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Tiivistelmä – Abstract <p>This study investigated cultural similarity and dissimilarity in intercultural conflicts, by focusing on how a mediator understands cultural difference in the process of mediation. Intercultural conflict occurs when cultural worldviews of an individual or group are incompatible with the worldviews of another cultural group within the same community. Special interest has been on social inequality, stereotypes and ingroup outgroup tension as causes of intercultural conflicts. Participants for this study were qualified mediators from South Africa. In order to understand their practice environment and mediation landscape in general, community conflict in South Africa was studied.</p> <p>The findings revealed that cultural similarity and dissimilarity exist in every conflict, and it surfaces in the early sessions of the mediation process. A mediator is therefore compelled to familiarize with cultural differences by analyzing nature of the dispute, checking background of the parties in conflict and observing the disputants. Factors such as race/ethnicity, language, age and education of the individuals in a group in conflict are indicators used to identify cultural similarity and dissimilarity. Similarity in culture tends to draw party members together, enabling cooperation in narrowing the issues and uncovering underlying interests and needs, which makes facilitating for a resolution easy. Cultural understanding by a mediator helps to avoid mediation breakdown.</p>	
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CULTURAL SIMILARITY AND DISSIMILARITY IN INTERCULTURAL CONFLICTS

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1 INTRODUCTION

Communication scholars have developed interest and studied conflicts for over three decades (Putman, 2009), focusing, among other cultural aspects, on issues rooted in worldviews that inform how people organize and make sense of the world around them (LeBaron & Pillay, 2006). Conflict is the difference within or between two or more people, which is perceived as a challenge to something they believe or need, exacerbated by poor communication or negative images of the other (LeBaron & Pillay, 2006). Conventional wisdom perceives this condition to be normal in human existence in social and personal relationship (Ting-Toomey, 1994; Orbe & Everett, 2009), and try as we might to avoid it, it is an inevitable part of life (LeBaron & Pillay, 2006). Broadly speaking, it is a struggle over power, resources, status, and identity et cetera between community members

Intercultural conflicts, however, occur when cultural worldviews of an individual or group differ with the worldviews of another individual or cultural group (Ting-Toomey & Takai, 2009). Provided that coming together of individuals from different cultural origins is becoming part of everyday life, members of a community will therefore be increasingly confronted with different ways of behaving and thinking (Kramer & Brugman, 2014). In other words no two people are the same regardless of individuals' background or experiences, therefore a person possess different values, belief and assumption from others (Fisher-Yoshida, 2005). Different ways of behaving and thinking breeds what Kramer and Brugman (2014) termed as perceived or actual incompatibility of values, expectations and outcomes between two or more parties from different cultures. Culture has been defined in more ways than one; Ting-Toomey's definition of culture was applied for the sake of understanding the usage of the term culture in this study. Culture is a system of knowledge, meanings and symbolic actions shared by the majority of people in a society (Ting-Toomey, 1994). It is

also important to emphasize that even though the content of different cultures varies, the basic elements – values, belief, norms, symbols and language – are universal (Ting-Toomey, 1994).

Intercultural conflicts relates to intercultural communication, which is a process of interaction between people from different cultures, needless, therefore, to state that intercultural conflicts are triggered off by miscommunication during interaction. Miscommunication arises when an individual expects others in an interaction of any nature to operate on the same cultural orientation as his or hers. If they don't, cultural clashes are likely to occur, bringing forth an intercultural conflict. Intercultural conflicts are prevalent in multicultural workplaces, in international organizations, in academic institutions and in diplomatic offices abroad, places that are rife with cultural diversity. In the course of interactions in such cultural diverse settings, interpersonal relationships by culturally different individuals may prove to be complicated, culminating into conflicts from time to time due to differing worldviews (Yu & Chen, 2008). In response to intercultural conflicts in the said places above, organizations employ training programs and sometimes as far as seeking help with a professional impartial third party – a mediator - as a conflict management method to improve employees' communication competence and performance (Yu & Chen, 2008).

This study focused on intercultural conflicts at a community level, and how they are managed or mediated. Intercultural conflicts at a community level are misunderstandings based on cultural differences by individuals from or residing in the same community. Racial and ethnic tensions in the community are some of the broader issues in multicultural societies like the United States and South Africa which have been looked at. Focusing on factors such as ingroup outgroup tensions, stereotypes and social inequality. Members of a community associate and identify themselves with a certain group, an ingroup, and the group they do not associate with become an outgroup. An ingroup could be a family, religion, ethnic, race, social club etc., which has an influence on its members in a particular sociocultural way that

differs from members of an outgroup. From communication point of view, an outgroup members are not perceived positively by members of an ingroup based on cultural differences (Gudykunst, 2003). They are seen as a threat to the locals' (ingroup) culture, economic resources and social privileges. Stereotype is a false generalization about someone else's culture (Gudykunst, 2003; Martin, Hutchison, Slessor, Urquhart, Cunnigham & Smith, 2014). It can evoke an intercultural conflict when used by an individual or a group in the community to demean or dehumanize another individual or group (Orbe & Everett, 2009). These factors above – ingroup outgroup tension, stereotype and social inequality - have been a source of intercultural conflicts in multicultural societies. The community therefore responded to such intercultural conflicts with a dispute resolution method known as mediation.

Conflicts need to be managed and addressed through right channels of communication (Ting-Toomey & Oetzel, 2006). Among other alternative dispute resolutions, the process of mediation has been widely used globally. Mediation is a type of conflict resolution method, in which parties in dispute seek or accept the assistance of a third party (Wallensteen & Isak, 2014; Park, 2010, Greig, 2013). The third party, otherwise known as a mediator, could be a volunteer who has received training, a religious leader, a political figure or a mediation response institution. The role of a mediator is to facilitate the process of resolving ongoing dispute without imposing an outcome by maintaining a position of neutrality (Wallensteen & Isak, 2014; Eisenkop & Bächtiger, 2012). Intercultural conflicts are mediated out of the court system (Barge, 2009). This approach has been practiced in the United States since 1960s (Canary & Lakey, 2009), and in South Africa before and after the apartheid era, to deescalate interracial and interethnic tensions that prevailed at the time. The community then was necessitated to train its members into mediators, conciliators and negotiators, and involved religious leaders, politicians and influential figures. These trained members and influential figures were expected to facilitate mediation and prevent violence, by addressing conflicts

effectively and sustain peace in the community (Barge, 2009). Mediation became a democratic process in which members' grievances were heard, and the resolutions achieved accomplished desired outcome for all involved. Despite its growing popularity and being the most preferred conflict resolution method, mediation has its weaknesses. Neutrality as a position by a mediator has raised a lot of question marks. Arguments claimed that mediator's presence in the process of mediation is to have participants behave well in ways consistent with certain norms that are already set, and that's not at all a neutral role or position. On the other hand neutrality has been perceived to perpetuate status quo, which can be damaging to the disadvantaged members of the community such as women and children if it is practiced in a chauvinistic society (Adams, 2014).

Mediation aims at resolving dispute by overcoming cultural differences, among other obstacles. The process is perceived as a form of intercultural communication given the level of interaction involved between different cultural groups that are in conflict. Mediators, therefore, are confronted with groups of individuals from different cultural backgrounds, individuals who borrow bits and pieces from several cultural sources (Adams, 2014), as stated by LeBaron & Pillay (2006) that we all belong to multiple cultures. These cultural groups bring to the mediation table conflicting worldviews, attitudes, values and behavior. LeBaron & Pillay (2006) description was that everyone views the world through their own kaleidoscope of cultural lenses. In such a scenario, a mediator has a task of discerning cultural differences inherently embedded in conflicts before attempting to resolve them.

Literature on how culture shapes and affects conflict is vast, but the issue of cultural difference in the process of mediation has not been given its deserved weight. Adams (2014) argued that mediation theory treats all forms of difference the same, and stated that mediator's inability to understand or ignore cultural difference can be compared to someone treating the symptoms but not the disease. In support of Adams's views, LeBaron and Pillay (2006)

claimed that conflict resolution theories do not situate cultural difference in the center where it belongs.

The aim of this study was to investigate how a mediator understands cultural similarity and dissimilarity (cultural difference) in the process of mediation. Since the data were collected from South Africa, by involving trained mediators as participants. It is necessary, therefore, for the benefit of the readers, to present a historical overview of conflict resolution in South Africa. South Africa has a long history of resolving conflicts at a community level through the process of mediation. Managing conflicts in traditional South Africa, dates way back before colonialism and the advent of Apartheid. It was part of the traditional culture by communities that inhabited South Africa prior to colonization. Mediation and other forms of alternative dispute resolution is a Western legacy that was introduced to the country by the white settlers (De la Harpe, 2014). Consensual method of resolving conflict was a style commonly used in traditional Africa, including South Africa, and it is still in use to date. The consensual method of managing disputes called for an open process that encompassed all, community supervisors, elders and overseers of the community norms and values (De la Harpe, 2014). All who participated during the process were involved in the dialogue that ended up determining what was fair and what was not. In the course of this kind of mediation not only the interests of the parties involved in conflict mattered, but also the consequences that affected others were looked at. Traditionally, mediation aimed at healing what had been hurt and reached for solution that was suitable for improving future relationship. Elders, due to the reverence attached to seniority, were, and they still are, the facilitators of mediation process. As a norm, mediation process took place in an attitude of togetherness and the spirit of Ubuntu – I am because we are. This meant that disputes were settled to reconcile the community but not as a basis for retribution. The style of mediation currently practiced in South Africa has its basis largely on the English model. It takes place

in formal settings where participants know the rules in advance, which are preceded by an agreement and defined responsibilities (De la Harpe, 2014). Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) has become a hybrid process in South Africa by which a legal dispute is facilitated by a neutral person without adjudication (Okharedia, 2011). ADR is a set of practices designed to manage conflicts outside the court system, and in today's South Africa ADR is a combination of negotiation, mediation, conciliation and arbitration (Okharedia, 2011). The method is now being applied not only in community conflicts but also in other contexts such as divorce, sexual harassment, education and child custody. The Apartheid era was characterized by endless clashes between black communities, and between blacks and whites. The Apartheid policies advocated social inequality and created racial and cultural tensions between and among all inhabitants of South Africa (Oetzel, Arcos, Mabizela, Weinman & Zhang, 2009). Years that preceded South Africa's period of political transition witnessed establishment of many fora designed to deescalate violence in the community (Bremner, 2001). Donors who had best wishes for South Africa funded NGOs, which attempted on ADR methods before and after the transition in government. Independent Mediation Service of South Africa (IMSA) was one of the earliest such NGOs, which was formed in the early 1980's with the focus on resolving labor-management disputes. Many more other organs for resolving disputes were established after that. These organs offered dispute management trainings, mediation and reconciliation programs in an effort to resolve neighborhood disputes and establish justice. After the democratic government assumed power, the Commission for Conciliation, Mediation and Arbitration (CCMA) was established as recognition for ADR programs, which existed before. CCMA was established based on a successful Australian ADR model. Since its onset, CCMA has been instrumental in solving disputes in South Africa. At present South Africa boasts a number of dispute resolution agencies more than any

other country in African. This could be partly due to South Africa's volatile past history, and partly due to its interest in guaranteeing regional peace and stability (Park, 2010).

