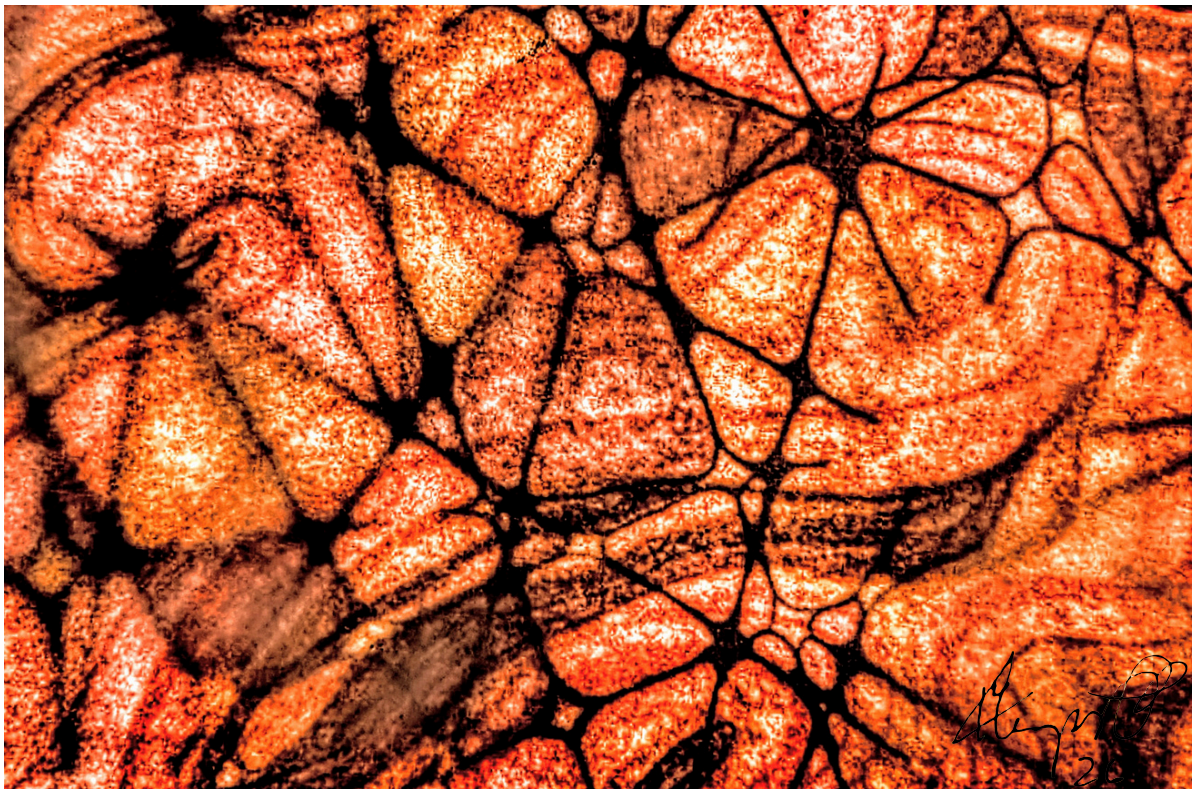
Producing knowledge through encounters

An examination of how Interactions shape Knowledge in a Migrant Mental Health Intervention



Master's Thesis 2026

cand. Soc. in international relations and development - global refugee studies

Aalborg University

author: Clara Estela Hammond Blay Kelm

Supervisor: Marlene Spanger

Character count: 157.557

Abstract

This thesis examines how knowledge shapes encounters within an evidence-based intervention on migrant mental health, and how such encounters contribute to the production of various forms of knowledge. Drawing on qualitative data from participant observations, ethnographic interviews, and fieldwork collected in Denmark, the analysis explores how participants and facilitators are positioned and position themselves within interactions. Furthermore, it explores how emotions contribute to the circulation and accumulation of affect and how it shapes participation and meaning-making.

The empirical data is collected through a mental health course, where participants engaged with audio-guided content, practical skill development, and facilitated discussions. Theoretically, the paper draws on Dorthe Staunæs (2003), Sara Ahmed (2004; 2014), Lise Galal and Kirsten Hvenegård-Lassen (2020; 2024), and Donna Haraway (1988), each of whom offer unique contributions in examining how hierarchies emerge through encounters, as well as how intersecting dimensions of education, culture, gender, and language shape various dimensions of participant engagement with the course material.

The analysis demonstrates that encounters within the course are influenced by implicit norms regarding appropriate participation, such as how to be a compliant participant. This illustrates how encounters are not neutral exchanges, but sites where power, visibility, and recognition are continuously negotiated. Moreover, it reveals how knowledge production is shaped by relational and positional dynamics, where certain perspectives are prioritised over others. Additionally, the analysis explores the role emotions play and how they move between individuals by analysing moments of tension that arise in the course. This highlights that cultural encounters produce knowledge that is relational, which circulates through expressions, reactions, and atmospheres.

The thesis argues that cultural encounters are affective sites where knowledge is produced through friction, subject positioning, and emotional exchanges. This reveals that encounters do not merely facilitate the sharing of knowledge but actively contribute to its production. These dynamics are rarely the focus of evidence-based interventions; however, this thesis demonstrates the importance of considering the ways in which participants' mental health is not only shaped by the curriculum of the intervention but also by the social and emotional encounters that take place during it.

Keywords: knowledge production, subject positioning, cultural encounters, group-based interventions, power relations, emotions,

Table of Contents

ABSTRACT **1**

INTRODUCTION **3**

STATE OF THE ART **6**

Constructing the Client: Institutional Practices, Narratives, & Power 6
The Politics of Knowledge Production 9

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK **12**

Cultural Encounters 12
Intersectionality 14
Intersectionality & Subjectification *15*
The Cultural Politics of Emotion 16
Situated Knowledges 18

METHODOLOGY **20**

Ethnographic Fieldwork 20
Empirical Material 21
Researcher Positionality & Reflexivity 22
Ethics & Data Protection 24
Limitations 24

ANALYSIS **26**

Analytical Strategy 26

CHAPTER 1 FINDING ONE'S PLACE IN THE COURSE **28**

Setting the Scene: Introducing the Empirical Example 29
The First Encounter 31
Establishing Education Hierarchies *32*
The Intersection of Religion, Culture & Gender 35
Defining Prayer *35*
Caring for Oneself: Culture & Gender in Practice *37*
The Role of Language 40
Difficulty Settling into One's Role 43
Negotiating Legitimacy *44*
Evaluating the Role of the Co-Facilitators *45*

CHAPTER 2 WHEN EMOTIONS MOVE BETWEEN PEOPLE **48**

The Conflict: Competing Expectations of Appropriate Conduct 49
The Aftermath of the Conflict 53
A Message of Dissatisfaction 55
Hierarchy of Negative & Positive Feelings 56
To Reflect on Difficult Emotions or Not *58*
Reflecting on Cultural Encounters as Sites of Knowledge Production 60

CONCLUSION **64**

BIBLIOGRAPHY **67**

APPENDIX 1: FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEW GUIDE **71**

Introduction

There are different forms of knowledge that shape how individuals understand and respond to the world. These forms of knowledge are produced through encounters, which is the focus of this thesis. One form of knowledge could be characterised as institutional knowledge, which is often produced and disseminated by institutions, organisations, and governments (Finck Carrales & Suárez-Krabbe, 2021). Such knowledge is based on evidence that is measurable, scalable, produced and validated within an institution like universities (Skewes, Occhino et al., 2021).

PATHWAYS, *Pathways for Preventive Mental Health in Migrants*[1], is a research project that illustrates institutional knowledge by aiming to implement the World Health Organisation's evidence-based intervention, Mental Health Plus (MH+)[2], within a social organisation in Denmark (Projects Archive - Mental Health Europe, n.d.).

The MH+ course is a group-oriented, highly structured, mental health intervention, consisting of five low-intensity sessions, grounded in Acceptance and Commitment Therapy principles (Psychological Interventions, 2024). The course aims to assist individuals by managing stress and improving their wellbeing through guided self-help materials that are adapted to the Danish context and delivered by lay facilitators to migrants (Projects Archive - Mental Health Europe, n.d.).

Within the PATHWAYS research context, migrants are defined as individuals who have migrated to Denmark at least five years ago. As such, the target group does not include newly arrived asylum seekers or recent migrants, as this demographic has access to specific services that are not available to individuals with a longer-established migration background in Denmark. For the sake of clarity, this will also be the definition that this thesis adopts.

The purpose of implementing the MH+ intervention is to explore migrant mental health and preventative strategies in Denmark, as it has been documented that this particular group often falls between the cracks of the health system, leading to worse health outcomes than the general population for this group (Buhl, 2024).

The MH+ intervention demonstrates being a branch of institutional knowledge by being a scalable intervention that is promoted within global mental health as both a cost-effective and accessible strategy for populations experiencing adversity to advance better health outcomes

[1] This is a pseudonym to help maintain the anonymity of the research context. It also allows for critical analysis without risking unintended consequences.
[2] This is also a pseudonym to preserve the anonymity of the research context. It enables critical analysis without exposing individuals or causing unintended consequences.

(Psychological Interventions, 2024). This shows institutional knowledge supports better health outcomes, but in the process, it also influences what kind of knowledge is prioritised and whose perspectives are listened to.

Alongside institutional knowledge, there are also quieter forms, such as the informal knowledge that is produced through lived experiences. This knowledge, produced through the interaction with the target group in the MH+ course, is the focus of this thesis. It explores how knowledge is created and negotiated by studying how power relations are enacted, negotiated, and embodied in practice. Moreover, it will examine what kind of knowledge is produced in the encounters in the MH+ intervention between participants, facilitators, and researchers.

The empirical data and ethnographic fieldwork for this thesis have been gathered in collaboration with PATHWAYS. However, the aims of the research project and this thesis are different. PATHWAYS exemplifies institutional knowledge by focusing on implementation outcomes of the MH+ course, relying on systematic, evidence-based data, including quantitative indicators and standardised evaluations.

In contrast, this thesis explores informal knowledge processes that are deeply entangled with questions of power, representation, and access (Haraway, 1988; Ahmed, 2012; Spivak, 1988). These dynamics become particularly visible when different social groups meet, interact, and interpret each other. This kind of knowledge raises critical questions such as: Who produces knowledge, and for whom? Who is positioned as the subject of the research? Who benefits from knowledge production? (Spivak, 1988; Haraway, 1988).

By approaching encounters as dynamic sites where meaning is negotiated, this thesis brings analytical frameworks from cultural encounters (Galal & Hvenegård-Lassen, 2020; 2024) and knowledge production (Haraway, 1988) into dialogue. This approach foregrounds how power, hierarchies, participation, and emotions (Ahmed, 2004; 2014) shape knowledge production through encounters (Järvinen & Mik-Meyer, 2003; Fahnøe, 2016; Ahmed, 2012). Guided by a feminist methodological approach, the thesis asks the following research question:

> *How do cultural encounters among stakeholders produce, structure, and prioritise different forms of knowledge within a migrant health care intervention?*

In order to properly answer this question, the following two working questions are posed to help structure the analytical process and to reflect on the various themes that emerge through the empirical data.

1. *How do processes of subject positioning shape encounters within the course, and how do these encounters contribute to the production of knowledge?*

2. *How does the circulation of emotions in encounters shape situated ways of knowing, and how does this affect which forms of knowledge emerge?*

Critically examining how and what forms of knowledge are produced is important because knowledge is power (Skewes, Occhino et al., 2021). Knowledge production is not a neutral or purely objective process; it actively shapes the world through determining how groups are perceived, what opportunities they are afforded, and whether these groups have influence over the knowledge produced about them. Knowledge is shaped by histories of inequalities, and historically it has been difficult to ensure that those represented by institutional knowledge also have a voice in shaping the representation (Ahmed, 2012; Spivak, 1988).

The concepts that this thesis applies have been widely adopted within gender studies and migration research; however, their integration into mental health intervention research remains limited. Feminist epistemologies are rarely centred in the evaluation of interventions, even though they offer vital tools for interrogating whose knowledge is prioritised and under what conditions knowledge is produced (Skewes, Occhino et al., 2021; Ahmed, 2012).

For these reasons, there is a need for research that foregrounds positionality, knowledge production, and power dynamics that does not focus on outcomes but on the relational and affective conditions under which knowledge is produced. This is what this thesis sets out to do by highlighting that knowledge produced about a subject group ultimately shapes the opportunities and resources it can access. Examining these dynamics through encounters underscores that the issue is not simply *what* forms of knowledge are produced, but *how* and by *whom* (Skewes, Occhino et al., 2021; others).

The following chapter will review literature on encounters between individuals and institutions along with knowledge production, identifying theoretical debates and methodological considerations relevant to this thesis. The subsequent chapter will outline the theoretical framework that will be applied to the empirical data, introducing the concepts that structure the analytical approach. A methodological chapter will then present the research design, including the methods of participant observation, interviews, and focus groups, and will address questions of reflexivity, ethics, and researcher positionality. This will be followed by the analysis, which will begin with a description of the empirical example and then explore how knowledge is produced through encounters within the MH+ course, attending closely to interactional and affective dimensions. Finally, the conclusion will reflect on the broader implications of these findings for knowledge production, suggesting how feminist perspectives can enrich migrant mental health in theory and in practice.

State of the Art

This section reviews important contributions from sociological literature, focusing on how clients are formed through meetings with institutional practices by employing interactionist and constructivist perspectives. The following studies highlight how identities are shaped through narratives, interactions, and organisational constraints across different contexts, such as welfare system encounters, alcohol treatment, and shelter placement meetings. Together, they underline how institutions and their staff produce client subjectives through interaction.

Constructing the Client: Institutional Practices, Narratives, & Power

Taking point of departure in the introduction to the book *At Skabe en Klient* (in English: *To Create a Client*), Margaretha Järvinen & Nanna Mik-Meyer (2003) argue that a 'client' is not a pre-existing category but created in a process of meetings between individuals and institutional contexts such as social services or healthcare. Individuals do not simply arrive as clients or as a 'case'; they become clients through identity processes that take place in interactions with professionals (Järvinen & Mik-Meyer, 2003).

Järvinen & Mik-Meyer (2003) explain that these processes involve categorisation and interpretation, where professionals like social workers or case workers play a key role in defining what kind of problem a person has and how it should be understood. This causes institutional norms to strongly influence how individuals are perceived, as the professional perspective often carries more weight than a client's own self-description of their situation. As a result, the identity of the client is shaped by how they are viewed by the social and institutional relationships they engage in. Thus, the process of creating a client is not neutral but involves unequal power relations (Järvinen & Mik-Meyer, 2003).

Theoretically, Järvinen & Mik-Meyer (2003) draw on the work of Erving Goffman to analyse how identities are constructed in social interactions through meetings, interviews, and written assessments. From this perspective, becoming a client is a social and performative process that emerges through the presentation of self, professional interpretations, and the situational framing of encounters (Järvinen & Mik-Meyer, 2003).

In continuation, Margaretha Järvinen's (2003) chapter, "*Alkoholfortællinger i et Institutionelt Landskab*" (in English: *Alcohol Narratives in an Institutional Landscape*), examines how alcohol problems are understood and narrated within institutional contexts, namely treatment systems and social services. Järvinen (2003) argues that alcoholism is shaped

through social interaction and institutional frameworks. This signifies that the way people talk about alcohol use, clients and professionals alike, plays a crucial role in defining what the problem is and what solutions are considered appropriate (Järvinen, 2003).

Järvinen's (2003) analytical focus for the chapter is three life story interviews that show how individuals in treatment settings are expected to present their experiences to fit into recognisable storylines, for instance, the idea of personal responsibility and recovery. These narratives reflect both cultural and professional understandings of addictions, which the client often adapts to be recognised as deserving of help (Järvinen, 2003).

This chapter builds on the introduction to *At Skabe en Klient* (2003), highlighting the collaboration of professionals in shaping narratives and reinforcing explanations. This demonstrates that institutional power operates through discourse, deeming certain ways of talking about alcohol more legitimate than others (Järvinen, 2003).

Järvinen (2003) particularly highlight 'problem identities', where tensions arise between a client's own experience and institutional categories through resistance to fitting into dominant alcohol narratives. By analysing narratives within institutional contexts, Järvinen (2003) reveals how definitions of alcoholism, responsibility, and recovery are actively shaped in practice.

Similarly, Kristian Fahnøe's (2016) article, *Bekendelsesformer i Gruppeterapi for Alkoholmisbrugere: en Interaktionistisk Analyse af en Magtteknik* (in English*: Confessional Forms in Group Therapy for Alcohol Abusers: An Interactionist Analysis of a Technology of Power*) examines how confessions work as a central social practice within group-based alcohol treatment. Fahnøe (2016) analyses confessions as a socially organised form of communication shaped by institutional expectations and interactional norms by showing how identities are produced and negotiated in face-to-face interaction.

Theoretically, the article draws on Foucauldian theory of 'technology of power', referring to the practical methods used by institutions to organise behaviour. Additionally, Fahnøe (2016) employs Goffman's conceptual framework to shape human behaviour. Empirically, the analysis demonstrates that group therapy establishes implicit rules about how participants are expected to speak about themselves and their alcohol use. Similar to Järvinen (2003), clients must present themselves through certain narratives to align with institutional expectations in order to be recognised as legitimate and receive help (Fahnøe, 2016).

In this sense, confession becomes a performative act where participants must demonstrate honesty, responsibility, and motivation. Power within the group therapy setting does not solely operate through the therapist, but circulates through participants' monitoring,

evaluation, and disciplining of others' confessions. This results in the group becoming a space of mutual regulation, where confessions shape subjectivity by encouraging participants to internalise therapeutic frameworks (Fahnøe, 2016).

