetenz*.

¹¹⁵Pugh et al., “Adapting Community Mediation for Colombian Forced Migrants in Ecuador”.

¹¹⁶Moore, *The Mediation Process: Practical Strategies for Resolving Conflict*.

tercultural communication often involves communicating parties who have different cultural standards and thus often face intercultural misunderstandings.¹¹⁷ Those cultural standards include values, norms, and conventions about how to behave “adequately” in certain situations, and what can be expected as appropriate from the other actors¹¹⁸

Therefore, cross-cultural conflicts are primarily connected to different core identities of human beings, such as differences in the sense of justice/injustice and the rule of law, in the concept of violence (e.g. different degrees of violence), in the concept of lying (lying behavior, telling a white lie, oath etc.) as well as in the concept of honor (insulting and restoring one’s own honor etc.)¹¹⁹ Therefore the conflict is largely determined by identity-related topics, meaning what the actors in conflict are or believe to be, rather than by what they want.¹²⁰ Therefore, banal misunderstandings and mere prejudices can escalate easily into an identity-based dispute.

Despite its “Western” character, the mediation process has been utilized and developed as an intercultural conflict management tool in recent years.¹²¹

For example, Claude-Hélène Mayer, a mediator and professor in industrial and organizational psychology, argues that the idea and concept of mediation is used as a conflict resolution process in many societies, cultures and religious groups around the globe. She claims that mediation seems to have a positive connotation in many cultures and is often viewed as a cross-cultural conflict resolution strategy. However, even though the resolution of disputes by impartial third parties is known and used in many cultures, it still seems that different cultures and different actors have different ideas about mediation.¹²²

2.3.5 Cross-cultural mediation models

The question remains: When can a mediation be regarded as a cross-cultural mediation? There are several different models and theories on cross-cultural mediation discussing when a mediation is considered to be intercultural.

¹¹⁷Schröder, Sprachliche Aspekte der Kommunikation von Ausländern vor deutschen Gerichten.

¹¹⁸ibid.

¹¹⁹ibid.

¹²⁰Treichel et al., Lehrbuch Kultur: Lehr- und Lernmaterialien zur Vermittlung kultureller Kompetenzen, p. 338.

¹²¹Busch, Interkulturelle Mediation in der Grenzregion : sprach- und kulturwissenschaftliche Analysen triadischer Interaktionsformen im interkulturellen Kontakt.

¹²²Treichel et al., Lehrbuch Kultur: Lehr- und Lernmaterialien zur Vermittlung kultureller Kompetenzen, p. 372.

2.3.5.1 Meta Model of Mediation

First and foremost, the meta model of mediation developed by Nadja Alexander, provides a great overview of different mediation models and may serve as a compass for cross-cultural mediation. The meta model identifies six mediation models that are organized around two dimensions: 1. Facilitative or evaluative intervention of the mediator, and 2. The type of intervention (e.g. negotiation or dialogue) among parties to mediation.¹²³ The six models serve to understand the variety of practicing mediation: comparative mediation, moderative mediation, transformative mediation, expert advisory mediation, village elder mediation, and traditionally based mediation. The first three models — especially the model of moderated mediation — show a facilitative and more Western approach to mediation, whereas the last three models are more directive. Nadja Alexander argues that Eastern models of mediation are more directive and more likely to fall under the last three models of mediation.¹²⁴ For example, in village elder mediation, the mediator can make his or her assumptions about the parties' feelings and interests, and even give them his or her assessment of what outcome would be in their best interest.¹²⁵ She claims that moderated mediation is "the biggest fish in the water" and claims to be "universally and cross-culturally applicable". However, the results may be valuable in a Western context and may lead to misconceptions in other cultural contexts.¹²⁶

Therefore, Nadja Alexander's meta model of mediation can serve as a great tool to classify appropriate models of mediation in a cross-cultural setting. She is calling for incorporating diversity into mediation practice and to question the implications of our mediation approaches.¹²⁷

2.3.5.2 Intercultural Mediation Model

According to the intercultural mediation model — specifically designed for cross-cultural mediations — a mediation is regarded as intercultural when the mediator facilitates a conversation between parties of different cultural backgrounds.¹²⁸ This means that the content of the mediation mostly deals with different cultural values and norms of the parties which the mediator needs to navigate. However, Mayer argues that this model follows a very restricted and closed concept of culture if the mediation's intercultural character is mainly defined by the parties' differences in national origin.¹²⁹

¹²³Alexander, "Von Fischen im Wasser und andere Mediationserzählungen", p. 305.

¹²⁴ibid., p. 308.

¹²⁵ibid., p. 307.

¹²⁶ibid., p. 310.

¹²⁷ibid., p. 312.

¹²⁸Treichel et al., *Lehrbuch Kultur: Lehr- und Lernmaterialien zur Vermittlung kultureller Kompetenzen*, p. 376.

¹²⁹Mayer, "Das kultur-synergetische Modell interkultureller Mediation", pp. 25, 26

Therefore, this model does not correspond with to the transcultural concept of culture.¹³⁰

2.3.5.3 Ethno-oriented Mediation Model

Another model is referred to as ethno-oriented mediation model. “The ethno-oriented variant of mediation is based on a non-western model, for example it can be based on a certain ethno-specific African mediation model, which is typically used in the context of the dispute at hand. However, it can also be used in another context if it appears appropriate.”¹³¹ These are mediation processes that have appeared outside of the western context and are subject to different processes, role definitions for mediators and conflict parties, and process design than in intercultural mediation. This model is often referred to as “third party intervention”.¹³²

2.3.5.4 Cultural Synergetic Mediation Model

Finally, the cultural synergetic mediation model takes into account the transcultural concept of culture because it operates under the understanding that all those involved (parties and mediator) bring different cultural aspects and cultural-specific mediation models to the mediation table such that a synthesis of different mediation models emerges.¹³³ Mayer describes the negotiation of the mediation concepts of the parties and the mediator as follows: “(...) synergy describes the spontaneous process of picking out and (re)-assembling individual culture-specific (mediation setting) elements, which flow together and are embedded in the culture-specific contexts of those involved.”¹³⁴ This model assumes culture-specific and (foreign and subgroup-specific) language skills, intercultural skills and increased flexibility of mediators.¹³⁵

According to Mayer, it is not just indispensable to integrate the cultural identities of the conflicting parties, rather it is pivotal to flexibly reconstruct the mediation setting and process. Cross-cultural mediation in a transcultural sense requires adapting the understanding of roles, methods, techniques and communication tools of the mediation process. Mediation therefore no longer means exclusively “Western mediation in an intercultural context, but rather culture-synergetic mediation, which becomes an independent, flexibly manageable process that manifests itself in culture-

¹³⁰Treichel et al., *Lehrbuch Kultur: Lehr- und Lernmaterialien zur Vermittlung kultureller Kompetenzen*, p. 376.

¹³¹Mayer, “Das kultur-synergetische Modell interkultureller Mediation”, p. 24.

¹³²Ury, *The third side: why we fight and how we can stop*.

¹³³Mayer, “Das kultur-synergetische Modell interkultureller Mediation”, p. 28.

¹³⁴*ibid.*, p. 28.

¹³⁵*ibid.*, p. 28.

specific orientations and continuously requires new creative forms.”¹³⁶ The idea is to ultimately create a mediation process that is acceptable to everyone involved.¹³⁷

Furthermore, in a cross-cultural mediation, the mediator or co-mediators have to be particularly sensitive to identity-based conflicts, as well as capable of changing perspectives such that the conflicting parties respect and accept them as mediators.¹³⁸

In my opinion, especially in a peer mediation setting, culture has to be regarded as dynamic and open, because, above all, when dealing with cultural identities of the participants (including the conflicting parties, as well as mediators), it is always important to negotiate what culture means to each participant and what role or influence it (a) had in the conflict; and (b) will play in the mediation. When working with people from different cultures, mediators can benefit from understanding the various cultural dimensions that can influence communication and behavior. These dimensions include power distance, collectivism versus individualism, masculinity, uncertainty avoidance, and long-term orientation. By taking these factors into account, mediators can better anticipate and respond to the social rules and expectations that may be at play in a given situation. This can help them to more effectively facilitate communication and promote understanding between parties.¹³⁹

Regardless of the specific context, a mediator who is knowledgeable about the cultural differences among the parties in conflict and is able to approach the situation with flexibility and respect can be a valuable asset. This ability to understand and navigate different cultural perspectives is known as “cultural fluency” and can be essential in helping the mediator to intervene effectively and facilitate a resolution to the conflict.¹⁴⁰

Therefore, culture should be regarded as negotiable and changeable with respect to any given situation. In the light of the research question, the arguments presented are accordingly indicative of choosing an open and transcultural concept of culture for the purpose of this dissertation.

¹³⁶Treichel et al., *Lehrbuch Kultur: Lehr- und Lernmaterialien zur Vermittlung kultureller Kompetenzen*, p. 377.

¹³⁷*ibid.*, p. 372.

¹³⁸*ibid.*, p. 373.

¹³⁹Pugh et al., “Adapting Community Mediation for Colombian Forced Migrants in Ecuador”, p. 417.

¹⁴⁰LeBaron, “The alchemy of change: Cultural fluency in conflict resolution”.

2.4 Status Quo of Mediation Efforts with Refugees and Migrants

Human beings who have experienced trauma, such as refugees, may need a broader understanding of peace that considers their overall well-being. This is because traditional approaches that focus on resolving specific disputes using neutral mediators may not be effective for individuals who have lost a sense of control and agency in their lives. A more comprehensive approach that considers their broader needs and concerns may be more appropriate in these cases.¹⁴¹ In addition to the numerous challenges that refugees face, they also often struggle to access justice. This can be due, in part, to a lack of trust in state institutions. For example, a survey of refugees and migrants living in Quito, Lago Agrio, and Esmeraldas found that 32 percent had no trust in the police (compared to 15.9 percent who had a lot of trust), and 21.9 percent had no trust in the courts (compared to 2.7 percent who had a lot of trust). This lack of confidence can make it difficult for refugees to seek justice for disputes and discrimination.¹⁴²

When refugees or migrants are in conflict with each other and members of their host community, various groups can help to facilitate communication and understanding. For example, second-generation migrants, long-term migrants, and teams consisting of both migrants and citizens can all help to create a safe space where parties can share their perspectives and be heard. This can help to promote reconciliation and prevent further conflict.¹⁴³

To be effective in mediating conflicts between different cultural groups, mediators or mediation teams need to be knowledgeable about and connected to both sets of cultural and social networks. This can help to create a space where both parties can hear and understand each other, reducing harmful stereotypes and prejudices.¹⁴⁴ Previous research suggests that co-mediators who are similar to the parties in terms of race and gender may help to increase satisfaction and reduce biased perceptions. Therefore, bi-cultural or bi-national mediation teams that are sensitive to cultural differences may be more effective in providing satisfactory outcomes for the parties involved.¹⁴⁵

Consequently, mediating conflicts involving migrants and refugees presents some unique challenges (such as dealing with trauma, vulnerability, access to justice, and lack of trust in state institutions) compared to those between

¹⁴¹Pugh et al., "Adapting Community Mediation for Colombian Forced Migrants in Ecuador", p. 418.

¹⁴²ibid., p. 423.

¹⁴³ibid., p. 423.

¹⁴⁴ibid., p. 423.

¹⁴⁵ibid., p. 423.

citizens from a homogeneous background. However, mediation can be a valuable tool for helping migrants to address problems and seek justice if it is adapted to meet the needs of both migrants and their host community neighbors.

In the context of mediation with migrants, Mayer suggests using a psychobiographical approach which involves uncovering autobiographical information that describes and documents a person's life in terms of self-expression. Working with psychobiographical narratives includes incorporating autobiographical expression. This can be done in two ways, with respect to the mediators' history or the history of a notable person with a similar biography to the parties to mediation.¹⁴⁶

There has been growing interest in exploring the use of alternative dispute resolution in refugee communities, with several pilot projects being launched to investigate this approach.¹⁴⁷ In some cases, community leaders and organizations have worked together to provide mediation services to refugees.

In many cases, mediators who are personally connected to the parties involved in a dispute (e.g. members of a peer group of refugees) may be better able to gain their trust and bring them to the negotiating table than an outside neutral mediator who has no personal relationship with them. This is because "insider-partial" mediators may be seen as more credible and trustworthy by both parties. Their personal connections can help to build trust and credibility, making it more likely that the parties will be willing to engage in mediation.¹⁴⁸

In many non-Western cultures, the use of elders to settle disputes is a common practice.¹⁴⁹ In Sierra Leone, chiefs are trusted leaders who play a key role in resolving disputes within their communities. According to McIntyre Miller, these disputes typically relate to social issues that could harm the group's cohesion or land use issues involving families' rights to land. Through interviews, observations, and participation in events, it was found that most community members trust and appreciate the chieftaincy-based system as an effective way to handle conflicts.¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁶Mayer, "Kulturspezifische Perspektiven auf interkulturelle und mediative Kompetenzen in der Arbeit mit Geflüchteten aus Syrien und dem Irak", p. 92.

¹⁴⁷Goethe Institut Istanbul; Digital Storytelling; Project LISTEN; Bühne für Menschenrechte; In der Storytelling Arena der Schottin Rachel Clarke erzählen Geflüchtete ihre eigenen Geschichten. Storytelling with refugee women.

¹⁴⁸Pugh et al., "Adapting Community Mediation for Colombian Forced Migrants in Ecuador", p. 423.

¹⁴⁹Hoffman et al., "The Mediator as Village Elder", p. 26; Alexander, "Von Fischen im Wasser und andere Mediationserzählungen", p. 307.

¹⁵⁰Miller, "Chieftaincy-based community dispute resolution: The case of sierra leone", p. 303.

In this example, refugees have developed a quasi-indigenous mechanism for resolving disputes within their communities. In their traditional culture, disputes were resolved by respected community members, known as Ajawid. These mediators mainly focused on reconciliation and restoring honor.¹⁵¹ This preference for peer mediation may be due to a lack of trust in outside mediators, or a desire to maintain a sense of community and control over the dispute resolution process.

Both the chieftaincy-based system in Sierra Leone and the quasi-indigenous mechanism used by Darfuri refugees in Israel demonstrate the importance of community-based mediation in resolving disputes. In collectivist cultures, community leaders are trusted and play a crucial role in maintaining group cohesion. By focusing on reconciliation, these mediation mechanisms can be effective in resolving conflicts within a distinct community. This approach may be not as suitable for a randomly composed group such as refugees living in a refugee shelter.

Pugh et al. explored the relationship between Colombian refugees and their Ecuadorian host community, and found that bi-cultural fluency, or the ability to understand both cultures, is essential for successful mediation with refugees.¹⁵²

Stewart et al. conducted a study that explored the benefits of creating support groups for refugees with similar characteristics, such as language, age, or gender. This approach was used to facilitate understanding and provide peer facilitators – ex-refugees who understand both the experience of the refugees and the customs and laws of the host country – to the groups. The study focused on refugees from African countries in Canada, who face a range of difficulties including loneliness, discrimination, a lack of access to services, and language barriers.

By creating support groups and providing both peer and professional facilitators, the study found that refugees were able to better deal with these challenges.¹⁵³ The refugees reported enjoying the emotional support they received from the group, and appreciated the chance to share their problems and learn about different potential solutions. The success of this approach highlights once more the importance of cultural fluency in providing appropriate support to refugees, and the value of having mediators who are embedded in the communities they are working with. This approach can be an effective way of providing refugees with the support they need to cope with the challenges they face, and can help to foster stronger connections

¹⁵¹Pely, "Quasi-Customary Dispute Resolution Mechanisms in Israel's Darfuri Refugees".

¹⁵²Pugh et al., "Adapting Community Mediation for Colombian Forced Migrants in Ecuador", p. 409.

¹⁵³Stewart et al., "Supporting African refugees in Canada: Insights from a support intervention".

within the refugee community. In addition, by providing a safe and supportive space for refugees to discuss their problems and seek out solutions, these support groups can also help to prevent conflicts from arising in the first place.¹⁵⁴

Acquiring mediators in the communities they are part of allows for a culturally appropriate way of resolving conflicts. This method takes into account the social and historical context of the parties involved and is perceived as trustworthy. Peers who are members of the same community potentially have more experience in the type of cross-cultural conflicts that arise among community members and their resolution. They can provide the necessary knowledge, trust, and access that is required for conflict resolution.

In some cases, community leaders and organizations may work together to provide mediation services to refugees. For example, in a refugee facility in Donaueschingen, Germany, an *alkalo* (a village chief, known as an “*alkalo*” in Gambia) was chosen to act as a mediator when disputes arose among residents in a refugee shelter.¹⁵⁵ This approach can be effective in helping refugees to resolve conflicts in a culturally appropriate manner, while also providing a sense of community and support.

In other cases, co-mediation teams involving second-generation migrants and citizens have been deployed to help resolve disputes between refugees and host communities. This approach has been found to increase trust and willingness among refugee parties to share their concerns, and can help to improve the effectiveness of mediation in these contexts.¹⁵⁶

A study by Paloma et al. aimed to evaluate the effectiveness of a peer support and mentoring program in enhancing resilience (the human ability to bounce back despite suffering hardship) and empowerment among refugees in southern Spain¹⁵⁷ The study used a model proposed by Gillespie et al. (2007) which views hope, self-efficacy, and coping as the three defining components of resilience.¹⁵⁸ The peer mentoring format involved trained volunteer refugees who were paired with newly arrived refugees and provided regular face-to-face support during their transition period. The results showed that the mentors’ resilience and self-efficacy increased over

¹⁵⁴ibid.; H. M. E. Winter et al., “Psychosocial peer mediation as sustainable method for conflict prevention and management among refugee communities in Germany”.

¹⁵⁵Fesenmeier, *Der Vermittler im Flüchtlingsheim: Manasseh Shedrach ist der Alkalo*.

¹⁵⁶Lutz, “In between or bridging cultural gaps? Migrant women from Turkey as mediators”; Pugh et al., “Adapting Community Mediation for Colombian Forced Migrants in Ecuador”; H. M. E. Winter et al., “Psychosocial peer mediation as sustainable method for conflict prevention and management among refugee communities in Germany”.

¹⁵⁷Paloma et al., “A peer support and peer mentoring approach to enhancing resilience and empowerment among refugees settled in southern Spain”.

¹⁵⁸Gillespie et al., “Development of a theoretically derived model of resilience through concept analysis”.

time, and they were empowered to utilize their inner strength to improve their community's situation and help newly arrived refugees in southern Spain.¹⁵⁹

Overall, the use of Alternative Dispute Resolution methods, mentoring and peer mediation in refugee communities can be a valuable tool for resolving conflicts and promoting social cohesion. By providing refugees with the support and resources they need to resolve disputes in a culturally appropriate manner, these approaches can help to improve the quality of life for refugees, develop a refugee's resilience and enable the participant to foster stronger bonds with their host community such as locals in the neighborhood.

Finally, the cultural synergetic model discussed above can be particularly effective when used by mediators or co-mediators who have a bi- or multi-cultural background and expertise in the field of mediation and conflict resolution. These mediators are able to draw on their bi- or multi-lingual skills and cultural knowledge to help parties understand and communicate with one another more effectively.¹⁶⁰

2.5 Summary

To be effective, a peer mediation model that is designed for use with refugee populations must be carefully tailored to take into account the unique challenges and needs of these individuals. Many refugees have experienced discrimination and violence at the hands of formal institutions, including the state. As a result, mediation efforts must be sensitive to these experiences and take steps to address issues of power imbalances and cultural differences. This may involve forming a team of mediators who are bi-cultural and have a strong understanding of the social and cultural context in which the mediation is taking place.¹⁶¹

One possible approach to effective mediation in refugee communities is to establish a peer mediation program. In this model, refugees who have undergone training in mediation skills are paired with other refugees who are in need of assistance to resolve a conflict. The peer mediators work with the parties to identify the underlying issues and help them to develop mutually acceptable solutions. This approach has the potential to provide many benefits, such as fostering a sense of community and empowerment

¹⁵⁹Paloma et al., "A peer support and peer mentoring approach to enhancing resilience and empowerment among refugees settled in southern Spain".

¹⁶⁰Mayer, "Das kultur-synergetische Modell interkultureller Mediation", p. 28.

¹⁶¹Pugh et al., "Adapting Community Mediation for Colombian Forced Migrants in Ecuador", p. 429.

among the refugees, helping to resolve conflicts in a constructive manner, and promoting a greater understanding of cultural differences.

The effectiveness of mediation for conflicts among refugees also depends on several key factors, including access (whether members of both the host and migrant communities have access to mediation, regardless of their race, class, and location), trust (whether both sides feel that mediation provides a safe space for resolving their differences), form (whether the intervention model is appropriate for the cultural context and responds to the needs of both sides), and capacity (whether the mediators have the necessary resources and cultural competency to effectively facilitate the mediation). In the context of migration, mistrust of state institutions and power imbalances between migrants and citizens often means that non-state, community-based actors are better positioned than state agencies to engender access and trust. However, these actors must also have sufficient capacity to play a constructive role in mediation efforts.¹⁶² Involving refugees as active participants in intervention programs (and thus allow refugees to act as agents of change) promotes cultural sensitivity and facilitates the establishment of equal relationships between service providers and users.¹⁶³

¹⁶²ibid., p. 429.

¹⁶³Paloma et al., “A peer support and peer mentoring approach to enhancing resilience and empowerment among refugees settled in southern Spain”.

3

Empirical Basis - Design of the Curriculum and Process of the Training and Peer Mediation Clinic

As part of this research project, I co-developed and implemented the curriculum for peer mediation training at two refugee shelter in Berlin, Germany. The process was greatly influenced by my own experience as an intercultural mediator as well as the experience and input of my co-founders and co-facilitators who are refugees. I have been working as an intercultural mediator and trainer in the field of conflict resolution for the past six years. This has included working in Los Angeles and Berlin as a mediator on anti-discrimination, labor and family law matters, as well as cross-cultural cases. Additionally, I have worked as a conflict resolution lecturer and a trainer for refugee populations. These cumulative experiences have influenced me to develop an attitude of curiosity, humility, and authenticity when working with people from different backgrounds and cultures who had to flee their former home country. Mainly, I have learned from my participants and members of the refugee community about their experiences with conflict resolution at large and what they thought was important when practicing intercultural peer mediation. Two aspects turned out to be very important.

For example, as I will explain in more detail in Chapter 5 all conflict resolution workshops that I ran as part of this research project were co-facilitated by a trained member of the refugee community. I found this element to be crucial and indispensable for building trust and credibility with the participants, as they could identify more easily with someone who had experienced similar events, being a refugee themselves. Also, the co-

facilitator was able to serve as a cultural and linguistic peer interpreter. Furthermore, the focus of the conflict competence training unit was set on experiencing and acting out conflict-based role-plays while learning about different conflict styles, types, and parameters in conflict. From my previous experience and mostly because of language barriers, it was important to transfer knowledge through an interactive and role-play based approach.

The theoretical background of the curriculum was based on the knowledge that I have gained during my Master of Laws in Dispute Resolution, working as a research assistant at the Master's Program for Mediation and Conflict Management at European University Viadrina, as well as my experience as a trainer and founder of R3SOLUTE (which has included learning from and creating materials together with refugee colleagues, and participants). Additionally, I acquired further theoretical knowledge during the process of conducting the research of this dissertation. I was able to weigh and verify my expectations and thoughts carefully during the process of writing this dissertation. In the following, I will describe the conception of the curriculum, as well as the content and process of the training course, which determined my data collection and analysis.

3.1 Conception of the Peer Mediation Training

3.1.1 Short Personal Note and Context

The first time I felt that everyone living in Germany—including myself—was affected by conflicts resulting from migration was during an incident in Cologne on New Year's Eve 2016, when twelve hundred women were sexually assaulted by at least two thousand men. The perpetrators were described to have been mostly of Arab or North African appearance. After this, it became inevitable to ignore the challenges caused by mass migration that Germany was facing. This incident was a turning point in the so called German "refugee crisis", both in terms of the public discussion that started to take place regarding refugee migration in Germany as well as for me personally. Although, I was still studying in California at that time, I began to identify strongly with the challenge of successfully and safely integrating refugees into German society as well as with the refugees arriving in Germany, seeking shelter and help. In turn, I focused most of my academic papers during the LL.M. program of the Straus Institute for Dispute Resolution on the conflicts that emerged among refugees, Germans, political parties, the media, and the government, following the 2016 event.

As my curiosity regarding this issue evolved, I started to wonder how I could apply my knowledge of dispute resolution to these conflicts and how to use these skills, despite being so far away from home. I was asking

myself how I could give back to society by applying the tools of mediation and conflict resolution to the challenges and opportunities that come with sudden mass migration.¹⁶⁴

In the context of both my dispute resolution studies and conflict resolution work, I have investigated various ways to mitigate conflict among refugee populations and their host communities. Most of my research has focused on how mechanisms of alternative dispute resolution, such as peer mediation, can help improve refugee lives. In particular, I have focused on the concept of self-empowerment, by teaching dispute resolution skills. The idea for founding R3SOLUTE and implementing peer mediation mechanisms in refugee shelters was originally conceived during a discussion with a colleague at the United Nations during a traineeship at UNOMS (United Nations Office of the Ombudsman). The colleague and I started working on the vision to establish peer mediation mechanisms in refugee communities, and soon the idea became a project and the project turned into a concept realized through a team of volunteers and the work of an organization, R3SOLUTE.¹⁶⁵

While working pro bono on R3SOLUTE for the first 1 ½ years, I was also working as an academic researcher and lecturer at the European University Viadrina. It was there that I discovered the necessity of proving the impact of new concepts, as well as probing new ideas and testing already existing theories. I quickly became fascinated by academia and contributing to the growing academic field of conflict resolution and in particular mediation. Thus, I wanted to write my dissertation on a topic close to my heart and to explore how setting up a peer mediation program in refugee shelters and their neighborhoods might look like.

Consequently, I set the following goals: First, strengthen mutual understanding and increasing trust among workshop participants by means of dialogue work. Second, build competencies in conflict management. Third, conflict prevention through sensitizing participants to trauma-related issues that can lead to conflict. Fourth, train refugees as peer mediators to facilitate the resolution of disputes among members of their refugee community, acting as third-party neutrals. Finally, the most important goal was to self-empower refugees residing in shelters and their neighbors with a skill-set capable of resolving disputes arising among community members.

In this chapter, I will introduce the concept of self-empowerment, which serves as a guiding design principle for the peer mediation program, and discuss the theory supporting the peer mediation training curriculum.

¹⁶⁴H. Winter, "Working from the Heart".

¹⁶⁵ibid.

3.1.2 Introduction to the Empowerment-Focused Approach

Since the 1960s, the term “empowerment” has been coined in social and educational literature and policy making. Ever since, it has been “widely used to describe the empowerment of marginalized individuals or groups (...) to mobilize self-activation against social constrains”.¹⁶⁶ Most literature defines empowerment as a (collective and an individual) process by which people (re-)gain control by making choices leading to wanted outcomes.¹⁶⁷

“Helen, you would not be able to make it here for more than two weeks. Your head would explode, believe me, mine does every day.”

– Participant

One of the participants told me after she had spoken extensively about a conflict that felt very draining to her and to which she did not see any way out. She blamed the shelter and its conditions not only for this conflict but also for her — in her view — “miserable living situation”. She went on and stated that she felt like her life had no meaning. I was trying to put myself in her shoes and indeed thought that I would not know how to handle a past trauma, daily loud noises, fighting, violence, over-crowded facilities, shared and limited resources, a lack of perspectives and cultural, and linguist misunderstandings, as well as being placed in a room with three other strangers experiencing something similar.

According to Frankl, an Austrian neurologist and psychiatrist, and a Holocaust survivor, the feeling of meaninglessness often results from frustration of our existential needs. A sense of meaning is defined as the potential meaning inherent and dormant in all the single situations one faces throughout his or her life. Even if “people have enough to live but nothing to live for”, they might lack meaning in life.¹⁶⁸ Frankl argues that there are three main avenues to create meaning in life.¹⁶⁹

Firstly, creating a work or doing a deed can generate meaning. Secondly, meaning can be found through love - by experiencing something or encountering someone.¹⁷⁰ Thirdly and most importantly, human beings are capable of finding meaning through unavoidable suffering by realizing and choosing an attitude to see suffering as an opportunity for growth; and thereby turning suffering into a human achievement.¹⁷¹ When a person finds the

¹⁶⁶Daniele, “Discourses on Empowerment in Adult Learning: A View on Renewed Learning”, p. 49.

¹⁶⁷ibid.;citing Rappapon, “Studies in Empowerment: Introduction to the Issue”; and citing Alsop et al., Empowerment in Practice: From Analysis to Implementation.

¹⁶⁸Viktor E. Frankl, Man’s search for meaning, p. 140.

¹⁶⁹ibid., p. 143.

¹⁷⁰ibid., p. 138.

¹⁷¹ibid., p. 138.

meaning of life it brings them happiness and helps them successfully cope with suffering. In a further study conducted by Frankl, he found that “being jobless was equated with being useless, and being useless was equated with having a meaningless life”. When he managed to convince his patients to volunteer and fill their free time with some unpaid but meaningful activity their depression and feelings of meaninglessness disappeared.¹⁷²

Peer mediation — like any meaning generating task — takes up Frankl’s idea of man’s search for meaning. Through the peer mediation training, we hope to give participants the chance to become more active and create more meaning in their lives by either volunteering and taking on the role as a peer mediator and thus having generated a purposeful task (meaning through work), by simply loving the experience and forming new genuine connections with other community members (meaning through love), or finally by individually being given the opportunity to make the conscious choice to turn suffering into an experience of growth (meaning through unavoidable suffering).

The goal is that participants increase their degree of autonomy and self-determination. Often, there is a huge power imbalance between the shelter’s management and staff, and the refugees living in the shelter. The management is creating the house rules and is making decisions on behalf of the inhabitants, thereby making it difficult for them to be the master of their own lives. Empowerment, particularly in this situation, involves gaining strength and confidence to control one’s life and assert one’s right to participate in decisions that affect their life. This can be achieved through developing skills that enable self-empowerment as well as professional assistance that helps individuals to overcome feelings of powerlessness, utilize their resources, and assert their own influence.¹⁷³

One could even go one step further and argue that the peer mediation training provided to residents of refugee shelters and locals from the surrounding communities is a form of legal empowerment. “Legal empowerment occurs when poor or marginalised people use the law, legal systems and justice mechanisms to improve or transform their social, political or economic situations.”¹⁷⁴

Mediation as such is essentially defined by the mechanism of procedural justice. Procedural justice is the idea of transparency and self-determination in the decision-making process (here peer mediation) that resolves disputes. Therefore, participants do not only become more self-determined when

¹⁷²ibid., p. 141.

¹⁷³Encyclopedia, Empowerment; see also Mafaalani, Das Integrationsparadox warum gelungene Integration zu mehr Konflikten führt, p. 112.

¹⁷⁴Domingo et al., The politics of legal empowerment: Legal mobilisation strategies and implications for development, p. 4.

learning conflict resolution tools but also get to discover how to use these mechanisms to improve their social situation through procedural justice in the shelter and mitigate conflict. Thus, two forms of empowerment (self- and legal) happen simultaneously.

Building conflict capacity from within not only helps individuals to become more independent, but it also stresses the importance of cultural and situational factors in a conflict that are often best addressed by community members themselves. Community members almost always know best about the problems and conflicts that arise within the community (see Chapter 5 in more detail).

For all the reasons stated above, empowerment is the overarching goal of the peer mediation training, as it can support participants to reinvent their lives after having experienced suffering through war and violence and having been placed in a shelter with seemingly no future prospects or opportunities for growth.

3.2 Design and Implementation of the Peer Mediation Training

My empirical research was focused on collecting data in refugee shelters in Berlin. As part of this research project, I and my team have trained two groups of refugees and locals in peer-mediation, from two refugee shelters located in Berlin. Those shelters were established as long-term accommodation for refugees (that is, they are not first-aid, short-term admission camps). The shelter of the first group consisted of seven hundred inhabitants. The second shelter held two hundred twenty inhabitants at the time the research was conducted. Syrian refugees were the largest group of inhabitants living in the first shelter. Whereas Afghans were the largest population residing in the second shelter.

The first group was composed of fifteen participants in total. They were either part of the community council, which had been established by the shelter's management prior the mediation training, or family members of council members. The majority of the group was Syrian, and three of the Syrian members were Kurdish. Two participants were from Palestine and three from Somalia. Eleven participants were male and three female. Their ages ranged between 36 and 66 years old. All spoke and understood Arabic. Thirteen of the fifteen workshop participants (among which two were women) have been volunteering/ volunteered as peer mediators in the shelter and its neighborhood.

The second group consisted of eighteen participants. They were between 20 and 35 years old. Ten participants were from Afghanistan, one from Iraq,

one from Syria and four from Eritrea. Two participants were neighbors of the refugee shelter and from Germany. Five of the participants were female (two German, one Kurdish and two from Afghanistan). After completing the training, eight of the participants have been serving / served as peer mediators for their community and neighborhood.

The peer mediation training consisted of a series of workshops including (1) storytelling, (2) conflict competence and (3) peer mediation training. All in all, the three workshop components comprised an eighteen-hour training program (five workshop units in total), which was aimed at building skills in conflict resolution and mediation. The entire curriculum was highly interactive and based on role-play scenarios that reflect common disputes arising in refugee shelters and their neighborhoods. The workshops were held in German and were translated to Arabic or Farsi, if necessary.

The focus of the storytelling unit is set on getting to know each other, building trust, and gaining the necessary sensitivity needed for an exchange about difficult topics — such as racism and discrimination — and experiences. The conflict competence training unit focuses on the acting out of conflict-based role-plays, which provides a setting for participants to learn about different conflict styles and parameters in conflict. For example, we discuss topics such as the role of cultural misunderstandings, emotions, prejudices, interests vs. positions, and psychological trauma in conflict.

In the third part of the workshop, the participants learn about the mediation process, its principles and how to use mediation techniques such as active listening, paraphrasing, reframing and future orienting. Again, these techniques were practiced and strengthened in mediation role-plays, which were based on real-life disputes occurring in refugee shelters on a nearly daily basis. Each participant got to experience the role of the peer mediator in a particular role-play dispute.

All workshops were co-facilitated by a trained member of the refugee community. As stated earlier, this element was found to be crucial when it comes to building trust and credibility with the participants. They could identify more easily with a co-facilitator that had experienced similar events being a refugee. After completion of the training, peer mediation clinics, were set up by us together with the shelter's management, and the participants who had undertaken the training commenced volunteering as peer mediators, to resolve real disputes (see in mor detail Chapter 5).

We spoke with all relevant stakeholders (comprising shelter management, peer mediators, and social workers to discuss their needs and how they would like to approach setting up the peer mediation mechanisms (peer mediation clinic). An important matter for the shelter management, for example, was that peer mediators offer transparency to management re-

garding the conflicts they mediated, and engage in regular communication with the management, as well as to adhere to the house rules and law. The peer mediators requested regular meetings and an office space for their mediations. In the larger refugee shelter (the shelter of the first group), the concept of mediation was introduced to the other shelter residents during the annual summer festival. The peer mediators had their own booth, informed the other shelter residents, in Arabic and Farsi, about the option of peer mediation, and encouraged residents to fill out the survey on their perception of the causes of conflict in the community and their ideal qualities of a peer mediator. In the smaller refugee shelter (the shelter of the second group), inhabitants were introduced to the concept of peer mediation during a residents' meeting in which the peer mediators introduced themselves and the option of peer mediation, following which the residents were given the opportunity to ask questions and sign up to attend mediations.

3.2.1 Acquisition of Participants and Organization of the Workshops

Three factors were found to be important when it came to successfully acquiring workshop participants for the peer mediation clinic: (a) getting management on board; (b) operating in an environment that promotes/ or is willing to promote participation; and (c) building trust and commitment by the peer mediators early on.

3.2.2 Getting Management on Board

When we first started offering Peer Mediation workshops in refugee shelters, it was difficult to gain a foothold. As part of a 'pilot phase', which we commenced in 2018, the purpose of which was to explore how best to engage with shelters to set up the peer mediation, we reached out to individual shelters with an initial offer to set up workshops. We found that we often had to explain to management the concept of mediation; as well as the benefits of residents' participation and empowerment. Most of the management personnel we talked to during the pilot phase had never heard of mediation as a form of alternative dispute settlement before. I accordingly had to convince management to attend several meetings to discuss the program, before we could start acquiring workshop participants, let alone funding. We lost a lot of time through this process. During the pilot phase, acquiring participants took us six months from initial contact with the shelter to the start of the training. In comparison, after management was on board and we successfully established the programs within shelters, it only took between one to two months to acquire participants. We found it extremely difficult to work with the management of the shelters that we approach during the pilot phase: we more or less had to spark their initial motivation and commitment,

take the time to explain the purpose of the workshops, and convince them of the concept of peer mediation.

We found ourselves in situations in which we had to knock on residents' doors, or sit in the backyard of a shelter with flyers and sign-up sheets for hours, which resulted in limited engagement (i.e. no more than a handful of residents would approach us to learn more about the programs we were offering). This approach was particularly unsuccessful as, at that time, none of the management staff members were willing to introduce us to the residents. It was extremely challenging to build trust from scratch. We observed that residents had been disappointed by projects many times in the past and it almost seemed like they had given up on participating in opportunities to learn new skills, as they found that nothing would change the position they were in. Their priority, naturally, was to find a job or an apartment and "how would we be able to help them with that", they wanted to know.

I soon realized that we needed to find a different approach to acquire participants. We encountered several "trial and error" obstacles and discovered that our attempts mostly failed when management had not bought into our idea or was not supportive (e.g. did not assist with the process of setting up the workshops, or did not remind the residents of the benefits of the programs, or the dates that the workshops were running).

After some time, I was given the opportunity to present our work and approach to the organisations responsible for overseeing the management of Berlin's refugee shelters at the State Office of Refugee Affairs in Berlin (Landesamt für Flüchtlingsangelegenheiten). After that presentation, we were contacted by many shelters who found the concept of peer mediation attractive and believed that it would be valuable and suitable for their inhabitants.

What is important to note further is that the management of the shelters we ended up working with had a comparatively stronger background in either psychology, and social work or law prompting them to understand the concept of peer mediation and its benefits. Consequently, they were more likely and eager to support and try out new ideas for conflict resolution in a refugee shelter.

Based on the the experience described above, I have concluded that it is important to collaborate with the shelter's management from the very beginning when planning the peer mediation workshop series. One has to factor in their ideas and understand what is important to their particular situation and the needs of their specific shelter. No two shelters are the same, not only in terms of ethnicity and size but also in the way that management has structured the operations of the shelter.

3.2.3 Rights of Participation

The entry-point to implementation of the program at the two shelters the subject of this dissertation evolved in two distinct ways.

First, with respect to the first group, the shelter's management, initially approached us after my presentation at the State Office of Refugee Affairs in Berlin, and requested that we set up the peer mediation program. Management at this shelter had a good working knowledge of the concepts of participation and empowerment, and had already established a Residents' Council, responsible for matters of the community, composed of residents at the shelter. The members of this Residents' Council had been elected by the inhabitants and intrinsically wanted to take responsibility on behalf of the community. As noted above, the participants at this shelter were comprised of members of the Residents' Council.

We reached the second group by collaborating with a local organization called BENN¹⁷⁵ supported by the senate for integration in Berlin. BENN is responsible for connecting locals and neighbors of refugee shelters with refugees in order to promote joint activities. BENN reached out to us, as the result of a change in management of the refugee shelter, which was in a highly conflict-prone environment. The second group consisted of participants who, for the most part, were chosen by management based on specific criteria (being residents who they had perceived as being extremely helpful during conflict and who had demonstrated a willingness to take on roles of responsibility). We were then invited to hold an informational meeting for those selected individuals in which we talked about the contents and goals of the workshop and had participants sign up by writing their names in a "binding" list. That led to more commitment than in earlier tries when individuals were selected randomly based on their interest talking to us when we e.g. distributed flyers at a refugee shelter. We observed that participants were highly eager to sign up when they learned that they would be given a certificate confirming the skills that they had acquired, upon completing the training. This was a form of 'up-skilling' and could potentially assist participants to acquire a job, as employers in Germany highly value communication skills.¹⁷⁶

Management of the second group were interested the idea of establishing a Refugee Council consisting of the newly trained peer mediators - so the other way around than the first group. This Council was successfully established upon the conclusion of the peer mediation training.