Mediation, as we have seen, deals with resolving conflicts in order to arrive to a peaceful agreement for the purpose of maintaining harmony in the community. Mediation as a response to intercultural conflicts deals with tension between cultural different individuals or groups. Cultural convergence and effective group decision are communication theories, which were applied in this study to explain cultural elements in intercultural conflicts and mediation. Also to explain how groups of individuals make decision with regards to the process of mediation. Cultural convergence relates to how cultural elements or ideas travel across borders and gets to be shared by different individuals through the process of convergence (Goldsmith, 1978), while effective group decision, revolves around the process of effective decision-making by a group of individuals.

The rest of this thesis is structured into seven chapters. Chapter two is a theoretical background. Discussing two communication theories mentioned above, and intercultural conflicts and how they are mediated. Research questions are introduced at the end of the chapter two. Methodology is in chapter three, which explains the type of study, participants and their location, and method used in collecting and analyzing the data. Chapter four presents the results from the analysis, and chapter five reflects on the findings and discusses their significance and critically connects the results with the theories and previous studies. The evaluation chapter looks back at the whole process of carrying-out this research and point out the challenges and shortcomings encountered in the course of conducting this study. The concluding chapter summarizes the findings, and offer suggestion on the area that deserves research attention in the future.

2 THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

2.1 Conflict

Conflict is an expressed struggle between two or more interdependent parties with incompatible values, belief, needs, desire or goals (Putman, 2009). It has a way of situating itself between interdependent parties wherever the above interests are involved. It is fueled by miscommunication and conflicting actions, especially when each party prioritizes on his or her interests, by perceiving the other as interfering (Guerrero & Valley, 2009).

Conflicts occur in different levels, from interpersonal to community level. Interpersonal conflicts occur when there is a miscommunication, contrary beliefs or ideas, and even competition for limited resources between two individuals. Interpersonal conflict is perceived as not a negative or destructive phenomenon, but how it is resolved impact relationships. Kim-Jo, Benet-Martínez and Ozer (2010) suggested that the manner by which an individual deals with interpersonal conflicts is influenced by culture. Oetzel and Ting-Toomey (2003) stated that every individual have a dominant conflict style, which is a person's way of communication toward a conflict, due to cultural background and personality. Conflicts at a community level involve a struggle by members over power, resources, values and identity (Koubi & Böhmelt, 2014) or in some cases friction between authority and minority groups. Conflict occurs in so many forms. It can happen over moral issues for instance, such as same-sex marriage, abortion and contraceptives, which could also be cultural. Moral conflict is a clash between two opposing parties, based on moral order (system of judging right and wrong) symbolized by each party's moral understanding (Littlejohn & Foss, 2009). Racial/ethnic hatred and ethnic identity has also been the origin of conflicts in many communities, marked mostly by high level of violence (Wegenast & Basedau, 2014; Warfield, 2009). Warfield (2009) affirmed that conflict of ethnic nature exist in a multicultural society, even if only subtly.

Conflicts at the community level concern issues that are faced by or impact the community, therefore solution to these issues lies within the community itself. Conflicts are not necessarily supposed to be negative or destructive at all times. Conflict can be a factor that shapes our dialogue thus becoming our ground for conversation. It can also be a tool that propels community members in sorting out and appreciating their differences.

2.2 Intercultural conflict

Intercultural conflict relates to intercultural communication, which is a process of interaction (communication) between two or more people from different cultural groups (Gudykunst, 2003; Fall, Kelly, MacDonald, Primm & Holmes, 2013). Every cultural group is endowed with its own worldviews, which entails specific values and norms. Intercultural conflict occurs when cultural worldviews of one group are incompatible with the worldviews of another cultural group within the same community (Ting-Toomey & Takai, 2009) causing cultural frictions between individuals from these different groups time to time. The world today is a diverse multicultural community, inhabited by interdependent cultural groups. Miscommunication, which may escalate to intercultural conflict, occurs in the course of interaction between these interdependent groups because members of these groups perceive the world differently. Orbe and Everett (2009) suggested that in order to deal with intercultural conflicts, which are inevitable in our community and prosper from diversity, community members need to consider a society that is hospitable to all who compose it. By accommodating and accepting communications that are different from their own. In other words conflict should be the ground for conversation (Orbe & Everett, 2009).

There are several causes of intercultural conflicts; social inequality, stereotypes and ingroup outgroup tension are few origins of intercultural conflicts discussed below. Literature on social inequality suggested that it happens when rights, privileges and resources are shared or distributed unequally in the society, based, for instance, on racial, gender and ethnic

inequality. Power, on one hand, play a role in social inequality, whereby a superior social group, for instance men, a particular race or an elite, has the most rights and privileges over others perceived as inferior. A superior social group assumes power of control over others from an attitude they presume to make them differentially and culturally equipped for high social status (Charles, 2008). Power (political and economic) is linked in the practice of discrimination, stigmatization and stereotyping of women, homosexuals and racial minorities, but on the other hand the reasons are rooted in cultural assumptions and negative attributions about tendencies and characteristics of a certain social group (Charles, 2008). Social inequality causes intercultural conflict when the minority and the disadvantaged members of the same community are denied an equal opportunity in the distribution of social resources, based on race, gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation etc. (Faist, 2014). The minority and disadvantaged, in response to the inequality, develop opposition to the values and norms of the social group that denies them social opportunities (Zomeran, Postmes, Spears & Bettache, 2011). In apartheid South Africa racial groups lived in segregated areas, as a method of control by the dominant group. The dominant group justified their subjugation over the locals on a biblical delineation that the locals – blacks – are designed by god to labor for the ruling class as slaves (Davidson, 2001). Culturally segregated communities in South Africa behaved and perceived their surroundings differently and did not make the effort to learn about one another (Ntuli, 2012). Consequently rivalry over social resources and basic needs emerged, which fueled violence within the South African communities, and magnified social and cultural gap between social groups, which produced intergroup tensions (Warfield, 2009).

Stereotypes probably relate to social inequality based on how a dominant social group employs its position of power to dehumanize members of another social group. A social group can use stereotypes as a tool of confirmation for perceiving itself superior over others (MacNab & Worthly, 2012). Stereotype is a false, inaccurate and negative generalization

about someone else's culture (Gudykunst, 2003; Martin, Hutchison, Slessor, Urquhart, Cunningham & Smith, 2014). Stereotypes are helpful as a shortcut to create psychological picture of another person's worldview, but they are a cause of intercultural conflicts because the element of truth in them is only partial and misleading (MacNab & Worthly, 2012).

Stereotype can be used as a criterion to differentiate between an ingroup and outgroup. As in how one social group perceive others as different from them by projecting stereotypes towards them (MacNab & Worthly, 2012). Ingroup - outgroup can be linked to social inequality based on an ingroup social categorization of others as an outgroup, by favoring its own members (ingroup) in terms of social resources (Gómez, Dovidio, Huici, Gaertner & Cuadrado, 2008).

An ingroup is a group in the community to which a person identifies him or herself with. This group could be a family, religion or any other social group. An ingroup has an influence on its member's behavior in a social-cultural way (Gudykunst, 2003). On the other hand, an outgroup is a group a person in the community does not identify with. More often than not, members of ingroup perceive outgroup members as a threat. An ingroup-outgroup tension tends to prevail within groups with social or cultural differences i.e. nationality, race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, religion and wealth. Especially when one, let's say a dominant group, holds derogatory social attitude or display prejudice and discrimination behavior towards the other (Oord, 2008). Ingroup-outgroup conflict can also be triggered by what is perceived by the ingroup as a threat to its culture, economy and social privileges.

Free movements and migration in today's societies encourages influx of new race, ethnic and other social groups that are not perceived positively by the local residents (Orbe & Everett, 2009). The new social groups not only bring competition over social resources, but also introduce different communication styles, belief, politics, values and traditions (Kim, 2010), a different worldview, which could spark an intercultural conflict in the course of

interaction. A case in point is when Korean Americans moved into an African American community and established businesses. The local residents saw this as cultural and economic power threat. The African American then accused the Korean Americans of rudeness and business interference. There was a heightened ingroup-outgroup tension characterized by defensiveness and hostility between the two groups. Korean-Americans attributed the tension to conflicting cultures (between Korean and African way of doing things) and miscommunication (Orbe & Everett, 2009). With regards to the case above, Ting-Toomey and Takai (2009) argued that group membership factors affect conflict negotiation process. Another instance is when Asian and African immigrants in Brixton, Great Britain, were the victims of hates activities by the skinheads in 1983, because they were seen as not part of Britain, based on identity and cultural difference. The Roma population in Eastern Europe has encountered hostility and discriminatory behavior by the ingroup authorities since this ethnic group immigrated to Europe from India. In the early 1980s Southeast Asians settled along the Gulf Coast of Texas and break into the Shrimp Fishing industry, their success and dominance only to be resented by the Ku Klux Klan (Warfield, 2009).

