

Understanding Intercultural Transitions and Migrant-Host Relationships: How Empathy,  
Social Support, and Intercultural Competency Facilitate Positive Intercultural Interactions

Between German Citizens and Refugees

by

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## ABSTRACT

In 2015, Germany was at the center of one of the largest displacements in history as upwards of a million refugees, many from Syria, fled to Germany. In my study, I was fortunate enough to spend three months living in Germany and interacting with Germans and refugees to hear their stories of positive intercultural interaction. Through the integration of Acculturation Theory (Berry, 1980), Cross-Cultural Adaptation Theory (Y.Y. Kim, 1980), and Coordinated Management of Meaning Theory (Pearce & Cronen, 1980) I conducted a qualitative research project where I interviewed 44 individuals representing both German citizens (25) and refugees (19) and collected their stories of positive intercultural interactions with one another. These stories affirmed the importance of intercultural competency, social support, and empathy as core elements of positive interaction providing a platform to create future initiatives grounded in these elements as others engage in intercultural transitions and develop migrant-host relationship. Furthermore, this research underscored the need to address both host and migrant experiences during intercultural transitions being sure not to privilege either group when seeking positive paths to facilitate interaction.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

According to the United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs (2015), there are an estimated 243 million migrants worldwide, meaning that roughly 1 out of every 30 people in the world is a migrant. This compelling number highlights the urgency of addressing the communication challenges of migrant populations. People have numerous reasons for leaving their primary cultural context to move to a new cultural context, some travel for business and educational opportunities or tourism while others leave to escape the harsh realities of war, famine, or poverty. Individuals may choose to move within their national boundaries or externally to neighboring countries or regions. Generally speaking, a migrant is any individual who leaves her/his primary cultural context to move to a new cultural context for an extended period of time (Berry & Sam, 1997). Depending on an individual's motivation for migration and the duration of her/his stay, migrants can be categorized as belonging to one of the following groups:

1. sojourner (short-term, voluntary),
2. immigrant (long-term, voluntary),
3. short-term refugee (involuntary), and
4. long-term refugee (involuntary). (Martin & Nakayama, 2013)

Refugees--the focus of this study--are individuals who face involuntary and forced migration typically due to economic devastation, disastrous war and violence, and/or crippling famine and poverty. The 1951 Refugee Convention defines a refugee as one who:

"owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality, and is unable to, or owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country." (UNHCR, 2016)

Once refugees leave their homes, they seek to find a country that will offer safe asylum. History reveals that the practice of granting asylum is one of the earliest hallmarks of civilization, and references to it can be found as far back as 3,500 years ago during early empires such as the Hittites, Babylonians, Assyrians and ancient Egyptians (UNHCR, 2016). Typically, refugees seek asylum in a neighboring country or one where they believe they can establish a better life. The choice to leave one's country of origin usually is a result of many factors, such as economic hardship, the desire to preserve one's freedom, to avoid governmental persecution, and, in many cases, fear for one's life (UNHCR, 2016). The failure to find asylum in another country may condemn refugees to death, at worse, or potentially to a life of invisibility without rights and resources (UNHCR, 2016).

Currently, there is a worldwide refugee crisis, with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR, 2015) reporting that worldwide forcible displacement has surpassed 60 million individuals. This figure represents roughly 20.2 million individuals fleeing war and persecution and the nearly 2.5 million pending asylum seekers (UNHCR, 2015). Of the asylum seekers, roughly two-thirds are living in Protracted Refugee Situations (PRS) where they may remain for years, if not decades, living in limbo in a space that feels neither permanent nor temporary (UNHCR, 2015).

Many refugees do not want to leave their home country but feel they have no other choice. Refugees often are part of mass migrations to host countries that are unprepared for an influx of poor, desperate individuals with pervasive and complex problems. Compounding the problem for the receiving countries is that many developing countries bordering conflict zones may fall into further economic stress due to the influx of migrants. For this reason, people in receiving countries sometimes experience resentment towards non-hosting countries and towards the refugees themselves. Thus, after fleeing their homes and countries, refugees often encounter individuals who refuse to accept them or accept them in very limited ways with great resistance and/or with prejudice and hostility, sometimes leading to acts of discrimination or even violence toward the migrants.

This situation described here typically leads to multifaceted problems for refugees and hosts, including issues related to intercultural communication. Refugee migrant groups face enormous challenges during their intercultural transitions: language barriers, religious and political differences, as well as host country educational systems that may be structured in ways that restrict a refugee's access to learning, leading to destabilized lives and problematic interactions with host country individuals. Even within enclaves and encampments that are solely for refugees, host cultures impact migrants' transitions into their new cultures. Upon entering a host nation, refugees become subject to the host country's policies and practices. For example, many host cultures, especially in the European Union, have policies in place to limit the number of refugees that may enter their country; these practices may divide families and are built around national policies that may not provide equal rights for both refugees and citizens.

Migrant transitions have been studied for many years in various disciplines, including communication. One of the first comprehensive research foci in intercultural communication addressed the cultural adaptation of sojourners and immigrants. Most early intercultural transition studies relied on social psychological theoretical foundations and focused on the psychological wellbeing and mental health of migrants (Church, 1982; Berry, 1994; Ward, 2004). In 1980, John Berry proposed his acculturation theory and framework of migrant-host relationships, based on a social psychological foundation that conceptualizes adaptation as the degree to which an individual maintains their culture of origin and/or adapts to the new cultural environment, using one of the following four strategies: assimilation, separation, marginalization, or integration. Assimilation occurs when individuals prefer interaction in the new culture and wish to distance themselves from their origin culture. Alternatively, separation happens when individuals chose their origin culture and avoid interaction with the new culture. When an individual lacks interest in both their origin culture and in the new culture, then marginalization takes place. Lastly, when there is a dual interest in maintaining one's origin culture as well as interacting with new cultures, integration occurs (Berry, 2008). Numerous studies have been conducted utilizing this framework (Al-Sharideh & Goe, 1988; Ghaffarian, 1998; Zagefka & Brown, 2002; Dow, 2011; Matera, Stefanile, & Brown, 2011). Berry's own as well as subsequent research has focused on social psychological dimensions and often overlooked the impact of communication on intercultural adaptation.

However, in 1980 Y.Y. Kim conducted an extensive study of the cultural adaptation of Korean immigrants and proposed a communication-based theory of cross-cultural adaptation. This theory explores how over time communication can lead to

adaptation and growth for immigrant populations, and numerous studies have been based on this theoretical framework (Pitts, 2009; Redick & Wood, 1982; Tran & Wright, 1986; Bhuyan & Senturia, 2005; Raj & Silverman, 2002). However, there are at least three major gaps in the research on migrants to date. First, there has been very little research focused on refugees; most studies are focused on sojourner and immigrant populations (Ward, 2004). Second, while both Berry (1980) and Kim's (1980) theories offer heuristically valuable conceptualizations of migrant adaptation and migrant-host relationships, Berry's neglects the communication aspect of adaptation, and Kim offers a rather limited, uni-directional (assimilation) perspective in her model. Lastly, neither acculturation theory nor cross-cultural adaptation theory fully explores migrant and host interactions on a micro-level taking into account the ways that both groups are transformed during their intercultural interactions. Fortunately, the coordinated management of meaning (CMM) does provide a communication-based theoretical framework for that explores human interaction--the focus of this dissertation study.

The coordinated management of meaning (CMM) theory (Pearce & Cronen, 1980), offers a way to explore how communication and relationships impact intercultural transitions. CMM is grounded in a social constructionist approach that assumes that reality is constructed by humans and that our experiences, including communication, are subjective. This perspective allows one to see culture as created and maintained through communication and not as a static entity to which others adapt. Rather, as new members join a culture, their interactions help maintain and reshape fundamental cultural principles. Since CMM examines how communication is used to create social realities, it offers a way to extend social psychological adaptation and communication research being

conducted on refugees and host nationals by focusing on human interaction. While each of these theoretical approaches are limited when used individually, taken together they form a useful theoretical foundation for a study of the communicative interaction between refugees and host country individuals. Therefore, the theoretical foundations for this dissertation study are: Acculturation Theory (Berry, 1980), Cross-Cultural Adaptation Theory (Y.Y. Kim, 1980), and Coordinated Management of Meaning Theory (Pearce & Cronen, 1980). Building on this theoretical foundation, this project focuses on understanding the migrant-host relationships of refugees and German citizens and their communication with and about each other. Below, I will explain the study context.

### **The Study Context**

One of the most challenging intercultural communication situations in the world today is occurring in Germany. By the end of 2015, Germany had registered 964,574 new asylum seekers, approximately one-third of whom were Syrian (Germany on course to accept one million refugees in 2015, *The Guardian*, December 2015), and not all Germans were pleased with the situation. Then, at the beginning of 2016, it was widely reported that a rash of rather brutal attacks occurred by young male immigrants on German women during New Year's Eve celebrations in Cologne (McGuinness, 2016). This event resulted in considerable soul-searching regarding Germany's policy of welcoming so many refugees. Some experts interpreted the attacks as the result of an extreme clash of cultural values involving gender roles and religious mores; others interpreted the events as simply hooliganism (McGuinness, 2016). Given this and many other examples of problematic interactions between refugees and German citizens, this dissertation focuses on intercultural interactions amongst German citizens and refugees.

Specifically, for the current study, I examined the migrant-host relationship and concomitant communication of selected refugees and German citizens. In order to explore this interaction, I limited my research to the current situation taking place within Germany. Before explaining the theoretical and methodological rationale for this study, I will provide context for what led to this inflow of refugees, most notably from Syria, into Germany.

## **Syria**

Germany's decision to open its borders was a response to Syria's civil war, which some consider "the worst humanitarian crisis of our time" (MercyCorps, 2016). The catalyst for the Syrian civil war was the pro-democracy protests that erupted in March of 2011 during the Arab Spring. Protestors demanded economic and political reforms from the Syrian government and also called for the resignation of President Al-Assad and the end of the Al-Assad family reign (BBC News, 2015). President Al-Assad refused to step down, and those loyal to the President responded with violence, igniting opposition and retaliation from other armed groups (Somanader, the White House Blog, 2015), including the Syrian Army (SARG), the Syrian Coalition (SC), jihadist militants from the Islamic State (IS), and Sunni majorities as well as the President's Shia Alawite sect, along with other rebel forces.

The various armies and militia groups continue to battle one another in a conflict that has led to numerous proxy wars and caused millions of Syrians to flee for their lives (BBC News, 2015) and nationwide violence, a collapsed infrastructure, and safety concerns for its people. Since 2011, almost 12 million Syrians have been displaced, including roughly 7.6 million of whom have left their homes but remained within Syria's

borders (Somanader, the White House Blog, 2015). Thus, over half of Syria's pre-war population of 23 million people has been dislocated (MercyCorps, 2016). Additionally, in 2015 alone, more than 3,700 Syrians perished in the turmoil, adding to the existing loss of over 320,000 lives (World Vision, 2016).

Syrians are fleeing bombings destroying their homes and cities; some of them are also leaving in search of basic needs like food and medical care (MercyCorps, 2016). The economy is in ruins with its healthcare and educational systems in shambles (World Vision, 2016). All of this loss and destruction has been exacerbated by the use of chemical weapons on the part of the Assad government as well as continued human rights violations and war crimes (BBC News, 2015). President Al-Assad has launched rockets in the highly populated suburbs of Damascus leading to many innocent men, women, and children being gassed to death (Somanader, the White House Blog, 2015). In addition, the children of Syria have lost loved ones, suffered injuries, missed years of schooling, and witnessed violence and brutality on an unimaginable scale. What is worse is that children are being recruited to serve as fighters and human shields by the different warring parties (World Vision, 2016). For these reasons and others, many Syrians choose to leave their country altogether to seek refuge and asylum.

The conditions in Syria have resulted in roughly 4,812,204 registered Syrian Refugees according to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) (2016). This figure includes those registered in Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Turkey, and North Africa, as well as the estimated 897,645 who have submitted Syrian Asylum Applications in Europe (UNHCR, 2016). These numbers represent the most extreme mass migration since the Rwandan genocide 20 years ago (MercyCorps, 2016).



After refugees decide to make the perilous journey to neighboring countries or Europe, they often experience another set of choices and obstacles. Not all of the refugees who have attempted the dangerous trip across the Mediterranean Sea from Turkey to Greece have made it across alive. Furthermore, those who do make it face additional challenges upon arrival in Greece as this country's resources are strained and services are minimal (MercyCorps, 2016). Additionally, at many overcrowded refugee camps such as at Za'tari and Azraq in Jordan, language barriers, lack of work opportunities, and lack of clean water and sanitation present an urgent concern for both refugees and their host nations. The United Nations asserts that it will take close to \$8 billion to meet the pressing needs of the most vulnerable refugees in 2016 (MercyCorps, 2016). Ultimately, the future remains unclear for many refugees.

### **Migration in Germany**

In addition to Syrian refugees, many refugees in general choose to resettle in Europe, and specifically in Germany, which is seen as the most welcoming (and economically prosperous) of the E. U. countries. According to Eurostat (2016), in 2015 alone, Germany received close to 450,000 formal asylum seeker applicants' however, this number is not inclusive of the estimated one million migrants who registered their intention to seek asylum in Germany during the year as well (International Organization for Migration, 2016). Applicants were from countries such as Syria, Afghanistan, Iraq, Iran, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Senegal, and Somalia. These numbers compare with roughly 175,000 applicants to Hungary and just over 150,000 to Sweden, represent the second and third largest E.U. countries to accept asylum seekers (Eurostat, 2016). As the Pew Research Center notes, "The 2015 surge marked the largest annual flow of asylum

seekers to Europe since 1985,” clarifying that the second largest came in 1992, following the fall of the Berlin Wall, and the third occurred in 2002 after the Kosovo conflicts of the late 1990s (Pew Research Center, 2016).

Additionally, the surge in 2015 represents more applicants in a single year than those from the previous two influxes in 1992 and 2002 combined (Pew Research Center, 2016). Therefore, as much as the Syrian refugee crisis has brought to light the entry of refugees into Germany and growing concerns of migration, the statistics further suggest the diversity of those seeking refuge in Germany and the urgency needed to address this changing cultural landscape. In fact, the head of the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (BAMF), suggested that approximately 500,000 refugees might have arrived in Germany in 2016 alone (International Organization of Migration, 2016). This potential influx further highlights the need to understand refugee and German interactions, as a case study to examine migrant-host relationships and makes many wonder, how did Germany become the perceived oasis for so many refugees?

## **Germany**

As Europe’s strongest country economically, Germany is best financially positioned to accept an inflow of refugees, and it is one of the few European nations willing to do so. Germany’s acceptance of Syrian refugees and refugees in general also has been attributed to their desire to present an image to the world that they are a non-discriminatory nation and to rewrite their history (i.e., the Holocaust and the Cold War). For example, Chancellor Angela Merkel and the people of Germany have been depicted as the European Union’s unpopular economic dictators during debt crises and troubled

times in other European nations (e.g., Greece), and critics have chosen to once again bring up the country's most notorious historical legacy – the Holocaust.

The Holocaust left a mark on the country of Germany, and many Germans are eager to make it clear that they are not that country anymore (Horn, September 2015). In August of 2015, Chancellor Merkel, along with French President Francois Hollande, to call for greater European coordination in addressing the migrant crisis. Part of Germany's response was to formally implement an open door policy (Horn, September 2015). However, this policy would not be implemented easily, as another aspect of Germany's past is rooted in a tension amongst Germans themselves. The lasting effects of the division created by the Berlin Wall between East and West Germany during the Cold War are still felt and have led to stark political and economic differences between the two regions, with the East cloaked in more conservative ideals and the West leaning towards more liberal ideals. Even though both the Holocaust and the Cold War are now a part of the past, what they signified is still present for many Germans and are reminders of the country's complicated history when it comes to dealing with outsiders (NPR, Rachel Martin, 2015).

The tensions and divisions that still remain in Germany, coupled with the arrival of numerous refugees, leads to culture shock among Germans as a whole, who essentially hadn't experience immigration until the 1990s (Horn, 2015). Those from opposing parties to Merkel's as well as many neighboring countries such as the Netherlands and Hungary view Germany's open door policy as a political mistake that entails accepting a flood of foreigners that will overwhelm the country, affect its culture, and may even allow members of the Islamic State (IS) to enter the country posing as refugees (Horn, 2015).

Moreover, critics and supporters alike recognize that Germany faces a host of obstacles and challenges that in its efforts to serve refugees and migrant populations effectively. Specifically, money must be found to cover the costs of education, training, shelter, healthcare, and general cultural integration (Germany may need €21bn to house and educate refugees - report, *The Guardian*, 2015). Germany's Vice-Chancellor, Sigma Gabriel, noted that this increase in asylum requests is the country's "biggest challenge since reunification" between East and West Germany in 1990 (Angela Merkel and François Hollande meet to tackle Europe's migrant crisis, *The Guardian*, 2015).

Regardless of the critics and challenges, Chancellor Merkel has remained steadfastly committed to her refugee policies and has since been named *Time Magazine's* Person of the Year for 2015 (Time Inc., 2016). Even after the Paris Attacks in November of 2015, Merkel refused to alter her policies, stating that "Everyone who comes, has a reason to flee" (Bershidsky, 2015). However, more recently she has noted that asylum for the refugees is meant to be a temporary residential status with the hope that once the war in Syria is over, Syrians will be able to return to home along with other refugees fleeing conflict in their home countries (Rinke, Reuters, 2016). A significant concern remains though; how will this intercultural transition affect German citizens and refugees? Specifically, what efforts, if any, will be made to facilitate the migrant-host relationship and interaction?

### **Contributions**

This project has the potential to increase our understanding regarding the difficulties cultural groups encounter when they interact while undergoing intercultural transitions. Even though the findings will focus on refugees and German citizens, they

may provide a new framework for and perspective to think about how other nations experiencing an increased population of refugees, migrants, immigrants, and even tourists can begin to approach multiculturalism with confidence, acceptance, and a deeper understanding of how to work with diverse groups to effect smoother interactions among its participants. As the nations of the world become more diverse, we need to find better ways for groups to interact as opposed to simply coexist with tension, misunderstanding, and a lack of respect for the cultural identities, traditions, and practices that each brings with them. Ultimately, finding ways to facilitate positive interactions ideally will lead to positive and lasting change.