Both shelters the subject of this dissertation had already demonstrated a

¹⁷⁵Nachbarschaften, Berlin entwickelt neue Nachbarschaften.

¹⁷⁶Paloma et al., "A peer support and peer mentoring approach to enhancing resilience and empowerment among refugees settled in southern Spain".

strong practice of participation and empowerment of refugees. In both cases they loved the idea of having peer mediators solve certain conflicts among community members right from the beginning. Also, they were highly supportive and arranged for staff to be allocated to our project; a social worker, who was also a representative of the management for the first group, and a volunteer coordinator and a Farsi translator in the case of the second group. They were responsible for coordinating mainly organizational tasks, such as looking for dates for the workshops, finding a room, and acquiring participants. Therefore, in both cases, the shelter was doing the job of the acquisition of participants.

Regarding the first group, having participants who were already members the Residents' Council helped immensely as already had structured meetings, and its members felt "chosen" and were committed to improving the experience of their fellow residents. Given this Council was meeting regularly, it was much easier for us to use this already existing structure as a gateway — in comparison to all the other previous trials prior to this research when we had to actively seek workshop participants.

As a result of these factors, the attendance rate was very high with only a few participants dropping out in each group after the very first workshop session (and new ones joining). It worked well to work closely with the management and to outsource the task of acquiring participants to management, given their knowledge about the people residing in the shelters, and who would likely be a willing participant. In addition, the fact that the management personnel were well known by the participants allowed for us to build credibility and gain the initial trust of the participants (which is otherwise lacking when we enter a the shelter for the first time). Based on these experiences, I have concluded that it is always useful to introduce peer mediation by engaging with already existing structures of participation like a Residents' Council, or to pair with other organizations that are familiar with the conditions on-site taking into account the experiences of the shelter's management, staff and inhabitants.

3.2.4 Building Trust and Commitment

Furthermore, I found that conducting the workshop over the course of several days during one fortnight - as opposed to once a week over the course of one to two months - leads to greater commitment (i.e higher rates of attendance at the workshops), a sense of achievement, and motivation among participants, as they have a short-term goal in sight and can accomplish a lot in a relatively short period of time. At the same time, participants develop a growing level of trust in us, the workshop facilitators, that they are not being abandoned but rather that we show up for them every single day; again and again.

Workshop dates are agreed upon in advance according to everyone's availability in collaboration with the participants and the shelter's management. They are usually scheduled to take place in the evenings from 5 pm to 8 pm, for a set of 4 sessions, and on a whole day on the weekend (usually on a Saturday). This approach allows for working participants to attend sessions without any scheduling conflicts.¹⁷⁷ In conclusion, a combination of working closely with shelter management, and promoting preexisting structures of participation within the shelter, as well as fostering participants' commitment by making it as easy as possible to attend workshops leads to a short and effective process of acquisition and attendance.

3.2.5 Overall Learning Goals of the Peer Mediation Workshop

The following goals and specific learning objectives formed the basis of the design of the peer mediation curriculum and its contents.

- Participants are able to transfer and apply the methods they have learned to their specific context and to adapt them to their personal learning/development wishes.
- Participants acquire a wider range of skills and models/thinking tools for conflict resolution and are able to apply what they have learned in real-life conflict contexts.
- Participants learn how to address and negotiate issues of intercultural misunderstanding, and power imbalances.
- Participants are capable of co-/acting as peer mediators inside refugee communities and between locals and refugees in non-violent conflict scenarios (including by being mentored and/or supervised by experienced mediators/facilitators if necessary).¹⁷⁸

3.2.6 Specific Objectives

- Communicating specific modules, such as approaches to mediation theory and practice that translate to the participants' real life experiences, primarily through interactive exercises and role-play¹⁷⁹
- Exploring more collaborative strategies as opposed to competitive approaches

¹⁷⁷Androusou, "Worlds Never Apart: Bridging Communities by Engaging Refugees in Cultural Mediation".

¹⁷⁸Training's booklet R3solute.

¹⁷⁹Alexander and Michelle LeBaron, "Exporting Mediation through Role Plays: Intercultural Considerations in Knowledge Transfer", p. 153.

- Fostering skill development that promotes peaceful communication, empathy and problem solving, especially with respect to intercultural misunderstanding and resulting conflict
- Discussing power dynamics and their implications on conflict
- Reflecting on peer mediation tools and establishing a peer mediation clinic in the specific context of the individual refugee shelter¹⁸⁰

3.2.7 General Approach and Attitude

The three training components being story-sharing, conflict competences and peer mediation training cumulatively sensitize participants to trauma-related issues, build competencies in conflict management, and train peer mediators to engage with conflict as third-party neutrals. This training approach is designed to culminate in the establishment of a permanent peer mediation clinic, able to address community conflict as it arises. This methodology allows sessions to build upon one another, thereby facilitating a holistic approach to community conflict management.¹⁸¹

The workshops are interactive and role-play based. We created the role-play scenarios with the help of refugee co-trainers according to the participants' needs and to real-life conflicts occur in refugee shelters on a daily basis. We achieved this by speaking to our refugee colleagues, who identified their experiences of typical conflicts that they had observed taking place in their refugee communities and their neighborhoods.

We encourage an active and stimulating learning environment. A mix of shorter and longer exercises, as well as simulations of real-life-situations are part of the training philosophy.

For example, the training is structured by short, visualized inputs that are prepared or followed by small group exchanges, exercises and practice reflections as well as role-play. Several studies have highlighted the effectiveness of interactive, role-play-based peer mediation in resolving intercultural disputes.¹⁸²

E.g., in one study, interactive role-plays were used to address the identity crisis faced by two divided ethnic groups, the North and South Cypriots.¹⁸³ The goal of this approach was to create a common understanding of the sensitivity of the multiple perspectives involved, thereby strengthening the interpersonal relationships between the parties. Our way of teaching/leading the training involves providing examples regarding the attitude and role

¹⁸⁰Training's booklet R3solute.

¹⁸¹H. Winter et al., R3SOLUTE Programmes.

¹⁸²Lederach, *Preparing for peace: conflict transformation across cultures*, p. 101.

¹⁸³Turk, "Experiential Activities in Mediation-Based Training, Cyprus 1997-2013".

of a mediator and facilitator as well as techniques and methods that create experienced based learning scenarios for the participants.

3.2.7.1 Curiosity

Curiosity lies at the heart of training vulnerable populations in conflict resolution. An open and curious attitude allows for fruitful discussions and creativity. Being open-minded as to what to expect and what to make of a situation without judging anyone will cultivate a learning atmosphere that allows for trust. One's own curiosity ideally transfers over to the participants who then also face others without judgement. This attitude allows for a process leading the participants to an approach of absolute openness and respect, especially towards other's opinions that some participants may initially reject based on their moral concepts.¹⁸⁴

3.2.7.2 Dignity

To me the most important component of the trainers' attitude is treating the participants with dignity – meaning recognizing their inherent dignity as human beings.

In her book "Dignity – it's essential role in resolving conflict", Prof. Donna Hicks discusses ten essential elements of dignity: acceptance of identity, inclusion, safety, acknowledgement, recognition, fairness, benefit of the doubt, understanding, independence, and accountability. "Accepting participants' identity" means "approach(ing) people as being neither inferior nor superior to you. (...) Interact without prejudice or bias, accepting the ways in which race, religion, ethnicity, gender, class, sexual orientation, age, and disability may be at the core of other people's identities."¹⁸⁵

"Including" participants is making them feel they belong to yourself and one another – no matter the relationship.¹⁸⁶ "Safety" refers to creating a safe space for people in which they feel physically and emotionally safe to be themselves and express their thoughts and feelings without having to fear humiliation¹⁸⁷ (see also Chapter 5). Additionally, giving people your fullest attention and validating them for their contributions and ideas is a strong sign for the essential elements of "acknowledgement" and "recognition".¹⁸⁸ Dignity's element of "fairness" means to "(t)reat people justly, with equality, and in an evenhanded way according to agreed-on laws and rules. People

¹⁸⁴Busch and Schröder, *Perspektiven Interkultureller Mediation, Interkulturelle Mediation. Empirisch-analytische Annäherung an die Bedeutung von kulturellen Unterschieden*, pp. 59, 60.

¹⁸⁵Hicks, *Dignity: The essential role it plays in resolving conflict*, p. 25.

¹⁸⁶ibid., p. 25.

¹⁸⁷ibid., p. 25.

¹⁸⁸ibid., pp. 25, 26.

feel that you have honored their dignity when you treat them without discrimination or injustice.”¹⁸⁹ Generally considering people as trustworthy and giving them the “benefit of the doubt” with respect to the nature of their intentions is another essential element of dignity.¹⁹⁰ “Understanding” means an attitude that gives others the opportunity to explain themselves thereby encouraging them to act self-determinedly (“independence”).¹⁹¹

And finally, the element of accountability stands for taking responsibility for your actions: “If you have violated the dignity of another person, apologize. Make a commitment to change your hurtful behaviors.”¹⁹² (In my view, Hick’s essential elements of dignity encompass the attitude that any trainer working with refugee populations should compulsorily adopt. Without the - in our world unfortunately not self-evident but indispensable - gift of treating people with dignity, participants will lack trust and motivation to fully emerge into the workshop experience. “Being treated with dignity triggers the limbic system to release those pleasant feelings of being seen, recognized, and valued — all the life-expanding experiences that come with human connection. (...) With our inner worlds free from the turmoil and uncertainty that accompany our fear of loss of dignity, we can explore a new frontier together: what it is like to feel safe and vulnerable.”¹⁹³

3.2.7.3 Authenticity

Another key characteristic of the trainer’s attitude towards vulnerable populations is authenticity. In my opinion an authentic demeanor means not fighting vulnerability, but rather embracing it. Being vulnerable makes us more authentic and trustworthy and allows for more honest discussions among participants. It allows for participants to open up about difficult and painful topics, and the potential for adapting a growth mindset which, in turn, allows participants to deal with suffering.¹⁹⁴ “As facilitators of intercultural dialogue we have to deal with other people’s extremes that are often displayed in situations of conflict. It is not a rare phenomenon that people start crying when they talk about their horrifying past. In these situations, we cannot be afraid of their, nor our, emotions. Rather, we have to embrace them. Every tear shed, every word listened to, will give people new strength to reinvent their lives.”¹⁹⁵

¹⁸⁹ibid., p. 26.

¹⁹⁰ibid., p. 26.

¹⁹¹ibid., p. 26.

¹⁹²ibid., p. 26.

¹⁹³ibid., p. 11.

¹⁹⁴H. Winter, “Working from the Heart”, p. 62.

¹⁹⁵ibid., p. 62.

3.2.8 Detailed Content of the Training Curriculum

In the following I will describe the contents of the training curriculum in more detail as well as reference relevant literature, as well as explain the research behind it. When deemed useful for comprehensive purposes, I will also go into some of my observations and how singular training components were apprehended and performed by the participants.

3.2.8.1 Overview and Purpose of Story-sharing

“Sometimes ...we destroy one wall only to build another. It could be an actual wall, or an invisible wall that surrounds the mind. There are walls that tell us not to go any further from where we are, and walls that tell others not to come in. One wall finally collapses, the world looks different, and we breathe a sigh of relief, only to discover that another wall has been erected in another part of the world — a wall of ethnicity, or religion, a wall of intolerance, of fundamentalism, a wall of greed, a wall of fear. Are we unable to live without a system of walls?”

– Haruki Murakami

The first training session is designed to open a dialogue between participants (refugees and locals alike). We achieve this by focusing on sharing their stories. This sets the stage for subsequent modules by cultivating mutual trust amongst the participants. Trust is a prerequisite to introducing sensitive issues related to conflict.¹⁹⁶

To ensure a safe space, the story-sharing session is designed for a group of not more than twenty participants. The idea is that the facilitators control the process of the dialogue, which strongly focuses on relationships, values and underlying assumptions. The goal is that participants will investigate their own group dynamics leading to a shift in control of the dialogue from the facilitators to the participants. Thus, possible cultural differences and values are the subject of joint exploration. The focus of the naturally emerging dialogue is to foster an awareness of each other’s differences and similarities.¹⁹⁷

The basic idea of the dialogue is to create a discussion, which encourages participants to tolerate and accept even extremely far-reaching differences in opinion and attitude based on ethnical or cultural differences. In her research regarding narratives in forced migration, Eastmond argues, “stories

¹⁹⁶H. M. E. Winter et al., “Psychosocial peer mediation as sustainable method for conflict prevention and management among refugee communities in Germany”, p. 66.

¹⁹⁷Busch and Schröder, *Perspektiven Interkultureller Mediation, Interkulturelle Mediation. Empirisch-analytische Annäherung an die Bedeutung von kulturellen Unterschieden*, p. 60.

are important sites not only for negotiating what has happened and what it means, but also for seeking ways of going forward.”¹⁹⁸

However, as I wrote about earlier “(t)he parties might experience dialogue work as an extremely new and uncomfortable process, so it is our duty (as facilitators) to navigate the participants through productive dialogue and thereby allow them to collaborate effectively. It is less about exploring the facts of a dispute or who did what, and more about mastering the dynamics of communication, tolerance, and respect. As the participants require time to elaborate on their conflict, our goal as facilitators is to actively listen and help the participants to feel understood. We are not there to provide judgment, but to assist the people in getting to know each other and in overcoming their prejudices.”¹⁹⁹

The aim in this process is to lead participants to an attitude of absolute respect, especially towards differences in opinions that participants may initially reject based on their moral concepts.²⁰⁰ To be successful, the story-sharing session requires a facilitator who can support the group through the difficult and sometimes painful processes of exchanging opposing views. Dialogue can open up opportunities for joint and intercultural learning, which can lead to the development of more meaningful communication.²⁰¹

The final aspect of the story-sharing session is that intercultural competencies of the participants, as well as the facilitators are strengthened through the constant respectful exchange of ideas and stories.²⁰²

The process of creating more meaningful exchange leads to participants noticing and becoming more aware of their own stereotypes towards the “unknown”. This awareness, and collective consciousness of the group that everyone is inherently biased is a first important step to reducing the impact of those biases.²⁰³

3.2.8.2 Detailed Outline of the Story-Sharing Session

The story-sharing session runs for approximately 3 hours and is comprised of the following parts: 1. Introduction and icebreakers; 2. Agenda and goal setting; 3. Interview exercise; 4. Painting and sharing exercise; 5. Introduc-

¹⁹⁸Eastmond, “Stories as lived experience: Narratives in forced migration research. *Journal of Refugee Studies*, 20(2), 248–264.p. 251”.

¹⁹⁹H. Winter, “Working from the Heart”, p. 62.

²⁰⁰Busch and Schröder, *Perspektiven Interkultureller Mediation, Interkulturelle Mediation. Empirisch-analytische Annäherung an die Bedeutung von kulturellen Unterschieden*, pp. 59, 60.

²⁰¹*ibid.*, pp. 59, 60.

²⁰²*ibid.*, p. 60.

²⁰³H. M. E. Winter et al., “Psychosocial peer mediation as sustainable method for conflict prevention and management among refugee communities in Germany”, p. 9.

tion to conflict management and mental health awareness; 6. Reflection and planning for future sessions.

I elaborate on each of those components below.

We commence the session with rounds of introduction by the training team and myself (where I act in the role of main trainer). I then ask everyone to introduce themselves by stating their name, where they are from, what their expectations are for the workshop and what they are hoping to learn – meaning why they are attending. The session usually starts off with an icebreaker: The facilitators challenge the participants to line up according to their height (e.g. smallest on the left with the tallest on the right). Participants are encouraged to greet each other, and then to observe, and ask each other about their heights in order to place themselves in order. Once the line is formed, a facilitator asks if everyone can state his or her height, one by one. This exercise aims at loosening the atmosphere among participants and creating a positive and engaging learning climate.

After the icebreaker I elaborate on the purpose of story-sharing, which is to strengthen the community, share our stories and understand one-another, as well as sharing what each of us cares about and what we are most concerned about in the community. This is typically a group discussion that helps me find out about preexisting conflicts of community members and serves as a small needs assessment, eventually allowing our team to make minor adjustments and prioritize the relevant topics of the curriculum.

Afterwards, I give an overview of the agenda for the story-sharing session and remind participants that participation is entirely voluntary and when feeling uncomfortable they might choose to observe only. The first story-sharing exercise is an interview exercise, in which participants are divided into pairs and ask to interview each other about suggested questions like: “Could you tell us about your journey?; What you are doing today?; What do you want to do in the future?; What are your biggest worries or problems today?” After 10 minutes, the interviewer and the interviewee switch roles. When dividing the group into pairs I usually make sure that the diversity in the paired groupings is varied and (preferably) that the pairs are not familiar with each other prior to the story-sharing.

If needed I usually conduct a short demonstration of the interview exercise with a refugee co-trainer.

Once the interview exercise concludes, we engage in a 10 minute debrief where I ask the participants how they felt the interview went and if anyone wants to share some of the key topics they talked about. When moderating this session, I find it important that trainers add their own insight with respect to vulnerable stories and painful memories and ensure that acknowledgement is given to the individual for sharing their personal and often

difficult story.

After a break, a painting and sharing exercise follows, in which participants are split up into groups of four people and provided with drawing materials such as pencils, acrylic, and finger paint of different colors, as well as pieces of paper to draw on. Then, I ask participants to get together and draw something which answers the following questions:

1. What did you like doing in your childhood?
2. What do you like about Germany? or What don't you like about Germany?
3. Choose: What was a positive event in your life? or What was a negative event in your life?

The main purpose here is for participants to slowly but surely get comfortable with sharing negative experiences in a creative way, in order to identify and heal underlying trauma. That is mainly why the questions are arranged in three consecutive parts, each building on one another (i.e. starting with a positive question about things people liked doing in their childhood, which they are most likely to feel comfortable answering, followed by more difficult, opinionated questions about their experience in Germany, which allows participants to talk about cultural differences and perhaps feelings they experience in their host country e.g. unwanted and strange or welcome and already somewhat belonging to Germany.

Finally, by posing the last question I want to give participants the chance to share their experience of fleeing their home country and open up for the possibility of moving one step closer towards healing any associated trauma. However, I purposely do not ask about that specific event, as I want the participants to decide whether they want to share something negative that happened in their lives or - if they don't want to - something positive, or both. No one should feel forced to open up about what is, likely, the most horrifying event in his or her life. However, in my experience I have observed that after asking the three questions, progressively, most participants are comfortable spontaneously sharing their stories of fleeing their home country. This exercise is rooted in the idea of including psychosocial support in this type of dialogue work.

Psychosocial support is defined as “any type of local or outside support that aims to protect or promote psychosocial well-being and/or prevent or treat mental disorder”.²⁰⁴

Many refugees who come to Germany, including those participating in workshops, have experienced prolonged and severe stress due to warfare, violence, persecution in their home countries, a dangerous journey to Europe,

²⁰⁴IASC, Inter-Agency Standing Committee Guidelines for MHPSS in Emergency Settings.

separation from loved ones, language barriers, and culture shock upon arrival. These experiences can be traumatic and even life-threatening.²⁰⁵ As a result, more than ¾ of refugees living in Germany suffer from trauma today.²⁰⁶

Most commonly, the mental health of individuals and communities is often disregarded when engaging in dialogue work with the purpose of forgiveness (reconciliation), as well as other processes such as story-sharing forums that aim to replace distrust among two groups with grander trust.²⁰⁷ However, it's been shown that mental health impacts the extent to which people are willing and able to participate in peacebuilding processes endorsing harmonious coexistence.²⁰⁸

In northern Uganda, an ongoing study revealed that individuals who had endured trauma during the Lord's Resistance Army conflict faced challenges building positive relationships years into the future. Upon participating in group counseling, they developed an understanding of how their traumatic experiences impacted their mindsets and behavior. The process of group counseling, especially through storytelling, and learning coping mechanisms enabled them to strengthen their trust and re-establish connections with others. The resulting social support system empowered them to resolve conflicts and partially regain financial stability.²⁰⁹

I believe that this finding can be applied to refugees living in refugee shelters, as - in addition to trauma that they carry as a result of fleeing their home country - they often face even harder living conditions in the shelter, which can negatively influence peaceful co-existence.

Healing trauma through artwork in peace-building contexts can be regarded as "a mode of being present, of attending to the suffering, of letting it find its form. The arts give a form to the suffering of the soul, a ritual communal structure in which it can be held".²¹⁰ The artwork exercise my team and I perform with the participants aims to promote the psychosocial wellbeing of the participants, with a view to ultimately fostering harmonious

²⁰⁵H. Winter et al., R3SOLUTE Programmes; section M3ntaware.

²⁰⁶aerzteblatt.de, Viele Flüchtlinge sind schwer traumatisiert.

²⁰⁷FELM, South African Institute for Justice and Reconciliation (IJR), Internal Conference Report, p. 1; citing Mendeloff, "Trauma and vengeance: Assessing the psychological and emotional effects of post-conflict justice"; and Vinck et al., "Exposure to war crimes and implications for peacebuilding in northern Uganda".

²⁰⁸FELM, South African Institute for Justice and Reconciliation (IJR), Internal Conference Report, p. 1; citing Mendeloff, "Trauma and vengeance: Assessing the psychological and emotional effects of post-conflict justice"; and Vinck et al., "Exposure to war crimes and implications for peacebuilding in northern Uganda".

²⁰⁹FELM, South African Institute for Justice and Reconciliation (IJR), Internal Conference Report, p. 3.

²¹⁰Kalmanowitz, "Trauma, Tragedy, Therapy: The Arts and Human Suffering", p. 27.

coexistence of community members.

From my experience in running these sessions, I personally, consider that these artwork exercises are a valuable story-sharing tool, as it provides participants with a comforting way of expressing and attending to their painful memories. Story-sharing through art allows participants to express feelings they might find challenging to communicate verbally due to language limitations or their reticence to discuss events they sense as potentially re-traumatizing for themselves or others.

After each participant has completed a drawing corresponding to each of the three questions, I ask the participants to share their drawings within their small group and to describe the story that the artwork depicts. I let the participants know that each group is then welcome to share what they discussed and present at least one drawing to the whole group. The goal is to get people talking with one another about meaningful events memories, as well as bonding over sharing those. Holding onto a piece of drawing and referring to it when presenting makes it easier for people to open up. The activity of drawing itself is part of processing some of the more difficult memories and events.

The way the drawings are composed usually hints at the feelings and emotions of the composer, which are linked to the memories. After each participant has shared the stories connected to their paintings, volunteers from each small group are asked to share what they discussed and present a painting and its story in front of the whole group.

I usually facilitate this session by asking questions like: What was something interesting you learned about another group member? Did you learn anything surprising? Uplifting? Painful? Relatable? Were those examples in your group similar to or different from yours? In what ways?



Figure 3.1: *Drawings of Story-sharing by Participants.*

Figure 3.1 displays paintings drawn by participants in a story-sharing session. I observed that in the story-sharing sessions of both group 1 and group 2, participants felt comfortable sharing personal stories about their experience of fleeing their home country, their arrival in Germany and subsequent challenges, as well as conflicts occurring in and outside the refugee shelter. Their stories often involved painful memories of war and violence as well as optimistic outlooks on the future, as reflected in their paintings. Participants stated they felt more understood and, vice versa, could relate to others more because of talking about each other's drawings: "The workshop helped understand the mentalities of people, and I got something new because of that."²¹¹

After the story-sharing through art component has concluded, a trainer with a medical or psychological background and I give a brief introduction to conflict management and mental health awareness.

We refer to some of the conflicts shared during the session and discuss how there are various approaches and techniques that participants may find useful to resolve them. These skills include analyzing: interest vs. positions, culture and biases, emotions, power; and using mediation tools like active listening, asking open ended questions, as well as paraphrasing and reframing. I then ask the refugee co-trainer to share some of their own experiences of conflict and how these skills helped or would have helped in a particular situation.

²¹¹H. M. E. Winter et al., "Psychosocial peer mediation as sustainable method for conflict prevention and management among refugee communities in Germany", p. 8, quoting workshop participant.

The trainer with the medical or psychological background then discusses mental health and its connection to communication and conflicts and introduces the phenomenon of PTSD.

Usually, a discussion among the participants on symptoms and possible experience with treatments such as different forms of therapy follows the introduction. The refugee trainer then shares some of their own experiences and how mental health realizations and/ or therapy were important to them. Participants are provided with sources they can reach out to in case they believe they or someone they know may need of mental health support.

Finally, the story-sharing session is wrapped up by asking participants to reflect on the session and if there are any questions left or specific topics, they would like to learn more about.

I then conclude with introducing the upcoming workshops: I provide information on the upcoming training sessions, and ask people to add their contact information to the sign-up sheet if they are interested in staying in touch with us and continuing the training. This serves to remind participants about the upcoming workshops right before they start and to keep in touch during the mentoring phase right after completing the training.

Lastly, we ask participants to fill out a feedback survey designed to gauge what participants think was done well and what could be improved. It is largely based on multiple choice and is relatively quick to complete.

3.2.8.3 Building Conflict Competences

3.2.8.4 Conflict Competences I

The goals of the second workshop unit of the peer mediation training “Conflict Competences I” are: : 1. building conflict resolution skills of the participants; 2. getting a better understanding of the conflict dynamics in the community and conflicts that need to be resolved. These goals are reached by asking the participants about their learning expectations, talking about the concept of conflict, explaining how culture and biases influence conflict management, and practicing the techniques of active listening and open-ended questions.

After a short icebreaker, I ask the participants to state their expectations towards the entire workshop series and becoming a peer mediator. Participants who take part in the first conflict competences workshop after having already completed the storytelling session described above are usually more committed to attend the entire workshop series, which is why this is a good point in time to ask about participants’ expectations. I inquire about what their goals are, why they are participating, and what they are hoping to learn. After that, we establish ground rules together. We agree on listening well to

each other and letting others finish talking without interrupting. I remind everyone of the confidential setting of the workshop and that everything that's being discussed will not "leave the room".

Then, we start talking about conflict and what it means to the participants. We collect positive and negative attributes of conflict on a whiteboard and stress the positive aspects of conflict, such as: opening our eyes to new ideas and perspectives, using conflict as an opportunity to verbalize needs, teaching us to listen, teaching us patterns of conflict styles, and behaviors, leading to a potential resolution and teaching us communication skills.

We then define conflict "as a clash between antithetical ideas or interests – within a person or involving two or more persons, groups, or states pursuing mutually incompatible goals. Like all social phenomena, conflicts are usually complex and may emerge on different levels. Some are primarily intra-personal, while others are inter-personal, and there are conflicts across all layers of society."²¹²

Conflicts in refugee shelters and their neighborhoods are often caused by misunderstandings resulting from people of different backgrounds, religions and ethnicities living in a confined space.²¹³ Subsequently, we introduce the topic of cultural misunderstandings and conflict resolution and ask participants about their understanding of culture. We conclude that culture is not only shaped by nationality or origin, but also by gender, social class, age, and profession and is part of our value system. Our culture influences how we see the world.

The co-trainer and I continue the session by giving the participants an example of a cultural misunderstanding:

"An African from Liberia and a German apply for the same job in Berlin. The interviewer is an elderly German man. When the Liberian job applicant enters the room, his eyes are on the floor avoiding eye contact, he slowly approaches the desk of the interviewer, and only when invited he weakly shakes the hand of the interviewer. The German applicant enters the room confidently, firmly shakes the interviewer's hand, and looks him directly in the eye. Who gets the job?"

The participants discuss the scenario and conclude that the German applicant gets the job because the behavior of the German applicant is what is regarded as polite in Germany – whereas the behavior of the Liberian applicant is considered as polite in Liberia. Then participants are invited

²¹²Berghof, "Berghof Glossary on Conflict Transformation - 20 Essays on Theory and Practice".

²¹³H. M. E. Winter et al., "Psychosocial peer mediation as sustainable method for conflict prevention and management among refugee communities in Germany", p. 3.

to share some of their own (sometimes similar) experiences and if and how those issues were resolved or why not.

In both groups participants shared stories in which they felt discriminated against or misunderstood by a member of the job center or another German government agency. Based on their new understanding of cross-cultural misunderstandings that can lead to bias and confusion, participants often expressed more empathy and understanding towards "the other side".

In the next exercise, participants are asked to break into groups of three or four members of different cultures and discuss and act out different rituals and behaviors of greeting and welcoming people in their cultures. They are asked to talk about how these different greetings are understood in their culture and how they might be perceived in other cultures. Afterward, each group is asked to present their findings in front of the whole group.

If time allows, I conclude with a very low-threshold input on individualism and collectivism – as the main goal is to build up basic knowledge in simple terms, having regard to the different levels of German language skills of the participants and to allow the participants to give some examples of their own understanding of these concepts, taking into account their own cultural background.

The following information on individualism and collectivism is brainstormed with the whole group: Interestingly, participants of both groups concluded: In individualism, a "good person" is autonomous, has his or her own values and preferences, makes decisions that are best for her- or himself, is responsible for his- or herself - no matter what the group wants, his or her needs are in competition with the needs of the group, and he or she wants to realize his or her own dreams. In collectivism a "good person" is in contact with others, relationships are important, decisions are made collectively and according to the needs of the group and what is best for the whole group, everyone is responsible for the group, and listening to each other is appreciated.

After a short break, I ask participants to take out a sheet of paper and write down the names of five people they really trust and like, who are not family members. I explicitly mention that those names will not be read out and are for them to look at privately. Then I tell them to please write the age, gender, profession, country of origin, relationship status, and educational background next to each persons' name and reflect on how these characteristics are either similar or different to the participants' own background. The discussion leads participants into the topic of prejudices and conflict management.²¹⁴

²¹⁴Mayer, Trainingshandbuch interkulturelle Mediation und Konfliktlösung didaktische Materialien zum Kompetenzerwerb, p. 157.

We then help the participants to observe that they have (typically) listed people who have a lot in common with themselves. We note that this makes sense because we feel most comfortable in our own culture and with “our own people”. This list serves as an example of unconscious bias.

We then explain to the participants: The term “unconscious bias” (or “implicit bias”) refers to a set of attitudes and stereotypes — whether positive or negative — that we are unaware of.²¹⁵ Everybody has unconscious biases, and they can turn into prejudices if we are not aware of them. These biases lead us to treat outgroup members (others who are different from and strangers to us) unfairly and we are not even aware of it. Therefore, we must become aware of these unconscious biases. If we become aware of them, we can control them.²¹⁶

I then allow for a discussion and reflection on biases and prejudices and related experiences of the participants. The following extract serves as an illustrative example of how participants discussed the issue of biases:

“(…) (A participant) spoke about how people have moved away from him on the bus and subway. ‘They think I am a terrorist’, he said, describing how it made him feel like an outcast who did not belong. (He) shared that he did not react at all; he simply felt increasingly sad, believing that he was unwanted in Germany. The group then discussed what might motivate someone to sit away from others on public transport, and how to respond to such behavior. They engaged with each other about the dangers of generalizations and pointed out that this behavior is sadly ubiquitous in contexts all over the world. They brainstormed different ideas for how to react in similar situations in the future. Participants sympathized with one another, speaking of their own experiences and feelings of marginalization. Hearing about these experiences from others gave the participant a feeling of belonging. It helped him understand that he was not alone in feeling left out and that there were people, including Germans, who could empathize with and even sympathize with his views.²¹⁷”

After the topic of unconscious biases has been addressed, we move into a discussion about tools that can help to uncover interests behind positions and thus allow for better understanding of the other side in conflict for the first time. First, participants are given an explanation on the differences between interests and positions. To illustrate this, I tell a version of the

²¹⁵Kang, *Implicit Bias: A Primer for Courts*.

²¹⁶C. Lee, “Awareness As a First Step Toward Overcoming Implicit Bias”.

²¹⁷H. Winter, *Sharing What Divides Us* « Harvard Negotiation & Mediation Clinical Program, p. 2.

well-known and wildly used “orange story”²¹⁸: “Two sisters are fighting over an orange and neither seems to want to give in. The father/ mother is witnessing the fight and wants to put an end to it. What would you do if you were the father/mother?”

The participants would answer that they would cut the orange in half. I conclude, “later the father/mother learns that one sister needed the peel of the orange to bake a cake and the other needed the pulp to make some orange juice. Had the father/ mother only asked why each of them wanted to have the orange so much, he or she would have understood that it was possible to please both children. That is the difference between interests (i.e. the motivation underlying why each sister wanted the orange) and positions (i.e. each sister’s surface statement that she wanted the orange). Positions are what we say we want in conflict, whereas interests are the reasons, and motivations why we want those positions.” Secondly, I explain two of the most common methods to uncover interests behind positions that are used in mediation; active listening and asking open-ended questions. Active listening is the most important tool of communication skills. It means that the person listening dedicates his or her whole body and mind to listening.²¹⁹

“Generally, active listening requires a desire to understand another human being, an attitude of respect and acceptance, and genuine empathy for the speaker. It demands that the mediators set aside their own thoughts and agendas, suspend evaluation and judgement and try to understand the speaker’s points, emotions and attitudes.”²²⁰

One technique to demonstrate that you are engaging in active listening is to repeat or rephrase what the speaker has said. However, in some cultures, like in parts of Asia, repeating what has already been said can be seen as rude. Additionally, there’s the difficulty of expressing emotions and requirements clearly in the Active Listener context. Each culture has its own language for handling emotions. For example, in some cultures (e.g., among the Shambaa in northeastern Tanzania), emotions such as anger or disgust may not be directly expressed. Or, there are many different ways to express anger in places like Indonesia.²²¹ Therefore, I typically ask the participants how they would feel about someone repeating what has been said and being explicit about feelings. Thus far, participants have informed me that they found it more helpful than harmful or hindering.

Following this discussion, I give several examples of good active listening skills and demonstrate these with the co-facilitator. Then we move to the

²¹⁸Ury, *Getting to yes: negotiating agreement without giving in*.

²¹⁹Walter et al., *Basic Guide to Mediation*, p. 16.

²²⁰*ibid.*, p. 17.

²²¹Mayer, *Trainingshandbuch interkulturelle Mediation und Konfliktlösung didaktische Materialien zum Kompetenzerwerb*, pp. 144, 145.

technique of asking open-ended questions. In addition to listening attentively, open-ended questions can uncover interests that are rooted in the positions of the conflicting parties.²²² We explain that open-ended questions cannot be answered with “yes” or “no”.

Open ended questions is an effective way to identify the motives behind a person’s positions, meaning their interests, basic needs, feelings and fears, which need to be addressed in order to facilitate finding a resolution.²²³ Together we practice a few open-ended questions in the plenum. After that we jump into the next exercise: Participants are paired up with a person they do not know well yet. They are then asked to tell their partner about a difficult situation or a conflict in their life. While the partner speaks, they are invited to listen actively and ask open-ended questions. Before switching roles, they try to determine the interests and positions of their partner. After the exercise, we reflect on a few questions with the whole group: Did your partner feel understood? Did you identify some of the interests and positions of your partner? What could the listener have done better?

In both groups, participants reported forming strong bonds with their partners and building trust as they shared something meaningful and profound allowing for the pairs to get to know each other. Participants reported feeling understood and validated through the experience of active listening.

The Conflict Competences I workshop concludes with a role-play on a conflict between a newcomer and a conductor on a train. This is a role-play that is first demonstrated by the co-trainer and myself and then acted out by the participants. The goal of this role-play is to experience a conflict after having learned about biases and cultural misunderstandings as a main driver for conflict, as well as having practiced the key tools of effective conflict resolution (i.e. active listening and asking open-ended questions). This role-play aims at showing the difficulties and limitations of the newly learned skills that come with a heated discussion and opposing positions. It also lays the foundation of the next workshop (Conflict Competences II) and the role of emotion in conflict. In the course of the training, the participants reported experiencing similar situations, and emphasized the issue of power imbalances when interacting with authority figures, as well as the importance of remaining calm and friendly when negotiating with a “difficult and more powerful party”. However, they stressed that when an official discriminates against a refugee, “the law is on our side”; meaning on the side of the refugees.

²²²Mayer, Trainingshandbuch interkulturelle Mediation und Konfliktlösung didaktische Materialien zum Kompetenzerwerb, p. 23.

²²³ibid., p. 23.

We end the workshop with final remarks or questions by the participants, how they felt during the role-play and what they found challenging. After that we thank everyone for coming and ask the participants to fill out a feedback survey.

3.2.8.5 Conflict Competencies II

The second workshop “Conflict Competencies II” is focused on: 1. exploring the role of emotions in conflict; 2. discovering the role of power in conflict; 3. learning two additional, effective communication techniques that can be used by a mediator to uncover interests of conflicting parties (i.e. [insert techniques]); and 4. introducing the concept and method of peer-mediation.

The workshop commences with an icebreaker; a game of rock-paper-scissors, in which winning participants play against other winning participants and losing participants play against other losing participants until only two participants are left to play against each other. The winner is then asked about his or her strategy and what they think they did differently than the others.

Our psychologist or medical doctor from the R3SOLUTE team then provides an overview on the role of emotions, and stresses in conflict. The medical team member explains that positive emotions can invite creative and open thinking, and that negative emotions (such as stress) are not entirely bad, as they can increase attention to detail, alertness, and motivation in difficult situations such as an exam. However, negative emotions typically close the mind to creative possibilities. Emotions can dictate our behavior, for example intense emotions can hijack our logical thinking (“Amygdala Hijack”) and cause impulsive behavior; thus, in tense situations, learning to manage emotions is a recommended first step.²²⁴

The amygdala is largely responsible for the fight or flight response. It can physically/chemically impede other brain functions. For instance, when someone is emotionally charged, it is not that they don’t want to be rational, sometimes they physiologically cannot act rationally. Factors like stress can stimulate the amygdala and limbic system and amplify its effects on the rest of the organism. Exposure to chronic high-level stress consequentially leads to impulsive behavior and a reduced coping ability. The psychologist/doctor then alludes to potential high stake / existential situations that may have been encountered by individuals throughout the course of resettlement and open the floor for a discussion on this topic with the participants.

Afterwards, we ask the group to brainstorm activities and techniques that

²²⁴Barnow et al., “Managing Emotions - Emotions under Control”; Mayer, Trainingshandbuch interkulturelle Mediation und Konfliktlösung didaktische Materialien zum Kompetenzerwerb, p. 161.

they find helpful when experiencing high levels of stress. They come up with ideas such as listening to positive music, meditating, counting to one hundred, going for a walk or run or taking a nap. We collect the suggestions in a list that participants can refer to when they experience restlessness and stress. This brainstorming activity is followed by a role-play called “Broken Family Picture”, which is aimed at demonstrating how negative emotions can lead to more conflict.

In order to conduct the “Broken Family Picture” role-play, two pairs of “actors”, (# 1,# 2; and # 3, # 4) are selected to participate in a voluntary demonstration and are asked to leave the room for instructions. The remaining participants are requested to observe the acting parties. Each participant is instructed, privately, as follows:

1. Participant # 1 of the first pair receives the following instructions: You are getting home from a horrible day at the German Citizen Registration Office. An official was yelling at you for not understanding him or her. You did not know how to fill out the forms and did not get any help. On your way back to the refugee shelter, someone made a racist comment towards you. The entire day has put you in a very angry mood.

2. Participant # 2 of the first pair is told: You’ve been at home all day, bored and cleaning the shared apartment waiting for your spouse to get home. They said they would be home three hours earlier and since then the intricate meal you had prepared has gotten cold. You are very angry because it is your son’s birthday and you wanted the whole family to be together for dinner. Both are asked to empathize with the mindset of their role.

3. Participant # 3 of the second pair of actors is given the following information: You just had a great day at the Registration Office and have learned that you are very close to being approved for asylum . One of the officials complimented you on your German and you feel like you have improved your language skills a lot. You feel like you might feel a little bit more at home soon.

4. Participant # 4 of the second pair is told: You have a special surprise planned for your spouse when they get home and are excited to give it to them because you have been feeling particularly close to them lately. They are also asked to take a moment to get into character.

As participants # 1 (# 3) finally returns home he or she finds the family’s precious picture frame broken on the floor. The story emerges from there encouraging the actors to stay in character and improvise.

Both pairs are asked to act out the role-play one after the other starting with participants # 1 and # 2 and immediately followed by participants # 3 and # 4. Naturally, the role-play of participants # 1 and # 2 escalates

very quickly and turns into a heated fight with accusations and no positive outcome. While the role-play of participants # 3 and # 4 goes on smoothly with people being able to forgive each other instantly and share the news about their good day.