Additionally, David Silverman and Mik-Meyer's (2019) article *"Agency and Clientship in Public Encounters: Co-constructing 'Neediness' and 'Worthiness' in Shelter Placement Meetings"* works with the same interactionist and constructivist traditions by showing how client identities are co-constructed through interaction between citizens and welfare professionals. Employing Goffman's work, they analyse how certain categories are collaboratively produced through face-to-face encounters, such as 'needy' or 'worthy'.

These categories are demonstrated in shelter placement meetings, where citizens advocate for their eligibility for clientship through narratives of hardship and vulnerability that are then interpreted in relation to institutional rules. This reflects that need is not purely factual but interactional, dependent on how convincingly something is communicated and how it fits with administrative expectations (Mik-Meyer & Silverman, 2019).

Mik-Meyer and Silverman (2019) highlight a key tension in encounters between citizen and staff, namely the simultaneous demand for agency and clientship. As staff function as gatekeepers, it highlights that power operates through active participation in shaping the outcome for the citizen. Moreover, this demonstrates that access to services is the result of a co-produced process. Citizens are expected to show dependency by demonstrating that they cannot cope on their own, while displaying agency through appearing motivated and capable of change. This delicate balancing act is often what is required to achieve a successful outcome, underscoring the citizen's strategic, performative involvement in this process (Mik-Meyer & Silverman, 2019).

The literature reviewed in this section demonstrates how clients are not pre-given categories but actively produced through institutional practices, interactions, and narratives. Drawing on Goffman and Foucauldian understandings of power, the literature highlights how client identities emerge through encounters with professionals and that these processes are marked by tensions and expectations. Inspired by how clients are shaped through processes, categories, and institutional practices, the focus now shifts toward the forms of knowledge that are created through these encounters. Accordingly, the next section will emphasise literature on knowledge production as a situated and contested process, rather than a neutral reflection of reality.

The Politics of Knowledge Production

This section theorises knowledge production, foregrounding how boundaries are drawn between what is considered valid knowledge and what is excluded from knowledge production. At the same time, the literature will explore expanded notions of knowledge, including informal, embodied, affective, and experiential knowledge. Furthermore, attention is given to how research practices reveal that what counts as knowledge is also produced through structured interests. Together, these perspectives underscore why it is vital to critically examine how knowledge is produced, what forms of knowledge are recognised, and what remains obscured by highlighting the power dynamics that underpin these divisions.

Boaventura de Sousa Santos' (2007) essay, *"Beyond the Abyssal Line: From Global Lines to Ecologies of Knowledge"*, argues a critique of modern Western[3] epistemology by arguing that contemporary knowledge is structured by what he refers to as an 'abyssal line'. This line divides the world into what is considered visible, legitimate, and knowable, and what is invisible, non-existent, and unintelligible.

De Sousa Santos' (2007) central argument is that the abyssal line originated in colonial history, granting modern science the monopoly of determining what true and false knowledge is. Knowledge located on the 'false' side of the line includes embodied, sensuous, experiential, and Indigenous knowledges. This kind of knowledge is often associated with the Majority World[4] and is excluded from hegemonic regimes of knowledge production (de Sousa Santos, 2007).

To move beyond abyssal thinking, de Sousa Santos (2007) proposes an 'ecology of knowledges' which argues for dialogues between different epistemologies, including Indigenous, feminist, and experiential knowledges. Therefore, an ecology of knowledges situates the value of science as one knowledge among others, each with a specific context and purpose (de Sousa Santos, 2007).

Similarly, in the chapter *"Of Knowledge",* Minna Salami (2020) critiques modern knowledge traditions that rely on hierarchical binaries such as mind over body, reason over emotion, objectivity over subjectivity, as she argues that it results in a marginalisation of embodied, emotional, and relational forms of knowledge. Similar to de Sousa Santos (2007),

[3] By Western, de Sousa Santos (2007) means cultures, societies, and knowledge traditions historically influenced by Western Europe, including North America (excluding Mexico) and Australia and New Zealand.
[4] It refers to the regions of the world where most of the global population lives, mainly Africa, Asia, Latin America and parts of the Middle East. It is used as an alternative to 'developing world'.

she too argues that these hierarchies are historically rooted in colonial, patriarchal, and capitalist structures.

Salami (2020) introduces the concept ‘sensuous knowledge’ as an epistemological intervention that foregrounds emotion, lived experiences, body, and interconnectedness as legitimate sources of knowing. Sensuous knowledge is not oppositional to rational thought, but complementary and necessary for understanding complex social realities. From this perspective, knowledge is produced through emotions, embodiment, and relational awareness, and not through a detached analysis.

Salami (2020) advocates for resisting and challenging the universalism of Western knowledge that she refers to as ‘Europatriarchal knowledge’ (p. 17), for knowledge production to become an ethical and political practice, inseparable from questions of power and lived experience.

Salami (2020) and de Sousa Santos (2007) both expose knowledge production as a site of power, where colonial hierarchies and internal binaries sustain epistemic violence. They complement each other by highlighting internal hierarchies within dominant knowledge itself, particularly the devaluation of embodied, emotional, and sensuous ways of knowing (Salami, 2020), and exposing how hegemonic knowledge renders non-Western and non-scientific knowledges invisible and non-existent (de Sousa Santos, 2007).

Their contributions open the space to consider how knowledge is actively shaped through lived and affective processes while simultaneously being influenced by inclusion and exclusion. This emphasis on the conditions under which knowledge is produced resonates with broader critiques of scientific research as a neutral endeavour. Indeed, Juan Carlos Finck Carrales and Julia Suárez-Krabbe (2021) examine how scientific research processes are shaped by social, political, and institutional forces that are rooted in colonial and patriarchal understandings of knowledge. These forces shape what questions are asked, whose perspectives are prioritised, and pinpoint that research agendas do not emerge independently but reflect dominant interests and power relations. Finck Carrales and Suárez-Krabbe (2021) call for reflexive and participatory approaches to science to include diverse knowledge forms and voices.

This position is echoed by Charlotte Højholt and Dorthe Kousholt (2019), who argue that knowledge emerges through interaction between researchers and societal actors. Rather than viewing research subjects as passive sources of data, they conceptualise research as a mutual learning process, highlighting that knowledge is a co-produced process, enriched by participants’ conceptualised experiences (Højholt & Kousholt, 2019).

This section has underscored that knowledge production must be approached as a situated and power-laden process. What counts as knowledge is embedded in historical and social structures that organise inclusion and exclusion but also shape embodied, relational, and affective encounters. By highlighting context, emotion, and the role of power, the literature emphasised here will assist this thesis by critically examining not only the content of knowledge, but also the processes through which it is produced.

Theoretical Framework

In the following section, the theoretical framework for this thesis will be presented. To examine how cultural encounters produce, structure, and prioritise different forms of knowledge within the MH+ course in the analysis, cultural encounters as a concept must first be introduced through the work of Lise Galal and Kirsten Hvenegård-Lassen (2020; 2024). This will be immediately followed by the presentation of intersectionality, where Dorthe Staunæs' (2003) reconceptualisation will bridge intersectionality and subjectification. Subsequently, Sara Ahmed's (2014) conceptualisation of emotions will be introduced, followed by Donna Haraway's (1989) critique of traditional scientific objectivity. Combined, these concepts will assist in theorising the dynamics at play in the MH+ course by illuminating the different forms of knowledge that the interactions and engagement within the intervention produce.

Cultural Encounters

Lise Galal and Kirsten Hvenegård-Lassen (2024) emphasise that culture has previously been understood as the meeting of different national, ethnic, religious, and racialised populations. They contend that culture should not be approached through assumptions but through critical analysis of how differences are produced, negotiated, and given meaning in specific situations. Moreover, they note that cultural encounters should first and foremost foreground 'encounters' as the term 'culture' has numerous understandings and discussions within anthropology, social sciences, and other cultural studies (Galal & Hvenegård-Lassen, 2024).

Cultural encounters can be understood as an analytical concept, as a present arena where negotiations and creativity are displayed. In this sense, cultural encounters are not interested in evaluating the meeting itself but are much more interested in analysing how differences are produced or reproduced through various meaning-making processes (Galal & Hvenegård-Lassen, 2024).

Galal and Hvenegård-Lassen (2024) argue that a cultural encounters analysis can be theoretically informed by various frameworks, but attention to how power, categorisation processes, and meaning-making are relationally created is always maintained. This means that cultural encounters is a concept, which first and foremost cements an approach to culture as anti-essentialist.

This includes that culture has the ability to change; it is dynamic and established through similarities and differences. Culture is not based on a fixed, essential, cultural core or essence that is ever present. Nor is it something to be understood as an explanatory variable in

itself, but to be understood as relevant in interaction, depending on the context and the power relations at play. In other words, cultural encounters are analysed as relational and processual encounters, embedded within various settings (Galal & Hvenegård-Lassen, 2024). This also means that for this thesis, all interactions from the MH+ course are considered cultural encounters, including the sessions and the meetings with the facilitators that directly followed them.

Another important part of Galal and Hvenegård-Lassen's (2024) conceptualisation of cultural encounter analysis is its focus on meaning-making and interpretation. Individuals interpret actions, norms, and intentions in relation to their own situated perspectives and institutional expectations. This includes that moments of misunderstandings or tensions should not be understood as failures, but as analytically productive, as they reveal norms and categorisations that are activated or taken for granted (Galal & Hvenegård-Lassen, 2024). Furthermore, cultural encounter analysis emphasises categorisation and positioning processes, exploring how individuals are positioned and position themselves in various social landscapes.

Galal and Hvenegård-Lassen (2020; 2024) draw inspiration from Sara Ahmed (2000) in their conceptualisation of cultural encounters as situated social processes, where meaning and differences are actively negotiated. Ahmed (2000) also argues that encounters are not neutral but shaped by histories of racialisation, colonialism, and mobility. These histories come into existence through encounters with others, relating that a subject's existence cannot be separated from those it encounters. In other words, encounters do not simply happen in the private arena of the subject's relation to themselves. Rather, in encounters with others, subjects are perpetually recreated, meaning the work of identity formation is never complete (Ahmed, 2000).

Galal and Hvenegård-Lassen (2020) insist that encounters do not only happen in everyday life, but also in the facilitated, institutional interventions that are designed to prevent or manage perceived problems. Organised cultural encounters explore the intentional, and at times scripted, interactions that occur in delimited time-spaces, deliberately organised settings that bring people together for a limited time in a specific time. These encounters aim to guide *"interventions into the contact zone"* (Galal & Hvenegård-Lassen, 2020, p. 6), where 'contact zones' should be understood as the social spaces where cultures meet and make sense of each other through social practices that foster transformation across cultural difference.

Their research on organised cultural encounters has a strong empirical grounding in institutional contexts that are either located in Denmark or related to Danish organisations, including interfaith work and scripted discussions across cultural difference (Galal &

Hvenegård-Lassen, 2020). Their conceptualisation of encounters is particularly useful for the analysis of this thesis, as it gives language and an analytical lens to the dynamics at play in the MH+ course program.

Intersectionality

Intersectionality as a conceptual framework signifies the complex, varied, and compounding effects that ensue when multiple axes of difference intersect in historically specified contexts (Davis, 2008; Brah & Phoenix, 2004). The term was originally coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989) and intended to address the struggles of how Black women fell between the margins of both feminist and anti-racist discourse, which failed to address the ways structures of power overlap and impact each other. She argued, alongside other Black scholars, that systems of power systematically had neglected and oppressed the experiences of marginal groups in the United States of America, by implicitly considering white, middle-class women or Black men as the exemplary victims of systems of sexism or racism (Davis, 1981; Lorde, 1984; Collins, 1990). In the conceptualisation of intersectionality, Crenshaw (1989) drew from Black feminist thought and earlier activism by scholars and organisers, who also addressed the 'interlocking oppressions' that were ignoring the experiences of Black women (Combahee River Collective, 1977).

As Crenshaw's (1989) original work on intersectionality is situated within the field of law, this thesis will take inspiration from other feminist scholars, who have applied the concept within fields of sociology, science and technology studies, and critical migration studies, where it has been applied to analyse inequity, representation, and knowledge production.

One of those feminist scholars is Kathy Davis (2008), who contends that the concept of intersectionality has moved from a critical analytical framework to a framework that is widely used. This has resulted in its meaning becoming less precise and broader. Davis (2008) notes that the conceptual openness of the concept makes it a successful theory as it fosters widespread appeal and facilitates interdisciplinary collaboration. At the same time, this flexibility introduces a tension between maintaining the concept's intellectual rigour and achieving broad accessibility, as it risks being applied in more superficial or diluted ways.

In contrast, Avtar Brah and Ann Phoenix (2004) emphasise the importance of grounding intersectionality in its historical and political roots. They defend the concept against critiques that the concept has become too mainstream or analytically weak, arguing that such critiques often overlook its original purpose. Rather than simply being about intersecting

identity categories, Brah and Phoenix (2004) reestablish that the framework has always been concerned with analysing power relations. In this sense, they maintain that intersectionality is about understanding how overlapping systems of domination produce specific forms of disadvantage and privilege. From this perspective, they contend that intersectionality remains a critical tool for understanding structural inequalities, as long as it retains its focus on power.

In this thesis, intersectionality will be utilised as more than a framework for tracing interconnections between various social and material categories. Instead, it will be applied as a useful analytical tool to examine how participants and facilitators are positioned and position themselves to reflect the complexities and power relations at play within the MH+ course.

Intersectionality & Subjectification

Dorthe Staunæs (2003) argues that intersectionality needs further reconceptualisation to be a useful analytical concept to highlight the complexity of the lived experience, advocating that subjects are not mere bearers of their social categories. She argues for *"a definition of intersectionality at a subject level as a process of "doing" and an argument for analysing this "doing" in situ, where concrete intersections, hierarchies and elaboration are not predetermined"* (Staunæs, 2003, p. 102). In other words, Staunæs (2003) explains that intersectionality is a lens to examine how multiple social categories intersect and co-produce subject positions, including ruptures, contrasts, and ambiguities within that position.

Similar to what Brah and Phoenix (2004) maintain, categories are not treated as stable or additive, but as relational and context-dependent, gaining only meaning in relation to one another. In this thesis, the categories of education, culture, gender and language will be included to highlight the differences and implicit hierarchies that are established and negotiated within the MH+ course.

Staunæs (2003) argues that subject positions cover the ongoing process individuals take up and make a position their own through verbal and non-verbal interactions. It takes place through social interactions, discourses, and practices (Staunæs, 2003). Finally, social categories are tools of inclusion and exclusion, of positioning and making hierarchies, allowing "*space for reconfiguring power relations in processes of subjectification and in relations between subject positions and intertwined social categories"* (Staunæs, 2003, pp. 104-105). In other words, power within this framework is understood as productive by foregrounding how social relations are actively done through ongoing and changing subject positions (Staunæs, 2003).

Empirically, Staunæs' (2003) research is about subjectification processes in multi-ethnic school contexts in Denmark, exploring how pupils within this context become certain kinds of subjects through discourses, norms, and institutional practices. She is particularly interested in understanding exceptions, paradoxes, and the ambiguities that may not be determined by social systems.

When explaining subjectification processes, Staunæs (2003) draws on Foucauldian notions of the duality of the individual as subject acting upon its conditions in context and being subjected to those conditions (Foucault, 1979; 1988, as cited in Staunæs, 2003, p. 103). In this sense, subjectivity explains the person's sense of self by exploring both stability and change. Therefore, subjectivity establishes that becoming is an ongoing process and builds on an understanding of the relationship between the sense of self and the social context (Staunæs, 2003).

Thus, understanding processes of subject positioning are significant for this thesis, as it examines social categories as dynamic, relational constructs continually shaped through hidden power dynamics between the participants and facilitators that are present within the MH+ course. Moreover, the participants in the course are not subjects in and of themselves, but become subjects through the processes of subject positioning, where they either take up a position or are assigned one within the course context.

The Cultural Politics of Emotion

In the book, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, Sara Ahmed (2014) conceptualises emotions as relational and social forces that circulate between bodies, discourses, and institutions. Instead of understanding emotions as psychological states, Ahmed (2014) argues that emotions are understood as effects of encounters and practices through which social worlds are organised. In this sense, emotions do not originate in isolation within individuals but emerge through shared norms and histories, which shape subjects within particular contexts (Ahmed, 2014).

A central aspect of Ahmed's (2014) understanding of emotions is the idea that they are productive; they are doing something. Emotions align individuals with some, while distancing them from others, producing boundaries of belonging and exclusion. By using 'affect' and 'emotion' almost interchangeably, she argues *"how emotions circulate between bodies, examining how they 'stick' as well as move"* (Ahmed, 2014, p. 4). In this sense, through processes of circulation, emotions become attached to particular bodies, objects, and spaces.

Over time, emotions such as fear, shame or pride come to adhere to specific social categories, shaping how subjects are anticipated and understood before interaction. This means that there are already certain emotional associations tied to social groups that individuals believe themselves to be a part of, implying that encounters do not happen neutrally (Ahmed, 2014).

Moreover, Ahmed (2014) proposes that a hierarchy of emotions has developed over time. In this hierarchy, *"some emotions are 'elevated' as signs of cultivation, whilst others remain 'lower' as signs of weakness"* (Ahmed, 2014, p. 3). Emotions that are perceived as productive for transformation or personal development tend to be valued. In contrast, emotions that cannot be easily disciplined or managed are often constructed as unwelcome and undesirable (Ahmed, 2014).

Ahmed (2014) emphasises that emotions are embedded in power relations and processes of normalisation. Accordingly, alignment with dominant norms may often be experienced through feelings of ease and comfort, while discomfort, anxiety, or anger indicate misalignment and vulnerability.