Practically, the current effort offers an applied research project that designed to increase understanding of the migrant-host experience in Germany. Theoretically, the project serves to extend research on acculturation, cross-cultural adaptation, and the coordinated management of meaning (Berry, 1980; Y.Y. Kim, 1980; Pearce & Cronen, 1980) by focusing on how communication can help us understand migrant-host interaction. Both acculturation and cross-cultural adaptation theories integrate host culture perceptions of migrant transitions, but they both neglect the ways in which host cultures are transformed during their communication with migrant groups and how they, in fact, go through intercultural transitions themselves. Examining Germany's situation through the coordinated management of meaning can more clearly reveal the integrative processes, practices, and policies that can facilitate positive interaction and integration during intercultural transitions. Specifically, here I focus on German citizen *and* refugee standpoints so that we can learn from these groups how to facilitate positive interaction.

Lastly, I aim to contribute to the study of intercultural transitions as a whole and to provide a timely and relevant contribution to the field.

Methodologically, I utilized ethnographic methods and immersed myself in the culture and space of Germany for roughly 3 months. Through this immersion, I employed participant observations as well as in-depth interviews. Much of the prior research in adaptation and acculturation has been conducted from a postpositive lens using quantitative methods. Therefore, the use of qualitative methods in the present study served to provide a more in-depth understanding of cultural immersion and intercultural transitions. Qualitative methods were best suited for this research project due to their ability to provide nuanced understandings of intercultural adaptation and human interaction. Ultimately, the study context provides an opportunity to advance the theoretical underpinnings of acculturation through a qualitative communicative lens (Cross-Cultural Adaptation and CMM) building on the dominant social psychological and quantitative approaches that represents the majority of the research on acculturation. Also, the study context offers a chance to examine the underrepresented migrant group of refugees, the majority of whom were Syrian, as they experience their intercultural transitions in Germany, accenting the timeliness and urgency of exploring intercultural interactions.

Overall, the integration of refugees is a major concern for Germany as Germans address their changing society. Thus, this study offers value to Germany, especially those serving in official and unofficial roles regarding migration as well as every day citizens who are bound to find themselves in situations with migrant groups.

Additionally, the focus of my study on both refugee and German citizen perspectives

offers a unique contribution to the research on intercultural contact and adaptation. By emphasizing the ways in which their interaction is transformative, I highlight the ways in which intercultural transitions shape interactions, and ultimately, the communication of these two groups. The following chapter presents a review of the literature on acculturation theory, cross-cultural adaptation theory, and the coordinated management of meaning theory as well as my research questions. The subsequent chapter describes the qualitative research methods utilized that enabled me to answer my research questions. Next, I have a chapter outlining my findings and contributions based on the data collected, followed by a closing chapter that includes my discussion, practical implications, limitations, areas for future research, and concluding remarks. In the end, I hope to provide a study that augments the research on intercultural communication, intercultural transitions, and the facilitation of positive intercultural interactions.

## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

The focus of this dissertation project is on the intercultural encounters and relationships between German citizens and refugees in Germany. The frequency with which individuals choose to migrate or are forced into refugee status has inspired a wide range of research exploring the movement of individuals across cultural and social boundaries, or what is known as intercultural transitions. The primary theoretical approaches used in this study to understand intercultural transitions are acculturation theory (Berry, 1977) and cross-cultural adaptation theory (Kim, 1980). First, I will overview acculturation theory (Berry, 1977).

#### **Acculturation Theory**

Generally speaking, acculturation refers to the processes by which individuals adjust to new and/or different cultural environments. For social psychologist Berry (1980), acculturation theory addresses the various ways in which immigrant groups strive to maintain their heritage culture and/or engage with the host group. Berry (1980) identified four types of migrant-host relationships (based on these two dimensions), they are: assimilation ( migrant identifies with and adjusts to the host culture's norms and rejects original culture), separation (the affinity for one's culture of origin and rejection/resistance to the host culture), marginalization ( lack of engagement with both the host culture and one's culture of origin), and integration (balancing one's culture of origin with the host culture, which some identify as becoming bicultural) (Berry, 1980, 2001). As Berry, Kim, Power, Young, and Bujaki (1989) noted, all these strategies may be used by migrants at different times and in different contexts as they adapt.



Berry et al. (1989) emphasized that context affects the ways in which relationships between immigrant groups and host groups unfold and asserted that these relationships may be viewed differently by the two groups. This perspective extended acculturation theory to take into account not only the strategies of the immigrant groups but also the acculturation expectations of host society-members (Berry, 2001; Berry, Kalin, & Taylor, 1977; Bourhis et al., 1997). These expectations are defined by similar dimensions as the ones for immigrant groups with the focus on intergroup contact (Berry, 2001) and host culture adoption (Bourhis et al, 1997), respectively, while keeping the same four strategies (assimilation, separation, marginalization, integration) in place. With this elaboration and extension, Berry studied acculturation theory through his lens of intergroup contact and cultural maintenance quite exhaustively (Berry, 2000, 2003, 2005, 2007, 2008, 2009; Berry & Georgas, 2008; Ataca & Berry, 2002; Berry, Phinney, Sam, & Vedder, 2006; Berry, Poortinga, Segall, & Dasen, 2002; Berry & Sam, 2003).

The value of acculturation theory for understanding cultural adaptation has been noted by a variety of scholars. For example, Pfafferott and Brown (2006) measured the acculturation preferences of German minority and majority adolescent groups and concluded that for both groups integration is the most preferred strategy followed by assimilation. As I engaged in my own research project, I was interested to explore if current experiences are reflective of these results given that currently Germans are overwhelmed by the mass migration of refugees, and this influx is leading to added stressors for both Germans and refugees. Similarly, Imamura and Zhang's (2014) study of American host nationals' communication with Chinese international students determined that American participants were more willing to communicate with Chinese

nationals and experienced less communication anxiety when they perceived that Chinese students assimilated or integrated. This and related research underscores the importance of the four acculturation strategies, most notably assimilation and integration, as markers to understand migrant-host relationships.

Many studies also have explored how the four acculturation strategies lead to acculturative stress. For example, Berry and Kim (1988) note that sojourners who assimilate or integrate have fewer adaptation difficulties in their host setting than those who separate or marginalize. Likewise, Ghaffarian (1998) found in his study of Iranian immigrants in the United States that those who culturally incorporated themselves had better mental health than those who were resistant. In addition, Al-Sharideh and Goe (1998) found a correlation between assimilation and positive personal adjustment in their study of international students' acculturation to American culture. Drawing on the assumption that the four acculturation strategies affect stress levels differentially, Dow (2011) examined acculturative stress and the potential psychological disorders that can affect immigrants as they adapt to the United States. She determined that all four strategies lead to acculturative stress, but assimilation and integration lead to the lowest levels of stress. She also found that having mental health professionals design culturally appropriate assessment tools and therapeutic interventions that take into account the acculturation of the individual and their family helped individuals cope with their new environment.

Other scholars have explored how host culture perceptions and acculturation preferences mediate the acculturation of migrant and minority groups (include citations). They have found that a discordance between the preferred acculturation preferences of

majority and minority groups leads to negative intergroup attitudes (Zagefka & Brown, 2002) and greater intergroup threat (Rohmann, Florack, & Piontkowski, 2006). As this research indicates, acculturation is ultimately a dynamic intergroup process affected by similarities or differences in how ingroups and outgroups perceive successful acculturation. (Arends-Toth & van de Vijver, 2003; Brown & Zagefka, 2011; Matera, Stefanile, & Brown, 2012). This research points to a need for studies that examine the dynamic interplay between the acculturation experiences and interactions of both the majority group (German citizens) and the minority group (refugees) during their intercultural transitions.

In addition to a congruence in migrant and host country perceptions, time and interaction play an important role in an individual's acculturation. Ramelli, Florack, Kotic, and Rohmann (2013) assessed the importance of the first few months after immigration and the role interactions during this period play in affecting the development of migrant acculturation orientations. Their research emphasizes the importance of personally relevant contacts, with a focus on friendships, during acculturation and how these shape attitudes and interaction (Brown & Hewstone, 2005; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006). They found that the more initial friendships migrants have with host culture members the more positive their attitude towards interaction (Ramelli et al., 2013). This work highlighted the usefulness of migrants engaging in friendships and effective communication with a host culture in facilitating positively perceived acculturation patterns during intercultural transitions. Similar research has found that effective communication during arrival has a positive impact on immigrants' desires to interact with host society members (Gudykunst, 2005; Kim, 2005) and facilitates identification

(Clement, 1986; Noels, Pon, & Clement, 1996). This research serves to support the importance of communication as a marker for positive attitudes towards interaction and the influence of friendships early on in intercultural transitions to facilitate positive acculturation.

Lastly, and most clearly connected to the goals of this research project, Okigbo, Reiersen, and Stowman (2009) used acculturation theory as a framework for their participatory and community-based action research that examined the acculturation experiences of 12 women from a community comprised of African refugees and immigrants. Their goal was “to identify the most pressing acculturation problems and also to engage the subjects (co-researchers) in proffering practical solutions to these problems” (Okigbo et al., 2009, p. 127). The co-researchers suggested a number of solutions to assist in their integration, such as recommending that migrants join religious or other social groups, encouraging host cultures to further develop ESL (English as a second language) programs by supplementing them with university courses, extending resettlement programs to provide more time for adjustment, and providing better opportunities for education, interaction, and orientation (Okigbo et al., 2009, p. 137). These results lead the researchers to create a network of resettlement agencies and city administration officials to address and expand integration assistance for refugees and immigrants. This research highlights the pragmatic ways that a post-positivist psychological theoretical framework can be extended to provide practical solutions to barriers associated with acculturation. For this reason, the current study explores the strengths of Berry’s framework and, ultimately, the potential contributions of my own study to that framework.

A complex understanding of acculturation and intercultural interaction is one I aim to achieve in my own research. Furthermore, accounting for all of the research that has been done on acculturation theory, Berry's theory offers a significant and clear foundation for my research goals by offering a more expanded conceptualization of host-migrant relationships, beyond assimilation. Furthermore, as Mana et al. (2009) state, Berry's acculturation model "presumes a more harmonious social world in which immigrants may choose how to relate to the host group" (p. 466). As noted, most of the studies reviewed have indicated that it is necessary to facilitate positive interaction between differing cultural groups in order to achieve positive outcome. This harmonious social world is the ideal I seek to understand and examine through exploring not only how migrants choose to relate and communicate with the host group but also how the host groups choose to relate and communicate with migrant groups.

As noted earlier, a limitation of previous research is that studies have focused on understanding adaptation and acculturation dimensions with the intent to understand social psychological well-being. This limited focus overlooks the important role communication plays in fostering adaption and, ultimately, social psychological wellbeing for both migrant and host communities. As an example, this focus overlooks the fact that Germans are having to adapt as well or at least deal with the possibility of adapting to refugees and that doing so can affect both their own and the refugees' wellbeing. In response, Jin K. Kim (1980) explicitly asserted the ways in which communication "as a vehicle of social integration, is a major determinant of the acculturation level a foreign immigrant achieves" (p. 176). Building on this assertion, Y. Y. Kim (2001) developed her own theory to address intercultural transitions and created

cross-cultural adaptation theory, which is centered squarely in the communication discipline. Below I will briefly overview this theory.

### **Cross-Cultural Adaptation Theory**

According to Kim (2001, 2005), cross-cultural adaptation occurs when people from one culture move to a different culture. This adaptation can take place at the individual level through thought, emotional, and behavioral processes as well as at the group level through language, history, traditions, and customs. Kim's (2001, 2005) theory assumes that humans have an inherent drive to grow and adapt, that adaptation to one's environment occurs through communication, and that adaptation is a complex and dynamic process. Four interrelated communication dimensions comprise the adaptation process of immigrants according to Kim: host communication (communicative engagement with members of the host culture), ethnic communication (communication with those in similar ethnic groups), personal communication (communication competence within the host society), and social communication (engagement with interpersonal communication and mass media with both the host culture and home culture) (Kim, 2001).

Cross-cultural adaptation theory focuses on the act of establishing and maintaining a relatively stable and reciprocal relationship with the host environment through adaptation. Kim's (2001, 2005) cross-cultural adaptation theory is an integrative theory that uses the stress-adaptation-growth model. Stress occurs when one experiences culture shock, or feelings of disorientation and discomfort, during the initial stages of transition (Oberg, 1960). Specifically, the inability to communicate competently in the new culture results in stress which increases the motivation to adapt, which can result in

growth and further experimentation leading to more stress as the cycle repeats itself. This leads to growth. It's a "draw back" and "leap forward" process (Kim, 2001). Unlike some scholars, Kim (2001) does not view culture shock as detrimental to the individual but rather sees it as necessary and even productive as the stress can lead to change and personal growth.

The ultimate goal of adaptation, then, occurs when fit is created through the process of intercultural encounters, personal adjustment to stressors, developing more effective cultural and interactional styles, and trying again until one achieves a closer fit (Pitts, 2009). Communication is used as an adaptive response to relieve stress brought on by encounters with the host culture, restore order, and assess expectations and behaviors that can result in growth and intercultural identity transformation (Pitts, 2009; Kim, 2005). This transformation and the outcome of successful adaptation includes: (1) functional fitness or being capable of addressing one's needs both effectively and appropriately during one's everyday life within society, (2) psychological health or achieving psychological wellbeing and healthy psychological adjustment, and (3) intercultural identity or the feeling of belonging to multiple cultures and lacking any strong bond to one specific culture, which some refer to as being multicultural (Harvey, 2007; Kim, 2001; Pitts, 2009).

As Kim points out, the process of cultural adaptation is complex, with many influential forces pushing and pulling individuals in multiple directions ultimately ending in an individual, changed, in various ways, by the experience (Kim 2001). Ideally, what results from cross-cultural adaptation is a blending of old and new, which helps individuals to fit into the receiving community while still maintaining elements of their

own culture, similar to the acculturation strategy of integration. According to Kim's theory, in order for the adaptation process to be successful, individuals need to demonstrate certain characteristics: a sense of personal, social and cultural identity, empathy and appreciation of the diversity of cultures, an ability to effectively communicate across cultural divides, and an awareness and sensitivity to major domestic and international issues. All of these characteristics are further developed through interaction and advance one's intercultural competence. This theory contributes to my proposed research by illuminating the complex and dynamic processes of cross-cultural adaptation and accenting the ways in which intercultural interactions develop and are maintained, while continually progressing through cycles of stress, adaptation, and growth as groups engage in transformative interactions.

#### Previous Research on Cultural Adaptation of Refugees

While most of the research studies using Berry's and Kim's theories have focused on short term sojourners (e.g. study abroad students) and long term immigrants (e.g. residents of 12 or more months), some scholars have focused on the acculturation patterns of refugees using a variety of theoretical frameworks (e.g. Redick & Wood, 1982; Tran & Wright, 1986). Semlak, Pearson, Amundson, and Kudak (2008) identified and described the dialectical tensions experienced by female African refugees during the cross-cultural adaptation process when relocating to the United States and noted the lack of previous research on refugees. Researchers also have investigated the differences between male and female refugees by focusing on marginalization (Binder & Tosic, 2005), differing social statuses (Bui & Morash, 1999), obstacles in forming new social networks (Abraham, 2000; Hagan, 1998), and a lack of participation in the new culture



due to differing gender barriers (Bhuyan & Senturia, 2005; Raj & Silverman, 2002). All of this research offers a call for scholars to advance studies on refugee populations. I responded to this call through conducting research on refugees and German citizens by exploring cross-cultural adaptation and intercultural interactions.

Scholars have emphasized the impact of the *involuntary* nature of the refugee experience on refugees' cultural adaptation. For example, Bhuyan and Senturia, (2005) explored the resistance of refugee groups to adaptation due in part to their wish to return to their culture of origin. They found that this resistance leads to a diminished desire for host cultural competency and interaction. Other researchers have found that refugee resistance to adaptation is based on a fear of losing one's origin culture as well as a fear that younger generations will not maintain the culture of origin once in the host culture (Hedegaard, 1999; Weine et al., 2004; Keel & Drew, 2004; Pyke, 2005). When searching for ways to increase positive adaptation, Cheah, Karamehic-Muratovic, Matsuo, and Poljarevic (2011) determined that like migrants, "host language competence, host and ethnic interpersonal relationships and media use, all positively contribute to refugees adaptation" (p. 219). Popescu (2014) asserts that employment, housing, education and health, challenges often faced by refugees, may be key aspects of integrating into a new society. This and other research reveal that intercultural interaction is not only difficult but possibly undesired, which points to other underlying issues that affect intercultural transitions and adaptation.

Research has elaborated on the idea that a strong proficiency in the host language aids in the cultural adaptation of refugees, their ability to secure jobs in the host culture (Portes & Bach, 1980; Birman & Trickett, 2001; Starr & Roberts, 1982; Kim, 1989,

1990), and to their ability to develop functional fitness and psychological health (Epstein, Botvin, Dusenberry, Diaz, & Kerner, 1996; Kim, 1990; Lee & Chen, 2000; Noels, Pon, & Clement, 1996). Similar research exploring immigrant groups more generally notes that language proficiency facilitates cultural adaptation and interaction with the host culture (Kim, 1990; Cui et al., 1998). More specifically, Kim (2001) asserts that communication with the host culture aids in adaptation and growth as newcomers learn verbal and nonverbal cues and local practices. Steinglass, Weisstub, and De-Nour (1988) extend this assertion to claim that strong ties with the host culture is a predictor of positive adjustment to the new environment. These findings highlight the importance of frequency of interaction to positive adaptation outcomes for migrant groups. This assertion is supported by other studies that argue for the importance of migrant-host interaction as a positive factor to facilitate successful intercultural transitions (Zimmerman, 1995; Heikinheimo & Shute, 1986; Schram & Lauver, 1988; Surdam & Collins, 1984; Kim, 1978; Shah, 1991; Wen, 1976; Cheah, Karamehic-Muratovic, Matsuo, & Poljarevic, 2007).

Although studies grounded in both Berry's acculturation theory and Kim's cross-cultural adaptation theory have much to offer, they address adaptation and acculturation as if they were processes that occurred in only one direction (the adaptation of the migrant to the host culture). In addition, both theories integrate host culture perceptions on migrant transitions, but they neglect the ways in which host cultures are transformed during their communication with migrant groups and how they also experience intercultural transitions. Doing so overlooks the fact that shared meaning and understanding can impact integrative processes, practices, and policies to facilitate

positive interaction and integration during intercultural transitions. In order to examine this dual-process model, I use the coordinated management of meaning theory to explicate the ways in which we can understand the interactions and experiences of both migrant groups and host cultures during intercultural transitions. In the next section, I overview the literature related to this theory.