In both groups this role-play was acted out very enthusiastically. The group who “has had a bad day” accidentally put a hole in the wall of the training’s room kicking it out of frustration. Especially, the group that “has had a great day” participated in this role-play to perfection and displayed great joy and enthusiasm. The trainer asks about what the other participants conclude after seeing two very different scenes portraying the same situation (the family picture is broken).

In both groups, the participants shared that they observed that they are more likely to argue with their loved ones and let out the bad experiences on their loved ones under stress and following previous negative events. They concluded that there is a lack of an outlet which is why they show their frustrations with the people closest to them. Some participants gave the example of being stuck in traffic and arguing in the car with their spouse.

After a round of reflection, the trainer typically concludes the following in simple terms: When a problem occurs, people behave very differently. Some people are calmer, some people get angry faster. But nobody always stays calm. It always depends on how the person is feeling in the moment. If someone has had a good day and is relaxed, then the person is more likely to remain calm in a stressful situation, like the example of the second pair in the role-play. If someone has had a stressful day and is dissatisfied, then this person tends to get angry (like the example of the first pair in the role-play). Many small conflicts arise because people forget that individuals react poorly without meaning to e.g., because they are stressed or have had a bad day.

Then, the psychologist or medical doctor present to the participants two real cases regarding refugee-patients suffering from two different majorly distributed mental disorders. The cases are presented one after the other, and the participants are not given further information on the exact diagnosis of the patient in each case. They are only informed about the life circumstances, past experiences, symptoms and problems of each patient.

Each case-study is followed by a round of reflection with questions to be discussed in small groups of four to five: “What do you think Ahmad’s / Mohamad’s problems are? What are the reasons for his problems? What are his symptoms? What do you think he is suffering from? What could help him? What does he need?” The psychologist or medical doctor then collects responses from each group, answers related questions and concludes that Ahmad is suffering from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and

Mohamad is suffering from depression. The discussions are then followed by an explanation about those mental states, including their characteristics, potential causes, impact, and common misconceptions, as well as strategies on how to support individuals suffering from either PTSD or depression. The psychologist or doctor states that it has been shown that 50 % of refugees in Germany suffer from a mental disorder that was caused due to their experience of fleeing their home country.²²⁵ There are at least over 350 million affected people worldwide suffering from depression.²²⁶

The psychologist or doctor explains to the participants that depression is a serious disease that is thankfully treatable. Common symptoms of depression are typically a sad mood, loss of interests, loss of drive or motivation persisting over at least two weeks.²²⁷ In contrast, Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) typically causes symptoms of recurrent sudden flashbacks (images, feelings, thoughts) of traumatic events, which can be associated with nightmares, memory loss of sequence of events associated with the trauma, depressed moods (highly jumpy or irritable), as well as de-personalization.

Impact of both distressed mental states can include: trouble concentrating reduced self-esteem, feelings of guilt and worthlessness, feeling of helplessness and negative mental perspective on one's future, insomnia/hypersomnia, excessive pondering/circular thoughts, reduced appetite and/ or weight loss, reduced libido, avoidance behavior / fear of public places, as well as self-harm and/or suicidal thoughts.²²⁸

Potential causes of either mental health condition can include violence, psychological abuse, accidents, resettlement, warfare, natural disasters, death of a loved one, events that may shock worldview or self-image, and events that cause extreme emotional shock.²²⁹

Distressed mental states and mental illnesses have a real and significant impact on people's lives – they cause emotional and/or physical pain, drain mental resources, and reduce social skills. Mental disorders are normal, common, and treatable (e.g. they are no signs of insanity or of personal weakness, they are not self-induced or contagious, etc.) If left untreated, they can lead to addictions, extremism, difficulty with communication and social skills, and trouble finding employment.²³⁰

In this session, most of the participants in both groups knew a surprising amount about mental illness, one said: “in our country this topic is tabooed, even if it is wrong, but it is very stigmatized, people with mental illness

²²⁵Abbott, “The troubled minds of migrants”, p. 160.

²²⁶Health, Depression.

²²⁷Taylor-Desir, What is Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)?.

²²⁸ibid.

²²⁹ibid.

²³⁰ibid.

are directly labeled as crazy.” They explained how stigmatized this topic is in their home country. For instance, one participant from Afghanistan observed: “Lots of prejudice and little help, 95% of the population has mental health problems. 95% in Afghanistan also believe that people with mental problems are crazy and not normal.” Another participant raised a provocative question and shared his discomfort with talking about mental health related issues: “what does that have to do with mediation now? I don’t understand!”

In the second group the question of what constitutes a disease vs. just a “problem” was raised. Many claimed that Ahmad in the case study only has problems but does not have a mental illness yet, however, German participants expressed their opinion that he already has an illness or is about to become mentally ill. A German participant stated that the issue of mental health is regarded as more positively in Germany. Surprisingly, most participants in the group also saw the issue of mental health more positively.

For example, one participant from Afghan reported positively about his psychotherapy that has been going on for four years. Another Kurdish woman shared positively about her experience with going to psychotherapy in Germany two times per week over the course of two months. These testimonies led to others sharing about their experiences with counseling. Only two skeptical observations were shared. One participant said: “But the psychiatrist has not experienced the war, he can never understand what we have been through.” Another participant stressed: “We must always be strong, especially the men in Afghanistan, we must not cry and have no weakness. That’s incredibly hard especially when mental health problems are added to it.”

Following these discussions, our psychologist or medical doctor usually stresses that we can all help and do our part in helping someone in need suffering from a mental disorder and further explains strategies on how to support individuals suffering from distressed mental states:

“If the person is not a stranger to you and/or you are comfortable speaking with them, you may try speaking to the individual and offering to actively listen. Do, however, make it clear that you will keep matters confidential at all times. Avoid profiling or judging this person (e.g., ‘What’s wrong with you?’ vs. ‘I feel like something is bothering you; I’m here if there’s anything you want to talk about’). It is important to inform the person of resources available if they need them. Whether the individual seeks help is their voluntary choice. If the person is a stranger and/or you are not comfortable speaking with them, discreetly informing and seek advice from help organizations such as handing out a flyer to them.”

Usually, we give out flyers of Vivo, Transfer, Ipso and Charité, ZIPP to the participants.²³¹

Additionally, our psychologist or medical doctor gives an overview on managing strong emotions of others. It is necessary to acknowledge the emotions of others by listening and seeking understanding of their perspectives. Letting the other person express their emotion and perspective can help calm them. People are more willing to listen to others once they feel they have been listened to. It is important to validate their emotions and avoid making them feel as though they are being unreasonable or irrational. People can't help feeling the way they feel, and it is not on the listener to judge their emotions in any way. Being calm and kind listener helps the other person to calm down as well, as we are naturally wired to reciprocate the actions and feelings of others. This is also an important skill of being a peer mediator.

Our trainer suggests being observant about reflecting to the speaker the feelings that have been expressed – for example, checking if the listener understands someone's feeling accurately can create trust, but telling them how they feel can make the listener seem arrogant. The challenge is to focus on empathizing and putting oneself in the shoes of the other person. Instead of simply sympathizing and telling the other person that you feel sorry or bad for him or her, the trick is to understand what they are truly feeling by remembering a time you've felt that way, taking his or her perspective and checking to ensure that you have correctly understood their experience, by understanding by using the technique known as 'looping'.²³² The trainer introduces the concept of looping to the participants, which is a technique that helps to focus the dialogue and the process.²³³

Looping is an active listening technique where the listener repeats or restates what the speaker has said, in their own words, while maintaining the same meaning. In doing so, the listener is seeking to ensure that they have understood the message accurately. This technique helps to show the speaker that the listener is fully engaged in the conversation and is making an effort to understand their perspective.²³⁴

For example, if the speaker says, "I'm feeling really overwhelmed when doing my shopping at the supermarket as I have difficulty speaking in German," the listener might respond by saying, "So, what I hear is that shopping at the local supermarket stresses you, because you are having difficulty communicating with the store attendants in German. Is that

²³¹International, Vivo International; TransVer, TransVer; Berlin, Zentrum für Interkulturelle Psychiatrie und Psychotherapie ZIPP; Ipso, Ipso.

²³²Walter et al., Basic Guide to Mediation, p. 23.

²³³ibid., p. 23.

²³⁴ibid., p. 23.

right?” Looping demonstrates interest and attention toward the speaking party, which in turn creates a stronger connection between the listener and speaker. It calms the person speaking and slows down the process of how her or his story unfolds. This causes the speaking person to understand his or her own feelings in a more structured way. Therefore, looping is a method of showing sincere respect for someone and what he or she has to say. “By means of looping understanding develops systematically, authentically and compassionately throughout the mediation.”²³⁵ There are four steps to the mediator’s loop:

1. Try to understand.
2. Express understanding.
3. Ask for confirmation that the party feels understood.
4. Receive that confirmation.

The mediator has to repeat the loop if the party does not feel understood after the first loop.²³⁶

One method of expressing understanding (that is, step two in the looping technique) is to use the tool of paraphrasing. To explain and illustrate this technique the co-trainer and I give several examples of how to begin a paraphrased statement. These could be: “you are saying that...?” and, “Am I right that you mean...? etc.”. We then demonstrate how to effectively paraphrase in a small demonstration. The co-trainer tells me how his or her day went, and I paraphrase his or her statements in front of the group. Explaining these concepts, I especially demonstrate how to use my own words when doing so, instead of simply repeating what the co-trainer said.

Afterwards, we discuss the power and benefits of paraphrasing: Paraphrasing reflects the essence of what a person is saying, it tests the understanding of the listener, it restates an idea so that it can be heard in a different way, it shows empathy by reflecting feelings, it demonstrates the attentiveness of the listener, it works by communicating the statement back at the listener, and thereby encourages reflexivity and autonomous solutions.

After we explain the benefits of paraphrasing, we move into an exercise to practice these tools. The participants are split into pairs, and each of the team members is tasked with telling the other, in detail, about a particular experience (e.g. their day, their childhood or why they came to Germany), The other participant then practices paraphrasing. The pairs then swap roles.

In both groups this exercise worked extremely well. I observed that whilst the participants were able to choose from the three above-referred

²³⁵ibid., p. 23.

²³⁶ibid., Juliane Ade, p. 23.

topics, they overall preferred sharing their reasons for coming to Germany. After engaging in the paraphrasing exercise, participants reported that they related very well to their partner and said that they felt understood. In both groups, this exercise sparked several individuals to share their personal reasons for fleeing their home country and how they felt living in Germany.

Afterwards, the co-facilitator and I introduce the technique of reframing. Reframing is a method that allows for the mediator to express the words of a party in a way that provides a different perspective. Reframing is a useful communication tool used to help the speaker see their situation in a new way. This tool can help to shift negative thoughts or feelings into a more positive or constructive perspective. For example, if a participant says, "I'm hate shopping at the local supermarket because I can't communicate well in German," you might reframe it by saying, "I understand that it makes you uncomfortable to communicate in German. It takes a while to learn a new language. You have shown courage by speaking in German with the shop attendants. The more often you go, the more practice you will gain and the easier it will become." Reframing the conversation in this way seeks to help the speaker see their situation from a different perspective, and reframe negative thoughts.

Whilst paraphrasing and reframing are similar communication techniques (in that they both involve restating someone else's message in a different ways), these techniques have different purposes and effects. In summary, paraphrasing involves restating someone's message in your own words while maintaining the original meaning. In contrast, reframing involves changing the context or meaning of the speaker's message, to provide a new perspective.

We specifically emphasize the importance of expressing what a party says in a more neutral or even more positive way when using the tool of reframing. There are many the benefits to using reframing: it can remove toxic language from a conversation and help to clarify the meaning of the stated experience. It can also provide commonly agreed upon definitions or even topics, as well as meaningful metaphors for the conflict. However, most importantly, reframing has the power to convert negative outlooks to more neutral or even positive ones. Positive reformulation enjoys a worldwide acceptance that is often understood as constructive: the situation, the statement, the conflict is to be given a new framework.²³⁷

Of course, there are risks involved in using both paraphrasing and reframing, which we then talk about in more detail with the participants. Those risks include: the failure to capture the speaker's meaning could cause them

²³⁷Mayer, Trainingshandbuch interkulturelle Mediation und Konfliktlösung didaktische Materialien zum Kompetenzerwerb, p. 145.

to become more agitated; poor paraphrasing could frame the situation to be even more negative and escalate the issue; speakers may simply want you to listen and paraphrasing or reframing too early makes the mediator seem inattentive or distracted. It is important to be considerate of the context and the person's attitude in the conversation.

The discussion about risks is followed by some examples of reframed phrases of parties in mediation, that the co-trainer and I respectively demonstrate:

Statement 1 He interrupts me all the time. He obviously does not respect my opinion.

Statement 1 reframed It sounds like you are saying that it is important to you that he listens to you and understands your take on things.

Statement 2 She is always late and obviously doesn't feel obliged to work. That is why I have to do all her work as well.

Statement 2 reframed It sounds like to me that you value punctuality as it also causes fair work distribution?

Statement 3 He is a very aggressive person.

Statement 3 reframed If I understand you correctly, you perceive his behavior towards you as emotionally charged?

After those examples, participants are given the time to practice the tool of reframing in a one on one exercise, in which one participant asks the other about their future plans and potential obstacles, and the other practices reframing. Then they switch roles.

In comparison to paraphrasing, most of the participants found practicing reframing much harder but also more effective. A woman from Syria, however, asked: "How can I rephrase it more positively when someone is aggressive? He is just aggressive." This exercise was not easy for the participants; however, they understood the importance and power of this tool. Putting this exercise in its context of helping people to resolve their disputes helped enormously to make the participants better understand the relevance of the exercise.

After a short break, we introduce the topic of power and its correlations to conflict. We show a slide that portrays four images: a king, a secretary, a crowd demonstrating on the streets, and a shepherd. I ask the group who of these people has power. After a brief discussion, we develop the following theories together; each of the people depicted in the images have power, based on the idea that power is situational and at least in part reliant on

perception: There are different forms of power, such as “power over,” which is the ability to make someone do something they would not otherwise have done (the King); “power with”, power is gained from the support of one’s peers or other equal collaborators (protesters); “power under”, meaning gaining power from others through a dependent relationship (secretary); and finally, “power from”, which is the power gained through autonomy, separation, and freedom (shepherd).

We then speak about typical misconceptions regarding power. In particular, we note that common misconceptions of power include that it: is solely about who has more money or resources; is about who has more authority or status; or that having power means that someone is more capable of hurting another person / group of people. Finally, and before we jump into an in-depth example of the refugee co-trainer about an encounter with the German police, we agree on the definition of power as the ability to achieve a certain result.

After the discussion of power, my co-trainer Mohamad tells the following true story to the participants:

“My name is Mohamad, and I am a refugee from Syria. I study law and politics at the Europa University in Frankfurt Oder. Frankfurt Oder is a town in Brandenburg, located directly at the border to Poland. The university’s facilities are situated in Germany and Poland. Last year I had a seminar on the campus on the Polish side in Sublice.

After the seminar, I wanted to return to the German campus with my friends, when we were stopped at the border by a police control!

I was travelling with German friends, as well as friends who also have a migrant background just like myself. My friends with a migration background and I were stopped, while my German friends were allowed to continue walking without any problems. The police asked us for our identity cards, and I did not have my identity card on me.

The policeman was really unfriendly to me, although I calmly explained to him why I did not always have my passport with me. A friend of mine, who was born and raised in Germany, didn’t have her ID on her either and came back to us to ask the policeman why he was checking us. The answer from the policeman was, ‘We control the people who don’t look like us!’ When the policeman found out that I am from Syria, he told me ‘Oh yes, you absolutely must have an identification card with you!’

In this situation the policeman was more powerful than me and I did not know exactly what to do, because I felt powerless.

Fortunately, another policeman joined us and was much nicer than his colleague, because he told me that I had to have at least a copy of my ID card with me. I told him that I had a copy with me and that his colleague was not willing to look for a solution with me. He then de-escalated the dispute, and I showed my copy and was allowed to cross the border.

I have learned that power plays an important role in conflicts and if the more powerful party uses his or her power with bad intentions, it can happen that both parties to the dispute cannot find a solution and are dependent on a neutral third party who can stabilize the balance of power. I have also learned that we cannot generalize the abuse of power by authority figures, but that, like the second policeman, one can choose not to play with one's power or simply use it in good faith.²³⁸

After Mohamad's story, we encourage the participants to engage in a discussion in which they share similar experiences and reflect about potential solutions to such an imbalance in power. The discussion is followed by an explanation about "power traps", and how these traps can influence a negotiation. The facilitators differentiate between high and low power traps. High Power Traps are defined by one party having too much power, which causes them to not consider the low-power party important enough to value their concerns. This party might also feel as though they are above having to apologize or admit partial wrongdoing, which might cause intimidation of the low-power party. High Power Traps can be a tool used to create dependency.²³⁹

Low Power Traps on the other hand are caused when one party perceives themselves as having too little power. In such a scenario they may see themselves as a victim rather than a disputant. They could also make it their mission to conquer the more powerful party rather than productively negotiate. They might also ignore addressing their needs in the negotiation in lieu of trying to get more power. In either case, we explain, such actions disable the skill to develop optimal solutions and hurt their own outcome. They could further potentially plant the seeds for future disputes, which exhaust time and resources.²⁴⁰

After having explained high and low power traps, we explore how to manage such power traps in conflict resolution. We emphasize that power

²³⁸Naanaa, Mohamad's Story

²³⁹Training's booklet R3solute.

²⁴⁰Training's booklet R3solute.

comes down to the ability to meet the needs of someone to convince them to agree to something that benefits the other side, which is why understanding interests and needs is so important. Typically, in mediation a balance of power between disputants or negotiating parties is preferred so that it enables parties to feel fairly treated and to more openly share their ideas.

We then share some ways to balance power, such as improving ones BATNA (in negotiation theory, the best alternative to a negotiated agreement) thereby increasing power – or to reduce the attractiveness of the other party’s BATNA, and bundling or de-linking the negotiation of different issues.²⁴¹

3.2.8.6 Introduction to Peer Mediation

After a short break, I provide a brief introduction to Peer Mediation and an overview of its five stages.

I note that in this session we are only going to run through a general introduction and that we will go into the details of each stage, as well as the principles of peer mediation in the upcoming workshop sessions. I explain that before the peer mediation starts, the mediator has to prepare the process. It is critical to understand the issue, and surrounding context prior to any mediation and prior engaging the parties. This includes gathering as much information prior the start of the peer mediation as possible.

Stage 1 The first stage regards the opening statement of the peer mediator declaring that mediation begins with ensuring that the parties understand the mediation process and agree on the ground rules and principles of mediation, which are confidentiality, openness of results, voluntariness, individual responsibility of the parties, neutrality, and being informed. This means, both parties must agree to the mediation in advance. The mediation can be terminated at any time by one of the parties. Furthermore, mediation is a strictly confidential procedure. Everything that is discussed in the context of mediation does not leave the space of mediation and may not be used in court. Mediation guarantees you impartiality of the mediator. This means equal treatment of all disputants. Additionally, the parties control the process and decide on a potential solution. The mediator only supports the negotiation process. Finally, mediation is not determined to a certain result, but results-open, flexible and creative. The procedure is adapted to the needs of the parties.²⁴²

Stage 2 The second stage concerns supporting the parties to share perspectives of the dispute (what happened?) and identifying issues. Parties are provided with a forum and equal amount of time to share their side of the story. The mediator listens and uses neutral wording to deescalate the

²⁴¹Training’s booklet R3solute.

²⁴²H. Winter, Mediation Winter - What is mediation?

discussion. The goal is to determine positions and counter positions, topics and overarching themes of the conflict. The mediator helps to develop an agenda as to in which order the themes ought to be discussed in more depth in stage 3 of the mediation.²⁴³

Stage 3 The third stage resembles the heart of the peer mediation; the mediator asks questions to uncover underlying interests and drivers of the conflict. It is crucial to create an atmosphere of trust that allows parties to feel free to share their perspectives. This is best achieved by using the introduced tools such as active listening, looping, asking open-ended questions and reframing. With those tools the mediator helps the parties to understand which important interests and needs are rooted in their positions. That way the parties are given the opportunity to see the differences in their points of view in a new light and to perceive them from the perspective of the other party to the dispute. Therefore, stage 3 promotes mutual understanding and the resumption of direct communication and already prepares the basis for finding options and solutions.²⁴⁴

Stage 4 The fourth stage of the peer mediation incorporates a discussion and brainstorming that aims at generating possible solutions. Only after a thorough exploration of the issues and interests does the conversation move to this stage.²⁴⁵

Stage 5 The final stage of the peer mediation regards drafting the agreement between the parties, based on the options generated, the parties will need to decide on whether they can agree to a solution that serves both of their interests.²⁴⁶

Stages 3–5 are not necessarily linear, there may be several rounds of iterations between the phases. The participants may naturally begin to speak with one another through the mediation process, and it is in Stage 3 where it will be most likely, as in this stage interests, unknown to the other side are usually discovered. As long as the conversations are productive it is helpful to let them talk to one another directly and only facilitate the conversation as needed.

I remind the participants that the goal is to have the parties gain mutual understanding of each other and rebuild a broken relationship. In a fishbowl with the trainer being the mediator and then switching roles, participants get to experience the mediation process in a final role-play for the day, “Abdul & Diana”, which constitutes a cross-cultural and intergenerational conflict.

After the role-play participants reported how amazed they were by the

²⁴³ibid.

²⁴⁴ibid.

²⁴⁵ibid.

²⁴⁶ibid.

mediation process and peaceful resolution of a dispute through assisted negotiation. Some share their experiences with elder dispute resolution and their familiarity. Others talk about similar conflicts they have experienced living in the refugee shelter and their desire to act them out in a mediation role-play. Overall, participants gained more confidence with mediation and its principles. (see Chapter 5 for more details)

3.2.8.7 Peer Mediation

We start the peer mediation workshop by asking participants to recall a time they felt truly powerful (e.g. having won a football match or succeeded in a competition or reached a personal goal) and encourage them to think about what specifically made them feel that way and how it changed their behaviors. After collecting several responses, I explain that cortisol (the stress hormone) and testosterone (the assertiveness hormone) both change in response to feelings of power and status. A high level in testosterone and a low level in cortisol relate to feeling powerful and confident. This means that those hormones can influence how people behave and how much confidence they have. The same researchers²⁴⁷ that were measuring these hormones, noticed that they can be changed and influenced by something as simple as the posture. With this discovery, they created what they called “power poses” or postures that cause your cortisol and testosterone to change.

High-power poses are poses that are open (limbs far away from body) and expansive (body taking up a lot of space) cause the testosterone to raise and the cortisol to drop.²⁴⁸

Lower-power poses, meaning poses that are constricted and clenched cause the cortisol to raise and the testosterone to drop. It was found that holding high power poses for only 2 minutes makes a measurable difference in hormone levels (as much as a 19% increase in testosterone and a 25% decrease in cortisol. The researchers found that interviewees did significantly better in job interviews having done a high-power pose prior the stressful experience of being interviewed.²⁴⁹ We then ask the participants to all stand up and hold a high-power pose for 2 minutes. Afterwards, we ask everyone how they felt and encourage participants to remember this technique next time they are entering a stressful or emotionally charged situation in their personal lives as well as during the mediation process.

Most participants took great joy in the power-posing exercise. Some participants shared that they generally feel better when they walk and stand

²⁴⁷Cuddy et al., “Preparatory Power Posing Affects Nonverbal Presence and Job Interview Performance”.

²⁴⁸ibid.

²⁴⁹ibid.

confidently or when they breathe deliberately. Some stated that they notice feeling more powerful and they found it to be easier to control a difficult situation. Others shared that they knew of this technique and had practiced power poses before important events as well.²⁵⁰

In the following, I re-share the working definition of mediation: “A process in which an impartial third-party facilitates communication and negotiation between the parties and promotes voluntary decision making by the parties to the dispute.”²⁵¹ Mediation is a facilitated negotiation, that allows parties to overcome the previously discussed barriers preventing them from negotiating amongst themselves. Mediation uses a specific process that is designed to improve the effectiveness of conflict resolution.

We all review the peer mediation process and stages. Afterwards, the co-trainers and I conduct a demonstration of a peer mediation process. Two facilitators will once more role-play the Transportation Trouble role-play; this time a third trainer will play the role of the mediator (alternatively, the disputants could be played by participants). The mediator will try to move the mediation through all the stages to demonstrate what the process looks like. I then remind participants that what they saw was a short mediation to illustrate how it works; some mediations can take months and mediation between countries can take years. I ask them what they have observed what went well and what was productive to the process.

Afterwards, I ask participants to try out being a mediator in a role-play. We repeat the opening statement and its key components to the participants.

The key purposes of the opening statement in peer mediation are to build credibility and rapport with the participants, help them understand the mediation process and its ground rules, as well as the role of the mediator. Furthermore, it is important to aim at the commitment and cooperation of the parties. This can be done in several ways, although there are some elements that are very commonly used and found to be effective. These are to welcome the participants, thank them for coming and affirming their willingness to cooperate. Then, it is important for the mediator to define her or his role as an impartial third party and describe the mediation process and its main principles, such as stating impartiality and the voluntary nature of mediation, as well as confidentiality and its limitations. Furthermore, the mediator can state that he or she may take notes during the mediation but has to mention during the opening statement that these notes will be destroyed with completion of the mediation. Then, the mediator suggests ground rules; such as being respectful, avoid interrupting someone talking and that the

²⁵⁰ibid.

²⁵¹Conduct, “Model Standards of Conduct for Mediators American Arbitration Association, American Bar Association, Association for Conflict Resolution”.

mediator will ensure each party has an equal opportunity to speak during the process of the mediation. Subsequently, the mediator explains that she or he will direct and moderate the conversation as needed to help keep it moving forward by asking people to talk about certain things and moving to a different topic. Finally, the mediator can answer any questions the parties might have and ask them for a clear commitment to begin the mediation.

Concluding this recap, I ask the trainer and two workshop participants to come to the front of the room and sit as though they were in a mediation to each give a sample opening statement as a demonstration. Afterwards, the workshop participants practice giving an opening statement to each other in pairs of two.

All participants were excited to give a personalized and purposeful opening speech without any problems. They understood the principles of mediation and recalled them effortlessly.

Only a few participants of the second group forgot to mention the principle of neutrality. Instead, they emphasized who they are and that the parties need to be patient and that each would get an equal share of speech in the mediation.

After a lunch break, I introduce the content of the role-play “Amir und Baz”, which deals with the aftermath of a violent incident between two newcomers at a local language café that needs to be resolved by a peer mediator. Then, I explain each phase of the mediation process in more depth as previously introduced in the workshop unit “Conflict Competency II”. Each explanation of a phase is followed by practice. The participants get sufficient time to act out each mediation phase based on the role-play in groups of three, with two being the conflicting parties and one being the peer mediator. Meanwhile, the co-trainers and I walk around the room and observe each group. We give feedback and answer questions that might arise. We pause after each phase that has been acted out and discuss experiences and observations. What went well and what did not go well? Why? After the mediation is entirely completed, the participants reflect upon their experiences and observations and share their insights with the group.

The mediation role-play went very well in both groups. The most apparent challenge of some of the participants was trying to be facilitative rather than evaluative. Some found it easier to speak justice and decide on issues that come up in the mediation rather than asking the parties to brainstorm and find options themselves.

Then, we end the workshop with a small exercise called “Come to my side!”. The participants are divided up into pairs of two facing each other and holding each other by their hands. I explain to the participants that the goal is to get the counterpart to one’s side physically. It is up to them how

they want to achieve this goal. Everything is allowed, they can talk and they can move. Then we give all pairs a few minutes to struggle with the task at hand.²⁵²

Afterward, we debrief about which different approaches were taken and why, as well as if they had any strategy in mind. Then, the co-trainer addresses the learning goals of this exercise. There are different ways on how to approach this conflict, such as with force, by negotiation, or both meet in the middle, etc. In any conflict, it is important to recognize our assumptions and that different people may have different assumptions and strategies to how they resolve conflict. Some strategies will be compatible, some not; we may need to adapt and adjust and observe our counterpart.

3.2.8.8 Peer Mediation II

The final workshop “Peer Mediation II” starts with repetition of the process of mediation by quizzing the participants on the phases of mediation and the principles of mediation. Then the participants are given time for the short mediation role-play “Yusuf and Josef”. They partake in the mediation role-play from the beginning to the end.

After a break, I explain the concept of co-mediation, which requires careful joint preparation by the two mediators, precise agreements on the division of tasks, and procedure in case of disruptions, as well as mutual trust and the willingness to give space to the other mediator.

The Golden Rule of Co-Mediation is to never stab the co-mediator in the back. This is best achieved by remaining eye contact to notice if the other mediator urgently wants to say something, taking breaks to reflect on the mediation, or reflect directly in front of the parties.

One big advantage of the concept of co-peer-mediation (CPM) in an intercultural context is that it facilitates and bridges language barriers and cultural misunderstandings of conflicting parties stemming from two different language and culture groups. If the peer-mediators are from the same cultural background of each party, meaning one peer mediator has the same background as party A and the other as party B, they not only ensure a more impartial process, but can also work together as a cross-cultural team and compensate for cross-cultural difficulties and challenges among parties.²⁵³ After this short input, we introduce the final role-play “Hans and Arbi”, which is designed to practice co-peer-mediation. The participants practice the co-mediation in a fishbowl setting in front of the others; meaning that roles are exchanged on the fly while the role-play is acted out.

²⁵²Based on an exercise provided by a UNOMS training I co-conducted.

²⁵³H. M. E. Winter et al., “Psychosocial peer mediation as sustainable method for conflict prevention and management among refugee communities in Germany”.

Both groups preferred acting out a recent conflict that happened in the shelter and create their own role-play. (See more in Chapter 5) Some participants wondered what they should do when the parties seem stuck and upset. Some participants recommended asking open-ended questions and others recommended separating the parties and trying sessions in caucus. Most of the suggestions were then successfully implemented.

We finish the workshop with a brainstorming exercise aimed at how to set up the peer mediation clinic in the shelter. Therefore, we ask the following questions to the participants:

1. What cases do you think are appropriate for peer mediation? (Family disputes, neighborhood disputes, disputes about the use of shared resources, etc.).
2. Who of the group wants to commit to be a peer mediator for the community?
3. How can residents and neighbors find the peer mediators? Rotation/ open door/ fixed hours? Office or home?
4. How do we draw attention to this new offering in the community? Booth at the summer/ winter festival?

After all these questions have been answered, we come up with an action plan together on how to start mediating in the shelter. We ensure that we will accompany the process by providing mentoring for the coming six months. (see Chapter 5)

3.2.8.9 Setting up the Peer Mediation Clinic

Finally, the participants receive their certificate stating the content and time-frame of their peer mediation training along with informative handouts about the peer mediation training's content in German and Arabic. Some group pictures are taken, and everyone gets together for some small goodbye celebration with cookies and tea.

After the training is completed and the first ideas have been gathered by the participants regarding the set-up of a peer mediation clinic in the last workshop session, I organize a meeting with the newly committed peer mediators, who have decided to operate as such in the shelter, the shelter's management, as well as the social workers of the shelter. This meeting serves the establishment of the clinic tailored to the specific needs of each individual shelter. The purpose is to ask each of those parties how to go about conflicts and how to best benefit from the help of the peer mediators and work together. The goal is to work out a plan to minimize conflicts in the community while working together in a time-efficient manner that saves

people's time and energy when dealing with disputes of inhabitants.

In this meeting, we raise several questions such as do the social workers inform the peer mediators about conflicts they could assist with, and how do they inform them while sticking to the policies on data protection? Which conflicts are applicable for peer mediation and how to differentiate between such that should strictly be dealt with by the management and the social workers and such that can be dealt with by the peer mediators?

Then the group brainstorms about the question of accessibility meaning how inhabitants of the shelter learn about peer mediation and that this is a new conflict resolution mechanism in the shelter open for everyone. Thus, we speak about the organization, notice and distribution of tasks. We discuss how the peer mediators and their offer to solve disputes of inhabitants can get known by the inhabitants of the shelter and what options there could be to facilitate this process by the management and the social workers. Usually, we speak about distributing flyers to the inhabitants, placing pictures of the peer mediators with their names and phone numbers at the entrance of the shelter, or having the peer mediators introduce themselves at an event or a special occasion taking place at the shelter. We also ask the social workers whether they would find it helpful to refer cases to the peer mediators or ask them for help if needed.

We encourage everyone to be open to the idea that the parties to a peer mediation should be able to choose their peer mediator/s themselves because trusting the peer mediator is the most important element for the peer mediation to succeed.

Furthermore, we discuss if there is an opportunity in the shelter for the peer mediators to operate in a safe space such as a peer mediation office, and wherein the shelter could this office be located. We brainstorm whether the peer mediators work by appointment or open-door policy and how their schedule should be set up.

We also address, whether the peer mediators should receive some monetary or non-material recognition for working as a peer mediator voluntarily and what options there are for potential funding.

Finally, we raise the question if cases need to be documented by the peer mediators and what some advantages and disadvantages are to documentation. Together we sum up our findings and impressions and develop a strategy to move forward for the peer mediators to get started with their peer mediations. (see also Chapter 5)

3.2.8.10 Mentoring

After the training, we visit the shelter once per month and learn from the peer mediators about the cases they mediate and address the questions they have. We discuss their concerns and support them. The shelter's management and social workers are also invited to those group discussions such that transparency is maintained. The mentoring period for both groups lasted 6 months. However, we are still in contact with them and have meanwhile trained new peer mediators in one of the shelters since many of the old peer mediators had found an apartment and moved out. (see also Chapter 5)

3.3 Summary

This chapter explores the empirical basis of the research, specifically the design, theory and implementation of the peer mediation training program in two refugee shelters. The curriculum was created by me with input from intercultural mediators and co-facilitators with refugee backgrounds, and it utilized a role-play-based and interactive approach. The training was co-facilitated by a trained member of the refugee community in order to establish trust and credibility with the participants, as well as provide cultural and linguistic translation. The chapter also delves into the motivation, target population, and goals of the program, as well as the structure, content, and methods used in the training. Additionally, examples are given and the actual course of the training is described after relevant training steps.

4

Empirical Study

4.1 Choice of Method

In my opinion, the basic assumptions of qualitative research are most likely to meet the complexity of exploring the attempt of establishing peer mediation mechanisms in refugee shelters. According to Flick et al.²⁵⁴ “qualitative research claims to describe worlds ‘from the inside’ — from the perspective of the acting people.”²⁵⁵ Qualitative research does not claim to reproduce reality, but uses what deviates from the norm as a source of knowledge and is often more open in its approach than other research methods that work with standardized and objective concepts.²⁵⁶

Social reality is the direct result of the interplay of meaning and contexts jointly created through constant social interaction.²⁵⁷ Accordingly, social reality has a character of continuous process and is regarded as reflexive. This means that, “objective” living conditions only become important through subjective meanings for one’s own living environment and conditions.²⁵⁸

As such, in qualitative research, social reality is thus constructed through interactive actions or communication. It tries to reconstruct this interactivity with the aim of making sense of social reality. The most important motive for a researcher to examine those subjective contexts through qualitative research is making an effort to see the world from the perspective of the research participants.²⁵⁹

There are a wide range of different approaches to this. However, there

²⁵⁴Flick et al., *Qualitative Forschung*. Ein Handbuch, p. 14.

²⁵⁵ibid., p. 14.

²⁵⁶ibid., pp. 14, 17.

²⁵⁷ibid., p. 20.

²⁵⁸ibid., p. 20.

²⁵⁹ibid., p. 16.

is no “magic bullet” of doing qualitative analysis. Juliet Corbin refers to qualitative research as a process a researcher has to “feel him- or herself through”: “How a person does qualitative analysis is not something that can be dictated. (...) A book only provides some ideas and techniques. It is up to the individual to make use of procedures that best suit him or her.”²⁶⁰ Nonetheless, one thing is certain, qualitative researchers commonly share the following characteristics which help them throughout their journey of making sense of social reality: “a humanistic bent, curiosity, creativity and imagination, a sense of logic, the ability to recognize diversity as well as regularity, a willingness to take risks, the ability to live with ambiguity, the ability to work through problems in the field, an acceptance of the self as a research instrument, trust in the self and the ability to see value in the work that is produced.”²⁶¹

4.1.1 Grounded Theory Method

With the dedication to keeping these characteristics of a researcher in mind, I am choosing the methodology of the Grounded Theory as a qualitative research method. “Grounded theory serves as a way to learn about the worlds we study and a method for developing theories to understand them.”²⁶²

The Grounded Theory methodology was originally developed by Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss in 1978 and describes a methodology for the collection and evaluation of predominantly qualitative data. The purpose of this data is to develop a theory that can be applied to a particular real-life context.²⁶³ I deliberately chose the Grounded Theory methodology because my research project is aimed at developing a sustainable conflict management concept that can be applied in practice. According to the Grounded Theory Method, a theory or hypothesis is not proven, but rather developed and constructed by analyzing the data collected. This circular research method can flexibly adapt to changes occurring in practice.

For years, the co-founder of Grounded Theory, Glaser stuck with his 1978 explication of the method, defining grounded theory as a method of discovery, emergent from data and separate from the scientific observer. Strauss (1987), independently, and in the 1990s together with his co-author, Juliet Corbin, further refined the method towards regarding grounded theory more as a method of verification grounded in the data.²⁶⁴ Their joint book “Basics of Qualitative Research” has resulted in severe reproaches by Glaser, against Juliet Corbin and Anselm Strauss, accusing them of diluting the

²⁶⁰A. Strauss et al., *Grounded Theory, Basics of qualitative research*, p. 4.

²⁶¹*ibid.*, p. 13.

²⁶²Charmaz, *Constructing Grounded Theory*, p. 17.

²⁶³*ibid.*, p. 11.

²⁶⁴*ibid.*, p. 11.

concept and going so far as to demand that Strauss not use the term grounded theory for this book.²⁶⁵

For the purpose of this research project, I chose the Grounded Theory methodology (from here on GTM) modified by Anselm Strauss and Juliette Corbin, which is primarily based on the idea that research and practice go hand in hand.²⁶⁶ According to Strauss and Corbin and unlike Glaser's approach, theoretical concepts are discovered in the course of analyzing data and must prove themselves, in turn, based on the data. Therefore, even at the end of a research project, the path back to the data is always retraced; thus the process of analysis is triadic and circular.²⁶⁷ However, before diving into the subtleties and details of GTM, I would like to stress that "(i)n their original statement of the method, Glaser and Strauss (1967) invite their readers to use grounded theory strategies flexibly in their own way."²⁶⁸

Following the idea that a GTM researcher should make use of procedures that suit him or her best, I took advantage of aspects and ideas following Charmaz' interpretation of GTM in order to constitute my own approach, which is based on borrowing the techniques that in my view most appropriately match with my area of research from Strauss & Corbin and Charmaz.

Charmaz assumes that rather than being discovered, we construct our grounded theories. She thereby emphasizes a stronger involvement of the researcher than Strauss and Corbin and Glaser and Strauss. She reckons that: "(...) we are part of the world we study, the data we collect and the analyses we produce. We construct our grounded theories through our past and present involvements and interactions with people, perspectives, and research practices (...) I chose the term 'constructivist' to acknowledge subjectivity and the researcher's involvement in the construction and interpretation of data (...)." ²⁶⁹ Like Charmaz, my approach assumes that any emerging theory offers an interpretive representation of the studied world, "not an exact picture of it," and that the researcher is part of the world studied. Nevertheless, this interpretive representation can be verified with the data by retrospectively reflecting on the entire process according to the approach of Corbin and Strauss.

According to the GTM, a theory or hypothesis is not proven but rather developed by analyzing the data collected; this circular research method adapts flexibly to changes occurring in practice. During the data collection and analysis, comparisons are made between similar events to see whether patterns are emerging. This means that the present data, e.g. ethnographic

²⁶⁵Hildenbrandt, Anselm Strauss, p. 41.

²⁶⁶A. Strauss et al., *Grounded Theory, Basics of qualitative research*

²⁶⁷Hildenbrandt, Anselm Strauss, p. 33.

²⁶⁸Charmaz, *Constructing Grounded Theory*, p. 16.

