FIRST-HAND EXPERIENCES OF BELONGING AMONG CHILD REFUGEES & ASYLUM SEEKERS, POST-MIGRATION: A META-SYNTHESIS

And

"IT'S GOOD TO HAVE A PLACE WHERE YOU CAN JUST BE YOURSELF": EXPLORING HOW INFORMAL LEARNING PROGRAMMES DESIGNED TO REDUCE LONELINESS CAN INFLUENCE IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION IN YOUNG PEOPLE FROM DISADVANTAGED BACKGROUNDS

by

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Thesis Overview

This thesis is submitted in partial fulfilment for the degree of Doctor of Clinical Psychology at the University of Birmingham. Comprising four chapters, the first presents a meta-synthesis of the qualitative literature explicating first-hand experiences of belonging among child refugees and asylum seekers, post-migration. The second chapter presents an empirical qualitative study, exploring how informal learning programmes designed to reduce loneliness can influence identity construction in young people from disadvantaged backgrounds. Finally, the third and fourth chapters each provide a ‘press release’, respectively pertaining to the meta-synthesis and the empirical research, outlining the main findings of each paper in a manner that is suitable for public dissemination.

Dedication

To the marginalised youth whose voices I have sought to provide a platform for.

And to my wonderful families; mum, dad, Jeb, the “bonglins”, and my trainee family, for their unwavering belief and support.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Dr Kate Woodcock for the opportunity to become involved in her research group, and to contribute to a charity as impressive as Children in Need, and the University of Birmingham overall really, for offering me a doctoral place. It took most of my first year of training to convince myself that the university hadn't made a mistake! I feel so honoured when I think back to my research interview with Kate and Andy; the one I walked away from thinking I'd well and truly blown it. It feels wonderful to reflect on how far I have come since then, and with you, Kate, as my research supervisor, no less.

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In Text Abbreviations

ACES	Adverse childhood experiences
ADHD	Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder
ASD	Autism spectrum disorder
APA	American Psychological Association
BBC	British Broadcasting Company
DCMS	Department of Digital, Culture, Media & Sport
EI	Emotional intelligence
JARS-Qual	Journal Article Reporting Standards for Qualitative Research
ICAM	Including children affected by migration
NICE	National Institute of Health & Care Excellence
PICOS	Population, Intervention, Comparators, Outcomes, Study Design
PRISMA-P	Preferred reporting items for systematic review and meta-analysis protocols
RTA	Reflexive Thematic Analysis
SIT	Social Identity Theory
TA	Thematic Analysis
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UASC	Unaccompanied asylum seeking children

Chapter 1. Literature Review

First-hand Experiences of Belonging Among Child Refugees & Asylum Seekers, Post-migration: A Meta-Synthesis

1.1 Abstract

Rationale

Refugees and asylum seekers represent a growing population worldwide, of which almost half are children. Child refugees are especially vulnerable and marginalised, yet research into refugee experiences infrequently captures their voices. Establishing a sense of belonging is a particularly pertinent issue for young refugees; however, the processes supporting belonging are poorly understood. This meta-synthesis collated the findings of qualitative studies that explored first-hand experiences of belonging among child refugees and asylum seekers, post-migration, with the aim of better understanding the processes that facilitate a sense of belonging in this population.

Method

Systematic searches of four electronic databases: PsycINFO, Web of Science, PubMed, and Education Resources Information Centre [ERIC], identified 1,192 primary studies, of which eight were included for meta-synthesis. An integrated qualitative appraisal checklist was used to assess quality of the studies (American Psychological Association [APA], 2018; National Institute of Health & Care Excellence [NICE], 2012). The analysis was subsequently guided by Noblit and Hare's (1988) seven-phase methodology.

Results

One overarching theme was interpreted from the analysis: *Migratory Loneliness and Societal Isolation*. This underpinned three themes which described the processes facilitating a sense of belonging: *Experiences of Inclusion and Support*, *Family Connectedness*, and *Adaptive Responses to Resettlement*.

Discussion

Findings are discussed in relation to existing research, and clinical implications considered. The study offers insights into the nuances of refugee children's lived experiences, alongside recommendations for the construction of safe and inclusive spaces where children feel visible. An individualised approach to working with newly resettled children is also advocated.

1.2 Introduction

Over the past several decades, migration has become a growing global phenomenon, whereby migrant families have left, or been forced to leave, their home countries to seek safety and refuge (Pieloch et al., 2016; Rodriguez & Dobler, 2021). The impact of this experience on people's health and wellbeing is well documented in the literature, as an unprecedented number of people have had to leave behind the land and communities they know, to resettle in unfamiliar countries (Hirad et al., 2022; Radjack et al., 2021).

By the end of 2021, 89.3 million people worldwide were forcibly displaced (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees [UNHCR], 2022a); that is, involuntarily fleeing their country of origin as a result of economic, social and political upheaval (Salami et al., 2021). For many, this has meant having to escape persecution, conflict, violence, poverty, natural disasters, human rights violations and/or events seriously disturbing public order (Harunogullari & Polat, 2017; Kumi-Yeboah et al., 2020; UNHCR, 2022a). Since this figure was published, the war in Ukraine has led to an updated figure of more than 100 million displaced people for the first time on record, the largest humanitarian crisis since the Second World War (Ioffe et al., 2022; UNHCR, 2022b). Of the total forcibly displaced population, 36.5 million (41%) are children below the age of 18 (UNHCR, 2022a), and a significant proportion are unaccompanied asylum seeking children (UASC). Since 2010, the number of UASC is reported to have increased fivefold in more than 80 countries around the world (Alarcón et al., 2021).

Refugee and Asylum Seeking Children: The Challenges They Face

There is a great deal of heterogeneity in the refugee community (Crawford, 2017; Hastings, 2012); however, there are numerous daunting challenges that youth from refugee

backgrounds are likely to share (Jensen et al. 2014; Lee et al. 2012; McDiarmid et al., 2021). For example, many will have separated from or lost family members, friends and possessions in the process of escaping threatening situations in their country of origin, which may have included destruction of their homes, physical and sexual abuse, and/or deprivation of their human rights (Hastings, 2012). Further, after what can often be a life-threatening escape journey, it is not uncommon for young people to have to deal with uncertainty regarding their legal rights, isolation, exploitation and discrimination, adjusting to which can lead to a range of health difficulties, notably anxiety and depression (McCormack & Tapp, 2019; Sime & Fox, 2015). These difficulties may be compounded by threats to their sense of safety and security, including well-founded fears of discovery and imprisonment, being placed in inadequate housing and/or with emotionally detached caregivers (Hastings, 2012; Weine et al., 2014). Meanwhile, many face the challenge of having to settle into a new educational environment, while trying to learn the language and culture of their new host country (Crawford, 2017; UNHCR, 2016). Given these challenges, it is perhaps unsurprising that youth from refugee backgrounds consistently show higher levels of psychological morbidity when compared to children from non-refugee backgrounds (Horswood et al., 2019; Reinelt et al., 2016; Van os et al., 2020).

For many young refugees, the experience of displacement and resettlement coincides with a significant developmental life stage, thereby interrupting the normative processes and transitions that adolescents typically go through (Mayoma & Williams, 2021; Pieloch et al., 2016). Although all adolescents can experience difficulties with ‘fitting in’, refugee adolescents are unique insofar as having been forced to leave their homes and seek asylum elsewhere, and thus face specific challenges to their evolving identities and their experience of belonging (Jardim & Marques da Silva, 2021; Kia-Keating & Ellis, 2007; Meloni, 2019; Miller et al., 2018).

What Does it Mean to Belong?

A sense of belonging is a fundamental aspect of psychological functioning, and a universal human need (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). In social psychology, the need to belong is described as an intrinsic motivation to form connections with others and be socially accepted (Cherry, 2021). Moreover, Amina et al. (2021) referred to belonging as a meaningful and transformative experience; one that helps people to develop emotional connections with their physical and emotional world, laying the foundations to their identity. Notwithstanding these descriptions, belonging is a complex concept and difficult to define. With no uniform definition, it is acknowledged in the literature as a multifaceted, nonlinear and subjective experience; one which is understood from different positions, cultures and contexts (Allsop & Chase, 2017; Lähdesmäki et al., 2016).

From the position and context of the young refugee who has left life as they know it behind, the meaning of belonging is particularly acute (Malsbary, 2014); a notion that is aptly captured by Nunn et al. (2021, p.43), who described belonging as a "frequent casualty of forced migration". In the extant literature concerning this population, belonging has been discussed in terms of establishing a 'sense of place'; that is, the opposite of being *dis*placed (Anthias, 2006; Jardim & Marques da Silva, 2021). This highlights the way in which studies seem to be shifting beyond the individualistic focus typically found in youth policy and practice (Moensted, 2020), to considering the impact of social and systemic change on young people. Such a shift has brought people's lived experiences into better focus, including their interconnectedness and participation within communities. A sense of belonging is a particularly pertinent issue for adolescent refugees, as the support they receive post-migration is likely to affect how they manage the combined transitions of adolescence and resettlement

(de Anstiss et al., 2019). Furthermore, a number of researchers have reported that, for school-aged children in particular, the processes supporting belonging, while attempting to negotiate different cultural beliefs, are poorly understood (Green & Thorogood, 2014).

Understanding Child Refugee Perspectives

Given the lack of success in prior attempts to support belonging in young refugees, there is clear value in unpacking their lived experiences and understanding how they establish a sense of belonging during resettlement. However, the existing literature tends to be from the perspectives of parents, teachers or clinicians working with or observing child refugees (Amitay, 2021; Arar et al., 2019; Barber, 2021; Basaran, 2020; Ceballo-Vacas & Trujillo-González, 2021; De Graeve, 2017; Fichtner & Trần, 2020; Kardeş & Kozikoğlu, 2021; Renzaho et al., 2017; Wille et al., 2019). While some studies have attempted to capture the voices of young refugees themselves, the majority focus on children with refugee parents, who have not migrated themselves (Bhambra, 2021; Cunningham & King, 2018; Dusi et al., 2015; Dvir et al., 2015; Korpela, 2016; Orupabo et al., 2019; Zayas & Gulbas, 2017), those who are now adults, reflecting on their past experiences of migration (Nunn et al., 2011; Ruth et al., 2019; Scutaru, 2021; Shmulyar Gréen et al., 2021; Sone & Thang, 2020; Uptin, 2021), or those who migrated voluntarily (Auger-Voyer et al., 2014; Marcu, 2012; Sime, 2020). To date, the literature seems to be lacking representation of young refugee or asylum seeker voices currently undergoing, or recently having undergone, the resettlement process.

Rationale & Aim

Young refugees and asylum seekers are often represented as the most excluded, stigmatised and disempowered people in the world (Wilding, 2009), yet research infrequently

includes first-hand perspectives of this marginalised population. As a result, there is a lack of knowledge of the unique belonging experiences of refugee children (Welply, 2015), or the processes facilitating belonging, post-migration (Woodgate & Busolo, 2018),

The limited studies on refugee youth tend to be quantitative and expert-driven, with less attention given to the meaning attached to experiences (Edge et al., 2014). Given that child refugees are a hard-to-reach population (Majumder, 2019), any efforts to capture their voices would offer fruitful implications for research and practice, through a better understanding of how to support their integration. The paucity of qualitative research into first-hand refugee experiences indicates a topical and timely area in need of greater research attention. Furthermore, the concept of belonging has become an increasingly relevant social phenomena within both migration and youth studies (Jardim & de Silva, 2021). Therefore, this study aims to identify and evaluate studies that explicate the voices of child refugees and asylum seekers, including UASC. Guided by the theoretical perspective that belonging is a multidimensional and socially constructed experience, the study sought to answer the following research question:

> What are the processes facilitating a sense of belonging in young refugees and asylum seekers during their resettlement?

A Note on Terms Used

Before proceeding further, it is worth noting that the term 'refugee'[1] is highly disputed (Crawford, 2017) and thus considered in further detail and context in Appendix A.

[1]*For the purpose of this chapter, the terms 'young refugee' and 'child refugee' will be used interchangeably and are intended to cover the wide spectrum of displaced youth, including UASC, and those who have migrated with their families.*

1.2 Methodology

The methodological protocol was developed in accordance with the preferred reporting items for systematic review and meta-analysis protocols (PRISMA-P) guidelines (Moher et al., 2015). The literature search strategy was informed by the mnemonic, PICOS[2] (Richardson et al., 1995; Moher et al., 2009), which is outlined in Appendix B.