Emotions operate as subtle mechanisms of governance, regulating who is recognised as legitimate and who is positioned as problematic or out of place. In this way, Ahmed (2014) provides a conceptual framework in which emotions are understood as relational, circulating forces that organise social life. Ahmed (2004) describes this concept as 'affective economies'. Ahmed (2014) defines it as,

> *"In […] affective economies, emotions do things, and they align individuals with communities—or bodily space with social space—through the very intensity of their attachments"* (p. 119)

This affective understanding highlights how emotions circulate, accumulate, and become unevenly attached to places and individuals across a social field.

This conceptualisation is significant for this thesis as it provides a critical lens for exploring how power operates through the MH+ course by shaping emotional conditions of belonging, recognition, and exclusion. In this sense, emotions should be understood as political not because they are about politics, but because they structure belonging, normality, and exclusion by shifting attention toward the affective ways subjects are positioned.

The 'doing' of emotions is also the focus of Marlene Spanger's (2017) work, *"What do emotions do? Circulations of annoyance, hostility and shame in fieldwork",* exploring the role of emotions in knowledge production.

Empirically grounded in ethnographic fieldwork among Thai migrant sex workers in Denmark, Spanger (2017) draws on Sara Ahmed's (2004; 2014) concept of 'affective circulation' as well as Judith Butler's work on subject formation to demonstrate how emotional responses are shaped by social policy discourses that dominate the field of prostitution studies.

Spanger (2017) focuses on how emotions like annoyance, hostility, shame, and empathy circulate between bodies and discourses, which pre-structure emotional encounters. These emotions are shown to move between researchers, social workers, and migrants selling sexual services, producing proximity, distance, and hierarchical subject positions in the field (Spanger, 2017).

Moreover, Spanger (2017) contributes to the field of knowledge production by showing what emotions do in the process of creating field relations, calling for reflexive engagement with emotions as analytical resources, arguing that attending to emotions strengthens scholarly rigour. This is argued by underlining how emotions regulate access, shape interpretation, and legitimise certain forms of knowledge that are often marginalised in scholarly research.

Situated Knowledges

Biologist and feminist scholar Donna Haraway's (1988) groundbreaking essay, *Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective*, cements a rethinking of objectivity by arguing that knowledge is always produced from somewhere by embodied and historically situated subjects moving through institutional worlds (Haraway, 1988).

Central to the essay is that objectivity should be reconstructed as a practice of accountability grounded in the positionality and reflexivity of the researcher (Haraway, 1988). Haraway argues,

> *"Knowledge from the point of view of the unmarked is truly fantastic, distorted and irrational. The only position from which objectivity could not possibly be practiced and honored is the standpoint of the master, the Man, the One God, whose Eye produces, appropriates and orders all difference. No one ever accused the God of monotheism of objectivity, only of indifference. The god trick is self-identifical, and we have mistaken that for creativity and knowledge, omniscience even* (Haraway, 1988, p. 587).

With this, Haraway (1988) encourages a feminist way of thinking about objectivity that aims to shift objectivity away from a universalist approach that she refers to as the *"the god trick"* or the *"conquering gaze from nowhere"* (p. 581). Instead, she advocates for situated

knowledges, which is an *"embodied objectivity that accommodates paradoxical and critical feminist science projects* (Haraway, 1988, p. 581). In other words, she calls for an emphasis on knowledge being shaped by specific social, cultural, and historical contexts.

Therefore, Haraway (1988) argues that all knowledge is positional, and objectivity is situated in a specific context. This does not mean that she argues for relativism either, meaning the idea that all forms of truth are equal. Instead, Haraway (1988) contends that relativism is a way of being nowhere, while claiming to be everywhere. This entails not taking responsibility for one's own position, which is another form of adhering to the idea of the 'god trick' (Haraway, 1988).

Accordingly, Haraway (1988) engages with both debates within feminist epistemology and science and technology studies by drawing on insights from Sandra Harding (1991) and her assertion that all knowledge is produced from a specific historical and social position. Simultaneously, Haraway (1988) rejects essentialist implications by maintaining that 'facts' are in fact the outcome of situated practices rather than the deliverances of a view from nowhere.

Haraway's (1988) reasoning is historically situated within a broader scientific debate about the idea that 'truth' is achieved through methodological rigour alone. This implies that 'truth' is removed from the knower's social position, values, or embodied experiences (Haraway, 1988). Her critique demonstrates that 'facts' are stabilised through networks of instruments, routines, and institutional arrangements rather than discovered free from cultural interpretations and constraints. Haraway (1988) states:

> *"I am arguing for politics and epistemologies of location, positioning, and situating, where partiality and not universality is the condition of being heard to make rational knowledge claims. […] I am arguing for the view from a body, always a complex, contradictory, structuring, and structured body, versus the view from above, from nowhere, from simplicity"* (p. 589).

Consequently, this framework bridges the gap between science and the subjective experience. In terms of this thesis, it is relevant as it highlights that all knowledge production is shaped by positional perspective and tied to power. A more detailed description of how these concepts will be applied to the empirical data will be explained in the *Analytical Strategy*, following *Methodology.*

Methodology

This chapter articulates the methodological architecture of the thesis and introduces the ethnographic fieldwork. To be transparent about the research process, this section details the fieldwork setting, materials, and ethical protocols, as well as reflects the researcher's positionality. As previously mentioned, the empirical data was gathered in collaboration with PATHWAYS; however, not all the data that was gathered will be analysed in this thesis. This chapter aims to be clear about what empirical data will be used in this thesis, including how it was produced and interpreted. This will be carried out as an effort to make visible the process through which knowledge in this thesis is actively produced rather than simply discovered.

Ethnographic Fieldwork

The fieldwork spanned six consecutive weeks from early January to the middle of February 2026, enabling attention to process, change, and how dynamics evolved. The ethnographic fieldwork consisted of two empirical elements that were both considered sites where cultural encounters occur, namely five course sessions and five meetings with facilitators.

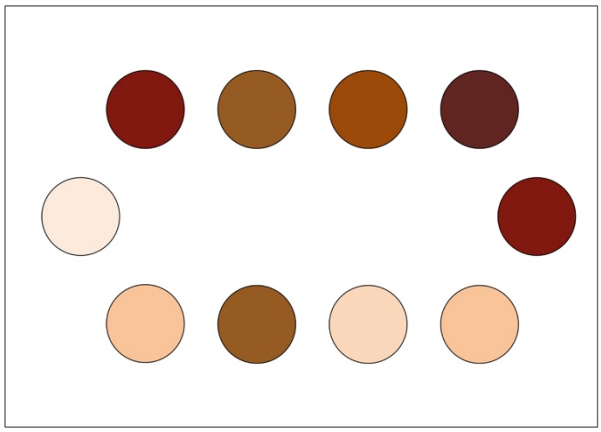


Figure 1: The five course sessions with facilitators and participants

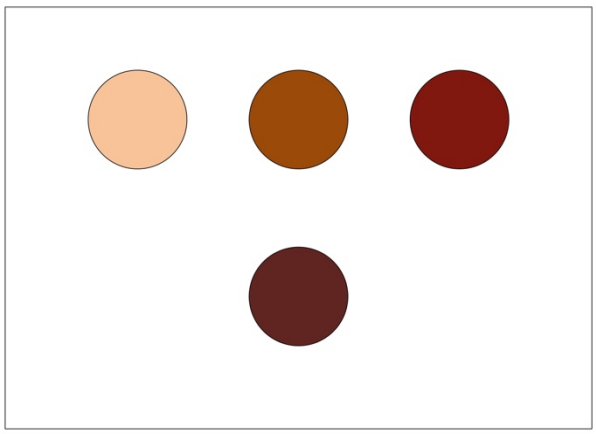


Figure 2: The supervisor meetings with the facilitators and the research team

Figure 1 illustrates the five course sessions that lasted approximately two hours each, where participant observation and fieldnotes were written focusing on interactional dynamics, ruptures, participation patterns, and fidelity adherence to the course material by the facilitators (Brodsky, 2008).

The sessions took place in a circle organised around a table, where I sat behind the circle in the corner to focus on observing. I participated in a limited capacity in the dialogue during the sessions, mostly in the breaks. As I was sitting outside of the circle where most of the participants had their backs to me, I was able to take notes during the course on who did what, how people reacted, as well as the dynamic shifts in the room (Brodsky, 2008).

Figure 2 illustrates the five meetings between the facilitators and the research team immediately following each session. In the analysis, these are referred to as supervisor meetings, which created a space for reflective accounts of practice, institutional constraints, and pedagogical rationales. The supervision meetings were guided by prompts around practice, conflicts, and pedagogical challenges, while leaving space for unanticipated themes. Combined, these meetings amount to two and a half hours of audio-recorded material, which were transcribed verbatim (Brinkmann, 2008).

Additionally, the week following the fifth and last session, a focus group was conducted with seven of the participants in the MH+ course. The aim was to hear their experiences of the course, its framing, and give feedback on the facilitator's participation in the course. The participants were encouraged to only share what they were comfortable discussing in a group. This also meant that the facilitators were not a part of the focus group in order for the participants to speak freely and to eliminate potential power relations between them. Invitations for participation in the focus group were extended to all participants who had completed at least two sessions in the course and consented to a group discussion.

Due to the relationship with the participants that I had cultivated over the six weeks, the choice was made for me to conduct the focus group. The research team were present, but the participant largely avoided contact with them. In a similar vein, we quickly discovered that questions had to be asked by me in order for the participants to properly respond due to the established trust and familiarity between the participant group and me.

The focus group was audio-recorded with permission and transcribed verbatim. A topic-based interview guide was developed for the focus group; however, many of the questions were left out due to time constraints (Morgan & Guevara, 2008). The interview guide is found at the end of the thesis, listed as *Appendix 1: Focus Group Interview Guide.*

Empirical Material

All supervisor meetings and the focus group were audio-recorded with consent and transcribed verbatim with the assistance of Good Tape, an AI-powered, GDPR abiding transcription tool,

which was gone through manually to ensure accuracy. Questionnaires were administered in paper form in the pre-interview sessions and later transferred to a secure online platform, using SurveyXact. All names used in this thesis are pseudonyms to protect the anonymity of participants and facilitators. This ensures that the individuals cannot be identified, while still allowing experiences and contributions to be meaningfully represented in the analysis.

In connection with the focus group, a post-course questionnaire was administered to the participants, which gathered reflections and self-assessment at the end of the course, to be able to analyse the accessibility and feasibility of the MH+ course to measure symptom reduction. These questionnaires were part of the PATHWAYS research project's research protocol to measure implementation outcomes. As this is not the focus of this thesis, these quantitative measures, the pre- and post-questionnaires, will not be included; instead, the qualitative empirical material gathered during the ethnographic fieldwork will be the primary focal point.

Finally, fieldnotes and memos from meetings with the research team were produced to document emergent insights, analytic decisions, and positional tensions. These were used as reflective and reflexive material rather than as direct empirical data.

Researcher Positionality & Reflexivity

This thesis is a continuation of an internship I held within the PATHWAYS project. This entails that I hold a dual position as both researcher and analyser, and meant that I was a part of all MH+ sessions, supervisor meetings, research meetings and conducted the focus group at the end of the sessions. This also meant that the participants and facilitators became familiar with my presence in the course. Rather than considering this position as a bias to be overcome, it is approached as a site of situated insight through reflexive engagement and critical reflection (Markham, 2017).

My own embeddedness in the field proved central to how knowledge was produced and interpreted in this study. Being present in the sessions allowed me to perceive unspoken dynamics that were not as easily captured in the various transcripts alone, including tensions between facilitators and participants that often manifested non-verbally, through tone, posture, silence, eye-rolls, or forms of overcompensation, revealing moments of friction or discomfort that were largely absent from spoken accounts. These unspoken dimensions were an integral part of how the encounter was experienced by those involved.

These observations also foreground the importance of reflexivity in the production of knowledge. My ability to bear witness to these unspoken dynamics became fundamental to recognising how power, vulnerability, and authority were felt and managed within these encounters. Reflexive practice addressed these tensions through continual reflection and writing, keeping explicit attention to moments of discomfort or surprise in mind (Dowling, 2006). This was put into practice by describing the context in which events happened within and highlighting interpretive decisions along the way. Furthermore, contradictions and ambiguity were not smoothed over but highlighted and considered important for the analytical process.

The position I held afforded access to processual dynamics within the MH+ course but may also have shaped participation patterns in subtle ways. My position as a researcher may have been more hidden as the group was made up of only female attendants, aged 25-60, many having a migration background, meaning that my attendance may not have shaped what stories were told and how trust was formed in the same way as if I had been male.

Moreover, my position as both author of this thesis and part of the research team means I am both a part of the empirical example as well as analysing it (Galal & Hvenegård-Lassen, 2020). This conveys that I decide which voices from the field are included and which are left out. This position will inevitably have shaped how empirical situations are interpreted, uncovering biases rooted in my background, assumptions, and values that may have influenced the focus of the analysis and the conclusions drawn along the way.

This observation also points to the inherent duality of the research process itself: while the thesis explores knowledge production as an object of analysis, it simultaneously constitutes an act of knowledge production. Therefore, it is important to acknowledge that this dual position could blur the distinction between studying knowledge and producing it, underscoring how analytical points are themselves situated, partial, and shaped by the conditions under which they are generated. Additionally, this reflexive tension underscores the importance of remaining attentive to how the act of writing a thesis actively participates in the very dynamics it seeks to understand.

This may lead to emphasising certain perspectives while overlooking others, affecting what knowledge is highlighted and influencing how knowledge is produced. This also means that different conclusions may have been drawn if I were in a different position, demonstrating the importance of being explicit about how partial perspectives shape both fieldwork and analysis (Haraway, 1988).

In connection to this, the choice was made to focus on a limited number of social categories, to allow for a more in-depth analysis of how particular forms of difference are produced, without diluting the analytical focus. As previously mentioned, these categories are education, culture, gender, and language. At the same time, it is important to acknowledge that these categories do not capture the full complexity of the participants' lived experiences. Other intersecting factors may also have been present but were not foregrounded in the analysis, which highlights my own partial and situated nature.

Lastly, it is important to note that this thesis does not aim to offer definitive conclusions or generalisable findings about the knowledge created through encounters in the MH+ course; rather, reflecting Haraway's (1988) notion of partial perspective, as it sets out to show how various perspectives highlight different aspects.

Ethics & Data Protection

All participants received information sheets and provided informed consent before administering the questionnaires and other data collection. Participation in research was voluntary and not a condition for course participation; in other words, if a participant wanted to be a part of the MH+ course but not a part of the research project, this was allowed.

Recruitment and gathering consent were separated from eligibility procedures to minimise undue influence. Anonymity and confidentiality were maintained by pseudonymising transcripts, removing identifying details, and storing linkage files separately on encrypted, access-controlled university folders that comply with GDPR. Additionally, audio files and raw survey exports were stored in secure folders with restricted access. The paper questionnaires were held in a secure spot, and after they had been safely transferred to SurveyXact, they were shredded.

Limitations

Language is one of the limitations for the empirical data gathered through the MH+ courses and supervision meetings. The questionnaires, MH+ course and materials, and focus group were all conducted in Danish, which was not the participants' first language. It was challenging to balance the commitment to methodological rigour, the expectations for the broader parameters of the PATHWAYS project, and what was actually understood and relevant for the participant group, as the group was particularly vulnerable, often falling outside of social interventions (Buhl, 2024).

Most of the questionnaires were validated, which meant little flexibility in how to communicate the questions to the participant group. Additionally, the questionnaires relied on self-reporting, which was challenging considering the language barrier. This required a lot of effort for the research group to balance the fidelity of the MH+ course with what appeared to be relevant for the participants themselves.

This chapter has outlined the methodological design of the thesis. The analysis will now follow, beginning with the *Analytical Strategy* that will detail how the concepts introduced in the *Theoretical Framework* are operationalised and applied in the analysis.

Analysis

Analytical Strategy

The analysis is divided into two chapters, which combined will answer the overall research question: *How do cultural encounters among stakeholders produce, structure, and prioritise different forms of knowledge within a migrant health care intervention?*

Chapter 1 of the analysis, *Finding One's Place in the Course*, will set out to answer the first working question: *How do processes of subject positioning shape encounters within the course, and how do these encounters contribute to the production of knowledge?*

The chapter will draw on Staunæs' (2003) conceptualisation of subject positioning and Järvinen and Mik-Meyer's (2003) research on identity processes in the encounter between client and welfare state. These concepts help to theorise the encounters in the MH+ course by allowing for a nuanced examination of how subjectification is situated and co-produced through various subject positions. Moreover, they reflect how overlapping systems of domination produce specific forms of disadvantage and privilege (Brah & Phoenix, 2004). Furthermore, the dynamics taking place within the MH+ course highlight how power is exercised between participants and facilitators, including how hierarchies are established.

Chapter 2 of the analysis, *When Emotions Move Between People*, will set out to answer the second working question: *How does the circulation of emotions in encounters shape situated ways of knowing, and how does this affect which forms of knowledge emerge?*

The chapter will draw on Ahmed's (2004; 2014) conceptualisation of emotions and how they are deeply embedded in knowledge production as an affective and embodied process, where knowing happens through emotions that are socially circulated and historically situated. Ahmed's (2004; 2014) and Spanger's (2017) research will underscore how emotions are actively shaping social realities by orienting subjects toward certain interpretations of the world.