²⁶⁹ibid., pp. 3, 14.

field notes or interviews are given codes consistently. The author writes memos about the interpretation and categorization of these codes.²⁷⁰ Similar codes are grouped into preliminary subcategories and more abstract categories. “Categories explicate ideas, events, or processes in (...) (the) data – and do so in telling words. A category may subsume common themes and patterns in several codes.”²⁷¹ They should be as conceptual as possible with “abstract power, general reach, analytic direction, and precise wording”.²⁷²

Those categories are in turn questioned and qualified in terms of their properties and dimensions to optimize content development and cultivate more complex categories. Dimensions are “variations within properties. They give specificity and range to concepts.”²⁷³ Properties are “characteristics that define and describe concepts.” For example, the phenomenon “flight” has the property of duration and could vary from long to short.²⁷⁴

Accordingly, abductive inferences are used to form a hypothesis such that one conclusion is inferred from the foregoing process and the other way around.²⁷⁵ During this process, a core category and the connected theory arise through constant comparison and examining whether the theory can be related back to the basis of the data.

4.1.2 The Tools of the Grounded Theory Method

“We adopt sets of categories which serve as ways of managing phenomena. The most fully developed products of this tendency are ideologies, the systems of ideas that rationalize, justify and sanctify our lives.”

– C. Trungpa²⁷⁶

Before I go into detail as to how I applied the tools of the Grounded Theory Methodology, I will briefly give an overview of the most common techniques of the methodology:

4.1.2.1 Coding

“A code sets up a relationship with your data, and with your respondents.”²⁷⁷ A code is essentially a heading that describes a certain topic or concept. This means that any collected data such as e.g. an interview is given codes, which

²⁷⁰A. Strauss et al., *Grounded Theory, Basics of qualitative research*, p. 195.

²⁷¹ibid., p. 189.

²⁷²ibid., p. 189.

²⁷³ibid., p. 220.

²⁷⁴ibid., p. 220.

²⁷⁵Hildenbrandt, Anselm Strauss, p. 34.

²⁷⁶Trungpa, *Cutting Through Spiritual Materialism*

²⁷⁷Star, “Living grounded theory: Cognitive and emotional forms of pragmatism”, p. 80.

in turn link the data to the respondents. There are several ways of coding: open coding, line-by-line coding, selective coding, and axial coding.

4.1.2.2 Open Coding

Open coding means the “process of breaking up, examining, comparing, conceptualizing and categorizing data”. This means that blocks of the present data, e.g., ethnographic field notes or interview transcripts, are given codes steadily. “(The) codes show how (one) select(s), separate(s), and sort(s) data and begin(s) an analytic accounting of them.”²⁷⁸

4.1.2.3 Line-by-line Coding

Line-by-line coding is usually done in the first phase of data collection and follows the same idea as open coding, except that the coding is done line-by-line (naming each line of the data) linking collected data with an emerging theory. This technique enables the researcher to study her data closely.²⁷⁹

4.1.2.4 Axial Coding

Axial coding is a strategy applied to the data to set them into an overall context and a coherent whole. It was first developed by Strauss in 1987²⁸⁰ and then expanded on by Strauss and Corbin in their first and second edition of “Basics of Qualitative Research” in 1998.²⁸¹ Strauss regards axial coding as constructing “a dense texture of relationships around the ‘axis’ of a category.”²⁸² Axial coding has the purpose of asking how categories are related to subcategories and then reassembling them in new ways in the paradigmatic model such that new ideas arise (see Chapter 5).²⁸³

“In analyzing the interrelationships between concepts, questions are asked about 1) causes of the 2) phenomena under investigation, their 3) contexts, 4) relevant intervening conditions, phenomenon-related 5) actions and strategies, and their 6) consequences which are brought to the material with the intent to generate a theory, thereby bringing the previously isolated phenomena into a structural context.”²⁸⁴ This process can ideally be done after and in addition to open coding.²⁸⁵ In Strauss and Corbin’s third edition, Corbin argues that open coding and axial coding are not separate techniques but go

²⁷⁸Charmaz, *Constructing Grounded Theory*, p. 111.

²⁷⁹*ibid.*, p. 129.

²⁸⁰Strübing, *Grounded Theory: Zur sozialtheoretischen und epistemologischen Fundierung eines pragmatistischen Forschungsstils*, p. 24.

²⁸¹Charmaz, *Constructing Grounded Theory*, p. 147.

²⁸²A. L. Strauss, *Qualitative analysis for social scientists*, p. 64.

²⁸³Charmaz, *Constructing Grounded Theory*, p. 147.

²⁸⁴*ibid.*, p. 24; referencing Strauss & Corbin, 1996, pp. 78.

²⁸⁵*ibid.*, p. 147.

hand in hand and complement each other. She argues that, after breaking up data, we also have to put it back together by relating those concepts to one another.²⁸⁶ However, “the analytic strategies of asking questions and making comparisons continue to be major analytic strategies for elaborating the analysis.”²⁸⁷

4.1.2.5 Selective Coding

Selective coding describes the process that usually occurs after substantial open and axial coding. During the process of selective coding, a core category finally evolves by connecting the categories through axial coding. This core category is the central phenomenon — the phenomenon that is at the center of a paradigmatic model that incorporates all other categories found in the data. The most important main categories from axial coding are then grouped around the core category as conditions, strategies, and consequences to explain the phenomenon that has been observed. Accordingly, the theory is constructed.²⁸⁸

Strauss and Corbin compare finding this central phenomenon to uncovering the thread of a story: it structures all the ideas developed into a comprehensive narrative. This narrative is an analytic narrative and thus a theory — a grounded theory. Integrating all data into a story is not easy even for experienced researchers — the core category wants to be discovered²⁸⁹

Often, for example, there are several categories that are candidates for the core category because they have many links and connections to the other categories. If the core category was easy to find, doing research would be unnecessary — but how exactly the discovery takes place cannot be determined by strict rules, rather it is a combination of science and creativity. Paradigmatic organization helps to approach the discovery in a structured manner.²⁹⁰

4.2 Research Design and Process

In the following, I will present my research process. To make my data analysis transparent, I will illustrate research steps in an exemplary way. For instance, I will include excerpts of my intermediate results.

²⁸⁶A. Strauss et al., *Grounded Theory, Basics of qualitative research*, p. 198.

²⁸⁷Charmaz, *Constructing Grounded Theory*, p. 199.

²⁸⁸Global, what is selective coding.

²⁸⁹A. Strauss et al., *Grounded Theory, Basics of qualitative research*, p. 117.

²⁹⁰*ibid.*, p. 117.

4.2.1 Research Question and Research Aim

The idea of implementing and examining peer mediation mechanisms stemmed from my research during my Master in Dispute Resolution at the Straus Institute for Dispute Resolution, where I analyzed different approaches to mitigating conflict in refugee communities. My interest was sparked by the so-called “refugee crisis” that emerged in 2015 and 2016, while I was studying in California, feeling very far away from home and still hoping to be able to support affected individuals with my skill-set of conflict resolution from afar. Back in Germany, I wanted to scientifically investigate the practical implementation of the concept of peer mediation in refugee shelters and their neighborhoods to be able to explore the theory behind it.

Thus, the first question that arose was the appropriate methodology for this goal. As previously explained, I decided on a qualitative research approach based on the Grounded Theory Methodology. Following the recommendations of Strauss and Corbin, I first chose a research question that is broad enough to serve as an entry point for my research. Such a question has to be formulated in an open way so that new discoveries are not excluded from the outset. The research question has the goal of serving as a “guide” into the research field: “The purpose of this question is to lead the researcher into the data where the issues and problems important to the persons, organizations, groups and communities under investigation can be explored.”²⁹¹ The method of Grounded Theory allows for a successive adaption of the research question to the state of knowledge because any possible shift of the research question in the research process is an opportunity for theory building.²⁹² Thus, my initial question was:

“How could a peer-mediation training and clinic for refugees be designed and adapted such that peer-mediation mechanisms can be established among refugee populations living in refugee shelters?”

The question of design and optimization, as well as implementation, seemed to be broad enough to encompass phenomena including approaches to peer mediation, intercultural aspects affecting peer mediation and the training itself, as well as attitudes of participants and residents toward the peer mediation training and clinic, and so on.

In addition to this, I wanted to keep this question open enough to cover a holistic approach to my research and associated sub-questions such as: how should the imbalance of power in peer mediation in a refugee shelter setting be dealt with? How can trust be built in the training? What motivates the participants to want to become peer mediators? What role does psychological

²⁹¹A. Strauss et al., *Grounded Theory, Basics of qualitative research*, p. 25.

²⁹²A. Strauss et al., *Grounded Theory, Basics of qualitative research*, p. 21.

trauma play? How can the peer mediators aspire to impartiality? How can we reach women and men equally and should we? Why would people decide to join the training? What would they like to speak about and learn? How can biases among participants, management, and even trainers and participants be overcome? How can the training be adapted according to different language skills and levels of education?

As will be shown in what follows, during the research process I have adapted my research question by focusing more on the specific needs of the participants over the course of my research.

4.2.2 Data Collection

The following section describes my data collection process as well as personal and ethical considerations regarding the research design of this dissertation.

4.2.3 Approach

4.2.3.1 Objectivity in Qualitative Data is a Myth

“The material guides the research process, and the research process guides the researcher. It is the creativity of the researcher that reveals the structuredness of the material.”²⁹³

All aspects of the researcher’s self, including knowledge, training, and biases directly influence the research process.²⁹⁴ “Theories, professional knowledge that we carry within our heads, inform our research in multiple ways, even if quite subconsciously.”²⁹⁵ Therefore, the sensitivity of the researcher and awareness of what she or he brings to the research process is paramount and indispensable. Sensitivity means that the researcher puts herself or himself into the research: “It means being able to present the view of participants and taking the role of the other through immersion in data.”²⁹⁶

Therefore, according to Corbin “(s)ensitivity is a fascinating interplay of researcher and data in which understanding of what is being described in the data slowly evolves until finally, the researcher can say, ‘Aha, that is what they are telling me’.”²⁹⁷ The qualities the researcher brings to the table, such as knowledge and experience (professional, gender, cultural, etc.) can help the researcher to understand the meaning of the data and its interpretation quicker because she does not have to “spend time gaining familiarity with

²⁹³Hildenbrandt, Anselm Strauss, p. 33.

²⁹⁴A. Strauss et al., *Grounded Theory, Basics of qualitative research*, p. 32.

²⁹⁵*ibid.*, p. 33; Sandelowski, “Theory unmasked: the uses and guises of theory in qualitative research”, p. 213.

²⁹⁶A. Strauss et al., *Grounded Theory, Basics of qualitative research*, p. 32.

²⁹⁷*ibid.*, p. 33.

surroundings or events.”²⁹⁸ The knowledge and experience of the researcher “enables them to respond to what is in the data.”²⁹⁹ It is important to note that the researcher does not impose his or her ideas onto the data, rather her or his qualities and characteristics enable him or her to receive messages provided by the data; “all the while keeping in mind that our findings are a product of data plus what the researcher brings to the analysis.”³⁰⁰

To prevent imposing knowledge and experience onto the data and therefore getting blind to some of its intrinsic content, Corbin recommends three pieces of advice: first, to always compare experience against data, second, to always investigate the properties and dimensions of categories and third, to focus on the meaning that participants attach to a concept or event rather than oneself.³⁰¹ What helps to comply with this advice and focus on the data, “is having a comparative base from which to work.”³⁰² For example, in my case I, the researcher, did not have to flee my home country. However, I have lost my father to cancer and can identify with what loss (in this case losing a family member) feels like. Reflecting upon such a baseline could help me as the researcher understand the meaning of loss and grief for the research participants.³⁰³

4.2.3.2 Insider and Outsider Researcher

When reflecting upon the myth of objectivity, it is important to understand one’s relationship to the research setting and its social surrounding. The literature differentiates between insider and outsider researchers. Insiders are familiar with and part of the social contexts studied e.g. cultural norms and language use. Whereas outsiders do not have a natural relationship with the researched setting and are less familiar with cultural norms. According to Patricia Zavella “...insiders are more likely to be cognizant and accepting of complexity and internal variation, are better to understand the nuances of language use, will avoid being duped by informants who create cultural performances for their own purposes, and are less apt to be disrupted by those they study. Some assert that ethnic insiders often have an easier time gaining access to framing questions in ways that respect community sensibilities.”³⁰⁴ However, an insider can also easily get lost in the researched setting and impose his or her own ideas on the data. It is more challenging for the insider to maintain a healthy distance from the studied social context.

²⁹⁸ibid., p. 33.

²⁹⁹ibid., p. 33.

³⁰⁰ibid., p. 33.

³⁰¹ibid., p. 33.

³⁰²ibid., p. 34.

³⁰³ibid., p. 34.

³⁰⁴Zavella, “Feminist insider dilemmas: Constructing ethnic identity with Chicana informants”, p. 79.

Any “outsider (researcher or other) has some advantage in the ‘lost’ to insiders, relates them (the data) to still other properties, and thereby discovers something of value to theory (...)”³⁰⁵ Also, the outsider-researcher “strives to maintain a continuing ‘de novo’ sensitivity and appreciation of all events.”³⁰⁶

Since I am primarily an outsider to the setting, meaning a stranger to the social life researched, it is commonly advised to find ways to reduce some of the distance to build trust and gain familiarity with the participants’ worlds: “The moral is this: Be neither discouraged nor overconfident about your relationship to the setting. Whatever that relationship, it is simultaneously an advantage and a drawback.”³⁰⁷ Being directly involved in the research setting as an outsider generates trust and creative insights that lead to the structuredness of the material: “Creative fieldwork means using every part of oneself to experience and equally understand what is happening. Creative insights come from being directly involved in the setting being studied.”³⁰⁸ However, how much of an outsider am I really?

4.2.3.3 Problem of being the Co-Founder of the Organization

I am not only studying and researching peer mediation but also working as an administrator and trainer for the organization that I co-founded. This organization establishes peer mediation mechanisms in refugee shelters. Hence, my role is a role of an extended outsider researcher, with some insider components. Inevitably, I am studying not just any topic of interest, but the actual work that I am doing. On top of that, being a founder, I am studying the work I created for myself to do.

That is why it is important to reflect on potential peculiarities or even potential biases I might have when conducting this qualitative research. Of course, I must admit that in everything I do, I want the organization to be successful. We are successful if a positive impact is reflected in the work we do — by effectively establishing peer mediation mechanisms. So, in a way, this goal is similar to the goal of my research project. The difference between my goal as a founder and my goal as a researcher is that the research question is broader. It is overall referring to the “how” of the process — meaning there could be many possible outcomes, e.g. one might even find that peer mediation mechanisms are not a suitable method and cannot be established in a refugee communities and its neighborhoods. As a researcher, I do want to understand the process and comprehend why and how or why

³⁰⁵Schatzman et al., *Field research; strategies for a natural sociology*, p. 53.

³⁰⁶*ibid.*, p. 53.

³⁰⁷Lofland et al., *Analyzing social settings: A guide to qualitative observation and analysis*, p. 23.

³⁰⁸Patton, “Qualitative research and evaluation methods”, p. 302.

not certain sequences of actions (training, setting the ground for establishing a mediation clinic) do or do not work.

The research question is thus more open than my goal of creating peer mediation mechanisms as a founder of the organization. Whilst the organization has the mission to establish peer mediation mechanisms, I do not have the same mission as a researcher. A potential critic might think that I am not able to differentiate my role as a founder (naturally wanting the organization to succeed) and my role as a researcher (being influenced by my role as a founder). They might see the potential danger of me regarding my research and its outcome too positively (or too negatively). This is a valid point. However, this is also why picking Grounded Theory Methodology as a research method is suitable. When conducting this research, I am per se bringing a lot of experiential data into the research process. Experiential data means everything that is in my head prior to and when undergoing the research.³⁰⁹

Thus, again, this data cannot be ignored, and — more so — has to be explicitly taken into account when conducting Grounded Theory Methodology. The experiential data includes — in my view — my personal experience as a founder of the organization (setting up an organization and pursuing its mission), as well as failing at that very same mission many times before. Therefore, I want to stress that it can also be an advantage that I have substantive personal experience as a founder and social entrepreneur working with different stakeholders in the refugee context in Berlin.³¹⁰ As Susan L. Star expressed, “I want to explain the relational and not the concrete-real world.”³¹¹ I think this motto is best put into practice when understanding and accepting that no researcher can be neutral to her or his research, but rather is him- or herself an important element driving the research process.

According to Strauss, “...the mandate to use experiential data gives the researcher a satisfying sense of freedom, linked with the understanding that this is no license to run wild but is held within bounds by controls exerted through a carefully managed triad of data collection/coding and memoing. This triad serves as a genuinely explicit control over the researcher’s biases.”³¹² Besides, on a more personal note — at heart, I feel more like a researcher than a founder now. Though I want both projects (my research and the organization’s work) to be successful — above all, I want to create value for the participants with my research and my work. This value can only emerge when I am being honest with others and myself; analyzing every aspect that might emerge. Inevitably, there is no doubt that a researcher con-

³⁰⁹A. L. Strauss, *Qualitative analysis for social scientists*, p. 11.

³¹⁰*ibid.*, p. 11.

³¹¹Star, “Living grounded theory: Cognitive and emotional forms of pragmatism”.

³¹²A. L. Strauss, *Qualitative analysis for social scientists*, p. 11.

veys emotions like sadness, anger, or happiness to the research participants, “in turn that participants react to researchers’ responses by continually adjusting their stances as the interview or observation continues.”³¹³ Therefore, it is important to keep in mind the reflexivity of the research process. Corbin sees this element of reciprocity in a positive light: “researcher and participants co-construct the research (at least data collection) together.”³¹⁴ In this respect, I tried to be sensitive to the nature of my role as a researcher and founder of the organization when collecting and analyzing the data.

4.2.3.4 Problem of being also a Trainer

As a peer mediation trainer, I was an outsider to the social context of the refugee shelter and, at the same time, I was also an active presence in the peer mediation workshop. This means the researcher is an active participant in the social phenomenon being studied while at the same time his or her role as a researcher is also known.³¹⁵ According to Schatzmann and Strauss, the researcher as an active presence is feasible if “the researcher wishes to capitalize on a combination of two kinds of expertise: sociological and nonsociological. An instance might be that of a nurse, trained as a sociologist, who works on a hospital ward as a nurse while also openly gathering data about features of ward life and interaction.”³¹⁶ Like the nurse, I am a peer mediation trainer in the setting of the social phenomenon, which I am studying as a researcher and thus combining nonsociological with sociological expertise. There are some disadvantages to participation as a researcher. The researcher is tied to his or her work in his or her active capacity (e.g. as a trainer) and cannot “freely float in space and time”, thus the research activities might suffer.³¹⁷ The range of his or her attention is also affected, for he or she cannot easily decide what exactly to focus on, “that decision may be directed largely by the participatory work in which he (or she) is engaged.”³¹⁸

According to Strauss and Schatzmann, the active participant-researcher “is more easily able to ‘go native’, (...); because he might not be able to balance what he sees, experiences, and ‘feels’, by hearing the whole range of views of others involved in the organization or social movement; because his experiences are so overwhelming that he gets ‘overinvolved’ and so falls victim to that intense engagement; and because being trained or experienced in his participatory activity has so unwittingly absorbed certain viewpoints that his participatory activities tend to reinforce those taken for granted to

³¹³A. Strauss et al., *Grounded Theory, Basics of qualitative research*, p. 31.

³¹⁴*ibid.*, p. 31.

³¹⁵Schatzman et al., *Field research; strategies for a natural sociology*, p. 58.

³¹⁶*ibid.*, p. 61.

³¹⁷*ibid.*, p. 61.

³¹⁸*ibid.*, p. 61.

such an extent that he never thinks to challenge them, to regard them as having the status only of hypotheses.”³¹⁹ On the other hand, there are also many advantages to being an active participant in the social phenomenon being researched. For example, this role may allow the researcher to access certain data which might not be equally accessible to a mere researcher without a defined and active role. The participatory “researcher is right there where things happen, and where members talk about what has happened. Others will talk, argue, confide in him because he is a co-worker, a friend, an actual or potential ally.”³²⁰ Through her participation the researcher gains valuable insights into the social phenomenon being studied “and with other participants in the collective failures and triumphs of group endeavors.”³²¹

Because he or she is a member of the group and simultaneously a researcher, the researcher might appear more trustworthy, and thus participants may share more insights, cultural norms and secrets with him or her. Without my role as a trainer, I would not have been able to establish the necessary trust with the research participants. They experienced that I truly cared about transmitting knowledge about peer mediation and especially demonstrating rapport by showing up every single day for them: coordinating the workshops, collaborating with the shelter’s management and social workers, being a spokesperson for the participants when questions arose, and being open for feedback. This role revealed a lot of my personality, making me appear less scary and more approachable as a person and, ultimately, also as a researcher.

In my view, I chose the approach of an outsider researcher with an active participatory role because it was the most appropriate to the research setting. This fieldwork role not only allowed me to have access to a social context I would not have had access to otherwise but also strengthened the level of trust the research participants had in me.³²²

4.2.4 Data Collection Process

As discussed previously, the research problem and the researcher’s preferences in tackling this problem shape the methods of data collection that the researcher chooses.³²³ According to Charmaz, “(c)ertain research problems indicate using several combined and/or sequential data collection approaches.”³²⁴ A strong strategy for data collection is to combine ethnographic observations and subsequent informal conversations with the par-

³¹⁹ibid., p. 61.

³²⁰ibid., p. 62.

³²¹ibid., p. 62.

³²²Lofland et al., *Analyzing social settings: A guide to qualitative observation and analysis*, p. 26.

³²³Charmaz, *Constructing Grounded Theory*, p. 27.

³²⁴ibid., p. 23.

participants.³²⁵ She claims: “This approach spawns multiple views of each incident for a researcher to ponder. Furthermore, this approach generates solid data for systematically comparing and analyzing incidents.”³²⁶ My aspiration was to generate an immense pool of data from different sources in order to construct a substantive and profound theory.³²⁷ Which data and what type of data a researcher collects, entirely depends on access and the field of research, as well as on how “participants identify and know us (as a researcher)”.³²⁸

According to Charmaz, “(r)esearchers often gather several types of data in grounded theory studies and may adopt varied data-gathering strategies.”³²⁹ Overall, a substantial grounded theory is composed of a variety of rich and diverse data which may include observations, field notes, diary entries, informal conversations, group interviews, and formal interviews.³³⁰

4.2.4.1 Data Collection Phase

“Creative fieldwork means using every part of oneself to experience and understand what is happening.”³³¹

4.2.4.2 Ethical Considerations

Social scientists have an ethical obligation to their study population and society at large because they study the lives of other human beings. As a result of their real life research policies, practices, and even laws may come into existence.³³² Researchers must ensure the rights and privacy of the research participants. When doing field research, it is important to address the role of a researcher and make the research project known to the research participants, such that they have a free choice of whether they would like to participate in the project or not. Additionally, “confidentiality is an important issue when doing interviews or observations and later when writing.”³³³ The most central obligation for field researchers is to guarantee anonymity via the “assurance of confidentiality” to the research participants.³³⁴

This means ensuring that “the real names of persons, places and so forth will not be used in the research report or will be substituted by

³²⁵Charmaz, *Constructing Grounded Theory*, p. 23.

³²⁶*ibid.*, p. 23.

³²⁷*ibid.*, p. 23.

³²⁸*ibid.*, p. 23.

³²⁹*ibid.*, p. 23.

³³⁰*ibid.*, p. 23.

³³¹Patton, “Qualitative research and evaluation methods”, p. 302.

³³²Lune et al., *Qualitative research methods for the social sciences*, p. 33.

³³³A. Strauss et al., *Grounded Theory, Basics of qualitative research*, p. 30.

³³⁴Lofland et al., *Analyzing social settings: A guide to qualitative observation and analysis*, p. 51.

pseudonyms”³³⁵ Typically, research participants give informed written consent to the research project. “Informed consent means the knowing consent of individuals to participate as an exercise of their choice, free from any element of fraud, deceit, duress or similar unfair inducement or manipulation.”³³⁶

Before entering the field, I made it clear to the research participants that next to my role as trainer and co-founder of the NGO, I and my team were also undergoing a qualitative research project and we therefore gave them a consent form in which our research purpose was laid out and which stated that identifiable information, such as names and places, would not be shared with anyone and would remain anonymous. The participants were also made aware that they could inform me at any point in time if they did not want to be part of the research project any longer.

4.2.4.3 Mediums

The qualitative data in both groups was collected through different mediums. First, observations of the workshops served as the principal source of data. The second largest source of data collection was informal conversations, followed by group interviews, testimonials and intensive interviews.

4.2.4.4 Observations

“OBSERVATIONS put researchers right where the action is, in a place where they can see what is going on.”³³⁷

Observations constitute the largest part of my data collection. According to Strauss and Corbin, “(t)he reason why observations are so important is that it is not unusual for persons to say they are doing one thing but in reality, they are doing something else. The only way to know this is through observation.”³³⁸

One concern to keep in mind is the question of what the researcher attends to and how she or he makes the decision on which of his or her observations should constitute her or his data?³³⁹ At the beginning of the research process the researcher will not know how she or he will code his or her observations and thus collect more data than she or he will ever be able to utilize.³⁴⁰ Many observations will only gain meaning at a later stage of the research process and the researcher is intuitively aware of that.³⁴¹

³³⁵ibid., p. 51.

³³⁶Lune et al., *Qualitative research methods for the social sciences*, p. 36.

³³⁷A. Strauss et al., *Grounded Theory, Basics of qualitative research*, p. 30.

³³⁸A. Strauss et al., *Grounded Theory, Basics of qualitative research*, p. 41.

³³⁹Schatzman et al., *Field research; strategies for a natural sociology*, p. 53.

³⁴⁰ibid., p. 54.

³⁴¹ibid., p. 54.

Schatzman and Strauss advise the researcher to take a modest and subtle attitude when making decisions as to which observations are relevant and which are not: “(The researcher) has great patience, as well as tolerance for ambiguity and his immediate ignorance. Far from acting like a scientist and telling himself, he is one, he is genuinely busy being a learner – indeed, a novice – and perhaps a participant.”³⁴² The researcher usually changes angles of observation and decides which perspective to take according to their value to his or her research problem.³⁴³ Even though his or her observations are therefore biased, they are purposefully chosen and controlled.³⁴⁴

My observations were recorded in short notes during the workshop (if time allowed) and field notes after each workshop. During the workshops, I intuitively adapted to the needs of the research participants and was mindful of not increasing any potentially existing fears by openly and constantly writing down what I saw and heard.³⁴⁵ I felt confident that I could recall my observations after leaving the field as did Snow and Anderson (1993) in a study on the homeless (a comparable vulnerable population that requires intensified trust building and thus less note-taking). I followed Lofland’s advice and wrote down short reminders of key events, talks or impressions immediately after I left the field.³⁴⁶

4.2.4.5 Eavesdropping

Furthermore, I utilized eavesdropping, which describes a technique that involves listening to unsolicited sounds while observing. “(It) is functionally equivalent to watching the ongoing existential scene of activity:”³⁴⁷ it is especially highly effective and data generating in the early stages of the research since literally everything is new data and is only being refined at a later stage of the research process when the researcher knows how “to control the verbal flow around him”.³⁴⁸

4.2.4.6 Informal Conversations

“At the site, the researcher regards all conversations between himself and others as forms of interviewing. (...) (I)t is a natural way of getting information and a comfortable form of social engagement for him and for his hosts.”³⁴⁹

³⁴²Schatzman et al., *Field research; strategies for a natural sociology*, p. 54.

³⁴³*ibid.*, p. 54.

³⁴⁴*ibid.*, p. 54.

³⁴⁵Lofland et al., *Analyzing social settings: A guide to qualitative observation and analysis*, p. 110.

³⁴⁶*ibid.*, p. 110.

³⁴⁷Schatzman et al., *Field research; strategies for a natural sociology*, p. 70.

³⁴⁸*ibid.*, p. 70.

³⁴⁹*ibid.*, p. 71.

This technique proved to be extremely helpful for the purpose of my research. It involves casual conversation and means brief and incidental on-the-spot questioning and informal conversations on or off the scene. It is regarded as an extremely helpful and data-generating method that can be very effective for the research process.³⁵⁰ This requires that the researcher is patient, polite, and cautious: “he finds the natural way, and the opportunity for posing a question or two about what he has seen and heard (...) and about the informants themselves.”³⁵¹ Conversations may be short but seen as opportunities for more in-depth communication later.

As my second largest set of data, I had extensive informal conversations on sight with participants, social workers, the management, and co-trainers. Those conversations happened during the training, in breaks, over lunch, in preparation for the workshops and after a training session, or even during the set-up of the peer mediation mechanisms, advertising peer mediation during community events, and during the mentoring process. Later, at home, I wrote down notes of these conversations in my notebook or diary.

This particular technique was especially helpful in the early stages to gain trust and generate trustworthiness by the participants. Because of my role as a trainer and thus being directly involved in the research phenomenon, it was easier to take part in informal conversations generating the largest amount of data next to my own observations.

4.2.4.7 Group Discussions

The group discussion method stems from the idea that phenomena concerning groups is ideally captured in natural discussions of groups themselves rather than in individual interviews.³⁵² It is a documentary method designed by Mannheim (1980) and elaborated into an empirical research strategy by Bohnsack (2003). “In accordance with the methodological and meta-theoretical premises of this strategy, group discussions are used to gain better access — in contrast to individual interviews — to a special dimension of knowledge by focusing more strongly on the social context, namely collective experiences, and orientations, which have an action-guiding function as implicit knowledge of the actors.”³⁵³

Group discussions can be conveniently arranged or can even happen spontaneously and consist of established or random groupings.³⁵⁴ “It is, in fact, one type of ‘multiple respondent’ interview.” (id), either formal or informal, relationships among respondents can be quite complex, and

³⁵⁰ibid., p. 71.

³⁵¹ibid., p. 71.

³⁵²Schmidt-Pfister, “Review: Ralf Bohnsack”.

³⁵³ibid.

³⁵⁴Schatzman et al., *Field research; strategies for a natural sociology*, p. 82.

their views diverse.³⁵⁵ While one on one interviews have advantages, the researcher eagerly creates or seizes opportunities for group and multiple respondent interviews to understand the larger picture of the social context he or she is researching.³⁵⁶ From my point of view, this method is a great technique to operate within the Grounded Theory Methodology according to Straus and Corbin to elaborate and explore further data on group patterns. Within this method, I aimed at reconstructing the groups' point of view.

I conducted two group interviews after of the training sessions and during the implementation phase of the mediation mechanisms. The group interviews were structured and designed in accordance with the Grounded Theory Method — in such a way that they would complete and add to the previous data collection. Therefore, I not only interviewed former workshop participants but also conducted group interviews with the shelter's management, social workers, and peer mediators together if I found it to be necessary and helpful to the research process. (see Chapter 5)

4.2.4.8 Intensive Interviews

There could come a moment in the research process when individual interviews (lengthy conversations with individual participants) could potentially serve as a valuable add-on to the previously described methods as they could go into more depth when it came to theoretical sampling.³⁵⁷

According to Charmaz, a researcher who primarily relies on sustained observation and completes the research with substantive interviews of key informants has more substantial and complex data than someone who has solely conducted a large number of intensive interviews.³⁵⁸ She argues: "Often the question of how many interviews assumes that conducting single interviews is the only method of gathering data. (...) Sometimes researchers do not give themselves credit for observational, archival, and documentary research that they have done. Mixed qualitative methods can strengthen a study with a small number of interviews."³⁵⁹

During my data collection and at a later stage in the research process, four lengthier interviews with key informants, such as participants, were additionally conducted. With the help of two Master's students and a translator, a refugee co-trainer and the shelter's management, as well as two peer mediators were interviewed. Additionally, I asked for three open-ended testimonials of participating peer mediators in the form of an unstructured summary of their experiences.

³⁵⁵Schatzman et al., *Field research; strategies for a natural sociology*, p. 82.

³⁵⁶*ibid.*, p. 83.

³⁵⁷*ibid.*, p. 71.

³⁵⁸Charmaz, *Constructing Grounded Theory*, p. 33.

³⁵⁹*ibid.*, p. 107.

Strauss and Corbin's experience has proven that most data-driven interviews are unstructured and not dictated by any fixed set of questions.³⁶⁰ Rather, one might simply start the interview by asking "tell me about your experience with xyz"³⁶¹ This also goes for Schatzmann and Strauss: "The interviewer does not use a specific, ordered list of questions or topics because the amount of formality would destroy the conversational style. He may have such a list in mind or actually in hand, but he is sufficiently flexible to order it in any way that seems natural to the respondent and to the interview situation."³⁶² Following Straus and Corbin's advice, my team and I applied an unstructured and open approach to the interviews with only a few questions having been predetermined. This allowed for a natural flow such that the direction of the conversation could evolve instinctively (see Chapter 5). The interviews were conducted, recorded and later transcribed in standard orthography with the help of my team.³⁶³

4.2.4.9 Additional Survey for Residents

Furthermore, I conducted an anonymized survey directed at 28 inhabitants of the larger shelter who did not participate in the peer mediation training in order to understand which qualities inhabitants seek in a peer mediator and what the main causes of conflict were.

4.2.4.10 Notes & Reflections

During the data collection, I kept a diary in which I kept handwritten notes regarding my thought process. I wrote about possible interpretations of observations, informal conversations, or simply how I felt during the research process. Those reflections served as data, as well as a means of motivation and guide for the next steps.

4.2.4.11 Literature

I also made considerable use of literature during my analysis. "(Literature) can be a source for making comparisons, it can enhance sensitivity, it can provide a cache of descriptive data with very little interpretation, it can provide questions for initial observations and interviews, it can be used to stimulate questions during the analysis, it can suggest areas for theoretical sampling, it can be used to confirm findings, and just the reverse, findings can be used to illustrate where the literature is incorrect, simplistic, or only partially explains a phenomenon."³⁶⁴ I made sure to integrate fitting

³⁶⁰A. Strauss et al., *Grounded Theory, Basics of qualitative research*, p. 27.

³⁶¹*ibid.*, p. 27.

³⁶²Schatzman et al., *Field research; strategies for a natural sociology*, p. 73.

³⁶³*ibid.*, p. 73.

³⁶⁴A. Strauss et al., *Grounded Theory, Basics of qualitative research*, p. 37.

literature sources into the research process and e.g. memo writing (see below). Literature primarily served as a source of inspiration and gave my line of argumentation stability and support (see Chapter 5).

4.2.4.12 Memos

Memo writing is a very important tool in Grounded Theory. Memos are interpretative texts that the researcher writes during the research process — they can be associative considerations or reflective references to the literature, as well as theoretical concepts. “Memos have different forms and functions depending upon the stage of the research. When writing memos, researchers don’t necessarily think about the kind of memo they are doing. They just brainstorm and let loose with their thoughts.”³⁶⁵ Memos represent analysis and are separate from field-notes.³⁶⁶

In the following, I will give a few illustrative examples of different types of memo writing. The first five memos illustrate how I explored and interpreted data in form of observations, then I will give an example of a diary memo, and lastly show two different explorative memos.

4.2.4.12.1 Memo — Real Trust only among Family Members

Observation: Exercise “Make a list”: woman from Syria (not the Kurdish woman) exclaims out loud “I don’t trust anyone except my family.” So she does not want to participate in the exercise as she cannot write down the names of people that she trusts who are not her relatives.

This woman is expressing her distrust towards anyone who is not a family member and therefore does not participate in the exercise when participants are asked to write down the names of 5 people they like and trust that are not family members. The goal of this exercise is usually to find that participants tend to write down people that are quite similar to them (age, ethnicity, profession, education, gender). The learning goal is to make a transition to implicit biases and that people generally feel more comfortable around people that are similar to them (ingroup favoritism).

This woman most likely reflects upon her experience teaching her to not trust anyone but her own family. Otherwise, it could also have been her upbringing that taught her this. She is telling this information to us the trainers in a defensive and matter-of-factly tone. The consequence is that she does not participate in the exercise. To her real trust can only exist among family members. Trust seems almost sacred to her. Does she have friends? Can she have friendships? Does she think she can trust her friends if she has

³⁶⁵Charmaz, *Constructing Grounded Theory*, p. 117.

³⁶⁶*ibid.*, p. 120.

them? She remains silent about these questions. I think the most important message here is that she only feels safe among her family and that she can only establish real trust among family members. All other participants participated in the exercise and got to the predicted results. Why does this particular woman have a different understanding of whom she can trust? Besides her only 2 more women attend the workshop. They seem to not have the same problem. It could still be a gender thing because the other two women are Kurdish and she is Arabic and from Syria. I will observe her more closely in the next session.

4.2.4.12.2 Memo — Emphasize the Importance of Family

Observation: Kurdish woman from Syria speaks out on the topic of collectivism: “Family is the most important thing, so we always pay attention to what is most important for the whole family rather than the individual.”

Here again, the other female participant (this time the Kurdish woman) mentions the importance of family – not in the sense of trust but rather in the sense of decision-making processes. When deciding, it is important to her to factor in all the different viewpoints and needs of everyone in the entire family. Rather than individualist decision-making, a collectivist attitude is applied. Family above all.

This participant talks about “we”, “we always consider what is important for everyone else”, meaning that she already counts her whole family in when she is explaining their way of decision-making. She is speaking for her entire family – reflecting her statement in her choice of words and language. This makes me think about how a collectivist mindset could influence not only decision-making processes but also conflict resolution practices. How could we address this further in the training such that efficient conflict resolution can be enabled in the community? What is their usual way of addressing conflict in their family? How does a collectivist mindset looking at what is best for the family influence a potential conflict that regards family members? I would imagine that it could lead to a less direct form of carrying out conflicts, but I would like to explore this idea further before making too quick of a judgment.

4.2.4.12.3 Memo — “Bonding” over Children

Observation: The participants of this self-introduced role-play with great joy, and an agreement is reached in some of the groups. The group of the Kurdish woman and her husband (who initiated to act out this dispute) gets to an agreement due to bonding over each of the conflicting parties’ children. The party acting as the shelter’s manager also has children and can understand the father of the family better after a while of negotiating

(both have common ground). Finally, the shelter's manager gives in.

It is interesting to note that the higher power party and lower power party bond over a similarity. Both of the parties in conflict have children and both of them can relate to the challenges and requirements children bring along and thus the family's consequential needs for a bigger apartment. Here again, a female participant brings up the issue of having a family and its importance. It seems that bonding over the family aspect seems to be particularly important for women.

4.2.4.12.4 Memo — Arguing with Family under Stress, Managing Emotions

Observation: Especially, the group that acts out the role-play purposefully "in a good mood" nearly acts to perfection. Followed by a discussion, many participants have observed that under stress and previous negative events, they are more likely to argue especially with their loved ones, and let out the bad experiences on their loved ones, there is a lack of an outlet (example, parking in traffic, arguing in the car).

We all seem to have the tendency to easily fight with people who are closest to us — especially when we are under stress. It is easier to take the stress out on someone we love and who loves us (family) because we know they will eventually forgive us more easily. I do not think that this is culture-related. Rather this is a common phenomenon among humans.

4.2.4.12.5 Memo — Privacy of the family

Observation: Question asked to participants: what kind of disputes are suitable for peer mediation? They answer: All, except between women, if the mediator is male, and between spouses, as this is very private, unless this is specifically requested by the spouses

It seems that again the issue of privacy and trust within the family is very important. Especially when it comes to solving conflicts, no one external should be involved, at least not between spouses. According to most of the participants spouses are to solve their problems themselves. An exception is apparently valid if the spouses explicitly wish this. The consequence is that mediation should tend not to be carried out between spouses. Interesting is also that a man should not interfere in a conflict between women, it seems to be not his place to advise female conflicting parties. Does this mean that such a conflict could culturally only be mediated by a woman? I would have loved to get the female perspective on this.

4.2.4.12.6 Example of a Diary Memo — My Motivation for doing this Research Project

Why am I interested in establishing peer mediation mechanisms in refugee shelters and their bordering neighborhoods? I am mostly interested in two parts of this project. First, trying to create a solution to a social problem, and second the systemic aspect of that solution. I believe that mediators are not neutral to the world. I believe that mediators can make a choice whether they want to apply their knowledge and their tool-set to a social problem or ignore it. I am consciously choosing to apply my knowledge to the cause to promote social justice. I am seriously interested in researching and exploring peer mediation as a sustainable method to mitigate conflict within and around a refugee shelter. Furthermore, I believe in Alternative Dispute Resolution. Thus, I want to promote sustainable and self-governing conflict resolution mechanisms for human beings who need them the most, are exposed to violence on a daily basis, and have little to no access to justice. I would like to understand whether peer mediation mechanisms could be a suitable and sustainable conflict resolution system for refugee shelters and their bordering neighborhoods.