### **Coordinated Management of Meaning Theory**

Coordinated Management of Meaning Theory (CMM) seems particularly relevant to investigating refugee-host interaction since it has proven a “useful framework for understanding how people coordinate meanings. . .especially when the meanings are contradictory” (Orbe & Camara, 2010, p. 285). Given the likelihood of divergent cultural perceptions of refugees and German hosts, CMM seems an appropriate theoretical lens for understanding how a diverse set of individuals conceptualize their communication encounters with each other. As described below, a number of recent studies have used CMM to address issues of culture, power, and intergroup dynamics (Pearce & Pearce, 2000, 2001).

Emerging from the ideas of Bateson (1972) and social construction theorists, CMM was developed by Barnett Pearce and Vernon Cronen (1980) to explain how meanings are created, coordinated, and managed in the social world. Fundamentally, it is a model for understanding the relationship between meaning and action (Montgomery, 2004). When it was originally introduced, it was seen as a radical departure from previous theoretical standards as it ascribed to the notion that “conversation is to be thought of as creating a social world” (Harre, 1983, p. 65). Social world here refers to the set of accepted beliefs and expectations people have regarding how human interactions,

including work production, parenting, consumption, and happiness, do and should occur. That is, CMM seeks to explain how people co-construct the meanings and expectations they hold for society, their personal relationships, and their individual identities through communication (Cronen, Pearce, & Harris, 1982; Cronen & Pearce, 1988).

CMM is an evolving theory. In the early development of CMM it functioned as a rules theory whose purpose is to understand “the ways in which human interaction is guided by rules within particular contexts and interactions” (Miller, 2004, p.149). However, as the theory advanced and social constructionist approaches became more widespread in the academic lexicon, CMM was situated more in a systemic social constructionism of meaning (Pearce, 2007). The focus more on social constructionism allowed for the ways in which CMM illuminates our ways of being in our social worlds through joint actions (coordination), stories (coherence), and mystery to be further developed and applied. Ultimately, CMM responds to and examines the different ways of being and how through our joint actions and stories we create shared meaning and social worlds.

Although scholars employ a variety of CMM heuristics to analyze meaning, for the purposes of this study the hierarchy model of meaning will be used to demonstrate how communication acts, like stories of positive interaction, to reveal meaning across multiple contexts. In the early development of CMM, the hierarchy model of meaning was arranged in a hierarchical pyramid of speech acts, episodes, relationships, self and culture to help define, redefine, and understand the relationships among each level of the pyramid (Cronen et al., 1988; Pearce, 1976; Pearce & Cronen, 1980; Pearce, Cronen, & Conklin, 1979). However, current formats of the hierarchy model of meaning attend to

the idea that there are always multiple stories of what is going on in a given interaction and situation and the relative importance of these stories can often shift as interaction with others occur (Pearce, Sostrin, & Pearce, 2011). In other words, there are no consistent categories or set levels that comprise a hierarchy of meaning. The updated model affirms that there is “no meaning without context” and there are always multiple contexts occurring (Pearce, Sostrin, & Pearce, 2011, p. 128). Thus, the hierarchy model of meaning works to illuminate how what people say and how they act are informed by their highest level context, which drives their interactions. For example, in the present study, by illuminating the highest level context for both host and migrant groups during their stories of positive interaction, we can gain insight into how to help create helpful next turns for different migrant and host groups to continue to create and foster positive interactions. In sum, CMM can be used to understand how people derive meaning from their interactions which can also guide their behaviors (Pearce & Cronen, 1980).

While CMM is not without its critics (Miller, 2004), it has been lauded for its ability to take stories we tell ourselves and each other and to interpret the underlying meanings of those stories (Phillipsen, 1995, p. 25), and it has been widely used in applied research (Glaser, 2006; Thompson & Kleine, 2015; Murray, 2014; Pearce, 2004). Thus, CMM provides a theoretical guide for understanding the experiences of German citizens and refugees as they co-construct meaning regarding their interactions (Cronen, Pearce, & Lannamann, 1982, Pearce, 2004, 2007).

CMM has been used to provide insight into intercultural communication. For example, through the use of rhetorical methods and CMM, Jirathun (2011) analyzed two compliance-gaining taxonomies that were developed in Western contexts and then

applied to Asian settings; he found that by applying the hierarchy of meaning heuristic to the compliance-gaining messages he was able to pinpoint the cultural assumptions underlying the Western taxonomies and the degree to which they were unrepresentative of behavioral and communication differences in other cultures. Specifically, he explored traditional cultural dimensions that suggest behavior and communication style for differing cultural groups (i.e. Asians = high context vs. Westerners = low context) to show that Western-based compliance-gaining typologies that focus on low context explicit messages do not translate well to cultures grounded in high context implicit messages. (Jirathun, 2011). This study demonstrates how essentializing experiences and interactions across cultures may limit one's ability to understand the nuances of interactions and how individuals conceptualize their experiences. Like Jirathun, I used CMM to allow me to understand German hosts' and refugees' differing experiences to produce a fuller understanding of the intercultural transitions experienced by each.

Peleg (2015) also used CMM to address intercultural relationships in the Jewish-Arab Israeli town of Ramla to determine patterns of constructive communication between the two groups, taking into account the ethnic, religious, lingual, and cultural aspects of the relationship that reinforce tensions. Peleg (2015) highlighted the need to find adept leaders and to establish cross-cultural cooperation as a way to engage in strategic interventions in a divided society. Furthermore, his study accented the importance of two fundamental components of CMM—coordination and meaning. Peleg (2015) argues for the importance of engaging participant groups in meaningful discussions that facilitate collaboration and interaction; he further states that with this coordination understanding and openness are enabled, resulting in more attentive and meaningful exchanges (Peleg,

2015, p. 20). These studies provide a useful contribution to the research regarding cross-cultural interaction, how to promote constructive communication between diverse groups, and how to create opportunities for interaction (Burr, 2003; Gergen & Gergen, 2003).

Other scholars also highlight the importance of coordination and meaning construction with regard to engaging disparate parties in fruitful interaction (Creede, Fisher-Yoshida & Gallegos, 2012; Pearce, 2007; Pearce & Littlejohn, 1997). In similar research, Orbe & Camara (2010) drew on CMM to analyze stories of discrimination, to illuminate core elements of communicative discrimination, and to explain the diverse nature of meaning-making across cultural groups. This research focused on what happens when meanings are contradictory (Bruss et al., 2005) and explored how individuals coordinate meaning across differing viewpoints and sources (Orbe & Camara, 2010). Their study allowed them to recognize how different forms of discrimination, such as verbal discrimination using derogatory terms and nonverbal discrimination such as threatening eye contact, are perceived and displayed, noting the subtlety of discrimination in everyday life and the inherent grounding of this concept in difference. Furthermore, Orbe and Camara's study determined that when perceived cultural assumptions become salient through communication they reinforced perceptions and experiences of discrimination by both ingroup/outgroup members (Orbe & Camara, 2010, p. 291). Thus, their study highlights the importance of not only engaging groups to explore their interactions with one another but also of understanding the underlying assumptions that guide negative interactions. In addition, it reveals how communication may influence decisions to avoid interaction and reinforce negative cultural assumptions in both individualized and structural forms of discrimination (Pincus, 1999; Orbe & Camara,

2010). Finally, the study explains how contradictory claims and experiences can exist between intercultural groups and how these varied meanings affect communication.

In related research, Montgomery (2004) utilized CMM to understand stories told and stories lived in the context of three refugee families' experiences with torture. She found that "The 3 families experienced their life stories and situations as refugees in very different ways, ranging from meaninglessness, discontinuance, and alienation to a sense of community, solidarity, and openness" (p. 349). Her research highlights the difference between stories told (developed from meanings given by an individual to various incidents and experiences) and stories lived (describable and observable interactions) (McAdam & Schilling, 1996). This difference can give rise to conflict when stories told and stories lived are in contradiction to one another and the meaning-providing context (i.e., German citizens vs. refugees). Ultimately, the use of CMM in these studies reveals the ways in which CMM is an ideal theoretical framework for analyzing interaction, especially when a researcher is attempting to understand a diverse set of individuals and how they conceptualize and recount difficult subjects and experiences as they relate to culture (Orber & Camara, 2010, p. 285).

Overall, CMM helps us understand how contextually-driven situations can be understood from multiple perspectives (Cronen et al., 1982; Cronen, Pearce & Changsheng, 1989; Hannah & McAdam, 1991; McCallin, 1990). The complexity, depth, and abstraction of this social constructionist theory complements the focus, clarity, and decisive nature of acculturation theory and cross-cultural adaptation theory as a way to understand intercultural transitions and interactions. This leads to the following research questions:



RQ 1: What core elements characterize the stories of positive intercultural interaction between German citizens and refugees?

RQ 2: How do the expressions of the core elements vary between German and refugee participants?

## CHAPTER 3

### METHODS

In order to answer the previously presented research questions, I used qualitative research methods. Qualitative inquiry explores boundaries and “is a situated activity that locates the observer in the world” (Denzin & Lincoln, p. 3), These methods were best suited for the present study because they offered a way to acquire in-depth and comprehensive understanding of the details of the phenomena being examined and allowed me to take into account multiple participants’ perspectives. Specifically, I engaged in participant observations and interviews (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002; Saldaña, 2013; Spradley, 1980; Tracy, 2013). Further, the methods allowed me to derive cultural meaning from layered accounts that are detailed, specific, and provide “thick description” (Geertz, 1973).

Below, I will provide further details regarding my study.

#### **Research Setting**

The research for this project took place in Nuremberg and Munich, Germany, where I immersed myself in the context, culture, and people’s experiences. Specifically, I lived in Munich for 3 months, beginning in mid-May of 2016. During my time, I attended cultural events (i.e. concerts and festivals) as well as enjoyed meals with many of my participants along with visits to their homes, schools, and businesses, in order to live as a participant observer. While in this setting, I attended classes on intercultural communication competence at the University of Federal Armed Forces, taught by Dr. Matoba, where I observed German students’ class discussions to understand how they view and grapple with refugee problems. Students were asked to engage in small dialogue sessions with refugees as part of their class requirements and ascertain what

kind of competence "Germans" need to survive in during this cultural transition. This assignment took place prior to my arrival, and students agreed to reflect on their interactions during interviews with me. I also visited Nuremberg where I was invited to collect data with co-researcher and participant Ilona Christl, who works with aid organizations to facilitate workers and supporters helping refugees. Additionally, I utilized my local host, Jonas Alves Alcantara Kühner, as a source to help me meet and interact with both refugees and Germans citizens in the Munich area.

### **Participants**

My first participant group included German students at the University of Federal Armed Forces who offered their perspectives based on personal experience from interacting with refugees. These students previously had engaged in dialogue with refugees and assisted me in making connections with refugee groups as well as other German citizens to interview. One particular student, Jonas Alves Alcantara Kühner, who I mentioned above and who acted as my local host in Munich, offered much of his time and insight to support my research and helped facilitate connections with both refugees and Germans. He assisted me with my local needs while in Munich and provided translation as needed during my stay (for example, with the interview protocol and interviewing).

Participants also included German aid workers and volunteers from support organizations such as the Workers' Welfare Association in Nuremberg, a support service organization that provides educational and health related support to refugees. Specifically, Ilona Christl, a member of the Workers' Welfare Association (WWA), provided me with access to this organization and offered her support and guidance while

I was in Germany. Thus, local connections facilitated my access to refugees and Germans.

Ultimately, I was able to interview 44 participants 15 of whom were female and 29 were males. The average age of my participants was 35 years old. More specifically, I interacted with 19 refugee participants comprised of 5 females and 14 males with an average age of 27.5 years old. These participants came from the following countries of origin: Syria (9), Iraq (3), Senegal (2), Ethiopia (2), Iran (1), Afghanistan (1), and Somalia (1). Furthermore, their average length of time in Germany was approximately 14 months based on the time of the interview with the more frequently occurring length of time in Germany being 9 months. Lastly, the range for the length of time in Germany was 6 months to 4 years, again based on the time of the interview. As for the German aid worker and volunteer participants, I interviewed 13 individuals, a group composed of 8 females and 5 males, with an average age of 57. Finally, I interviewed 12 German students comprised of 2 females and 10 males, with an average age of 23. Below, is a more detailed list of my participants:

Table 1

*List of Participants*

Name	Age	Sex	Country of Origin	Data Set	Arrival	Role	Interview Length
Mr. Kreßner	65	M	Germany	A	N/A	Aid Worker	1:15:52
Abraham	27	M	Iraq	A	Aug. 2015	Refugee	1:15:52
Iris	64	F	Germany	A	N/A	Volunteer	1:15:52
Falel	38	M	Senegal	A	Sept. 2015	Refugee	1:15:52

(Continued)

Maida	N/A	F	Syria	B	Sept. 2015	Refugee	39:29:00
Boushra	N/A	F	Syria	B	Oct. 2015	Refugee	39:29:00
Omran	17	M	Syria	B	Oct. 2015	Refugee	39:29:00
Kiyanoosh	26	M	Iran	C	Nov. 2015	Refugee	28:17:00
Gelila	33	F	Ethiopia	D	Nov. 2015	Refugee	17:33
Sisay	33	M	Ethiopia	E	Sept. 2015	Refugee	11:43
Mohamad	30	M	Syria	F	Oct. 2015	Refugee	42:08:00
Ammar	26	M	Syria	G	Aug. 2015	Refugee	1:06:39
Mudasser	21	M	Afghanistan	H	2012	Refugee	49:07:00
Midya	16	F	Iraq	I	Jan. 2016	Refugee	32:35:00
Sossan	42	F	Iraq	I	Jan. 2016	Refugee	32:35:00
Ümit	N/A	M	Germany/ Turkey	J	N/A	Aid Worker	41:21:00
Andrea	40	F	Germany/ Hungary	K	N/A	Aid Worker	30:47:00
Markus	23	M	Germany	L	N/A	Student	19:12
Simon	23	M	Germany	M	N/A	Student	18:57
Ester	23	F	Germany	N	N/A	Student	28:16:00
Steve	24	M	Germany	O	N/A	Student	36:28:00
Johannes	22	M	Germany	P	N/A	Student	29:30:00
Jessica	23	F	Germany	Q	N/A	Student	16:14
Volkan	22	M	Germany/ Turkey	R	N/A	Student	17:05
Marc	37	M	Germany/ Luxembourg	S	N/A	Volunteer	56:04:00
Ilona	56	F	Germany/ Czech Republic	T	N/A	Aid Worker	26:49:00
Jonas	24	M	Germany/ Brazil	U	N/A	Student	27:07:00

(Continued)

Steven	21	M	Germany	V	N/A	Student	15:18
Abdullah D	40	M	Syria	W	Oct. 2014	Refugee	1:02:58
Basel	31	M	Syria	W	Sept. 2015	Refugee	1:02:58
Abdullah S	21	M	Syria	W	Sept. 2015	Refugee	1:02:58
Majd	19	M	Syria	W	Sept. 2015	Refugee	1:02:58
Fredevike	77	F	Germany	X	N/A	Volunteer	39:22:00
Waltraud	75	F	Germany	Y	N/A	Volunteer	16:24
Franz	67	M	Germany	Z	N/A	Volunteer	12:00
Irene	50	F	Germany	AA	N/A	Aid Worker	33:33:00
Mahamed	19	M	Somalia	BB	May-14	Refugee	12:31
Mamadou	29	M	Senegal	CC	2013	Refugee	20:41
Lina	23	F	Germany	DD	N/A	Volunteer	22:12
Nicolas	23	M	Germany	EE	N/A	Student	33:44:00
Hermann	73	M	Germany	FF	N/A	Volunteer	36:28:00
Mike	24	M	Germany	GG	N/A	Student	36:56:00
Judy	60	F	Germany	HH	N/A	Aid Worker	38:39:00
Tim	27	M	Germany	II	N/A	Student	N/A

### **IRB and Recruitment Procedures**

I submitted my Institutional Review Board (IRB) application soon after my prospectus defense. This application included my approved rationale, descriptions of the research design, timeline, and the letters needed to confirm access to my research sites as well as drafts of the required consent letters and interview guides for each participant group. This step allowed me to attend to the procedural ethics of my research project (Tracy, 2010; Sales & Folkman, 2000).

## **Data Gathering**

I collected data through participant observations and semi-structured/unstructured interviews. During participant observations, I spent time in the field observing public interactions and recording notes either in situ or, when that was not possible, as soon as possible after exiting the situation (Merrigan & Huston, 2004). Specifically, I observed German students on the university campus and as they engaged with their peers. Similarly, I observed aid workers from the Worker's Welfare Association and from Munich as they interacted with one another and with refugee populations.

In addition, where possible, I captured moments visually through photographs. During observations that occurred in field settings, I also engaged in initial unstructured field interviews. I engaged in field interviews with at least one person from each of the three participant groups described above in order to pilot my interview guide before finalizing the interview protocols I used for the semi-structured interviews. After conducting observations and field interviews, I developed field notes from my jottings using thick description (Geertz, 1973), and then I began initial coding and categorization (Saldaña, 2013). This initial coding and categorization allowed me to develop more fleshed out interview guides with which to conduct the semi-structured interviews (Kvale, 1996).

I audio recorded interviews with members of the participant groups described previously (German students, German aid workers/volunteers, and refugees); however, in one case I was unable to do that (with my participant Tim), so I collected the interview data via email. In total, I was able to conduct 35 interviews with 44 participants comprised of 19 refugees, 13 German aid workers/volunteers, and 12 German students

with a total recorded interview time of 18 hours, 12 minutes, and 15 seconds for all participants. The average length of the recorded interviews was roughly 32 minutes. My interview protocol asked participants to respond to the following questions:

1. Can you tell me a little bit about a positive experience you have had with a refugee/German?
2. Why do you think this experience was positive?
3. What did the refugee/German do to make this experience positive?
4. What did you do to make this experience positive?
5. What do you think refugees can do in general to create positive experiences with Germans?
6. What do you think Germans can do in general to create positive experiences with refugees?
7. What do you think/hope the future of Germany is going to look like?
8. Is there anything else you would like to add that we haven't talked about yet regarding your experiences?

The interviews allowed me to engage in “mutual discovery, understanding, reflection, and explanation” with my participants (Tracy, 2013, p. 132). Furthermore, the use of semi-structured interviews provided more comparable data sets than unstructured interviews would have and were crafted to better attend to my analysis goals. This interview process allowed for open dialogue, reflection, and the sharing of experiences (Holstein & Gubrium, 2003; Bates, 2004).