2.3 Mediation of intercultural conflict

Intercultural mediation in this study is defined as a process of negotiation, when disputants from different cultural origins make use of a process to try to settle their dispute. The focus of this study has been on intercultural conflicts at a community level; therefore intercultural mediation is also referred to as community mediation, which means intercultural mediation at a community level.

Intercultural mediation has been sought quite often as an answer to intercultural conflicts boiling in the community. Mediation as a conflict resolution method has proliferated dramatically in the past decades (Canary & Lakey, 2009). Historically, intercultural mediation at a community level is a process that is designed to operate outside the court

system to assist the community in managing intercultural disputes, by lessening clogging the courts with caseloads (Barge, 2009). Intercultural mediation has existed in the United States since 1960s (Canary & Lakey, 2009), and in pre and post-apartheid South Africa, due to interracial and interethnic conflicts, and intergroup tension that prevailed in the US and South African local communities. At present there are many mediation programs and centers established around the world, especially in the United States and South Africa (Canary & Lakey, 2009). These programs are designed to train volunteers into community mediators. Community mediation employs members of its own community such as influential religious and political figures, and trained volunteers as mediator, negotiator and conciliator in finding solution to intercultural disputes (Barge, 2009). These Mediators are expected to prevent and deescalate conflicts, utilize conciliatory mechanisms to strengthen relationship between disputants, and involve the community neighborhoods in addressing conflicts effectively (Barge, 2009). Their role is to identify parties in conflict and then facilitate a mediation process to resolve the dispute. Because of its success and effectiveness in solving disputes, mediation is now practiced as a larger dispute management scheme that encompasses negotiation, conciliation, adjudication and arbitration (Canary & Lakey, 2009). Intercultural mediation aims to promote building of democracy and strengthen citizen's capacity in solving disputes in the community. This method can be seen as a democratic process in which voices of the parties in conflict are heard, by engaging with respective parties in their version of the problem to provide suggestions and solutions to the conflict, which allows both parties to accomplish desired outcome collaboratively.

2.4 Mediator

A mediator, known also as a third party, could be a volunteer who has received training, a religious leader, a political figure or a mediation response institution. The role of a mediator is to facilitate the process of resolving ongoing dispute without imposing an outcome by

maintaining a position of neutrality (Wallensteen & Isak, 2014; Eisenkop & Bächtiger, 2012). A mediator is expected to be impartial, take no sides between the disputants and avoid preferences over the issues in dispute (Park, 2010). A mediator comes into the conflict hoping to produce an agreement or help disputants out of a predicament. Therefore both, the disputants and mediator must have an interest in intervention (Böhmelt, 2012). A mediator engages disputants in mediation process through facilitation, formulation or manipulation tactic. As a facilitator he ensures a continuous discussion and dialogue between disputants by transmitting information between the two parties to facilitate parties understanding of each other's goals. He or she is also responsible for clarifying misconception by gathering information about the conflict (Greig, 2013). As a formulator, a mediator brings to the mediation table new ideas and proposes solutions to the dispute. In manipulative mediation a mediator uses threats, rewards and punishment, known as carrot-and-stick measures to influence the parties to reach an agreement (Salmon, Gelfand, Celik, Kraus, Wilkenfeld & Molly, 2013).

As the world witnessed proliferation of international mediation in the past decades since the late 1970's in various places around the world, so were the establishments of community mediation centers and programs (Canary & Lakey, 2009). The latter targeted members of local community as volunteers and equipped them with conciliatory skills, to help the society mitigate existing and emerging frictions between community members (Palihapitiya & Eisenkraft, 2014). A political figure such as a mayor could use his influence to facilitate forging of biracial, interreligious and intergroup coalition, which would oversee harmony in the community (Warfield, 2009). In the United States, conflict in the community were intervened and resolved by a societal institution such as Conflict Resolution Services (CRS). CRS responded to community conflicts by invitation or by its own volition, they intervene a conflict first by identifying all parties involved or affected by the conflict and then

engaged them in the process of reaching a peaceful agreement (Warfield, 2009). Mediation and conciliation techniques had been in use a lot in South Africa by the Center for Conflict Resolution in South Africa to deescalate violence (Warfield, 2009). Intercultural mediation aim at developing moral growth in the community, it is also meant to restore sense of value, which fosters individual ability to handle problems in life. This is a process where an outside person, a mediator, comes in to assist the parties in conflict settle a dispute. In Chinese communities, conflict is a disgrace that should not be made public. Therefore a mediator is likely to be any ingroup senior member trusted and respected by the parties in conflict (Ting-Toomey, 1994). Seniority is well revered in Chinese societies because it is a symbol of prestige, where the power of persuasion rests (Oetzel et al, 2009). A mediator acts as a communication tool to guide disputants through substantive discussion to facilitate reaching of a peaceful agreement (Ting-Toomey & Oetzel, 2006).

2.5 Communication theories

Mediation, as we have seen, deals with resolving conflicts in order to arrive to a peaceful agreement for the purpose of maintaining harmony in the community. Mediation as a response to intercultural conflicts deals with tension between cultural different individuals or groups. Cultural Convergence and Effective Group Decision are communication theories, which were applied in this study to explain, one, cultural elements in intercultural conflicts and mediation, and two, how groups of individuals make decision with regards to the process of mediation. Cultural convergence relates to how cultural elements or ideas travel across borders and get to be shared by different individuals through the process of convergence (Goldsmith, 1978), while effective group decision revolves around the process of effective decision-making by a group of individuals.

2.5.1 Culture convergence

To converge is to come together and have one interest, purpose or goal. Convergence, as a

concept, focuses on movement of two objects towards one point (common interest). For instance, in order for two individuals to achieve a result of having a common interest, they need to share information with each other to create a common understanding (Kincaid, 1988). Kincaid's (1979) concept of convergence model revolves around a communication process of sharing information, which results into two individuals having a common interest as a point of convergence.

Cultural convergence occurs when people from different cultures share information and become more similar (mutual understanding), or even coming together. Goldsmith (1978) stated that these are similarities that are characterized by cultural pattern of people occupying similar ecological niches. Bednar, Bramson, Jones-Rooy and Scott (2010) looked at it from the perspective of conformity - preference to become similar to the ones around us. They argued that the incentives to conform stem from the desire to fit in with others, the opportunity to intermingle with people we are similar to and the comfort of coordinating with them. Observations from social psychology researches indicated that human beings tend to ape behavior and beliefs of those they socialize with, which substantiate the existence of similar pattern in behavior. Technological advancement has made movement of people and information easy. The global society, therefore, attributes the emergence of culture convergence to global communication, travel, tourism and increased immigration (Reisinger & Crotts, 2009).

A look back in history shows that cultures of one particular place had little or no contact with other cultures. These separate cultures in Americas, Asia, and Africa etc. had different set of belief, religions, and food, shelter and clothing styles. Due to trade, and later advance in technology, developments in one cultural domain spread to other cultural domains, creating similarities in religion, politics, education and social life. One society learns, and

possibly adapts, what is happening in the other society in a very short time, attributing to the phenomenon of cultural convergence. What has come to be known as globalization could be a bigger picture of cultural convergence, in the sense that different cultures come together to form a common global culture. Cultural convergence is visible in cross borders ideas and concepts such as politics, languages, religions, education and sports. The very same cultural elements –maybe except sports – that are visible in intercultural conflicts and mediation, as factors of cultural difference. Democratic politics has been sweeping across the globe since the late 1980's replacing dictatorial regimes. Democracy succeeded apartheid in South Africa when the country became democratic in 1994. Democracy is also used in the process of mediation as a decision making style by parties in conflict when reaching for consensus. The spread of English language, as a lingua franca, has been a medium of communication across the world in the past decades; it is among the eleven official languages of South Africa and most commonly spoken language in official and commercial interaction. Although it is possible that other vernaculars can be used depending on the audience during mediation, English is used to communicate across different racial and ethnic groups, which belong to different tribal languages. Reissinger and Crotts (2009) asserted that the convergence to a cultural commonalty has its strength in the magic of Internet, information technology and Western education.

People from one end of the world cross national borders to the other end (travel), exporting own cultures and exposing themselves to other cultures through exchange of ideas, consequently becoming culturally similar in a number of ways. Clarke (2004) stated that our societies today are a mixture of people and cultures interwoven together by conquest, immigration, trade and geography. Cultures are converging because the world has become interdependent and people are discovering the benefits of international cooperation. This is evidenced by the fact that most post industrial countries are less homogeneous than before

(Clarke, 2004), people speak foreign languages, adhere to foreign politics and religion and adopt foreign education system. They travel to foreign destinations and visit foreign restaurants.

On the opposite end of cultural convergence lies divergence. Divergence in culture can be defined as a process when members of a culture detach from core values of their culture. Convergence and divergence are two sides of the same coin. It has been argued that it is a process that occurs simultaneously only at different levels (Reisinger & Crofts, 2009). New ideas such as religion, politics, economy, technology and foreign languages are factors of cultural convergence as we have seen above, but on the other hand these are the very same attributes of cultural divergence.

Since politics, religion, education and languages are considered to be factors of cultural convergence and globalization, Clarke (2004) believed that academic institutions have the responsibility in enculturating world citizens with knowledge and attitudes. Clarke (2004) suggested that the cross section of an academic curriculum of a modern university should reflect an integration of several cultures, and be able to address topical issues such as politics, religion, languages, economy and technology.

The cultural elements discussed above link cultural convergence to intercultural conflict and mediation based on the argument that these are factors of cultural difference present in the process of mediation. The cultural elements discussed above – democracy, religion, education and languages – cross borders from one side of the globe and exported to the other side through Internet, media and travel. Individual with the same interest come together and share these ideas –convergence - but they are rejected by some as well – divergence. These cultural elements are factors of cultural difference in the process of mediation, of which this study is investigating.