4.2.4.12.7 Explorative Memo — Retrieving Efficacy through Role-plays

Observation: They don't want a prefabricated role play, they want to play out an actual conflict that recently happened in the dormitory to one of the participants: they say, "the shelter's manager has the power" and has promised one of the participants an apartment, he has a large family, many children, he wants an apartment since a long time, the manager promised him one that is suitable for a large family, ultimately he gets another much smaller apartment and another smaller family gets the large originally promised apartment. The resident feels screwed over, he says nothing because "the manager is the boss and has the power".

Here I find it remarkable that the participants collectively decide to role-play a real case instead of a role-play designed by us. They have made an independent decision that is of some use to themselves and from which they could potentially learn something for the future, if necessary. I also find it interesting that a situation was chosen in which someone has no power ("the shelter's manager has the sole power"), and now through the role-play the "power" is "retrieved" in this conflict that took place in the past.

This participant originally felt powerless and believed that he could not help himself in this situation. In reality, he says nothing and does not complain (because the manager is the boss) – but now in the role-play, he experiences first-hand how such a conflict could have been handled through mediation by working out alternative ways to solve it. Therefore, the partic-

participants experience firsthand how mediation can work. In my opinion, this participant might feel empowered after the role-play because he has “experienced” the very situation one more time but through a more empowered lens – and therefore processed it differently, probably and hopefully even more positively; e.g. in the case of resolution and coming to an agreement in the role-play. This experience could potentially have had a healing and soothing effect on the disputant. This example illustrates how participation in a process and being treated equally relates primarily to gaining self-efficacy as a means to counter feeling powerless.

In my view, the participants seek equality and recognition as an equal party in conflict over gaining power for the sake of simply gaining power. I will have to try to understand the relationship between equality, agency and power, and should find literature surrounding these topics.

4.2.4.12.8 Explorative Memo — Appeal to Humanity and Common Ground when Powerless

Observation: What can we do as a less powerful party? How can we become stronger in a conflict? Many participants answer: Appeal to humanity, common ground, kind and polite, respect: “I was in prison in Austria and was held there, then I calmly said I was a lawyer in Syria and talked politely showing my respect to the policemen explaining my situation and what had happened to me and my family due to the war, after a while they respected me and at last they even paid for my trip to Germany.”

Memo: Here I see for the first time the connection between being powerless and humanity. The participant claims that as the weaker party in a power conflict, he appeals to the humanity of the stronger much more powerful counterpart and to a possible common ground. He also treats his counterpart with respect and acknowledges the counterpart’s power. A positive characteristic of powerlessness could be that, in the best case, it causes respectful treatment on the part of the weaker party, which in turn ideally causes the stronger party to lose power and the power levels to adjust.

4.2.4.13 Open Coding

Following initial line-by-line coding and in parallel to continuous memo-writing, in open coding, I continued the process of assigning headings and codes to my data, working with small text passages. In the following, I will illustrate a few examples:

Example 1

Observation: Importance of religion is strongly emphasized again and again by some men. For some, it is important that the mediator has

the same religion as them and knows and respects their faith. Likewise, the confidants listed by the participants have the same religion as they do.

Code: Importance of Religion as a catalyst for trust

Example 2

Observation: Exercise: Paraphrasing and reframing: they find it much more difficult; Woman from Syria says: how can I express it more positively when he is aggressive? He is just aggressive. It is not easy for them to practice these tools but they understand that it's a technique of the mediator, again I think they appreciate learning a concrete framework and technicalities to take peer mediation more seriously. It is important to repeat to them that they are trained to be a "community leader", always emphasizing the importance of the role of a mediator and giving context to the concrete exercises helps enormously – such that the participants understand why they are doing an exercise.

Code: Teaching concrete tools, giving context to exercises, and stressing the role and responsibility of the mediator

Example 3

Observation: We want an office, we want a neutral space to make it simple. So far we have done it in our small shared apartments, but now we think a neutral room is better.

Code: Importance of a neutral space

Example 4

Observation: Being a mediator is a matter of honor, we don't want to have money for it. We want to do it for the sake of obtaining a respectable position.

Code: Peer mediator as a matter of honor

Example 5

Observation: Mental health: a nasty question.. only one participant exclaims: "What does that have to do with mediation now? I don't understand!", the others participate well in the exercise and know surprisingly much about trauma and mental illness, one participant says: "in our country, this topic is tabooed, even if it is wrong, but it is very stigmatized, people with mental illness are directly labeled as crazy."

Code: Tabooing mental illness – questioning the relationship between mental illness and mediation, Predominant awareness that stigmatizing is wrong

After open coding, I organized the codes in order to maintain an overview. For this purpose, I searched for generic terms and categories for my codes and thus established a preliminary hierarchical order, which enabled me to assign the several hundred codes to twelve generic headings in the form of categories and subcategories. (see chapter 5)

4.2.4.14 Theoretical Sampling

Theoretical sampling is based on concepts that have been proven relevant for developing theory. It is an aspect of comparative analysis that allows for the purposeful search for and recognition of indicators of concepts in the data.³⁶⁷ Theoretical sampling includes both the selection within the data sources that are already available and the collection of additional data in the field. Anselm Strauss emphasizes the importance of developing concepts during data collection in order to find the appropriate data sources and to adapt when developing concepts. During coding and conceptualization, I went back and forth to the field to verify my data and explore further by means of theoretical sampling.

4.2.4.15 Axial Coding

My next step was axial coding according to Strauss and Corbin (first edition). I used this step to put codes and categories in relation to one another. I continued to think of those as preliminary headings in the sense explained above, which again corresponds to the idea that the individual steps of coding (open -axial - selective) do not follow each other linearly, but are passed through again and again in circular processes until a focus finally emerges.

In the early stages of axial coding, I chose phenomena as axial categories that had caught my attention by appearing frequently in the data.

As an approach to axial coding, Strauss and Corbin suggest relating categories and subcategories to each other by asking questions about the inductively identified phenomena, which they place at the core of the paradigmatic model. As stated earlier, these are the questions about causal conditions, the context, the intervening conditions, the strategies, and the consequences of a phenomenon. Figure 4.1 demonstrates an illustration of the paradigmatic model with respect to the phenomenon of “recognition”:

³⁶⁷Corbin et al., *Grundlagen qualitativer Sozialforschung*, p. 148.

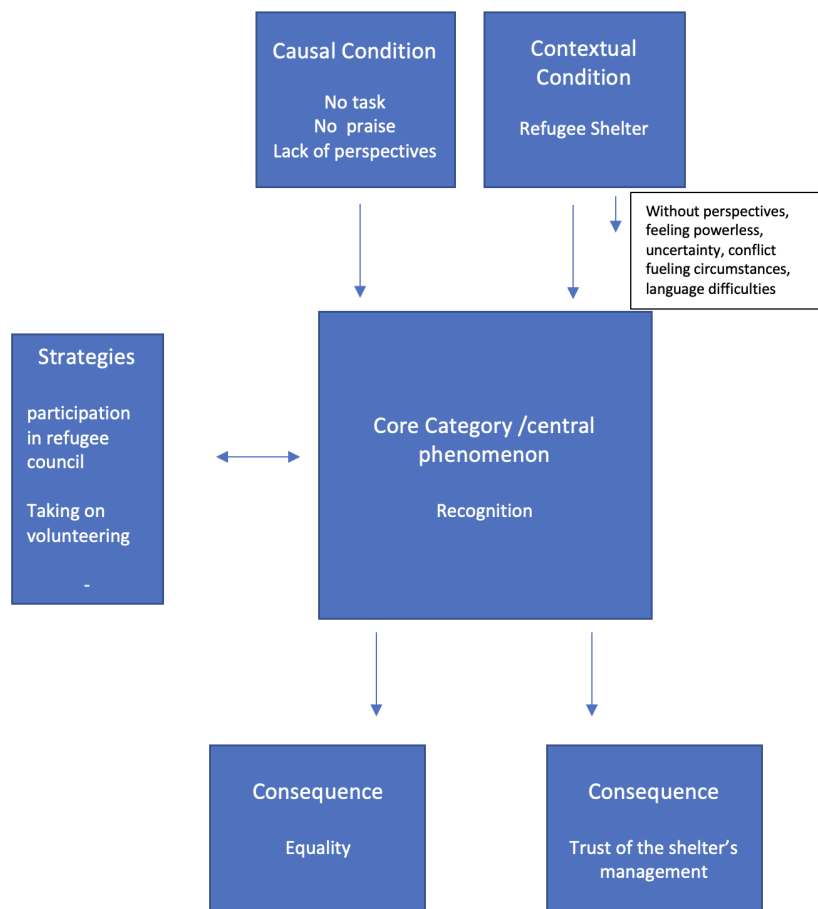


Figure 4.1: *Paradigm Model: Recognition.*

4.2.4.16 Rethinking the Research Question

When finding my main categories throughout the process of axial coding and memoing, I understood more and more that the current research question under which I was operating did not entirely serve and reflect the findings that emerged from the data. This led me to critically question my initial research question. Rather, the answers that I was receiving evolved around a broader question that pointed towards a richer discovery. Changing the research question over the course of the research process is a common phenomenon in Grounded Theory Methodology. The initial research question, asking about a suitable adaptation of the concept, was too narrow to do justice to the data. Rather, the data wanted to be asked the following research question:

“What constitutes peer mediation from the participants’ point of view?”

Using this question, I re-sorted my codes, again with the help of the coding paradigm.

4.2.4.17 Axial Coding II

The second data collection was followed by another phase of intensive axial coding. I strictly followed the methods suggested by Strauss and Corbin and, alternating between deductive and inductive procedures, related to the various categories, their subcategories, and codes to each other in paradigmatic models. The codes sometimes turned out to be properties, conditions, strategies, or consequences of the subcategories that appear in different dimensions. I returned again and again to the original data and searched for supporting material for the presumed relationships or for counter-evidence between the phenomena. The analysis work turned out to be circular. Thus, phenomena that were strategies in one paradigmatic model became causal conditions of another phenomenon in the next paradigmatic model. Using this procedure, I gradually sorted all the codes into paradigmatic models, each representing a category.

4.2.4.18 Selective coding, further Group Discussion, and Testimonials

Lastly, I conducted another round of intensive selective coding with the aim of understanding which of the categories could be best contextualized with the other categories as a “central phenomenon”. The remaining categories themselves would then function again as causal/contextual/intervening conditions, action strategies, and consequences in the sense of the paradigmatic model.

According to Corbin and Strauss, even at the end of the research project, the path back to the data is always retraced by finding evidence for the categories in the data. By conducting an additional group discussion and three testimonials of peer mediators, the core category became more and more visible and was reflected throughout the former and additional data. This data collection method seemed appropriate to the phenomenon I wanted to capture.

Overall, however, the group discussion was a very useful addition to the data available up to that point. During this process, it became immanent that the remaining categories easily grouped around the core category contextualizing it. Thus, it was only through the transcripts of the group discussion that I realized new connections and references, as well as through the in-depth process of writing reflection memos on all the thus far emerged categories. Then, I sorted my categories in various ways, always declaring other categories to be the central phenomenon. However, the actual processing and realization work had taken place before: the memo writing and

sorting was only a representation and confirmation of the thoughts I had already developed previously in the model. Throughout this process, the core category became more and more apparent.

4.3 Summary

Chapter 4 discusses the empirical research conducted as part of the project. To explore the complexities of implementing peer mediation in refugee shelters and develop a theory that can be applied in real-life contexts, the study employed the Grounded Theory Method (GTM). This method allows for flexibility and adaptability to changes in practice. The data collection and analysis for the dissertation followed GTM procedures, including open and axial coding, memoing, and constant comparison, as well as sampling. The chapter gives examples for all of these tools to illustrate the data collection process. Over the course of the research, a new research question emerged investigating what essentially constitutes peer mediation training from the participants' point of view. The study took place in two Berlin-based refugee shelters and the data collection included interviews, group discussions with mediators, staff, and residents, as well as observations.

5

Research Results

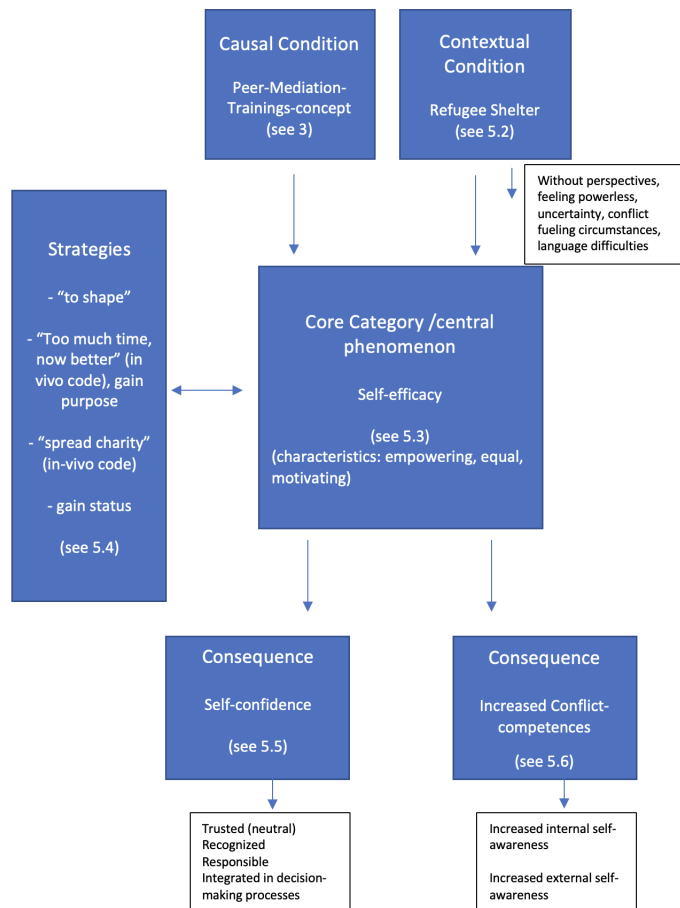


Figure 5.1: Paradigm Model: The Core-Category—Self-efficacy (Research Result).

5.1 Summary of the Paradigm Model: Self-efficacy

As shown in the Figure 5.1, the central core category – meaning the central phenomenon according to the Grounded Theory Methodology – is the concept “self-efficacy”. Self-efficacy represents the desire of the participants and peer mediators to take their lives back into their own hands and increase their “beliefs about their capabilities to produce designated levels of performance that exercise influence over events that affect their lives.”³⁶⁸ This core phenomenon displays the characteristics of “empowering”, “equal” and “motivated”. These characteristics and their origins will be outlined in detail in this chapter. These characteristics affect the consequences that result from the central phenomenon, which are increased self-confidence and trustworthiness, as well as increased conflict competencies.

I categorized the peer mediation training itself as the causal condition for the core category because it is the causal condition for the data to emerge and display the core category.

The central phenomenon is embedded in the contextual condition of the environment in which the peer mediators spend their daily lives: the refugee shelter.

Strategies directly influencing the central phenomenon are the strategy “to shape”, which stems from an *invivo* code and encompasses the participants desire for designing their own role-plays during the peer mediation workshops, which are based on their real-life conflicts occurring in and outside of the shelter. The *invivo* code “Too much time. Now better.” represents the strategy of gaining purpose. Refugees, like this quoted participant, seem eager to become peer mediators and attend the workshops regularly because they appreciate the tasks that comes with it, and are gaining more structure in their daily lives, which again affects their level of self-efficacy. The strategy “spread charity” stems also from an *invivo* code and represents the enjoyment of doing something good and meaningful for other community members. Lastly, another strategy is to gain status in the community. For participants, to partake in the workshop and become a peer mediator was a means to gain control over their perceived powerless situation.

The mentioned strategies have a reciprocal effect on the phenomenon and vice versa. They influence the phenomenon and its characteristics and are affected by the central phenomenon itself.

A consequence of the central phenomenon is an increased self-confidence of the peer mediators which results in increased trust of the community in the peer mediators, as well as integration into decision-making processes. Another consequence is the phenomenon of increased conflict-competences

³⁶⁸Bandura, “Bandura Self-efficacy defined”.

which results in greater internal and external awareness with respect to managing conflicts. I will briefly explain the outline of this chapter before diving deeper into each of the components.

Under 5.2.1 I illustrate the contextual condition and explain the living environment and living conditions of a refugee shelter, as well as factors leading to conflict. Those factors include cramped living conditions, shared resources for people of different backgrounds, language barriers, psychological trauma, lack of daily structure and perspectives, cultural unfamiliarity, different religions, fears, and ethnic tensions. This atmosphere results in the widespread feeling of a lack of perspective and powerlessness, and reinforces low levels of self-efficacy, which I will further analyze as a consequence.

The core category and central phenomenon is explained in detail under 5.2.2. In this section, I enlighten all relevant references and connections of the core category, as well as its characteristics. 5.2.5 explains the strategies that influence and are being influenced by the core category. I elaborate in detail on the various strategies and how they shaped the emerging theory.

In section 5.2.6 I describe how the training within the context of the central phenomenon has a direct effect on the consequence “self-confidence”.

5.2.7 explains the consequence “conflict-competences” with the characteristics of internal and external self-awareness.

Finally, under 5.3 I summarize the above and show how participating in the training and peer mediation clinic results in greater self-efficacy and, thus, increased self-confidence and conflict-competences of the peer-mediators.

5.2 Analysis

5.2.1 Contextual Condition

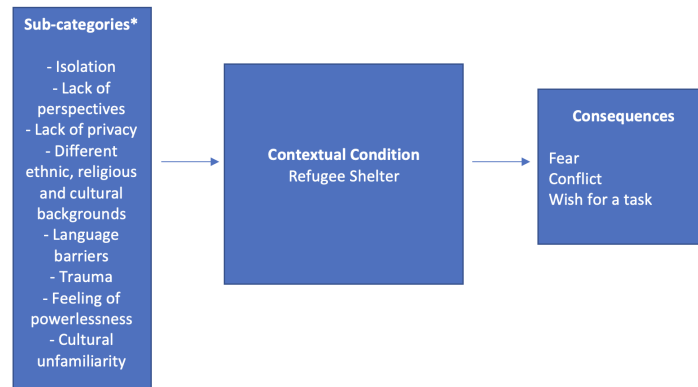


Figure 5.2: *Contextual Condition Refugee Shelter.*

The contextual condition is the refugee shelter itself: an environment that by no means serves all basic needs, such as physiological and safety needs of the participants. It therefore directly influences the central phenomenon negatively. As shown in the figure, consequences are fear, conflict and a search for meaning and something to do. In the following I will explore my initial feelings and thoughts regarding my first visit of a refugee shelter to introduce the contextual condition, as well as outline the context of the refugee shelter as it pertains to the core phenomenon in more detail.

5.2.1.1 Excursus — My Impressions Visiting a Refugee Shelter for the first Time in my Life (taken from a memo)

When I entered a refugee shelter for the first time in my life, I felt nervous and anxious as to what to expect. Not because I was afraid of the people living there, but more because I was frightened that they might judge me for carrying a trendy purse and wearing nice footwear – for not living there. I did not want to be seen as fortunate nor did I want to be judged as someone who did not fit in. Even though, it was obvious to any outsider that I did not. I remember that I turned my purse around for people not to see the DKNY (Donna Karan New York) logo. I felt shame. I felt privileged. I felt grateful for not having to live there. At the same time, I wanted to fit in. I wanted to get to know the people and connect with them on a personal level and eye to eye.

I understood that behind my feelings of uneasiness was an unmet need. The need for belonging. Belonging to a group of newcomers that I cared for

and deeply wanted to help to find a new home in an unfamiliar country.

After traveling for one and a half hours by train from my apartment to the outskirts of Berlin, I arrived at a place like no place I had ever seen before. The shelter itself consisted of several containers made from super-thin plastic walls. Across the street, you could see panel constructions with several hoisted German flags out-front. It was hot outside. The sun was at its highest peak and there was no place for shade inside in the entire backyard. A few children were running around coming to me excitedly asking questions in perfect German: "Who are you? What are you doing here?". They seemed curious and pleased for the distraction. It was even hotter inside the containers when I entered to get to my appointment with the manager – almost 40 degrees – and no AC in sight. People were super friendly. The management welcomed me and offered me a glass of water. The atmosphere in the office was rather chaotic and loud. Inhabitants were cueing to speak to the social workers to get some help with piles of paperwork. They had all been here for several years already.

This place was not exactly a place in which you could hope for finding peace of mind to restart your life after you have lost everything and experienced a great deal of grief.

Still, I felt a bit of hope in this place. I sensed humanity and connection. At first glance, it seemed to me that most people tried to make the best out of their situation. Through the small window, I watched a few boys heading out to play soccer in the sun.

After speaking to the management, and when I was just about to leave the shelter, a family invited me in for tea. They welcomed a stranger in their tiny new home. Someone to get to know, a local. That does not happen often, they said. Then the family father told me their story:

"When I came to Germany, I was very tired, very exhausted. We lived in Turkey for two years and then we traveled/fled to Germany on foot for one month. We slept on the street, on the floor. During the boat crossing, the boat was suddenly full of water. I called the police because my cell phone was the only one still working out of 43 people, but the police didn't come."

When I continued listening to him, I thought to myself, everyone here has a story like this to tell. After we spoke for a while, he was very pleased when I invited him and his wife to the workshop. When I was about to say goodbye, a neighbor dropped in and said hello. After he left, the wife said:

"That is strange. He is always sleeping. Never up. Though his children always fight. It is driving me crazy."

5.2.1.2 Refugee Shelter

Refugees living in shelters like the one I visited are confronted with an environment that causes daily interpersonal conflict. Refugees often reside in overcrowded shelters, which lack space and privacy, shared resources, as well as limited facilities for children. Racially biased incidents take place regularly. Most refugees, like the family I spoke with, have had traumatic experiences such as warfare, detention and violence and suffer from mental disorders.³⁶⁹

They all come from different backgrounds and religions which causes ethnic tensions. Most suffer from a lack of perspectives and daily structure, as well as chronic unemployment, and are confronted with cultural unfamiliarity and fears. Socioeconomic isolation within society as a whole adds to further psychological distress.³⁷⁰

All these factors reinforce conflicts among the inhabitants themselves and inhabitants and neighbors of refugee shelters.³⁷¹ Significant disputes among residents or conflicts related to the local community and neighborhood often occur on a daily basis.³⁷² Conflicts regarding daily life among the shelter's inhabitants often evolve around non-compliance with rules, alcohol and drug use, food and eating habits, hygiene, noise, and the use of common areas. These seemingly trivial conflicts have a high potential for ethnicization and escalation because of the reasons stated above and, therefore, are not necessarily comparable to everyday conflicts, which arise in any other shared accommodation.³⁷³

Like in my own experience, contact between German citizens and refugees is highly limited because refugee shelters are mostly located in the far outskirts of cities or the countryside, where contact is nearly impossible or locals generally have a tendency for prejudice and are afraid of newcomers.³⁷⁴

Refugees need space and resources to process painful memories and rebuild their lives. These resources might encompass medical treatment, ways to gain comfort in an unfamiliar environment, and skills for responding to prejudice, as well as dealing with their own biases.³⁷⁵

The problem-centered context "refugee shelter" came up again and again

³⁶⁹Abbott, "The troubled minds of migrants"; H. Winter, "Working from the Heart".

³⁷⁰ibid.

³⁷¹Plich, Feststellung der Konfliktbereiche in drei Gemeinschaftsunterkünften zur Unterbringung von Flüchtlingen und Asylsuchenden sowie deren kommunaler Umgebung in Niedersachsen, Landespräventionsrat Niedersachsen.

³⁷²I. Bauer, Unterbringung von Flüchtlingen in deutschen Kommunen: Konfliktmediation und lokale Beteiligung.

³⁷³Plich, "Konflikte im Umfeld von Unterkünften, Analyse und Handlungsoptionen".

³⁷⁴H. Winter, "Working from the Heart".

³⁷⁵ibid.

in the training but also in the interviews, which is why its discussion and illumination are important to determine what refugees experience and regard as essential for the peer mediation training and their task as peer mediators. The sub-categories displayed in Figure 5.2 show the residents' complaints and how they feel living in the refugee shelters for years – day in, day out. Those circumstances influence participants' ways of learning and how they operate as peer mediators.

In the peer mediation training of the second group a man shared how he fights with his wife:

“A man from Eritrea talks about his wife who stayed at home and that he beats her in case of quarrels. That is his culture. A woman from Iran is outraged and asks ‘But why? Aren’t we the same you and me, man and woman?’ The Eritrean says that rationally he understands that it is wrong to beat his wife, but culturally it is just right and therefore he hits her, 3 times in a row or until she falls.

Afterwards, he is always sorry and wants to apologize, his wife goes along with it. Now they have little disputes due to the long-distance relationship with Germany. ” (Extract taken from field notes)

Different ethnic, religious, and cultural backgrounds and views collide in the shelter daily giving lots of room and space for conflicts to escalate quickly. Participants like this man reported not feeling safe in the shelter, and being afraid of violent incidents.

In one of the group-interviews, a peer mediator talked about causes for conflict in the refugee shelter:

“We need more time to prove ourselves. I think that the main problem is the language, we can mediate well in Arabic but what about German and other languages, then misunderstandings occur often. Mediation lives through language.”

Others agreed that language barriers were one of the most common reasons for disputes to arise and that they felt like they were often misunderstood by others and especially the management. They wanted to find ways to circumvent this problem when mediating. (See also section 5.2.4.4 on bi-cultural co-mediators)

Furthermore, another subcategory of the context of refugee shelter is psychological trauma.

Approximately 50 % of refugees in Germany are estimated to suffer from a mental health disorder, such as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD),

anxiety or depression.³⁷⁶ This number also matches my own observations. Within this sub-category, an Afghan participant from the second group talked about the stigmatization of trauma:

“We always have to be strong, especially the men in Afghanistan, we must not cry and have no weakness. This is then incredibly difficult when psychological problems are added to it.”

This example shows that refugees must face biases and stigma on top of everything else – even if they are ready to deal with their past. Most participants, however, are unaware of the effects and causes of trauma and its treatment. They welcome the mental health literacy sessions which are an integral part of the peer mediation training whereby participants learn about the role of mental health in daily life and conflict and are sensitized to the manifestation and management of prevalent conditions such as PTSD, anxiety disorders, depression, substance abuse and addiction.³⁷⁷

Most shelters do not have enough resources for traumatized individuals, which is why most traumatized refugees are unaware of their condition. Most people also do not understand why they are sometimes being offended or attacked by other residents who might struggle with mental health issues. A woman of the first research group shared that she was frequently afraid of another woman living in the shelter:

“She’s very aggressive and always yelling. I’m afraid of her. She even got physical with me and hit me.”

Residents are not only confronted with coping with their own psychological trauma that they are often unaware of, but they are also confronted with, e.g., violent outbursts of other traumatized residents.

Another sub-category of the context of a “refugee shelter” is isolation and cultural unfamiliarity:

“We want to do something and meet up with locals, but people don’t have time after 8 hours of work ...how does that work? Here in Germany, it is difficult to meet new people. Nobody has time, everyone works so much. It is different at home. We meet with our friends and neighbors every day after work. Community is most important.”

Most participants I spoke with claimed that they would like to have more contact with Germans and locals. They were missing interactions and are lacking opportunities to meet them. Even if they managed to find a job

³⁷⁶Abbott, “The troubled minds of migrants”.

³⁷⁷H. M. E. Winter et al., “Psychosocial peer mediation as sustainable method for conflict prevention and management among refugee communities in Germany”; see also chapter 3.

where they would naturally interact with locals, they found it extremely difficult to build up a friendship because of the lack of spare time after a working day. They also reported that most Germans stick to themselves and just go home to their families straight after work – unlike in their home country where it was common to spend time with colleagues after work and the working day was also much shorter allowing for more leisure time and interactions with others.

Lack of privacy is another very dominant subcategory in the context of a refugee shelter. Most single travelers, for example, have to share a room with three other roommates. Very often, participants in the workshops complained to me:

“I’m always so tired and then I can’t sleep because it’s so noisy. My roommates are so loud and have an opposite sleep-wake rhythm and schedule.” (Workshop participant, group 1)

Such conditions were often pointed out as a frequent cause for disputes arising among roommates and neighbors; next to the most common cause: shared resources. Most participants criticized the conditions of shared resource facilities such as the kitchen, the bathroom, the washroom, as well as the common rooms (if there were any). Several women of both groups mentioned the disputes arising from the infrastructure of the laundry room:

“The women always block several washing machines. It’s unfair. You’re only allowed to use one machine, then you can share the washing machines.” (Female peer mediator, group 1)

The common bathrooms were also in very bad condition. Inhabitants had to buy their own toilet paper and hygiene was very poor. Even the kitchen seemed to cause many problems, one participant of the second group complained about the smell of food someone else was preparing:

“The food that she cooks always smells so bad. It is not halal. I can no longer smell this.”

Such conflicts particularly lay the ground for cultural tensions and escalating ethnic conflicts, as well as perpetuating stereotypes.

Furthermore, many refugees mentioned a feeling of powerlessness as an obstacle to agency, self-realization, and empowerment.

“We are powerless. Here, the management has the power. In this country we are powerless.” (Participant of the first group)

In this environment, participants do not feel able to take their lives back into their own hands. They feel like everything is controlled by the shelter’s management and that they have to obey the house rules. Even though they understand that someone needs to be in charge and administer the shelter,

they feel powerless and have almost no co-determination rights. Therefore, most of the participants welcome the offer to be trained as peer mediators and take on an active role in the community to look forward to receiving a certificate that potentially optimizes their chances on the labor market.

The consequence of the shelter's environment is reoccurring and persisting conflict. Disputes arise daily causing the inhabitants even more discomfort. Therefore, in addition to the observations around the contextual condition, I ran a survey with twenty-eight residents of the shelter of the first group, the results are shown in Figure 5.3.

The condition to participate in the survey was that they had not participated in the workshop previously. The survey aimed at getting a better understanding of the types of disputes and reasons that conflicts occur in the refugee shelter. It served as an add-on to better interpret the qualitative data and get an understanding of the conflicts resulting from the contextual condition. The most frequent topic in conflicts among residents mentioned was "resources" stated by about a third of all those surveyed, followed by the topic "neighbors" (19%). For the younger generation (20 to 30 years old) the main topic discussed was conflicts in connection with the "management of the shelter" (40%). Reasons for conflicts within these three topics were mainly seen in "cultural misunderstandings" (44%), "asylum envy" (42%), and "language" (36%). However, "infrastructure" (22%) of the shelter as a direct reason for conflicts was only named in the 30 to 40 year old age group.

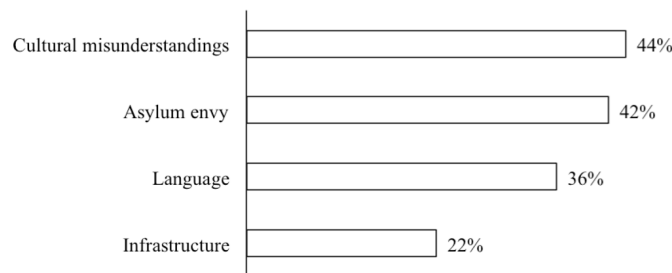


Figure 5.3: Main reasons for conflict according to survey participants. The percentage for the category "infrastructure" represents only participants aged 30 to 40.

Besides a very conflict-prone nature, another consequence of such an environment is the fear of an uncertain future caused by a lack of perspective. Refugees living in a shelter fear that they will not be allowed to stay in Germany. They wonder how they will feed themselves, how and if they will find a job, and whether they will be able to rent their own apartment one day. Some often have to stay in the shelter for many years and are constantly reminded of their perceived powerlessness and uncertain future.

As a result of this state of mind, the peer-mediation workshop is regarded as compensation for the dreary everyday life in the shelter. The participants have the desire to confront the feeling of lack of perspective, to exchange ideas, and to be able to talk about their problems in a trusting environment. Apart from the training itself, the participants like the objective of having a task at hand and something to do and look forward to after completion of the workshop. This consequence of wishing for a task is also reflected in their joy in being a peer-mediator. Once they have become peer mediators and have started mediating cases in the community, they report feeling rewarded with a daily task and occupation. The peer mediation programs in the shelters also reportedly led to less conflict and less police operations in the communities.

5.2.2 The Origin of the Core Category

Two thirds into my analysis, I came to the premature assumption that the core category and most dominant phenomenon of my data had to be “power”. Refugees who live in refugee shelters and have, per se, a powerless perspective on life were – judging from appearances – expressing the wish to gain “power” through the peer mediation training in order to achieve a more powerful position and respected status in the community as a peer mediator. However, after analyzing my data and categories repeatedly and going back to the field for more data, I came to the realization that the data, including all the categories I originally had, had to be grouped under the only possible core category: “self-efficacy”. After this essential discovery, the other main categories turned out to be merely strategies directly influencing this specific overarching phenomenon.

This central phenomenon showed itself across all data. While single sections taken from interviews and field notes originally represented different codes and categories, and still do, they still can be grouped under the same all-encompassing core category: “self-efficacy”.

“The main problem is the communication with the shelter’s manager. We had the solution for a conflict and the manager did not want to listen to us. She said that we are only responsible for small disputes. This demotivates us, we want to help as real mediators in the future. We can do that, and we have the confidence to do that, and we told her so. But probably we have to prove ourselves first. Do you think, Helen, that she doesn’t trust us because we are foreigners?”

The quote above represents the origin of the discovery of the central phenomenon and reflects its meaning in its broader complexity and context. Its strongest impression is this peer mediator’s desire to hold on to his

newly (re)gained self-efficacy and not wanting to be limited by the shelter's managers postulated distrust of his capabilities and those of his peer group.

This peer mediator is expressing his dismay about the relationship with the shelter's management. He mentions a specific conflict that he felt confident and equipped to solve. However, the shelter's manager, who has the only decision-making power, told him that peer mediators are only responsible for and in charge of smaller conflicts. He thinks the manager does not trust the peer mediators and their skills to resolve more complex disputes and he even suspects that she could be racist.

At the same time, he is expressing his confidence and capability that he is convinced that the peer mediators would have been able to resolve the dispute at hand. Interestingly, he wants to express his concern on behalf of the others when saying

“This demotivates us, we want to help as real mediators in the future, we can do that, and we have the confidence to do that”.

This means, he does not only believe in his achievement of being a good peer mediator, but also trusts that the whole group will be successful in mediating arising conflicts in the shelter that are not only regarded as “small”.

5.2.3 The Meaning of Self-efficacy

The central phenomenon self-efficacy is also a concept coined and researched by psychologist Albert Bandura. Notably, Bandura pointed out that “[a]mong the mechanisms of agency, none is more central or pervasive than people's beliefs about their capabilities to exercise control over their own level of functioning and over events that affect their lives. Efficacy beliefs influence how people feel, think, motivate themselves, and behave.”³⁷⁸ As stated above, perceived self-efficacy is thus defined as “people's beliefs about their capabilities to produce designated levels of performance that exercise influence over events that affect their lives.”³⁷⁹

This means that self-efficacy is essential for people's motivation and behavior. If people believe highly in their skills, they tackle difficulties as challenging encounters and increase their commitment to the tasks at hand despite the potential risk of disappointment and failure. Whereas people with low self-efficacy beliefs see such situations as obstacles and dangers to preferably run away from. People with high self-efficacy beliefs were found to be less vulnerable to episodes of depression.³⁸⁰

³⁷⁸Bandura, “Perceived Self-Efficacy in Cognitive Development and Functioning”.

³⁷⁹Bandura, “Bandura Self-efficacy defined”.

³⁸⁰ibid.

Therefore, efficacy expectations predominately determine people’s choice of activities and challenges, as well as how much they will attempt to reach their goals despite stressful circumstances.³⁸¹

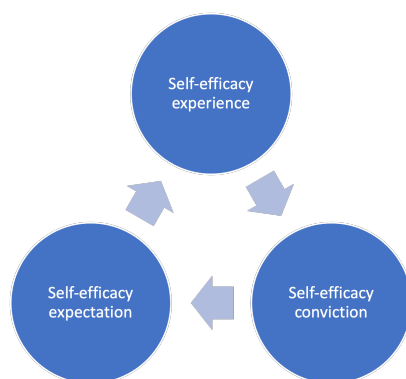


Figure 5.4: *The circle of self-efficacy.*

Figure 5.4 displays the circle of self-efficacy³⁸². Going through a challenging situation and succeeding with the task at hand leads to a self-efficacy experience. A self-efficacy experience then results in a self-efficacy conviction and the trust in a person’s own capabilities to be likely to succeed again with the same or a similar task. A self-efficacy conviction generates a self-efficacy expectation, meaning that the person is firmly expecting to succeed at the task at hand. As shown in the figure above, a self-efficacy expectation enables further self-efficacy experiences, which strengthen the self-efficacy conviction and thus the self-efficacy expectation and set in motion a cycle of self-efficacy.³⁸³

For instance, the peer mediator in the example above is expressing his self-efficacy conviction that he trusts himself to be capable of settling the dispute at hand. The conviction is only shattered by doubts coming from the shelter’s manager. Consequently, the peer mediator finds himself on the way to self-efficacy expectation – expecting to resolve the conflict at hand.

The central phenomenon “self-efficacy” and its cycle, illustrated in Figure 5.4, presented itself also in quotations of participants who claimed to be using the newly obtained mediative techniques in their personal and professional lives:

“I will use the techniques for myself with my family and with my children, it has already helped me in conflict situations.”

³⁸¹Bandura, “Self-efficacy: Toward a unifying theory of behavioral change”.

³⁸²Schröder, Selbstwirksamkeit Sammlung

³⁸³ibid.

This peer mediator reports about her conviction to explore the learned methods in conflict with her family members, as well as about her self-efficacy experiences of managing conflict well after the training. She further articulates the desire to live through more of such experiences, thereby conveying her trust in her own abilities, as well as her need for strengthening her self-efficacy.

Throughout and after the completion of the training, all active peer mediators expressed the wish to build trust with the inhabitants and the shelter's management in order to prove that they can take on this responsibility of mediating disputes occurring in the context of the shelter. After the completion of the training, one of the peer mediators expressed his self-efficacy expectation like this:

“We will be successful with our cases, do a good job to gain the trust of the residents and the management of the shelter.”

Another peer mediator stated in a group interview:

“We want to develop our skills and learn more. Maybe one of you (trainers) can always join any occurring mediation. Then we can show you that we do it well!”

This quotation expresses this peer mediator's self-efficacy expectation that “we do it well”, as well as the wish for more guided self-efficacy experience. At the same time, this mediator wants to get approval and recognition for the — in his view — valuable work of the peer mediators.

These examples show that the experiences, expectations, and convictions on how self-efficacy is lived and obtained are diverse and unique throughout the process of the training and the establishment of the peer mediation clinic. The following quote captures the feeling resulting from self-efficacy.

“The most beautiful and longest lasting sense is that of accomplishment. Still in memory, it nourishes, fills with joy and gratitude and – depending on temperament – with humility or pride. There is no substitute for this feeling.”

– Hartmut Schröder

In the following example, taken from an interview extract, I will explore the self-efficacy journey of a Syrian peer-mediator (Peer Mediator 1) along with his feelings and thoughts associated with this process:

“I was a lawyer in my home country, but now I unfortunately work as a construction worker in a big construction company in drywall. Back in Syria I was working as a lawyer and that was pretty much like being a peer mediator. Because as a lawyer you

also have to try to solve a problem with the disputing parties. And for me that was quite like working as a peer mediator here. But in Syria I actually did that between companies and here in Germany between residents. And I have successfully been serving as a peer mediation for about 1 1/2 years now.”

Having lost one’s profession and status in addition to mourning loved ones and a former home where one’s language was spoken, due to war and prosecution, causes a sense of disruption and, consequently, a loss of self-efficacy and reinforces the perception of feeling powerless.³⁸⁴

“Language, social networks and status are important identity-forming aspects that are called into question by migration, causing corresponding psychological stress and an identity crisis.”³⁸⁵ Hannah Arendt even expanded on this idea and wrote about the impossibility of finding a new home: “What is unprecedented is not the loss of a home but the impossibility of finding a new one. Suddenly, there was no place on earth where migrants could go without the severest restrictions, no country where they would be assimilated, no territory where they could find a new community of their own.”³⁸⁶

The quoted peer mediator finds meaning in being a peer mediator because he not only used to be a lawyer in his home country and therefore reports to be familiar with the process of mediation, but he also identifies with being a lawyer. Having previously worked as a lawyer in the field of mediation constitutes as an identity-forming self-efficacy experience that he can build on as a peer mediator, in which he can easily find his (old and new) calling.