Given that the research aims to explore lived experiences, a qualitative study design was selected. Qualitative research typically facilitates an exploratory approach into how people interact with and interpret their world (Atkins et al., 2008; Malterud, 2001), otherwise known as a double hermeneutic (Giddens 1984). Individual qualitative studies can provide rich insights into a specific population of interest. However, the approach has attracted criticism over the years for merely summarising stand-alone findings and not drawing connections between studies (Nye et al., 2016), thus limiting their usefulness in understanding a population or phenomenon.

Qualitative synthesis approaches go beyond summarising findings, by systematically reviewing, interpreting and merging evidence across studies (Lewin et al., 2018). In so doing, another level[3] of findings is generated through the advancement of theory and knowledge (Nye et al., 2016). After consulting Kastner et al.'s (2016) conceptual recommendations[4] (Appendix C), a meta-synthesis was considered the most applicable method for answering the research question, and enriching understanding of complex experiences and contexts. This was informed by Noblit and Hare's (1988) seven-phase methodology (Table 1.1), which

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[2]*Population, Intervention or exposure, Comparators, Outcomes, Study design or type (PICOS).*
[3]*Frequently referred to as 'higher order' or 'third order constructs' (where first order constructs are the primary data, and second order constructs are the primary authors' interpretations of that data).*
[4]*Conceptual algorithm to optimise selection of a knowledge synthesis method for answering a research question.*

serves as a comprehensive guide to the comparative analysis and synthesis of interpretive studies, otherwise known as meta-ethnography[5].

Table 1.1

Noblit & Hare's (1988) Seven-phase Methodology

Phases	How phases were actioned
1. Getting started	Deciding the focus of the synthesis: Reading literature to develop interest and understanding of chosen area, developing research question according to PICOS.
2. Deciding what is relevant	Preliminary scoping: Developing the search strategy, discussions with research support team, conducting the main search, full text screenings, study selection and quality appraisal.
3. Reading the studies	Repeated reading of studies: Data extraction (study and participant characteristics), paying attention to details (e.g., concepts, themes).
4. Determining how the studies are related	Juxtaposing concepts (metaphors, ideas, phrases) from studies to see how they relate to each other: data extraction (themes), and reducing themes and descriptions to key concepts.
5. Translating the studies into one another	Comparing concepts/metaphors between and within studies.
6. Synthesising the translations	Establishing if there are common types of translations, or if some translations or concepts can encompass those from other studies.
7. Expressing the synthesis	Writing down/articulating themes.

Epistemological Position

In conducting this meta-synthesis, a critical realist position was assumed, drawing from a realist ontology and a relativist epistemology. This position acknowledges that there is

[5]*An interpretative, inductive approach upon which most qualitative synthesis methods are based, particularly suited to the development of conceptual models and theories.*

not one universal truth to be found, but multiple truths (Bhaskar, 1975). In other words, not all child refugees will describe their experiences in the same way. Further, a critical realist stance considers that, while participants can provide important information about a phenomenon, it is being understood through a subjective lens and within a socially constructed world (Coyle, 2016).

Search Strategy

Preparing the systematic search strategy reflected phases 1-2 of Noblit and Hare's (1988) methodology, beginning with the iterative process of preliminary scoping of the existing review literature. This guided the subsequent processes of developing inclusion and exclusion criteria, generating search terms, systematic screening, and study selection.

The search strategy was developed following six, monthly workshops, which offered guidance on the different approaches to meta-ethnography, and a space for consultation with other qualitative researchers. This enabled the development of a research support team based at the same university.

Inclusion & Exclusion Criteria

The population of interest comprised child refugees, including UASC, resettled in any host country that is not their country of origin. In accordance with the UNHCR (2022b), child refugees and asylum seekers are defined as children, aged 18 years old and under, who have migrated to other countries due to fear of persecution in their home country due to factors such as race, religion, or political opinion. Studies that focus on those who fled their country of origin voluntarily, or internally displaced populations, were not considered for inclusion.

Quantitative studies were not considered for synthesis, but mixed methods were on the condition that the study featured at least one qualitative research question that related to the current study's aims. Moreover, as this study sought to explore the broad experience of belonging in response to migration and resettlement processes, studies in which the main aim was to evaluate outcomes of an intervention (e.g., family interventions for refugees), were excluded. In terms of the type of publication considered, preliminary scoping indicated that sufficient peer-reviewed journal articles would be available on the topic area to provide data with high information power for addressing the research questions, that dissertations, book chapters, conference publications and grey literature need not be considered.

Given the international nature of refugee research, the researcher considered studies of all languages in the first instance; however, following preliminary scoping, it was decided that papers would be limited to English language. This was due to the researcher's first language being English and using other languages may result in losing the content and meanings inherent within the original language, once translated. Furthermore, the scoping process indicated that most of the available literature on refugees was published within the last 5-10 years, likely reflecting the growing refugee crisis during this time frame. Studies were thus limited to those that had been published in the last 10 years. Full inclusion and exclusion criteria are summarised in Table 1.2.

Table 1.2

Inclusion & Exclusion Criteria

Inclusion Criteria	Exclusion Criteria
First-hand accounts given by children (<18 years old at the time of study participation) who have been forcibly displaced and fled their country of origin due to war/conflict, about their recent migration and resettlement experiences.	Studies that focus on the child's experience from another's perspective (e.g., parents, teachers, clinicians). Studies in which "child" participant ages range from <18 to >18 (e.g., 16-25), or

Inclusion Criteria	Exclusion Criteria
	where age of participants is unclear, or not specified. Studies that focus on retrospective accounts from adults reflecting on their childhood experiences, or children of refugees who have no experience of resettlement themselves. Papers that focus on those who have resettled voluntarily, and/or or internally (within their home country).
Studies reporting original data, published in English and within peer-reviewed journals.	Papers published in a language other than English. Dissertations, books, book chapters/reviews, grey literature (e.g., meeting/conference papers, repositories, white papers, government documents).
Accounts that have been analysed using formal qualitative methods that explore experiences (e.g., thematic analysis [TA], interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA), case studies, narrative analysis or grounded theory).	Papers using qualitative methods that: (i) focus on language as opposed to experience (e.g., frequency analysis, discourse analysis. content analysis), or (ii) do not specify what method of qualitative analysis was used or appeared not to use any formal method of analysis.

Developing Search Terms

As belonging is a fluid concept, and there are many terms to describe refugee children, a range of free-text terms that attempt to operationalise these concepts were compiled by the researcher. These were purposefully simple and broad, to capture a range of potentially relevant studies. The respective search strings were developed after conducting simple Google Scholar searches on the topic areas, making a note of the wording used, and

checking synonyms. Preliminary scoping enabled the researcher to filter search terms, discover new terms, and remove those that were found to yield too many irrelevant papers[6]. Based on the research question and scoping outcomes, the terms shown in Table 1.3 were developed.

Table 1.3

Search Terms

Search String 1 (OR)	AND	Search String 2 (OR)	AND	Search String 3 (OR)	AND	Search String 4 (OR)
Belonging*		Refuge*		Child*		Qualitative
Connectedness		"Asylum seek*"		Adolescen*		Interview*
"Feelings of connection"		"Unaccompanied asylum-seeking child*"		"Young person"		Focus group*
"Perceived connection"		"undocumented child*"		"Young people"		Ethnograph*
"Fitting in"		Migrant*		Youth		
"Feeling included"		Immigrant*		Teenage*		
"Feelings of inclusion"		"Displaced person"				
"Social inclusion"		"Displaced people"				
Closeness						
"Feeling integrated"						

[6] *"Unaccompanied asylum-seeking child*", "undocumented child*" and "displaced person"/"people" were added, and "minor" was removed due to generating more studies of minority groups than young refugees.*

Search String 1 (OR)	AND	Search String 2 (OR)	AND	Search String 3 (OR)	AND	Search String 4 (OR)
“Perceived integration” “Feeling accepted” “Feelings of acceptance” “Perceived acceptance” “Feeling respected” “Feelings of respect” “Perceived respect” Togetherness “Feeling valued” “Feeling cared about” “Feeling cared for” “sense of community” Relatedness						

Information Sources

Databases were searched using date restrictions (2012–present), and searched for titles, abstracts and key words, concepts, or topics. ‘English language’ limits were applied,

but the option to limit to peer-reviewed articles was only available on two of the databases; therefore, this was determined through the screening process.

Studies were identified after entering the search terms on the following electronic databases. These were systematically searched on 16th January 2022:

- PsycINFO
- Web of Science (all databases)
- PubMed (National Library of Medicine [NLM])
- Education Resources Information Centre (ERIC, via EBSCOhost)

The most suitable combination of databases for performing systematic searches remains open to debate. However, it is widely recommended that searches include a combination of broad and subject-specific databases, for optimum coverage and retrieval of the maximum number of relevant references (Bramer et al., 2017).

Data Management

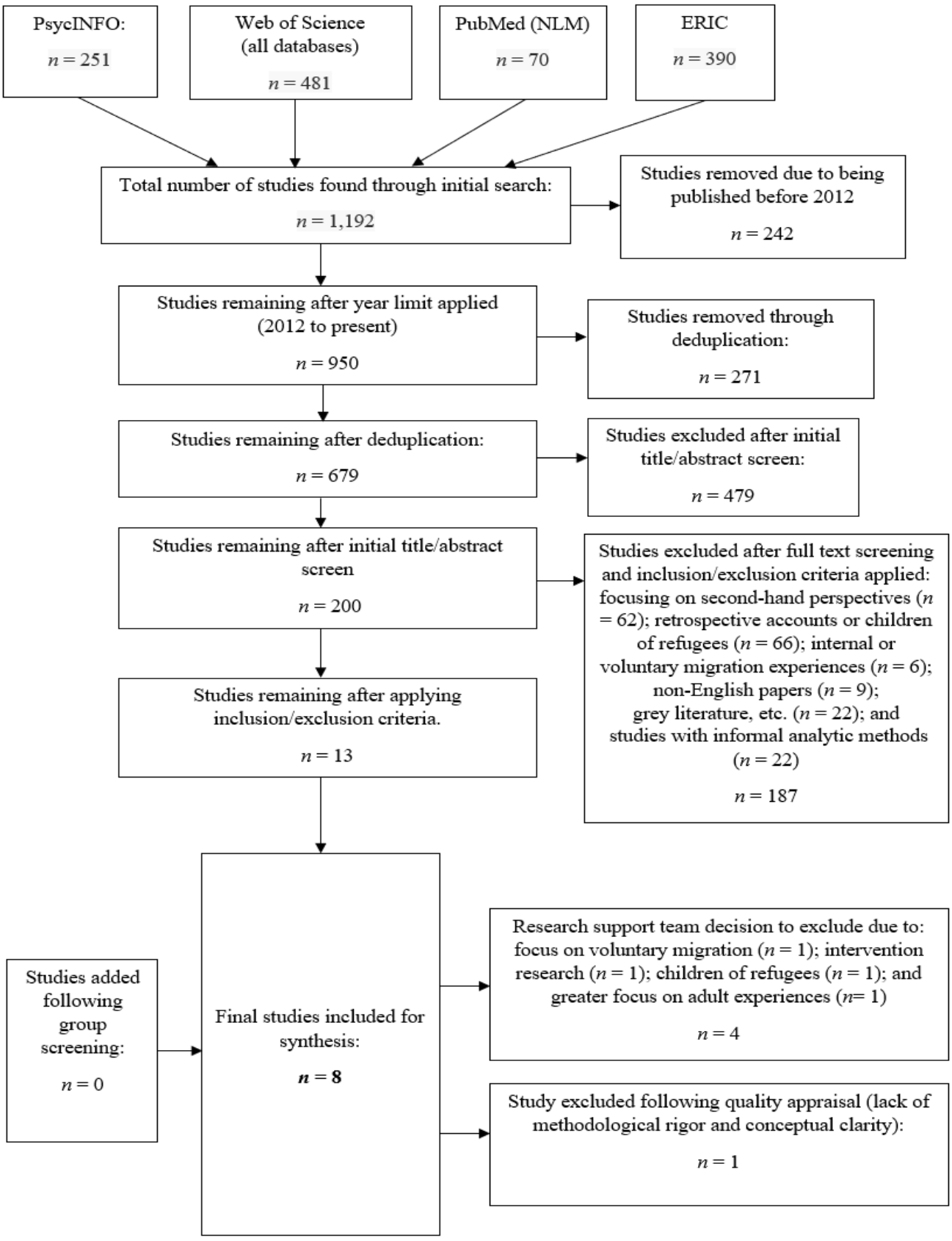
Once the search had been performed, all references were exported to Endnote 20, an online reference management software package. Once Endnote had created a complete bibliography of results, the screening process commenced, beginning with the electronic removal of duplicated papers.