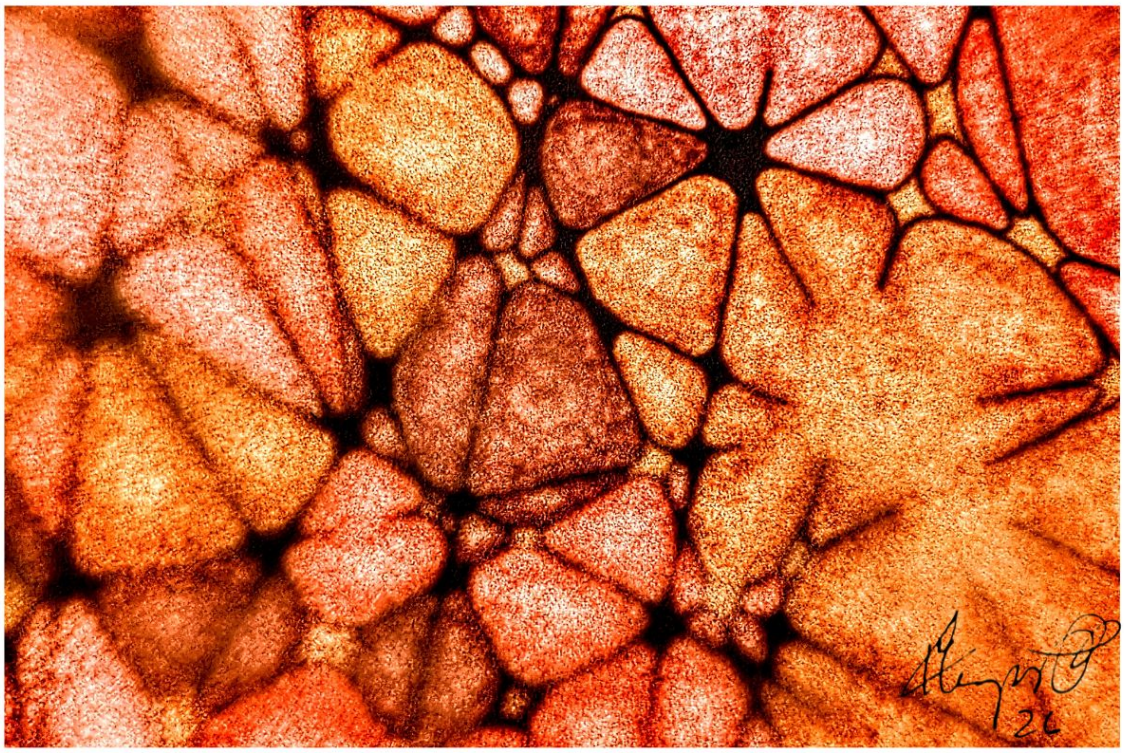
Moreover, the chapter will bring Galal and Hvenegård-Lassen's (2020; 2024) conceptualisation of cultural encounters and Haraway's (1988) concept of situated knowledges into dialogue and highlight what kind of knowledge is produced in the process. It will reflect that knowledge is produced through situated encounters within the MH+ course context. This makes it possible to examine not only how participants and facilitators interpret and negotiate difference, but also how these negotiations contribute to processes of legitimacy, inclusion, and exclusion within the MH+ course context. In this way, knowledge is actively produced through

these encounters, through perspectives and interpretations located and produced by particular bodies and within power relations.

The conclusion will return to the overall research question and consider how the analytical chapters have reflected the knowledge that emerges from encounters. Moreover, it will draw on what the theoretical concepts have contributed to the process and consider the consequences of the forms of knowledge that have emerged through this process.

Finding one's place

in the course



This chapter of the analysis explores how processes of subject positioning shape encounters within the MH+ course and how these encounters contribute to the production of knowledge. Employing Staunæs' (2003) understanding of subject positioning and research from Fahnøe (2016) and Järvinen and Mik-Meyer (2003), it examines how participants and facilitators are formed through interaction that influences their roles and participation. By analysing selected interactions, the chapter highlights how positions are negotiated in practice, revealing how power relations structure encounters. In doing so, this chapter argues that knowledge in the course is co-constructed, rather than simply disseminated, through dynamic and situated interactions. First, the MH+ course will be described in detail to present it as the central empirical example for the analysis, establishing the context through which the theoretical framework of subject positioning can be applied.

Setting the Scene: Introducing the Empirical Example

PATHWAYS is not specifically catered to women; however, as the MH+ course was implemented in a social organisation, which already focused on women who had migrated to Denmark, this became the target group for this implementation. The recruitment for the course was facilitated by an employee at the social organisation, who had been involved with PATHWAYS since its origin. The employee became the lead facilitator of the MH+ course and recruited both additional facilitators and participants. All facilitators were lay persons and not mental health professionals. The recruitment process can be seen below in Figure 3.

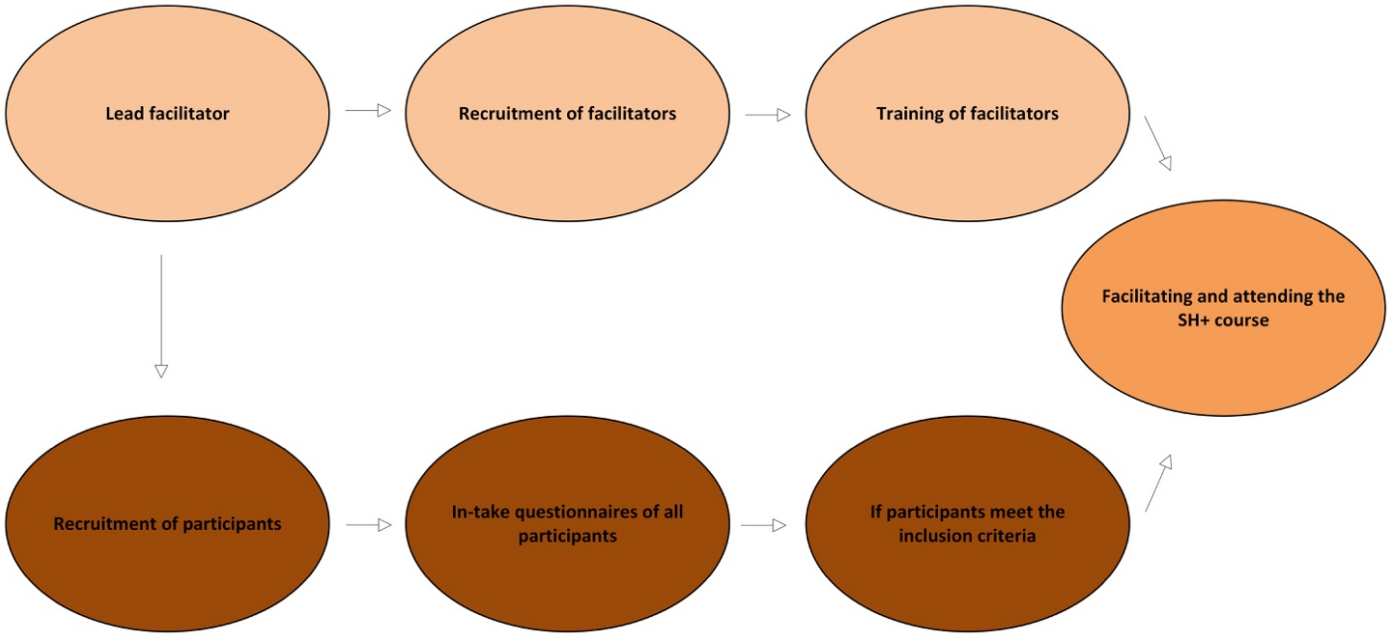


Figure 3: Recruitment Process

The lead facilitator conducted the intake questionnaires with the participants and obtained consent. The intake questionnaires documented eligibility categories, demographic information, baseline indicators, and applied the eligibility criteria for participation in the course. If a participant was experiencing a severe mental health crisis that was beyond the capabilities of the facilitators of the course to manage, the lead facilitator would refer them to professional mental health services instead.

It was deliberate that the lead facilitator was an employee of the social organisation for the sake of sustainability once the MH+ course itself was over. This would allow the lead facilitator to still be in contact with the participants. At the same time, when the lead facilitator led the MH+ course, she left her professional, organisational role at the door and asked the participants to engage with her only as a facilitator and not in the usual capacity that they were familiar with.

The participant group consisted of nine women who had migrated to Denmark 20-50 years ago, aged 40-60, as they had been identified as the target group of PATHWAYS (Buhl, 2024). Two dropped out along the way due to family situations, health, or travel. All of the participants had various countries of origin, yet they were all of Muslim background. The facilitator group consisted of three women, one of whom had migrated to Denmark, aged 25-60. The research group from a Danish University's Migration and Health Department were compiled of four women, aged 25-45.

The purpose of the MH+ course is to help individuals better cope with mental distress by developing practical skills for managing difficult thoughts and emotions to strengthen resilience and well-being. The course itself consists of five sessions, where the participants learn practical skills in each session. The content and methods are described in the table below.

	Session 1	**Session 2**	**Session 3**	**Session 4**	**Session 5**
Session Methods	Grounding	Unhooking from difficult thoughts & feelings	Values-guided problem-solving	Caring for others & yourself	Summary of the last four sessions

Table 1: Overview of the MH+ course

Due to the MH+ course being an evidence-based intervention, each session was highly structured with a clear objective that built on the previous one (Psychological Interventions, 2024). This means that the course draws on institutional knowledge that has been produced, validated, and disseminated through research. The MH+ course is intended for scalability and generalisation, designed to be applied across diverse contexts while maintaining consistency in its core principles and outcomes. This includes that the sessions are standardised, guided by a pre-recorded audio in Danish, entailing that the facilitators do not need to teach freely nor improvise, and each one-to-one discussion and break is mapped out in the manual with a certain number of minutes to keep the MH+ course the same, where it is implemented. Having introduced the empirical example, the focus now shifts to the first encounter in the MH+ course.

The First Encounter

For the first session of the course, the three facilitators had arrived prior to the arrival of the participants. The intention behind this was to properly welcome the participants to the course, help them to their seats, as some of the women were not familiar with each other. Most of them were only familiar with the lead facilitator, whom they had spoken to during the intake process of the course in connection with the intake questionnaires.

This initial encounter was the first time the facilitators, the participants, and the research team would meet. Upon my arrival, the room was quiet, full of expectation, and I found myself unsure where to put my notebook and materials. After a brief hesitation, I chose a spot in the corner, just outside of the circle of chairs where the participants and facilitators would soon gather. From here, my position felt both clear and ambiguous: visibly not a participant in the course yet still attached to it. Another member of the research team was already present and engaged in a low, familiar conversation with the facilitators.

The first six participants entered the room quietly, offering brief greetings but carefully avoiding those they did not know, particularly the research team, before settling into the seats in the circle. Just before the session began, the last participant, Aicha, arrived and immediately shifted the atmosphere. Unlike the others, she entered the room loudly, greeting everyone who had taken their seats, introducing herself, and then turned toward the research team to do the same. Smiling, Aicha said: *"Welcome. I don't think I have met you before. You are welcome here"* (fieldnotes, del 1, l. 2-3).

This initial encounter immediately set the tone for how Aicha positioned herself. Her actions were a direct contrast to the other participants, who had quietly taken their place in the

circle of chairs. Their actions shaped expectations of appropriate conduct and reinforced a submissive role division among participants, which became particularly visible through Aicha's contrasting approach.

This could be interpreted as Aicha asserting a different kind of engagement characterised by familiarity, ease, and initiative. Her actions conveyed a sense that she did not fully accept the expected, submissive participant role, but rather positioned herself in a way that blurred the boundary between facilitator authority and expected participant passivity. In doing so, she disrupted the expected participant compliance, making the underlying hierarchy visible by not conforming to it.

This dynamic further illustrates how hierarchies were embedded within the framework of the MH+ sessions in implicit ways, rather than openly stated or actively enforced. The expectation was that facilitators occupied a position of authority and that the participants should take a more passive role. This was maintained through a silent but shared understanding of appropriate conduct rather than explicit rules. Aicha's deviation from this pattern spotlighted the underlying hierarchical structures, almost as if the space belonged to her and the facilitators and research team were merely guests. This aligns with Staunæs (2003) example of a pupil who wanted to subvert the hierarchy by expanding the borders of what it meant to be a legitimate student, illustrating how power relations can be unsettled. Aicha did not embody the expected participant position in the same way as the participants who had arrived prior to her, displaying that social hierarchies and expectations of adherence were reproduced through interaction.

Establishing Education Hierarchies

There were only three participants who had attended post-secondary education, and most of the participants, the remaining six, had either no formal education or only a primary school certificate. Interestingly, these differences in education level led to an implicit divide that correlated with patterns of participation and engagement. Those with a higher education felt more comfortable positioning themselves as more visible within the course setting. Similar to Fahnøe's (2016) work on how confessions and engaged participation are conditions for being recognised as a proper participant, the more outspoken participants actively shaped how they were perceived and positioned, thereby reinforcing the idea that 'proper' participants occupied a higher position within the group's hierarchies.

One participant, Aicha, was very vocal in the course. To make sense of her actions, the facilitator, Hanne, mentioned that Aicha used to be relied on for her professional expertise by other stakeholders outside the course context. However, a change had happened over the last few months, meaning that Aicha was no longer asked to consult. Aicha's desire to be heard in the MH+ course could be understood as an attempt to make herself visible due to her previous position. In this sense, taking up space in the course could be seen as a way of resisting her new diminished position by negotiating her positioning within the established hierarchy of the course.

Based on this insight, the facilitator, Hanne, figured out a way to embrace Aicha's desire for validation. When it was time for the participants to get into groups to discuss, Hanne worked out a strategy to embrace what Aicha needed during the course by pairing her with herself. Hanne reflected on her considerations in a supervisor meeting after the session:

> *"So, I just split everyone into pairs and decided who should be together, and she's paired with me, and everyone else is happy with their matches too. And it's actually worked really well, but she was fine with it, because I was a bit… I was a bit of a joker at first, but she took it in her stride, and she thinks it's really cool to be with me* (Supervisor meeting 3, l. 350-362)*"*

This interaction can be understood as a negotiation where Hanne recognised that Aicha was either at risk of being positioned as disruptive due to her need for validation, or as overwhelming to the other participants in the course. Rather than correcting or disciplining her actions directly, Hanne restructured the interactional condition by pairing Aicha with herself. In doing so, Hanne recognised Aicha's desire for validation and met her with neither exclusion nor correction. As a result, this repositioned Aicha from a potentially problematic subject to a valued participant.

Aicha's acceptance of this arrangement suggests that she took the opportunity to shape her own positioning, taking on a role that placed her in closer proximity to the facilitator. This displays Staunæs (2003) argument that positioning can function as a tool of making hierarchies and changing positions within it. In doing so, it subtly marked her as distinct from, and potentially above, the other participants within the group's hierarchy.

The contrast between outspoken subjects and those who were compliant through silence could be understood as different strategies of negotiating positionality within the course. This echoes Staunæs' (2003) argument that the act of positioning works in both verbal and non-verbal ways. While outspoken subjects negotiated a more visible position by taking up space

and directing attention toward themselves, quieter subjects engaged in what could be understood as a form of compliant positioning.

The format of the MH+ course was tightly organised with very little room for deviation, including the fact that each participant received a guidebook that explicitly states when it is time to listen, pause, reflect, and engage in specific exercises. Within this framework, quieter forms of participation, such as listening attentively, completing exercises as instructed without interruption, and refraining from unsolicited contributions, reinforced a hierarchical structure in which facilitators directed the process while participants were expected to follow.

For participants with a post-secondary education, outspokenness could function as a viable means of positioning themselves as competent subjects. For others, silence may constitute a way of maintaining recognisability without risking disrupting the flow of the course. However, within the MH+ course, where there is little room for pause or time for deviation from the course content, outspoken subjects were at times interpreted as disruptive and taking up more space than the course allowed for. As such, quieter subjects could be seen as more aligned with the kind of participation that the format required.

Silence could either be understood as avoiding being positioned as a disruptive subject, or quiet participation could be treated as resistance to participating. In this sense, Fahnøe's (2016) research on confessions functioning as a technology of power could implicitly suggest that silence could be viewed as a problematic resistance to participation. However, considering the structured evidence-based format of the MH+, it could be argued that participants who adopted quieter and more compliant forms of engagement worked better, as unsolicited contributions were more restricted in the predefined expectation that facilitators led and participants followed.

Some of the participants, particularly those who had no formal education, adopted this compliant, quiet form of engagement throughout the sessions. Others, who had completed primary and secondary school, started off with quieter participation, but as they found their footing in the group, they became more engaged and outspoken as the sessions progressed. Others still, like Aicha, who had completed post-secondary education, were outspoken from the beginning, and it became necessary for the facilitators to consider alternative strategies to regulate their engagement.

These contrasting modes of participation demonstrated how positionality was produced through interaction rather than being individually determined. Although there was no explicit hierarchy imposed by the facilitators based on educational background, such distinctions were nonetheless negotiated among participants themselves, underscoring how power functioned

through processes of normalisation rather than direct, overt authority. This underlines Staunæs's (2003) argument for the relevance of examining how social categories and power relations actually unfold in situ, where hierarchies are not predetermined, as it better reflects the complexity of the lived experience of subjects.

This section has explored how differences in educational background influenced hierarchical positioning and participation within the course. Participants with post-secondary education tended to take up more visible, outspoken positions, while other participants adopted quieter, compliant forms of participation, which tended to align more closely with the MH+ format. These dynamics did not emerge from explicit negotiation among participants, illustrating how hierarchical subject positions were subtly normalised among participants. Furthermore, this form of knowledge is important as it makes visible relational and often hidden dynamics that institutional knowledge tends to overlook.

The Intersection of Religion, Culture & Gender

In this section, religion, culture, and gender will be explored as categories shaping participants' interpretations, interactions, and positioning. Rather than functioning as fixed backgrounds, the categories of religion, culture, and gender are analysed as socially negotiated meanings that both enabled and constrained engagement with wellbeing practices.

It became evident in the initial session that both participants and facilitators were trying to find their footing, tentatively mapping out who everyone was and where they fit within the emerging group hierarchy. In this process, several participants emphasised the importance of establishing decorum when contributing to the course, arguing, *"it is our culture to talk on top of each other"* (Fieldnotes, del 1, l. 9). This suggests that the participants offered this conduct as an explanatory frame for the facilitators, particularly those without a migration background.