To give more background on this peer-mediator; he was one of the most active and engaged participants I came across during my research. Over the period of one and a half years, he helped to settle over 60 disputes in the shelter and found true joy in his new role. I remember that he was also one of the most involved in the training and eager to learn, as well as to share his knowledge with the others. He showed a highly positive spirit, great sense of humor, and creativity when acting out the role-plays. While being a peer mediator he was also an active member of the residents’ council and a father of two daughters who were attending middle school. His wife and eldest daughter also participated in the workshop and were highly engaged in the topics and mediating conflicts as well. As a father, he always encouraged them to learn more – as he claimed education was the most important asset in life.

³⁸⁴Mafaalani, *Das Integrationsparadox warum gelungene Integration zu mehr Konflikten führt*, pp. 112, 113.

³⁸⁵*ibid.*, p. 112, 113.

³⁸⁶Arendt, *Origins of Totalitarianism*, pp. 293, 294.

The opportunity of being active in a similar capacity as in his home country, while at the same time learning something new could have enabled him to more self-efficacy experiences and to consequently trust in his own skills; thereby possibly increasing his self-efficacy conviction.

This peer Mediator finds joy in his task through which he can give back to the community. When describing his experience in the workshops he further stated:

“The workshop was very good, and I really liked that we learned the theory and also to practice mediation. We really experienced what it is like to be a mediator in the role-plays. Peace processes among people represent one of the highest values for me. When the mediator takes the first step to resolve conflicts – and also just being a mediator feels very nice and peaceful. You learn more about yourself and from others through the experience. Of course, through the workshops I learned a clear strategy on how to deal with conflicts and especially the psychology behind working with difficult disputants.”

The statement “...just being a mediator feels very nice and peaceful ” and especially his choice of words “being” indicate that this participant fundamentally identifies with his role as peer mediator and experiences the values he associates with it out of conviction. By stressing “I learned a clear strategy on how to deal with conflicts”, he further indicates that he trusts in his own abilities to successfully fulfill this role, thereby making a valuable contribution to the community. His statement “You learn more about yourself and from others through the experience.” again shows that the self-efficacy experience is central to his growth process and that his motivation is strengthened by this experience.

Peer Mediator 1 was most likely capable of regaining parts of his self-efficacy – and his past job – through the peer mediation training and through further self-efficacy experiences of being a peer mediator in the shelter for one and a half years. Even though he might also have started at a higher level of self-efficacy when beginning the training, it is not deniable that he lived through additional self-efficacy experiences and successfully contributed to mediating disputes at the refugee shelter. Interestingly, he was one of the first peer mediators who moved out of the shelter. This could also be an indirect result of his strengthened self-efficacy. As of today, he is still volunteering as a peer mediator at his former refugee shelter.

As part of her mindset theory, in which Ellen Langer differentiates between mindfulness and mindlessness consequently advocating for mindfulness as a catalyst to regain purpose and counter feeling stuck and purposeless, she conducted the following experiment in an elderly home:

“One day at a nursing home in Connecticut, elderly residents were each given a choice of houseplants to care for and were asked to make a number of small decisions about their daily routines. A year and a half later, not only were these people more cheerful, active and alert than a similar group in the same institution who were not given these choices and responsibilities, but many more of them were still alive. In fact, less than half of the decision-making residents had died as had those in the other group.”³⁸⁷

According to Langer’s concept on mindfulness, our mindset not only influences the way that we see things and how we judge any given situation or context, but it also has a direct impact on our emotional and physical wellbeing. Mindsets are inner attitudes that lead to a judgement or a conclusion on how we perceive situations, circumstances, and people around us. Those attitudes include our belief system and consequently our patterns of behavior that are manifested within us and repeat over time according to our given mindset. Langer differentiates between two mindsets: mindlessness and mindfulness.³⁸⁸

Mindlessness describes a state of mind in which the mind is trapped by categories by too rigidly relying on distinctions of the past and applies automatic behavior causing us to act from a single perspective: “We build our own and our shared realities and then we become victims of them- blind to the fact that they are constructs, ideas.”³⁸⁹ Therefore, mindlessness easily breeds prejudices and biases.

Mindfulness, on the other hand, means the continual creation of new categories, an openness to new information, and an awareness of more than one perspective. With an open mind, we can create new contexts and pay attention to two sides of an impression. Mindfulness has the power to shape another reality which creates joy and minimizes depression.³⁹⁰

This means that our mindsets are infectable and changeable. The human mind can create a healthy context through mindfulness. Consequently, our contexts do not exist but can rather be regarded as constructed through our mindsets.³⁹¹

According to Langer, “most of our suffering, physical or psychological is the direct or indirect effect of mindlessness.”³⁹² However, if we can become more mindful, we can benefit from the effects that this has on the quality of our lives. Looking at the quoted experiment in the nursing home, we observe that the experimental group was given more control, responsibility

³⁸⁷Langer, Mindfulness.

³⁸⁸ibid.; Schröder, Selbstwirksamkeit Sammlung.

³⁸⁹Langer, Mindfulness.

³⁹⁰ibid.

³⁹¹Schröder, Selbstwirksamkeit Sammlung.

³⁹²Langer, Mindfulness over matter.

and autonomy in their lives and thus was in a position to determine their own daily routines to a certain extent over the period of 18 months, which led to an increase in their mindfulness and an improvement of their overall health. Remarkably, being involved in decision-making processes and taking charge and control over one's life results in guaranteed self-efficacy experiences and, thus, an increase in autonomy and overall self-efficacy.

Regarding the experiment with the elderly in the nursing home, Langer concludes:

“Watching someone else do things that we used to do ourselves leads us to feel that we are now incapable of doing them. This is true even if the only reason for our inaction is outside ourselves (institutional policy, for example).”³⁹³

Notably, refugees, like the elderly in the example, frequently encounter social challenges, including a lack of autonomy and experience that their independence is minimized to some degree by social workers operating in the refugee shelters, e.g., helping them fill out forms or making residents obey the house rules. In the example of filling out forms, this particular task used to be something that most residents were able to do on their own in their past lives, whereas suddenly they have to witness how others are filling out forms for them. According to Langer, this causes them to feel less capable and thus hinders self-efficacy. Langer's findings suggest that gaining control and autonomy through being involved in decision-making processes, like in the example of the elderly, could increase the peer mediators' mindfulness, resulting in a heightened wellbeing and self-efficacy. Setting impulses for accomplishment and success makes people aware that they always have a choice of which mindset to adapt.

One way to do this is through a peer mediation training and the resulting tasks that come with being a peer mediator for other community members. Hence, I advocate integrating residents of refugee shelters into decision making processes through the method of peer mediation so they can regain autonomy and enter a state of mindfulness, ultimately leading to an increase of self-efficacy. Additionally, there are other ways to further strengthen refugees' autonomy and mindfulness, such as empowering educational programs aiming at conveying topics like living in Germany, cultural aspects, housing, the job market, or simply language courses; as outlined in chapter 2.

To me it seemed necessary to examine the roots of self-efficacy from a neuroscientific perspective to holistically understand how our neurobiological development and our brain influences our mindset and likelihood of becoming self-efficacious. According to Joachim Bauer, a neuroscientist,

³⁹³Langer, Mindfulness.

physician, and psychotherapist, “self-steering” means holistic self-care and consists of the art of uniting impulses and their control.³⁹⁴ He describes both components neurobiologically: the limbic system and the higher order system situated in the prefrontal cortex controlling the limbic system when sufficiently developed.³⁹⁵ The limbic system is responsible for our impulses including feelings of fear, fight-or-flight responses, impatience, and convenience, whereas the superstructure system regulates our ability to focus our attention, our working memory, our empathy with others, as well as the ability to flexibly adapt to a new system of rules.³⁹⁶

Only when the prefrontal cortex is matured and in a functional state it can control the limbic system. The development of the prefrontal cortex happens between the ages 1 and 20. People with a highly developed self-steering ability show a highly developed prefrontal cortex and a healthy interplay between the limbic system and superstructure system. They show great independence and report feeling successful at what they are doing. If the prefrontal cortex is used less over time or constantly challenged by addiction – such as excessive use of mobile phones or media, smoking, and unhealthy food choices – there is a risk that it will regress causing further risks of falling prey to addiction.³⁹⁷

To the contrary, The potentials of self-steering resulting from a developed prefrontal cortex and its ability to control our limbic system, such as planning and reaching long-term goals, being creative, and experiencing self-growth are not only abilities of the human species but also our needs.³⁹⁸

An extremely important aspect immanent of the prefrontal cortex is our ability and need to anticipate the future. This includes the hope for good as well as expecting misfortune and taking the resulting precautions. Those anticipations can also have a direct effect on the psyche and the body of the individual, either by charging or weakening the body.³⁹⁹ “People have a need for anticipating the future. Where this need is not nurtured but disregarded or destroyed, there is a slackening, sometimes a breakdown, of psychological and biological vitality.”⁴⁰⁰

Notably, refugees living in refugee shelters, sometimes for over several years, have a lack in future perspectives and are faced with a great deal of uncertainty and fear. Therefore, they are often unable to imagine their

³⁹⁴J. Bauer, *Wie wir werden, wer wir sind: Die Entstehung des menschlichen Selbst durch Resonanz.*

³⁹⁵ibid.

³⁹⁶ibid.

³⁹⁷ibid.

³⁹⁸ibid.

³⁹⁹ibid.

⁴⁰⁰ibid.

future as most of them are waiting on their residence permit, are not allowed to work, or do not know when and how to move out of the shelter for several years. This reasoning and being in a constant state of passive waiting suggests that their need for anticipating the future is not fulfilled.⁴⁰¹

According to Bauer, this lack may paralyze the prefrontal cortex and cause psychological and biological breakdowns. Consequently, refugees living in refugee shelters are not only confronted with less autonomy and the resulting mindlessness and health problems, but their lack of sufficient future perspectives could also lead to a further loss of their self-steering ability and thus hinder their path to self-efficacy.

Several techniques influence how we can change our mindset from mindless to mindful thereby strengthen our self-steering ability. Practicing mindfulness increases our ability to control our limbic system and helps us decide to follow our long-term goals rather than getting lost in distraction. Through an increased capacity to reach long-term goals we have more self-efficacy experiences and, ultimately, our self-efficacy increases as well. Therefore, self-steering can be regarded as a “predecessor” to self-efficacy.

Through introducing certain tools in the peer-mediation training – of which some are also immanent in the mediation process – the participants’ mindfulness and self-steering ability are gradually sensitized. Such tools immanent in the training which cultivate mindfulness and train the prefrontal cortex are e.g., priming, framing and the deconstruction of narratives.⁴⁰²

Priming describes how the processing (cognition) of a stimulus is influenced. Words, images, or scenes lead to an internal pre-activation in people that effects their subsequent behaviors in a certain way.⁴⁰³ A preceding stimulus activates implicit memory contents. The linking of the stimulus with specific associations in memory based on prior experiences occurs largely unconsciously.⁴⁰⁴

For example, people who hold a warm cup of coffee in their hand rate their counterpart as more warm-hearted and friendly. People who sit on a soft seat are more likely to compromise in negotiations. For instance, in Eastern cultures tea is always offered as an entry into any negotiation. Priming effects can furthermore influence bodily reactions.⁴⁰⁵ Individuals asked to adopt postures that exude power respond with a rise in testosterone and a

⁴⁰¹Khosravi, *Waiting - A Project in Conversation*.

⁴⁰²Schröder, *Selbstwirksamkeit Sammlung*; see also chapter 3.

⁴⁰³J. Bauer, *Wie wir werden, wer wir sind: Die Entstehung des menschlichen Selbst durch Resonanz*.

⁴⁰⁴Schröder, *Selbstwirksamkeit Sammlung*.

⁴⁰⁵J. Bauer, *Wie wir werden, wer wir sind: Die Entstehung des menschlichen Selbst durch Resonanz*.

drop in cortisol levels, in addition to greater self-confidence.⁴⁰⁶

Practicing these power poses and teaching the theory behind them were also part of the curriculum (see chapter 3). In this respect, I wrote the following observation in a memo right after practicing power-poses with the participants of the first group observed:

“The feeling of being powerful and of lowering one’s stress level and appearing more self-confident just by doing power poses for two minutes is received very positively by all participants. Some say they know of it and also subconsciously practice power poses before important events. They are pleased that they understand why it works. Others are amused, but most find it very exciting and practice power-poses with great joy: ‘At soccer, when we win, we do poses like this, too,’ says one of the younger men.”

Framing (with respect to the cognitive interpretive framework) – also known as the framing effect – refers to the psychological phenomenon of different wordings of a message (linguistic formulations) as well as the use of images, with otherwise identical content, influencing the understanding and behavior of a recipient differently. The well-known example is the contrast of “The glass is half full” to “The glass is half empty.”⁴⁰⁷ This phenomenon happens through frames in the brain.

The results of the different formulations are framing or framing effects. It was found that 80 percent of our thinking is (unconsciously) shaped by metaphors and frames. Our thought structures are changed by framing not only psychologically, but also neurologically. It is not facts that generate opinions and influence decisions, but frames and framing.⁴⁰⁸ In mediation framing is used to reinterpret and reframe slightly offensive statements in a more positive and optimistic or more negative and pessimistic way. It is a technique that aims at future orienting and re-stabilizing the relationship of the parties. (see also chapter 3)

Deconstructing narratives is another technique to increase mindfulness and, thus, self-efficacy. Narratives establish interpretations of important events through a “story” (roles, course, etc.). They claim legitimacy and use and convey values and emotions, while relating to a specific context. They aim at promoting group identity and demarcation.⁴⁰⁹

⁴⁰⁶ibid.; Cuddy et al., “Preparatory Power Posing Affects Nonverbal Presence and Job Interview Performance”.

⁴⁰⁷Stangl, Online Lexikon für Psychologie & Pädagogik – Online-Enzyklopädie aus den Wissenschaften Psychologie und Pädagogik; Schröder, Selbstwirksamkeit Sammlung.

⁴⁰⁸Hemmelmann, “Elisabeth Wehling: Politisches Framing. Wie eine Nation sich ihr Denken einredet - und daraus Politik macht”; Schröder, Selbstwirksamkeit Sammlung.

⁴⁰⁹ibid.

For example, in the (still) dominant narrative in the context of the physician-patient relationship, an expert status is limited to medical professionals, who are regarded as experts on illnesses and their treatment. In the very same narrative, sick people are viewed as “patients” without any expert status and without any self-efficacy with respect to their healing process. Therefore, the question remains: Could this narrative be deconstructed in a way that the passive “patient” becomes an “agent” and an expert of his or her disease, thereby regaining part of his or her self-efficacy and eventually having better chances for healing?⁴¹⁰

According to Mildenerger and Schröder, who explored the field of Cultural Medicine as a more holistic approach to healing, “an inner attitude conducive to health means mindfulness, self-care and self-cultivation. A suitable therapeutic relationship means resonance and results mainly from empathy and encounter at eye level.”⁴¹¹ Healing is regarded as a self-healing process by which the “inner physician” heals. Therefore, the whole person in their natural and cultural environment is considered during their self-healing journey. Thereby, the patient’s self-efficacy is strengthened, so that he or she becomes a co-manager of his or her own healing process.⁴¹²

For example, practicing power changes in role-plays by changing the position of power (from 1 (lowest) – 10 (highest)) in the role-play for all parties causes participants to feel what it is like to live a different narrative with respect to power and status than in their daily lives – in which the shelter’s management has the power over the inhabitants. Understanding that they can become more powerful and experience power themselves by means of a role-play might have an effect on their perception on their seemingly powerless situation and narrative (see also chapter 3).

Such tools, as well as other impulses aimed at triggering accomplishment and thereby self-efficacy, can be found in the peer mediation training and process. Methods elaborated and refined over time like story-sharing, empowerment of peers, gaining a certificate and status, bi-cultural characteristics of co-trainers, shaping and designing role-plays based on real life conflicts, bi-cultural co-mediators and mental health literacy have demonstrated a strong influence on the characteristic of trusting one’s own self-efficacy.

⁴¹⁰Schröder, *Selbstwirksamkeit Sammlung*; Walach et al., “Patients and agents—or why we need a different narrative: a philosophical analysis”.

⁴¹¹Schröder and Mindenberger, “Kulturheilkunde: Über das Medizinische hinaus”, p. 58.

⁴¹²ibid., p. 58.

5.2.4 Characteristics of the Core-Category: Empowering, Equal, Motivated

I determined the characteristics of the core-category self-efficacy as “empowering”, “equal”, and “motivated”; all equally impacting participant’s trust in their own self-efficacy. Those characteristics were found to be dominant in the data relating to the core-category. The peer-mediation training has to be empowering in order to set an impulse for self-efficacy, participants have to feel equal and be on an equal footing with the trainers, and participants have to be motivated to want to learn new material. In the following, it is illustrated how those characteristics were found in the data.

5.2.4.1 Empowering

An informal social network of migrants was discovered to be the primary source of support for most refugees. Social support can decrease feelings of isolation and increase feelings of belonging.⁴¹³ However, most refugees experience a loss of autonomy and control over their own lives, which is why reinforcing opportunities for refugees to actively be a part of an informal social network that facilitates integration into a new society can potentially foster their agency.⁴¹⁴

Transmitting mediation skills in a forum of trust not only strengthens the feeling of belonging of workshop participants and soon-to-be peer mediators but it also allows for peers to take matters — and the resolution of community disputes — into their own hands. This learning experience is reported to feel very empowering as it is setting a contrast to residents’ usual perception of their powerless situation.⁴¹⁵ This phenomenon was also demonstrated by a recent study which found that refugees, participating in peer workshops in order to become mentors to newly arrived refugees, enhanced their feelings of resilience and empowerment.⁴¹⁶

These findings are in congruence with my observations and analysis regarding the first and second groups of the peer-mediation training. With the following interview extract, I will demonstrate an empowering experience of one of the peer mediators of the first group after they were an active peer mediator and spokesperson for conflict resolution in the shelter for about two years.

⁴¹³Stewart et al., “Supporting African refugees in Canada: Insights from a support intervention”.

⁴¹⁴H. M. E. Winter et al., “Psychosocial peer mediation as sustainable method for conflict prevention and management among refugee communities in Germany”.

⁴¹⁵ibid.

⁴¹⁶Paloma et al., “A peer support and peer mentoring approach to enhancing resilience and empowerment among refugees settled in southern Spain”.

- Interviewer** And how does the shelter deal with these conflicts settled through peer mediation?
- PM 3** I think the shelter's management thought it was a very good idea and was happy because before the peer mediators started working, for example, there were problems that could not be solved for a long time. But we, the peer mediators, were able to do it in less than 5 minutes and then the management wondered how we did it so easily. And for the residents peer mediation was also a new idea. They didn't really have that in their home country. At home, there was something like a mediator, but in a different way, not that you are trained, but that, for example, an older person talks to both parties in the dispute. [...]
- Interviewer** When someone from the shelter comes to you with a concern or conflict, do you consult with someone else on the matter? If so, with whom?
- PM3** I never went alone, I always took someone with me so that the disputants cannot complain that he is not neutral. They also learned in the workshop that it is better to go in pairs so that the disputants feel better since at least one of the co-mediators can remain neutral. That's why I always talked to another mediator.
- Interviewer** And is that difficult for you when people come to you with a conflict?
- PM3** (laughs) Yes, settling disputes was clearly not easy and also a headache sometimes, but we didn't want to just stop. We wanted to keep going. And even the shelter's management asked our group if we wanted to continue as peer mediators or if it was very stressful. Because we could stop if we wanted. But we wanted to continue working as mediators.
- Interviewer** What were some of the impacts you saw from the training? For you personally and for the shelter.
- PM3** Yes, one positive impact was that the mentality of the residents changed, accepting the idea of mediation. In the beginning, it was quite difficult, and this was new, and they maybe didn't dare to go to the peer mediators. But over time, as the group of mediators solved different problems, they liked the idea. So, a positive impact could be that the mentality of the residents changed as a result.
- Interviewer** And what impact did it have for you personally?

PM3 You feel good and then you are also respected more by people because of your role and because you do it well. We can support the social workers in the shelter because we can also speak Arabic and maybe even understand the cultures and mentalities better than them. Communication between us and the residents was also easier because the social workers also needed a translator in case of conflicts. So, I was very helpful for the social workers in the shelter and the shelter's management.

In this interview extract, peer mediator 3 describes his view on how peer mediation established itself in the shelter and the impact it has had on the residents, management, as well as on the peer mediators including himself. His statements demonstrate that he not only values the work of the peer mediators, but also concludes that some conflicts could not have been resolved without their help:

“...before the peer mediators started working, for example, there were problems that could not be solved for a long time. But we, the peer mediators, were able to do it in less than 5 minutes and then the management wondered how we did it so easily.” (Peer Mediator 3)

This particular train of thought reflects a sense of pride and empowerment, as the management, which is typically regarded as the final instance, who has the answers to anything, did not even appear to understand how the peer mediators were able to resolve some of the conflicts “so easily”. This very same idea of the shelter's management usually being the most powerful stakeholder in the shelter is also echoed in the proclamation: “And even the shelter's management asked our group if we wanted to continue as peer mediators.” as it demonstrates the management's role of a last resort.

He not only addresses the shelter's management and their view on the work of the peer mediators but also alludes to the other residents: “...the mentality of the residents changed, accepting the idea of mediation.” I would argue that by focusing on a change of mentality of the residents, he also insinuates that he felt more accepted by other community members. This idea is further supported by him outlining the following: “But over time, as the group of mediators solved different problems, they liked the idea.” It appears as if he was able to prove to himself and other community members that he and his colleagues succeeded in helping the residents solve problems.

Furthermore, peer mediator 3 displays a great deal of enthusiasm, calling for more self-efficacy experiences, which in my view are a direct result of this demonstrated sense of empowerment. Even at times when the peer

mediation was perceived as extremely stressful for the peer mediators by the shelter's management, he claims: "...we didn't want to just stop. We wanted to keep going." He describes the positive feelings he associates with volunteering as a peer mediator in the community: "You feel good and then you are also respected more by people because of your role and because you do it well." The feeling of having a task and something useful to do causes peer mediator 3 to describe volunteering as a peer mediator as a "role". In my view, a role is almost like belonging to a specific profession and obtaining expertise and status in a certain environment. Exercising this role leads peer mediator 3 to experience that he is more respected by other residents. In addition, he appears to feel like he is excelling at the task, which is granting him further trust in his own abilities, as a result of the many cases he was able to solve: "because you do it well". While he is still using the words "we" and "you" in the sense of "one" in those statements, he later switches to speaking of himself as "I," almost as if he is realizing that he himself was of tremendous support to the community and his personal work had a great impact on others: "So, I was very helpful for the social workers in the shelter and the shelter's management."

Peer mediator 1 reports a similar observation regarding a change of mentality in the residents, as well as a sense of empowerment of the peer mediators themselves with direct relation to the shelter's management decrease in power:

"In the beginning, before the training, the shelter administration always solved the problems or was in charge when any conflict happened. After that, when we, the peer mediators, started it became known that there was an active group of peer mediators in the shelter and then that changed the situation because then we were in charge and not the shelter's management when any conflict happened in the shelter."

This illustrates the prior common practice of the shelter's management overseeing disputes arising in the community, in contrast to the growing shift in mindset of the residents that the peer mediators are taking over responsibility for settling disputes.

Additionally, I found a change in the shelter's management's attitude and perception of the peer mediators' work, admitting that the peer mediators' self-confidence stood out when they mediated disputes in the community:

"In any case, this is very helpful, so on the one hand that is a form of empowerment, that the residents themselves take matters into their own hands and are active. It is very good, that they are also self-confident in how they do it. That is a positive aspect for the peer mediators. And of course, the residents have the

opportunity to realize that they cannot just come to us, that there are also other peers.” (Shelter’s management)

This statement shows that the leadership wants to promote this empowerment and even elevates the peer mediators to the same level as themselves when it comes to resolving conflicts in the community.

Most peer-mediators explicitly alluded to their cultural sensitivity as an asset that they had in comparison to the shelter’s management when helping people reach an agreement in a dispute. This advantage could be seen as a reason why some of the disputes in the community were settled much faster through the aid of peer mediators.

For example, some used traditional norms as an instrument to get to a resolution faster. In one case, a peer mediator reported how he helped two arguing families in his shelter settle their differences. He had been invited into one of their apartments when, after several hours of negotiation and no solution in sight, he simply refused to drink the tea he was offered unless they would make up. Not drinking offered tea is considered a big affront in Syria. Faced with the social crisis of having a guest not drink tea, the parties swiftly became willing to find a solution so that at least the peer mediator would have a cup with them.

I further discovered that most parties to peer mediation rarely wanted to draft a written agreement but preferred to adhere to an oral agreement or other forms of symbols for a reached agreement. For example, to illustrate this observation I wrote the following in a memo:

“In one particular case, a female peer mediator from Guinea wanted to come up with a written agreement. However, the parties, both females from Angola, did not want to do this because they don’t want the mediator to have so much responsibility if the agreement fails later. So, they all brainstormed on what to do instead and proposed together that parties simply swear over the bible as a substitute to a written agreement. In this way, they said they were more likely to commit to the agreement and the peer mediator was less in charge of the success of the mediation.”

My findings are in line with Mayer’s research stating that spirituality can play an important role in cultural synergetic mediation, “as there is room for other including god-like dimensions that can support finding a solution.”⁴¹⁷

Giving participants the opportunity to take into consideration spirituality, customs and cultural nuances rather than rigidly follow Western norms

⁴¹⁷Treichel et al., *Lehrbuch Kultur: Lehr- und Lernmaterialien zur Vermittlung kultureller Kompetenzen*, p. 378; Mayer and Boness, “Interventions to promoting sense of coherence and transcultural competences in educational contexts”.

when mediating is key to shaping the process and finding innovative ways of working with conflicting parties to find a solution. This is something that the shelter's social workers and the management often struggle to do. Therefore, incorporating a "mediation approach" that encompasses a broader range of diverse techniques and takes into account the distribution of power is crucial. This idea also relates to the core-category as this approach would trust in the peer mediator's knowledge and thus allow for more opportunities for strengthening self-efficacy.

5.2.4.2 Equal

The characteristic "equal" of the core-category encompasses the idea that participants desire to feel equal and see eye-to-eye with the trainers who teach them a new skillset. This means that they must be able to identify with the trainers. Therefore, the characteristics of the co-trainers and their refugee background play an important role in the peer-mediation training.

5.2.4.3 Characteristics of Co-Trainers

The peer mediation trainings are ideally co-facilitated by professional mediators, and co-trainers of refugee background who have a mutual cultural background.⁴¹⁸ For example, it was found that "this approach (not only) discourages the myth that the only good ideas are those coming from the West, but it also demonstrates to participants a respect for their own expertise and unique insight into the promotion of locally relevant social change."⁴¹⁹

The presence of a refugee co-trainer causes participants to identify with a "role model" displaying similar characteristics and having experienced similar events and makes them enter a dialogue at eye level with the trainers.⁴²⁰

Here, I see a correlation to Bandura's theories on observational learning and modeling. Observational learning is described as "a way that people can learn simply by watching others thereby removing the need to learn everything by tedious trial-and-error".⁴²¹ However, according to Bandura, people do not just mindlessly imitate what they observe but rather mindfully decide which behaviors to mimic.⁴²²

This is because Bandura found that people most likely copy a behavior with an expected positive outcome. This expectation is a direct result of

⁴¹⁸H. M. E. Winter et al., "Psychosocial peer mediation as sustainable method for conflict prevention and management among refugee communities in Germany".

⁴¹⁹Noel et al., "Conflict resolution in a non-western context: Conversations with Indonesian scholars and practitioners".

⁴²⁰H. M. E. Winter et al., "Psychosocial peer mediation as sustainable method for conflict prevention and management among refugee communities in Germany".

⁴²¹Group, A Study Guide for Psychologists and Their Theories for Students: Albert Bandura.

⁴²²ibid.

how people anticipate what their behavior might lead to.⁴²³ Next to the anticipated positive outcome, they also reproduce a behavior because of the “characteristics of the person being observed – for example studies have found that the person’s age, sex, similarity to the observer, status, skill and power may all be important.”⁴²⁴ Similarly, participants might identify more with a co-trainer of refugee background showing similar characteristics to the observer, while at the same time demonstrating an expert status and a new skillset that the observer might reproduce more likely as a result.

Furthermore, Bandura discovered that people tend to imitate behavior that is perceived as simple or admired.⁴²⁵ Therefore, I found that motivating participants taking part in role-plays by applauding after successful completion of their mock mediation could be perceived as admiration by the observers, causing them to want to participate and excel in a mock mediation as well.

Correspondingly, another aspect of the characteristic of “equal” is that refugee co-trainers can reflect on their own emotional journey as refugees and the challenges they have encountered upon arrival to the host country. One of my co-trainers stated:

“Some of the participants often don’t even know the language and are still very eager to learn and to change their lives and that is very inspiring to see that.”

Therefore, in a reciprocal manner, refugee co-trainers themselves feel affirmed in their ability to have a positive impact on the participants’ lives.⁴²⁶

In the article “Interpreting as mediation of migrants’ agency and institutional support. A case analysis” by Baraldi, the author explores the role of interpreters in mediating interactions between migrants and institutions.⁴²⁷ The author argues that interpreters function as intercultural mediators, as they facilitate communication and understanding between individuals with different cultural backgrounds. The analysis focuses on the ways in which mediated interactions highlight migrants’ problems and enhance institutional support for solving them.⁴²⁸ The author finds that interpreters actively contribute to the social construction of migrants’ problems and to the enhancement of possible solutions by extending institutional support, showing active listening, and reducing the risk of conflicts. These findings support the idea of using refugee co-trainers in a peer mediation training

⁴²³ibid.

⁴²⁴ibid.

⁴²⁵ibid.

⁴²⁶H. M. E. Winter et al., “Psychosocial peer mediation as sustainable method for conflict prevention and management among refugee communities in Germany”.

⁴²⁷Baraldi, “Interpreting as mediation of migrants’ agency and institutional support.”

⁴²⁸ibid.

because they can provide valuable cultural and contextual knowledge and understanding to the mediators, which can help to facilitate effective communication and resolution of conflicts.⁴²⁹ Similarly, Androusou et al. argue that cultural mediation goes beyond language interpretation by creating the necessary conditions for refugees and members of the host society to understand each other within a specific context.⁴³⁰

Three aspects can be highlighted from this: First, that the participants can identify with the co-trainers, that they have the same background regarding their flight history and, second, that they can learn from the model that bicultural cooperation works. Third, as interpreters play a key role in facilitating understanding between individuals with different cultural backgrounds, having refugee co-trainers present in mediation training can enhance the effectiveness of the training by providing a deeper understanding of the cultural and social context of the conflicts being addressed - if they speak the same language as the parties.

Most importantly, close collaboration between refugee peer and professional trainers can serve as a role-model for bi-cultural teamwork between host community members and refugees.

5.2.4.4 Bi-cultural Co-Mediators

“I never went (into a mediation) alone, I always took someone with me so that the disputants cannot complain that I am not neutral. We also learned in the workshop that it is better to go in pairs so that the disputants feel better since at least one of them can remain neutral. That’s why I always talked to another co-mediator.”

– Peer Mediator 3

Another aspect of the characteristic “equal” is the composition of the mediating team that carries out the peer mediations.

Haumersen and Liebe speak about a potential threat to impartiality if the mediator does not belong to a party’s culture: “Belonging to a specific group results in greater familiarity with the sign systems, the cultural codes that apply within that group than is possible for persons who do not belong (to that cultural group). And so, it is quite conceivable that a party to the conflict who belongs to a different nationality or a different social class than the mediator will express himself in a way that the mediator does not understand, or even realize, that something has remained misunderstood, and so cannot

⁴²⁹Baraldi, “Interpreting as mediation of migrants’ agency and institutional support.”

⁴³⁰Androusou, “Worlds Never Apart: Bridging Communities by Engaging Refugees in Cultural Mediation”.

even inquire. However, because understanding on the part of the mediator is (his or her) control instrument this actual non-understanding is a potential source of error and a threat to the neutrality of the procedure.”⁴³¹

Following their line of argumentation, impartiality seems less endangered when a mediator is of the same cultural background as a party such that cultural codes and cues can be addressed and interpreted.

Moreover, peer mediations conducted by a team of bi-cultural co-mediators increases the, oftentimes, multicultural parties’ satisfaction with the mediation process and the principle of impartiality.⁴³² Such co-mediation teams are composed of refugee peer-mediators from diverse backgrounds and ideally replicate the cultural backgrounds of both conflicting parties. This composition results in a rise of cross-cultural understanding, mutual acceptance, and an improved effectiveness, as well as satisfactory outcomes.⁴³³

It furthermore strengthens the parties’ trust in the mediators. A research study by Pugh, Sulewski, and Moreno shows that cross-cultural co-mediators who reflect the parties cultural backgrounds increase the parties’ contentment with the mediation process and counter unconscious biases⁴³⁴ This leads to ensuring a more impartial process. In contrast, mediations in which only one cultural background of one of the parties is represented may result in one party feeling excluded.⁴³⁵

This characteristic is also present in different dimensions. If there is no equal treatment reflected by the composition of trainers and bi-cultural co-mediators, the growth of conflict skills and self-efficacy is jeopardized.

5.2.4.5 Motivated

Another characteristic that has a direct influence on the levels of trust in participants’ own self-efficacy is the characteristic immanent to the core category; participants are “motivated” to become peer mediators, meaning undergoing the training, learning a new skillset, as well as volunteering as peer mediators.

As stated above, self-efficacy is an integral part of people’s motivation as

⁴³¹Busch and Schröder, *Perspektiven Interkultureller Mediation*, p. 70.

⁴³²Pugh et al., “Adapting Community Mediation for Colombian Forced Migrants in Ecuador”; H. M. E. Winter et al., “Psychosocial peer mediation as sustainable method for conflict prevention and management among refugee communities in Germany”.

⁴³³ibid.

⁴³⁴Pugh et al., “Adapting Community Mediation for Colombian Forced Migrants in Ecuador”; H. M. E. Winter et al., “Psychosocial peer mediation as sustainable method for conflict prevention and management among refugee communities in Germany”.

⁴³⁵Pugh et al., “Adapting Community Mediation for Colombian Forced Migrants in Ecuador”; H. M. E. Winter et al., “Psychosocial peer mediation as sustainable method for conflict prevention and management among refugee communities in Germany”.

it determines someone's belief and capabilities to produce certain levels of performance to reach a goal. Thus, motivation is the process that initiates, guides, and maintains goal-oriented behaviors.⁴³⁶

This means, participants are eager and willing to learn and engage in the peer mediation training and become a peer mediator. (see also chapter 3)

During my analysis, I have found two main forces influencing participants' motivation to partake in the training. Those were the acquisition of knowledge in an interactive and stimulating way purely for the personal gratification of the experience (intrinsic motivation) and the prospect of gaining a reward in the form of a certificate, as well as status (extrinsic motivation).

5.2.4.6 Intrinsic Motivation

To my knowledge, intrinsic motivation means to be able to overcome one's "inner laziness" and take concrete actions towards certain goals – even if that involves overcoming big obstacles and resistance, it means intrinsically not giving up and wanting to try harder.

Bandura describes this idea in his concept of "self-reinforcement" as the ability of a person to teach oneself to picture the consequences of a certain action and then acting in such a way that the anticipated consequence and outcome is achieved. Thus, self-reinforcement is a way of increasing our motivation when we take actions towards our ambitions and try to realize our goals.⁴³⁷

At the beginning of each peer mediation training, we talk about potential benefits of attending the peer mediation training, such as being able to help other members of the community, gaining a new skillset that might lead to a potential job, or even simply practicing and improving one's German skills and the chance to meet locals. Picturing those advantages makes it easier for the participants to picture themselves after the training and to use their self-reinforcement mechanisms.

In his book chapter "What drives Motivation?", Alan McLean identifies four main external drivers that trigger intrinsic motivation, two of which he derives from our biggest fears:

"Loneliness and chaos are our two greatest fears. We strive to avoid loneliness via intimacy with, and approval of, others (our relationships). We strive to avoid chaos by seeking autonomy and control over our lives

⁴³⁶Cherry, What Is Motivation?

⁴³⁷Bandura, "Self-efficacy: Toward a unifying theory of behavioral change"; Group, A Study Guide for Psychologists and Their Theories for Students: Albert Bandura, p. 14.

(empowerment). Chaos and loneliness are often at the heart of the problems of students with motivational problems.⁴³⁸

Therefore, according to McLean, caregivers, teachers and trainers should provide learning individuals with consistency and structure to prevent chaos, as well as promote social and emotional engagement to be able to create a relational bond with the participants.⁴³⁹

Another driver for motivation that he describes is the “simulation driver”, which refers to the quality of training and learning: “Students are intrinsically motivated when they want to do something for its own sake, interest and enjoyment. Relevance, challenge, control, curiosity and fantasy are some of the key intrinsic motivators”⁴⁴⁰ Lastly, intrinsic motivation is increased by positive feedback, which emphasizes personal accomplishments causing the participants to directly feel responsible for their great achievements.⁴⁴¹

Most workshop participants have reported that acquiring knowledge through primarily acting in role-plays and observing role-plays are their main motivations to regularly partake in the training. They overall reported that they had the most fun during role-plays, and the biggest aha-moments when being active as a mediator or a party in a mock mediation. This feedback matches McLean’s description of the “simulation driver” causing an increase in the intrinsic motivation of the participants.

Participants equally stated that observing key role models such as refugee trainers led to an increase in their motivation to follow through with the workshops and later volunteer as a peer mediator. For example, one participant stated:

“I felt that I could trust the trainers immediately and opened up about my own problems and conflicts. It helped me watch the trainers engage in role-plays inspired by real conflicts in the shelters. I would like to be able to solve conflicts on my own.”

This statement shows how this participant’s motivation for learning how to mediate is directly caused by the relational engagement driver. Thus, we were able to build a meaningful connection with the participants and to create a forum of trust and intimacy. This led to an increase in the participants intrinsic motivation.

⁴³⁸McLean, “What Drives Motivation?”

⁴³⁹ibid.

⁴⁴⁰ibid.

⁴⁴¹ibid.

5.2.4.7 Extrinsic Motivation

Peer mediator 5 from Syria talked to me extensively about the importance of receiving a certificate as a reward for the peer mediation training during the annual summer festival where he actively advertised making use of the newly established peer mediation mechanisms in the shelter to the residents:

“Most people only want to do it if there is a certificate or money. The mindset of the people is different. They grew up as children in a dictatorship and they were always told that the Arabs are the best people in the world and are always right. They argue about everything, the Syrians. Hopefully it will be better for the children who are now growing up here in Germany, that they grow up more freely. Here in Germany, we have a different mindset. Here in Germany, we, the Syrians think the Germans are the best. It is crazy. They don't understand that everyone is equal, and you should talk and discuss with each other to find a solution to a problem. I think in the training they understand it.”

In his view, most participants join a peer mediation training initially only if they get a certificate or a reward in return. At the same time, he emphasizes how important such a training could be for Syrians, because in his view they are constantly arguing and have grown up with an opinionated mindset. Moreover, he believes that the Syrians have a competitive and confrontational culture. However, by stressing that his peers might understand the importance of solving disputes through peaceful communication by attending the training, he indirectly emphasizes how initial extrinsic motivation can change to intrinsic motivation.

Concluding from my own observations, participants are highly motivated when they are promised that they will receive a certificate from an institution. In my view, the reason behind this is that most participants have learned that a certificate is of utmost importance in Germany for people to pursue a career and make a living. Sometimes they even asked me for an additional stamp on their certificate, as they have learned that only a valid stamp proves the official nature of a document in Germany. The motives behind this reasoning are that residents in the shelter want to get out of the shelter as fast as possible, find a job and have a “normal life” in an apartment of their own. Some of my workshop participants have lived in the shelter for over five years.