Systematic Screening Process

Figure 1.1 illustrates each stage of the screening process, including how and at which point inclusion and exclusion criteria were applied.

Figure 1.1

PRISMA-P Diagram of the Systematic Screening Process



Initially, 1,192 potentially relevant studies were identified. Once records had been limited to the last 10 years[7] and all duplicates removed, the remaining studies underwent title and abstract level screening to remove any unsuitable papers. For the papers with insufficient details in the abstract, a full text screen was completed, and studies that did not meet inclusion criteria were removed. Any duplicates that had evaded the initial deduplication process were also deleted. Next, the remaining studies were subjected to full text screening against the inclusion and exclusion criteria.

Concurrently, three research interns carried out respective title screens, before coming together to check levels of inter-rater consensus. Their individual decisions and agreements were documented on a spreadsheet and rated using a 'traffic light' system, before consulting the researcher with their justifications. A meeting was then held between the researcher and research interns to discuss the remaining 13 papers, namely those that had not received unanimous agreement. Another full text screen resulted in the exclusion of four papers. A screen capture to illustrate the screening process is shown in Appendix D. A total of nine studies remained, all of which were subjected to quality appraisal and data extraction. As shown in the PRISMA-P diagram (Figure 1.1), one more paper was excluded following the quality appraisal stage, resulting in eight final papers.

Quality Appraisal

Reflecting the diversity of qualitative approaches, there is no consensus regarding the necessity, methods or standards for quality appraisal (Majid & Vanstone, 2018). However, to facilitate transferability of findings, appraisal checklists are commonly used (Lewin et al.,

[7] *10-year time frame was specific to the search date. I.e., a search carried out on 16th January 2022 meant that the date filter would only allow studies published on or after 16th January 2012.*

2015). For this meta-synthesis, an 18-item appraisal checklist developed by the research support team was used. This integrated two existing checklists: the American Psychological Association's (APA, 2018) Journal Article Reporting Standards for Qualitative Research (JARS-Qual) and National Institute of Health and Care Excellence ([NICE]; 2012) guidance. This contained questions about methodological rigor, transparency, whether researcher bias was considered, and whether ethical procedures were adequately reported, as examples. The researcher added two items regarding whether the studies offered definitions of the key concepts: namely, belonging and child refugees (Appendix E, Figure E1).

The first stage of quality appraisal involved gathering descriptive data from the final studies in response to the checklist. Then, each study was rated against each checklist criterion using a 'traffic light' scoring system, whereby the colours 'green', 'amber' and 'red' denoted whether a criterion was fully, partially, or not met (Figure 1.2).

Figure 1.2

Quality Appraisal Rating Key

Green	Criterion fully met (e.g., item and all sub questions answered with a 'yes').
Amber	Criterion partially met (e.g., item answered with a 'yes', but one or more sub questions answered with a 'no').
Red	Criterion not met (e.g., item answered with a 'no', and/or or all sub questions answered with a 'no').

Once all papers had been rated, an overall score for quality was given (Figure 1.3). This also determined whether any additional studies would be excluded from the meta-synthesis. As depicted in Figure 1.3, any paper that received a 'red' rating was taken to the research support team to discuss any aspects that the researcher felt compromised the overall methodological quality. Then, a collaborative decision was made as to whether the paper would be included or excluded. The outcome of the quality appraisal process, including the final decisions that were reached following consultation with the research support team, are displayed in Figure 1.4. This process required repeated reading of the final papers, thus reflecting phase three of Noblit and Hare's (1988) methodology.

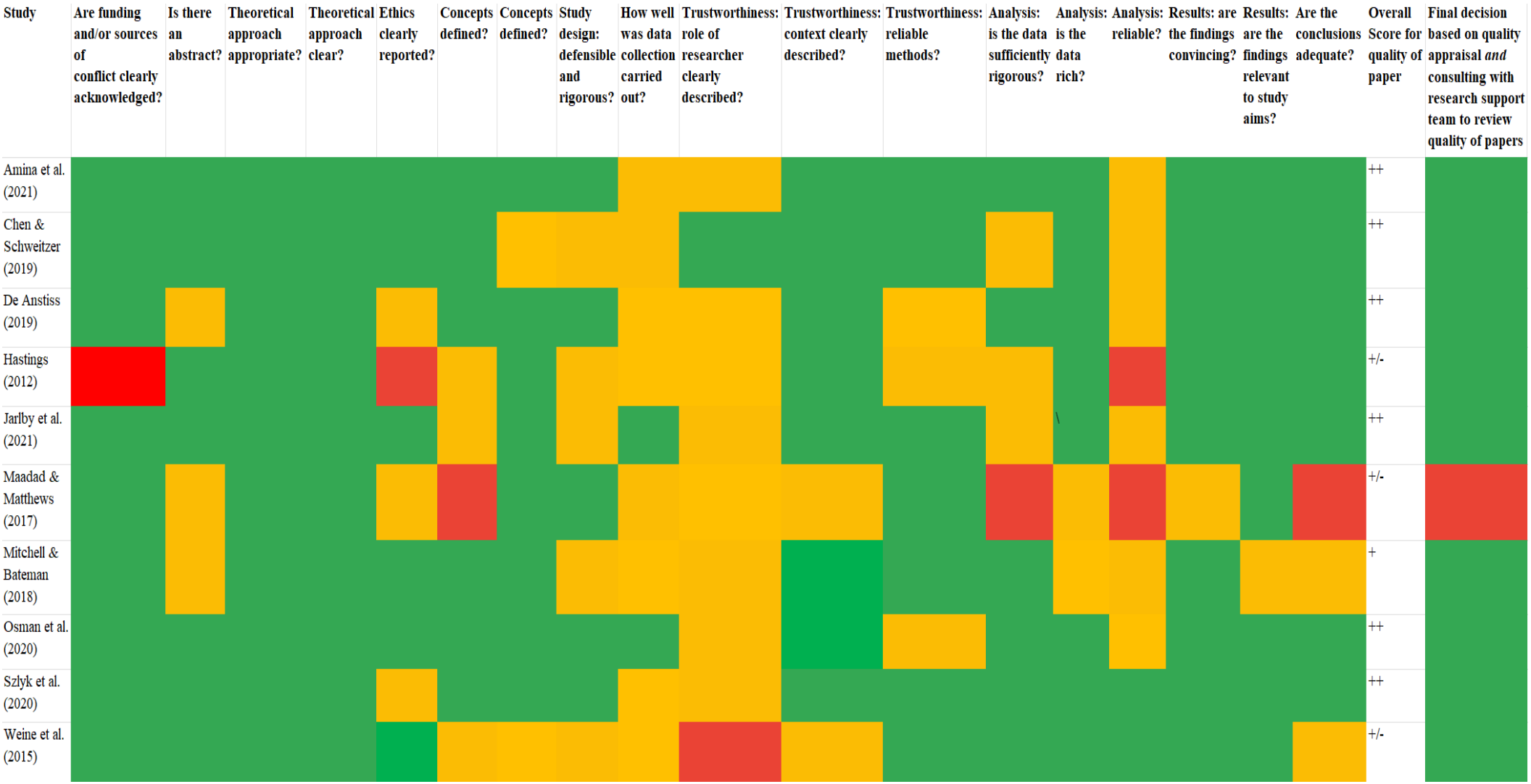
Figure 1.3

Quality Appraisal Scoring Parameters

++	Two thirds or more of criteria given a 'green' rating (12 or more) and no red ratings.
+	Less than 12 rated with a 'green', but no 'red' ratings.
+/-	Some of the criteria given a 'red' rating, but less than one third (e.g., 6 or less items). Consult with research support team to discuss further.
-	More items given a 'red' rating than any other rating. Eliminate due to questionable quality, or consult with research support team if still unclear

Figure 1.4

Quality Appraisal of Studies



Overall, green ratings were assigned more than any other rating. This indicates that the majority of studies met or partially met the full criteria, with common strengths in theoretical approaches; that is, clearly stating study aims, and justifying their decision to use a qualitative approach. The remaining criteria received varied ratings, though quality appeared to consistently fall short when it came to trustworthiness, particularly in relation to describing the role of the researcher(s) and how well data collection was carried out. Although three of the papers received at least one 'red' rating (Hastings, 2012, Maadad & Matthews, 2017; Weine et al., 2014), only one stood out as being of questionable methodological quality (Maadad & Matthews, 2017). Two of these papers were discussed for issues such as not clearly reporting ethical procedures (Hastings, 2012), and not clearly describing the role of the researchers (Hastings, 2012; Weine et al., 2014); however, they scored highly in all other areas. Maadad and Matthews' (2017) study was the only paper considered to carry a real risk of methodological bias. Specifically, the data analysis was not considered sufficiently rigorous or reliable, and the conclusions did not seem adequate. The paper also lacked conceptual clarity insofar that no attempts were made to define 'belonging'. For these reasons, the paper was not included for meta-synthesis. Therefore, the quality appraisal process resulted in a total of eight final papers for synthesis.

Data Extraction: Study & Participant Characteristics

Data relating to study and population characteristics were extracted from each study, as summarised in Table's 1.4 and 1.5, respectively.

Table 1.4

Study Characteristics

Author (year)	Country of origin	Host country	Epistemological position	Sample size	Method & analytic tool
Amina et al. (2021)	Afghanistan	Australia	Not stated	*n* = 5	Qualitative: Thematic analysis (TA) and experience drawings
Chen & Schweitzer (2019)	Albania, Afghan, Myanmar, China, Congo, Iran, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Indonesia, Iraq, Samoa, Somalia, Sudan, Syria, Thailand, and Vietnam	Australia	Social constructivist	*n* = 30	Qualitative: Thematic narrative analysis
de Anstiss et al. (2019)	Bosnia, Iraq, Liberia, Iran, Sudan	Australia	Not stated	*n* = 85	Qualitative: TA
Hastings (2012)	Afghanistan, Somalia and Turkey	UK	Not stated	*n* = 6	Qualitative: Interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA)
Jarlby et al (2021)	Middle East and South Asia	Denmark	Not stated	*n* = 6	Qualitative: TA and field observations
Mitchell & Bateman (2018)	Burma	New Zealand	Not stated	*n* = 2	Qualitative: TA (with conversation analysis approach)
Osman et al. (2020)	Somalia	Sweden	Not stated	*n* = 47	Qualitative: Thematic network analysis
Weine et al. (2014)	Burundi and Liberia	America	Not stated	*n* = 73	Qualitative: Grounded theory analysis

All studies were published in Western countries, documenting first-hand accounts of children who had migrated from Eastern countries within the last five years. Most studies did not report their epistemological position, with the exception of Chen and Schweitzer (2019). All studies employed a qualitative study design with interpretive methods of analysis. Five papers used a triangulation of multimodal data collection methods, to give voice to linguistically diverse, or younger children. Five studies focused on children's voices exclusively, while three featured accounts of child refugees supported by family members, teachers or service providers (Chen & Schweitzer, 2019; Mitchell & Bateman, 2018; Weine et al., 2014).

Table 1.5

Participant Demographics

Author (year)	Mean age (and range) in years	Gender	Ethnicity/Culture
Amina et al. (2021)	Mean not stated (9-12)	1 female 4 male	Afghanistan (5)
Chen & Schweitzer (2019)	Mean not stated (13-18)	9 female 21 male	Albanian, Afghan, Chinese, Congolese, Eritrean, Ethiopian, Indonesian, Iranian, Iraqi, Karen, Samoan, Somali, Sudanese, Syrian, Thai and Vietnamese
de Anstiss et al. (2019)	Mean not stated (13-17)	41 female 44 male	Afghan (16), Bosnian or Serbian (10), Iraqi (17), Liberian (15), Iranian (14), and Sudanese (13)
Hastings (2012)	Mean not stated (12-16)	0 female 6 male	Afghan (1), Somalian (4), and Turkish (1)
Jarlby et al (2021)	Mean not stated (17-18)	0 female 6 male	Middle Eastern or South Asian
Mitchell & Bateman (2018)	4 (4)	1 female 1 male	Burmese
Osman et al. (2020)	16 (14-18)	25 female	Somalian

Author (year)	Mean age (and range) in years	Gender	Ethnicity/Culture
		22 male	
Weine et al. (2014)	15.3 (range not stated)	37 female 36 male	Liberian (37) and Burundian (36)

The population comprised 254 participants, of which 45% were female (*n* = 114) and 55% male (*n* = 140). A mean age could not be calculated as most of the studies (*n* = 7) did not list individual ages, with five studies reporting age range only. Participants ranged in age from 4-18 years old. A possible exception to this was Weine et al. (2014), who only reported the mean age of participants (15.3 years). Consequently, the age of their youngest participant(s) and overall age range is unknown.