## Data Analysis

My data analysis was iterative, utilizing aspects of grounded theory and constant comparative methods (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Saldaña, 2013; Tracy, 2013). The aspects of grounded theory that informed my data analysis were: initial open coding (using *in vivo* and *holistic* coding), axial coding (to identify the relationships between categories), and theoretical coding (connecting my categories to my theoretical framework) (Charmaz, 2014; Saldaña, 2013; Strauss & Corbin, 1990, 1994, 1998). As previously noted, I conducted 35 interviews, with 44 participants. Within these interviews, I collected roughly 209 stories of positive intercultural interaction. However, in order to fully attend to my participants' perspectives and conceptualizations as well as my research questions and goals, it was important to code and analyze the pertinent data surrounding these stories and participant responses in full. Therefore, I examined and coded all interview transcripts in connection to my research questions, goals, and specific interview questions.

Specifically, after I finished the data collection, I revisited all of my data for initial or open coding. Primarily, I used *in vivo* coding (Strauss, 1987) and *holistic* coding (Dey, 1993) to code all 35 interviews as a way to identify important words or groups of words in the data accordingly, especially those words used on a repetitive basis that were part of larger positive stories of intercultural interaction and/or were direct responses to interview questions. The 762 codes created highlighted the important words from participant interviews that represented clear connections to my research questions and goals (Holloway, 2008).

Throughout this process, I wrote analytical memos to myself to record my thoughts during analysis (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Throughout coding the interviews, I noticed relationships emerging between my codes and across interviews, and I wrote analytical memos detailing these potential relationships that emerged. After finalizing the initial coding, I reexamined the codes and engaged in axial coding to begin grouping related codes into categories. I reviewed the list of potential relationships I had generated during my initial coding and focused the list to account for the major categories emerging across the interviews.

Based on this information, I organized the codes into 16 categories, which are as follows: Germans/Germany (codes where participants spoke about what Germans/Germany could/should do to create more positive interactions as well as what they may have done and observed in their own experiences); Refugees (codes where participants spoke about what refugees could/should do to create more positive interactions as well as what they may have done and observed in their own experiences); Open-Minded (codes where participants specifically used or referenced the term open-minded or a synonym); Learning German (codes where participants spoke about learning the German language, language courses, and/or the importance of language as a pathway to interaction); Translation (codes where participants described any translating they engaged in and/or observed others engaging in as well as the importance of translating as a pathway to interaction); the Future (codes in direct response to the interview question “What do you think/hope the future of Germany is going to look like?” – participants replied both for their own future and the future of Germany); Being Human (codes where participants addressed the importance of being treated like a human and/or recounted

stories where they felt they were treated or treated others as human); Communication/Interaction (codes that specifically highlighted a directed communication episode and/or positive interaction); Cultural Awareness (codes where participants acknowledged cultural similarities and/or differences, and how culture impacted their interactions); Friends/Family Connections (codes where participants discussed their friendships and/or how they viewed or were viewed in familial terms during positive interactions); Activities (codes referencing specific activities such as going to the zoo, going to the gym, going to museums, etc. that led to positive interaction); Support (codes where participants acknowledged and referenced their support systems and/or their role in providing support during interactions); Germans as Migrants (codes where German participants highlighted their personal understanding through connecting their own experiences and histories to others); Integration (codes where the word integration was directly used and/or referenced in relation to positive interactions); Gratitude (codes where participants highlighted the importance of being grateful, thankful, and/or appreciative as a way to facilitate, create, and motivate positive interactions); and lastly, the German System (codes where participants spoke directly about the German political, economic, and/or bureaucratic system). These categories reflect the most prevalent topics mentioned across the data set and allowed me to organized pertinent excerpts from the transcripts in a more efficient and useful manner in order to draw comparisons across the interviews.

Next, I engaged in theoretical coding to explore the relationships among the categories in order to answer the research questions (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). In grounded theory, typically at this point a core category is identified that encapsulates a

potential theory for the research and allows for subsidiary categories, sub-categories, and their properties to emerge from the initial conceptual framework (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). However, since I had already identified the theoretical frameworks to be utilized, instead I engaged in theoretical coding (Glaser, 2005). This process provided explanatory power to the categories and codes in relation to my chosen theoretical bodies of knowledge and research questions (Birks & Mills, 2011). By comparing the categories and their underlying links to one another, the theoretical frameworks, and research goals, I was able to illuminate connections across the data and interpret the findings more holistically.

In addition, I selected exemplar codes from the categories and reviewed the transcripts to further explore the story or stories surrounding the code(s). For example, when looking at the category Germans as Migrants, it became clear that an underlying theme within the category was empathy, however, when I went back to the transcripts to review the stories more fully, many of the stories present in this category also addressed stories of support. Similarly, when looking at both the Germans/Germany and Refugees categories, the codes provided insight into comments regarding intercultural competency, allusions to empathy, and stories of support. In order to confirm the initial interpretations, I would return to the stories within the transcripts and review them in full to validate the underlying themes emerging within each category. Some categories were more overt in their likely underlying theme, such as the categories Cultural Awareness, Support, and Open-Minded. Therefore, I connected these categories to the theoretical frameworks directly to illuminate the ways that cultural awareness, support, and open-mindedness have been addressed in the literature on intercultural interactions. In addition, I checked

which categories shared the same stories to identify the dominant stories across the categories. Upon reviewing these dominant stories, I was further able to draw comparisons across categories and stories to illuminate the central themes.

This constant comparison of interviews to interviews, interviews to codes, codes to codes, codes to categories, categories to categories, categories back to interviews, as well as categories to theories, allowed me to connect the categories to specific stories presented by the participants as well as the overarching theoretical frameworks and research questions (Birks & Mills, 2011). This dually emergent and iterative process continued until three primary repetitive themes emerged from the 16 categories and across my 35 interviews. Ultimately, these three themes mirrored the core elements of positive intercultural interactions. The dominant elements are the importance of competency, social support, and empathy in positive intercultural interactions. In the following chapter, I elaborate on these findings and reveal how they connect to the stories in the data as well as the theoretical grounding of this dissertation. In the subsequent chapter, I highlight the different conceptualizations of positive interaction that existed between the two dominant interview groups (refugees and German citizens) noting the differing ways in which participants experienced and explained the importance of competency, social support, and empathy.

Throughout the data analysis, I engaged with relevant research literature to assist me in developing theoretical sensitivity to my participants, intercultural interactions, the complexity of cultural adaptation and acculturation, and other areas of interest that emerge from my data collection, coding, and analysis processes. Also, I allowed for my tacit knowledge (Polanyi, 1967) or the things I know and have experienced to influence

my study and allow for unexpected insights and ideas. Steedman (1991) emphasizes that we always bring to our research our personal knowledge and experience and, therefore, need to find a way to effectively integrate the two as they cannot be separated.

In addition, throughout this process I engaged in reflexivity and memo writing as well as member-checking to confirm interpretations of my data with members of my participant groups. Denzin (1994) states that reflexivity allows for the ongoing interpretation of ideas and observations. Memo writing allowed me to engage in continual reflection while bringing theoretical knowledge and research literature to bear on my collected data, analysis, and research questions (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The process included theoretical, observational, analytical, and methodological memos. All in all, I engaged in a thorough and iterative qualitative research project that highlights the rigor of qualitative data collection and analysis as well as provides a fruitful contribution to the literature on intercultural transitions, integration and the coordinated management of meaning.

### **Intercultural Considerations**

As I engaged in this research project, I was mindful of the ways that I too was experiencing intercultural transitions and new intercultural interactions. Fundamentally, it was by crossing borders and traversing cultural spaces that separate me from my research context that I was able to build coalitions of understanding (DuBois, 1995; Giroux, 1992). However, there were many challenges on my path to understanding.

Merryfield (1985) notes the significant difficulties in engaging in cross-cultural research, such as the inability to speak the local language(s) or to understand beliefs and values, different communication styles of interaction, how social relationships are

managed, and attitudes towards time, infrastructure, and political sensitivities. While the inability to speak German or Arabic was a limitation, it did not derail my research project; as Ginsberg (1988) argues, establishing rapport with participants is more a function of time spent and interpersonal skills than cultural identity and linguistics. However, in order to engage in successful cross-cultural research, five main skills and qualities have been identified: tolerance for ambiguity, patience, adaptation, capacity for tacit learning, and courtesy (Seefeldt, 1985). Fortunately, I was well suited to embody these skills as I am an avid traveler who explores new cultural landscapes with ease and curiosity. I am respectful and polite during my cultural interactions, attempting to use the local language when possible, and I am open to learning from new cultures and experiences at every turn. Luckily, I had roughly three months to refine these skills and build relationships while in Germany.

Additionally, researchers suggest that having a team representing both the researcher's culture and the culture(s) within the community provides the most suitable approach for cross-cultural research (Chow, Murray, & Angeli, 1996; Cuthbert, 1985; Westwood & Brous, 1993). In line with this recommendation, I established connections with participants in Germany (Dr. Kazuma Matoba, Ilona Christl, & Jonas Alves Alcantara Kühner) who guided my research on the ground and served as member-checkers to evaluate the interpretation of my data during collection and analysis (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). My research team in the United States (Dr. Jess Alberts, Dr. Judith Martin, Dr. Benjamin Broome, & Kim Pearce) ensured that I met the guidelines and expectations of a doctoral dissertation as understood from a U.S. social science research standpoint.

Once in Germany, I was equally mindful of the voices I represented. Specifically, one major participant group in my study, refugees, is a vulnerable population, which may have presented a barrier to my ability to engage these voices. James and Platzer (1999) highlight three key issues to be mindful of when conducting research with vulnerable groups: susceptibility to harm, the politics of representation, and the use of self. In their work, they explain that as a researcher one needs to be attentive to one's participants throughout the entire research process and to be reflective of participants' values, beliefs, culture, and language (James & Platzer, 1999). In addition, in order to properly respond to participants' potential distress, trauma, and emotions, a researcher needs to be equipped with information regarding how to direct participants' towards support and therapeutic intervention if needed. Fortunately, due to the focus of the present study on positive stories of intercultural interaction, I did not need to provide this information to the participants. At the same time, James and Platzer (1999) point out the ways in which emotions and distress complicate the research process and can provide a space for researchers to reflect upon moments of discomfort and unease. They see this as an opportunity for researchers to engage in self-exploration and reflexivity, to develop abilities to do no harm, and to promote positive change (James & Platzer, 1999, p. 80). Again, I was fortunate to enjoy primarily moments of comfort and ease during the research process and found myself reflecting upon the effortlessness I seemed to enjoy as researcher as I collected data.

When thinking about the politics of representation, Sparks (2002) notes that, "All cultural voices are multisubjective, contingent, power-laden, incongruent and offer political solutions to everyday negotiated realities" (p. 116). Ultimately, I was only able



to explore the “positioned utterances” of those who agreed to participate in my study and those whom I was able to observe (Clifford, 1986). Therefore, I am limited by who specifically from the refugee group I had access to due to my connections with German students and aid workers. Depending on their connections, I may have been interacting with more privileged and acculturated members of this group, while those who are really struggling may not be open to participating or unable to do so due to their positionality, such as religiosity - practicing strict Islam may limit my interaction with some Islamic men -- or culturally, if the language barrier is too thick to cross and there is no one available to translate. Therefore, I was only able to remark on the positions of my participants and their experiences, providing context based results that will make no claims to universality.

Also, I needed to grapple with issues of translation while in the field. Even though I received support from Jonas, a German student, who assisted in my German translation needs, doing so assumes that any bilingual person can be an effective translator (Condon & Yousef, 1988; Robinson, 2001). Additionally, many of my participants themselves such as Jonas, Ilona, and Abdullah served as translators during group interview settings with refugee participants. In reality, I inherently gave Jonas and other participants the power to assign meaning to words in German, Arabic, English, and other languages as needed, and their meanings and translations may be mediated by power relations and social contexts surrounding their positionality (Bühler, 2002). Because of this, I sought to make translation a visible practice as opposed to it being merely an exercise in producing language equivalence (Maier, 1995). I did this by having the translators serve as research confederates (i.e. Jonas and Ilona) and sometimes participants during interviews, making

them an overt part of the data collection process. In addition, I utilized the insight and support of my participants and support team in Germany as I crafted my interview protocols and during the interviews themselves as well as during my data analysis as I transcribed, engaged in member-checking, and began to interpret my data (Poland, 1995; Tilley, 2003). This allowed for the emergent adjustments to the interview protocol as I received feedback from my support team (i.e. Jonas, Ilona, Kazuma) as well as many of my initial participants (i.e. Iris, Ammar, Mohammad, etc.) The language barriers at times forced me to explicitly formulate the evidence and arguments that support my interpretations, making them accessible to others (Kvale, 1996). Ultimately, I needed to be mindful of how anyone who serves as a mediator between languages, whether it is through the spoken word or written texts, is also serving as a mediator between the cultural worlds of oneself and one's participants (Wong & Poon, 2010). Consequently, I needed to be mindful of all of the above considerations during my data collection in Germany.

Ultimately, the data collection allowed me to adequately answer my research questions. In the following two chapters, I will provide more detailed information from my data and analysis processes to demonstrate how my findings specifically answered my research questions.

## CHAPTER 4

### FINDINGS

*During my first visit to Nuremberg in June to conduct interviews, I met Ammar, a 26-year-old refugee from Syria; he was welcoming, hospitable, and supportive. He insisted on feeding me at every opportunity and encouraged me to make a return visit after Ramadan when we would have more time to talk with other refugees stationed in Nuremberg. Consequently, I planned a July bus trip to Nuremberg where I would arrive at the unfortunate hour of 4 a.m. Ammar offered to meet me at the bus station in Nuremberg and suggested that since I would likely be tired that I come to the refugee housing and sleep for a bit before the day began.*

*When the day arrived, Ammar promptly met me at the bus station and escorted me through the dark and deserted streets of Nuremberg back to the City Hostel (refugee housing). He informed me that he had told his roommates I was coming, and everyone was okay with my visit. Although he offered me his own his bed to rest, I insisted on resting on the couch. He also made it clear that if I needed to use the bathroom, he and his roommates would step out or he would stand guard outside the bathroom so no one disturbed me.*

*After I awoke, Ammar was still asleep, and one of his roommates who speaks very little English was up, made coffee for us both and offered me food. We sat, mostly in silence, sharing what little English and Arabic we knew, enjoying the morning sun and smiling at one another.*

I begin with my own story because it is representative of the three core elements of empathy, social support, and competency that I found to characterize positive intercultural interactions between refugees and their German hosts. Specifically, Ammar was empathetic in understanding my potential early morning needs and recognizing that I might be tired and in need of sleep, he knew the city better than I did and offered his

knowledge to help me navigate it, and he provided social support in terms of helping to meet my basic needs.

As indicated in the previous chapter's data analysis section, empathy, social support, and competency emerged through an iterative analysis of the overarching elements that connected the 16 categories, 762 codes, 209 stories, 35 interviews, and 44 participants with the theoretical framework, research questions, and goals of this project. Below, I offer further insight into each of these elements by briefly defining them and integrating exemplars from the data that demonstrate the elements' impact on the stories and experiences of positive intercultural interaction between German citizens and refugees. Next, I connect the three core elements to the theoretical frameworks of this project and explore the expression of these core elements in the stories of positive intercultural interactions between Germans citizens and refugees. Ultimately, these findings connect to the theoretical framework, accomplish the intended research goals, and answer the research questions:

RQ 1: What core elements characterize the stories of positive intercultural interaction between German citizens and refugees?

RQ 2: How do the expressions of the core elements vary between German and refugee participants?

### **Empathy**

It is fitting that the original conceptualization of empathy is considered to originate with German psychologist Theodore Lipps. In the 1880s he coined the term *einfihlung* which translates to English as “in-feeling” or in other words “feeling other people's feelings” (Rasoal, Eklund, & Hansen, 2011). This initial definition highlights

the affective importance of empathy by focusing on feelings. Similarly, Gagan (1983) states, “empathy is the ability to perceive one’s feelings on one hand, while transmitting them on the other” (p.119). However, it is important to recognize the ways in which our understanding of empathy has become multidimensional and encompasses more than the ability to share and understand emotions (Ioannidou & Konstantikaki, 2008). For instance, McLaren (2013) defines empathy as “a social and emotional skill that helps us feel and understand the emotions, circumstances, intentions, thoughts, and needs of others, *such that we can offer sensitive, perceptive, and appropriate communication and support*” (p. 27) (emphasis mine). Furthermore, empathy includes the ability to communicate one’s understanding of another person’s experiences, situations, emotions, and feelings through verbal and nonverbal communication (De Vignemont & Singer, 2006).

Empathy serves a vital role in human communication (De Vignemont & Singer, 2006) and is an essential means of social communication (Engelen & Röttger-Rössler, 2012). It is viewed as a fundamental aspect of positive contact between in-groups and out-groups and predicts reduced prejudice and racism (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2008). Broome (1993) found that empathetic communication also is the key to solving interpersonal conflicts. Likewise, Dewaele and Wei (2012) refer to empathy as “the ‘glue’ of the social world, drawing us to help others and stopping us from hurting others” (p. 193). Moreover, Floyd (2006) notes that empathetic communication is a part of the expression of affection and that affection is crucial to the health and wellbeing of humans. Additionally, empathy serves both social and communicative purposes by leading to increased levels of understanding, stress relief, and the reciprocity of positive

emotions such as joy and happiness (McLaren, 2013). Conversely, a lack of empathy is associated with antisocial behavior, aggressiveness, and possibly a lack of morality which could negatively affect individuals and their social and personal relationships (DeVignemont & Singer, 2006).

The majority of current studies have examined empathy from a psychological perspective (Davis, 1983; De Vignemont & Singer, 2006; Lawrence et al., 2004; Walter, 2012); however, scholars also have acknowledged the communicative function that empathy fulfills (Broome, 1993; Floyd, 2014; Ioannido & Konstantikaki, 2008). By and large, empathetic communication can be described as the ability to utilize empathy to communicate with others. This communication may come in the form of giving advice, reassurance, storytelling, and acts of consoling. In addition, it is difficult to offer appropriate social support if one cannot understand another's feelings from their own point of view. Furthermore, scholars have advanced initial conceptualizations of empathy leading to various other types and classifications, such as emotional contagion (De Vignemont & Singer, 2006), relational empathy (Broome, 1993), empathic accuracy and regulation (McLaren, 2013), associative empathy (Shen, 2010), empathetic embarrassment (Miller, 1987), state and trait empathy (Shen, 2010), cultural empathy (Dewaele & Wei, 2012), ethnocultural empathy (Rasoal, Eklund, & Hansen, 2011), and intercultural empathy (Zhu, 2011).