2.5.2 Effective group decision

There are two types of decision maker, a lone decision maker and a group decision maker. Literature suggested that decisions made individually are not strong enough as compared to an effective decision made collectively by a group. Groups make most of the important decisions in the world. Decision made by a group is effective and appropriate, on the ground that a group is presumed to be a collection of experts in various fields of knowledge (Griffin, 2012; Kelly & Karau, 1999), which is a source of new and divergent ideas (Witte, 2007). Effective group decisions are considered to be reliable source of superior solutions (Hirokawa & Gouran, 2012). This method is practiced all over the world by governments, business entities and institutions, and in mediation process to resolve conflicts (Kelly & Karau, 1999). Yet, a group is faced with the challenge of how to collaborate and combine information due to its diverse nature in values and perspectives (Gibson & Saxton, 2005). In a mediation process for instance, groups that are homogeneous are advantaged when it comes to decision-making, because of similarity in attributes and opinions that results from prevailing social and cultural activities that bring similar people into contact on a regular basis (Auer-Rizzi & Berry, 2000). Homogeneity produces confidence among members in decision-making, arising, as noted before, from similarity in opinions. Heterogeneity, on the other hand, is perceived as a disadvantage in decision-making, especially in mediation process. Heterogeneity is credited for creativity and broader solution options, because of its diverse group members. On the other hand it is said to generate conflict among members, rendering the group unable to maintain itself over time, thus failing to produce effective solutions (Gibson & Saxton, 2005; Hirokawa & Poole, 1996).

Effective decision-making is a long process that takes time, commitment and a lot of reasoning. Time constraints might hinder group performance in making a decision. If members of a group are working under time pressure to meet a deadline, it is likely they

might opt to omit some of the salient issues that require careful consideration (Kelly & Karau, 1999). Since the sole objective in a mediation situation is to reach a peaceful agreement, the process is expected to allocate ample time for parties in conflicts to engage in dialogue. Nevertheless, time might run out of hands for the groups to find themselves constrained. When cornered by time, groups are likely either to arrive at no agreement at all, an impasse, or make an ineffective decision. Group commitment, when looked at positively, means members' unquestionable dedication to the group's ideals and values attached to effective decision-making, rendering it as a cohesive unit (Rijnbout & McKimmie, 2012). On the other hand, group's commitment might translate to absolute loyalty, allegiance to senior or superior members of the group, which encourages the absence of dissent. Rijnbout and McKimmie (2012) argued that absence of dissent produces undemocratic decision outcome.

Literature on effective decision-making does not seem to be precise on procedure to be followed in the course of making a decision; the reason might be because groups differ in composition and in the manner of their settings. Composition of a group is different for instant from a team of researchers in an institution or business organization, and factions in conflict in a mediation process, they all operates on a different settings. It thus suffices to conclude that decision-making procedure is likely to be different in each group and setting. On the other hand some of the factors happen to be common in group decision making. Factors such as problem, goal, alternatives, consequences, sharing of information and communication are very recurrent in most of the literature (Hirokawa & Gouran, 2012; Orlitzky & Hirokawa, 2001). Decision is a reaction to a problem, and a problem is a recognized obstacle(s) within the system where the group is operating (Salazar, 2009). Thus a decision is expected to act as a solution to fix a problem. Identifying and understanding the problem first will help the group envision the answers the problem calls (Salazar, 2009). After identifying the problem the group needs to set a goal, which comes as a requisite for a

group in decision-making process. In the course of this process opinions and suggestions flows from every side as group members attempt to marshal a wide range of options, with the hope of producing a solution. In order to stay a course, a group is required to establish criteria by which to filter through proposed solutions, by making its interests clear (Salazar, 2009). After the goal has been set and interests clarified, the group will get down to identify alternatives. Alternatives are wider range of suggested options, which gives a group a wider scope of solutions to choose from. It is from this wider scope of solutions that the decision will be made. Members test the merit of every considered option, revisit the mechanism in place by which it arrived at such a choice. Weigh the consequences with care by comparing all possible alternatives against each other until an appropriate desired decision is reached (Salazar, 2009).

Literature suggested that availability of enough information and communication between members are the engines that drive group members towards arriving to an effective decision. Hirokawa and Gouran (2012) categorized the process into three steps - input, process and output. The input step involves accumulating and accessing as much information as possible from every possible source. Communicating through talks, discussions, reasoning and conferring will then process this information. Eventually producing an output, which is an effective decision. Hebrew believes that you can plan successful if your plans involve many advisers, but if your plans go wrong it is due to lack of proper counsel. This Hebrew adage reflects on the fact that decision making calls for digging of facts, ideas, new thinking, and the ability to communicate with others (Hirokawa & Gouran, 2012). In a decision-making process, shared information bias should be avoided. Shared information bias is a phenomenon of having information known only to one or few group members (Baker, 2010). Decision is likely to be achieved if all members in a group share information equally (Swaab, Galinsky, Medvec & Diermeier, 2011). One of the reasons a group is considered effective

compared to an individual in decision-making is because there is the presence of dissent and divergent thinking in a group, which increases the availability of new information (Rijnbout & McKimmie, 2012). The new information is then shared through lengthy discussions. When information is being shared it means that members are communicating ideas and opinions to each other (Hirokawa & Poole, 1996).

2.6 Summary and research questions

Conflict is an expressed struggle between two or more interdependent parties with incompatible values, belief, needs, desire or goals. It is fueled by miscommunication and conflicting actions, especially when each party prioritizes on his or her interests, by perceiving the other as interfering. Intercultural conflict is when worldviews (values, belief, norms) of an individual or group mismatch or are incompatible with the worldviews of another individual or group in the community. Causes of intercultural conflicts discussed in this study are social inequality, stereotypes and ingroup outgroup tension. Social inequality causes intercultural conflict when the minority and the disadvantaged members of the same community are denied an equal opportunity in the distribution of social resources, based on race, gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation etc. These social groups become victims of discrimination, stigmatization and stereotyping for reasons that are rooted in cultural assumptions and negative attributions about their tendencies and characteristics. Stereotype is a false, inaccurate and negative generalization about someone else's culture. Stereotypes can be used by a social group as a tool of confirmation for perceiving itself superior over others. It relates to social inequality based on how a dominant social group employs its position of power to dehumanize members of another social group. Although stereotypes are helpful as a shortcut to create psychological picture of another person's worldview, they cause intercultural conflicts because the element of truth in them is only partial and misleading.

An ingroup is a group in the community to which a person identifies him or herself with and an outgroup is a group a person in the community does not identify with. An ingroup has an influence on its member's behavior in a social-cultural way. Ingroup-outgroup tension tends to prevail within groups with social or cultural differences i.e. nationality, race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, religion and wealth. Especially when one, let's say a dominant group, holds derogatory social attitude or display prejudice and discrimination behavior towards the other. More often than not, members of ingroup perceive outgroup members as a threat to its culture, economy and social privileges.

Intercultural mediation at a community level is a process that is designed to operate outside the court system to assist the community in managing intercultural disputes by lessening clogging the courts with caseloads. For the reason that it is time effective, cost effective and private than solving a dispute in court. Intercultural mediation has existed in the United States since 1960s, and in pre and post-apartheid South Africa, due to interracial and interethnic conflicts, and intergroup tension that prevailed in the US and South African local communities. As a result, a number of mediation programs and centers have been established around the world to deal with intercultural conflicts at the community level. A mediator could be a volunteer who has received training, a religious leader, a political figure or a mediation response institution. His role is to facilitate the process finding a resolution to a dispute without imposing an outcome by maintaining a position of neutrality.

Mediation as a response to intercultural conflicts deals with tension between culturally different individuals or groups. Cultural Convergence and Effective Group Decision are communication theories, which were applied in this study to explain cultural elements in intercultural conflicts and mediation, and how groups of individuals make decision with regards to the process of mediation. Cultural convergence relates to how cultural elements or ideas such as democracy, religion, languages and education travel across borders and gets to

be shared by different individuals through the process of convergence. Cultural convergence occurs when people from different cultures share information and become more similar by having common interests on a cultural level. These cultural elements are factors of cultural difference in the process of mediation, of which this study is investigating. Effective group decision revolves around the process of effective decision-making by a group of individuals. It is practiced all over the world by governments, business entities and institutions, and in mediation process to resolve conflicts.

Given the fact that the world is full of so many people from different cultural backgrounds, a world without differences is unimaginable (Ting-Toomey, 1994). The role culture play, and its influence, in conflicts have attracted a lot of research interests. How cultural difference impacts on mediation has been examined from different perspectives by fields such as International Relations (IR) and Cross-Cultural Psychology (CCP). While IR examined cultural difference on the basis of interactions among states in international crisis, CCP examined how culture influence individual behavior in negotiation (Inman, Kishi, Wilkenfeld, Gelfand & Salmon, 2014). Meanwhile intercultural communication focuses on how differences in culture influence how individuals communicate in various contexts of interactions. This study focused on cultural difference between parties in dispute by examining how a mediator understands cultural similarity and dissimilarity in the process of mediation. A mediator, a neutral third party in the process of mediation, plays a role of a facilitator in resolving a conflict between parties in dispute (Adams, 2014). Literature on cultural difference suggested that mediator's ability to recognize and understand cultural difference is important in the process of mediation. It was also suggested that cultural difference has an influence in the process of mediation. It can lead to a resolution if recognized and accepted, but if ignored can hinder the process (Sgubini, 2014). Given the impact and influence of cultural difference in the process of mediation, here below are two

research questions posed to explore mediator's understanding of cultural differences in the process of mediation.