Data Extraction: Themes

Next, the themes from each study were extracted and juxtaposed against each other (Table 1.6).

Table 1.6

Extraction of Themes

Source	Extracted Themes				
Amina et al. (2021)	Theme: The importance of peers as social and linguistic brokers	Theme: The role of teachers' praise and how recognition increases the students' sense of belonging	Theme: How inclusive school practices and policies improve the students' sense of membership and participation	-	-
Chen & Schweitzer (2019)	Theme: Connection to a larger entity Subthemes: (1) a deep experience of the present; (2) a spiritual connection`	Theme: Experience of immersion Subthemes: (1) positive feelings of comfort and happiness; (2) being submersed in memories of the past	Theme: Experience of connection (and disconnection) Subthemes: (1) connections to significant others; (2) connections through objects; (3) sense of disconnection and yearning	Theme: Sense of identity Subthemes: (1) experience of self in time; (2) sense of agency	Theme: Instrumental outcomes Subthemes: (1) obtaining help and support; (2) opportunities for leisure, growth and development
de Anstiss et al. (2019)	Theme: Bonding connections	Theme: Bridging connections	Theme: Linking connections	-	-
Hastings (2012)	Theme: Needing and getting help	Theme: Feeling safe and secure	Theme: Adaptation and belonging	-	-
Jarlby et al. (2021)	Theme: Social support	Theme: Normalcy/ acceptance	Theme: Loneliness	Theme: Deviation/ exclusion	Theme: Activities (bodily, meaningful, shared)

Source	Extracted Themes				
Mitchell & Bateman (2018)	Theme: Greetings	Theme: Positioning the child within the family and wider cultural community	Theme: Reading	Theme: Dancing	-
Osman et al. (2020)	Global theme: Longing for a sense of belonging Subthemes/organising themes: (1) experience of social exclusion; (2) Pathways to social inclusion and acculturation.	Underlying theme (1): Experience of social exclusion - Perceived discrimination - Lack of supportive adults - Swedish language proficiency - Cultural in-between-ness	Underlying theme (2): Pathways to social inclusion and acculturation - Facilitating immersion - Collaborative engagement by teachers and parents - Coping and resilience	-	-
Weine et al. (2014)	Theme: Protective agents Subcategories (& capacities): (1) Youth (friends, peers); (2) Family (parents, older siblings, extended family members); (3) Service providers (schoolteachers, staff, church congregants, resettlement agency workers, activity leaders, volunteers, health and mental health providers)	Theme: Protective resources Subcategories (e.g., family and community capacities): (1) Finances for necessities; (2) English proficiency; (3) Social support networks; (4) Engaged parenting; (5) Family cohesion; (6) Cultural adherence and guidance; (7) Educational support; and (8) Faith & religious involvement)	Theme: Protective mechanisms Subcategories (& competencies/behaviours): (1) Relational (supporting, connecting, belonging); (2) Informational (informing, preparing); and (3) Developmental (defending, promoting, adapting)	-	-

Conducting the Meta-synthesis

It is widely reported that phases 4-6 of Noblit and Hare's (1988) methodology are the most challenging phases to conduct; yet the literature lacks a rigorous description of how these should be approached in practice (Atkins et al., 2008; Cahill et al., 2018; Sattar et al., 2021). For this reason, the researcher consulted recently developed, practical guidance provided by Sattar et al. (2021) and Toye et al. (2014) who clarified and built on the original steps. It is worth noting here that the original phases are intentionally iterative and cannot be reduced to a set of "mechanistic tasks" (Britten et al., 2002, p.211). Therefore, while the researcher attempted to work closely to recent guidance, they accepted that parallel or overlapping steps would be likely.

One extension to Noblit and Hare's (1988) original methodology was the collaborative construction of concepts and themes. Qualitative interpretation tends to be richer when two or more researchers are involved (France et al., 2014); therefore, these phases were carried out in collaboration with the research support team. The specific steps taken are outlined in Table 1.7.

Table 1.7

Collaborative Construction of Concepts & Themes

Phase	Steps Taken	Rationale
4. Determining how themes were related	The researcher reduced all study themes to key concepts[8] and organised them into conceptual categories. Categories were then discussed, challenged and developed within the research support team (reviewers 1 and 2).	Key concepts are the raw data of the synthesis, which attempt to explain and not just describe data.
5. Translating studies into one another	Studies were arranged in order of quality appraisal score, from highest to lowest. The main findings of study one were compared ('translated') to study two, and the synthesis of these studies translated into study three, and so on. Areas of similarity, divergence, and study context were noted, and whether each study added anything to the knowledge offered by the last. Participant data were reorganised within the newly formed categories and juxtaposed alongside the primary authors' interpretations, aiding the development of collaborative interpretations (third order constructs).	The order in which studies are compared can strongly influence the synthesis, as earlier studies will affect the subsequent development of ideas and interpretations. The intention of any qualitative synthesis is to retain the rich context of the data.
6. Synthesising the translations	Two team members independently created visual 'maps' to summarise key findings, alongside a textual 'line of argument' synthesis to draw relationships between findings. The visual 'maps' were then merged, to determine the story being told by the data as a whole. Reciprocal translations developed by the researcher, and then reviewed by two team members.	A line of argument synthesis describes how findings from across studies identify different aspects that can be drawn together into a new interpretation, 'storyline' or model, that may have gone undetected within individual studies.

[8]*Metaphors, phrases, or meaningful ideas within the data that develop through comparing instances.*

Determining how themes were related resulted in the identification of 25 common concepts (see Appendix F). The translating of studies into one another is partially portrayed in Figures 1.5 and 1.6, and fully in Appendix G. The abovementioned steps did not necessitate valuing one team members' interpretation over another's; rather, the aim of collaboration was to challenge the researcher's initial ideas and ensure final interpretations remained grounded in the original studies.

Figure 1.5

Translating Studies Into One Another

Findings from study one (Amina et al., 2021) show that both peers and teachers can support the process of belonging for newly resettled primary school children. This was facilitated through offering support with language development, inclusion in games by peers or in class discussions by teachers. For some, inclusion fostered feelings of safety and protection, too. On the other hand, these same facilitators to belonging could also serve as barriers, with some participants describing experiences of being excluded by other children, feeling unable to enjoy activities due to the language barrier, or feeling "invisible" to teachers, when compared to their non-refugee peers. The children's specific cultural practices and financial circumstances were also factors in their resettlement, with some referring to not being able to afford food in the canteen or find the appropriate food for their culture.

Similarly, study two (Osman et al., 2020) found that support from teachers was essential for their adjustment to a new school. However, with its focus being on secondary school and participants who migrated during their adolescent years, many referred to it being harder to resettle. This was attributed to finding it harder to learn the language than if they had migrated at a younger age, experiences of being discriminated at school, and a feeling of falling in-between cultures. A recurring theme was the lack of adult support available to participants, both at home and at school, differing somewhat from the first study. This study also went beyond the remit of study one by exploring coping strategies that helped children adapt to a

Figure 1.6

Collaborative Translation of Studies

Key Concepts	First Order Constructs (Participant Quotes)	Second Order Constructs (Primary Authors' Interpretations)	Researcher 1 Interpretation	Reviewer 1 Interpretation	Reviewer 2 Interpretation	Collaborative Interpretation (Third Level Constructs)
Concept of support & inclusion	"I feel included because of my friends. It is because, in the beginning, I felt very nervous going to school and staying there, but with the help of friends, I feel less nervous, when they are around I feel less nervous…My classmates invite me to the activities that they are doing, so that helps me feel adjusted, friends are important for me because they play with me."	The findings indicate that peers play a key role in helping young people from refugee backgrounds feel included and safe, and enable them to participate in classroom activities through linguistic brokering (translating). Teachers also play a vital role in creating a sense of belonging (e.g., through praise and recognition of participants' knowledge, skills and interests).	Both peers and primary school teachers can support the process of belonging for newly resettled primary school children. This was facilitated through offering support with language development and inclusion in games by peers or being included in class discussions by teachers.	I wonder how participants differed the experience of words of encouragement from low expectations and being infantilised (below).	I'm wondering if confidence is a byproduct of supporting or not. When I read the first order, I felt that the refugees need to build confidence with their peers and teachers during the process of adjustment. I would say building confidence is a part	Peers, teachers and members of the host community may facilitate processes of belonging in child refugees, through inclusions efforts, words of encouragement, and offering support with development opportunities (e.g., language development). This may also enable children to build their confidence while adjusting to a new culture.
Concept of exclusion	"... I am very sad that my friends ignore me." "Mostly teacher doesn't care if I am included or understanding whatever she is	Peers can create a sense of social capital, yet they can also take it away. For participant XXX, his emotional wellbeing, expressed on a scale from happiness to sadness, was determined by the acknowledgement	Peers and can be the facilitators to a sense of belonging during resettlement, but for some they can be the barrier.	Agree with this category. Added extra quote for exclusion "because teachers are not always there for me"	I agree with your interpretation. Maybe you could add "teacher" in your interpretation. Moreover, I	Peers and teachers can also serve as barriers to belonging. Experiences of exclusion may create feelings of rejection too.
Seeking protection	"My friends make me more comfortable at school than my teachers because teachers are not always there for me but my friends are especially when we are playing outside, friends are there to protect me." [Parent]: "When my kids arrived and we arrived, ... opened the door for them… and they were in peace, and they were safe, and they like the school". [Teacher] "new arrivals are not at risk for	Friends provide a sense ofcomfort and protection, which teachers cannot provide, at least with the same consistency as friends. 'Outside' the classroom appears to be a domain where teachers may not always be present but friends will be... For P5, friends are the constants who provide comfort and security, for P6, friends are determining factors of school belonging. They can make you feel like you belong or solidify the feeling of being disconnected and alone. - Amina et al. (2021)	This seems to go beyond belonging due to shared language and being made to feel emotionally comfortable, but a matter of protection and security (is this a physical need for protection due to past-based fears or more of an emotional vulnerability? Peers may be a barrier to belonging when it comes to		I'm not sure but do the words "protection" and "accompaniment" mean the same? If they are different words, I felt that participants were not only seeking protection but also accompaniment" in their daily life	Participants sought a sense of comfort and protection within their host community. For most, this was an emotional protection that was facilitated through feeling connected to others, especially friends who were seen as 'constants'. For others, this extended to seeking physical protection, as if needing security against school bullies, or peers, who facilitated feelings of being alone, disconnected, rejected and vulnerable, reminding them of their migratory trauma.
Helping others, feeling needed and appreciated	"Once I helped my friend and my teacher appreciated me a lot. At that time I felt that I am part of this class and I belong. I felt very happy about it…" "If society accepts you… you feel included and can contribute to positive things."	The participants wanted their teachers to not only notice them but also acknowledge and recognise their knowledge, behaviours, skills and interests. Being acknowledged by the teacher communicated to these learners that the teacher knows, understands and cares for these students, and more importantly, that they hold their rightful places within the school community. Their participation within the classroom	Participants not only feel a sense of belonging in response to their teachers praise and inclusion efforts, but there is something here about paying it forward and wanting to help others, to make sure their peers also feel a sense of belonging.	There is something about being appreciated or the act of appreciation that facilitates belongingness. Appreciation can include being rewarded, feeling proud, respecting personal space and need for solitude	I agreed with you that the participants wanted to make sure their peers feel a sense of beloning and contribute to society. Is it possible the participants wanted to meet their needs to be needed? They wanted to be accepted	Amended this conceptual category to 'Helping others, feeling needed and appreciated', following reviewer 2's suggestions. Also added the new conceptual category 'Being seen', which seems to go beyond just being appreciated and being more about feeling understood and recognised.

When synthesising the translations, the findings from across the studies were pulled together and viewed as one 'whole'; one that is more than the parts alone imply (Noblit & Hare, 1988). It had become clear by this phase that the studies were sufficiently similar in focus to warrant a reciprocal synthesis[9]. Practically, this required comparing and merging the translations above into categories of shared meaning (Appendix H). This resulted in five reciprocal translations (Table 1.8). Given the individual differences and circumstances inherent within participant accounts, it was agreed that the available data could not be reformulated into a fixed, linear model of belonging, as the visual 'maps' (see appendix I) might have implied. Therefore, the reciprocal translations were collaboratively reviewed and interpreted into new themes, which produced a more narrative description of the processes facilitating a sense of belonging in child refugees.