Some scholars have pointed out the potential challenges in communicating empathy across cultures (Bennet, 2013; Broome, 1991, 1993, 2015; DeTurk, 2001). DeTurk (2001) argues for the impossibility of empathy in intercultural communication particularly when it comes to intercultural understanding of power relations. DeTurk

(2001) cautions against the more dominant groups universalizing their own experiences potentially silencing minorities. Broome (1991, 1993, 2015) argues that one can never really understand another's point of view especially in an intercultural context due to our inability to detach from our own unique personal, cultural, sociocultural, and individual past experiences, which our thoughts and perceptions are ultimately based on. Broome (1991, 1993, 2015) instead proposes relational empathy as a third culture of shared meaning and mutual understanding created between individuals that leads to new perceptions and emotions produced by the two interacting. Whereas Bennet (2013) suggests we assume different and multiple realities as individuals and therefore, must treat one another as just that, individuals. However, Bennet (2013) does assert that empathy promotes individuals to participate in the realities of others and is concerned with their experiences and perspectives. Due to this, Bennet (2013) suggests the platinum rule, do unto others as they would have me do unto them, which posits the need to actually be there and get to know one another even if it is comfortable and inconvenient. Ultimately, these perspectives challenge the cultural universality of empathy pointing out how a universal viewpoint may lead to privileging dominate cultures, ethnocentrism, cultural imperialism, and monolingual societies. Therefore, there is a likely difficulty present in achieving cross-cultural empathy. However, the present study utilized traditional conceptualizations of empathy as a core element of positive intercultural interactions and based on the findings below, my participants *perceived* and/or *felt* they were empathetic and identified the reception of empathy.

Proficiency in empathy is comprised of two primary abilities: a cognitive understanding of others' mental states and a shared affective response to others' emotions

(Decety & Jackson, 2006; Decety & Moriguchi, 2007) or more simply, cognitive and affective empathy (De Vignemont & Singer, 2006). Below, I analyze participants' stories as they reflect the two strands, incorporating exemplars from the data and highlighting the importance of cognitive and affective empathy in their experiences of positive intercultural interaction.

### **Cognitive Empathy**

Cognitive empathy is defined as “the intellectual/imaginative comprehension of another’s mental state” (Lawrence et al., 2004, p. 911). Perspective taking is the intellectual component and refers to the capacity to understand others’ mental states, including their thoughts, feelings, intentions and motivations (Engelen & Röttger-Rössler, 2012). Imagination (or fantasy) is the means through which individuals are able to access others’ mental states. This is a skill that develops throughout childhood as children develop a theory of mind and learn to identify with and understand fictional and real characters (Leith & Baumeister, 1998; Davis, Conklin, Smith, & Luce, 1996). Ultimately, cognitive empathy represents a role taking capacity that enables individuals to envision how others view the world (Mead, 1934). In the stories and experiences of positive intercultural interaction between German citizens and refugees, the findings demonstrate that German participants by and large engaged in experiences of cognitive empathy.

For example, with regards to the role of perspective taking, six of my German participants recounted the ways in which their understanding and empathetic communication stemmed from a shared migrant experience. Ümit, a local businessman and philanthropist original from Turkey, stated:



“...we have experience what is meaning [sic] to be a foreign German. And so, this experience we want to use to not make the same mistakes. And so, we built these [refugee] houses maybe would want to build some other stations, too. And show them, and give them our experience.” (Ümit, interview, June 2, 2016)

Here, Ümit’s refers to his own experiences as a migrant to reflect his understanding of the feelings, emotions, and experiences that refugees in Germany today might have as well as what their potential needs might be. Dewaeli and Wei (2012) note that empathy and empathetic communication help individuals understand “the intentions of others, predict their behavior, and experience an emotion triggered by their emotion” (p. 193).

Therefore, the experiences of current refugees in Germany triggered empathy from others who have experienced migrant situations in Germany as well. In another example, Ilona, a 56-year-old female German aid worker born in the Czech Republic who immigrated to Germany as a child, reflected on her own experiences as a migrant noting, “I think I’m one of them as well” and further stating:

“...but many of the Germans have kind of a refugee story themselves, after the second world war, many of the families have been, or during the second world war, have been pushed out of the big right, so, and if you experienced elder women, like 66, who are really active, and who give German classes and they say well we’ve gone through, we know how it is. And that’s why we are active now. They don’t want the pain, them to experience the same pain as they experienced. So it’s a healing aspect, another healing aspect.” (Ilona, interview, July 8, 2016)

Similarly, Johannes, a 22-year-old male German student asserted:

“Um, first of all, there are some people who yea, are refugees themselves and came to Germany like in the Cold War time when they came from Eastern Germany to West Germany, or later on from other countries, and they are like oh, this happened to me myself, someone helped me here. Yea, and now I’m going to help.” (Johannes, interview, June 16, 2016)

As revealed in these excerpts, perspective-taking and shared experiences led many German participants to engage in positive interactions. These examples underscore the ways in which perspective-taking based on one’s own experience is a dimensions of empathy (Stiff et al., 1988). At the same time, many German participants who had not had a migrant experience also engaged in cognitive empathy by imagining the experiences of the refugees coming to Germany; thus, they participated in perspective-taking through fantasy and imagination of the refugee’s mental state. Waltraud, a 75-year-old German volunteer, expressed that her reason for teaching German to refugees arose from her thoughts of what it would be like to be in a foreign country herself. She said:

“Yes. I think when I would be in a foreign country, and I cannot understand, I can’t understand anything, it’s, it is so difficult for me that I say, I can, I can die. And so, when they learn the German language, they will be happier. They can get work, without language, they can get no work.” (Waltraud, interview, July 30, 2016)

In this case, Waltraud’s experience demonstrates the ways in which empathy allows one “to tune into how someone else is feeling, or what they might be thinking” (Baron-Cohen & Wheelwright, 2004, p. 193). Moreover, this empathetic experience helped Waltraud to

better understand her individual agency in supporting refugees (Steuber, 2012). In a similar situation, Lina, a 23-year-old female German volunteer, recounted her reason for helping refugees:

“I don’t know, I just think, you hear so much about how their journey is so bad, and what they have to experience, and there’s not much I can do because I’m not rich or anything, but I can just be there and yeah, whatever I can.” (Lina, interview, August, 9, 2016)

Lastly, Hermann, a 73-year-old male German volunteer, specifically noted how empathy played a role in his motivation to support refugees:

“Yeah, first, my knowledge of German language, foreign language, I have 40 years’ experience of teaching German, for foreigners. And after my active time in school, I thought that I can do a little bit and useful work for them. And yeah, of course a little empathy, of the situation, when you hear of their way, such as the long way for a guy in Mali, it’s terrible for them. And I think you must help them, that’s a consequence.” (Hermann, interview, August 10, 2016)

These examples highlight the importance of role-taking for German participants and “the act of constructing for oneself another person's mental state” as a catalyst for engaging in positive interactions and accent the significance of cognitive empathy (Hogan, 1969, p. 308). In the next section, I explain the ways in which affective experiences of empathy were represented in the data.

### **Affective Empathy**

Affective empathy differs from cognitive empathy in that the focus is on the capacity to experience the feelings of another (Kohler, 1929). In other words, affective

empathy is “an emotional response to emotional responses of others” (Lawrence et al., 2004, p. 911). The involuntary response generated from experiences of affective empathy “stems from another's emotional state or condition and that is congruent with the other's emotional state or situation” (Eisenberg & Strayer, 1987, p. 5). Therefore, empathic concern, affective attunement, emotional resonance, and emotional contagion are imperative for the affective experience of empathy as these qualities enable individuals to experience the emotional states of others (Lawrence et al., 2004; Stern, 1985). Specifically, empathic concern refers to other-oriented emotions elicited by and congruent with the perceived wellbeing of another individual (Batson, 1991 & 1987). Affective attunement is the recognition of the affective state of another through one’s own complementary gestures and actions (Stern, 1985). Similarly, emotional contagion occurs when two individuals emotionally converge through the mimicry and synchronization of one’s expressions, vocalizations, postures and movements (Hatfield, Cacioppo, & Rapson, 1993). Whereas, emotional resonance is the ability to evoke emotion in another person causing them to feel deeply and become more interested in another person (Lawrence et al., 2004). In the stories and experiences of positive intercultural interaction, both German citizens and refugees expressed moments of affective empathy; however, it should be noted that these experiences focused on Germans as the ones engaging in affective empathy and resulting in increased positive perceptions of one another.

For both refugee and German participants, moments of affective empathy stemmed from a reflection on the connection between the positive actions of others and the emotional response to those actions. Furthermore, during experiences of positive

interaction, expressions of affective empathy led to more positive views of one another. For example, Mohamad, a 30-year-old male Syrian refugee, explained the role emotion played in a positive interaction he had at the supermarket when an older German woman kindly gave him and his friends money for their next shopping trip. He explained his experience while focusing on the role of kindness:

“Kindness is when you try to communicate, because we don’t ask her for money and say if no we don’t need money, we have, it’s okay. She say no you have to take it, I really know what are you feeling, what you are going through. And she tries to communicate. So that’s something nice and kind. She tries, even if she is old woman, and maybe she is in need. But she, she do something, something tells about humanity, kindness. Because we don’t ask her anything.” (Mohamad, interview, June 1, 2016)

In this example, the woman’s empathic concern and affective attunement that Mohamad is in an emotional state of need led her to engage in a positive and appropriate behavior, even though he and his friends did not ask for anything. Ultimately, Mohamad, viewed her actions in a congruent fashion with the emotional experiences of a refugee and how the woman was able to tap into the emotional state and situation of a refugee leading to emotional resonance and contagion. This experience not only represents a positive interaction, but it also led Mohamad to construct a more favorable view of a member of the dominant cultural group, which in turn may facilitate future positive interactions. In a similar example, Midya, a 16-year-old female refugee from Iraq, explained how her positive interactions with German people have led to positive emotional contagion for her mother, leading to a more positive view of Germans. She said, “I think yeah, because

now she [her mother], when I told her how many people help me, and German people like this, yeah maybe not all the German people she will say are bad like this” (Midya, interview, June 2, 2016).

In a more explicit expression of affective empathy, Mudasser, a 21-year-old refugee from Afghanistan recalled an interaction he had at a bar in 2013 with a German man after he received some bad news:

“And, I sat there, and there was a guy and then he come to me, ‘Hey, you are alone.’ I said, ‘Yeah.’ He ask, ‘What’s wrong? Hey, how are you, why are you too sad?’ And then, okay we got to speak with each other...” (Mudasser, interview, June 1, 2016)

Here, the German man’s clear recognition and emotional response to Mudasser’s negative emotions led them to engage in a positive interaction which led to the two men developing a cross-cultural friendship. In the above examples, expressions of affective empathy helped shape current and potentially future interactions in positive ways during intercultural transitions and highlights the important role that understanding the emotional state and situation of others plays in positive intercultural interactions. It may be difficult to engage in perspective-taking or to truly imagine the experiences of others; however, affective empathy allows for the shared expressions of emotion to facilitate positive interactions.

Complementing the above examples, many German participants also acknowledged the ways in which emotions positively affected their views of refugees and supported their positive interactions. Jonas, a 24-year-old German student, relayed the following:

“I cannot explain it very well, my feeling was so, my heart, was full we can say, it’s, I don’t know to say it’s really, but I think you can understand it if I say I feel love, not love I love the guy. If you love about the people, and I realize that this guy is say thank you with the whole soul, and not only thank you and then goodbye. And this is why this interaction was for me, very interesting and very good.” (Jonas, interview, July 12, 2016)

Here, Jonas’s affective response to his interaction with a refugee is what marked it as positive. He felt the emotional response of the refugee was positive and ultimately reflected those positive emotions in his own behavior and response to the situation. In another example, where the emotions of the refugees positively affected the emotions of a German, Lina, a 23-year-old female German volunteer acknowledged her own reflections on the courage she sees in refugees:

“They are always smiling, and if I see what they’ve gone through, I don’t know if I could be that positive. And then I Just come and they are like hey Lina so nice to meet you, have a great day. And I’m like ok, cool.” (Lina, interview, August 9, 2016)

In this interaction, Lina responds to the unexpected emotional states that she sees from the refugees she works with and, thus, chooses to respond in a reciprocal and equally positive manner. Overall, in these examples of expressions of affective empathy Germans can be described as striving to grasp the other’s emotional state and respond in effective and appropriate ways (Engelen & Röttger-Rössler, 2012, p. 4).

In the end, both cognitive and affective expressions of empathy are important characteristics that marked many of the stories and experiences of positive intercultural

interactions. In addition, contemporary accounts of empathy involve an integration of cognitive and affective processes rooted in evolution (Smith, 2006; Zaki & Ochsner, 2012). This perspective posits that cognitive empathy stems from individuals' need to engage in flexible and prosperous social interactions, whereas affective empathy stems from individuals' need to respond to others' welfare and engage in altruistic behaviors (Hoffman, 2000; Smith, 2006). Both forms of empathetic expressions and communication represented vital components during positive intercultural interactions.

Consequentially, the stories and experiences of positive intercultural interaction collected between Germans citizens and refugees reflect an overarching need for the dominant cultural group during intercultural transitions to engage in more empathetic communication and behavior to facilitate positive interactions. At the same time, it is important to note the ways in which expressions of empathy facilitated increased perceptions of positivity for both groups (refugees and German citizens). I discuss this finding in more detail during the discussion and implication sections of my final chapter.

In my interviews, empathy represented a shared element that not only characterized many stories of positive intercultural interaction, but it also served as a motivating characteristic for social support and competency building. In the next section, I transition to the second characterizing element of the stories of positive intercultural interaction between Germans citizens and refugees: social support.

### **Social Support**

From a communication perspective, social support highlights the interactions between support senders and receivers (Vangelisti, 2009). Burleson & MacGeorge (2002) define social support as “verbal and nonverbal behavior produced with the intention of



providing assistance to others perceived as needing that aid” (p. 374). More specifically, Cobb (1976) explains social support as “reassurance, validation, and acceptance, the sharing of needed resources and assistance, and connecting or integrating structurally within the web of ties in a supportive network” (p. 300). Numerous positive benefits are associated with social support such as an improved ability to deal with stress (Thoits, 1986), an enhanced sense of overall health and well-being (Wills & Fegan, 2001), and more satisfying interpersonal relationships (Burlison, 1990). In addition, previous research has acknowledged the importance and benefits of social support during cultural adaptation (Geeraert et al., 2014; Kashima & Loh, 2006, Sobré-Denton, 2011). Traditionally, these benefits have been reserved for the receivers of social support, however, senders equally benefit by cultivating empathy, openness, and in the case of the stories of positive intercultural interaction between German citizens and refugees, cultural awareness. Therefore, the exchange of social support becomes dually beneficial for senders and receivers and can be seen as constituting positive intercultural interactions.

Furthermore, supportive messages can include verbal content as well as nonverbal aspects of the message. The overall content can be either problem focused or emotion focused (Burlison, 2009). Problem-focused support consists primarily of advice, information, and tangible aid, and emotion-focused support includes expressions of concern, belonging, esteem, and comforting (Horowitz et al., 2001). Overall, messages of social support are evaluated based on message quality and effectiveness (Burlison, 2008).

Message quality is evaluated using the concept of person centeredness (Burlleson, 1994). Person centeredness refers to the degree to which a message clearly recognizes, legitimizes, and elaborates the other person's distress. Highly person-centered messages explicitly recognize and legitimize another's feelings while helping them to articulate and elaborate on those feelings to see how they fit in a broader context (Burlleson, 2008, p. 208). Highly person-centered messages characterize effective social support messages while low person-centered messages viewed as the least helpful and most ineffective form of social support messages (Burlleson, 1994).

In addition to person centeredness, Jones and Guerrero (2001) also found that nonverbal immediacy behaviors contribute to the ways in which receivers evaluate supportiveness. Nonverbal immediacy behaviors refer to behaviors that increase physical and psychological closeness during an interaction such as a hand on an individual's shoulder, a hug or signs of conversational involvement (Jones & Guerrero, 2001, p. 570). When helpers are more nonverbally immediate, supportive communication is perceived as more effective. Nonverbal immediacy and person centeredness complement one another to create highly supportive messages (Jones & Guerrero, 2001). Other nonverbal aspects of supportive messages that contribute to the overall quality and effectiveness of social support include non-content and nonverbal message elements such as pitch, rate, and volume during delivery as well as uses of silence and fluency (Burlleson, 2009).

Thirty of the 35 interviews conducted referenced social support. Moreover, examples of all three of the three dominant types of social support: informational support, instrumental support, and emotional support (Berkman, Glass, Brissette, & Seeman, 2000; Cobb, 1976; Moss, 1973) were present. Informational support refers to advice and

information provided (Berkman, Glass, Brissette, & Seeman, 2000), instrumental support refers to tangible assistance that may include money or labor (Berkman, Glass, Brissette, & Seeman, 2000), and emotional support are displays that suggest one is loved, accepted, esteemed, and cared for (Cobb, 1976; Moss, 1973). Below, I offer further details on each type of support and provide exemplars from the data that capture the ways in which these types of social support were present and indicative of positive intercultural interactions.

### **Informational Support**

Informational support by and large refers to advice and information provided by a sender to a receiver (Berkman, Glass, Brissette, & Seeman, 2000). This form of support serves to help a person manage or deal with a difficult or stressful situation (Cohen, 2004, p. 676). The support itself can come as “advice, factual input, and feedback” and is intended to help the receiver “make decisions and attributions, and judge actions” (Walther & Boyd, 2002, p. 158). An example could be as simple as providing someone with directions or as complicated as guiding someone through the asylum-seeking process. In addition, informational support tends to include more problem-focused expressions of social support due to the emphasis on advice and information (Burlison, 2009). In the interviews, informational support was primarily provided by Germans regardless of whether the stories were conveyed by German or refugee participants.

Franz, a 67-year-old male German volunteer, explained how he assists refugees, “I give support to all the documents, to all the interviews, to all the questions. And I try to figure out all the problems, to solve the problems with the money they are getting, and a lot of things.” He continues to affirm how the German system is “already a drama for German peoples, you can imagine what this means for those refugees” (Franz, interview,

July 30, 2016). Here, the problem of navigating bureaucratic channels as a refugee is underscored by the complexity of the system, which Germans themselves understand. In fact, 17 participants, both German citizens and refugees, remarked on the hurdles and challenges they face due to the German bureaucratic system. As a result, Franz, and many other Germans, offer informational support to refugees through advice and information (Berkman, Glass, Brissette, & Seeman, 2000).