Research Questions

1. How does a mediator understand cultural similarity and dissimilarity in mediation?

And

2. How does cultural understanding influence the process of mediation?

3 METHODOLOGY

Methodology is a research terminology that stands for description and justification of the methods used in a research (Carter & Little, 2007). This section discuss the methods used in this study by elaborating the type of research, participants, and the method used to collect and analyze data. This is a qualitative research project; a qualitative method in research is one of the legitimate vehicles for researching the sphere of human life of any interest in order to discover social reality (Davies, 2007). It seeks to uncover meanings and perspectives that participants attach on particular issues and behaviours, and how they interpret certain situations (Woods, 2014). Qualitative research, as opposed to quantitative, is dictated by the nature of its data such as words, texts, photos etc. known as soft data, which is interpreted contextually (Newman, 2006). The context of this study is based on intercultural conflict and mediation literature and explained through the perspectives of communication theories. The processes of mediation in South Africa were examined as part of achieving the aim of this study. The researcher took the liberty of delving into the mediation literature and involved practitioners to participate as a way of discovering their understanding of cultural similarity and dissimilarity in the process of mediation.

3.1 Method

A method in research is the process of activities a researcher goes about in sampling, collecting and analyzing the data. A method is mechanisms, techniques and procedures of a research for gathering evidence to substantiate or refute a claim (Cater & Little, 2007), which lead to answering research question(s). A method is used in data collection and in approaching a research as a glimpse of reality or approximation of knowledge, because first, a researcher has to rationalize whether the method is appropriate to deal with the research question(s) at hand (Neuman, 2011). An open-ended questionnaire was used as a data-collecting instrument for this study. A questionnaire is a common instrument or tool used in

carrying out a survey (Davies, 2007). It can be designed in different ways depending on the aim of the research. The aim of a questionnaire is to facilitate communication with respondents by asking them a question whereby the researcher gets answers. The questionnaire for this study was designed to contain eleven open-ended questions. The questions were drafted on the basis of four key areas that are significant and directly related to the research questions, meant to serve the aim of this study. The aim was to investigate mediator's understanding of cultural similarity and dissimilarity in the process of mediation. The questionnaire was administered via Web to the respondents to avoid incurring the cost of traveling to the location of interview. The first three questions focused on the area of mediator's experience. The questions in this category assessed mediator's experience in the capacity of years spent in the practice, magnitude of groups he or she mediated and his understanding of community conflict. The next two questions that follow was an area about cultural and causal factors. Questions in this area aimed to determine the role of culture in the process of mediation, and to establish cultural factors that cause conflicts in the community. The third, a set of three questions, is a cultural similarity and dissimilarity area. The questions in this area are sequential, in the sense that they were set to find out the existence of common similarity and dissimilarity issues in conflicts, then inquired on how a mediator identify and deal with these issues in the process of mediation. The last three questions is an area that focused on challenges and influence in decision-making. These last three questions connect to the theoretical aspect of the research, which focused on the concept of cultural elements and decision-making, based on cultural factors and similarity and dissimilarity dimension. Social demographic such as gender and age, which requires participants to declare their age, and if whether they are male or female, was omitted. Age and gender was not included because the researcher did not consider it as relevant in this research. That's why age and gender is missing in the description of participants in Figure 1 on page 33.

3.2 Location and respondents

Respondents who participated in this study were qualified mediators from South Africa. Data for this research were collected in South Africa from Conflict Dynamics database of mediators.

Conflict Dynamics is a mediation training center based in Johannesburg, South Africa. It was established in 1996 with a mission to train and equip people from South Africa and beyond with necessary skills to manage conflict and settle disputes. The organization, which is a Small and Medium Micro Enterprise (SMME) in nature, considers itself a contributor to the empowerment of the disadvantaged people in the society. Both in what comprise a team of its trainers and the people it trains. Conflict Dynamics offers training on mediation skills, conflict management skills, discipline management skills and labor law, arbitration skills, negotiation skills, facilitation skills and alternative dispute resolution. Conflict Dynamics conducts training outside South Africa as well. Its training has been extended to countries such as the United Kingdom, Botswana, Namibia, Zimbabwe and Lesotho. The organization aims to address the need for conflict management and dispute resolution in the society, by providing world-class conflict management and dispute resolution training. Conflict Dynamics clients are local and international individuals from across various sectors ranging from global corporates to local communities. Conflict Dynamic received CEDR ADR Trainer's award in 2012 in the UK for Commercial Mediators skills training course. The organization works in association with Africa Center for Dispute Settlement (ACDS) at the University of Stellenbosch's Business school, South Africa Dispute Settlement Accreditation Council, International Mediation Institute and Center for Dispute Effective Resolution. Conflict Dynamics keep and maintain a rich database of all the mediators the center has trained, which contains a list of more than a hundred mediators

The researcher's first contact with participants started with the African Center for Dispute Settlement, a research center for alternative forms of dispute resolution at the University of Stellenbosch Business School, of which Conflict Dynamics works in association with. The administrator of Africa Center for Dispute Settlement recommended the researcher to Conflict Dynamics. Conflict Dynamics welcomed the research request and forwarded the link of the questionnaire to its database of trained mediators. The list in the database is a mixture of all practitioners of alternative dispute resolution in commercial, family, labor and community matters. Profile of some of the mediators indicated that they were involved in more than one mediation practice area. As shown by the example below:

"MEDIATION PRACTICE AREAS: Workplace Conflict; Family; Commercial-general; Elderly matters; Peer Mediation (ADR in Scholarly Environments); Community; Social; Consumer Supplier disputes; Healthcare"

It was hoped that all the mediators in the database received the questionnaire although it was their choice whether to respond or not. The researcher stayed in touch constantly with his contact at the Conflict Dynamics, to follow up on their effort to assist in getting mediators to participate in the research. It was not in the capacity of Conflict Dynamics nor the researcher to control how quick and which mediator in what area of practice should participate. Only nine respondents participated in a period of three months, the researcher then decided to work on the available data to complete the study, given the fact that there were no participants responding any more. All participants who responded have experience in mediation ranging from 3 to 27 years of practice. They have mediated conflicts of a minimum size of two to a maximum size of a hundred people. Seven of the participants have experience in community mediation, and the rest, one is involved in commercial mediation and the other one in family mediation.

FIGURE 1: A detailed cross section of participants

	Experience	Size	Area of Practice
P1	18 years	2 – 200 people/2 – 8 parties	Community Mediation
P2	14 years	2 – 50 workers	Community Mediation
P3	3 years	2 – 8 people	Commercial
P4	27 years	2 – 100 people	Community Mediation
P5	10 years	2 – 6 people	Family/Divorce
P6	9 years	2 – 40 people	Community Mediation
P7	15 years	2 parties – 47 people	Community Mediation
P8	25 years	Individuals to many people	Community Mediation
P9	3 years	10 - 100	Community Mediation

3.3 Data analysis

Thematic method of analysis is a widely used approach in qualitative research for analyzing data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Braun and Clarke (2006) argued that thematic analysis method provide core skills that are useful for conducting many other forms of qualitative analysis. Braun and Clarke (2006) therefore suggested that it should be the first analysis method researchers should learn, because a lot of analyses in research are essentially thematic but are either claimed as something else. Braun and Clarke (2006) argument was, thematic method can be used as a tool across different other methods, and one of the advantages he cited was its flexibility. They argued that flexibility lies in the researcher's judgment in determining what a theme is, essentially in terms of whether a pattern (theme) captures something significant in relation to the research questions. Thematic analysis is an instrument in research that is used for identifying, analyzing and reporting patterns – known as themes – within collected data. The aim of using thematic analysis method as a tool is to identify

patterns of meaning across a dataset that will provide an answer to the problems being addressed (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006). Also, it is suitable for questions related to people's experiences, views and perceptions. With that regard the researcher found thematic analysis method as an appropriate data-analyzing tool for this research. One because of its flexible advantage of data being coded based on the theoretical approach of the research. That is to say, if this research interest is about conflict and cultural difference in terms of similarity and dissimilarity in the process of mediation. Data will be coded based on the area of interest of the research. Second the issue of conflicts and cultural difference, which this research is about, can be identified under different thematic patterns, as we will see in the analysis below.

Collecting the data took more than three months. Participants took their time to respond to the questionnaire and submitted their responses at their own convenience. It is worth noting that responses were submitted in written form via web so there was no need to rewrite them, as is always the case with recorded interviews. The responses amounted to thirteen pages of data. The shortest was one page from participant 3 and 5 who are not dealing with community conflicts, so most of the questions were not relevant to their area of practice. Participant 3 deals with commercial mediation but had concrete input on the issue of cultural elements, which were included in the data analysis. Participant 5 deal with family and divorce mediation therefore his or her input was not relevant to this study. A response from participant 4 was a little bit more than one page and the rest had at least 2 pages of answers per participant. More than three quarters of the data was transcribed during the analysis and used in the presentation of the results.