At the same time, this statement could also be seen as a pre-emptive explanation to implicit or explicitly valued norms of orderly turn-taking. In this connection, it could be read as a way of negotiating legitimacy for an interaction style that might otherwise be perceived as disruptive. In other words, culture was used to assert recognition and defend a particular way of speaking.

Defining Prayer

As the sessions used various self-help practices for stress management, a discussion arose around the similarities between the MH+ skill, 'grounding', and 'prayer' (In Arabic:

Salah). In the MH+ context, grounding refers to simple exercises that help participants bring attention to their present moment, focusing on their body through breathing, or their immediate surroundings. It is used to manage stress and overwhelming thoughts by reconnecting individuals with a sense of stability and control in the here and now (World Health Organization et al., 2020).

Similarly, several participants described the structured act of Muslim prayer as a way of connecting with the earth through coordinated bodily movements, as a means of releasing negative energy through the body's contact with the ground. They emphasised the physicality of prayer, pointing to how specific body parts touch the floor and anchor the person. Building on this, some participants felt that there was little distinction between prayer and grounding, suggesting that grounding could simply be incorporated into the prayer movements.

This prompted a response from one of the Muslim facilitators, Ayan, who stepped in to clarify that the two practices should remain separate. The moment carried a certain tension, as different understandings of the exercise and of prayer itself were being negotiated in real time. The exchange resurfaced in the supervisor meetings following the session, where the Danish facilitators, Hanne and Sofie, reflected on having found the situation difficult to navigate. One of them noted:

> *"I was really happy that you helped with the difference between salah (prayer) and grounding. It's because that's where I fall short, I mean, I just do it that way. It was really great that you also mentioned a bit about that, but my experience is generally that there's a lot associated with religion, you know, and that makes perfect sense, […] but with that particular one, I don't really know the routine, so it's difficult to, like [respond to]..."* (supervisor transcript 1, l. 36-42)

This interaction illustrates an encounter where meaning and boundaries were negotiated around spiritual and bodily practices. The participants' suggestion to understand the nuances between 'prayer' and 'grounding' could reflect an effort to make an unfamiliar practice familiar by interpreting it through a religious frame. This process of meaning-making could be understood as religion becoming a resource to understand and legitimise these newly learned skills from the MH+ course. The facilitator's insistence on separating the two practices demonstrated how cultural differences were actively negotiated and regulated through the interaction, producing both inclusion and limitation within the course setting.

The discussion of grounding and prayer created a momentary point of tension between some of the participants and the facilitators. This tension could be understood in relation to differing forms of authority, as the participants were positioned as religiously knowledgeable

through their lived experience and their everyday understanding of prayer. From this perspective, knowledge gave them authority over what prayer was and how it should be understood and practised. In contrast, the facilitator, Ayan, spoke from a position that combined both professional responsibility in the course and religious competencies, by drawing on both institutional and experiential forms of knowledge. Ayan reflected:

> *"It's that focus in Salah, […] she's understood that she doesn't need to do it other times because she gets so tired. But it's not the same, is it? They're different situations. That's why I think that it's important for her to know."* (supervisor meeting 1, l. 53-55)

This could be understood as Ayan challenged the participants' understanding by suggesting that their knowledge was insufficient for the situation at hand. Additionally, it explains the contention between the two groups, as Ayan's position implicitly overruled the participants' religious authority, despite them all sharing experiential religious knowledge. This aligns with Staunæs' (2003) argument that in lived experiences, a hierarchy between various categories may be established to overrule others. This was displayed through Ayan's position as a facilitator, including her experiential knowledge as a Muslim woman, which placed her in a position where her definition of prayer overruled that of the participants.

Furthermore, it could be argued that it could reflect how power and positionality are enacted through interpretations of knowledge and competence. In this sense, what counted as 'knowing' or being 'competent' in the course emerged through encounters in which participants and facilitators were positioned differently in relation to one another. Ayan, with her facilitator perspective, carried more weight, which resulted in her contribution being perceived as authoritative and knowledgeable, while the participants who argued with her may be positioned as less authoritative. This mirrors Järvinen and Mik-Meyer's (2003) argument that processes of categorisation and interpretation are shaped by unequal power relations, where certain perspectives come to define how situations are understood. In this way, encounters within the course became sites where knowledge was actively negotiated and produced, as subject positions shaped both whose contributions were recognised and who got to define what counted as legitimate.

Caring for Oneself: Culture & Gender in Practice

As seen in Table 1 in the introduction of the empirical example, one of the themes that surfaces in the course was caring for oneself. Although this was built into the curriculum, it appeared to be a relatively unfamiliar concept to most of the participants. The unfamiliarity was explained

during the focus group by a participant, Fatima, who leaned forward and explained: "*It is our culture. It is like, we are superwoman. It is like we have to save all people"* (Focus group, l. 77-78). Other participants echoed their agreement with Fatima's statement, some visibly showing relief that their own experiences were mirrored by others.

Across the sessions, similar sentiments emerged in fragments through passing remarks about always being available to others, in laughter when self-care was framed as something unusual, and in stories of exhaustion told almost matter-of-factly. Participants repeatedly linked their reluctance and unfamiliarity with prioritising themselves to 'culture', invoking an image of the endlessly capable woman who carries responsibility for all without complaint. In this sense, caring for oneself was not simply a new practice they were introduced to, but something that seemed to counter a deeply embedded moral and cultural orientation.

This framing could be understood as highlighting the intersection of gendered and cultural norms that together constructed self-sacrifice as both virtuous and an expected form of conduct. These categories intertwined to produce a moral framework in which care for others, restraint, and the suppression of one's own needs were elevated as markers of what one participant called 'Muslim womanhood' (Fieldnotes, del 5, l. 16), where overextension was not only normalised but expected and valued.

Another participant, Zainab, reflected,

> *"I worry too much about others - I'm always responsible - I don't know why; no one asks after me. I get tired and depressed. I have to look after myself; they don't think about me or how I'm feeling […] Most Muslim women are brought up that way. We all feel that way. It's part of our culture. It's an abuse of care"* (Fieldnotes, del 5, l. 12-15).

Zainab's narrative further demonstrates how gender played a central role in this configuration, as she highlighted that expectations of care, emotional labour, and selflessness were disproportionately attached to female subjects. At the same time, she highlighted that cultural narratives reinforced these expectations by framing these dispositions as integral to collective values and belonging.

She explicitly connected 'being brought up that way' and 'Muslim womanhood' with a particular cultural discourse that served as an explanatory framework that both normalised and constrained her position. Additionally, it illustrates how subject positioning operated through internalised norms, where gendered expectations of care became moral obligations rather than choices. As a result, it simultaneously limited the articulation of personal needs and legitimised emotional strain, making self-care appear as a difficult and contested repositioning.

Even though the importance of self-care was acknowledged by all of the participants, it was also acknowledged that attempts at repositioning were met with resistance. A participant, Fatima, noted:

> "*It's too late. I think we've learnt this far too late. We should have learnt long ago to say no, but we haven't. We couldn't say no before. But now, when we say no, everyone gets angry."* (Focus group, l. 150-155).

Using Järvinen's (2003) concept of problem identities, this narrative illustrates how Fatima wanted to resist the expectations tied to her role as a Muslim woman. The issue was asserting boundaries which did not align with the gendered and cultural expectations of her. In this sense, Fatima expressed being perceived as a problem subject, illustrating how this position was produced through relational clashes in attempting to change the expectations of her social environment.

It demonstrates how efforts to adopt a more self-caring position challenged established social expectations through the lens of Staunæs' (2003) research, where individuals sought to do the same by broadening the criteria of belonging. However, this resulted in negative reactions when the participants wanted to depart from expected positions of care.

The facilitators and the research team became concerned that the curriculum of the course might inadvertently be reproducing a problematic norm by placing strong emphasis on caring for others, potentially at the expense of the participants' own self-care. Hanne, one of the facilitators, reflected,

> *"[The participants are] actually far too caring […] Caring towards others, and others taking advantage of that. […] So, this talk about them needing to be even more caring, and first they have to choose one person, then they have to choose a second person, then they have to be caring towards two people, and then, at the very end, they can think about themselves"* (Supervisor meeting 4, l. 46-53).

Hanne's reflection highlights how the curriculum, placing strong emphasis on caring for others, risked reproducing a moralised expectation of self-sacrifice that aligned with the participant's own gendered, cultural framings. This reflection highlights how an evidence-based intervention like MH+ could unintentionally reproduce existing cultural, gendered and social norms.

In a sense, the course curriculum risked enforcing a moral hierarchy of care, where self-care only became acceptable after extensive relational giving. Importantly, this hierarchy was not imposed through explicit instruction but emerged through good intentions to help participants manage stress in their everyday lives. Rather than inadvertently limiting the

transformative potential of self-care practices for the participants, this dynamic illustrates how the MH+ course actively participated in producing particular forms of identity.

This section has illustrated how religion, culture, and gender function as closely intersecting categories within the course, shaping participants' meaning-making, positioning, and responses to the course material. Moreover, this sub-chapter highlighted how self-care practices intersected with religious and cultural norms in ways that both enabled and constrained the participants' possibilities for change. Furthermore, this kind of knowledge matters because it draws attention to the relational aspects of implementation that are often obscured in research. In doing so, it foregrounds the lived experience and dynamics by broadening what is considered valid knowledge.

The Role of Language

In the following sub-chapter, language proficiency will be explored as a socially constructed category that became a point of contention among the participants throughout the course. Rather than functioning as a neutral measure of ability, language proficiency became a site where power, inclusion, and legitimacy were negotiated in interaction. These negotiations directly influenced the processes of knowledge produced through the encounters in the course.

The MH+ course itself was in Danish, entailing that some proficiency was necessary for participation. However, it varied greatly how fluent and comfortable each participant felt with Danish. All of the participants spoke either Arabic or Somali as their native tongue, but two felt that Danish was more pedagogical and better reflected what they were learning. The rest of the participants felt most comfortable keeping the shorter one-to-one conversations in Arabic, to fully encapsulate how they were feeling. This individual discretion was acceptable for the facilitators, as they wanted everyone to communicate in the language they felt most comfortable with.

A situation arose during a one-to-one conversation where two participants disagreed on which language their conversation should be in; one participant, Sahar, felt most comfortable with Arabic, and another participant, Aicha, wanted to keep the conversation in Danish. As Aicha was one of the participants who felt comfortable speaking up, her assertiveness resulted in a continual policing of Sahar to speak Danish, even though she did not feel comfortable with this. This created tension, causing a facilitator, Hanne, to intervene by reorganising the participants into groups according to language proficiency and comfort level.

This could be understood as Aicha, who insisted on Danish as the only acceptable medium of interaction, positioning Danish as the only legitimate language of participation. She claimed control over the conversation by making inclusion language-depend, resulting in Sahar being excluded from Aicha's group due to her preferred language.

The two participants who preferred speaking Danish during the course were also some of the participants who had attended and completed post-secondary education. Through Aicha's attempts to discipline Sahar to speak Danish, Sahar's linguistic struggles were not treated as neutral but instead marked her as deficient, amplifying feelings of vulnerability and exclusion. The facilitator, Hanne's, intervention worked to reconfigure the conditions of participation, illustrating that subject repositioning does not need moral instruction. In this sense, inclusion was not simply a matter of correction but an active negotiation where power relations became visible in who was authorised to speak and how (Brah & Phoenix, 2004).

This situation eventually discouraged Sahar from continuing to attend the MH+ course, suggesting that being repeatedly disciplined through correction challenged her ability to see the MH+ course as a place of comfort. In other words, it showcases Staunæs' (2003) reasoning that social categories are tools of inclusion and exclusion and how actively being positioned in a particular way can be cumulative. This discomfort can lead to disengagement in an interactional context where belonging has become fragile.

The facilitators reflected on there being several participants who preferred speaking Arabic. One facilitator mentioned:

> *"Yes, I actually think it is really good, […] because I know they want to speak Arabic and they still do. They're both a bit unsure about the whole thing and stuff like that, so I actually think they can support each other and see themselves reflected in one another, don't you think?"* (Supervisor meeting 3, l. 379-382)

This illustrates that the facilitators reframed language not as a deficit or problem, but as a shared source where participants could shift language from a source of vulnerability to collective confidence. By grouping participants according to linguistic preference, the facilitators supported Arabic or Somali as a legitimate medium of engagement rather than a marker of vulnerability. Moreover, this could be argued to reflect an attempt to work against exclusionary dynamics by re-shaping the conditions for participation.

Another linguistic dispute arose in the later sessions when something in the course curriculum needed to be translated into Arabic to ensure understanding by all. One participant, Aicha, stepped in early, taking the role of translator as the discussion unfolded, with a few others chiming in to help. Ayan, one of the facilitators who also spoke Arabic, noticed subtle

tensions in the interaction that had gone largely unnoticed by the Danish-speaking facilitators. Ayan later recounted that Aicha had initially begun translating, but as others began to assist, she grew visibly frustrated, snapping at them in Arabic and insisting on being the sole translator. Ayan recalled:

> "*She's the leader and wants to play the leader, and it's me who says that, and then she translates it so that the others can understand, because when she says a word, it's not quite right, so she just says it. It's me who says it. I'm the one who has to say it, do you understand?"* (Supervisor meeting 3, l. 330-333)

This narrative illustrates how language had symbolic authority, where Aicha wanted to position herself as linguistically competent. In other words, translation was not only a practical task but became a socially valued position that determined control over the meaning that was translated and knowledge. When other participants offered their assistance, this position was threatened, prompting Aicha to reassert control over the translation process. The dispute revealed how social processes can highlight internal hierarchies and negotiations of legitimacy, even among participants who share a language. Furthermore, it demonstrated how translation practices could be seen as a contested space where recognition and leadership are at stake.

Crucially, Ayan's recollection of the situation underscored how these dynamics may remain invisible to those without shared linguistic competence, highlighting how knowledge imbalances can shape what becomes visible within the encounter. It highlights the subtleties of processes of subject positioning, particularly when they are language-dependent. It illustrates how a well-meaning inclusion practice like participant-led translation unintentionally activated struggles over authority or recognition. This added new layers to the hierarchy within the group through intra-group negotiations, where positions of leadership were continuously negotiated and reordered (Staunæs, 2003).

This section demonstrates how language operated as a social category through which participation and authority were negotiated in the course. Linguistic practices became sites of tension and recognition, illustrating that language functions as a relationally produced source of legitimacy, inclusion, and exclusion. These encounters not only shaped who was able to speak and be heard, but also influenced whose contributions were validated. In this sense, the negotiation of language proficiency became central to the production of knowledge, as it structured whose perspectives were recognised as authoritative.

Difficulty Settling into One's Role

This section explores how some participants navigated the process of taking up particular roles within the MH+ course, highlighting that it was a struggle for some to settle into their roles as participants. Particularly, prior professional experience made it difficult for some to shift from giving care to receiving or sharing it, which blurred the boundaries and expectations of what it meant to be a participant.

Over the six-week course, a participant, Amina, expressed how it was difficult attending the courses as a participant, particularly considering her education and background in care work. Drawing on her professional experience, she reflected on the tension this created for her, noting:

> *"I've worked and worked my fingers to the bone. But then suddenly I fell ill and was given various diagnoses, even though I really want to earn my own money. My kids have moved out of the family home, so I was proud of myself for earning my own money. Maybe I could buy a small flat and enjoy myself. Then, all of a sudden, this illness I have came along. I have different thoughts running through my head. And that's what happens: I don't accept that you're ill. I'm two people. One of me keeps saying I have to work and carry on at the same time, I have to do it, I have to do it. But when I get up, I say, 'No, you're ill, you can't do it.' So, I'm two people arguing with each other."* (Focus group, l. 498-505)

Amina's narrative illustrates the process through which subjectivity was shaped by multiple, competing discourses at the same time, in this case, those related to work and illness. Amina positioned herself both as a hard worker and as an ill subject, whose capacity to work was constrained, resulting in what can be understood as a split positionality. The tension between the 'two people' revealed how moral worth and legitimacy were continuously negotiated through this narrative. Another participant, Fatima, echoed a similar challenge, stating:

> *"I'm a care worker; I'm a care assistant. I've done various other courses and have a range of skills; I've worked for many years and have a great deal of experience. So, the things I say, all those minutes, they just vanish – what am I supposed to do? I also think it's very hard these days, in this new world/everyday life, or in the world/everyday life we live in. It's very hard, for example, if you have to change your lifestyle. I think it's hard. Because of illness"* (Focus group, l. 519-521)

This illustrates how not only Amina but also Fatima experienced a tension between long-standing professional identity and changed life circumstances related to illness. Work was

associated with pride, autonomy, and future orientation, whereas illness was associated with interruption, limitation, and diminished agency. In this sense, illness functions as a repositioning force that disrupts access to valued forms of participation in society, producing a precarious positionality.

Within the dynamics of the course, this tension became particularly visible as two of the participants shared a similar professional background to the facilitators, while simultaneously attending the sessions in a different capacity. Employing Staunæs' (2003) perspective, this tension could be understood as a struggle with how the category of 'participant' was loaded with expectations about hierarchical positioning within the group and clashed with their self-understanding. Moreover, it reflects both an instability in the social category itself and the internal discomfort experienced by the participants as they struggled to navigate the tension between the 'two people', two competing versions of themselves.

In contrast, other participants appeared to more readily accept the category of 'participant'. This resulted in a division between the participants who aligned with the MH+ course expectations in order to receive help and those who challenged it.

Negotiating Legitimacy

As previously mentioned, not all participants and facilitators knew each other prior to the beginning of the course, which also meant that trust was something that was built over time. Though the first session established a shared group agreement in order to cultivate trust among the group members, this did not mean that participants immediately trusted the expertise of the facilitators.