They know that the job center values a certificate stating their knowledge and skill-set on conflict resolution and peaceful communication. For some participants, the outlook of receiving a certificate might even be their initial and only motivation to join the peer mediation training. Therefore, I always

state the prospect of getting a certificate as “bait” in the beginning of a training and trust the process enough to know that participants join and motivate even more participants once the training has started. I have seen participants who have initially joined to receive a certificate, only to develop an intrinsic motivation over the course of the workshop.

Furthermore, I have found that participants’ motivation increases if they can complete the training in a couple of days rather than over the period of a few weeks. In the beginning, we offered the workshop over a period of several weeks. This led to discouragement and having to start building trust with the participants repeatedly.

Participants dropped out because they wanted to see quicker results and form stronger bonds with their peers over a shorter period of time. I have therefore changed the structure of the training in a way that they can complete an intensive workshop within the time-frame of several days. Gaining knowledge in a short period of time is more foreseeable and tangible for the participants. This led to an increase in their motivation, as well as consistency in participation and significant disappearance of dropout rates.

Aside from the three characteristics (empowered, equal, motivated) intrinsic to the core category, I have found four strategies which directly influence the core phenomenon and its characteristics and vice-versa.

5.2.5 Strategies

Those strategies include the categories “to shape”, the invivo code “too much time, now better”, the invivo code “spread charity”, as well as the category “to gain status”.

5.2.5.1 “To shape”

The strategy “to shape” encompasses the desire and need of the participants to design the role-plays and cases themselves when practicing mediation. As stated above, when asked what they particularly liked about the workshops, all participants stated that they most enjoyed acting in the role-plays and practicing the role of the mediator, which led to an increase of the participants intrinsic motivation caused by the “stimulation driver” resulting from interactive learning methods and more meaningful interactions through play.

In their article “Play – and People Living With Dementia: A Humanities-Based Inquiry of TimeSlips and the Alzheimer’s Poetry Project”, Swinnen at al. argue that the expression of joy through experiencing “play” leads

to experiencing meaning and purpose for people living with dementia.⁴⁴² They refer to Dutch historian Huizinga who argued that play is at the core of being human and argued for the term “homo ludens”, which means “man the player”.⁴⁴³ He writes that “in play there is something ‘at play’ which transcends the immediate needs of life and imparts meaning to the action. All play means something”⁴⁴⁴ Therefore, he argued that play in itself contains meaning.⁴⁴⁵

Swinnen et al. further state that the ability of play was found to decrease boredom, tensions, and fosters belonging, which are “challenges often faced by people living with dementia. (...) Focusing on play allows us to shift from the construct of ‘man the knower’ (homo sapiens) whereby people living with dementia are mainly positioned in terms of their cognitive limitations, to ‘man the player’ (homo ludens) which emphasizes their capabilities.”⁴⁴⁶

As stated above, the environment of a refugee shelter, as well as a lack of perspectives, increase boredom and tensions between the inhabitants. Play in the forms of role-plays and group exercises can therefore be regarded as an activity that fosters meaning and creates a sense of belonging. It is important to note that “play is not used (...) as a way of infantilizing or trivializing people (...) but instead as a concept through which to explore new potential for expression, meaning-making, and relationship-building...”.⁴⁴⁷

Above all, the participants stressed in the interviews that they particularly liked the possibility to shape the role-plays themselves – meaning they explicitly asked for the opportunity to design their own conflict scenarios and act them out based on their recent experiences and conflicts that had occurred in the shelter. Notably, the participants demanded that they design their own role-play based on a recent conflict they had experienced, even though – in collaboration with the refugee co-trainers – I had prepared role-plays based on real life conflicts in the shelters.

In my understanding, giving participants a choice in the type of conflict they want to mediate enhances their self-efficacy in many levels. First, it gives participants the opportunity to talk about their own conflicts that affect them. Hence, they are more likely to understand the conflict and find possible solutions to their problems because the conflicts they are learning to mediate are relevant to their personal living context. Secondly, participants are in

⁴⁴²Swinnen et al., ““Play” and People Living With Dementia: A Humanities-Based Inquiry of TimeSlips and the Alzheimer’s Poetry Project”.

⁴⁴³Huizinga et al., *Homo ludens. A study of the play-element in culture.*

⁴⁴⁴ibid.

⁴⁴⁵Swinnen et al., ““Play” and People Living With Dementia: A Humanities-Based Inquiry of TimeSlips and the Alzheimer’s Poetry Project”.

⁴⁴⁶ibid.

⁴⁴⁷ibid.

charge of the learning process themselves and, thus, have a strong influence on the content of the workshop. Therefore, they have a direct impact on their learning curve as they are emotionally attached to the content. Thirdly, they are on an equal footing with the trainers which causes them to increase their awareness for autonomy. Thus, those components foster their self-efficacy. It has been proven that giving pupils a choice in what they can learn not only strengthens their self-efficacy, but also increases their motivation and their ability to memorize and apply the learned.⁴⁴⁸

Giving students the opportunity to make real choices in the classroom can lead to an increased engagement in the tasks at hand, builds on their strengths, and enables them to meet their individual learning needs.⁴⁴⁹

“Students feel autonomous when they understand the value or relevance of a task, particularly if they believe that the task aligns with their values, interests, and goals. It comes not just from participating in the process of choosing but, rather, from having a sense that the choice is personally meaningful.”⁴⁵⁰

By choosing and creating a role-play based on a conflict that is personally meaningful to them, participants perceive more autonomy as a direct result of their choice and participation in composing the role-plays.

The idea of empowerment and the collective wish for shaping the learning experience goes beyond their role as active participants. This desire is also reflected later among peer mediators during intensive group discussions.

The group discussion method is an appropriate data collection method for the phenomenon “self-efficacy” that I wanted to capture among the peer mediators (see chapter 4).

I came to learn that individuals of the group feel more comfortable and open up more easily as they observe and listen to other group members express their concerns and ideas. In my role as a researcher and trainer, I have the advantage that I am familiar with the group and yet not part of them. This method served as an excellent resource to obtain further data for the analysis based on the Grounded Theory Methodology.

The group discussions among the peer mediators, the management, social workers and myself as the facilitator and researcher took place after the completion of the peer mediation training during the mentoring. The group discussion centered around the topic “responsibilities of peer mediators”

⁴⁴⁸Kageyama, How (and Why) Giving Students Choices, Can Dramatically Improve Learning.

⁴⁴⁹Parker et al., “To engage students, give them meaningful choices in the classroom”.

⁴⁵⁰ibid.

and addressed the scope of their work in the shelter and which types of conflicts they would or should oversee.

In this respect, the peer mediators of the second group unanimously agreed that they would like to solve more complex disputes than “only quarrels among children” to demonstrate their abilities:

“We want to mediate problems greater than conflicts among children, we want to show that we can do it, that we know how to solve real problems.” (Peer mediator 2)

This shows that they not only want to shape the process of the mediations but also express the desire to be given authority and responsibility to mediate a range of disputes that include not only concerns of children but also adults. This is perceived as more complex and difficult by the peer mediators, as they state, “we want to show that we can do it, that we know how to solve real problems.”, expressing their confidence in their abilities.

5.2.5.2 “Too much time, now better”

The strategy “too much time, now better” stems from an *in vivo* code. Peer mediator 4 talked about his experience in and after the peer mediation training:

“I am happy I participated and can help others now. You know, Helen, here, too much time, now better”.

I have found that this statement and attitude resembles the need for participants to gain purpose through an activity that they perceive as meaningful to pursue, as well as their strong desire for regaining or gaining *joie de vivre*. Going to a workshop regularly or volunteering as an active member of the community in the community council and ultimately as a peer mediator can create more meaning in their lives.

At first, I contemplated the idea that participants simply want something to do and that that task could be any simple tasks that distracts them from their daily struggles. However, then I dived deeper into corresponding literature on the philosophy of boredom to understand that boredom can cause people to engage in meaningful activities that they perceive as worthwhile and purposeful.

German philosopher Hans Blumenberg defined boredom as “the metaphysical principle of the world”, while Nietzsche called it “God’s most common mood” and Kierkegaard subsequently called it “God’s reason to create us”.⁴⁵¹ Commonly, boredom is known for causing “depressions, anx-

⁴⁵¹Tilburg et al., “The unbearable lightness of boredom: A pragmatic meaning-regulation hypothesis”.

ieties, hostile and aggressive behaviors, sleep disorders, (...) addictions, reckless driving, states of despair and loneliness, criminal actions, school deviations, suicidal tendencies, low self-esteem, lack of social affiliation, and eating disorders, among many others.”⁴⁵²

Schopenhauer directly linked boredom to – in his view – the meaninglessness of life: “Human life must be some kind of mistake. The truth of this will be sufficiently obvious if we only remember that man is a compound of needs and necessities hard to satisfy; and that even when they are satisfied, all he obtains is a state of painlessness, where nothing remains to him but abandonment to boredom. This is direct proof that existence has no real value in itself; for what is boredom but the feeling of the emptiness of life?”⁴⁵³

According to Wijnand A. P. van Tilburg and Eric R. Igo, Schopenhauer’s rather negative perception on boredom still demonstrates that the state of feeling bored is somehow linked to the question of the meaning of life as Schopenhauer sees boredom as “evidence of life’s ultimate emptiness”.⁴⁵⁴ In their chapter “The Unbearable Lightness of Boredom: A Pragmatic Meaning-Regulation Hypothesis” the authors challenge the nihilistic view on boredom to find out if boredom is linked to giving life meaning and can potentially lead us to change course and pursue a more meaningful task in our lives.⁴⁵⁵

Sadly, numerous circumstances in life challenge our sense of meaning, be it at a particular scale of not finding meaning in a particular task or at a broader scale considering one’s whole life as purposeless e.g. having to flee one’s home country.⁴⁵⁶ Such circumstances that cause a threat to meaning may be mortality salience, ostracism, expectancy violations, and disillusionment.⁴⁵⁷ Naturally, it is human to fight and counter these threats. The terror management theory⁴⁵⁸ suggests that human beings try to maintain life’s meaningfulness by following ideologies and religions that offer “a sense of symbolic immortality that helps people to ‘transcend’ their individual and limited existence.”⁴⁵⁹

According to the authors, boredom can be considered as a threat to meaning, consequently not having solely negative effects, since people can natu-

⁴⁵²ibid.

⁴⁵³Schopenhauer, *The Essays of Arthur Schopenhauer*; Tilburg et al., “The unbearable lightness of boredom: A pragmatic meaning-regulation hypothesis”.

⁴⁵⁴Schopenhauer, *The Essays of Arthur Schopenhauer*; Tilburg et al., “The unbearable lightness of boredom: A pragmatic meaning-regulation hypothesis”.

⁴⁵⁵ibid.

⁴⁵⁶ibid.

⁴⁵⁷ibid.

⁴⁵⁸Greenberg et al., *Handbook of experimental existential psychology*.

⁴⁵⁹Tilburg et al., “The unbearable lightness of boredom: A pragmatic meaning-regulation hypothesis”.

rally fight this threat. Therefore, “(b)oredom involving a lack of purpose opens the opportunity for its antagonist: meaning”.⁴⁶⁰ Notably, it was found that people who experience a state of boredom report that they constantly and actively try to seek alternative activities that will lead to a more challenging or meaningful experience. For instance, it was shown that engaging in a subjectively boring task caused people to trick themselves into inventing explanations as to why the task might still be important and appealing.⁴⁶¹ These findings suggest a motivational character of boredom. Thus, the authors analyze: “Indeed, the research by Sansone et al. (1992) and Smith et al. (2009) suggests that boredom signals to people that there is a need to engage in responses that are helpful to remain interested (...) reflecting an overall attempt to reestablish a sense of meaningfulness that is lacking when people are bored.”⁴⁶²

Therefore, it can be argued that boredom increases the search for meaning and potentially causes people to engage in activities or tasks that are perceived as meaningful. This means “if a source of meaning is readily available, then boredom may cause one to pursue it.”⁴⁶³

Wijnand A. P. van Tilburg and Eric R. Igo conclude: “(1) boredom thrives in environments that are appraised as meaningless; (2) boredom triggers a search for meaningful alternatives; (3) sources of meaning prevent boredom.”⁴⁶⁴

In my opinion, this theory can be applied to the strategy “too much time, now better”. An environment that fosters a lack of tasks and a purposeless routine, without any goal or greater objective to aspire to, leads us to feel useless and meaningless;⁴⁶⁵ “like if it does not matter if I exist or not” (Peer Mediator 2). This boredom, on the other hand, causes a search for meaning and the willingness to change one’s situation by looking for opportunities, e.g. a workshop, a project, a language course.

A task, on the other hand, in which we believe in and in which we find joy in can cause certainty that it makes a difference in the meaning of our lives

⁴⁶⁰Tilburg et al., “The unbearable lightness of boredom: A pragmatic meaning-regulation hypothesis”.

⁴⁶¹ibid.; Sansone et al., “Once a boring task always a boring task? Interest as a self-regulatory mechanism.”

⁴⁶²Tilburg et al., “The unbearable lightness of boredom: A pragmatic meaning-regulation hypothesis”; Sansone et al., “Once a boring task always a boring task? Interest as a self-regulatory mechanism.”

⁴⁶³Tilburg et al., “The unbearable lightness of boredom: A pragmatic meaning-regulation hypothesis”; Sansone et al., “Once a boring task always a boring task? Interest as a self-regulatory mechanism.”

⁴⁶⁴Tilburg et al., “The unbearable lightness of boredom: A pragmatic meaning-regulation hypothesis”; Sansone et al., “Once a boring task always a boring task? Interest as a self-regulatory mechanism.”

⁴⁶⁵Froese, On purpose: How we create the meaning of life.

whether we choose to perform this task or not. Consequently, participants engage in peer mediation workshops and serve as a peer mediator most likely to set a contrast to their perceived meaningless situation (“too much time, now better”), and to seek a meaningful alternative that provides them with a purposeful activity potentially enriching their lives.

5.2.5.3 “Spread Charity”

The strategy “spread charity” stems from an in-vivo code from peer mediator 5 and peer mediator 7 who both tried to capture what being a peer mediator means to them:

“For me, being a mediator means doing something good and spreading more charity between people here.” (Peer Mediator 5)

To me, it is interesting that this peer mediator refers to charity as his primer motivation to be a peer mediator. Especially noteworthy to me is that he is not just taking on the role as peer mediator because he wants to direct charity to those who are in need of help, but rather it seems like he wants to actively empower other people (the parties to mediation) to spread charity amongst themselves; thereby referring to the radiating effect of charity.

“Love your neighbor as yourself” is a leitmotiv of Christianity and Judaism. Based on the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37), the neighbor is defined as the someone who is in need, to whom one gives, and from whom one cannot expect anything in return. Love is unconditionally directed to this fellow human being who is in need of help.⁴⁶⁶

Unlike the Bible and the Torah commandments, the Koran does not cite the commandment to love one’s neighbor and one’s enemy. However, Muhammad supposedly stated:

“None of you has attained faith unless he loves for his brothers what he loves for himself”.

⁴⁶⁷ Therefore, social charity (zakat) is one of the five pillars of Islam.⁴⁶⁸

In Buddhism Karuna, though not an explicit commandment, has a comparable implication as it suggests to the believer to actively practice compassion and mercy in order to minimize the suffering of others. It is rooted in the unity of all.⁴⁶⁹

Notably, the phenomenon of charity can be found across religions and, therefore, across cultures.

⁴⁶⁶Spehr, Enzyklopädie der Neuzeit Online.

⁴⁶⁷Wikipedia, Charity, Nächstenliebe.

⁴⁶⁸Spehr, Enzyklopädie der Neuzeit Online.

⁴⁶⁹ibid.

However, aside of its religious roots and cross-cultural universality, I would stipulate that charity is, in fact, something intrinsic to human nature. So, why do we perform acts of human kindness without expecting anything in return from strangers whilst even putting ourselves at risk?

In my opinion, empathy and compassion with other human beings – strangers or not – are at the heart of charity. Empathy means to feel what others are experiencing and to resonate with them⁴⁷⁰ We ultimately feel their joy, excitement but also their pain and suffering when we empathize with them. We experience empathy in a way that we become, to some degree, the same person as the other person, and hence physically feel their sensations.⁴⁷¹

However, according to Bloom, empathy may also cause us to feel overwhelmed and distressed, making it more challenging for us to respond in a compassionate way as we get emotionally involved ourselves. Bloom as well as Ricard therefore advocate to be mindful of the distinction between empathy and compassion. “Compassion is nothing else than love applied to suffering. Such love (...) can override the feelings of distress and powerlessness that empathy alone generates and leads to constructive states of mind such as compassionate courage.”⁴⁷²

I have often witnessed workshop participants talking about experiencing compassion for their fellow participants when engaging in story-sharing exercises like the exercise that involves two people sharing a conflict or a difficult decision that they had to make in their lives with one another. For example, a female participant from Hungary who was a neighbor to the second refugee shelter and had lived in Germany for over 20 years said that she truly connected with the other participant, a female from Afghanistan:

“I have lots of empathy with my exercise partner, because I had no idea what she had been through. I feel compassion towards her and the urge of wanting to help her.”

When I asked her if this experience had also led to her connecting in an amicable way, she replied:

“I definitely feel closer to her because we skipped the small talk, but it would need more conversations like this to become real friends. It is astonishing though how quickly we got intimate.”

Overall, participants stated how much they related to the story of their partner and how this caused them to want to help them. Therefore, even

⁴⁷⁰Ricard, *Empathy and the Cultivation of Compassion* - Matthieu Ricard; H. Winter, Independent study project, the self-aware mediator.

⁴⁷¹Bloom, *Against empathy: The case for rational compassion*; H. Winter, Independent study project, the self-aware mediator.

⁴⁷²Ricard, *Empathy and the Cultivation of Compassion* - Matthieu Ricard; H. Winter, Independent study project, the self-aware mediator.

though this exercise was aimed at fostering active listening skills, it additionally caused people to empathize with one another and triggered connection and compassion.

However, what exactly causes people to behave in an altruistic way and wanting to “spread charity” amongst others that deal with unbearable conflicts almost daily? Like peer mediator 5, peer mediator 7 also refers to the “spread of charity” and directly links it to the peaceful coexistence between people.

“I can only thank you for your human work so that people can understand and get along with each other and reduce the conflicts. Through your idea, you have created a possibility that the coexistence between people and the spread of charity works.”

– Peer Mediator 7

The empathy-altruism hypothesis also refers to empathy and suggests that altruistic behavior is linked with experiencing empathy.⁴⁷³ Experiments inducing empathetic concern demonstrated “that high empathetic conditions increased altruistic responses.”⁴⁷⁴

The phenomenon of “overlapping brain activation patterns when feeling an emotion and when observing (an emotion) in another person” has been suggested to be the main driver for altruism to arise.⁴⁷⁵ Altruism “involves helping someone else, even when it is risky, without any reward.”⁴⁷⁶

This means that altruism has its root cause in empathy; while at the same time altruism in human nature could have affected the phenomenon of interfaith charity. From a neurobiological standpoint, altruism was found to be rewarding as helping others without expecting anything in return activates the reward system of the human brain and decreases stress levels.⁴⁷⁷

Altruistic behavior is agile – meaning it can be obtained and enhanced by being a member of a pro-social environment: “Social support, emotional security and positive priming increase motivation to help.”⁴⁷⁸ Similarly, Garaigordobil and Berruenco found that cooperative games and being on the same team can increase altruistic behavior and mitigate aggression.⁴⁷⁹

⁴⁷³Lozada et al., “Beneficial effects of human altruism”.

⁴⁷⁴ibid.

⁴⁷⁵ibid.

⁴⁷⁶Cherry, What Is Motivation?

⁴⁷⁷ibid.

⁴⁷⁸Mikulincer et al., “Attachment, caregiving, and altruism: boosting attachment security increases compassion and helping”.

⁴⁷⁹Garaigordobil et al., “Effects of an intervention program in children aged 5–6 years: assessment of proactive change in behavioural and cognitive development factors”.

Consequently, altruism and wanting to spread charity among people is caused by brain-based rewards, social and religious norms, as well as engaging in activities and an environment that increases pro-social behavior.⁴⁸⁰

According to Gilster, involvement in activities that benefit the community can lead to a greater sense of control and agency in one's own life and social environment, which can contribute to higher levels of psychological well-being. This suggests that working for the good of the community can have positive effects on an individual's mental health and overall sense of well-being.⁴⁸¹

The sharing exercise, as well as mock mediations, may be classified as cooperative games that strengthen participants' wishes to help others. The more peer mediators experience "rewards" by helping others solve their conflicts and consequently experiencing approval, recognition and praise from others, as well as engage in pro-social activities, the more they are likely inclined to do it again and "spread charity". It is rewarding to help others and creates a sense of meaning and belonging for the peer mediators.

5.2.5.4 To Gain Status

"You feel good and then you are also respected more by people because of your role and because you do it well."

– Peer Mediator 3

At first, I thought the sentiment of this peer mediator relates solely to gaining status in the community. Status is defined as "the position of an individual in relation to another or others, especially in regard to social or professional standing".⁴⁸² My reasoning behind linking these findings to an expressed wish to gain status was that this participants' motivation of becoming a peer mediator is driven by being respected more by others as well as being good at something: "...you are respected more by people because of your role and because you do it well". In my opinion, status is often linked to recognition; we want to be recognized by others for our abilities, education or even symbols of status. However, on second thought, this peer mediator does not only refer to status but also to his role. Role mainly means our function as mother, trainer, learner, or whatever title we and others give our activities. In this case, he talks about his role as a peer mediator which involves the tasks that he takes on to assist other residents with their disputes.

⁴⁸⁰Cherry, What Is Motivation?

⁴⁸¹Gilster, "Comparing neighborhood-focused activism and volunteerism".

⁴⁸²Dictionary.com, Definition of status.

Designing and shaping one's role and status reminded me of the five core concerns of human beings. According to Daniel Shapiro and Roger Fisher "core concerns are human wants that are important to almost everyone in every negotiation and in general communication. They are often unspoken but are no less real than our tangible interests. (...) These core concerns are universal and encompass 'appreciation', 'affiliation', 'autonomy', 'status' and 'role'."⁴⁸³ The authors argue that we can stimulate positive emotions both in ourselves and others when dealing effectively with these emotions in any given form of communications dynamics.

For example, in relation to "status", when our relative standing is treated as inferior to that of others, our core concern "status" is ignored, rather than given full recognition when deserved. When status is recognized appropriately, we feel at peace with ourselves and our abilities. The authors argue that an easy way to acknowledge status is to look for our own and other's individual areas of particular status, which can be found in different areas of life, such as education, business experience, social skills, cooking abilities, or emotional insights.

In this respect, they make the case that the more we understand how others see their own status, the more equipped we will be to trigger their positive emotions associated with their status in that particular area and, vice-versa, we will be much more likely to take pleasure in our own areas of status. Peer mediator 3 is taking pleasure in his own area of status derived from his skills and resulting respect of those abilities as a peer mediator and could potentially draw on other parties' particular areas of status to make them feel recognized.

The core concern of "role" is unmet when our current role and its activities are not personally fulfilling, as opposed to when we define our role and its activities that we find them fulfilling. One way of making our conventional roles more fulfilling is to shape our role by including fulfilling activities and getting rid of unfulfilling ones if possible because every role is more than a title and includes a list of activities:

"Only we can know with certainty what is personally meaningful to us. Often, a role may be meaningful in relation to what we do. (...) A meaningful role incorporates our skills, interests, values, and beliefs into the task at hand. Meaning is found not only in what we do but also in how we perceive a situation. Our role can be fulfilling in relation to how we 'make meaning' of a situation."
(Roger Fisher and Daniel Shapiro, *Beyond Reason*)

Peer mediator 3 is actively shaping and exercising his role as a peer mediator, which demonstrates to me how he is trying to make meaning of his

⁴⁸³Fisher et al., *Beyond reason: Using emotions as you negotiate*.

situation by taking on the role of a peer mediator, which causes positive feelings in him: “You feel good and then you are also respected more by people because of your role and because you do it well.”, and is at the same time creating more meaning in his life as a resident of the shelter. The other three core concerns are not explicitly at stake here but could potentially also be playing a role in the other contexts, which is why I will briefly illustrate them for the sake of completeness.

The core concern of “appreciation” is unmet, when our thoughts, actions or feelings are devalued as opposed to being acknowledged as having merit. We have a natural desire to be appreciated by those around us, which means we want others to find value in what we think, feel or do and have them communicate that to us and vice-versa.⁴⁸⁴ When serving as a peer mediator, you are being appreciated by the parties if you succeed in assisting in solving their conflict. Furthermore, the core concern of “affiliation” is ignored when someone is treated as an adversary rather than as an ally. It describes our sense of connectedness with another person or group. If we are affiliated with a person or group, we experience less emotional distance which makes working together easier.⁴⁸⁵ I would argue that this is particularly applicable for parties and peer mediators equally as both belong to the same peer group, which creates a sense of affiliation and thus connection per se.

Our core concern “autonomy” is ignored when our freedom to make decisions is impinged upon rather than others respecting our freedom of choice to decide important matters on our own. The concept of “Always Consult Before Deciding” (ACBD), is a great way to make sure that we are not stepping on the autonomy of our counterpart and rather watch out for ways that may compromise the autonomy of others.⁴⁸⁶ In taking up a role as a peer mediator, the peer mediator consequently also strengthens his or her autonomy by making the active choice to take on responsibility for the community, as well as through mediating.

To find out about what residents would find important characteristics of a peer mediator and whom they would confide in, I ran a survey in the shelter of the first group survey with twenty-eight residents who did not participate in the workshop. Its purpose was to serve as an addition to better interpret the qualitative data as part of the GTM. The survey aimed at getting a better understanding of the types of disputes and reasons for conflict in the refugee shelter, as well as what they were looking for in a peer mediator. For example, I ask whether they would prefer a life-experienced mediator or a trained mediator and what age an ideal peer mediator should have. As I found out that gaining status was one of the major strategies

⁴⁸⁴Fisher et al., *Beyond reason: Using emotions as you negotiate*.

⁴⁸⁵*ibid.*

⁴⁸⁶*ibid.*

linked to the core category, I was not surprised about what I found.

According to this evaluation, the ideal peer mediator should be “life-experienced” (say 50%), while “trained” in peer mediation was also considered important (say 25%). It is particularly interesting to note that training in mediation was not as important for the 50 to 60-year-olds as for the younger respondents. The ideal age of a peer mediator for most respondents was 40 to 50 years (57% of respondents), followed by “older than 55 years” (29%).

A younger mediator was only welcome for respondents under the age of 30. Thus, this data helped me to further understand the strategy to gain status as it includes the wishes of the peer group taking advantage of peer mediation. It shows that the elder generation rely more on a life-experienced and older mediators, while the younger generation was open to a trained, as well as younger mediators. This demonstrates a change of perception of status across generations, as the younger generation sees status as something that can be obtained through training, while the elder generation believes that status can be obtained naturally through life-experience and age. There seems to be a cultural shift concerning the younger generation, who see education as more important or equally as important as age. Interestingly, this mindset is typical in German culture, which regards education as one of the highest values.

5.2.6 Consequence Self-confidence and Trustworthiness

I discovered self-confidence as a consequence to the central phenomenon of self-efficacy. An increased self-confidence leads to a greater belief of the peer mediators that others can trust them and that they are e.g. perceived as neutral by the conflicting parties. They are recognized by community members and regarded as trustworthy and responsible for community matters. Self-confidence presented itself a key element of making others believe in one’s trustworthiness.

The psychologist Anne Dufourmantelle famously stated “there is no such thing as a lack of self-confidence” meaning that all the insecurity and anxiety she witnessed in her patients came from a lack of trust and confidence in others, as they had mostly had miserable experiences with caregivers and other humans in their past and especially in their childhoods.⁴⁸⁷ Charles Pépin, a philosopher and novelist, thus, argues that “self-confidence and confidence in your relationships therefore refer to the one and the same thing”.⁴⁸⁸ According to him, self-confidence is manifested as confidence in life.

⁴⁸⁷Pépin et al., Self-confidence.

⁴⁸⁸ibid.

In his book “Self-Confidence”, Charles Pépin recognizes that self-confidence first comes from others, even-though this observation may seem paradoxical at first⁴⁸⁹ Seeing the light of day in a premature state of fetal development, human infants are extremely depended starting from day one of their lives. They constantly rely on adults to nurture and care for them. “Their confidence first and foremost, is a confidence in their caregivers: self-confidence begins as confidence in others.”⁴⁹⁰

Pépin argues that little by little children gain confidence through the unconditional love they receive simply for being who they are. This represents the basis and the foundation for inner security and the primal trust in life itself.⁴⁹¹ “While self-esteem is based on our assessment of our own value, self-confidence is tied to our capacity for action – our ability to venture forth despite our doubts and take risks in a complex world. To find the courage to venture into the outside world you have to have inner assurance.” Pépin discusses the example of a toddler recognizing his or her image for the first time in the mirror and becoming conscious of him or herself, and the adult witnessing this scene reassuring the child “yes this is really you.”⁴⁹² “The philosophical implications of this encounter are enormous – the ‘other’ is there from the outset between me and myself. I am conscious of myself only through that other person.”⁴⁹³

When the same experiment was tried with rhesus monkeys, which are genetically closely related to us, they don’t look for reassurance from other fellow monkeys despite becoming aware of their body parts and being social animals. They are not “relationship-based creatures to the same extent as humans are. Without others we humans could not develop our humanity; without others we could not become what we are.”⁴⁹⁴ He then gives the example of wild children who are like haunted animals displaying a major lack of self-confidence due to a lack of attachment to other humans perceiving them as dangerous. In milder examples concerning children who did not grow up in a loving household but were familiarized with other humans, it was shown that we can form attachments that give us confidence also at a later stage in life.⁴⁹⁵

This means that “(n)o one can develop self-confidence all on his or her own. Self-confidence is first and foremost about love and friendship.”⁴⁹⁶ Consequently, love and friendship from others who believe in us are a precondition

⁴⁸⁹Pépin et al., *Self-confidence*, p. 7.

⁴⁹⁰*ibid.*, p. 7.

⁴⁹¹*ibid.*, p. 8.

⁴⁹²*ibid.*, p. 9.

⁴⁹³*ibid.*, p. 9.

⁴⁹⁴*ibid.*, p. 9.

⁴⁹⁵*ibid.*, p. 9.

⁴⁹⁶*ibid.*, p. 21.

for self-confidence to evolve, which I also observed at the completion of the training. After the training, the freshly baked peer mediators raised concerns about their neutrality and worried that they were not perceived as neutral by community members.

Peer mediator 6 raised the aspect of mediating in a peer group in which mediators are friends with or neighbors of parties to peer mediation:

“If my neighbor has a dispute, I actively go and help. My concern is then my neutrality. Whereas if we are just neighbors and not friends, then I am neutral, right?”

And peer mediator 4 also worried about his neutrality and being perceived as neutral by parties to mediation:

“Can we really be neutral; does not the other party then think that we are biased and won’t trust us?”

I realized that the overarching category of trust in their own abilities as peer mediators was more at stake than their fear of not coming across as neutral. The doubts of not being neutral were really doubts about trusting their own abilities and skills as peer mediators. More so, the belief that others would trust in them to be “a trustworthy peer mediator” – in this example “to be neutral” – was grounded in their level of self-confidence.

This very same phenomenon arose in the group discussion between the peer mediators and the shelter’s management of the first shelter a few months after the peer mediators had started working. All active peer mediators unanimously asked the shelter’s management: “Do you even trust us?” When the shelter’s management replied that they do “have great trust in the peer mediators”, they backed up their words by listing all the steps they had taken to promote peer mediation in the shelter and all the activities they had undertaken to spread awareness outside of the shelter and even on a governmental level. They added they would value open and honest communication.⁴⁹⁷

I wrote the following memo after reading Pépin in this context:

“The shelter’s management expresses trust in the peer mediators, which is so important in the opinion of Pépin. It is pivotal to demonstrate love and friendship in the figurative sense for confidence to arise in the first place. The only question remaining is, how to establish a relationship on equal footing if there is a power-imbalance to begin with? The idea and concept of peer mediation eventually tries to even this power-imbalance out – (at least

⁴⁹⁷Gilhooley, *Using peer mediation in classrooms and schools: strategies for teachers, counselors, and administrators*, p. 9; noting: “If the students have the feeling that the faculty has faith in the process, they will as well” in the context of peer mediation in schools.”.

to some extent – within the framework of house rules.) The question I am asking myself is: can the peer-mediators begin to trust in the management to be able to build up their self-confidence and what steps are necessary to take for both sides??"

The peer mediators then stated that they wanted to build even more trust with the shelter's management as they felt that trust was still lacking, and "proof to them that we are able to solve conflicts!". They repeatedly stated:

"We want to do our job well, that's why we need your trust; from the management and the social workers."

and

"We will be successful with our cases, do good work to gain the trust of the residents and the trust of the shelter's management. We now see this as a kind of trial period."

They suggested to start small by trying to mediate disputes between children first and then move to more complex disputes e.g., between families. This again showed me that the main issue was that they wanted to gain trust in their own abilities by "starting small" and convincing themselves rather than others that they were able to mediate conflicts – which would in return lead to greater trust by the shelter's management and the residents: "We need more time to prove ourselves." Once trust is gained, this would in turn would create even greater self-confidence.

In her article "Reason or Madness," Renz places trust in one's own cognitive ability on the same level as trust in others and draws an apparent connection.⁴⁹⁸

"Trust is not relevant for the justification of our beliefs, Renz argues, but it comes into play even before the question of justification can be posed, in that it is – as trust in itself – the condition for our being able to become subjects of beliefs at all."⁴⁹⁹

Renz reasons that one has to have self-confidence in order to take action and become self-efficacious, mere confidence in what others say is not enough for us to act rationally. According to her, self-confidence is thus the precondition for trusting others.⁵⁰⁰ I would like to second her hypothesis and stipulate that, in addition, we need self-confidence in our own abilities – and what Renz calls self-confidence in our own "powers" – to appear trustworthy for other people and to appear in the same way, so that others can trust us.⁵⁰¹

⁴⁹⁸Renz, "Vernunft oder Wahnsinn?"

⁴⁹⁹Budnik, "Schwerpunkt: Vertrauen und Vertrauenswürdigkeit".

⁵⁰⁰Renz, "Vernunft oder Wahnsinn?"

⁵⁰¹ibid.

In the case of the peer mediators, the increase of their self-confidence in their own abilities and powers as peer mediators leads to a greater degree of trustworthiness.⁵⁰²

Davidhizar relates self-confidence to being powerful in the hospital context: “(Nurses) who are really confident in their skills and values do not have to act powerful, they are powerful”.⁵⁰³ Linking this idea to Pépin’s research, this means that people are only powerful if they are also trusted by other people who follow them. Conversely, a low self-confidence makes others feel uncomfortable as well⁵⁰⁴ “When we listen to the answers of a mechanic, physician, or other expert and feel that they are not confident, we also tend to fear they do not know what they are talking about”.⁵⁰⁵ Notably, a high level of self-confidence lends authenticity and results in a higher level of trustworthiness.



Figure 5.5: *The reinforcement of self-confidence.*

Figure 5.5 shows the reinforcement of self-confidence. Self-confidence being a product of confidence in others, according to Pépin, finds expression in the form of trustworthiness and through this recognition and the trust of others in an individual’s abilities, the self-confidence of that individual is thus strengthened.

This was also demonstrated through my field visit and a group discussion with the peer mediators and the shelter’s management that took place one and a half years after the training. As well as in a later extensive interview with the shelter’s management during the second phase of axial coding and theoretical sampling:

“In any case, this [concept] is very helpful, so on the one hand that is a form of empowerment, that the residents themselves take matters into their own hands and are active. It is very good, that they are also self-confident in how they do it. That is a positive aspect for the peer mediators. And of course, the residents have the opportunity to realize that they cannot just come to us [with problems], that there are also other peers.”

⁵⁰²ibid.

⁵⁰³Davidhizar, “Self-Confidence: A Requirement for Collaborative Practice”.

⁵⁰⁴Kröner et al., “The relationship between confidence and self-concept — Towards a model of response confidence”.

⁵⁰⁵ibid.

This clearly addresses the shelter management's change of perception over time (see also the Empowerment-Focused Approach, subsection 3.1.2); they perceive the peer mediators as self-confident and therefore as trustworthy. This is especially reflected in the statement "And of course the residents have the opportunity to realize that they cannot just come to us [with problems], that there are also other peers.", because this declaration puts the peer mediators and the shelter's management on equal footing, as the residents can come to either of them with their conflicts.

Recognizing a gain in self-confidence, another peer mediator stated:

"Thank you through the certificate and the process of mediation and through the techniques learned, the disputants trusted and believed me. I was able to mediate the dispute."

Because of his self-confidence and because he was "able to mediate the dispute" the parties trusted him, which again demonstrates the connection between trust in one's own abilities and being perceived as trustworthy from others. This is also shown in the following statement of peer mediator 5:

"One positive impact was that maybe the mentality of the residents changed, accepting the idea of the mediator. In the beginning it was quite difficult, and this was new and they maybe didn't dare to go to the mediators. But over time, as the group of mediators solved different problems, they liked the idea. So a positive impact could be that the mentality of the residents changed as a result."

Peer mediator 5 addresses a change of perception and mentality of the residents who came to like the option of peer mediation and learned to trust the process as they saw that several disputes had been resolved by the peer mediators over time. Thus, self-confidence causes the peer mediators to convey security and appear trustworthy to potential parties such as the residents as well as to the shelter's management and as someone who will "keep a secret" to parties to mediation.

In conclusion, the trust placed in them by the shelter's management and the residents also led to a further increase in the self-confidence of the peer mediators. Peer mediator 4, for example, stated:

"I can imagine very well to come across any conflict with what I have learned and to be the mediator."

This is a further indication that a self-efficacy experience leads to a self-efficacy conviction and an increase of trust in one's abilities (self-confidence) to be likely to succeed again with the same or a similar task. Going through a challenging situation and succeeding with the task at hand results in a

self-efficacy experience, which in turn leads to a self-efficacy conviction to be likely to succeed again.

5.2.7 Consequence Conflict-competences

“Aware of the suffering caused by unmindful speech and the inability to listen to others, I (Buddha) am committed to cultivating loving speech and deep listening in order to bring joy and happiness to others and relieve others of their suffering. Knowing that words can create happiness or suffering, I am determined to speak truthfully, with words that inspire self-confidence, joy, and hope. I will not spread news that I do not know to be certain and will not criticize or condemn things of which I am not sure. I will refrain from uttering words that can cause division or discord, or that can cause the family or the community to break. I am determined to make all efforts to reconcile and resolve all conflicts, however small.”

– Thich Nhat Hanh

Another consequence to the core phenomenon is a perceived increase of internal and external self-awareness with respect to managing conflicts in the intermediate environment of the participants. According to the subjective perception of the participants, the rise of awareness consequently led to a perceived improvement of their conflict-competences.

Becoming “self-aware” is rooted in the concept of mindfulness.⁵⁰⁶ “Self-awareness means having a deep understanding of one’s emotions, strengths, weaknesses, needs, and drives.”⁵⁰⁷ Other authors regard self-awareness as a temporary state of self-consciousness.⁵⁰⁸ From an emotional intelligence perspective, self-awareness helps us to quickly make sense of our own emotions and to be able to tolerate the discomfort of focusing on negative feelings. People high in self-awareness are very capable of understanding what motivates them and what pushes their buttons.⁵⁰⁹

In a comparative study analyzing nearly 800 existing scientific studies on self-awareness, organizational psychologist Tasha Eurich and her colleagues found that there are two different categories of self-awareness: internal, and external self-awareness. Internal self-awareness which “represents how clearly we see our own values, passions, aspirations, fit with our environment, reactions (including thoughts, feelings, behaviors, strengths, and

⁵⁰⁶Hahn, *The Heart of the Buddha’s Teaching: Transforming Suffering into Peace, Joy, and Liberation*.

⁵⁰⁷Goleman, “The first component of emotional intelligence,”

⁵⁰⁸Dierdorff et al., *We’re not very self-aware, especially at work*.

⁵⁰⁹Bradberry, *Emotional Intelligence - EQ*; H. Winter, Independent study project, the self-aware mediator.

weaknesses), and impact on others.”⁵¹⁰ Eurich names the second category external self-awareness, which describes our ability to understand how other people view us regarding our values, thoughts etc. She found that people with a high degree of external self-awareness also score higher on empathy and are more likely to put themselves in the shoes of others.⁵¹¹ Neuroscientist Nicole Gravagna describes the external part of self-awareness as such: “It might seem magical, but you can also be aware of others on a level that is closely on par with self-awareness. You can feel how someone else feels. You can’t read their thoughts, but you can read their emotions. We read each other through a sense of empathy.”⁵¹²

When asked in a group discussion how they felt when managing stressful situations after the training, all participants except two reported that they feel like they have gotten calmer in conflict situations and more aware of their emotions due to the training, as well as practicing peer mediation and applying some of the acquired skills in their daily lives.