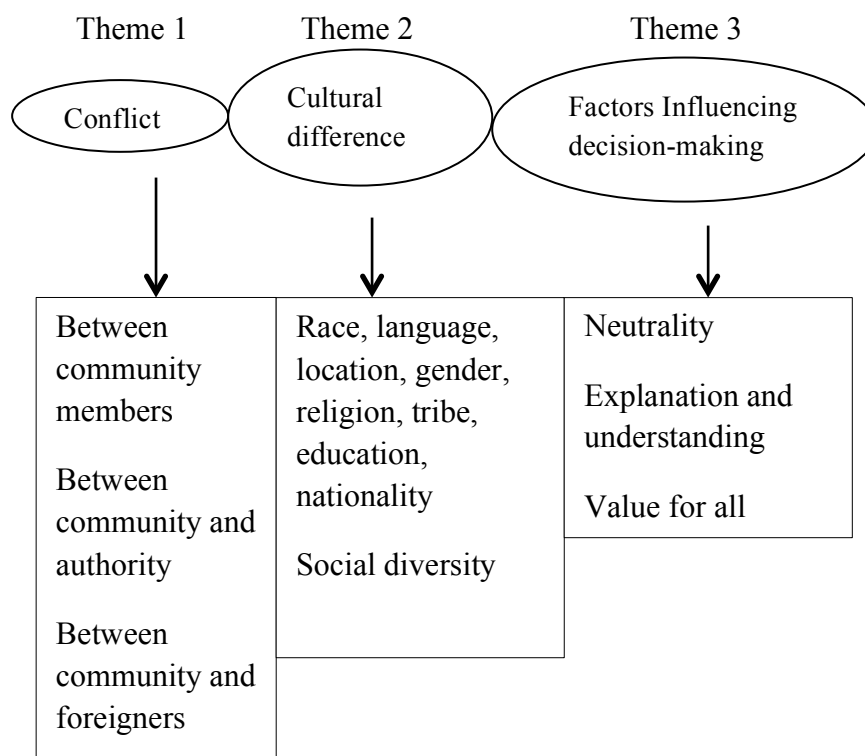
Data analysis was carried out according to the six steps of thematic analysis, namely familiarizing with the data, coding the data, searching for themes, reviewing the themes, defining and naming themes and producing the report (Braun & Clarke, 2006). They were

transcribed only for the purpose of being coded to identify patterns, which would develop into themes. Whenever there was a new response submitted, the researcher took time to review its content and develop an understanding of it in relation to the research, and brainstorm on the initial coding process. The same exercise was repeated to other responses until all the data were properly reviewed as they amassed to nine responses (respondents) in total. Data were then coded according to how the questionnaire was structured, which is directly related to the research questions and the research interest in general. All the responses were organized into eleven different groups and coded accordingly. They were then reviewed carefully for possible development of similar patterns. Patterns from the grouped data that appeared to be similar in content were organized together, reviewed and developed into themes.

4 RESULTS

When the coded groups of data were analyzed, they were arranged into three thematic patterns. These three patterns were then refined into three themes according to the contents of the entire data. The themes are conflict, cultural difference and factors influencing decision-making. The figure below is a thematic presentation of the themes and underlying subthemes.

Figure 2: Themes



The theme conflict revolves around disputes in the community and the parties involved in it in South African communities. This theme frames and shapes our knowledge on how mediators perceive and understand community conflicts, and contribute in answering the two research questions. Cultural difference hinges on mediators' perception of cultural similarity and dissimilarity in the community and during the process of mediation, and answers research question one. Research question two is answered by the last theme, factors influencing decision-making, which is about factors that play a role in decision-making in the process of mediation. Cultural difference, in terms of similarity and dissimilarity is a dominant factor in

both second and the third theme. Below is a presentation of the themes mentioned above in relation to the research questions and the interest of the research in general.

4.1 Conflict

Participants in this study, all of them practitioners of mediation, described conflict with regards to their perception of community conflicts. There were three dimensions to community conflict in South Africa according to the responses. These are conflicts between community members, conflicts between community and the authority, and conflict between community and foreigners. Participant 6 defined community conflict as a conflict between community members, and between community members and other parties such as government and foreign external groups.

Community conflict according to my experience involves conflict between community members or conflict, which exists between community members and other parties such as the municipality, government or foreign external groups.

Community conflicts are social frictions that exist between individuals who interact socially in a normal social setting in the community. Participant 8 perceived conflict as dispute between individuals or neighbors, which arises over trivial matters such as noise, parking and boundaries. Conflict occurs when community members happen to disagree with each other over personal matters, which affect their social life. Participant 1 described conflicts as likely to occur between interests groups such as youth gangs, business owners et cetera based on incompatible goals and interests. Conflicts between community and the authority are about friction concerning unsatisfied expectations of the community on one hand, and unfulfilled promises by the government/authority on the other as described below by participant 1.

Any issue that brings the community to a standstill, whether be it on government not delivering services, clash of youth in gangs, or xenophobic issues. If it brings misunderstanding and has potential to cause commotion in the community, it is a community conflict.

Opinions of participant 7 and participant 3 suggests that if the government fails in its civil duties, misunderstanding are likely to occur, causing conflicts between the two parties, community and the government.

Participant 1 described issues such as xenophobic as one of the factors that can bring the community to a standstill. Below is how participant 1 attributed xenophobia to South Africans' lack of exposure towards the rest of Africa and described South Africa as very European. A factor perceived to be the cause of friction between South Africans and nationals of other African countries.

Although cultural issues come up, they are not necessarily the cause for conflicts. South African and foreigners are often at loggerheads due to the fact that South Africans have not been exposed to the rest of Africa and their culture seems to be very European and often clashes with other Africans.

Even though South Africa has been under apartheid regime for centuries, there is no evidence in the data by any other participants than participant 1 who support this opinion that South Africa is very European. Evidence outside the data is likely to agree on the fact that South Africa is very European because of its modern infrastructures and centuries of Western influence. As opposed to participant 1, participant 8's opinion attributed community conflict to cultural difference, stereotyping and misunderstanding.

Community conflict is often aggravated by perceptions informed by cultural differences, stereotyping and misunderstanding.

Participant 7 described it as a phenomenon that usually starts with group dynamics and develops into a few wanting all the power.

It usually starts with group dynamics and develops into a few wanting all the power/status and revenue for themselves. This causes untold hostility and ultimately ends in full-blown conflict, which is often accompanied by violence.

Resources are perceived to be causal factors of conflicts in the community (Putman, 2009).

Participant 6 described resources as basic services such as water, electricity housing and other

basic needs that are vital to the community's day-to-day life. When supply of basic resources such as water and electricity is poor or lacking all together in the community, it could be a cause of conflict. Participant 6's opinion is that jobs and business become a resource in scarcity due to competition from foreign nationals. Resources causes conflicts indirectly in terms of what participant 7 described as perceived lack of accountability, corruption and greed.

Greed, corruption, Status and power, lack of capacity, training and support from the government, and lack of monitoring and evaluation/accountability. Corruption within the government, which makes people angry because it affects the distribution of resources.

Conflict as a theme defines the nature of disputes within South African communities based on participants' perception of community conflict. Also it captures mediators' understanding on how they perceive the concept of community conflict in South Africa. Community conflict has been described in three dimensions. First, conflict between individuals in a social interaction or between groups with conflicting interests within the same community. Second, conflict between community and the government. And third, conflict between local community and foreigners. This theme contribute to the second and third theme in answering the two research questions

4.2 Cultural difference

Theme 1 above, conflict, captured mediators' understanding on how they perceive community conflict. Theme two, cultural difference relates to and answers research question 1, which is "How does a mediator understand cultural similarity and dissimilarity in mediation?" Cultural difference as a theme portrays the perceived role of culture in the community and in the process of mediation. Difference in culture exists in South Africa because South Africa is a mixed race society. Cultural difference is an important factor in the process of mediation, and mediators' perception in trying to understand and identify cultural deference help on how

they resolve disputes. Members identify or are identified in terms of race, gender, religion, tribe, location, and education level. Cultural difference plays a big role in the process of mediation as well as in the community in South Africa. South Africa had a rough past of interracial conflicts, as how participant 8 described it.

In South Africa in the 1980s and 1990s groups formed in opposition to apartheid. Sometimes there were cultural dimensions to the groups such as tribe, language, and almost always race.

Participant 3 described culture as a factor that needs consideration when dealing with different racial groups in the process of mediation, an opinion, which was echoed almost in a similar manner by participant 8.

Disputing parties tend to more easily draw negative inferences about each other where there are cultural differences.

Participant 1 was in agreement with the idea of the major role culture plays. Participant 1 perceives culture as a bridge between mediator and the parties in mediation and suggested that it is important to observe cultural practices otherwise it might put the process at risk of breaking down.

Culture is everything in mediation. Observance of cultural practices builds bridges between mediator and parties in conflict. Failure to observe culture might jeopardize a mediation process.

Participant 6 described culture as important, and can influence resolution of a dispute if it is understood. She described it from gender perspective; her perception was that understanding culture is a sign of respect to the parties in dispute.

Culture is very important and understanding the culture can be a great tool to influence the resolution of the dispute. As a woman in the field it is important to observe cultural issues because in many cases they are sign of respect for the parties in dispute. Disregarding the culture may result in distrust by the parties.

Not all the participants agree on this though. Participant 5 disagreed with the fact that culture plays a role in the community. Instead he/she perceived education as a factor that plays a big role in the community. Participant 4 had the opinion that culture do not affect or influence the

resolution in dispute, it is how a mediator adhere to basic principles of mediation, that's what matters

I do not think culture plays a big role if the mediator follows the basic principles of mediation.

Participant 6 stated that every conflict contain elements of cultural difference, therefore it is rare to mediate a dispute where there is no cultural difference in South Africa because South Africa is a diverse society. South Africa is comprised of indigenous Africans who had been there before colonialism, Indians, Dutch Afrikaners, Brits and a mixture of many other foreign nationals. Making South Africa a very diverse society (Davidson, 2001).

Many of the conflict have elements of cultural difference. South Africa is a very diverse society and it is rare to mediate disputes where there is no cultural difference. In all disputes it's important to be sensitive to the particular issues presented in that dispute.

The difference in culture is perceived to manifest itself along social and cultural demographics, as in the manner a cultural similar group tend to do things opposed to their dissimilar other. Issues such as race, gender, tribe, nationality, education and location are the factors attributed to cultural similarity and dissimilarity. Participant 1 described greetings as one of the examples where cultures may differ. Some cultures appreciate shaking hands while others greet by hugging. In other cultures senior members are always given priority to speak first and lead discussion regardless of the presence of well-educated young professionals. Participant 1 explained that mediators do spend time in understanding background of the parties in conflict to figure out similarity and dissimilarity between parties.

During the analysis of the conflict, a mediator spends time in understanding the background of the parties. Often, there is similarity because it is people who come from the same area except where there are conflicts that involve for instance, foreigners and locals, and cultures are often very different.

Participant 6 perceived race and language as the major identifying factors of cultural difference in the process of mediation.

In South Africa race and language are a big identifying factor of cultural differences. In some instances location is also a factor of identifying a

culture. There are instances where people of the same language group come from different parts of the country. This has a big impact on the influences and culture, which they practice.