It was interesting to note that there was particularly more scepticism from the participants toward the facilitator with a migration background, Ayan, than the other facilitators with a Danish background. This dynamic surfaced clearly during one of the breaks, when two participants turned to Ayan with curious, probing questions about her place within the facilitator team, asking about her educational background and what she did for work. Meeting their curiosity head-on, Ayan responded by laying out her credentials, professional experience, and connection to the group in detail. Her answer seemed to settle the room, satisfying the curiosity of the participants (Fieldnotes, del 4, l. 10-12).

This moment revealed how legitimacy and authority were unevenly negotiated through the intersection of ethnicity, education, and professional status. The participants' probing questions directed specifically at Ayan signalled that her position within the facilitator team

was not taken for granted in the same way as her Danish counterparts. Instead, her belonging within the facilitator team had to be actively established and defended, suggesting that ethnicised difference shaped how her authority was perceived. In this context, education and profession became key resources through which Ayan could assert legitimacy, effectively compensating for the initial scepticism directed at her.

This contrasted with the experience of the Danish facilitators, whose authority was implicitly recognised and left unquestioned, illustrating how their positioning as part of the majority in Denmark naturalised competence and belonging. Moreover, it reflects Brah and Phoenix's (2004) argument that intersections of ethnicity and professional identity structure expectations of credibility through specific forms of disadvantage and privilege. While Ayan's qualifications needed to be made visible and accounted for, those of the Danish facilitators, Hanne and Sofie, remained assumed and uncontested. In this sense, authority was not simply a function of formal role but co-produced through relational dynamics where ethnicised and educational hierarchies shaped who was trusted, who was scrutinised, and who was afforded immediate legitimacy.

Evaluating the Role of the Co-Facilitators

One participant, Amina, took the opportunity during the focus group to express scepticism toward the co-facilitators, Sofie and Ayan, whose role involved less direct leadership and more supportive presence by being available for individual conversation or providing additional assistance when needed. Amina expressed her mistrust,

> *"Yeah. We know them well; they're incredibly nice, [but] it makes a bad impression. We're not in the psychiatric ward, we're ordinary people. […] Why are those two sitting here, because they think I'm crazy and keeping an eye on you?"* (Focus group, l. 168-171)

Amina continued,

> *"But that's what I mean... For example, two of [the facilitators] aren't saying a word. They're just sitting here staring at us. But they're like two guards. […] It's a bit like... Yeah, that surveillance stuff. […] Those things create a bad atmosphere too. I think they think we're all a bit mad to come here."* (Focus group, l. 193-204)

These two narratives could be understood as expressing a layered struggle over identity, authority, and belonging, influenced by Amina herself having a background as a care worker. She actively distanced herself and the group from a more clinical setting that could be

associated with professional care, where the presence of the co-facilitators could be interpreted as monitoring the participants, rather than supporting them.

At the same time, Amina's reaction reflected an internal tension in her own positioning within the course. As a care worker, Amina was accustomed to occupying the role of the helper and not being the participant in 'treatment'. In this sense, being placed in a participant role could destabilise her identity further, particularly in the light of the tension that she already felt of being 'two people', as mentioned earlier in this sub-chapter.

Amina's critique could be seen as an attempt to negotiate positions, rather than aligning with the category of participant. In this sense, her narrative revealed how her own professional identity and experiential knowledge shaped not only how she interpreted the situation with the role of the co-facilitators in the MH+ course, but also how she negotiated her own place within it. This further displays Staunæs (2003) argument that the social categories, such as the category of 'participant', can result in new hierarchical positioning within the group.

Importantly, Amina's interpretation should not be read as a direct reflection of the co-facilitators' intentions or personal attitudes. Rather, it illustrates how positionality was produced relationally and emerged beyond the intent of the individual. In this context, Amina's professional background and personal struggle with her current position became particularly significant, as the support of the co-facilitators triggered her and was reinterpreted as suspicious and an act of surveillance.

This sub-chapter demonstrated how certain participants navigated their newfound role within the course and met this dynamic with scepticism. These processes made some facilitators more visible and subject to scrutiny than others, particularly Ayan's position as a facilitator, which reflected intersectional factors such as ethnicity and professional roles. As a result, this revealed that not only participation but overlapping social categories influenced whose presence and knowledge was more readily accepted within the MH+ course.

This first chapter of the analysis has set out to answer the first working question of how processes of subject positioning shape encounters within the course, and how these encounters contribute to the production of knowledge. This was demonstrated through examining how processes of subject positioning were central to shaping how encounters unfold within the course. This influenced not only how participants and facilitators relate to one another but also how knowledge is produced and circulated. Subject positions were dynamically changing through ongoing interactions, shaped by implicit hierarchies, cultural norms, and intersectional factors such as gender, language, race, and prior educational experience. These factors affected

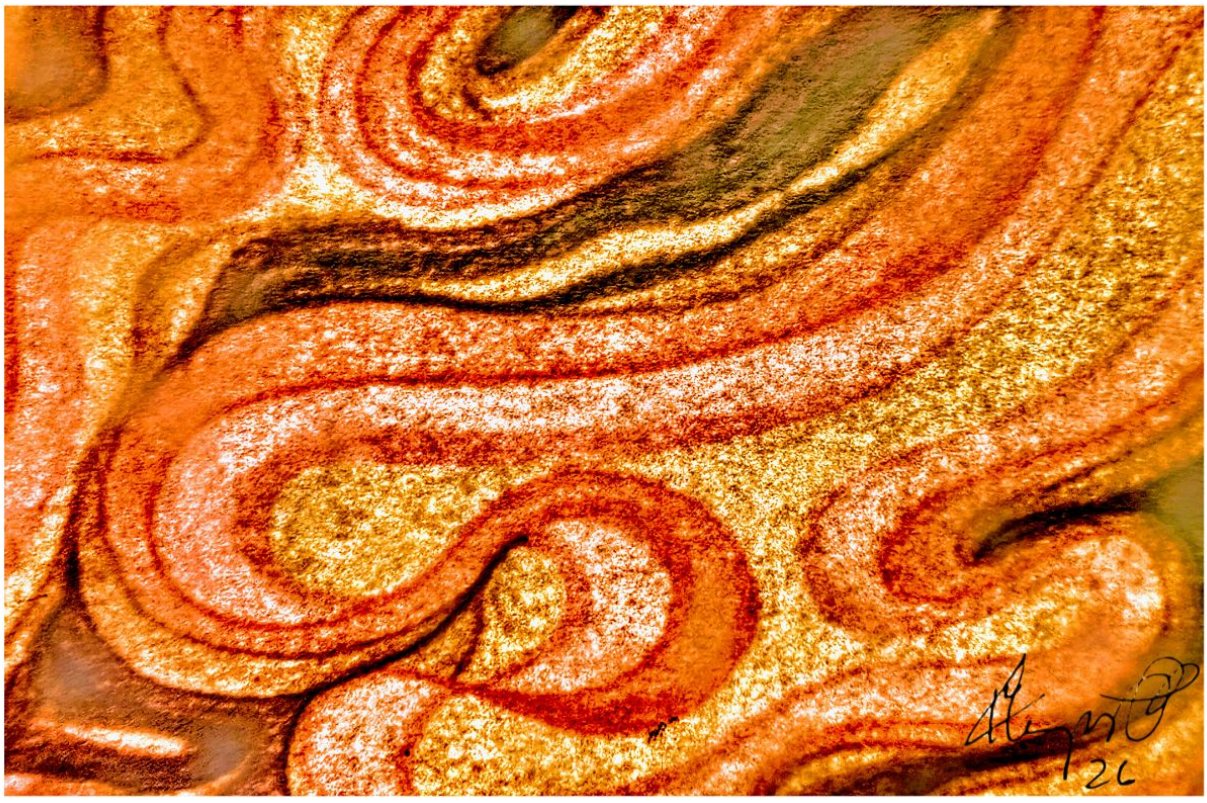
who was able to participate with confidence and ease, whose contributions were heard, and who was required to negotiate their legitimacy more actively.

Moreover, it illustrated how encounters within the MH+ course were not neutral exchanges, but sites where power, visibility, and recognition were continuously negotiated. As a result, the forms of knowledge that were produced through encounters in the course cannot be understood as purely collaborative or an egalitarian process. Focusing on subject positioning highlighted forms of situated, experiential, and interactional knowledge that emerged in practice, which is often marginalised or overlooked by standardised evaluations of evidence-based interventions like the MH+ course. Institutional knowledge often obscures how knowledge is negotiated, resisted and shaped by relational and positional dynamics in situ, which upholds the idea that formalised, measurable, and decontextualised forms of knowledge should be privileged over other forms of knowledge.

By foregrounding important moments of tension, negotiation, and resistance, it contextualises important insights into how an intervention actually works. By allowing these dynamics to create openings for expressing frustration with dominant gender-specific cultural norms and allowing room for alternative perspectives, this chapter underscores that leaving this form of knowledge out risks reproducing dominant hierarchies of knowledge. In this sense, subject positioning played an active role in determining what came to count as knowledge, whose contributions were valued, and how the MH+ course was ultimately experienced.

When Emotions Move

Between People



This chapter will explore how emotions move and take shape through encounters within the MH+ course, drawing attention to how emotions move, settle, and are projected through encounters between participants and facilitators. Acknowledging the diverse positionalities of facilitators and participants present in the course, it argues that emotions emerge relationally through informal, often subtle dynamics of interaction. As emotions circulate across these encounters, they influence how participants engage with each other. By drawing on Sara Ahmed's (2004; 2014) and Spanger's (2017) conceptualisation of emotions, this chapter explores how emotions circulate, attach to bodies and subjects, and actively shape social formations. By foregrounding the role of circulating emotions, this chapter highlights how situated knowledge is produced through dialogue and interaction, and how the participants and facilitators affectively orient themselves toward one another.

The Conflict: Competing Expectations of Appropriate Conduct

During one of the sessions, a moment of tension unfolded between two participants, Aicha and Noor. They were some of the few participants who had known each other prior to the course. The incident took place during a break, in the loosened atmosphere that followed once most participants and facilitators had stepped out of the room. In this informal space, Noor teased Aicha with what she later described as a light, familiar joke. According to Noor, this was in line with the tone of their existing relationship, yet the moment did not land as expected. Instead, Aicha reacted sharply, breaking into an emotional outburst that seemed to catch the remaining participants and facilitator off guard. What was intended as a small, playful exchange quickly escalated into something heavier, exposing tensions that had perhaps been simmering beneath the surface. Recounting the incident afterwards in the supervisor meeting following the session, one of the facilitators, Ayan, who had been present during the conflict, reflected:

> *"[Aicha yelled] You're childish! You're so childish, playing around like a toddler and saying, 'I'm hungry. I want to eat right now.' And then [Noor] said, 'I was joking'. And then [Aicha] said, 'I don't need your jokes; I came here for the course.'*
> (Supervisor meeting 2, l. 69-71)

This altercation illustrates how Aicha's emotional outburst actively produced a boundary between what she thoughts was legitimate and illegitimate behaviour within the MH+ course. The purpose of the course was to help individuals better cope with mental distress by developing practical skills for managing difficult thoughts and emotions to strengthen

resilience and wellbeing. Aicha's attempt to discipline Noor could be seen as her interpreting that a serious demeanour was required for participation in the course, which would paint Noor as immature. This could be seen as Aicha wanting to determine who belongs to the course, i.e., who acted in accordance with the legitimate behaviour required of the participants, and who was marked out of place.

The rest of the participants and facilitators returned to the session after the break, seemingly unaware that anything unusual had occurred. The atmosphere at first felt routine, chairs scraped lightly against the floor, and low conversations settled as the participants took their seats. Yet beneath the ordinary rhythm lingered a tension that had not fully dissipated. As everyone resettled, Noor, who originally made the joke, suddenly stood up and raised her voice. One of the facilitators, Hanne, recalled,

> *"And then [Noor] just snapped at [Aicha]. [Noor] gave her a real telling-off and just, well, let it all out, saying, 'I was just joking, I didn't mean to…' and, well, it turned out that way. It was quite a violent outburst, but I think [Noor] simply needed to speak her mind, that it wasn't right."* (Supervisor meeting 2, l. 80-83)

This outburst illustrates Ahmed's (2014) argument that emotions continue to circulate within a space, in this case showing how affect accumulated and resurfaced later in the session. By articulating her frustrations publicly, Noor drew the entire group into the affective dynamic, which reshaped the emotional atmosphere of the room.

Simultaneously, the outburst could be read as Noor's attempt to reassert moral legitimacy, cementing that the reprimand for the joke was 'not right', as the joke was intended to be harmless. In other words, the emotional outburst contested what Aicha had previously attempted to establish as the boundaries of acceptable behaviour. This suggested that what the facilitator, Hanne, described as a 'violent outburst' might be understood as an emotional expression of shame or frustration.

Most of the facilitators and participants had been out of the room when the conflict first unfolded, which meant that the second outburst caught most completely off guard. One of the facilitators, Hanne, quickly tried to handle the situation so that it would not escalate further. In the supervisor meeting following the session, she reflected:

> *"I was referring to our group's agreement to respect one another, and we were all here to focus on tackling stress and any conflicts we might have; we were supposed to try to keep that sort of thing out of the room."* (Supervisor meeting 2, l. 11-14)

Employing Ahmed's (2004) concept of affective economy, this could be understood as an attempt to regulate the emotional dynamics of the room by framing certain emotions as

something that should be contained, managed, or at least kept outside the room. Furthermore, by invoking the group's agreement and the purpose of the course, Hanne redirected attention away from the confrontation and toward the course material. In this way, emotions were framed as acceptable if they were channelled into exercises within the course, while disruptive expressions were marked as belonging outside the room, such as the conflict between Aicha and Noor.

Following the session, the facilitators attempted to follow up with both Aicha and Noor. Hanne recalled the follow-up conversation with Noor, saying:

> *"Then when we'd finished, I went over to her and said, 'Do you need us to sort this out?' And [Noor] said, 'No, no, it doesn't matter. I've forgotten about it now.'"* (Supervisor meeting 2, l. 111-113)

This illustrates that while emotions from the conflict continued to circulate, the handling of the conflict had been suspended during the session, resulting in Noor feeling detached from it after the session. In this sense, forgetting could function as an effective strategy that allowed for the MH+ course space to return to its previous emotional orientation, rather than reflecting that the conflict was resolved.

Moreover, Noor's outburst during the session could be understood as a response driven by a need to release accumulated tension with Aicha, rather than a deliberate intention to disrupt the session. This recognises that Noor's response may have been shaped by prior experiences or an affective build-up in the room, after the conflict began. In this sense, what from Hanne's perspective appears as something to be managed or contained, may from Noor's perspective be a necessary moment to relieve pressure to return to the course material.

Later, the facilitators agreed that the second outburst may have been a necessary step to relieve the emotional tension. Hanne reflected:

> *"I think it was really good. [Noor] actually spoke up, and [Aicha] certainly didn't react by escalating the situation. She actually went very, very quiet."* (Supervisor meeting 2, l. 152-154)

On the one hand, Hanne's account frames the outburst as productive, as it created more balance among the participants, where Aicha had previously been allowed to dominate other participants, which was highlighted in the first chapter of the analysis. Viewed through this lens, the moment could be seen as challenging an existing power imbalance in the group dynamic. The subsequent quietness of Aicha could be interpreted as a sign of de-escalation, resulting in Noor's outburst functioning as a corrective force that re-ordered the group dynamic.

On the other hand, the moment could be read as an example of affective discipline, where Aicha's quietness could be seen as a sign of being shamed into disengagement. Using Ahmed's (2014) argument that certain emotions, such as anger, carry different weight, it could highlight how Aicha's actions became attached to notions of what was considered unacceptable, resulting in her withdrawal rather than continued dialogue.

Both of these interpretations underscore how the same emotional moment could reflect a range of meanings and simultaneously appear as constructive and suppressive. Furthermore, Hanne's reflection on the conflict revealed how emotional productivity is often measured through the visible, such as through Aicha's silence, while the less visible cost of her withdrawal from the conflict remained unexamined.

Though Noor felt comfortable leaving the conflict at the door, it was less clear if Aicha was able to. The facilitators did not have a chance to debrief with her after the session, but in the post-supervisor meeting, they reflected on how to approach the altered dynamic in future sessions, as the conflict may continue to circulate within the group. Hanne said:

> *"I don't know if it'll happen again – I mean, I hope not. I've got a chance now, because [prior to the session] [Aicha's] been on the phone [with me] with some sort of problem, and now I've said I'll ring her back later, and I think I'll just try and have a bit of a chat with her then, and just say that, well, we need to keep our tempers in check here and we have to respect each other and stuff like that, you know? I think there's just a chat with her on the phone and then I hope nothing else happens"* (Supervisor meeting 2, l. 140-145)

This illustrates how the facilitators anticipated what regulations may be needed to manage the emotional aftermath of the conflict. Moreover, it displayed how Hanne wanted to move the tension away from the collective space of the MH+ course and into a more private, one-to-one exchange. From this perspective, disruptive emotions were approached as something that could be pre-emptively managed, rather than a shared experience that required discussion among the participants.

It could be argued that this approach reflected the interpersonal dynamic between Hanne and Aicha, where relational repair in private was more effective in preventing further emotional outbursts. At the same time, this approach could be seen as reflecting Hanne's dual role as both lead-facilitator and employee within the social organisation. Her response reflected that maintaining stability was central for participation, informed by prior experiences of supporting participants through emotional outbursts in other work contexts. Following up with

Aicha in person highlighted how Hanne favoured individualised, preventative support as a way to look after Aicha and the wider participant group.

The Aftermath of the Conflict

As previously mentioned, a conflict emerged during a break in the MH+ course between two participants. Although the conflict appeared to be resolved or at least dismissed in the moment, it lingered in subsequent sessions. Drawing on Ahmed's (2004; 2014) idea that emotions "stick" to people and spaces, and Spanger's (2017) question of what emotions *do*, this suggests that the tension did not simply fade but continued to shape interactions, atmospheres, and group dynamics over time.