In another example of information support, Andrea, a 40-year-old female social worker originally from Hungary, explained one of the ways she assists refugees is by helping to coordinate their family reunions. She explained, “Family reunion, so the man is here, and the wife and the kids are still somewhere in Turkey, Jordanian, somewhere. And now they allowed to the camp ok, you have to make process, it’s very intricate and everything” (Andrea, interview, June 2, 2016). Here, Andrea explains that she offers feedback, input, and advice as refugees seek to reconnect with their families as one of the many forms of informational support she provides through her role as a social worker.

Informational support can also help to relieve the stresses of everyday life. For instance, Mohamad, a 30-year-old male refugee from Syria, recalled a time when he was lost in the streets of Nuremberg, “There was a woman with a child, a baby actually. She was holding it, and she was holding a bag. And she noticed that I’m lost in the street, and she came to me and helped me” (Mohamad, interview, June 1, 2016). Additionally, eight of the refugee participants recounted moments of social support through their everyday interactions such as grocery shopping, riding the bus, and yes, seeking directions. Overall, informational support seemed to play a key role in facilitating positive

interactions between Germans citizens and refugees. In the next section, I discuss the role of instrumental support in positive interactions.

### **Instrumental Support**

During supportive interactions instrumental support refers to tangible assistance that may include money or labor (Berkman, Glass, Brissette, & Seeman, 2000). Cohen (2004) more succinctly defines instrumental support as the “provision of material aid” (Cohen, 2004, p. 676). This tangible assistance serves to create opportunities for the receiver to accomplish tasks (Walther & boyd, 2002, p. 158). Similar to information support, instrumental support tends to include more problem-focused approaches to support due to the emphasis on tangible aid (Burlinson, 2009). Examples of instrumental support could be as complex as teaching someone a new language, taking someone to the hospital, or conducting fundraising efforts. On the other hand, instrumental support can also be represented by simpler actions such as cooking dinner for another person, cleaning, and conducting repairs. In the data, German participants engaged in more complex forms of instrumental support to refugees, while refugee participants provided simpler forms of instrumental support to Germans. Regardless, both forms of instrumental support were dually transformative for German citizens and refugees, and ultimately, highlighted the ways in which social support constituted positive intercultural interactions. For example, Judy, a 60-year-old female German volunteer, helped an Eritrean refugee woman through her pregnancy and the birth of her child. Judy recollected:

“Oh, it’s just always positive getting a baby. But especially being there, at her side, preparing before the baby came, we visited the hospital several times, and at

that time she wasn't very good in German, now she's much better, and so I could translate everything, and we looked in the room where the birth was prepared. And there was a bathtub, and yes, and then was a woman, the name for the woman who's giving birth, who's helping with the birth...the mid-wife, I would say. I had all the words that time, but now I forgot. And then, when it happened, yes, I was with her, holding her hand, and could rub her back and so, yes. It was really positive.” (Judy, interview, August, 9, 2016)

Here, Judy was able to provide tangible assistance and time to the young woman from Eritrea by supporting her throughout her pregnancy. Furthermore, the provision of social support in the interaction described by Judy, constitutes a positive interaction for the giver as well as the receiver. This story demonstrates the importance of instrumental support and when talking about positive intercultural interactions, many participants often remembered instances where this type of support was present.

Another example of problem-focused instrumental support is the numerous activities that take place to support refugees during their intercultural transitions. Ester, a 23-year-old female German student, described some of the work she did with refugees: “Like we collect clothing for the refugees, and we do like entertainment, like games...” (Ester, interview, June 16, 2016). Similarly, Marc, a 37-year-old male volunteer originally from Luxembourg said:

“So we found accommodation, they couldn't stay the whole time at their place, you know, but we found people who gave their accommodation for free. We found people who made a big discount on the price, we bought food, we found a

doctor, you know. We bought a pharmacy, pharmaceuticals, so everything they, a family needs. Needs, for such a long period.” (Marc, interview, July 1, 2016)

Another type of instrumental support that occurred frequently was teaching German to refugees. Specifically, of the 25 German participants, 20 had served in both formal and informal roles to teach German to refugees. For example, Simon, a 23-year-old male German student described his previous experience teaching refugees as follows:

“With the refugees, it was mostly the first days of class, just to get the basic information from them, where they are from, what they learn in their home countries, and so on and so forth. And, also a little support during the classes, when it was about talking and learning to listen and just to support and to understand what the teacher was saying (3:25) the classes were held in German, to first and to learn, and it was kind of difficult for some of them, because they had no idea of course, and so I was their supporter, and yeah.” (Simon, interview, June 15, 2016)

These examples of instrumental support highlight the ways in which Germans provide social support to refugees in the stories and experiences of positive intercultural interaction. Whether the support was conveyed through fundraising, teaching, or health-related assistance, the provision of social support ultimately enhanced the interaction for both German citizens and refugees. Still, examples of refugees providing instrumental support were equally present in the data, and these representations similarly contributed to enriching the intercultural interactions between the two dominant groups. For example, Lina, a 23-year-old female German volunteer, expressed how a refugee helped her fix her bike while she was providing instrumental support of her own to other refugees:

“I was, I’m doing homework with the children, and that’s what I usually do every Tuesday, and I teach German to older refugees, so about our age, and this one time, this one student of mine, he came in and when I was working with the kids, and he was like Lina, your bike, the chain, it looks all rusty. It doesn’t look good, you want me to fix it? I was like, yeah, ok. So I just gave him my key and then he fixed everything for me and gave it back to me. And I was like oh wow, thank you, and it was really nice because they are so glad when they can give something back to you. Yeah, I really like that.” (Lina, interview, August, 9, 2016)

In a similar example, Ilona, a 56-year-old female volunteer originally from the Czech Republic recounted an experience where a refugee helped to repair her car, she noted, “...he has changed my car, I don’t know what’s the um, I had an accident and my car wheel was kaput. And so it was him who changed the wheel” (Ilona, interview, July 8, 2016). In a different example, Hermann, a 73-year-old male German volunteer said, “...once a woman from Iraq, she cooked for us, she cooked something and brought it for me during the lesson” (Hermann, interview, August 10, 2016), and in a final example of instrumental support by refugees, Waltraud, a 75-year-old female German volunteer and Fredevike, a 77-year-old female German volunteer, described how a refugee woman with no language or knowledge would cook, clean, and wash clothes in order to offer instrumental support for both the German volunteers as well as her fellow refugees (Waltraud & Fredevike, interview, July 30, 2016). All in all, these examples of instrumental support signify the unique ways in which social support can be achieved and enacted during intercultural transitions. In the next section, I demonstrate the ways in



which emotional support was present in the stories and experiences of positive intercultural interaction.

### **Emotional Support**

Emotional support is the type of support people usually think of first when they think of social support. Burlleson (2003) defines emotional support as communicative behavior intent on helping another cope effectively with emotional distress (p. 552). Emotional support shows that one is loved, accepted, esteemed, and cared for (Cobb, 1976; Moss, 1973). Providing social support may be as modest an act as being with another person so they do not feel alone or as involved as talking through the person's experience and emotional reactions to it. Emotional support is proven to be beneficial for someone experiencing a tough situation and can lower anxiety, alleviate loneliness, enhance social engagement, reduce stress, and increase pleasure through "the expression of empathy, caring, reassurance, and trust and provides opportunities for emotional expression and venting" (Cohen, 2004, p. 677). In addition, emotional support is characterized by more emotion-based supportive messages due to the emphasis on expressions of concern, belonging, esteem, and comforting (Horowitz et al., 2001).

Family and friends often are providers of emotional support (Kim, 1988, 2001; Sandel & Liang, 2010; Ward & Kennedy, 1993; Ward & Rana-Deuba, 2000; Ye, 2006). However, many refugees are separated from their families. In response, a number of them created family-like relationships with their support networks in Germany. Ilona, a 56-year-old female German aid worker stated, in regards to the unaccompanied minor refugees she had worked with in the past, "And most of them, I've really taken into my heart and some of them, I still have contact with. So I could say they've, they've widened

my life spectrum, they are kind of part of my family” (Ilona, interview, July 8, 2016). Likewise, Volkan, a 22-year-old male German student and volunteer said of his work with refugees, “I go to the family, I help the children with school stuff, and it’s like also for me, like a second family in Munich, because my family is in Berlin, so it’s really good friendship” (Volkan, interview, June 22, 2016). Moreover, Iris, a 64-year-old female German volunteer affirmed the motherly feelings as a volunteer and spoke of the many times when the male refugees she works with would come to her and kiss or hug her. Also, she recalled an interaction between the Turkish security and some of the black refugee men where she claimed, “I jumped in front of black guys and took them in my arms and said ‘security, don’t do anything’” (Iris, interview, May 30, 2016). All of these examples further underscore how providing social support improves the lives of those who give it.

Similarly, some refugee participants noted how women serving in volunteer and support roles become like family. Kiyanoosh, a 26-year-old male refugee from Iran asserted that the female social workers are “more like mother, you know” (Kiyanoosh, interview, June 1, 2016). Also, Basel, a 31-year-old male refugee from Syria described how the female volunteers who are older women have become stand-ins for “your mother” and even the younger girls address him as “mine brother.” He further stressed that “For our people that is big, you understand?” (Base, interview, July 13, 2016). Likewise, Maiada, a female refugee from Syria talked about her relationship with a woman she met through the conversation cafes, stating, “I love her and she love me” (Maiada, interview, May 31, 2016). In another example, Mudasser, a 21-year-old male refugee from Afghanistan, explained how his relationship with an aid worker turned into

a friendship, “and that make me happy actually, that makes me feel like I am not alone here” (Mudasser, interview, June 1, 2016). Also, Ammar, a 26-year-old male refugee from Syria commented on the importance and support he received through his friendship with a German man named Sebastian:

“He [Sebastian] said, you like, you already have been through a lot. You cross all the distance to here, and you struggle in Lebanon, and you can’t give up here. It’s just like he give me some motivated advices. And it’s like, so much for me. So good for me. That’s what I need. I have been alone for five years, and I didn’t hear that encourage sentences from anybody.” (Ammar, interview, June 1, 2016)

Ultimately, the importance of social support is exemplified in the stories of positive intercultural interaction and demonstrates how social support can alleviate the accompanying stresses of different life situations, such as an intercultural transition.

From the findings, it is clear that Germans provided informational and emotional support in the majority of experiences, whereas, instrumental support was represented by both Germans and refugees, with German expressions being more consequential to the intercultural transition of refugees. In the next section, I will demonstrate how the element of intercultural competency characterized the stories of positive intercultural interaction between German citizens and refugees.

### **Intercultural Competency**

Various scholars agree that intercultural competency consists of the skills that allow an individual to interact appropriately and effectively in multiple contexts with culturally diverse groups or individuals (Emert, 2009; Spitzberg & Changnon, 2009; Hammer, 2012; Deardorff, 2009). Spitzberg (2003) further elaborates, noting that these

skills may include the ideas, beliefs, and norms of a given culture and each interaction and relationship may call for its own set of expectations for appropriate and effective communication. Moreover, Deardorff (2009) asserts that intercultural competency is based on intercultural attitudes, knowledge, skills, and sociolinguistic awareness coupled with a person's ability to interact effectively and appropriately in cross-cultural situations.

However, similar to scholars who challenge the traditional conceptualizations of empathy, many scholars similarly question the traditional conceptualizations of intercultural competency, partly because they do not take into account differential power of interactants (Collier, 2015; Martin, 2015). Collier (2015) contests the ethnocentric, homogenous, and monolingual basis for previous literature on intercultural competence. In addition, Collier (2015) problematizes the individual impression of competence and offers approaches contingent on contextual factors such as hierarchies and power relations as well as the benefits for diverse parties in intercultural encounters. Similarly, Martin (2015) calls for more relational, holistic, and spiritual approaches to developing intercultural competency and the distancing from the presumption of culture as homogenous, bounded, and stable. Ultimately, these challenges push to advance traditional conceptualizations of intercultural competency to be more contextually-situated, viewing culture as dynamic and fluid, and being attentive to the influence of power relations on intercultural interactions. Even though the current study utilized the traditional approach (attitudes, knowledge/skills, sociolinguistic awareness) to intercultural competency as a foundation to understand the presence of intercultural competency as a core element in positive intercultural interactions it is still important to

highlight the potential nuances within the interactions overlooked by this conventional approach.

Developing appropriate attitudes, knowledge, skills, and sociolinguistic awareness can help people achieve internal outcomes of adaptability and flexibility as well as external outcomes of effective and appropriate communication and behavior in intercultural interactions (Deardorff, 2006). More specifically, internal outcomes of gaining intercultural competency include the ability to adapt and use various communication styles along with being able to adjust to new cultural environments. Additionally, internal outcomes describe one's ability to understand things from others' perspectives and to respond the way the other people expect (Deardorff, 2006). Alternatively, external outcomes are built on top of internal outcomes and are achieved when a communicator is able to communicate and behave more effectively and appropriately in the intercultural interactions (Deardorff, 2006).

Overall, all of these definitions highlight the importance of interacting in effective and appropriate ways with individuals from diverse backgrounds. In order for a communication interaction to be both appropriate and effective, a competent communicator must choose an accepted medium for the given situation (i.e. be appropriate) and achieve their desired outcome for the communication (i.e. be effective) (Westmyer, DiCioccio, & Rubin, 1998, p. 27). Spitzberg describes appropriateness as "the extent to which behavior conforms to existing contextual rules" (Spitzberg, 2003, p. 98). These rules can be seen as the social norms and expectations for how one should behave in different contexts. He defines "effectiveness is the extent to which preferred outcomes are achieved" (Spitzberg, 2003, p. 98). For both factors, what is deemed

appropriate and effective is set by the culture in which one is communicating. Therefore, something thought to be appropriate in one context may be completely inappropriate in another context. Consequently, appropriateness and effectiveness are the markers by which communication competency is measured (Spitzberg, 2003).

In the stories of positive intercultural interaction between German citizens and refugees that were collected, intercultural competency emerged as a core element of the interaction. Intercultural competency is comprised of one's attitudes, knowledge, skills, and sociolinguistic awareness (Deardorff, 2009). In what follows, I provide exemplars from the data that directly connect to these components and highlight the significance of intercultural competency in the stories of positive intercultural interaction.

### **Attitudes**

Deardorff (2006) claims that attitudes of respect, openness, and curiosity act as the fundamental components of intercultural competency. These requisite attitudes represent an individual's thinking or feeling about another culture reflected through their behavior and communication. Respect includes the valuing of other cultures and cultural diversity, openness involves a readiness to learn from other cultures withholding judgment, and curiosity implies a willingness to move beyond one's comfort zone and turn differences into opportunities (Deardorff, 2006). Across the data, these attitudes grounded the stories of participants' experiences with positive intercultural interaction. Mohamad, a 30-year-old male refugee from Syria, recalled a story where a surplus of curiosity compensated for a lack of other aspects of competency and led to a positive intercultural interaction:

“...we attend a church to interact with German people. Like international cafe, so we were here. Those people are supposed to be educated and highly cultured people. And when we sit with them, they say, ‘we thought you are black. As a Syrian, we thought you are like Boko Haram.’ We say, ‘No, we are like a normal country. We have everything.’ (Mohamad, interview, June 1, 2016)

After the Germans’ admission of misinformation about Syrian refugees, Mohamad and the other refugees in attendance shared pictures and stories of their lives and culture in Syria. In this case, a lack of knowledge but a willingness to engage helped expand the intercultural competency of those German people present. In this example, both the German participants and the refugees were willing to take risks to move beyond their comfort zones to learn about one another’s culture (Deardorff, 2009). Similarly, Gelila, a 33-year-old female refugee from Ethiopia, explained her own openness and curiosity about the German culture by stating, “If I’m not asking, I’m not learning anything” (Gelila, interview, June 1, 2016). Gelila’s openness, curiosity, and eagerness primed her to take the appropriate steps to pursue the knowledge and skills essential for her own intercultural competence development (Deardorff, 2006).

The importance of openness, respect, and curiosity were also underscored by German participants. In fact, both German and refugee participants explicitly mentioned the significance of being “open-minded” across 14 of the interviews conducted. For example, Markus, a 23-year-old male German student explained:

“What I do is trying to tell them that cultural diversity is an interesting thing like, start with the food for example which everyone loves here in Germany, with their food variations, but also that you have to be more open minded in our

globalization time where everyone can travel anywhere in the world so you just have to be more open minded to try to get in contact with people, and I think it's quite sad when these people [refugees] are seen as some kind of I don't know, extra weight for society." (Markus, interview, June 13, 2016)

Additionally, Waltraud, a 75-year-old female German volunteer asserted, "You have to speak hello, the gate is on [sic] then you come in contact and you see they are people, normal. They are not different because they are dark" (Waltraud, interview, July 30, 2016). Even more specifically, Mike, a 24-year-old male German student and volunteer recounted an experience he shared with a refugee family:

"So first of all, I'm, this wasn't an order, for me to help these people. So I wanted to do it, so first of all, it's important that you want to help, that you want to interact with those people, with other people, then for sure it's very important to have an open mind. So if you don't have an open mind, and for example, what, the dinner we had. We shared the same plate, and we, yeah, so we ate from the same plate and in our culture it's not very used to share food from the same plate. So, it's very useful, very helpful to have an open mind and yeah to go onto those people with other beliefs, or other cultural backgrounds, and just be open minded to see how they do, how you do, to see the differences, to see the similarities, to compare each other and also to grow with each other..." (Mike, interview, August 10, 2016)

Mike's story also raises the issue of motivation as an important element in the beginning stages of achieving intercultural competency (Spitzberg & Changnon, 2009). As his story demonstrates, if individuals have attitudes of respect, curiosity, and openness, they likely



will be more motivated to engage in intercultural interactions (Deardorff, 2009), which increases their intercultural competence. The emphasis both participant groups placed on an attitude of openness reflects their shared understanding of the importance of remaining open to others. Also, in each of these excerpts, the impetus is on engaging in interaction with the other cultural party in order to advance one's intercultural competency. Next, I take up Deardorff's (2009) second major component of intercultural competence, knowledge and skill development.