Table 1.8

Reciprocal Translations

Reciprocal Translations	Examples	Number of Instances
Experiences of support & inclusion	Feeling included and protected by teachers and peers; feeling seen, needed, appreciated; feelings of family/home; help with language translating.	8
Experiences of exclusion	Feeling ignored, invisible, dehumanised; being attacked and discriminated; language barrier.	8
Migratory loneliness & societal isolation	Like a "boat", alone at sea; being an 'outsider', a 'foreigner', a 'refugee'; stigma and racism; falling between cultures; separated from family.	5
Maintaining a cultural identity	Maintaining connections to country of origin, through language and cultural practices.	7
Adaptive strategies	Embracing opportunities to learn; practicing gratitude and self-reliance; engaging in meaningful, shared activities.	7

[9]*When the concepts in one study can incorporate those of another.*

1.3 Results

The final phase, ‘expressing the synthesis’, marks the reporting of the final themes. One overarching theme was interpreted from the analysis: *Migratory Loneliness and Societal Isolation*. This represents the wider context in which participants are living, and the context they bring to their resettlement experiences, given their refugee status. This theme underpinned three themes which describe the different types of processes facilitating a sense of belonging, which comprised six subthemes (Table 1.9).

Table 1.9

Meta-synthesis Themes

Overarching Theme	Themes	Subthemes
Migratory Loneliness & Societal Isolation	Experiences of Inclusion & Support	Peers as Protectors & Translators
		Feeling Seen, Accepted & Needed
	Family Connectedness	A Sense of Security & Cohesion
		Maintaining a Cultural Identity
	Adaptive Responses to Resettlement	Embracing Agency & New Learning Opportunities
		Shared & Meaningful Activities

Migratory Loneliness & Societal Isolation

This theme embodies the overarching lived experience of “being a refugee”, “a foreigner”, and an “outsider”. One participant drew a picture to portray himself as a boat, alone at sea (Jarlby et al., 2021). The ocean represented the world, and he was unsure where

he was heading: “Just the world… but it does not mean [that I am] free. It is difficult” (p.6). Here, this young person seems to be clarifying that while he may be physically free now, this does not reflect his felt reality; the fear and loneliness from having to migrate has stayed with him. Later, he explained the meaning of the sun in his drawing: “sometimes the sun is painful, as is your life”. This was echoed in a number of accounts that referred to the sadness and loss experienced through migration.

Many participants alluded to the social impact of migration, especially during the early stages of resettlement (e.g., Hastings, 2012), which placed them in the unique, isolating position of feeling misunderstood from the outset: "I know many people from my school. But… I cannot really talk with them about my problems… about my life" (Jarlby et al., 2021, p.186). One participant referred to his worry about being seen as a “freak” from another country (de Anstiss et al., 2019, p.353), and another expected that societal stigma would accompany their refugee status: “[We will be seen as] extremely scum in their mind… They think, “Oh, [these] people are [all] the same”… that [we] don’t want to interact with society, [that we]… want to be isolated…” (de Anstiss et al., 2019, p.358). These expectations were rooted in perceived experiences of racism and prejudice, which led participants to feeling unwanted in their host community (Jarlby et al., 2021).

Participants’ concerns went beyond their direct experiences, with some referring to how their status dehumanised them from a systemic perspective: “Politicians and the government do not see the human being…” (Jarlby et al., 2021, p.185). Such concerns appeared to culminate in participants becoming socially withdrawn and generally distrusting of people in their host country, including service organisations (de Anstiss et al., 2019). For these individuals, it was harder to participate within the local community, seek help if needed, and establish a sense of belonging.

Notwithstanding this, while many reflected on how their migratory loneliness defined their experiences, one participant reflected on how, with time and increased familiarity with his new environment, things changed:

> First day I feel like a lone person, like I don't feel like I belong to this country. When I learn all the laws and about all the people's behaviours, like I feel now like I belong in this country now. (Hastings, 2012, p.342).

Experiences of Inclusion & Support

Following migration, a process found to facilitate a sense of belonging was the extent to which participants experienced inclusion and support during resettlement. These experiences were organised into two subthemes: (i) *Peers as Protectors and Translators*, and (ii) *Feeling Seen, Accepted and Needed*.

Peers as Protectors & Translators

Building peer relationships was fundamental for establishing a sense of belonging among child refugees. Participants resettling in primary and secondary school contexts reflected on how they felt nervous and alone at first, but making friends reduced these feelings (Hastings, 2012). Specifically, being included in activities recreated feelings of home, as one participant described: "When I am with my friends, I feel like I'm home… they make me feel better than ever" (Chen & Schweitzer, 2019, p.1983). This led to feelings of safety and protection in their new environment: "I feel included in my school because of my friends… they help me. My friends make me more comfortable at school than my teachers… friends are there to protect me." (Amina et al., 2021, p. 9).

Furthermore, participants stated their preference for relying on peers for support, because "no one else understands you" (de Anstiss et al., 2019, p.355). This was especially relevant for those who were able to form attachments with children from their own ethnic or refugee community (Weine et al., 2014), with whom they could share experiences as well as the language, which appeared to instil a sense of camaraderie. Indeed, a factor found to support feelings of inclusion across study contexts, was being able to speak the same language as peers or having peers as linguistic brokers, particularly when they struggled to understand what their teachers were saying (Amina et al., 2021).

These important new relationships in the child's life, termed 'protective agents' by Weine et al. (2014), can facilitate belonging; however, they can also take it away, indicating a continuum of experiences reflecting the extent to which a child is included or excluded.

> Some of my friends include me in their games, especially when I am sad…This makes me feel very good… The next one [referring to a picture he has drawn] is about my friends… I am very sad that [they] ignore me. (Amina et al., 2021, p.11).

Many participants described instances of discrimination, that were based on being different from their peers. For example, one recalled experiences of being bullied at secondary school due to his inability to speak English: "There were seven boys… they beat me that day." (Hastings, 2012, p.341). This suggests that, while language proficiency can facilitate belonging, the opposite is also true; for those who cannot speak the local language, or do not have peers to translate, language may be a significant barrier (Osman et al., 2020).

Feeling Seen, Accepted & Needed

In a similar vein, for those resettling in school contexts, teachers played a key role in creating a sense of inclusion. Teachers of younger refugee children would encourage belonging by showing how their home culture was valued through using familiar hand

gestures and greeting them in their home language (Mitchell & Bateman, 2018). Belonging was also facilitated through observable behaviours reported by older children, such as acknowledging participants in the classroom (Amina et al., 2021), helping with language learning (Chen & Schweitzer, 2019), and generally showing that they cared about the child's wellbeing and resettlement experiences (Weine et al., 2014). Participants spoke fondly of the teachers who seemed dedicated to supporting newly resettled children and helped them to recognise their future potential (Hastings, 2012). These efforts caused participants to report feeling "important", "happy" and "confident", as one participant recalled: "Two months ago, I went to parent/teacher interviews with my mother, my teacher appreciated me... I really felt confident, that made me feel that I really am part of this school." (Amina et al., 2021, p.11).

Participants also recalled experiences where they had helped others, namely other newcomers to their school, and this had been seen and praised by teachers. For example, one reflected: "Once I helped my friend and my teacher appreciated me a lot. At that time I felt that I am part of this class and I belong. I felt very happy…" (Amina et al., 2021, p.12). By being appreciated in this way, participants described feeling accepted, needed, and consequently wanting to contribute to their new society through more pro-social acts: "If society accepts you… you feel included and can contribute to positive things." (Osman et al., 2020, p.8).

As with the previous subtheme, these experiences seemed to occur along a continuum, reflecting the extent to which participants felt included and/or excluded. Some described feeling discouraged, underestimated and ignored by teachers, who were seen as prioritising local children (Amina et al., 2021). This led to children feeling vulnerable, stressed, and hopeless about their future (Osman et al., 2020). Once again, difficulties with language proficiency were identified as a barrier to belonging; participants did not always understand their lessons, nor did they feel cared for or supported to learn, which led one participant to

state: “…although I am sitting in front of her, it seems I am invisible. I don’t like this.” (Amina et al., 2021, p.12). Moreover, some children described feeling discriminated against by teachers’ comments about their appearance or religion, which seemingly set a precedent for classmates to do the same (Osman et al., 2020).

Across these subthemes, the extent to which participants felt included seemed to be influenced by their: (i) age at migration, and (ii) resettlement context. Those who migrated at a younger age reported fewer transitional difficulties: "I was four or five years old when I came to Sweden, so I started preschool… and learned the language more easily." (Osman et al., 2020, p.7). Older children, however, based in secondary schools, residential settings, the local community and/or service organisations, reportedly found it harder to learn the language and culture, build relationships, and would find themselves drawing comparisons between their own upbringing and current treatment to that of their local peers (de Anstiss et al., 2019). Moreover, older children seemed more aware of the life they had left behind, and the stigma attached to being a refugee that younger participants did not verbalise (Jarlby et al., 2021).

Family Connectedness

A separate process found to facilitate belonging was the extent to which participants felt connected to their family. This process was organised into two subthemes: (i) *A Sense of Security and Cohesion*, and (ii) *Maintaining a Cultural Identity*.

A Sense of Security & Cohesion

For those who migrated with family, a sense of security was felt during resettlement, with one participant describing family relationships as “…the most important thing… affecting… every aspect of our life" (de Anstiss et al., 2019, p.352). This was echoed

throughout participant accounts, which referenced the importance of talking through problems they might be having as a family (Weine et al., 2014). Such relationships were thought to protect children against aimlessness, depression and other mental health problems that may arise post-migration (de Anstiss et al., 2019). One participant explained: "…my family stay in my life all my life now and my family lives with me here in Australia, and really help me for everything, and when I'm sad… my family stands up behind me." (Chen & Schweitzer, 2019, p.1983).

Moreover, a sense of belonging was facilitated when those resettling in school contexts had parents and/or family members that were engaged in this aspect of their life, instilling a sense of cohesion (Weine et al., 2014). In turn, schools that involved the family and values of their home culture when welcoming children were seen as strengthening belonging for younger refugees in particular, as well as helping the family to resettle and embrace new traditions. One parent stated:

> We love it, we love the birthdays… we didn't have this in our country, it's not our… way. But … what we see is that our child is alive and for another year. And we're so happy that we want to celebrate that… So that's what we think now – it's not just a birthday party… It's very special. (Mitchell & Bateman, 2018, p.385).

This process seemed to go beyond facilitating a sense of belonging, by helping children and their families to move forward, and in a way that celebrated their survival of the migration experience. In so doing, this parent's quote implicitly speaks to the life-threatening aspect of being forcibly displaced, and how different things could have been.

Maintaining a Cultural Identity

Furthermore, proximity to parents enabled participants to maintain their cultural identity. Efforts to remain connected to their country of origin included reminiscing about

past memories, the landscape of their home country, sentimental objects, and the important role of family and friends. One participant proudly reflected: “It’s something special about my country. I love my country. I think I’ve learnt [many things in] my country…” (Chen & Schweitzer, 2019, pp.1982-1983).

For these participants, thinking about their home country seemed to lead them to making sense of how their past and present worlds could integrate coherently to enable a better sense of belonging. On the other hand, sometimes these attempts to remember where they had come from reminded participants of what they had lost, igniting feelings of sadness, yearning and disconnection. Some described feeling like they fell between cultures; something Osman et al. (2020) termed ‘cultural in-betweenness’. For example, one participant explained: “I do not know which country I belong to or which culture I have... I did not grow up in Somalia, and here, I do not celebrate the Swedish midsummer.” (Osman et al., 2020, p.7). Many reported that they strongly identified with their family and home country, but also wanted to engage in the traditions of their new culture (de Anstiss et al., 2019), a desire that was not always supported by parents who were struggling to adjust themselves.

Furthermore, it is important to acknowledge that not all participants felt close to their family, and some were UASC who had been physically separated from family before or during migration. For these participants, it was not uncommon to ruminate about lost connections; however, if they felt included as a member of the local community[10] and had the chance to talk with others, this seemed to encourage a sense of belonging in the absence of family connections (Jarlby et al., 2021; Weine et al., 2014). For example:

[10]*Including neighbours, volunteer agencies, the local church and other children.*

> I have many things to think about… why I am alone, where my family is… it could be six or ten or twenty years that I have to live like this, without a family… I like to talk with people, and if I can help people, it makes me happy. (Jarlby et al., 2021, p.188).