Cultural difference answers research question one, which is how does a mediator understand cultural similarity and dissimilarity in the process of mediation? Cultural difference portrays the perceived role of culture in the community and in the process of mediation. Difference in culture exists in South Africa because South Africa is a mixed race society. Cultural difference is an important factor in the process of mediation, and mediators' perception in trying to understand and identify cultural difference help on how they resolve disputes.

4.3 Factors influencing decision-making

Factors influencing decision-making and the theme before, cultural differences, are interrelated. The previous theme, cultural difference, introduced the perception of cultural difference and its role in the community and in the process of mediation, and answered the first research question. Factors influencing decision-making as a theme describes how cultural difference influence decision-making process in mediation, and answers research question two, which is "How does cultural understanding influence the process of mediation?"

Participant 3 described cultural difference as a matter that needs to be dealt with extreme caution as it can often divert attention from the real issues, and this is where patience, understanding and gentleness are essential. Participant 7 shared the same opinion by suggesting that a mediator need to listen and allow parties to ventilate, while participant 8 suggested on approaching the issue from a dialogue perspective

I ask people to be specific, give examples, talk about their own needs and expectations, and listen actively to the other party to understand their needs and expectations.

Participant 7 was of the opinion that difference in culture is identifiable during the early stages of mediation and suggested on how it should be dealt with in order to proceed with the process of mediation towards finding resolution

This aspect cultural difference usually surfaces within the first few sessions, and I usually focus on the common factors at hand, encouraging compromise and individual participation as we progress.

Participant 3 described the decision-making as a complicated process due to cultural difference. Difference in culture by the parties can lead into breakdown of the mediation process.

There is little doubt that cultural differences play an important role in mediation matters. Dissimilarity complicates the process and requires careful treatment that can take time. I have not as yet experienced an actual breakdown because of cultural differences but have been involved in matters where it has nearly happened.

Perception on the issue of cultural difference suggests that a mediator needs to identify the difference in culture between the parties in the course of resolving a conflict. Different mediators approach this issue from different angles. Some make observation and look at the background information and context of the conflict. Participant 2 deals with the parties in conflict first by checking the context of the conflict before mediating, observing the parties separately, and asking relevant questions. Participant 4 preferred separating the parties into confidential side sessions and asking open questions about underlying causes and aggravators of the conflict and listening carefully. Participant 6 felt that identifying cultural difference was very important because it helps mediator and the parties to be sensitive to the issue of culture in the process of mediation. Once cultural difference has been identified, participant 4 thinks it is important to help parties understand the problem from each other's point of view.

I identify it if I think it is relevant to the resolution of the conflict, and then I try to help the parties understand the problem from each other's perspective. I try to demonstrate neutrality and understanding myself and avoid judgment and evaluation.

Dealing with cultural difference in the process of mediation is a challenge to a mediator. Participant 1 described the challenge as a result of individuals perceiving their own culture as superior than the others, thus a mediator is faced with the task of making the parties value each other's cultures. In the process of balancing the cultural difference, a mediator is also burdened by the task of making sure that the process stays a course by focusing on actual issues of the dispute.

I ensure that the focus remains on the actual issues and the resolution thereof. Getting cultural issues out of the way as soon as possible is important so that the focus can again be placed on the issues that require resolution. Sometimes an apology or face-to-face explanations are required and sometimes breakaway sessions are needed, it really depends on the circumstances.

Making parties value each other's cultures, and steering the parties towards resolution requires good communication skills. Participant 4 described communication as a challenge in terms of building a rapport with the parties, communicating across different cultures and keeping the parties in conflict together. Participant 8 who pointed out that mediators deal more with the process but not the outcome shared the same opinion.

Mediators make decisions about process, not outcome. So I think some of the challenges a mediator might face relate to the influence culture might have on process, such as working with people in mixed groups or culturally specific groups. From a relationship point of view, mediators would need to manage their own prejudices and cultural stereotypes, and be able to manage highly charged emotional exchanges.

Participant 6 stated that parties that share similar culture easily identify each other, which makes it easy for a mediator to facilitate a settlement.

Similar culture helps the parties to easily identify with each other. This may make it easier to understand where they are coming from and therefore facilitate a settlement. However cultural similarities can also create unrealistic expectations between parties to identify and understand the other side's point of view when in fact they don't identify or understand each other.

Cultural similarity in the aspect of values and rituals by parties in conflict are factors attributable to reaching resolution in conflict, due to what participant 7 described as similar rituals and values help in narrowing the issues and uncovering underlying interests and needs.

Nevertheless, decision-making between and within parties lies in the democratic nature of individual cultural group. As in how views are expressed and respected by other members like described by participant 4.

The difference lies largely in how democratic the culture of each group is and to what extent individual views are allowed to be aired and respected. The less democratic the more difficult it is to deal with the real causes of the conflict and the less creative the solution search is.

Participant 8 explained that in some settings voting and the use of power are readily resorted to, while in others time is spent on building consensus before any resort to power. In some cultures seniority is very much revered, thus views of the older members weighs more than the young ones as described by participant 1 below.

In concluding mediation recently, a senior man who is respected by both sides was given the responsibility of thanking the mediators and he also took the pleasure of giving the agreement a name, and this was highly accepted by both sides because both see an elderly as one to be respected.

On the other hand, participant 7 described cultural difference as not a reason for failed mediation but individual difference is.

In my experience cultural differences are more often not the reason for failed mediations but more often about individual differences and the associated factors.

Factors influencing decision-making highlights factors that influence decision making in the process of mediation, and answers the second research question.

5 DISCUSSION

Conflict in South African communities is perceived as a social friction that exists between individuals who interact socially in a normal social setting in the community. It occurs when community members happen to disagree with each other over personal matters, which affect their social life. Conflict can also occur when interests or goals of differing groups in the community are incompatible, or when there is friction between the community and the authority. One of the participants suggested that conflict in the community is aggravated by cultural difference. Similarity and dissimilarity in culture happens, according to Putman (2009), through miscommunication, contrary beliefs or ideas, and even when there is competition for limited resources between two individuals from different cultural origins. Poor delivery and competition for basic needs and resources that are vital to the community's day to day life, such as water, electricity and housing, as indicated in the results, is perceived to be a cause of conflict between community and the authority, and between locals and foreigners. Conflict between local community and foreigners can be explained in terms of ingroup-outgroup tension. One of the reasons for ingroup outgroup tension is that one, an ingroup, perceives the other, an outgroup, as a threat (Gudykunst, 2003) to its culture and social or economic resources. One of the participants suggested that South Africans and foreigners are often at loggerheads due to the fact that South Africans have not been exposed to the rest of Africa, and their culture seems to be very European and often clashes with other Africans.

Culture is a system of knowledge, meanings and symbolic actions shared by the majority of people in a society (Ting-Toomey, 1994). Difference in culture exists in South Africa given the nature of cultural backgrounds of its population (Davidson, 2001). Cultural difference plays a big role in intercultural conflicts as well as in the process of mediation. Almost all the participants addressed and acknowledged the presence of cultural difference in

mediation. One of the participants even pointed out in the results that every conflict contains elements of cultural difference. It was also stated that it is rare to mediate a dispute where there is no cultural difference, from the perspective that individuals who are involved in a conflict come from different cultural backgrounds, and borrow bits and pieces from several cultural sources (Adams, 2014). As a result parties in dispute tend to draw negative inferences about each other where there are cultural differences.

Historically, South Africa has endured social and cultural difficulties in the past. Racial and ethnic segregation and social inequality in the community escalated interpersonal and intergroup tension (Warfield, 2009). The transition period when South Africa was preparing for a democratic society, witnessed rising of violence in the community (Bremner, 2001). Post-apartheid South Africa was characterized by democratic government facilitating and enabling formation of mediation agencies to deescalate conflicts in the community (Bremner, 2001). Conflicts are still prevalent in South African communities due to racial/ethnic and intergroup tensions, as Warfield (2009) stated, division of ethnic nature exist in every society, even if only subtly. South Africa has a long history of resolving conflicts through the process of mediation and other alternative dispute resolution methods. Even transition from apartheid to democracy was facilitated through mediation and negotiation. Mediation existed in traditional South Africa but the modern practices are an adaptation models borrowed from Western cultures such as England and Australia. Participants in this study were experienced mediators who deal with cultural difference every time they facilitated resolving a conflict through mediation. A mediator identify similarity and dissimilarity in culture in the course of mediation through observing existing cultural demographics such as values, race, gender, religion, tribe and education of an individual or a group that is involved in a conflict. These cultural elements are the key indicators used by a mediator to identify existing cultural difference between individuals when resolving a

conflict. The cultural elements mentioned above - religion, education, languages, and in addition democracy - are cultural ideas that travel across the globe and get to be shared by different individuals (Reissinger & Crotts, 2009; Clarke 2004). Advance technology in communication and immigration has made it possible for cultural similarities in religion, politics (democracy), education and global languages the likes of English and French to exist.

Cultural difference exists not only between two different groups but within the same group as well. Parties in mediation get into communication conflict because the cultural constructs differ from one culture to the other, thus things are seen and perceived differently (Bailey, 1991). People are similar or different based on the language they speak, religion they practice, values and beliefs, education level and race they identify with. Therefore a mediator must take cultural difference between and within parties into consideration (Sgubini, 2014). Sgubini (2014) argued that since disputes are settled based not on legal premises, but on communication, it is important to break down communicative and cultural barrier. A mediator understands cultural similarity and dissimilarity in mediation by studying background of the parties he or she is about to mediate. Observe cultural patterns and be sensitive to every cultural issue presented in dispute. It was argued in the results that understanding cultural practices is a sign of respect to the disputant and a great tool to influence the resolution of a dispute. Also the aim in understanding cultural difference is to build a communication bridge between a mediator and the parties in conflict. Furthermore cultural difference needs to be identified, and if relevant to the conflict, then a mediator help parties to understand it from each other's perspective. Borisoff and Victor (1998) argued that identifying similarity and dissimilarity and then determining which ones are to be acknowledged might help to explain why the parties are in conflict or what hinders the resolution. Cultural issues in mediation can only be side stepped if a mediator is sure that it has little or no impact on the outcome (Adam, 2014). Not all the participants perceived

cultural difference as an important factor in mediation. Some argued that culture has been used so much to mask the real problem. They suggested that people have more in common than they think and if a mediator focuses on human needs and values, resolving a conflict might not be a complicated process. This side of argument thus suggested on encouraging parties to focus on individual behavior they find problematic rather than labeling people based on culture. A mediator employs skills such as understanding, careful listening, patience, gentleness and avoiding judgment in dealing and addressing cultural difference in mediation. According to the data a mediator finds parties that are similar to be easier to facilitate a settlement than parties that are different. The argument is that presence of dissimilarity in mediation complicates the process and requires careful treatment and time. A group that is comprised of members that are culturally different is likely to generate conflict among itself for being unable to hold itself together, making facilitating a resolution almost impossible (Gibson & Saxton, 2005; Hirokawa & Poole, 1996).