### **Knowledge/Skills**

The second major component of Deardorff's (2006) definition of intercultural competency focuses on developing the knowledge and skills necessary for individuals to develop internal and external intercultural competencies (Deardorff, 2006). That is, he argues that competent intercultural communicators should demonstrate the ability to develop knowledge of both their own culture and that of the new culture(s). Perhaps unsurprisingly, then, in 26 of the 35 interviews participants from both groups expressed the importance of cultural awareness to the creation of positive interactions. For example, Ümit, a businessman and philanthropist in Germany, illuminated this necessity by pointing out ways in which misunderstandings stemming from cultural differences can lead to negative interactions. He noted:

“Okay, well, they [refugees] are people from another country, with another culture and religion, who don't get, who hasn't had contact with this land, with this culture, and so they act in the way they act in Syria. That's, maybe a problem, but you have to know that to treat them right. And so, if you say, okay, they act like they would act in Syria, they are very nice persons, yeah. But if you say okay,

they have to act in the way we are, we are acting or living in Germany, then you would say they are not good persons. But, we have to give them the time to understand the culture and to know, to get to know our culture.” (Ümit, interview, June 2, 2016)

Here, Umit acknowledges the existence of an intercultural competency gap and the need for more knowledge and skill development, but his emphasis is on the fact that it will take time for an out-group (refugee population) to fully acclimate to the in-group (German culture) and that during this period both cultures should take the opportunity to reflect and grow. As Johannes, a 22-year-old male German student explains, Germans have a need for and an opportunity to develop their knowledge and skills of refugee populations. He said, “They [German people] don’t know their [refugees] story and their history. And there’s, there’s a point where the Germans have a lot to learn, I think” (Johannes, interview, June 16, 2016). Similarly, Steven, a 21-year-old male German student argued “They [Germans] are afraid of some people that come from Syria or Afghanistan or wherever they come from, because simply they don’t know about their culture” (Steven, interview, July 12, 2016).

In addition to knowledge and skill development of a target culture, it is equally beneficial for competent communicators to reflect upon the assumptions of their own culture. Storti (2009) stated that individuals assume that they already know their own culture; however, people are assimilated by their own culture’s norms and values at such an early age that they rarely consciously reflect on them. For example, during the influx of refugees, there was a widespread worry that Germany would lose its culture; however, some participants challenged this claim. Jonas, a 24-year-old male German student,

asserted that the German culture as we know it today hasn't really existed that long. He stated in regards to this claim:

“I don't think so. Because 20 years, or 36 years ago the East Germany and the West Germany would like to be one Germany and there are differences in their thinking about political systems and they, you can say up to this time, the German culture is another like before this. Or like the second World War. Before the Second World War, and after the Second World War. And there are differences in the culture, or even in the revolution from 1842, I think.” (Jonas, interview, July 12, 2016)

Correspondingly, Irene, a 50-year-old female German teacher and volunteer, noted, “...culture is never fixed, so culture is always moving and changing and they are trying to fix it and say this is our German culture and we don't want to change it, and this is not possible” (Irene, interview, July 30, 2016). Thus, both scholars and participants believe that gaining knowledge of both self and the target culture is important to developing intercultural competency. In the next section, I remark upon the ways in which a third component of intercultural competency, sociolinguistic awareness, was present in the stories and experiences of positive intercultural interaction.

### **Language**

The final major component to acquiring intercultural competency is the ability to gain sociolinguistic awareness and to use language appropriately across contexts (Deardorff, 2006). Language proficiency has been credited as one of the most important elements to interacting successfully with individuals from other cultures (Chen, 2000). In the data, all 44 participants expressed awareness of the significance of language

development as a component of intercultural competency to gain access to another culture, in most cases, access to the German culture through the development of learning the German language.

Kiyanoosh, a 26-year-old male refugee from Iran stated that “Nowadays people around the world are the same. Just the language is different” (Kiyanoosh, interview, June 1, 2016). Mohamad, a 30-year-old male refugee from Syria, claimed, “The language is the key now. Now the tool. To study the language, to be able to speak German language will be the key, maybe when I speak the language, they look at me differently” (Mohamad, interview, June 1, 2016). Basel, a 31-year-old male refugee from Syria explained, “I think in my mind, the language like the key. On the future, like the door” (Basel, interview, July 13, 2016). Similarly, Mudasser, a 21-year-old male refugee from Afghanistan said, “Language is like a key that if you don’t have that key, you cannot open any door” (Mudasser, interview, June 1, 2016) and Ammar, a 26-year-old male refugee from Syria asserted, “You know, just like at least it start with the language. Because the language in Germany is the keys of integration and having my free life” (Ammar, interview, June 1, 2016).

German participants articulated similar sentiments with regard to the importance of language development. Ümit, a male businessman and philanthropist originally from Turkey explained, “I think they [refugees] understand that to take part, of society of German society. And they have to learn German, so I think that most of them understand that, and they try it” (Ümit, interview, June 2, 2016). In another case, Ester, a 23-year-old female German student stated, “Like, you cannot live in one country and not be able to speak the language.” (Ester, interview, June 16, 2016). Steve, a 24-year-old male German

student expressed the following concerning his interaction with a refugee, “if there was no language [problems], it could be, he’s a German” (Steve, interview, June 16, 2016). Irene, a 50-year-old female German volunteer and teacher remarked, “They can learn German better. This is really, this is the most important thing very much. If you don’t learn the language, it’s very difficult to get into the society” (Irene, interview, July 30, 2016). Additionally, Mike, a 24-year-old male German student and volunteer, asserted, “...so it is important for them also to take the chance, and learn the German language to get into Germany and to get a look, for inside Germany” (Mike, interview, August 10, 2016). Thus, both refugee and German participants agree that language development represents a key component to developing intercultural competency that contributes to positive intercultural interactions.

Overall, the above stories exemplify the importance of attitudes, knowledge, skills, and language acquisition to not only developing intercultural competency, but also to promoting positive intercultural interactions. Ultimately, with globalization increasing, developing intercultural competency is a valuable asset for individuals that allows them to address and respond to changing cultural landscapes (Deardorff, 2006). As Mike, a 24-year-old male German student and volunteer reiterated:

“I’m very curious about other cultures, and so this view was for me very nice to have, because right now we have a lot of refugees coming to German, we’ve got the globalization so we’ve got countries all mixed up in the whole world, I’m in the military, so I’m going to be in the deployment, which means that I need those views inside or outside other cultures, so I can understand their cultures and know how to interact with those people.” (Mike, interview, August, 10, 2016)

Ideally, through intercultural communication grounded in the effective and appropriate utilization of the attributes of intercultural competency individuals have the power create successful interactions and facilitate quicker adjustments during intercultural transitions (Spitzberg & Changnon, 2009). In the final chapter, I explore the ways in which empathy, social support, and intercultural competency connect to the theoretical frameworks of this dissertation and explain how the differences and similarities in expressions and experiences of these characterizing elements can expand our understanding of intercultural transitions and migrant-host relationships.

## CHAPTER 5

### GENERAL DISCUSSION

Now that I have explained how empathy, social support, and intercultural competency represent the core elements that characterize stories of positive intercultural interaction between German citizens and refugees, I explore how the theoretical frameworks help to explain the findings and how the findings ultimately refine the theories that guided the study, focusing on acculturation theory (Berry, 1980) and cross-cultural adaptation theory (Kim, 2001). I then demonstrate the ways in which the coordinated management of meaning theory (CMM) (Pearce & Cronen, 1980) can be used to enhance our understanding of intercultural transitions from both migrant and host experiences. Lastly, I conclude with a discussion of the theoretical and practical implications of the present study along with the limitations and areas for future research followed by closing remarks.

#### **Discussion**

##### **Acculturation Theory**

To recall, Berry (1980) identified four types of migrant-host relationships: assimilation (migrant identifies with and adjusts to the host culture's norms and rejects original culture), separation (the affinity for one's culture of origin and rejection/resistance to the host culture), marginalization (lack of engagement with both the host culture and one's culture of origin), and integration (balancing one's culture of origin with the host culture, which some identify as becoming bicultural) (Berry, 1980, 2001). Considering that the strategies of assimilation and integration are the only two that necessitate intercultural interaction, it is clear that in order to successfully engage in

either approach both host and migrant members would need to achieve intercultural competency, especially of the target culture or, to use Berry's language, the "host" culture. In addition, in order for assimilation or integration to be realized, both migrant and host parties need to engage in social supportive measures to facilitate efforts to attain the preferred migrant-host relationship.

Furthermore, in this study both affective and cognitive empathy seemed to motivate social support, and through the process of giving empathy, members of the host culture reported they felt encouraged to engage in intercultural interactions. Based on migrants' stories, receiving empathy appeared to inspire them to connect more which enhanced their desire to build their intercultural competency with the host culture. Ultimately, through the experience of empathy and the associated social support that arouse out of it, members of the host culture reported feeling connected to and learning about migrant culture, which influenced their willingness to engage in interaction promoting successful intercultural transitions for both migrants and hosts.

However, it is important to also note how the four acculturation strategies lead to acculturative stress. For example, Berry and Kim (1988) note that sojourners who assimilate or integrate have fewer adaptation difficulties in their host setting than those who separate or marginalize. Likewise, Ghaffarian (1998) found in his study of Iranian immigrants in the United States that those who culturally incorporated themselves had better mental health than those who were resistant. In addition, Al-Sharideh and Goe (1998) found a correlation between assimilation and positive personal adjustment in their study of international students' acculturation to American culture. Drawing on the assumption that the four acculturation strategies affect stress levels, Dow (2011)



examined acculturative stress and the potential psychological disorders that can affect immigrants as they adapt to the United States. She determined that all four strategies lead to acculturative stress, but assimilation and integration lead to the lowest levels of stress. Given the deleterious effects of stress, understanding how stress can be ameliorated should lead to a smoother, healthier acculturation process. Thus, the core element of social support is not only important to participants' experience of positive interactions but also likely serves as a significant strategy that helps facilitate acculturation.

Social support can help to counteract the effects of acculturative stress and lead to enhanced well-being and the alleviation of distress, anxiety, and depression that may arise from the acculturation process, even in the case of assimilation and integration (Jou & Fukada, 1997; Ye, 2006; Choi, 1997; Shen & Takeuchi, 2001; Lee, Koeske, & Sales, 2004; Jibeen & Kahlid, 2010; Tonsing, 2013; Garcia, Ramirez, & Jariego, 2002). In addition, perceptions of social support can lead to positive affective states, which in turn can lead to increased engagement with diverse cultural groups, the further development of intercultural competency, and the reduction of uncertainty involved in intercultural interactions (Gudykunst, 2005). These experiences can then lead to more positive intercultural interactions during intercultural transitions. Furthermore, these experiences could enhance functional fitness (Kim, 1988, 2001), which clearly connects these findings to Kim's (2001) cross-cultural adaptation theory.

### **Cross-Cultural Adaptation Theory**

According to cross-cultural adaptation theory, for the adaptation process to be successful, individuals need to demonstrate the following characteristics: a sense of personal, social and cultural identity, empathy and appreciation of the diversity of

cultures, an ability to effectively communicate across cultural divides, and an awareness and sensitivity to major domestic and international issues (Kim, 2001). Here, the importance of empathy and intercultural competency are duly noted. Intercultural communication competency, which refers to an individual's ability to analyze and collect knowledge through cognitive, behavioral, and affective means, allows individuals to effectively and appropriately communicate across cultural divides (Kim, 2001, 2005). Though this ability is dependent on one's intercultural interactions, it is likely to lead to successful adaptation when both cultural groups' communication styles are congruent (Kim, 1995, 2001, 2005).

With increased networking and communication with members of different cultures being fundamental to achieving successful adaptation, social support is likely to come into play in both formal and informal ways, especially within Kim's (2001) stress-adaptation-growth model. Therefore, the integration of empathy, intercultural competency, and social support should lead to both sociocultural and psychological adaptations. Hence, it is essential that migrant and host cultures alike maintain social ties during intercultural transitions.

Social ties also are important because they can reduce mental stress, enhance mental wellbeing, and promote intercultural interactions. One way this was exemplified in the findings was through the development of both familial and friendship networks. Specifically, in the context of cultural adaptation, both family and friends facilitate psychological and sociocultural adaptation (Kim, 1988, 2001; Sandel & Liang, 2010; Ward & Kennedy, 1993; Ward & Rana-Deuba, 2000; Ye, 2006). Previous research has shown that while family primarily facilitates psychological adaptation, friends facilitate

both psychological and sociocultural adaptation (Ye, 2006). Due to the circumstances of many of the refugee participants, their cross-cultural familial networks often stem from strong friendship bonds that mirrored the support and affection of family connections. These bonds also appeared to lead to more empathetic communication that lessened misunderstandings between the two dominant cultural groups and led to more experiences of positive intercultural interaction.

Kim (2001) highlights the importance of fewer cultural misunderstandings as a marker for better communication between diverse cultural groups and as a sign of perceived fluidity during interactions. The core elements that characterize the stories of positive intercultural interactions between German citizens and refugees are linked to individuals' intercultural transformation and, more theoretically, to their cross-cultural adaption (Kim, 1988, 2005). Ultimately, the more equipped individuals are during their intercultural interactions the more successful their communication will be (Kim, 2001). Immediately, when individuals enter a new cultural environment they begin the process of acculturation, adaptation, and transformation. Empathy, social support, and intercultural competency have the potential to enhance experiences for individuals during intercultural transitions leading to more successful and positive interactions across cultures.

The connections between the results of this study and acculturation and cross-cultural adaption theory confirm what the majority of intercultural scholars already affirm constitute positive intercultural interactions and transitions. Therefore, the present study's major contribution is how these seemingly unassuming results advance our understanding of intercultural interactions, transitions, and migrant-host relationships by focusing on the

ways in which the core elements interact with one another across German citizen and refugee participant groups to facilitate positive intercultural interactions. In order to illuminate these contributions, the coordinated management of meaning theory (CMM) (Pearce & Cronen, 1980) can be used to enhance the understanding of intercultural transitions from both migrant and host experiences to further develop the shared meanings that underpin positive intercultural interactions.

### **Coordinated Management of Meaning Theory**

CMM helps us understand how contextually-driven situations can be understood from multiple perspectives (Cronen et al., 1982; Cronen, Pearce & Changsheng, 1989; Hannah & McAdam, 1991; McCallin, 1990). The complexity, depth, and abstraction of this social constructionist theory complements the focus, clarity, and decisive nature of acculturation theory and cross-cultural adaption theory as a way to understand intercultural transitions and interactions. Here I demonstrate how expressions and experiences of the core elements connect to the ways in which CMM can be utilized to enhance understanding of intercultural transitions from a multidimensional and interactional approach. Rather than building on unidimensional and cross-cultural approaches (i.e., acculturation theory and cross-cultural adaptation theory) that privilege host nation perceptions and culture and assert that cultural transformation is a singular experience influenced primarily by migrant populations themselves, the findings illuminate how cultural transformation is a dually transformative and interactive process between cultural groups during intercultural transitions.

To recall, CMM was developed by Barnett Pearce and Vernon Cronen (1980) to explain how meanings are created, coordinated, and managed in the social world.

Fundamentally, it is a model for understanding the relationship between meaning and action (Montgomery, 2004). That is, CMM seeks to explain how people co-construct the meanings and expectations they hold for society, their personal relationships, and their individual identities through communication (Cronen, Pearce, & Harris, 1982; Cronen & Pearce, 1988). Orbe & Camara (2010) claim that CMM has proven to be “useful framework for understanding how people coordinate meanings. . . especially when the meanings are contradictory” (Orbe & Camara, 2010, p. 285). For this project, CMM provides a theoretical guide for understanding the experiences of German citizens and refugees as they co-construct meaning regarding their interactions (Cronen, Pearce, & Lannamann, 1982, Pearce, 2004, 2007). Ultimately, the use of CMM as a theoretical framework for analyzing interaction benefited attempts to understand a diverse set of individuals and how they conceptualize and recount difficult subjects and experiences as they relate to culture (Orbe & Camara, 2010, p. 285).

For the purposes of this study, the hierarchy model of meaning was used to demonstrate how communication acts, like stories and experiences of positive intercultural interaction, reveal meaning across multiple contexts. According to K. Pearce (2012):

“The Hierarchy Model is designed to help you understand the highest contexts and stories you have about any given situation that guide what you see and how you act. Every event includes several types of stories we are telling; for example, the actual situation or the episode, one’s sense of self, the importance of the relationship, the cultural stories and cultural constraints, etc. But not every story has equal weight. Exploring and naming your higher level contexts can be

extremely helpful in understanding the different frames and forces that are contributing to your stories and the unfolding interactional pattern.” (pp. 93-94)

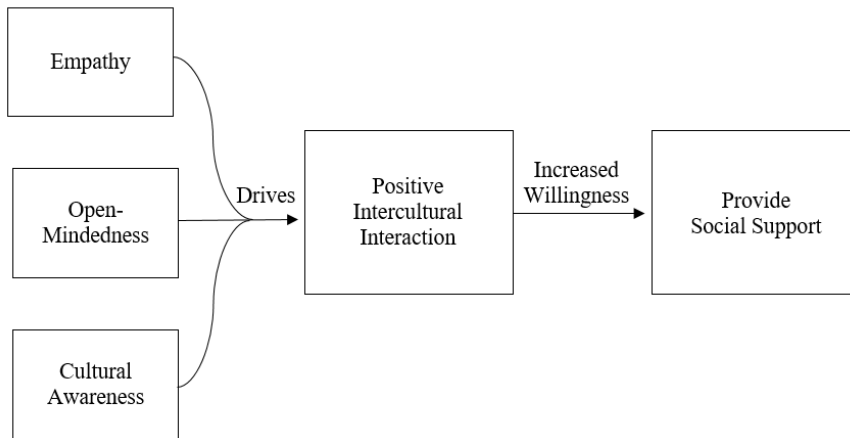
In my study, I am not focusing on a singular story or interaction to but rather multiple stories across various contexts. I am using the hierarchy model to make claims about the stories as a collective, focusing on repeating higher level stories from each group and their connection to positive intercultural interactions. Therefore, I am focusing on the action situation or episode of positive intercultural interaction as well as their connections to cultural stories for both German citizen and refugee participants in order to offer broader claims about the meaning of positive intercultural interaction for each dominant participant group.

In what follows, I review the core elements once again, focusing on the differences and similarities between German citizens and refugees in their experiences and expressions of positive intercultural interaction. I also explore how these differences and similarities generate two hierarchies of meaning, one for each participant group based on their respective expressions and experiences of what characterizes their positive intercultural interactions. Furthermore, the two hierarchies of meanings produced provide a platform for answering how these differences and similarities can expand our understanding of intercultural transitions and migrant-host relationships. First, I begin with the element of empathy.