This suggests that 'family connectedness' may also sit along a continuum of resettlement experiences which incorporates disconnection too. Many reported low self-esteem because their parents were not involved in their lives (de Anstiss et al., 2019; Jarlby et al., 2021; Osman et al., 2020). For the children in this position, it is inferred that disconnectedness might feed back into feelings of migratory loneliness and impede a sense of belonging.

Some resettlement experiences were also marked by intense conflict and violence at the hands of parents, reportedly due to their own migratory difficulties, which served to maintain the trauma of being forcibly displaced and posed a barrier to belonging:

> He (dad) gets abusive… he gets really angry when he drinks… they're always having arguments ... And he's just like "It's the only way I can like cope with the war and stuff."… mum's like, "You can't always be taking it out on the war." It's been like 12 years now and still he does it. (de Anstiss et al., 2019, p.352).

Adaptive Responses to Resettlement

Across contexts, participants described the processes that helped them to adapt within their new culture. This theme was organised into two subthemes: (i) *Embracing Agency and New Learning Opportunities,* and (ii) *Shared and Meaningful Activities*.

Embracing Agency & New Learning Opportunities

Adolescent refugees in particular voiced the bidirectional nature of belonging, with many believing that it was their responsibility to integrate and learn about their new culture,

especially for those lacking family connections and other forms of support (Osman et al., 2020). These participants opted to accept and normalise the challenges that come with change and coming to belong in a new country, indicating a sense of agency and emotional maturity beyond their years. One group of participants recalled telling themselves that things will get better with time, with one declaring:

> There are challenges and changes in your life, you have to accept these because you have come to a new country, and everything is new… Eventually, you will adapt… you will meet other people who will encourage you... (Osman et al., 2020, p.8).

Many participants embraced opportunities to develop new skills. With this came expressions of gratititude, for their parents, their safety, and the experiences they may not have had if they had remained in their war-torn home country, including free education and healthcare (Chen & Schweitzer, 2019; Osman et al., 2020). A large proportion of secondary school participants valued learning English in particular: "I just want to learn. I just love to learn English" (Hastings, 2012, p.342). These opportunities allowed participants to nurture hopes and dreams for the future, and think about developing the necessary competencies to create a better life for themselves (Chen & Schweitzer, 2019; Jarlby et al., 2021).

Another way that participants appeared to embrace agency and new learning opportunities was through reflecting on their spiritual beliefs, and the universality of human experience. This implied that belonging may take on a transcendent quality, conceptualised as being connected to something bigger than themselves; a shared earth (Chen & Schweitzer, 2019; Jarlby et al., 2021; Weine et al., 2014). This involved connecting with the present moment, nature, and embracing a sense of communion, regardless of their past and where they have come from, implying a sense of humility: “the word belonging in our language…

like, being united, being together, and once people are together… they're one" (Chen & Schweitzer, 2019, p.1981). Another participant stated:

> It doesn't matter if you are from Africa, Asia, Europe, South America… we are people and we live only in one earth … Being part of a place… It doesn't matter if you are from outside of Australia… just you are belonging here. (Chen & Schweitzer, 2019, p.1982).

Shared & Meaningful Activities

Some suggested that a sense of belonging was promoted through membership to recreational teams and opportunities to participate in meaningful activities with others. This allowed participants to nurture hobbies they loved in their home country, or develop new interests altogether, which enabled them to have fun, alleviate migration-related stress, and begin to move forward (Amina et al., 2021; Chen & Schweitzer, 2019; Jarlby et al., 2021; Osman et al., 2020). One participant explained: "Through activities such as sports, you learn how to adapt to society. Playing football with native youths… helps you get to know them and make friends, which… helps you feel happy and able to manage every hardship." (Osman et al., 2020, p.7).

In addition to the positive experience of the activities in themselves, they were also part of pursuing an ordinary, meaningful life, through which child refugees could access opportunities for bonding and feel a sense of normality. One participant shared: "It makes me happy when I go out with someone, just walking… talking together. Like normal people do…" (Jarlby et al., 2021, p.188).

As with the preceding themes, divergent experiences were also described. Despite particpants' willingness to engage in meaningful activitities, not all of them had these

opportunities in their life (Jarlby et al., 2021). This was due to the aforementioned challenges of feeling misunderstood, an absence of meaningful relationships, and language barriers. These were highlighted in accounts of poor health and wellbeing, which led some to report low self-esteem and believe themelves to be "…the most useless thing on the planet" (de Anstiss et al., 2019, p.354), ultimately obstructing opportunities which may facilitate belonging. Some also resorted to maladaptive ways of manage their pain, from dropping out of school (Osman et al., 2020), to self-harming (de Anstiss et al., 2019; Jarlby et al., 2021).

1.4 Discussion

Summary of Findings

The current study aimed to explicate the voices of children from refugee backgrounds, to understand the processes that facilitate a sense of belonging. After systematically searching four electronic databases, 1,192 studies were identified, of which eight primary studies were included for meta-synthesis. Following Noblit and Hare's (1988) seven-phase methodology, it became clear that there were considerable differences between child refugees' experiences and personal circumstances *within* studies. However, the studies were sufficiently similar in focus to warrant a reciprocal synthesis. Subsequently, one overarching theme was interpreted: *Migratory Loneliness and Societal Isolation.* This underpinned the development of three themes: (i) *Experiences of Inclusion and Support, (ii) Family Connectedness,* and *(iii) Adaptive Responses to Resettlement*. These themes comprised a total of six subthemes (see Table 1.9), each of which offered a narrative description of the processes facilitating a sense of belonging in child refugees.

Connection to Existing Theory & Research

The organising themes are considered in the wider context of the broader literature, noting similarities, differences, and any new ways of understanding the population of interest.

Experiences of Inclusion & Support

A key process found to facilitate a sense of belonging was building supportive relationships with peers, within school and the local community. Teachers also played a vital

role, through accepting newly resettled children and their home cultures. These findings are supported by the wider, recently published literature concerning refugee and immigrant youth, which attests to the importance of developing social support networks post-migration (Garcia and Birman, 2022). Schools have been identified as a particularly important context for facilitating such support, where youth can both learn, and be part of a welcoming environment (Schachner et al., 2016). Corresponding with the current study, Pastoor (2015) found that being able to attend school and build relationships with local peers also promoted stability and a sense of normality during a time that tends to be characterised by coping with traumatic memories and fearing what the future might hold.

Participants' experiences were interpreted as occurring along a continuum, highlighting how the processes facilitating a sense of belonging for some, may have had the opposite result for others. In keeping with previous research (McCormack & Tapp, 2019; Sime & Fox, 2015), participants across study contexts raised the issue of being excluded and discriminated against. Participants perceived this treatment as being based on difference, from their appearance and how refugees are portrayed by the government, to not being able to speak the local language. While first-hand knowledge of child refugee experiences is lacking in the broader literature, this finding is unsurprising when considering that similar experiences have been reported by young adult refugees (Edge et al., 2014), and children of refugees (Demir & Ozgul, 2019).

The extent to which participants felt included or excluded seemed to be influenced by participants' age at migration and the context they were resettling in. This finding has been reported in earlier studies which have noted that age of displacement can be a critical factor for refugee children (Rutter, 2003). Moreover, the significance of resettlement context is consistent with Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory, which supports the idea that the social conditions within a child refugee's host country, combined with any

psychological resources formed in their home country, can affect their wellbeing post-migration. This indicates an additional influencing factor that was not explored within the current study: the impact of pre-migration experiences on belonging.

Family Connectedness

Another key process supporting a sense of belonging was the extent to which participants felt connected to their family, which afforded opportunities to remain connected to their country of origin, while still feeling supported with integrating into a new community. This too appeared to occur along a continuum, given the stark reality that many participants were UASC and had been separated from their loved ones. In the absence of family connectedness, some participants reported a feeling of falling between cultures, and consequently not belonging to any country.

These findings bear similarities with research carried out with adult individuals and families. For example, Gangamma (2017) found that maintaining family connection during resettlement appeared to help members to make sense of the loss they have experienced. This was largely rooted in their shared trauma experiences and navigating the challenges of resettlement together. However, it is impossible to say whether this interpretation can be extended to reflect child refugees' experiences.

Adaptive Responses to Resettlement

Participants described a sense of belonging through embracing opportunities for learning and development, through learning new skills and participating in recreational activities. In recent years there has been a shift within the evidence base, from pathologising

refugee experiences (Garcia & Birman, 2022), to framing their narratives in the context of strengths, resilience and aspirations in resettlement, despite any migration-related stress they may be carrying (Alarcón et al., 2021; Becker et al., 2018; Pieloch et al., 2016; Rodriguez & Dobler, 2021). Reflecting this shift, the current study highlighted narratives in which participants voiced gratitude for their newfound safety, and the new educational opportunities they would not have had if they had remained in their country of origin. The findings therefore contribute to a more positive representation of refugee children in the academic literature, while also going some way in dispelling views of vulnerability and resilience as mutually exclusive (Ni Raghallaigh & Gilligan, 2010).

Clinical Implications

The current findings are consistent with previous research that has called for an extended scope of treatment for refugees that looks beyond symptoms of distress and trauma and considers the important role of family, peer and community connections when establishing a sense of belonging (e.g., Gangamma, 2017).

At the clinical level, the findings have real world applications for service provision within the local authority sector. For example, some participants described feeling dehumanised by their refugee status, which reportedly made it harder for them to trust service organisations and seek help if needed. This is a particularly worrisome finding given the growing population of child refugees, who bear an increased risk of mental health difficulties as a result of their traumatic experiences prior to, during, or post migration. Adding to this, the current study found that being unable to speak the local language created a barrier to belonging for participants. Although refugees and asylum seekers are entitled to equality of access to mental health services, free emergency care and primary healthcare in the UK

(Office for Health Improvement and Disparities, 2017), greater resource support is needed from government (Pollard & Howard, 2021). Moreover, the language barrier represents a significant problem related to accessing these services. Therefore, the current study provides evidence to support the continued commissioning of interpreting services across health services (NHS England, 2018), while calling for the recruitment of more culturally and linguistically diverse workforces. At the very least, health information and therapeutic resources should be made available in a range of languages, which would be particularly helpful for those who are distrusting of health care providers, and may struggle with engagement.

Clinical Psychologists could play a vital role in the development of such resources; for example, by developing and disseminating trauma-informed training programmes across contexts, including schools and the care sector. An example of an existing programme that has been rolled out across Europe is ‘Including children affected by migration’ ([ICAM], 2022), which provides resource packs for schools who are welcoming Ukrainian children. Moreover, a number of child and adolescent services across Europe have opened specialist outpatient units for young refugees and asylum seekers, led by healthcare professionals (Hodes et al., 2018). This may be an additional area requiring psychology input, through providing clinical supervision for the professionals providing direct support, especially given their risk of exposure to vicarious trauma (Barrington & Shakespeare-Finch, 2013). Holding a space for reflective practice may also be beneficial, which could provide time for service providers to think about how to implement culturally appropriate treatment for this vulnerable population (e.g., Pollard & Howard, 2021).

Regarding the educational sector specifically, the findings relating to the support experienced from peers and teachers at school offer important implications. The experience of migratory loneliness is likely to be accentuated by the fact that most refugee children will

also encounter interruptions to their education (Wofford & Tibi, 2018), causing a number of social and learning consequences. This is a timely issue given the recent context of Covid-19 (Browne et al., 2021), which not only brought more interrupted schooling for this population but may have exacerbated the feelings of isolation felt through migration. Access to a supportive educational environment, as a basic human right, should therefore be a priority for newly resettled refugee children. The following recommendations may help to facilitate this process, and thus a sense of belonging.

First, those responsible for child refugee integration[11] should make efforts to create safe, welcoming environments in which children feel visible and accepted. Reflecting Mitchell and Bateman's (2018) study, these should include activities that celebrate children's home cultures, while introducing the host country's own western traditions. Indeed, integration should be a two-way process, whereby participation within a new community also requires encouragement from members of that community (Bouchara, 2021). This seems important given the current findings which suggest that some adolescents can assert agency in their integration efforts; however, this may not be possible for all refugees. For very young refugees, the onus lies with the host society to take a more involved role in accommodating diversity and removing barriers to belonging.