Mindset and approach to conflict differ from culture to culture. Some culture employ a democratic approach to decision making, by valuing and respecting views expressed by members. Others spend a lot of time in reaching a consensus, while others revere seniority therefore allow older members to have the final say. According to the data it is complicated to resolve a conflict in which different decision making styles exists. In such a situation it is a mediator's role to understand and respect the communication styles of the parties involved in mediation (Sgubini, 2014). Mediator's ability to communicate and his level of understanding cultural difference are significant for parties to reach an agreement. A mediator should have intercultural skills to enable him communicate across cultures and build a rapport with the parties, deal with prejudice and keep the parties together. A mediator's position as a neutral party in mediation translates to the ability to manage his or her own prejudice and cultural stereotypes, and handle highly charged emotional exchanges that transpire between parties.

6 PROCESS EVALUATION OF THE STUDY

This research attempted to investigate mediator's understanding of cultural similarity and dissimilarity in the process of mediation. In order to understand conflicts, mediation and the role of a mediator in the process of mediation, this study delved into conflict and mediation literature, focusing on intercultural conflicts at a community level. Cultural Convergence and Effective Group Decision are communication theories, which were applied in this study to explain cultural elements in mediation, and how groups of individuals make decision with regards to the process of mediation.

The data for this study were collected from South Africa. Nine mediators participated in this research and all of them were qualified and experienced practitioners, with a minimum of three and maximum of twenty-seven years of experience. Two of the nine mediators practice mediation of a different context than community mediation. One is a divorce mediator and the other a commercial mediator. The commercial mediator had substantial input on the issue of cultural difference which was included as part of the data.

All the participants received training at Conflict Dynamics, an organization that offers training to a lot of mediators from South Africa and beyond. Trainers and training participants at Conflict Dynamics come from different backgrounds, mostly from previously disadvantaged groups in the society. Conflict Dynamic maintains a very rich database of all the mediators the center has trained, and it is in this database a questionnaire was sent requesting participation. The research used web-based questionnaire as an instrument for collecting data. The web-based questionnaire was used as a tool to reach respondents located far from the researcher to avoid travelling to South Africa. Even though the researcher had access to the database of the list of mediators, he could not contact respondents directly, which delayed the exercise of data collection, because making follow up was impossible. The questionnaire had eleven open-ended questions, which was divided into four segments of

questions: mediator's experience, cultural and causal factors, cultural similarity and dissimilarity, and challenges and influence in decision-making. It took three months, May to August, for nine participants to respond. Given the time frame within which this study was supposed to be completed, and the fact that participation stopped after three months, the researcher decided to work on the available data to complete the task. The data amounted to thirteen pages altogether. The minimum per participant was one page and the maximum was two pages. Question one and three in the questionnaire were short answer questions, by which participants were required to state their experiences in years and the number of people in the groups they have mediated. The rest of the questions required participants to share their experiences and perceptions by explaining and elaborating. Despite that the data after analysis answered the research questions, the study could have done better in explaining a mediator understanding of cultural difference if there were more participants than nine. Gender and participants' educational background were not part of the questionnaire, the researcher feels that this could have added value to the data. It could have helped for instance to determine if there is any difference between male and female mediator on how they understand cultural difference. Also, intercultural mediation happens outside of the legal system, some of the mediators come from the legal background and others were not, they are volunteers from the community. Background information could have been used to determine if there is any difference in understanding cultural difference between a mediator with a legal background and the one without.

One of the contacts in South Africa the researcher had a chance to speak to on the issue of participating in the research described the exercise as not beneficial to South African mediators, especially those dealing with community conflicts. His argument was that there are a lot of researches being conducted in South Africa involving mediators as respondents,

but they don't see how the knowledge benefits their profession. He stated that it is the researchers who are on the receiving end while mediators get nothing.

7 IMPLICATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

The aim of this study was to investigate a mediator's understanding of cultural similarity and dissimilarity, and how cultural understanding influences the process of mediation. Cultural similarity and dissimilarity has been used interchangeably with cultural difference, which has been approached less from an intercultural perspective in relation to mediation. Hence this thesis contributes to the literature on cultural difference from an intercultural standpoint, especially in South Africa. It offers insights on how mediation is one of the most preferred styles of resolving conflicts, and sheds light on how it developed and became active in South Africa compared to the rest of Africa. Some literature on intercultural conflicts in South Africa focused on how ignorance of others culture and wrong use of nonverbal signals can be misinterpreted and generate conflict (Ntuli, 2012). On the other hand there is probably less or non that the author of this thesis came across, which focused on a mediator cultural understanding, despite an inevitable presence of cultural difference in intercultural conflicts.

Almost all the participants in this study addressed the issue of culture in mediation, and explained their approach in understanding it. According to the results, cultural difference is not a factor that a mediator anticipates. It surfaces in the early sessions, or even before the process' onset, and because it is an obstacle in facilitating a resolution, a mediator uses his or her skills and experience to deal with it. He or she is therefore compelled to familiarize him or herself with cultural differences surfacing in every conflict, by analyzing and background checking. It could be by separating the parties into confidential side sessions and asking open questions about underlying causes and aggravators of the conflict. The results pointed out that factors such as race/ethnicity, language, age and education of the individuals in a group in conflict are indicators used by a mediator to identify cultural similarity and dissimilarity. These cultural elements are factors that inform a mediator about a group's background, its composition, location and possibly education level. A group that is composed of educated

members might look down upon the uneducated and expect their opinion to be heeded despite presence of the elders. One racial or ethnic group might despise another or perceive the other as a threat and extend prejudice and stereotypes, based on the perception that one's own race/ethnic is superior to the other. Where there is age difference, seniority in some cultures is where the power of decision making reside.

Dealing with cultural difference in the process of mediation is a challenge to a mediator, thus he is faced with the task of making the parties value each other's cultures. Results indicate that similarity in culture tends to draw party members together, enabling cooperation in narrowing the issues and uncovering underlying interests and needs, which makes facilitating for a resolution easy. When facilitating for a resolution, a mediator's role is to maintain neutral position by listening and restraining from judgment, and keeping the process a course. Understanding cultural difference put a mediator in a position of recognizing and accepting the difference, which is a sign of respect appreciated by parties involved in conflict. His cultural understanding is an important factor on his part by which he will work towards preventing mediation breakdown.

South Africa has experienced conflicts of all sorts in all sphere of life in its wider society. As we have seen cultural difference in conflicts is unavoidable, but as to how mediators in South Africa are prepared and trained to deal with cultural difference in mediation is not clear. This thesis did not come across any literature that focused on how a mediation practitioner is prepared to understand cultural difference. This could be due to the fact that all the participants for this study were trained at the same place. Conflict Dynamics offers mediation training for various conflict contexts, but it is not indicated anywhere that trainees are also equipped with skills on how to deal with cultural difference in mediation. Given the limited number of participants in this study, more research focusing on understanding cultural difference in the process of mediation is recommended. Social

demographics such as gender and age were not included in the data, a limitation that could have shed light on how sex and age could have an impact on how cultural difference is understood in mediation. Gender, for instance, could have been an indicator on whether male and female mediators face the same level of challenges in mediation.

Understanding cultural similarity and dissimilarity in mediation was approached from a mediator's perspective. Mediators' perceptions in understanding cultural difference have been covered to some level in this thesis. There is none or very little review, with regards to similarity and dissimilarity in culture, on groups or parties in conflict. Therefore approaching it from the perspective of the parties in conflict is an open angle as well for future research, because parties bring different cultural styles of conflicts to the mediation table.

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APPENDIX

Questionnaire

This is an open-ended questions questionnaire, designed to gather information about a mediation process from mediators' perspectives. Your participation, as a mediation practitioner, will help to determine how a mediator understands cultural similarity and dissimilarity in the process of mediation.

This questionnaire contains eleven open-ended questions that should take approximately 20 minutes to answer. The questions require no personal information of any nature. All responses are anonymous, and the results of this study will not show how you as a respondent answered the questions.

If you have any questions or are interested in the outcomes of this study, please contact me at george.m.lauwo@student.jyu.fi. If you have additional questions you may contact my thesis supervisor: Professor Stephen M. Croucher (stephen.m.croucher@jyu.fi).

Thank you in advance for participating in this study.

1. For how long have you been involved in mediation practices?
2. How do you define Community Conflict based on your experience in mediation?
3. What are the minimum and maximum group sizes you have ever mediated?
4. What are the common causes of conflicts within your community?
5. What role does culture play in the mediation process?
6. What kinds of issues regarding similarity or dissimilarity in culture are common in such conflicts?

7. As a mediator, how do you identify culture similarity or dissimilarity within and between groups you are mediating?
8. How do you deal with culture similarity/dissimilarity in a mediation process?
9. What are the cultural factors responsible for formation of groups that are in conflicts in most of your cases?
10. What are the decision making challenges faced so far when mediating between groups that are similar or dissimilar in culture?
11. How does similarity or dissimilarity in culture influence the process of group's decision making in mediation?