It became increasingly evident that the conflict did not remain contained in the session in which it unfolded but was carried forward by the participants as an affective undercurrent in the session that followed. The participants involved, Aicha and Noor, seemed to move through the session space with a residual charge, resulting in their interactions being shaped by emotions that had not yet settled. In this way, the conflict continued to live on, not through direct confrontation, but through small shifts in posture, tone, and engagement, quietly reshaping both their interactions and the broader atmosphere within the group.

This became particularly noticeable at the beginning of the MH+ session immediately following the conflict. Noor had already arrived prior to Aicha, and the room felt light and sociable with the participants chatting easily, and laughter flickering across the space. As soon as Aicha entered the room, this ease proved fragile as the atmosphere shifted almost instantly. Conversations trailed off, voices were lowered, and a noticeable stillness settled in. What had moments prior been a friendly atmosphere now felt strained and uncertain. Aicha and Noor, who were at the centre of the earlier conflict, avoided looking at each other entirely. In this way, the emotional residue of the conflict became collectively felt, organising not only by their interaction but the mood of the room itself.

The shift in atmosphere when Aicha arrived indicated that even though not all participants were directly involved in the conflict, its effects were felt by all. Even without explicit discussion, participants responded in relation to what they sensed about the incident. Applying Spanger's (2017) work on how emotions produce effects in the world, the response to Aicha's arrival among the participants could be understood as examples of emotions, such as through silence, avoidance, and awkwardness, reinforcing group boundaries or even

showing solidarity with Noor. This further suggested that the relational dynamics between Aicha and the other participants had changed as a result of the conflict.

Aicha's participation in the MH+ course had previously been very engaged, and she had contributed without being asked. However, as the session began post-conflict, it became hard to miss her shifting participation. Where others leaned in, sharing reflections, exchanging smiles and nods of recognition, she seemed to retreat. Quiet, leaning away from the table, eyes fixed on her phone, she positioned herself at the edge of the unfolding discussion rather than within it. Her reserved participation stood out because of its contrast to the group's engaged participation, where she used to be one of the loudest in the room.

This moment could illustrate how emotions circulate over time, suggesting a lingering affective weight that altered Aicha's sense of belonging and participation in the group. In this manner, the earlier conflict continued to ripple through the room, influencing who felt able to speak and withdraw into silence, ultimately reorganising the group's social and emotional landscape.

It was clear to all that something had changed in the wake of the conflict, in a sense marking the participants involved and shaping how they were seen by others. This resonates with Spanger's (2017) research, illustrating how emotions can play a significant role in shaping a hostile atmosphere by reinforcing divisions between individuals. Furthermore, Aicha's altered mode of participation could be understood as a form of withdrawal shaped by shame, discomfort, or exclusion.

After this shift in atmosphere, the facilitators reflected on the new dynamics in the supervisor meeting following the session:

> *"It was a completely different situation to last time, wouldn't you say? I mean, there wasn't... There weren't any widespread incidents, no outbursts or conflicts like that, but you just had to be on the ball. I think we were all just a bit more vigilant and kept an eye on a few specific people as well as the group itself, and were sort of ready in case something happened"* (Supervisor meeting 3, l. 308-312)

This reflection illustrates how, in the aftermath of the conflict, the affective residue of the earlier conflict also continued to shape the facilitators' orientation toward the group. It could be understood as a sense of heightened vigilance of the circulating emotional pattern lurking beneath the surface. Even in the absence of visible outbursts, the emotional fallout was still doing something, producing a sense of anticipation for potential future volatility.

A Message of Dissatisfaction

The following week, one of the facilitators, Hanne, mentioned in the supervisor meeting that she had been contacted by Aicha, who originally started the conflict. Hanne narrated:

> *"So, after the last meeting, I received a text message from one of the participants who'd been having a lot of problems, and she'd had a bad experience and thought, on the whole, that it was awful to attend the course. She thought the course itself was good, but it was the whole atmosphere among the women and at the centre she was actually dissatisfied with the whole thing. So, I replied to her saying that I thought it was really good that she wrote that to me, and that I'd like to talk to her about it. I was happy that she'd got something good out of the course. And I also wanted to find a way for her to take part in the course in a positive way – so that it wouldn't be a bad experience."* (Supervisor meeting 5, l. 144-172).

Following Ahmed's (2004; 2014) argument that emotions stick, this illustrates how negative emotions became attached to the atmosphere, the social relations among the participants, and the social organisation itself. It could be understood as emotion stuck to the collective environment, which transformed participation into an 'awful' experience. This was contrary to the purpose of the MH+ course, which was intended to help individuals better cope with emotional anguish. Instead, the emotional fallout seemed to add to Aicha's mental distress.

Hanne's response could be seen as a way of trying to reorient the complaint toward positive engagement by attempting to solve the situation with a one-to-one conversation. Additionally, as this critique only came from Aicha, it could also be seen as an individual experience, not reflective of the collective feedback of the course. This displayed how emotions were managed not only during sessions but also through informal communication, where there was better room for disruptions to be dealt with.

Hanne recalled how she tried to get in contact with Aicha to properly talk through her experiences, saying:

> *"And so, I did call her, and I did that many times. She wouldn't talk to me. And well, I actually thought—I actually expected—she wouldn't come today. But she did. She showed up anyway, and I actually just talked to her a little bit before she left. Not so much about that, but just about how nice it was that she came and that it was good she was here. She thought it had been nice today. I actually think she just needed to get that out."* (Supervisor meeting 5, l. 182-200).

This could illustrate how Aicha had a temporary need to express herself through the message, in a way needing to discharge negative emotions and then move on from them. It is interesting to note how Aicha's release of emotions was similar to Noor's response following her outburst, who also expressed the need to 'just get it out'. Hanne tried repeatedly to get some resolution from the message, whereas Aicha may have only needed a place to unload her feelings and then be allowed to move on. It illustrated how Hanne and Aicha interpreted the situation differently, illustrating how meaning-making was negotiated uniquely by participants and facilitators.

These three sub-chapters have explored the circulating emotions in the MH+ course by focusing on one of the conflicts that happened during the sessions and the lingering effects it had in the later sessions. These encounters demonstrated the central role emotions had within the course, revealing that the knowledge that emerged was closely tied to these emotional dynamics. Moreover, emotional responses were shown to be socially produced through encounters that ultimately shaped participation, allegiances, and relationships. Furthermore, foregrounding these often-overlooked dimensions of affective landscapes contrasts the idea that outcomes of implementing an intervention should be formally measured by highlighting how encounters are shaped by various relational and context-dependent dynamics.

Hierarchy of Negative & Positive Feelings

The following sub-chapter focuses on Ahmed's (2014) hierarchies of emotion within the MH+ course, to explore how certain emotions came to be valued as appropriate for the course context, while others were seen as disruptive. Furthermore, it considers facilitators' reflections that underscore the tensions and limitations inherent in the design of the MH+ course aimed at scalability.

Considering that it is a group-based course on stress management, one of the purposes of the MH+ course was to help individuals manage difficult and negative feelings. As such, during the course, the participants were regularly asked to locate a feeling within their bodies and name it, as a way to encourage awareness of internal states. The audio guide would typically instruct the participants to locate a difficult or negative feeling during these exercises for them to practice skills such as grounding that they learned in the course.

One of the facilitators, Hanne, struggled with the course content, which did not properly reflect the nuances of the lived experience and wanted to add emphasis on working with neutral feelings. She reflected:

> *"But there it was, I had a bit of that again today, […] because when I sit there doing that grounding exercise, I don't have any negative thoughts. I sit there every time, and now I have to find one or two that I might as well… It can be very nice that it's a bit more neutral. I mean, that it can be negative and positive and neutral and things like that. It's just a matter of finding a thought that stands out and putting a name to it"* (Supervisor meeting 4, l. 203-208)

Hanne expresses frustration that negative or difficult emotions appear to be the primary object of attention to be identified and worked through. This reflection illustrated how the course content implicitly reproduces the idea that some emotions were more meaningful, actionable, or in need of management than others, which aligns with Ahmed's (2014) notion of a hierarchy of emotions where some emotions are considered more transformative for personal growth.

Moreover, it could also reflect that Hanne's discomfort with having to 'find' negative thoughts during a grounding exercise revealed how the hierarchy of emotions can fail to align with lived experiences. The desire to include neutral feelings complicates the dominant binary of negative versus positive emotions by recognising neutrality as a potentially meaningful and affective emotional state. Alternatively, it could point to how the hierarchy of emotions was already shaping expectations about what emotions participants should be experiencing within the MH+ course.

In this way, Ahmed's (2014) hierarchy of emotions could be argued to structure the facilitator's self-reflection and the MH+ course content. Neutrality of emotions was framed as 'very nice', yet still required justification within the course content, which was oriented toward managing negative or difficult emotions. This underscores how certain emotional states became more desirable and, in this case, useful for the course than others. Moreover, it could reflect how emotional expectations in the course subtly prioritised specific affective experiences over others.

This discussion continued in the supervisor meetings among the facilitators and the research team, where the question was raised whether encouraging participants to meditate on difficult or negative feelings had any unintended harmful effects. This topic emerged in the encounter with another participant, Fatima, who mentioned the difficulty of being asked to remember difficult experiences. A facilitator recalled:

> *"Well, […] she said she found it hard when we were just supposed to be quiet, and then she had this and that, and I think that's because there are some feelings, that are hard to deal with, that's why it's difficult, isn't it? I mean, someone said that, but it was her;*

she laughed a bit about it and just said, 'I think so,'" (Supervisor meeting 4, l. 229-233).

This illustrates how Fatima did not necessarily ask for there to be more emphasis on neutral emotions, but that negative or difficult emotions were challenging and demanding work. It does confirm that it required work and was not easy to do the emotional work of bringing troubling emotions to the surface. At the same time, it does not mean that it is not an important practice.

This emphasis on encouraging participants to work with difficult or negative feelings could also be understood as believing emotional difficulty to be representative of meaningful engagement, where distress becomes normalised or even expected, mirroring Ahmed's (2014) argument that some emotions are considered more productive than others.

As a consequence, this could create an affective pressure to access difficult feelings to participate in a meaningful way. Furthermore, this approach would also overlook that participant capacity to engage with negative or difficult emotions may vary and is shaped by past experiences, including trauma. In this sense, what is framed as a therapeutic self-help reflection may function to reactivate vulnerability rather than alleviate it.

To Reflect on Difficult Emotions or Not

As previously stated, the MH+ course was designed to be delivered by lay facilitators who go through training, rather than mental health professionals. The training included equipping facilitators with the skills to guide sessions through audio recordings and manuals, emphasising skills such as managing group dynamics and responding to emotional expressions without positioning facilitators as experts or therapists. While the MH+ model decentralises clinical expertise by relying on trained lay facilitators, it does not fully embrace a peer-to-peer approach, as facilitators remain positioned as the guides of the sessions, responsible for delivering the intervention.

Across the course, the participants were encouraged to reflect and identify their emotions; however, not all emotions were equally welcomed. As has been highlighted through the analysis, some emotional expressions were framed as potentially overwhelming for other participants or difficult for the facilitators to manage. This perspective did not take into account that emotions were part of the situated processes that unfold in the room. As a result, certain emotional expressions were welcome while others were characterised as needing to be constrained. In other words, participants were encouraged to reflect and speak about

challenging experiences, yet it was not always possible to separate which emotions were permitted and manageable within the course space, and which were not.

In this sense, this challenges the MH+ format of using lay facilitators as participant emotional responses may exceed their level of training. Considering this, it becomes a fragile balancing act of encouraging self-reflection while limiting emotional depth, as emotions cannot be selectively invited without risking the emergence of emotions that are more intense or potentially disruptive.

A way to solve this was the purpose of the pre-interview before the course. The intention was to provide participants with a separate space to unload and release emotions that may be considered too much to work with in the course itself. This could be understood as an attempt to manage the potential stickiness of certain emotions by containing them before they move into the collective course space, attaching to other participants and affecting the collective atmosphere.

This model of using lay facilitators was intended to support the scalability of the MH+ course, enabling the intervention to be delivered across diverse settings without requiring specialised clinical expertise. At the same time, there were clear gaps when this was put into practice. While the course did not explicitly set emotional boundaries around what could be expressed and how, it became clear in the real-life encounters that there were implicit limitations. As has been shown, participants' emotional outbursts could exceed or destabilise a session, revealing discrepancies between the MH+ design and the lived experiences of the intervention.

These moments exposed the challenges of encouraging emotional openness. Intense or unexpected emotions interrupted the planned flow of the session, challenged facilitator strategies, and affected the collective atmosphere, making visible the gap between the standardised intervention model and the complexity of participants' reality. In this way, circulating emotions highlighted how the MH+ course was not implemented in a detached manner as the intervention was designed, but its implementation was continuously reshaped through the unpredictability of affective encounters. This underscores the importance of recognising that encounters are valuable forms of empirical data that are often overlooked in the evaluation of standardised interventions yet are crucial for understanding how knowledge is produced in practice.

Reflecting on Cultural Encounters as Sites of Knowledge Production

In this section, Galal and Hvenegård-Lassen (2020; 2024) and Haraway (1988) will be combined to reflect on how cultural encounters within the MH+ course have emerged not only as sites of exchange but as productive spaces where knowledge was produced through relational and affective processes, shaped by the specific dynamics, expectations, and affective atmosphere of each session. This knowledge can be mobilised to critically contemplate how knowledge production is tied to power, with participants having limited agency over how their experiences are interpreted, represented, and used.

The first chapter has examined how processes of subject positioning shaped encounters within the course through how participants and facilitators came to see themselves and each other. These dynamic processes influenced who was able to participate with confidence, whose contributions were heard, and who had to work to establish legitimacy. These social processes structured the encounters that unfolded, revealing how power, expectations, and belonging shaped both participation and the knowledge that emerged in the course. This perspective resonates with the conceptual lens of Galal and Hvenegård-Lassen (2020; 2024) and their argument that encounters are not simply spaces where cultural differences are shared, but where meaning, boundaries, and subject positions are actively negotiated.

As illustrated in the chapter, social categorisations, particularly how they are relationally produced and intersect, are reinforced by the social responses and reactions. Interactions, norms, and subtle forms of positioning constituted certain subjects as ‘disruptive’, ‘outspoken, or ‘quiet’. Consequently, these processes of subject positions generated knowledge about difference, hierarchy, and legitimacy within the MH+ course that speaks to broader questions of the importance of experiential knowledge to reflect the complex social processes embedded in the real-life implementation of a standardised evidence-based mental health intervention.

In many ways, the forms of knowledge explored in this thesis contrast with the outcome-focused knowledge that the PATHWAYS project set out to produce, through the explicit focus on social encounters as sites where knowledge emerges. These micro-level interactions contributed to highlighting the group’s power relations through implicit and internal hierarchies, emphasised by whose actions were disciplined, whose were overlooked, and who was able to occupy space comfortably.

This chapter also reflected how processes of subject positioning that took place were also shaped by intersectionality, underscored by the fact that not all participants entered the

space on equal footing. As an example, it became clear that some of these implicit hierarchies were influenced by the intersecting categories of education and language, where participants with Danish proficiency often appeared more confident and engaged in the course with greater ease than participants navigating linguistic and educational barriers.

Another encounter reflected how the course curriculum made gender-specific cultural norms visible, which highlighted that a standardised mental health intervention may clash with certain norms or reproduce others, ultimately reinforcing certain intersecting inequalities.

This highlighted how the participants' social differences were not merely background variables but came to play an active role in shaping the forms of knowledge that were produced through the MH+ course. The differences influenced whose perspectives were given space for, and whose voices were included or excluded in the process. In this sense, it emphasises how the knowledge produced through the encounters in the course is deeply situated within intersecting structures of power and difference, emphasising that all perspectives are situated, partial, and shaped by specific social and cultural positions (Haraway, 1988). Furthermore, it underscores the importance of examining knowledge production critically, particularly a detached, evidence-based intervention like the MH+ course. By focusing on power relations, norms, and contexts that shape the production of knowledge, it challenges the illusion of the neutral, standardised, all-seeing objectivity of knowledge production (Haraway, 1988).

At the same time, by emphasising social processes reveal how power is a productive force that shapes subject positions by making certain forms of knowledge visible, while keeping others invisible. This was highlighted during the course, where differing forms of participation and emotional expressions were not always interpreted equally, which underscored that knowledge production is structured by social inequalities.

This analysis has displayed how encounters through which knowledge is produced are foundational as they shape not only what can be known, but also who is recognised as a legitimate knower in the first place. It can also be seen in this analysis by certain participants' experiences taking up more space or emphasising facilitator interpretations, in a sense, privileging some voices while silencing others. Highlighting these dynamics allows for a more critical and nuanced understanding of knowledge as something that is negotiated and shaped through relational encounters.

The second analytical chapter set out to answer the second working question, highlighted how the circulations of emotions within cultural encounters shaped situated ways of knowing by structuring how experiences were interpreted and acted upon. Through this chapter, a conflict within the MH+ course was analysed by demonstrating how emotions

circulated between participants, facilitators, and in the following sessions. Moreover, the conflict that unfolded and lingered across subsequent sessions demonstrated how knowledge was transmitted through felt and embodied interactions marked by hostility, silence, and shifting participation.

The initial conflict was suspended but did not get resolved in the session; rather, it persisted as an affective residue that was carried on by participants into later encounters. This lingering emotional charge became a way of knowing, a shared awareness of the group's altered dynamics despite the fact that the original conflict was not experienced by all. Participants oriented themselves differently in response to it: some became more cautious, others more withdrawn, and the friendly collective engagement grew more tentative. In this sense, the encounter produced knowledge that displayed how participants interpreted the conflict in relation to their own situated perspectives and underscores Galal and Hvenegård-Lassen's (2020; 2024) notion that misunderstandings or conflict can be seen as analytically productive, as they reveal underlying social boundaries, discomfort, and the fragility of group cohesion.