Second, to minimise perceived discrimination, support should be in the form of a holistic, strengths-based approach that builds on refugee children's goals and previous level of education, not limiting their value to language proficiency. That said, language and literacy development in both the home and host culture languages of refugee children have been found to increase the likelihood of successful adjustment and should therefore be prioritised, at home and in the classroom (Wofford & Tibi, 2018). This reflects recently updated UK

[11] *Including teachers, clinicians, residential care staff, policymakers, community workers, etc.*

policies, including the ‘Home Office indicators of integration framework’ (Ndofor-Tah et al., 2019). The framework identified both social connection *and* the development of language and cultural knowledge as key facilitators for the positive integration of young refugees in the education sector. With this in mind, when educators within western societies do attempt to teach a language to children from the eastern world, an additional recommendation within the wider literature is that they must also teach them about the corresponding cultural paradigm, including any taboos that may come with it (Bouchara, 2021). Furthermore, to facilitate a sense of cohesion and connection in the child’s new life, educators should attempt to bring parents or caregivers into the conversation when planning language and literacy interventions for their children where possible, or at least offer support to families who may lack the resources to support their children in navigating academic contexts (Zeynep, 2012).

Finally, those supporting children from refugee backgrounds should ensure that all of their actions look past the stigma that can come with ‘being a refugee’, and instead see the human being, and the unique position their experiences have placed them in. As alluded to in previous research, the very definition of being forcibly displaced should also be held in mind when working and communicating with newly resettled children, as a reminder of the non-normative experiences that set them apart from their non-refugee peers (Horswood et al., 2019; Korjonen-Kuusipuro et al., 2019; Van os et al., 2020). With this in mind, it is felt that a more individualised and trauma-informed approach is warranted with this population; one that recognises a person’s lived experiences and resulting adjustment strategies, while respecting their cultural and religious identity (Sobitan, 2022). This was shrewdly captured by a teacher in one of the primary studies:

> I wondered how much of [their] behaviour might be survival strategies learned previously, behaviours and mentalities that might have been necessary to survive in conditions of scarcity and uncertainty. Part of addressing their behaviour is to create

> an environment that is safe and predictable, and where every student is assured of having everything they need in the classroom. Not needing to fight to get what they want. (Weine et al., 2014, p.14).

Future Research

The processes described within the first two organising themes were interpreted as existing along a continuum of experiences. However, it was not clear whether any one participant experienced either inclusion *or* exclusion experiences, for example, or both. Similarly, it was not known whether participants who felt included by peers and/or teachers, were in a position to maintain family connections or not, reflecting a limitation of the available data and an area worthy of further exploration. Previous research has found that support from peers, but not family, to be a predictor of successful adaptation in UASC (Tartakovsky, 2009), implying that a sense of belonging in one context may counteract a lack of belonging in others. However, these studies were not based on forcibly displaced youth, making it difficult to draw inferences in relation to participants within the current study, indicating a potential area for future research attention. Such research efforts may also capture broader insights into young refugee experiences by exploring their migration and pre-migration experiences, to better contextualise their resettlement experiences and how a sense of belonging is established.

Limitations

Despite this study's contributions, several limitations were noted. First, the raw data of meta-syntheses are participant narratives selected by the primary studies' authors to

support their interpretations, meaning the current findings are limited to what the original authors chose to present. As the majority of primary studies did not report their epistemological position, potentially valuable information is lost regarding any beliefs or biases of the authors' that may have influenced how they made sense of participants' experiences.

Considering the multicultural nature of the studies being reviewed and the range of participant languages, an initial concern of the researcher, as an English-speaking, monolingual female, was that she might have missed important individual differences between participants and their experiences when translating studies into one another. However, this issue is somewhat mitigated by the collaborative approach to analysis, through which the researchers' individual interpretations were challenged and developed at each phase. Discussions with the research support team, who represented a diverse population[12], also involved exploring any a priori assumptions or biases held by the researcher, enabling an iterative, dialectic and thus, more rigorous process (Toye et al., 2014).

Strengths

Though concerns have been raised within previous literature about the potential loss of explanatory context when combining the findings of multiple studies (Atkins et al., 2008), the current study countered these by synthesising a small number of studies, as recommended by Campbell et al. (2011)[13]. The final studies also represented a range of contexts, each of which were acknowledged when translating studies into one another. The studies combined

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[12]Collaborative efforts involved the researcher, a Caucasian female, and two reviewers; one was a north African female, and the other an Asian male. Three Caucasian supervisors were also involved in the process. Though culturally diverse, a caveat may be that the research support team were exclusively formed by clinical psychology trainees or supervisors.

[13]Campbell et al. (2011) recommended <40 papers for an effective meta-synthesis.

also represented voices from a large sample of children (*n* = 254), aged 4-18 years, who had migrated from at least 22 countries in the Eastern world, thus capturing a broad but in-depth range of child refugee experiences.

Another strength was that the analysis explored both complementary and contradictory data, offering a more holistic and contextualised understanding of the range and complexity of resettlement experiences. This is supported by Haarlammert et al. (2017), who contended that representing just one aspect of a story can inadvertently "other" refugee children. This meant that the study adhered to representational ethics and facilitated a richer synthesis of findings, while still remaining close to the research question.

Conclusion

The current meta-synthesis offered insights into the nuance of child refugee experiences and circumstances, and how these can vary between individuals depending on their age and resettlement context. Perhaps more importantly, the study provided a platform from which child refugee voices could be heard, thus contributing to a significant gap in the literature and paving the way for further developments to clinical practice and research into the processes facilitating a sense of belonging.

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Chapter 2. Empirical Paper

"It's Good to Have a Place Where You Can Just be Yourself": Exploring how Informal Learning Programmes Designed to Reduce Loneliness can Influence Identity Construction in Young People from Disadvantaged Backgrounds

2.1 Abstract

Rationale

Loneliness is considered one of the greatest public health challenges of the 21st century, with young people reported to be among the worst affected. Indeed, adolescence has long been considered a period of life when loneliness can be particularly prevalent; however, it is only in recent years that this has been linked to the challenges of identity development. Constructing a sense of identity is widely understood to be a key developmental task of adolescence, yet there is limited research concerning disadvantaged populations who may be struggling with loneliness and finding a sense of self in the world.

Aim

This qualitative study aimed to capture how young people from disadvantaged backgrounds construct a sense of identity through the context of an informal learning programme, designed to enhance peer connectedness and reduce loneliness.

Methodology

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with seven young people, aged 12-17 years, accessing informal learning workshops within a deprived suburb in the UK. Interviews were audio recorded and transcribed, before being subjected to reflexive thematic analysis (RTA).

Results

Three overarching themes were generated through the analysis: A *Strengthened Sense of Identity Through Embracing Difference*, *Who I am Depends on the Context I am in*, and *A More Emotionally Attuned Self*.

Discussion

Findings are considered in the context of existing research, and implications for clinical practice and future research are noted. The study offers insights into how safe, inclusive and informal science learning may influence a stronger sense of personal, social and emotional identity in disadvantaged youth.

2.2 Introduction

Loneliness, a universal yet stigmatised human experience, characterised by sad or aching feelings of emotional and social isolation (MacEvoy et al., 2011; Rokach, 2019), has received increasing research attention and political prominence in recent years. Prior to the Covid-19 pandemic, which forced people into isolation, loneliness had been described across the literature as an 'epidemic' and considered one of the greatest public health challenges of the 21st century (Brake, 2019; Royal College of Nursing, 2022; Zarei, 2021). In response, 2018 saw British Prime Minister, Theresa May, launch the Loneliness Strategy, through which the world's first Minister of Loneliness was appointed (British Broadcasting Company [BBC], 2018; Department of Digital, Culture, Media & Sport [DCMS], 2018). This was an attempt to inspire policy, reduce societal stigma, and open up the national conversation on loneliness, in the hope that people would feel more able to reach out for help.

Loneliness in Youth

Loneliness does not discriminate by ethnicity, gender, age, or background (Department of DCMS, 2018). However, studies have increasingly reported that young people are among the worst affected, contrary to the longstanding belief that the problem is specific to older generations (Lasgaard et al., 2016). In 2018, over 55,000 people aged 16 and over participated in a nationwide BBC Loneliness Experiment (BBC, 2018), which explored attitudes and personal experiences of loneliness. Results indicated that 16–24-year-olds not only experience loneliness more *often* than any other age group, but more *intensely*; a finding corroborated by the Community of Life Survey 2020/1 (Department of DCMS, 2021)[14].

[14]*People aged 16-24 were found to be twice as likely than people over the age of 65 to say that they "often" or "always" experience loneliness.*

While these statistics do not represent people under the age of 16, the scope of childhood loneliness is illuminated in the wider literature. Hards et al. (2021), for example, reported that children as young as five years old experience high levels of loneliness, especially those with pre-existing mental health difficulties or neurodevelopmental conditions.

The impact of loneliness on youth is of growing concern among researchers, who have consistently described it as a strong predictor of psychosocial difficulties, including peer rejection, victimisation, and low self-esteem (Heinrich & Gullone, 2006). Additionally, increased risk-taking behaviours, such as dropping out of school, alcoholism (Stickley et al., 2014), suicide attempts and self-injury (Macrynikola et al., 2018), have been reported. The scope of childhood loneliness is extensive, particularly given the recent impact of covid-19 (Ford et al., 2021; Viner et al., 2021), and is thus considered in greater detail in Appendix J.

Generally, such findings may be partially explained by cohort effects; younger people are more likely to have been exposed to conversations about mental health than previous generations, and thus may more readily report experiences of loneliness. However, the growing reports of loneliness in young people are compelling, consistent over time and across cultures, including the USA and Russia (Chatterjee, 2018; Stickley et al., 2014), Mexico (Jenkins et al., 2020), Europe (Cicognani et al., 2014), and Japan (Ozawa-de Silva, 2020).

Identity: A Core Determinant for Loneliness in Youth?

With no single or common cause of loneliness in younger populations, it is a challenging phenomenon to make sense of (Cherry, 2021). Loneliness in older generations is often a reaction to loss or declining physical health (Mushtaq et al., 2014; Novotney, 2019). However, there is no clear correlation between isolation and loneliness in younger

populations; many young people feel alone, cut off or distanced from others, even when they are surrounded by people and appear to be living full social lives (MacEvoy et al., 2011; Ozawa-de silva & Parsons, 2020). Many researchers have attempted to explain this, with some suggesting that adolescents feel loneliness more intensely because they are entering a significant life stage of discovering who they are (Goossens, 2006; Mental Health Foundation, 2021). Moreover, older generations are likely to have developed definite coping skills throughout their lifetime and, therefore, can adjust accordingly to change, loss, and solitude (Mushtaq et al., 2014). Adolescents, on the other hand, may lack such skills; they are still developing, socially and emotionally, during a time when being accepted and loved is of major importance to their developing sense of identity (Hosie, 2019).

The issue has been widely addressed with reference to classical theories, and the reorganisation of one's attachment system (Bowlby, 1969; Cicognani et al., 2014); that is, the evolving social needs, roles, and expectations that adolescents normatively encounter within different relationships. When transitioning from childhood into adolescence, peer relationships become more central for most (Arnett, 2018; Larson, 1999). While early experiences with parents and/or caregivers seem to be crucial for the development of general identity aspects, such as developing temperament and self-concept, the development of further, domain-specific aspects of identity, such as self-efficacy, may be influenced more by building 'out of family' relationships (Orth & Robins, 2019). The changing social expectations that come with these relationships can be difficult to satisfy, and as one tries to navigate their social world, the risk of loneliness can increase, which can be especially harmful for a person's developing sense of identity (Goossens, 2006; Heinrich & Gullone, 2006).

The significance of identity in peer relationships has become a focal point of recent research, which has defined 'peer connectedness' as a "psychological bond that people feel in relation to individuals and groups" (Haslam et al., 2017, p.1), and thus, the opposite of loneliness (Hare-Duke et al., 2019). Mitic et al. (2021) proposed an integrated model of peer connectedness in early adolescence, integrating individual affective components and environmental planes[15] to form one organised self. At the centre of this model, identity was found to be a core determinant of peer connectedness, in line with earlier research (Karcher et al., 2008; Stets & Burke, 2000). To that end, appraisals of social relationships seem to be critical in the experience of loneliness (The Mental Health Foundation, 2021; Ozawa-de silva & Parsons, 2020), in which identity formation appears to play a central role (Harter, 2015; Kaniušinytė et al., 2019; Wilson & Wilson, 2014).