Peer Mediator 6, who was one of the two peer mediators who had a different opinion and more skeptical stated:

“This is not done with five days of intensive training, you have to practice those techniques and your awareness of yourself every day. A character does not change just like that.”

Peer mediator 2 agreed:

“I can’t change my temperament overnight. I have to practice that with the techniques.”

Peer mediator 4 replied directly to these two comments and spoke from his experiences:

“I practiced those techniques for over a month in Yemen, and it helped – something like this takes a lot of time, and then it got better, and I got calmer over time and felt more at ease in conflict situations.”

According to this peer mediator and the others, who experienced an increase in their abilities to manage conflict, internal self-awareness is a skill that can be practiced.

In their book “Emotional Intelligence 2.0”, Travis Bradberry and Jean Greaves agree with this hypothesis and describe strategies which improve our self-awareness. First and foremost, they advise that we have to quit treating our feelings as good or bad. Judging whether we should or should not feel

⁵¹⁰Eurich, “What self-awareness really is (and how to cultivate it”).

⁵¹¹ibid.

⁵¹²Gravagna, Where does self-awareness come from?

the way we feel just heaps more emotions on top of the pile and prevents us from becoming self-aware of our emotions. Suspending judgment from emotion allows our emotions to run their course and vanish.⁵¹³

They advise that we should pay close attention to how our emotions immediately can affect other people's emotions and use that information as a "guide for how [our] emotions are bound to affect a wider circle long after [we] unleash the emotion. The more [we] understand how [our] emotions ripple outward, the better equipped [we] will be to choose the type of ripples that [we] want to create."⁵¹⁴ To become more self-aware it is helpful to allow ourselves to feel our emotions physically. Often we notice that we are physically aware of an emotion long before we are mentally aware of it.⁵¹⁵ It helps if we simply think of emotionally arousing events and become aware of our physical sensations in order to be prepared for the real thing and get more comfortable with our emotions.⁵¹⁶

Peer mediator 11, for example, talked about practicing patience through meditation, which was introduced in the mental health awareness session of the peer mediation training, and the importance of understanding and learning from others in conflict which ties into the concept of external self-awareness:

"I learned to practice patience through meditation and also the process of mediation and how mediation works and especially in the beginning having trouble settling into Germany, and arriving, it really helped to learn something new. I'm always excited and interested in trying something new and also in applying some of the methods that I have learned and also learning from others and growing in this personal experience."

He clearly sees value in being curious about learning and practicing the newly obtained skills, as well as focusing on others trying to understand their perspectives and paying attention to how they apply the methods. This reaffirms Bandura's idea of observational learning, as this peer mediator describes learning and growing as done simply by watching others mediate.

When asked how and if their communication with others changed, all peer mediators, without exception, reported that they were able to put themselves in the shoes of others much more than before the training. Peer mediator 11 indicated for example:

"In the family and with neighbors, it (communication) works much better. We have been able to improve our communication

⁵¹³Bradberry and Greaves, *Emotional Intelligence 2.0*.

⁵¹⁴*ibid.*, p. 67.

⁵¹⁵*ibid.*, pp. 70,71.

⁵¹⁶*ibid.*, pp. 70,71.

with other people.”

In my view, this shows a better understanding of communicating with others and empathizing with them, causing less friction in behavior and a communication which is less likely to escalate. Again, Peer mediator 3 addressed how he was able to understand others better due to practicing and anticipating different conflict scenarios in role-plays:

“The workshop helped me to understand the mentalities of people better because we also discussed and acted out different types of conflict in the workshops and then through that I learned what kind of conflicts you might experience and how to deal with them. And I learned something new because of that.”

This statement describes this peer mediator’s ability to understand how other people view him and also themselves (“the mentalities of people”), which is the essence of external self-awareness.

The increase of internal as well as external self-awareness led to a subjectively perceived increase of conflict-competences and mediation skills as well as tools. When asked if he noticed any differences in the level of conflict since the workshops, Peer Mediator 1 (the Syrian lawyer) talked about the importance of a preliminary discussion with both of the parties separately:

“I noticed something in the level of conflicts since we are acting as peer mediators. For example, when you work as a peer mediator, it’s better to have a preliminary conversation with the disputants separately first, and not to talk directly with both disputants simultaneously. So, if you first talk to one of the disputants alone in a preliminary discussion, that helps a lot to solve the problem later. And I really learned this through the workshop and that was a new method for me.”

This was also confirmed by Peer Mediator 11 but from the perspective of a party to a mediation role-play who stated:

“We don’t apologize as fast in the East as in the West – I am proud, it takes time, I want to talk alone with the mediator first – want to trust him.”

This observation shows that the peer mediators pick techniques from their repertoire with which they feel most comfortable in respect to their culture. Again, trust and how it is established plays a crucial role when the peer mediators determine the design of the peer mediation process. Peer mediator 3 specifically mentioned the technique of asking open ended questions as a helpful method to peacefully resolve conflicts:

“I learned how to deal with different difficult situations and how

to negotiate and how to resolve conflicts peacefully with different peaceful methods, like asking open questions.”

Peer mediator 10 praised the collective aspect of problem-solving when asked what he thought of the training he stated:

“I liked the joint discussions and cooperation – that we found the solutions to the conflicts together and through personal exchange and personal experience.”

Most participants valued the experience in peer mediation that they were able to gain through mock mediations and role-plays. Peer mediator 6 asked to gain even more experiences through practice and real-life cases as he would like to optimize his skill set and feel more secure mediating disputes:

“We have gained more experience as mediators in resolving conflicts, and we need even more experience so that we have more ideas on how to solve the problems.”

One and a half years after the peer mediation started being active, peer mediator 6 talked about a decrease in the escalation of conflicts that he witnessed due to the activity of the peer mediators in the shelter:

“When there is a peer mediator or a group of peer mediators in the shelter, somehow the problems don’t escalate. Because someone comes in who is not from the disputing parties but is neutral and who is trained and that helps to solve that problem. Now if something happens and there is no peer mediator, for example, then maybe the problem escalates between the disputants. And that is a positive effect of the peer mediators being around.”

The same observation was made by the shelter’s management one year and a half later, when they directly thanked the peer mediators in a group discussion:

“It is great and thank you for your work so far. It has become much quieter since you have been around. It is a mediation on several levels. It should be the free decision to whom the residents go in the conflict.”

Subjectively, it has become quieter in the shelter, which is perceived as valuable by the peer mediators and the shelter’s management.

5.3 Summary of the Research Results

This chapter outlined the core category “self-efficacy” and its causal and contextual condition, as well as its strategies and consequences illustrated based on the paradigm model. The core category is integral to the training

concept, which is why the peer mediation training itself is categorized as the causal condition.

The core category is embedded in the contextual condition of the refugee shelter, which is an environment that does not serve the basic psychological and safety needs of the residents directly negatively influencing the core category. The core category “self-efficacy” represents the increased motivation and desire of the participants to regain agency in their life which is resulting from a consolidation in their “beliefs about their capabilities to produce designated levels of performance that exercise influence over events that affect their lives.”⁵¹⁷

Succeeding with a challenging task despite all odds, enormous stress, and difficult circumstances leads to a self-efficacy experience. This experience results in a self-efficacy conviction to be likely to succeed again with the same or a similar task. The self-efficacy conviction can ideally generate a firm self-efficacy expectation to succeed with the same or a similar task. The expectation to succeed with the task then causes further self-efficacy experiences and convictions setting in motion the cycle of self-efficacy.⁵¹⁸ Self-efficacy was found to be indispensable for the participants’ motivation and behavior. Over the course of the training and volunteering as peer mediators, participants started to believe more in their mediation skills and increased their commitment to the task at hand despite the potential risk and doubts of not being “good enough” or “not being trusted by the shelter’s management and community members”. The peer mediators were found to be less vulnerable to threats of failure and wanted to continue their work also in the face of challenges and difficulties.⁵¹⁹

The peer mediators’ mindfulness is increased by gaining autonomy and a say in decision-making processes such as the involvement in a residents’ council. A heightened mindfulness results in more well-being and leads to an amplified cycle of self-efficacy. According to psychologist Langer, nudging people with setting impulses for accomplishment and success causes them to become aware of the fact that they always have a choice of which mindset to adapt; a mindless or a mindful mindset. Langer found that taking charge and control over one’s life, even by autonomously making small decisions on a daily basis, results in a longer life, mindfulness and guaranteed self-efficacy experiences, and an ultimate increase of overall self-efficacy.⁵²⁰

According to neuroscientist, physician, and psychotherapist Bauer, our ability of “self-steering” represents holistic self-care. It entails the ability of balancing our impulses and controlling them to the point that we succeed

⁵¹⁷Bandura, “Bandura Self-efficacy defined”.

⁵¹⁸Schröder, Selbstwirksamkeit Sammlung.

⁵¹⁹Bandura, “Bandura Self-efficacy defined”.

⁵²⁰Langer, Mindfulness.

at any given task we put our mind to.⁵²¹ A highly developed prefrontal cortex and a well-functioning interplay between the limbic system and the superstructure system is a predominant characteristic of people with a great self-steering ability. Those people generally display a greater independence and report feeling more accomplished.

However, if the prefrontal cortex and our self-steering ability is exercised less and less over time (due to boredom and a lack of opportunities and therefore tasks and perspectives in the e.g. in the context of the refugee shelter), and/ or constantly confronted by society's traps of addiction, chances are that our self-steering ability will degenerate. This regress of the prefrontal context would mean a limited self-steering ability and not being able to accomplish our tasks and reach our goals. Rather than being agents of our lives, we would only passively react to life's challenges and rarely get anything done. Therefore, it is so important to further increase opportunities of participation and involve refugees in activities and decision-making processes that strengthen their self-steering abilities on their path to self-efficacy.

The core category self-efficacy displays the characteristics of "empowering", "equal" and "motivated". This means the self-efficacy experience has to be empowering, participants have to feel equal and be on an equal footing with the trainers, and participants have to be motivated to want to learn and experience new skills. The characteristic of empowering encompasses the idea of fostering belonging by building a social network, as well as the concept of training peers in conflict resolution. Rather than having an outsider come into the community to resolve disputes, peers are self-empowered to learn the skill-set that enables them to take on a beneficial role in the community. This experience was reported as feeling very empowering and stands in contrast to residents' usual perception of feeling powerless. The characteristic of equal encompasses the impact of including co-trainers with a refugee background who train alongside local mediators. This approach "demonstrates to participants a respect for their own expertise and unique insight into the promotion of locally relevant social change."⁵²²

Participants are likely to identify with a "role model", such as the co-trainer, who has experienced similar suffering and faced similar challenges, while at the same time training alongside locals and having successfully left the context of the refugee shelter. Finally, another characteristic of the core category is that participants have to be motivated to take part in the training and volunteer as peer mediators. Two main drivers cause their motivation to participate in the training and to become an active member in the peer

⁵²¹J. Bauer, *Wie wir werden, wer wir sind: Die Entstehung des menschlichen Selbst durch Resonanz*.

⁵²²Noel et al., "Conflict resolution in a non-western context: Conversations with Indonesian scholars and practitioners".

mediation clinic. First, the interactivity of the learning materials in the form of group exercises, role-plays and mock mediations reportedly served as a great intrinsic motivation for participants and, second, the prospect of getting a certificate contributed to their initial and extrinsic motivation.

Aside from the characteristics immanent to “self-efficacy”, these strategies directly influence the core category: “to shape”, “Too much time. Now better.”, “spread charity”, as well as the category “to gain status”.

The strategy “to shape” has its origin in an invivo code and represents the participants wish to design and conceive their own role-plays based on their real-life experience during the peer mediation workshops. Giving participants a choice in the type of conflict they want to practice mediating augments their self-efficacy. Not only are the conflicts that they are learning to resolve relevant to their personal living conditions, but the participants are also creating and designing the learning materials and process as they have an influence on the content creation of the workshop. Furthermore, participants’ awareness for autonomy is increased as they are on equal footing with the trainers enhancing their self-efficacy experience.

The invivo code and strategy “Too much time. Now better.” represents the category of finding purpose and meaning. Participants want to participate in the workshop and become peer mediators because they appreciate having a meaningful task to do and thus gaining more purpose and structure in their daily lives. They generate meaning out of monotony and boredom by wanting to change their situation and create a new routine and purpose.⁵²³

The strategy “spread charity” stems from an invivo code and embodies the enjoyment of helping other community members and doing good. Peer mediators experience rewards, approval and gratitude by resolving disputes and thus having a positive impact on other people’s lives. Engaging in such pro-social activities amplifies their motivation “to spread charity”. Another strategy influencing the core category is “to gain status” in the community. Learning how to become a peer mediator is an approach to take on a role that allows for a gain in status and respect by other community members.

Aside from the characteristics of the core category “self-efficacy”, its consequences are self-confidence and trustworthiness, as well as increased conflict competencies.

A consequence of the core category “self-efficacy” is increased self-confidence resulting in amplified trustworthiness perceived by the management and the community which results from being integrated in decision-making processes as peer mediators. Self-confidence leads to a feeling of trustwor-

⁵²³Swinnen et al., ““Play” and People Living With Dementia: A Humanities-Based Inquiry of TimeSlips and the Alzheimer’s Poetry Project”.

thiness and ultimately recognition and trust by the conflicting parties as well as the shelters' management. Thus, participants' increased self-confidence in their abilities as peer mediators is central to making others believe in one's trustworthiness and competence. Through the recognition of others and their belief in one's abilities, the self-confidence of individuals is further altered.⁵²⁴

Improved conflict-competences and subsequently greater internal and external awareness with respect to managing conflicts is another consequence of the core category "self-efficacy". According to the subjective perception of the participants, their rise in internal and external awareness of how to deal with conflict and difficult conversations consequently led to a perceived improvement of their conflict-competences, like being able to relate to others better and stay calm in stressful situations. Internal as well as external self-awareness reportedly led to a subjectively perceived improvement of conflict-competences, mindfulness, and mediation tools.

⁵²⁴Pépin et al., Self-confidence.

6

Conclusion and Outlook

“The less we are free to decide who we are or to live as we like, the more we try to put up a front, to hide the facts and to play roles.”

– Hannah Arendt⁵²⁵

6.1 The “Success-Expectation-Challenges-Conundrum”

Germany is a country with a history of immigration and has recently gained a reputation for being a society that strives for inclusion. However, this process can be challenging for both migrants and locals, as it often involves adapting to new cultural norms and fears to “lose one’s homeland”. According to the German sociologist Aladin El-Mafaalani, this can lead to feelings of cultural anxiety among both migrants and locals, as they may fear losing their own cultural identity. This fear is in fact the biggest commonality between locals and refugees. Despite these challenges, integration in Germany has become increasingly successful over time.⁵²⁶

El-Mafaalani argues that as people or phenomena become more successful, the expectations of others rise. For example, as the process of integration becomes more successful, more is expected from it. However, as expectations increase, so do obstacles, pressure, and competition, which can lead to mistakes being more easily noticed by observers. In other words, as success grows, so do the challenges and scrutiny faced by those who have achieved it.⁵²⁷

⁵²⁵Arendt, *The Jewish Writings, We Refugees*, p. 270.

⁵²⁶Mafaalani, *Das Integrationsparadox warum gelungene Integration zu mehr Konflikten führt*, p. 49.

⁵²⁷*ibid.*, p. 28.

Therefore, positive developments and success result in an increase in subjective expectations by observers. To address this, it is important to manage these expectations by constantly questioning and adjusting how they can be met. In other words, managing expectations is crucial in order to effectively navigate the increased responsibilities and complexities that come with success.⁵²⁸ El-Mafaalani's reasoning behind this "success-expectation-challenges-conundrum" is rooted in his observations and evaluations of the phenomenon of integration in Germany over the past few years. In his view, integration in Germany has been more successful than it has ever been in German history.⁵²⁹ The population's expectations for improvements have grown faster than the actual improvements. According to El-Mafaalani, the problem with integration that society perceives is not a reflection of the current situation and its status quo, but rather a result of the gap between what is expected and what is reality.⁵³⁰

"Migration accelerates social change making society more diverse, confusing, and overall more complex."⁵³¹ El-Mafaalani argues that if integration succeeds, society will not become more homogeneous, harmonious, and more conflict-free. Instead, the opposite is much more likely. In his view, the central consequence of successful integration is an increased potential for conflict—which does not have a negative implication per se.⁵³² According to the sociologist, the process of "growing together" inevitably causes friction among migrants and locals and other members of German society:

"More people can and want to participate, take an active part in (co-determination) and get something out of it. (They are) (a)ll (sitting) at the same table. More and more and more different people are sitting at the table and want a piece of the pie. Where does the belief that everything should be harmonious come from, especially at this time? This idea is either naive or hegemonic. (...) The reality is quite obviously different."⁵³³ El-Mafaalani suggests that conflict arises when people are suddenly in a new relationship that did not exist before. He believes that this conflict is a result of "growing together" and can be seen as a positive outcome of trying to coexist and achieve equal participation.⁵³⁴

I agree with El-Mafaalani's view. Diverse people obtaining equal participation rights by taking a seat "at the table" consequently causes friction and conflict. People which usually enjoyed all the privileges of 'sitting at

⁵²⁸Mafaalani, *Das Integrationsparadox warum gelungene Integration zu mehr Konflikten führt*, p. 29.

⁵²⁹*ibid.*, p. 29; this was pre Ukraine.

⁵³⁰*ibid.*, p. 35.

⁵³¹*ibid.*, p. 57; translated from German to English by Helen Winter.

⁵³²*ibid.*, p. 76.

⁵³³*ibid.*, p. 77; translated from German to English by Helen Winter.

⁵³⁴*ibid.*, pp. 81,82.

the table and getting a slice of the pie' will naturally feel threatened and fear losing their advantages.

At the same time, in my opinion, it is necessary to create structured opportunities for dialogue that facilitate the process of taking a seat at the table in the first place to consequently manage expectations and start growing together more peacefully. In my view, this also includes basic humane living standards for refugees and their accommodation, as well as promoting opportunities for refugees aiming at strengthening self-efficacy. So that a life, overshadowed by a lack of perspectives, can be rebuilt and culminate in a self-efficacious path with the possibility of "growing together" with the host community.

6.2 Creating Opportunities to foster Self-efficacy of Refugees

It is noteworthy that "the average length of time spent in a refugee camp (worldwide) is now 10 years, an indictment of the encampment approach to protection and of humanitarianism more broadly. For many populations (...) a third generation is eking out a painful and minimal existence in camps, a 'zone of exclusion' beyond the bounds of ordinary social intercourse."⁵³⁵

In Germany, the average time that refugees stay in refugee shelters is up to 6 years.⁵³⁶ This systemic problem is in direct contradiction with the claim of policy-makers of providing a dignified life for every human being, as well as wanting to abolish long-term housing for refugees. The Declaration for Refugees and Migrants, an UN policy, "recognizes the devastating consequences of protracted encampment for refugees and the de facto choice by more than 60 percent of the global refugee population to live outside camps, increasingly in urban settings."⁵³⁷ However, the circumstances are not improving for refugees. From a humanitarian standpoint, in Germany, "(t)he ethical imperative to ensure human dignity and safeguard the unconditional worth of every human being has been suggested as an important ethical leitmotiv in German policy-making".⁵³⁸

In my opinion, a dignified living environment and policies which provide

⁵³⁵Bhabha, *Can we solve the migration crisis?*, p. 38.

⁵³⁶H. M. E. Winter et al., "Psychosocial peer mediation as sustainable method for conflict prevention and management among refugee communities in Germany".

⁵³⁷Bhabha, *Can we solve the migration crisis?*, p. 57; citing the UN Assembly, *New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants*, A/71/150, September 15, 2016.

⁵³⁸H. M. E. Winter et al., "Psychosocial peer mediation as sustainable method for conflict prevention and management among refugee communities in Germany"; S. F. Winter et al., "Human dignity as leading principle in public health ethics: A multi-case analysis of 21st century German health policy decisions", p. 211.

incentives for refugees to rebuild their sense of self-agency and self-efficacy are essential for preserving the ethical standard of policy-making that values the dignity and worth of every human being. Such a living environment can help refugees regain a sense of control over their lives, build resilience, and feel empowered to contribute to their communities. This is particularly important given the prolonged periods of time that many refugees spend in shelters or camps, which can lead to a loss of hope and a feeling of exclusion from society. By providing refugees with the resources and support they need to reclaim their self-efficacy, we can not only help them rebuild their lives, but also promote a more inclusive and compassionate society. In her book “Refugees in extended exile”, Jennifer Hyndman addresses a related, important aspect that I have also referred to in Chapter 3, which is the phenomenon of invisibility of refugees that goes hand in hand with the problematic long-term accommodation of refugees: “People who are displaced from their home countries and remain in long-term exile become largely invisible to the outside world. They are treated as a ‘remnant population’, unofficially excluded from the global polity, counted and managed by large humanitarian nongovernmental organizations (NGOs).”⁵³⁹ Hyndman argues that human rights are not prioritized in refugee camps in order to protect the “right to life” itself: rather, “once fed, camp residents live on, but without the resumption of basic human rights, including mobility, the right to work or establish a home.”⁵⁴⁰

Hyndman references how, on the other hand, “refugees who have left the camp context and live in more urban areas feel more secure and have engaged in the local economy” She cites an article from *The Guardian* exemplifying that those refugees who were able to leave the shelter context have taken their lives into their own hands and are self-efficaciously rebuilding their lives on their own, without any local support.⁵⁴¹ In my view, this suggests that while people are inside the context of a refugee shelter, empowerment programs that encourage participants to take matters into their own hands and rebuild a new life in the host country are a necessary first step to help refugees move out of the shelter. However, once they are able to leave the shelter, they no longer require assistance and rather take control and responsibility back into their own hands.

This observation, coupled with the risk of a conflict-prone environment in refugee shelters and surroundings, underscores the importance of empowerment programs like peer mediation in the shelter setting. By providing people with the opportunity to regain their self-efficacy and develop skills such as conflict resolution and communication, this kind of training and task

⁵³⁹Giles et al., *Refugees in extended exile: living on the edge*, p. 121.

⁵⁴⁰*ibid.*, p. 100.

⁵⁴¹*ibid.*, p. 5; Hovil, *With camps limiting many refugees, the UNHCR’s policy change is welcome.*

can self-reportedly help them transition successfully to life outside the shelter and engage more fully in the local economy and labor market. In other words, once people have regained their sense of agency and self-efficacy, they are better equipped to participate actively in their communities and contribute to the well-being of others. This is especially important given the challenges that many migrants and refugees face in adapting to new environments and cultures, and the importance of building resilience and fostering a sense of belonging.

Especially, in the setting of psychological trauma, being able to eventually move out of the shelter is particularly important because, encampment oftentimes feels like a subsequent traumatization to refugees: “The challenge of arriving and resettling in the host country has been referred to as the postmigratory ‘third hit’ of sequential traumatization, that is preceded by migratory (e.g., life-threatening flight experiences) and premigratory (e.g., warfare/prosecution in home country) stressors.”⁵⁴² This aspect is comprehensible as people leave their friends and families and the country that their language is spoken in. Refugees lose their prior professions and thus their status and recognition (see Chap. 5). In their homeland they were “somebody”, and at their destination they not only live in a refugee shelter, they also have to start from scratch and receive hardly any recognition from others.⁵⁴³

As already discussed in Chapter 2 and 5, identity loss and psychological stress are the consequence of their new living conditions. E-Maafalani illustrates how important it is for refugees to regain parts of their identity: “The feeling of a stable identity is extremely important for people. People need to be able to recognize themselves. They need to feel like they are the same person they were yesterday, last year, and twenty years ago.”⁵⁴⁴ Thus, accordingly, we cannot solve the issue of migration “by fencing people off in desolate camps for decades, (...) or by denying a means of self-sufficient livelihood to populations eager to rebuild their lives.”⁵⁴⁵ Rather, we have to “restore subject positions to refugees and open up space for their speech beyond mere supplication.”⁵⁴⁶

I agree with the demands made by the authors and would like to add that policy-makers and civil society have a responsibility to create opportunities that help people remember their subjectivity as individuals and support them in coping with their suffering. Reiterating and summarizing what was

⁵⁴²H. M. E. Winter et al., “Psychosocial peer mediation as sustainable method for conflict prevention and management among refugee communities in Germany”.

⁵⁴³Mafaalani, *Das Integrationsparadox warum gelungene Integration zu mehr Konflikten führt*, p. 122.

⁵⁴⁴*ibid.*, pp. 112, 113.

⁵⁴⁵Giles et al., *Refugees in extended exile: living on the edge*, p. 57.

⁵⁴⁶*ibid.*, p. 129.

already outlined, one way to do this is by implementing peer mediation programs, which can foster the self-efficacy of migrants by providing them with a safe and supportive space to express their needs and concerns. By participating in peer mediation, refugees can develop skills such as conflict resolution and communication, which can empower them to take charge of their own lives and advocate for their own needs. This not only helps to restore their sense of dignity, but it also promotes a more inclusive and harmonious community.

6.3 Reclaiming Meaning as a First Step to Self-efficacy

Viktor Frankl (see also Chap. 3) found that “(t)hose who found a larger meaning and purpose in their lives, who had a dream of what they could contribute, were (...) more likely to survive (the concentration camp) than those who gave up. (...) Our perspective on life’s events—what we make of them—matters as much or more than what actually befalls us.”⁵⁴⁷ Empowering refugees with a skill set that allows them to take on a valuable task and role in their community, and helping them see the importance of perspective on life’s events, can potentially reignite their desire to adapt to their new situation despite suffering. By providing refugees with the opportunity to contribute to their community and feel a sense of purpose and agency, we can help them rebuild their lives and move forward with hope and resilience.

The use of peer mediation in refugee shelters can lead to increased self-efficacy and agency among the refugees participating in the program. This is demonstrated by the fact that a large number of the peer mediators have even moved out of the shelter, indicating that they have gained the skills and confidence to navigate and advocate for themselves in other contexts.

As explored in Chap. 3, according to Frankl, there are several ways to create meaning: “creating a work or doing a deed” such as being a peer mediator which can generate meaning.⁵⁴⁸ Furthermore, meaning can also be found through loving experiences and connection (connecting with the parties in conflict), and even through the act of suffering itself by regarding suffering as an opportunity for growth, thereby turning it into an accomplishment (taking advantage of the opportunity to learn something new and adapt despite severe hardship).⁵⁴⁹ Thus, generating meaning in life through these three different paths or, in my view, a combination of them, leads to purpose and ultimately feeling more fulfilled and self-competent. Notably, “(o)nce an individual’s search for meaning is successful, it not only

⁵⁴⁷Viktor E Frankl, *Yes to life: In spite of everything*, Foreword, p. 16.

⁵⁴⁸Viktor E. Frankl, *Man’s search for meaning*, p. 143.

⁵⁴⁹*ibid.*, p. 138.

renders him or her happy but also gives him or her the capability to cope with suffering.”⁵⁵⁰

According to Frankl, overcoming suffering is one of humanity’s greatest challenges and can be achieved through a growth-oriented mindset that shifts our expectations of life from demanding to responding: “The question can no longer be ‘What can I expect from life?’ but can now only be ‘What does life expect of me? What task in life is waiting for me?’ Life asks us the question about the meaning of life, directs the question at us – we are the ones that are questioned. (...) Living itself means nothing than being questioned; our whole act of being is nothing more than responding to – or being responsible toward – life. With this mental standpoint nothing can scare us anymore, no future, no apparent lack of a future. Because now the present is everything as it holds the eternally new questions of life for us.”⁵⁵¹

In my opinion, as mediators, trainers, and facilitators, it is our ethical responsibility to not remain neutral but to work towards justice and guide vulnerable populations like refugees towards a resilient mindset, taking a dignified approach. To do this, we must create opportunities that allow refugees to take charge of their lives and respond to challenges in a self-reclaiming way, rather than remaining in a perceived state of victim-hood. This means supporting a growth mindset that helps refugees be less afraid of the uncertainty of the future and encourages them to embrace new opportunities for growth and development to regain meaning in their lives. It is important to approach this work with sensitivity and understanding, as refugees may have experienced trauma and loss that can affect their ability to cope with change. By offering support and guidance in a compassionate and respectful way, we can help refugees navigate the challenges they face and build resilience for the future.

As explored in Chap. 5, refugees’ lack of sufficient future prospects may impair their self-steering ability, hindering their path towards self-efficacy, or the belief in one’s own ability to succeed and achieve goals.⁵⁵² According to Langer, our mindset influences the way we perceive situations and people, and it has a direct impact on our emotional and physical well-being. Mindsets are attitudes that shape our beliefs and behaviors and can be either “mindless” or “mindful”. Mindlessness is a state of mind in which we rely too heavily on past distinctions and automatic behaviors, and it can easily breed prejudices and biases.⁵⁵³ Mindfulness, on the other hand, is an openness to new information and the ability to consider multiple perspectives. It

⁵⁵⁰ibid., p. 138.

⁵⁵¹Viktor E Frankl, *Yes to life: In spite of everything*, p. 33.

⁵⁵²I. Bauer, *Unterbringung von Flüchtlingen in deutschen Kommunen: Konfliktmediation und lokale Beteiligung*.

⁵⁵³Langer, *Mindfulness*, p. 9.

has the power to shape a reality that creates joy and minimizes depression.⁵⁵⁴

Langer's findings suggest that being involved in decision-making processes and taking charge of one's life can increase mindfulness and lead to improved well-being and self-efficacy. One way to do this is through peer mediation training and the resulting tasks of being a peer mediator for other community members. Therefore, integrating residents of refugee shelters in decision-making processes through peer mediation empowers them to regain autonomy and enter a state of mindfulness, ultimately leading to increased self-efficacy.

As Frankl tried to convey to his students in Vienna in March 1946, in my mind peer mediation trainers and facilitators should also adopt the mission of exploring ways to offer refugees a different, growth-oriented perspective on the terrible things they have experienced.

By acknowledging the challenges that refugees have faced and supporting them in finding meaning and purpose in their struggles, trainers can help refugees develop a more mindful and resilient mindset and build the skills and confidence they need to rebuild their lives.

Shifting the focus from "what can I expect from life?" to "what does life expect of me?" can be an empowering experience and leitmotiv, guiding participants throughout the peer mediation training towards a more self-efficacious life: "Fate, in other words, what happens to us, can certainly be shaped, in one way or another. 'There is no predicament which cannot be ennobled either by an achievement or by endurance,' said Goethe. Either we change our fate if possible or we willingly accept it if necessary. In either case we can experience nothing but inner growth through such misfortune."⁵⁵⁵

It is not realistic to expect refugees to suddenly adopt a growth mindset overnight, and that is not what I am advocating for. However, by inviting refugees to reflect on their choices and attitudes towards their challenges, by providing them with opportunities to learn new skills such as peer mediation, and allowing them to take on a role in the community as a peer mediator, we can help them shift their perspective and, ideally, regain their self-efficacy. These reflections should be done in a dignified way, for example, as outlined in Chap. 5 by using co-trainers with a refugee background who can invite these ideas in a respectful and compassionate manner.

As shown and analyzed in Chapter 5, peer mediation training for refugees can promote their self-efficacy and self-confidence in several ways.

First and foremost, the participants themselves are the key resource in peer mediation training. Therefore, it is important to design a program that

⁵⁵⁴Langer, *Mindfulness*, p. 10.

⁵⁵⁵Viktor E Frankl, *Yes to life: In spite of everything*, p. 39.

maximizes the potential of these key resources and encourages their full participation in the training process.⁵⁵⁶ Individuals within a community have the agency and ability to actively engage with and understand their own context, experiences, and circumstances. They can actively shape and respond to the realities of their community in a dynamic and evolving manner. This process can contribute to the overall self-efficacy of the community.⁵⁵⁷ Those who like to take on responsibilities will be interested in the peer mediation program and encourage other peers to join.

Furthermore, in the context of the peer mediation training and clinic, effective conflict resolution within a group is often informed by the group's own cultural and social experiences. It is important to consider the various conflict resolution mechanisms that are familiar to the group members and to identify any gaps or areas that may need to be addressed in the current context. Inviting group members to reflect on their own cultural backgrounds and experiences can help to facilitate a more comprehensive approach to resolving conflicts within the group.⁵⁵⁸ The success of a peer mediation training program depends on the active participation and engagement of the participants, who bring their own cultural and social experiences to the table.

This also means that it is important to continually think about new peer mediators and training, in order to ensure that the program can continue to support and empower refugees in the shelter. Overall, the use of peer mediation in refugee shelters has the potential to not only resolve conflicts and promote a positive community environment, but also to foster the self-efficacy and agency of the refugees involved.

6.4 Adapting the Peer Mediation Program Moving Forward

As an addition to the data, participants had several suggestions on how to further improve the peer mediation concept which they wrote down in anonymous feedback surveys. One approach is to make it as part of the training that newly trained peer mediators are required to solve three cases in the community and report about their experiences in the first mentoring session. This would give them practical experience in handling conflicts and allow them to see the impact of their efforts, as well as receive feedback by the trainers and their peers. Additionally, organizing mentoring sessions at regular intervals can provide ongoing support and guidance to newly

⁵⁵⁶Lederach, *Preparing for peace: conflict transformation across cultures*, p. 111.

⁵⁵⁷*ibid.*, p. 112.

⁵⁵⁸*ibid.*, p. 114.

trained peer mediators, helping them to feel more confident and competent in their role. Some participants reported:

“I think the course needs to be longer and that we can discuss in more depth because the participants need more confidence to do that.”

Another stated:

“I would like to see more role-plays and also that more participants can be trained by you.”

And yet another one wrote:

“I would like to go deeper into the problems and deepen the workshops even more. When can we get follow-up workshops?”

It is also important to consider the broader context in which refugees are living and to work to promote their autonomy and self-efficacy in other ways. This could include providing resources and support to help refugees feel more comfortable and confident in their new home country, such as information about local laws and customs or providing the materials (PowerPoints and handouts) in their respective native language:

“I would have liked to learn more about how refugees can feel comfortable in Germany and, for example, learn more about the language and laws of the country.”

And another participant stressed:

“I wish that we talk more about the problems that we experience here and that we also talk about the laws of the land in case we experience problems with the racists or neighbors.”

And another participant mentioned:

“I think it’s important to talk about awareness of the new society when you come to Germany so that it (the awareness) lasts.”

Someone else concluded:

“I would like to talk more about conflict and about such questions as, how can we educate our children in Germany? The difficulties when you have a personal problem when you don’t know the language? How can I get along with another society/culture?”

As one can see some of the requests go beyond the idea of a mediation training and show an overall need for programs educating on e.g. the legal system. Moreover, incorporating more role-plays and handouts printed in their respective native languages could help make the training more accessible and relevant to refugees. It is also important to address the

specific concerns and challenges that refugees face, such as navigating a new culture and language, and to provide resources and support to help them cope with these challenges.

Overall, improving peer mediation training for refugees requires a multifaceted approach that addresses both the specific needs and goals of the training process, as well as the broader context in which refugees are living. By promoting self-efficacy and autonomy, and by providing ongoing support and guidance, we can help refugees feel more confident and competent in their ability to handle conflicts and navigate their new surroundings.

6.5 From Grass-root Efforts to Policies

As shown in this dissertation, the phenomenon self-efficacy is the main motivation, and competence that participants were seeking and developing throughout the peer mediation training and clinic. On a broader level, programs that strengthen participants' self-efficacy and help them regain meaning and purpose in life—and thus have better chances moving out of the shelter and participating in the host country's labor market—are of utmost importance and should be incentivized through policies.

I am proud to report that Berlin's state office for refugee affairs (LAF) included peer mediation efforts in refugee shelters in its policy regarding the performance and quality description of refugee long-term shelters under the contract of operators and management of refugee accommodations. Under the section "requirements for the protection against violence" it is stated: "Conflict management (e.g., through mediation, de-escalation and dispute resolution models) shall be implemented by the operator."⁵⁵⁹

The inclusion of peer mediation in this policy aims to promote access to justice for refugees, as it provides a means for them to address and resolve conflicts in a peaceful and constructive manner. Access to justice refers to the ability of individuals to have their legal rights and grievances heard and addressed through the legal system. Lack of access to justice can be caused by a variety of factors, including financial barriers, lack of awareness of legal rights, and discrimination. We have since been in dialogue with the authorities to make this goal more explicit by e.g. naming providers in the provision and/or to oblige the carriers of refugee shelters to implement peer mediation systems.

According to the statements made by the shelter's management, the use of

⁵⁵⁹LAF, Leistungs- und Qualitätsbeschreibung GU 1 und 2 zum Betreibervertrag Flüchtling-sunterbringung Land Berlin 2020, Ziffer IV 1. translated by Helen Winter, "Das Konfliktmanagement (z.B. durch Mediation, Deeskalations- und Streitschlichtungsmodelle) ist durch den Betreiber umzusetzen".

peer mediators has significantly reduced the need for security intervention in conflicts within the shelter. Prior to the implementation of the peer mediation group, security forces were called upon more frequently to address disputes within the shelter:

“Yes, so before the peer mediator group was active the police were more in the shelter when there were regular disputes, but later the shelter administrator, always tried to solve the problems through the peer mediators. Only if that didn’t work she called the police. But usually the police were not so much in the shelter since the peer mediators started doing their work.” (Peer mediator)

The shelter administration has since made an effort to resolve conflicts through the use of peer mediators and has only called upon the police as a last resort. As a result, the police have become much less involved in the shelter and conflicts have been largely resolved peacefully through the use of peer mediation. The peer mediation training has likely played a role in their ability to effectively address and resolve conflicts, helping to decrease the need for police intervention. Overall, the use of peer mediation has contributed to a more peaceful and harmonious environment within the refugee shelter:

“Before there were peer mediators, the police were often at the shelter when there were conflicts. But the situation has changed very much for the better and the police very rarely came to the shelter.” (Peer mediator)

One additional potential benefit of using peer mediation is that it can have a preventive character, meaning that it can help to prevent conflicts from escalating and potentially leading to criminal cases. When conflicts are addressed and resolved early on, through the use of mediators who are trained to facilitate complex disputes, it can help to prevent the development of larger, more serious conflicts that may require intervention by the legal system. By having policies in place that provide individuals with access to a means to address and resolve conflicts peacefully, policies can help to create a more harmonious and cohesive community, potentially leading to fewer disputes.

6.6 Call to Action and Key Message

The use of a peer mediation system in refugee accommodations could be implemented by organizations not only in Germany, but potentially in other countries as well. It could serve as a model for other carriers that provide long-term accommodations. Participants not only learn important and

valuable life skills but they also regain their self-efficacy and are thus, self-reportedly, more likely to take control over their lives by, for example, finding a job and an apartment outside of the shelter. As stated previously, this not only benefits the participants but also society as a whole, especially because Germany suffers from a shortage of skilled labor.⁵⁶⁰

Refugees not only help their peers, but also themselves by pursuing a meaningful task that motivates them to take on a special role as peer mediator in the community.⁵⁶¹ In my opinion, peer mediation in refugee shelters as a dispute resolution system and vehicle for self-efficacy has “model character”, which refers to the idea that this approach could serve as a model or example for other models to follow.

As a society, it is important that we recognize the inherent dignity and humanity of all individuals, including refugees. All too often, refugees are treated as objects of charity, rather than as full and equal members of society with their own subjectivity.

It is essential that we work to restore subject positions to refugees and create space for them to speak and be heard as members of society. This means acknowledging their inherent dignity and humanity. It also means actively listening to their voices and experiences and working to create opportunities for them to participate fully in the decision-making processes that affect their lives.⁵⁶²

By restoring self-efficacy to refugees through peer mediation and creating space for their voices to be heard, we can help individuals to rebuild their lives and foster a more inclusive and just society.

⁵⁶⁰Welle, Fachkräftemangel, Ist Made in Germany bald Geschichte?

⁵⁶¹Gastil et al., The Jury and Democracy; discussing how jury deliberation promotes civic engagement.

⁵⁶²Giles et al., Refugees in extended exile: living on the edge, p. 129.

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