Empathy was reflected in the data primarily through the stories told by Germans, even though both groups were able to recall and recount experiences where empathy played a role. However, by and large, cognitive empathy was demonstrated by German participants through their ability to engage in perspective taking, and that empathy

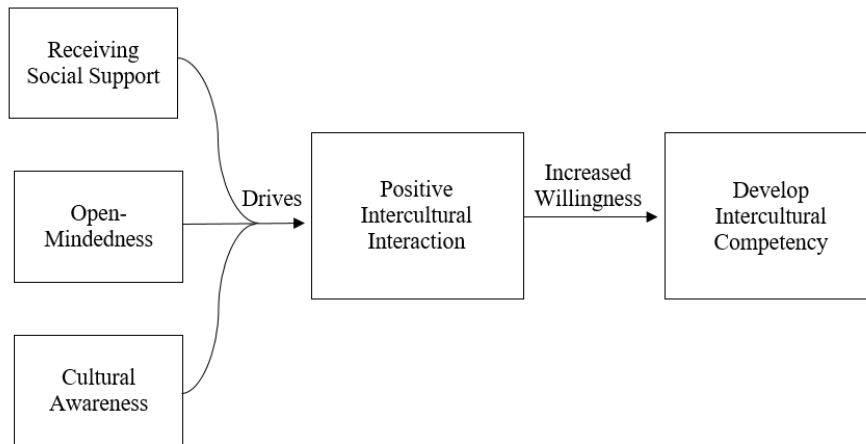
positively influenced their willingness to engage with refugees. On the other hand, affective empathy was demonstrated by refugee participants through their ability to recognize and reflect on the emotional state of others and themselves, and how that may have affected German citizens' willingness to provide refugees with social support. These findings illuminate that empathy motivates host culture members to engage in positive interaction and that the receiving of empathy by migrant groups is represented through experiences of social support underpinned by empathy rather than explicitly demonstrative of empathetic communication. Therefore, empathy appeared to motivate social supportive measures by German citizens.

However, explicit discussions of social support were more prevalent across the two groups. On the whole, the majority of experiences and expressions of positive intercultural interaction by both refugee and German participants were characterized by references to social support. In these expressions and experiences, German citizens offered informational support, instrumental support, and emotional support. On the other hand, refugees offered some instrumental support and expressed the importance of emotional support and social support in general as grounding for their experiences of positive interactions. Regardless, provisions of social support served to constitute positive intercultural interactions for both migrant and host groups. This emphasis underscores the role that social support plays in perceptions of positive intercultural interactions. Additionally, when German citizens engaged in empathetic behaviors, they became more open-minded and culturally aware, which influenced their desire to offer social support to refugees. Therefore, the influence of the core elements of positive interaction for German citizens could be described as followed:



*Figure 1. German Positive Intercultural Interactions.*

On the other hand, the receiving of social support from German citizens to refugees guided refugee experiences of positive intercultural interaction motivating them to become more open-minded and culturally aware leading to a heightened desire to engage in competency building and learn more about the German culture. Therefore, the influence of the core elements of positive interaction for refugees could be described as followed:



*Figure 2. Refugee Positive Intercultural Interactions.*



In regards to competency, both groups equally stressed the importance of attitudes of respect, openness, and curiosity as driving forces in their experiences of positive intercultural interactions. These attitudes were presented as contributing factors that both German citizens and refugees needed to possess in order to cultivate positive intercultural interactions. Similarly, both groups expressed the key role that knowledge and skills, particularly those connected to cultural awareness, played in the development of positive intercultural interactions. They also agreed that awareness of one's own culture and that of the new cultural group equally contributed to positive outcomes. Lastly, the importance of language development was identified by all participants as a chief factor that built competency and facilitated positive intercultural interactions. However, in regards to language development, German citizens provided social support to assist refugees in developing this competency, while refugees needed to actually engage in competency building measures to develop their language skills. Regardless, both groups noted that language acquisition was a primary factor that facilitated positive intercultural interactions, thereby, highlighting the complementary roles that each participant group played in language development and competency building.

First, looking at German citizens' overarching expressions and experiences of positive intercultural interactions, empathy represents the driving force for their positive engagement and initial motivation for interaction. Empathy ultimately cultivated perspectives and emotions that facilitated the host nationals, in this instance German citizens, to engage in intercultural interactions. On the other hand, refugees' expressions and experiences of positive intercultural interaction are grounded in social support. This makes sense, in that refugees, forced migrants, and displaced persons in general cannot

predict if, when, or where they may be forced to relocate; thus, they maximize the need for social support as the first order of business upon entering a new culture and as the impetus for intercultural interaction. These findings also provide insight into the power relations between these interactants and the fact that the host nation is in a privileged position to provide support and the refugees are in the less powerful position and need to receive and seek support.

Open-mindedness and cultural awareness play a shared role in facilitating positive intercultural interactions for both refugee and German citizen cultural groups. In these findings, social support represents the most critical communication behavior for German citizens to engage in, building on empathy, open-mindedness, and cultural awareness, in order to facilitate positive intercultural interactions. Alternatively, intercultural competency with a focus on language development signifies the most vital communication behavior for refugees to engage in, building on social support, open-mindedness, and cultural awareness, in order to facilitate positive intercultural interactions.

However, the ultimate outcomes of those competency building behaviors differs for each participant group, accenting the positive intercultural interactions for each and ideally, what will eventually sustain positive intercultural interactions between the dominant cultural groups. Therefore, if host nations provide social support grounded in empathy, cultural awareness, and open-mindedness, and migrant groups develop intercultural competency grounded in receiving social support, open-mindedness, and cultural awareness, then there is an increased likelihood of facilitating sustained positive intercultural interactions for both groups. In addition, the development of competency is

ultimately a prerequisite for both migrant and host groups prior to, during, and post interaction as seen by the balanced need for open-mindedness and cultural awareness for each group. This underscores, the dual transformation that each group undergoes as they approach and engage in positive intercultural interactions. In the end, this dual transformation, is what ultimately sustains the positive intercultural interactions and highlights the role that both migrants and hosts play in facilitating positive intercultural transitions and developing positive relationships with one another.

Ultimately, by using the hierarchy model as a heuristic to make sense of the connections between the 209 stories, 16 categories, and three overarching themes, I was able to determine which of these main categories means the most to each group respectively. For refugees, the highest level context driving their positive intercultural interactions was the provision of social support because the experience of support elicits positive interaction which encourages their development of intercultural competency. For Germans, the highest level context driving their positive intercultural interactions was the importance of empathy, by putting themselves in the shoes of refugees enabled German citizens to experience more open-mindedness and cultural awareness that encouraged their willingness to provide social support. Overall, this study helps us understand the higher level contexts that make it easier for refugees and citizens of a host country to *not only* have positive interactions but to have a better sense of what helps refugees and host nations adjust in positive and product ways during intercultural transitions. In the next section, I explain the theoretical and practical implications based on the findings and discussion.

## **Implications**

### **Theoretical Implications**

The findings of the present study add to the vast research on acculturation and cultural adaptation, specifically they focus on how empathy, social support, and intercultural competency positively affect intercultural transitions and migrant-host relationships. Researchers to date seem to have focused primarily on a unidimensional approach to studying this intercultural phenomenon with an emphasis on what migrant groups need to do during intercultural transitions (Abraham, 2000; Binder & Tonic, 2005; Kim, 2001; Lee & Chen, 2000). The present study advances previous work, by offering a bi-dimensional approach where members of the migrant and host cultures served as participants who are dually undergoing an intercultural transition.

Specifically, the present study provides a clear understanding for what might enable successful intercultural transitions and highlights the ways in which both host and migrant groups undergo cultural transformations during these transitions. Furthermore, the present study expands our knowledge of how outside variables such as empathy, social support, and intercultural competency influence intercultural transitions. The findings also confirm previous results across acculturation and cross-cultural adaptation theories and validate their value to both parties who participate in an intercultural transition thus, offering a more comprehensive understanding of intercultural transitions and migrant-host relationships that considers the experiences and perspectives of both migrant and host groups.

In addition, the current study's focus on stories of positive intercultural interaction, underscore the reality that members of migrant and host groups are able to

cultivate positive intercultural interactions. This serves to not only confirm the findings of previous literature as to what constitutes a positive intercultural interaction, but it also sheds light on intercultural contexts and situations where members of host and migrant groups appear to be engaging in these positive behaviors almost innately. Therefore, acculturation and cross-cultural adaptation theories as well as our understandings of empathy, social support, and intercultural competency, may be advanced by approaching contexts where positive intercultural communication and interaction are occurring to reveal how these behaviors are developed, practiced, and sustained by members of diverse cultural groups.

Ultimately, the current study affirms that the capacity to adapt is greatly associated with competent interactions between migrant and host cultures. By promoting a willingness to interact, conflicts that usually stem from cultural differences (Koskinen & Tossavainen, 2004; Lee & Chen, 2000) can be ameliorated if there are enough successful interactions between the individuals (McLaren, 2003). This further demonstrates the significant contribution of the present study to understanding intercultural transitions and migrant-host relationships by offering concrete examples of successful and positive intercultural interactions.

### **Practical Implications**

According to the United Nations Population Fund, in 2015, 244 million people, or 3.3 percent of the world's population lived outside their country of origin, meaning more than 650,000 people migrated every day. With this growing migration, the cultural landscape of the world is changing, people are moving more often than ever before which has created more borders, more refugees, and more opportunities to facilitate positive

intercultural interactions. The present study shows we need to teach people how to engage by teaching them how to be more empathetic, how to offer emotional and cognitive support, and how to work together to build intercultural competency.

Ioannidou and Konstantikaki (2008) argue that empathy is a powerful communication skill that is learnable and teachable and even though some intercultural scholars challenge this assumption and see the treatment of empathy as a skill or competency as unrealistic (Broome, 1991; DeTurk, 2001), the current study's findings demonstrate the ability for members of diverse cultural groups to recognize and engage in empathetic behaviors. Therefore, I tentatively assert the potential to cultivate empathy across cultural groups as a way to better prepare individuals for positive intercultural interactions. Steps to cultivate empathy can be approached through role-playing exercises, providing information and education on other worldly perspectives, praising empathetic behavior when it occurs, encouraging individuals to talk about and label their feelings, practicing the acknowledgement and recognition of another's feelings, and teaching nonverbal cues (Breakstone, M. Dreiblatt, & K. Dreiblatt, 2008; Shapiro, 2002; Washburn, 2008). This practice of cultivating empathy can begin in the home and in the classroom; however, actual interactions, experiences, and opportunities to engage in empathetic behavior are more valuable (Zimmerman, 1995). Similarly, social support can be improved by modeling support behavior, encouraging supportive physical contact, providing early intervention to address needs and issues, offering feedback during interactions, asking questions, and sharing points of view and information (Cobb, 1976; Sarason, 2013).

Both empathy and social support are skills that an individual can develop in their own culture and research shows that the more skilled an individual is at communicating in their own culture, the more likely they will be a competent communicator and adapt to new cultures (Ruben & Kealey, 1979). In order to strengthen intercultural communication competence many universities now offer classes towards building competency and being mindful of differences (Beamer, 1992; Chang, 2013). Additionally, training programs have been suggested to prepare migrant cultures before they travel to new cultures in order to help them become more competent communicators (Brislin & Kim, 2003; Furnham & Bochner, 1982; Kim, 2001, 2003, 2005; Kitsantas, 2004; Shackleford, 2011). However, the present study adds to this practical implication by highlighting the need for both migrant and host cultures to develop intercultural competency; therefore, training, development, and education opportunities should be provided for both hosts and migrants. By offering opportunities for people to develop intercultural communication competence prior to interacting, individuals may be more prepared for intercultural changes when they occur, which Kim (2001) notes has a positive influence on adaptation.

Overall, the primary practical implications of this study suggest that preparing individuals prior to migrant-host interactions through cultivating empathy, modeling support behavior and communication, and developing intercultural competency is of great value. By preparing individuals prior to interacting with new cultures, individuals will be able to progress faster to cultural understanding (Brislin & Kim, 2003). The present study affirms the importance of this preparation for both host and migrant groups; regardless of one's expertise at interacting in their own culture (Furnham & Bochner,

1982), knowledge of proper communicative behaviors with members of different cultures facilitates positive interaction (Mizera, Tulviste, Konstabel, & Lausa, 2013).

### **Limitations and Future Directions**

Despite the value of the present study, it is worthwhile pointing out the factors that could have affected the outcome of this study. First, my gender could have served as a limitation; a male conducting this study may have had access to different stories and information which may have then led to different results. Future researchers might consider creating a diverse research team to better attend to the effects of identity when conducting qualitative research. In addition, the use of qualitative methods could have impacted the results as this method is perceived as more subjective and interpretive in nature; ideally future researchers should engage in a mixed methods approach to attend to statistically significant results that could be generalizable to a larger population as well as the importance of interviews, focus groups, and observations in attending to the nuances of communicative episodes.

Furthermore, the participants themselves represented a convenience sample that was collected through snowball sampling that focused on those who could easily offer stories of positive intercultural interaction. Future researchers should aim to engage participants with both positive and negative interactions in a singular study to more extensively study intercultural interactions and draw comparisons across experiences. Additionally, the present study depended on participant recall in regards to their stories of intercultural interaction. A prudent way to remedy this limitation would be to spend focused time also observing intercultural interactions as they occur. Also, participants needed to know English or have a member available for translation into English.



Therefore, the research was conducted outside of the participants' native language. This affected who ultimately participated in my study and left out those individuals who lacked English language skills or a member of their network who could serve as translator. Future researchers could attend to this discrepancy by conducting interviews in the native languages of their participants, providing written materials in multiple languages, and enlisting the support of credible bilingual confederates to assist in the research design, collection, and analysis processes.

Another limitation of this study was the context. The study occurred in a context that was undergoing a massive intercultural transition. Future researchers may consider addressing this limitation by conducting research in contexts similar to the one in this study across time, providing more of a longitudinal approach to studying intercultural transitions. Moreover, researchers could study cultures and communities where there hasn't recently been a massive cultural transition to understand their perceptions of appropriately and effectively navigating through past transitions or the potential for future transitions.

One more limitation of this study was the reliance on traditional conceptualizations of empathy, social support, and intercultural competency. By utilizing the foundational understandings, I was able to illuminate the presence of these elements in the stories of positive intercultural interaction. However, by using the conventional wisdom, I may have overlooked dynamic, fluid, and contextual nuances of the stories collected and their connection to the individuals and cultures more holistically. In addition, the current study does not overtly address the influence of power relations on the intercultural interactions even though there is a differential between host and migrant

groups. However, through conducting the research and collecting the data, neither group appeared to acknowledge issues of power when recounting their stories of positive intercultural interaction. This could possibly be due to the emphasis on positive stories of intercultural interaction. It could also be due to the fact that I was not a member of either participant group being interviewed. In addition, there is the possibility that by Germany internationally welcoming refugees to their country played a positive role in how refugees perceived the dominant group (Germans) and ameliorated some expected effects of power on their intercultural interactions. Either way, future scholars could utilize more modern conceptualizations of empathy and intercultural competency that better account for the diversity of perspectives, experiences, perceptions, and thought as well as aptly attend to power differentials between host and migrant groups.

Lastly, the present study was conducted within the communication discipline under the division of intercultural communication. Researchers of other divisions in communication as well as researchers of other disciplines, could study these interactions in more specific contexts. Regardless, the present study provides a platform for studying positive intercultural interactions between migrant-host cultures.

### **Conclusion**

Ultimately, the findings in this study illustrate the governing elements of positive intercultural interaction for German citizens and refugees. This can further expand our knowledge of intercultural transitions as a whole by noting that when people become a host nation this is how positive intercultural transitions can happen. In reality any nation has the potential, either expectedly or unexpectedly, to serve as a host nation to diverse members of their own cultural group (i.e. displaced persons in the U.S. after Hurricane

Katrina) or members of migrant groups (i.e. Syrian refugees in Germany). Therefore, the importance of cultivating empathy, having attitudes of open-mindedness, and building cultural awareness of both one's own culture and other cultures prior to and during these inevitable cultural shifts and disruptions can enhance the eventual supportive behaviors of host nations in positive ways to facilitate intercultural interactions that increase the likelihood of successful intercultural transitions for migrant groups.

Conversely, members of migrant groups, specifically forced migrants, displaced persons, and refugees, cannot likely predict the unfortunate upheaval of their lives and the need to relocate. Therefore, the emphasis for their immediate interactions is captured by the receiving of social support as the basis for positive intercultural interactions. Thus, enhancing refugees' ability to interact with host nations in appropriate and effective ways is likely to facilitate intercultural interactions that increase the likelihood of successful intercultural transitions while helping them develop intercultural competency and build positive relationships with host nations.

All in all, communication seems to be the foundation for building relationships and culturally adapting (Kim & McKay-Semmler, 2013). Overall, this project has the potential to provide a new framework for and perspective to think about how nations experiencing an increased influx of refugees, migrants, immigrants, and even tourists can begin to approach multiculturalism with confidence, acceptance, and a deeper understanding of how to work with diverse groups to effect positive interactions. As the nations of the world become more diverse, our approaches to studying intercultural interactions need to become more diverse as well. Drawing on the positive stories from both host nations and migrants alike allows for the multitude of paths towards positive

interaction to be illuminated. I hope finding ways to facilitate positive interactions will lead to positive and lasting change.

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APPENDIX A  
HUMAN SUBJECTS APPROVAL

Janet Alberts  
 Human Communication, Hugh Downs School of  
 480/965-7141  
 JESS.ALBERTS@asu.edu

Dear Janet Alberts:

On 5/4/2016 the ASU IRB reviewed the following protocol:

Type of Review:	Initial Study
Title:	Exploring Positive Intercultural Interactions Between German Citizens and Syrian Refugees
Investigator:	Janet Alberts
IRB ID:	STUDY00004327
Funding:	None
Grant Title:	None
Grant ID:	None
Documents Reviewed:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• IRB Recruitment Script - Versha Anderson.pdf, Category: Recruitment Materials;</li> <li>• IRB Consent Form - Versha Anderson.pdf, Category: Consent Form;</li> <li>• IRB Interview Questions - Versha Anderson.pdf, Category: Recruitment Materials;</li> <li>• Recommendation_Matoba.pdf, Category: Other (to reflect anything not captured above);</li> <li>• IRB Protocol - Versha Anderson.docx, Category: IRB Protocol;</li> </ul>

The IRB determined that the protocol is considered exempt pursuant to Federal Regulations 45CFR46 (2) Tests, surveys, interviews, or observation on 5/4/2016.

In conducting this protocol you are required to follow the requirements listed in the INVESTIGATOR MANUAL (HRP-

103). Sincerely,

IRB Administrator

cc: Versha Anderson  
Janet Alberts  
Benjamin Broome