Moreover, the emotions that circulated through these encounters point to the presence of dynamics that lie beyond the formal aims of the intervention. This suggests that this migrant mental health intervention is overlooking broader influences, shaped by affective and relational factors that were not captured when focusing solely on whether participants learned to implement the practical skills from the course.

This became particularly visible in the way the atmosphere shifted after Aicha's arrival, the participant who had initiated the conflict. Conversations dissolved, and what had been a lively and relaxed atmosphere became tense. These shifts illustrated how cultural encounters were ongoing processes where emotional currents were reshaped. The knowledge produced here lies in how participants and facilitators collectively recognised and responded to moments of tension, which also showcased an embodied understanding of how relational history shaped the social environment. In this way, emotional circulation did not only reflect certain viewpoints, but it actively participated in producing them.

Similarly, Aicha's positioning of herself at the margins of participation following the conflict could illustrate a response to the altered atmosphere. Her response revealed how encounters generated knowledge about belonging and exclusion, which was not always verbalised but became visible through practice; in this case, through silence, avoidance, and small acts of disengagement.

These examples highlight that cultural encounters produce knowledge that is relational, emerging between participants, circulating through expressions, reactions, and atmospheres. Following Galal and Hvenegård-Lassen's (2020; 2024) notion that encounters have a meaning-making function, the original conflict became a point of orientation where meanings shaped how participants interpreted each other and the situation at large, including which position to align themselves with. This further showed how knowledge was collectively enacted and continuously negotiated in the course.

This chapter's reflections were relayed primarily through one of the facilitators' recollections, which in itself were situated accounts, shaped by professional authority, personal relationships, and retrospective interpretation. Haraway's (1988) concept of situated knowledges underscores that their accounts do not offer neutral descriptions of events but reflect a specific standpoint within the course setting, emphasising how both the interaction and its recollection were produced within particular social, relational, and institutional contexts.

Moreover, this chapter explored how facilitators reflected on the course content. This included whether emotional discussions should include a more neutral emotional focus to avoid pushing participants to engage with emotionally difficult content that the course was unprepared to handle. Through practices such as moving certain emotional conversations into one-to-one exchanges, some emotional moments were redirected to other venues. This revealed which emotions were considered appropriate within the MH+ course context and the challenges of making space for diverse experiences that may not align with the intervention's standardised design format.

Cultural encounters are therefore affective sites where knowledge is produced through friction, disruption, and emotional exchanges. It is precisely in moments of tension and discomfort that implicit norms, power relations, and social boundaries become visible. These encounters do not merely share knowledge; they produce it through the ways the participants and facilitators feel, respond, and reposition themselves in relation to one another. This kind of knowledge is important because it highlights dimensions of the MH+ intervention, such as emotions, relations, and contextual dynamics, showing that migrant mental health is not only shaped by the curriculum itself, but also by the social and emotional dynamics that surround it.

Conclusion

This thesis has explored how cultural encounters in the MH+ course have shaped the production, negotiation, and development of knowledge. Through this examination, it has been demonstrated that knowledge is neither static nor neutrally transmitted, but continually formed through ongoing, situated interactions shaped by diverse perspectives, norms, and positionalities. By investigating these encounters, this thesis has highlighted the dynamic and relational nature of knowledge production, particularly its contrast to institutional knowledge from which the MH+ intervention originates.

Returning to the research question of how cultural encounters within the MH+ course produce, structure, and prioritise different forms of knowledge, this thesis has highlighted various ways in which encounters have not only influenced the content of knowledge, but the processes it is generated through. This underscores the importance of viewing the MH+ course as a dynamic space where knowledge is socially produced, negotiated, and situated through engagement with difference and friction (Haraway, 1988; Järvinen & Mik-Meyer, 2005; Fahnøe, 2016; Ahmed, 2012). Cultural encounters are central to this process, shaping not only what is known but how it comes to be known (Galal & Hvenegård-Lassen, 2020; 2024; Ahmed, 2000).

At the core of the analysis is the recognition that encounters function as both sites of opportunity and tension. On the one hand, encounters enable the introduction of multiple viewpoints through ongoing positioning. This underscores that what can be known and understood about social processes within the MH+ course is ever evolving. On the other hand, encounters involve processes of negotiation, highlighting that knowledge is relational and co-constructed through engagement, dialogue, disagreement, and adaptation.

By paying attention to how participants and facilitators interpret actions, norms, and intentions in relation to their own situated perspectives, the analysis has showcased how moments of tension were analytically productive, as they revealed the complexity of meanings being constantly negotiated (Galal & Hvenegård-Lassen, 2020; 2024). Consequently, and in accordance with Haraway's (1988) situated perspective, all findings from the thesis should be understood as context-dependent and not generalisable, shaped by the encounters that took place within the MH+ course format.

Moreover, it has been important to highlight the role of reflexivity in the research design, where the researcher is implicated within the process of knowledge production. Applying this has required a transparent and critically engaged analysis, acknowledging that

while this thesis critically examines knowledge production, it simultaneously contributes to the production of knowledge.

By including engagement with de Sousa Santos (2007), Salami (2020), Spanger (2017), and Haraway (1988) to understanding knowledge production, this thesis highlights how the process is deeply intertwined with power relations. This has been shown through analysis where educational, linguistic, and cultural dynamics intersected to highlight how processes of subjectification and negotiation produced implicit hierarchies that shaped inclusion and exclusion.

In addition, the analysis pointed to the importance of emotion and affect as integral to processes of knowing within these encounters. Affective dynamics, embodied and emotional responses that emerged through the MH+ course, shaped knowledge production through what participants felt able to express and how their responses were received. In this sense, emotions actively constituted ways of knowing by revealing how power operates through embodied processes, underscoring that the interplay of feeling, experience, and interaction is a valuable space where knowledge is produced.

The kind of knowledge that this thesis has explored is different from the knowledge that is typically prioritised within a research project like PATHWAYS. It focuses more on the standardised, measurable implementation outcomes, such as whether participants acquire the practical skills taught in the MH+ course or improvements in their test scores that indicate underlying mental health struggles.

This contrasts greatly with the form of knowledge that this thesis highlights, where knowledge emerges through lived experiences and interactions, which, as a result, highlights how interventions are actually implemented in practice. This shifts the attention away from the measurable to the relational and contextual factors that shape engagement, revealing effects that may otherwise remain invisible. As a result, this thesis has called into question what counts as evidence and suggested that this mental health intervention may need to be more flexible and responsive to participants' lived realities by incorporating feminist perspectives that can enrich and better reflect the lived experiences of migrants.

While both participants and facilitators actively engaged in the production and negotiation of knowledge in this thesis, their ability to shape how they were represented was constrained. The PATHWAYS research project had predefined objectives, formats, and guidelines sets clear boundaries for what can be changed in the intervention and what feedback can be incorporated into future implementations of the MH+ course. This reflects the constraints of the research project as it is primarily focused on implementation outcomes, rather

than the social processes that shape encounters. Consequently, facilitator and participant feedback, for instance, there being too much emphasis on negative and difficult emotions, may only be taken up in selective ways, suggesting the ramifications of putting greater emphasis on measurable outcomes than qualitative, situated insights. Ultimately, the knowledge produced about this group will shape future opportunities and access to resources. Neglecting to properly include their perspectives risks continuing to reinforce potential biases and inequities, limiting their ability to influence knowledge produced about themselves as a target group.

These social processes highlight that migrant mental health is shaped by a range of factors that extend beyond the course curriculum itself. At the same time, because this kind of knowledge is harder to measure, it may be overlooked or undervalued, limiting its influence on what kind of knowledge is prioritised when designing and implementing a migrant mental health intervention. This underscores what scholars like Salami (2020) and Finck Carrales and Suárez-Krabbe (2021) argue, that knowledge is never neutral but deeply entangled with history and power. It reflects processes through which certain perspectives are elevated while others are constrained, highlighting broader dynamics of authority, legitimacy, and control. In this sense, knowledge production is also an exercise of power in shaping not only *what* is known, but *whose* voices are recognised as knowers (Salami, 2020; de Sousa Santos, 2007; Spivak, 1988).

The thesis has highlighted the complexity of knowledge production in diverse social landscapes through the MH+ course, highlighting that knowledge is continuously made through interaction and not something that can simply be transferred. Considering the dynamics of cultural encounters and the power relations that structure them reinforced the importance of approaching knowledge critically. Rather than taking it as given, this thesis has shown the need to question how knowledge is produced, whose perspectives it reflects, and what norms it may reproduce. By foregrounding encounters and affect, it emphasised the necessity of remaining attentive to the power relations embedded in knowledge practices.

In this sense, qualitative and participant-driven knowledge could be seen as a crucial complement to institutional knowledge to draw attention to underlying power relations within the research process and to capture lived experiences. This would reflect de Sousa Santos (2007) argument that the value of institutional knowledge could be situated as one knowledge among others, each contributing in its own distinct way. Moreover, this perspective opens the possibilities for more reflexive, inclusive, and critically engaged forms of knowledge production that are not primarily concerned with implementing top-down priorities but amplify voices that are otherwise marginalised. (Finck Carrales & Suárez-Krabbe, 2021).

Bibliography

"The Combahee River Collective Statement" (1977). (2017). In University of Pittsburgh Press eBooks (pp. 292–300). https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt5hjqnj.50

Ahmed, S. (2000). *Strange Encounters: Embodied Others in Post-Coloniality*. Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203349700

Ahmed, S. (2004). Affective Economies. *Social Text*, *22*(2), 117–139. https://doi.org/10.1215/01642472-22-2_79-117

Ahmed, S. (2012). *On being included : racism and diversity in institutional life*. Duke University Press.

Ahmed, S. (2014). *The cultural politics of emotion* (2nd ed.). Edinburgh University Press. https://doi.org/10.1515/9780748691142

Brah, A., & Phoenix, A. (2023). Ain't I a Woman?: Revisiting Intersectionality. In E. Taylor, D. Gillborn, & G. Ladson-Billings (Eds.), Foundations of Critical Race Theory in Education (3rd ed., pp. 308–317). Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/b23210-29

Brinkmann, S., 2008, as cited in Given, L. M. (2008). *The Sage encyclopedia of qualitative research methods*. Sage Publications.

Brodsky, A. E., 2008, as cited in Given, L. M. (2008). *The Sage encyclopedia of qualitative research methods*. Sage Publications.

Buhl, A. (2024). Stakeholders' perspectives on the prospective implementation of a mental health intervention for migrants in Denmark: A qualitative study. [Unpublished manuscript]. Department of Psychology & Department of Public Health, University of Copenhagen.

Collins, P. H. (1990). Black feminist thought : knowledge, consciousness, and the politics of empowerment. Unwin Hyman.

Crenshaw, K. (1989) Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics, U. CHI. LEGAL F. 139 (1989).

Davis, K. (2008). Intersectionality as buzzword: A sociology of science perspective on what makes a feminist theory successful. Feminist Theory, 9(1), 67–85. https://doi.org/10.1177/1464700108086364

de Sousa Santos, B. (2007). Beyond Abyssal Thinking: From Global Lines to Ecologies of Knowledges. *Review - Fernand Braudel Center for the Study of Economies, Historical Systems, and Civilizations*, *30*(1), 45–89.

Dowling, M. (2006). Approaches to reflexivity in qualitative research. *Nurse Researcher, 13*(3), 7–21.

Fahnøe, K. (2016). Bekendelsesformer i gruppeterapi for alkoholmisbrugere : en interaktionistisk analyse af en magtteknik. *Dansk sociologi, Årg. 27, nr. 1 (2016)*. http://www.alf.dk/tidligere-numre-af-da-arkiv/2014/44-dansk-audiologopaedi-nr-1-2014/file

Finck Carrales, J. C., & Suárez-Krabbe, J. (2021). *Transdisciplinary Thinking from the Global South: Whose Problems, Whose Solutions?* (J. C. Finck Carrales & J. Suárez-Krabbe, Eds.; 1st ed.). Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003172413

Galal, L. P., & Hvenegård-Lassen, K. (2020). *Organised cultural encounters : practices of transformation* (1st Edition 2020). Palgrave Macmillan. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-42886-0

Galal, L. P., Hvenegård-Lassen, K., (2024). *Kulturmødeanalyser* (1. udgave.). Samfundslitteratur.

Haraway, D. (1988). Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective. *Feminist Studies*, *14*(3), 575–599. https://doi.org/10.2307/3178066

Harding, S. (1991). Whose science? whose knowledge? : thinking from women's lives. Open University Press.

Højholt, C., & Kousholt, D. (2019). Developing knowledge through participation and collaboration: Research as mutual learning processes. *Annual Review of Critical Psychology (Online)*, *16*, 575-604. https://discourseunit.com/annual-review/arcp-16-kritische-psychologie-2019/

Järvinen, M. (2003). Alkoholfortællinger i et institutionelt landskab. I M. Järvinen & N. Mik-Meyer (Red.), At skabe en klient: Institutionelle identiteter i socialt arbejde (s. 30–58). Hans Reitzels Forlag.

Järvinen, M., Mik-Meyer, N., (2003). *At skabe en klient : institutionelle identiteter i socialt arbejde*. Hans Reitzel.

Lorde, A. (1984). Sister outsider : essays and speeches. Crossing Press.

Markham, A. (2017) Reflexivity: Some Techniques for Interpretive Researchers - Future Making Research Consortium. Retrieved from http://annettemarkham.com/2017/02/reflexivity-for-interpretive-researchers/

Mik-Meyer, N., & Silverman, D. (2019). Agency and clientship in public encounters: co-constructing 'neediness' and 'worthiness' in shelter placement meetings. *The British Journal of Sociology*, *70*(5), 1640–1660. https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-4446.12633

Morgan, D. L, & Guevara, H., 2008, as cited in Given, L. M. (2008). *The Sage encyclopedia of qualitative research methods*. Sage Publications

Projects Archive - Mental Health Europe. (n.d.). Mental Health Europe. https://www.mentalhealtheurope.org/project/

Psychological interventions. (2024, March 11). https://www.who.int/teams/mental-health-and-substance-use/treatment-care/Psychological-interventions

Salami, M. (2020). *Sensuous knowledge : a black feminist approach for everyone*. Zed.

Skewes, L., Occhino, M. A., & Rolandsen Agustín, L. (2021). Making Ripples and Waves through Feminist Knowledge Production and Activism. Kvinder, Køn & Forskning, 30(1), 5-14. https://doi.org/10.7146/kkf.v29i2.124891

Spanger, M. (2017). What do emotions do?: Circulations of annoyance, hostility and shame in fieldwork. In M. Spanger & M.-L. Skilbrei (Eds.), *Prostitution Research in Context* (1st ed., Vol. 1, pp. 125–140). Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315692586-8

Spivak, G. C. (1988). Can the subaltern speak? In C. Nelson & L. Grossberg (Eds.), *Marxism and the interpretation of culture* (pp. 271–313). University of Illinois Press. [1]

Staunæs, D. (2003). Where have all the subjects gone? Bringing together the concepts of intersectionality and subjectification. *NORA : Nordic Journal of Women's Studies*, *11*(2), 101–110. https://doi.org/10.1080/08038740310002950

World Health Organization, Kestel, D., Van Ommeren, M., Harris, R., Carswell, K., Epping-Jordan, J., Au, T., Brown, F., Foley, C., Garcia-Moreno, C., Kogan, C., & Riano, O. (2020). *Doing What Matters in Times of Stress: An illustrated guide* (D. Wilson, Ed.). https://www.un.org/sites/un2.un.org/files/2020/05/who_doing_what_matters_in_times_of_stress.pdf

Artwork

Cover page: Lempert, Thea Caroline Sonne. (2026). *Encounters (b)+(e)* © [Drawing]. Private collection. All rights reserved. Permission Granted.

Page 28, Chapter 1: Lempert, Thea Caroline Sonne. (2026). *(b)Orders* © [Drawing]. Private collection. All rights reserved. Permission Granted.

Page 48, Chapter 2: Lempert, Thea Caroline Sonne. (2026). *(e)Motions* © [Drawing]. Private collection. All rights reserved. Permission Granted.

Appendix 1: Focus Group Interview Guide

Section 1: Overall experience of MH+

1. How would you describe your overall experience of participating in MH+?
    - How was the pace and amount of information in the sessions?
2. What were your expectations before the programme? Did the programme live up to those expectations?
3. Which parts of MH+ did you find most useful or valuable?

Section 2: Acceptability of MH+

1. Did you feel comfortable/safe participating in MH+? Why/why not?
2. In some sessions, we talked about caring for others and caring for oneself. What did you particularly notice?
3. Were there any cultural, religious, or personal factors that made MH+ more or less relevant for each of you?
4. If you could change anything about MH+, what would it be?

Section 3: Feasibility

1. How easy or difficult was it for you to attend and participate in MH+ sessions?
2. Were there any barriers (e.g., time, location, commitments) that made it difficult to participate?
3. What did you think about the home exercises? Was there anything that made them difficult to complete? What would have made it easier for you to carry them out?
    - Did any of you use the audio guide?
4. We decided to hold the course in Danish because you each have different backgrounds. Do you think it worked well to conduct it in Danish, or would you have preferred it in your first/second language?
5. Did you feel supported during the programme (e.g., by the facilitator or other group members)? If not, what additional support would you have needed?

Section 4: Impact and future use

1. Have you noticed any changes in yourself since completing MH+? (e.g., new skills, emotional well-being, coping strategies)
2. Do you think MH+ should be offered to more people? Who do you think would benefit most from it?
3. Would you recommend MH+ to a friend or colleague? Why/why not?