Identity Construction in Adolescence: Theory & Context

The concept of identity is one of the most well researched in the social sciences (Cote & Levine, 2015). Historically, this was acknowledged as a matter of physical survival, dating back to Aristotle who observed how human beings benefit from being 'social animals'. However, over the centuries, physical health, survival and wellbeing has become recognised as being intricately connected to a person's psychological needs, which are contingent on one's interpersonal skills and ability to process their place in society. Generally, Erikson's (1950) psychosocial theory of development is credited as being the first to focus on the meaning of identity, in which adolescence is depicted as the preeminent stage for identity formation; a stage in which loneliness is typical (Coleman & Hendry, 1999; Lavoie, 1994).

[15] *An integration of social and emotional skills, specific behaviours, and general perceptions of wellbeing, that are further influenced by peer, family and community settings.*

During this stage, people typically start to let go of childhood identifications and lay the groundwork for transitioning to adult life, commitments and relationships.

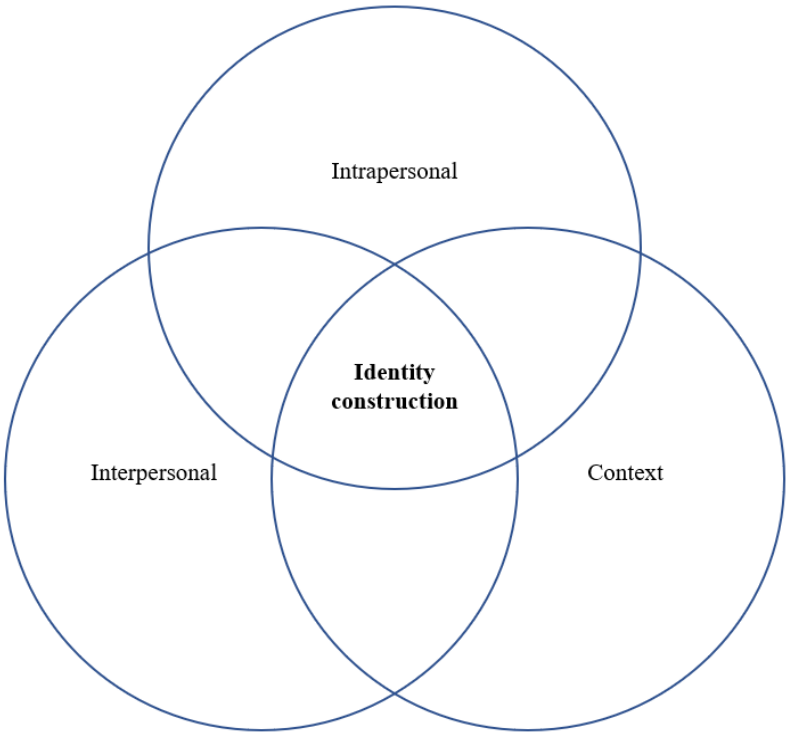
Though Erikson (1950) acknowledged the role of social and cultural foundations in identity development, many of the traditional identity theories have attracted criticism over the years for supporting a limited view of human development. These theories tend to emphasise the structurally defined processes occurring within the typically developing individual (Schachter & Galliher, 2018; Sneed et al., 2006), thereby neglecting how identity may be constructed for those who encounter non-normative experiences in their young life. Such experiences may impact their developing sense of self, and ability to find meaning in their world and relationships (Kroger, 2006). For example, those born to a background of poverty or oppression may not encounter developmental stages at the same time or in the same way as those with a less challenging background. Though research in this area is limited, poverty and economic disadvantage have been linked to lower levels of self-identity in young people and are associated with negative outcomes such as social exclusion and, indeed, loneliness (Department of DCMS, 2021; Gerdhart, 2015; Phillips & Pittman, 2003; To, 2016).

Furthermore, traditional theories tend to conceptualise identity formation as an individualised affair (Schachter & Ventura, 2008). Little attention has been given to understanding the contextual facilitators of identity; yet, in reality, people are influenced by a range of contexts. In contrast, Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory accounts for the multiple contexts in which children undergo significant developmental changes, from their immediate surrounding environment or 'microsystem' (e.g., family, peers), to broader sociocultural contexts. Many researchers have since explored identity construction in context (Good & Willoughby, 2007; Laughland-Booÿ, et al., 2018; Wicks et al., 2019). However, for

the purpose of the current study, the identity construction process will be conceptualised and explored through the lens of Duerden et al's (2012) multidimensional framework. This proposed that identity construction is facilitated by three interrelated antecedents: intrapersonal, interpersonal, and contextual factors, as depicted in Figure 2.1, and described below.

Figure 2.1

Identity Construction Ven Diagram



Note. The antecedents of identity construction (Duerden et al., 2012).

Intrapersonal

The intrapersonal aspect of identity construction harnesses how the transition into adolescence is a result of the physical, emotional and mental changes associated with puberty

and exposure to new environments and opportunities (Brinthaupt & Lipka, 2002). These changes appear to serve as the genesis for identity formation, marking a time that prompts life's big, existential questions, such as "*who am I?*" and "*who will I become?"*

Identity construction tends to look very different between young people depending on the stage of cognitive and emotional development they are at. By early adolescence, between ages 10-14 (World Health Organisation, 2019), people are able to develop personal abstractions (e.g., "I'm a loner", or "I'm kind to others"), and the way they relate to their personal identity tends to be context specific. By middle adolescence (15-17 years), peer feedback becomes more meaningful. However, it is not until the later stages of adolescence (15-19 years) that one's cognitive ability to internalise values and beliefs, as opposed to seeking validation from others, occurs.

Interpersonal

The interpersonal aspect accounts for the impact of significant others, including family and peers, which seems to serve as a catalyst for identity formation. Schachter and Ventura (2008) introduced the concept of 'identity agents' to describe individuals who actively interact with young people with the intention of participating in their identity development, and who mediate wider social influences on identity construction. This highlights an important shift in the mainstream literature, which historically portrayed adolescents as the sole reflective agents in their identity development. Now, much of the literature cultivates a holistic view of identity developing through bidirectional interactions between the individual and their surrounding social contexts (Duerden et al., 2012).

Context

Limited research has focused on the impact of social contexts on a young person's identity, and fewer attempts have been made to explore the impact of specific environmental settings or interventions intentionally designed to promote identity construction (Schwartz et al., 2005). Some have attempted to address this gap, including Groff and Kleiber (2001), who explored participant experiences of attending an adapted sports programme for adolescents with physical disabilities. Findings indicated that the opportunity to express their "true" selves, develop skills and interact with others with disabilities facilitated emotional expression and exploration of identity alternatives, with participants feeling less defined by their limitations. Further, Duerden et al. (2012) reported qualitative findings attesting to the benefits of recreational programmes specifically designed to promote identity construction.

These studies have offered some initial qualitative insights into the impact of intentionally designed contexts on identity construction, which may also afford young people opportunities to foster social relationships, by collaborating in interactive and experiential activities across different settings. Moreover, opportunities for informal learning outside of school settings have also been found to help young people across cultures to develop a sense of achievement, connectedness and belonging, thus potentially strengthening their personal and social identity and reducing feelings of loneliness (Cicognani et al., 2014; Evans, 2007; Kawagley, 1999; To, '16).

The Research Context

The literature presented hitherto highlights a need for increased understanding of how specific contexts influence identity formation. A related initiative is the UK wide Curiosity Project, which was launched in 2019; a partnership between two global charity foundations:

BBC Children in Need and Wellcome. This partnership was born from the shared vision of enhancing the lives of children and young people experiencing disadvantage throughout the UK, via participation in informal science learning programmes. One such programme is Science4Friends, a rolling cycle of eight, weekly interactive workshops designed to support young people in exploring the science behind emotions. The aim of these workshops is to build participants' confidence, peer connectedness, and thus, target loneliness. Those who attend are often young people at greater risk of loneliness due to disadvantage.

The limited literature concerning this topic refers to those born into economic disadvantage or poverty; however, for the purpose of the current study, disadvantage was considered a broad and relative experience. The young people attending the workshops face a range of disadvantage, including a history of difficult family relationships or family breakdown, or living in lower socioeconomic status households. Moreover, some may be experiencing, or have experienced, a history of adverse childhood experiences (ACEs), being in the care system, social isolation, discrimination, school exclusion or failure, low self-esteem, mental or physical health difficulties, or being a young carer to a parent or guardian with mental or physical health difficulties. Additionally, many of the attendees would have received diagnoses of neurodevelopmental conditions, such as autism spectrum disorder (ASD) or attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). Irrespective of background, Science4Friends sets out to provide a safe and nurturing environment for young people to learn, build interpersonal skills, and exercise their creativity and critical thinking. Further details on the content delivered in each workshop cycle is presented in Appendix K.

Rationale & Aim

The extant literature highlights that both feelings of loneliness and identity concerns are of utmost importance to the experiences of young people. However, despite the serious

implications of loneliness on health outcomes, little is known about youth who are at risk of loneliness due to coming from disadvantaged backgrounds, and limited research attention has been given to the antecedents and contexts that may facilitate identity construction. Previous research by Turner (2019) explored loneliness in disadvantaged youth who had participated in community group programmes, through which a sense of self-identity was found to be a core component in building peer relationships, corroborating Mitic et al.'s (2021) findings. However, to date, there are no *known* studies pertaining to how participating in contexts designed to reduce loneliness might influence identity development, particularly in those from disadvantaged backgrounds. Thus, the aim of this research was to answer the following research question:

> How do young people from disadvantaged backgrounds construct a sense of identity after participating in informal learning activities based on the science of emotions, that were designed to reduce loneliness?

2.3 Method

A qualitative methodology was considered to be the most appropriate for addressing the research question and exploring sensitive concepts (Black, 1994). It also allowed the researcher to pursue a rich and detailed inquiry into how young people make sense of their experiences. Qualitative approaches are characterised by an interest in the process of 'finding out'; treating research as more of an idiographic, exploratory approach, as opposed to a replicable experiment (Willig, 2008).

Epistemological Statement

The research was conducted from a critical realist ontology, within a broadly contextualist framework. That is, the researcher did not assume that there is one, universal truth to be found. Instead, they assumed that an accessible reality exists, but that one cannot know another's reality with certainty, and representations of this can vary and be shaped by individual psychological processes, such as perception, consciousness, and the context in which people are placed (Coyle, 2016).

Participants

Recruitment

Participants were recruited from four, respective eight-week workshop cycles, which took place across three educational and/or community settings, or 'research sites', between October 2021 and June 2022. Overall, 21 young people had regularly attended a workshop

and were invited to participate in the research. The research sites, described in Table 2.1, were located in a suburb within one of the top 10 more socially deprived areas in the UK (Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government, 2019), and documented to feature considerable levels of poverty, family breakdown and domestic abuse.

Table 2.1

Research Sites

Site	Context	Description
1	Educational	A large comprehensive school committed to providing a safe, inclusive space for vulnerable students, including refugees and unaccompanied asylum seeking children (UASC). These could be children who have troubles at home or are seeking sanctuary. The school's Pastoral Manager identified students who might benefit from the workshops.
2	Community	A youth hub that provides a safe space to speak to professionals about various topics: mental health, self-esteem, sexuality, gender, relationships, and sexual health. The hub also offers mentoring and counselling, signposting for addictions, and support with education.
3	Community	A youth centre which provides after school sessions. These include recreational activities and learning opportunities for children living with disabilities, complex needs, mental health difficulties, or young carer responsibilities. Attendees may also have experienced social and school exclusion, ACEs, substance misuse problems, or histories of criminal involvement.

Sample

An opportunistic, heterogenous sample of seven young people were recruited, aged 12-17 years old, indicating a research response rate of 33%. While there are no hard and fast

rules for sampling in qualitative research, this sample size was justified by Braun and Clarke (2013), who recommend a small to moderate sample of 6-10 participants when conducting face-to-face interviews. This is large enough to credibly demonstrate patterns across a data set, but small enough to retain focus on individual experiences.

Participants took part of their own volition and were recruited on the basis that they had taken part in the Science4Friends workshops. Of the four participants recruited from the first research site (school), two were accessing free school meals, which are based on low family income, and/or their family had been referred to their local foodbank. A breakdown of participant demographics, background, and reason for workshop participation is outlined in Table 2.2.

Table 2.2

Participant Demographics

Pseudonym	Gender Identification	Age	Ethnicity	Religion	Areas of Disadvantage	Reason for Group Referral	Research Site
Nas	Male	12	Other Pakistani	Muslim	Living with parent with a diagnosed mental health difficulty.	Bullied prior to attending workshops. Identified as someone who was being discriminated at school and might benefit from developing peer connections.	1
Joshi	Male	12	White British	Christian	Not reported.	Identified as someone who was socially isolated and may benefit from the workshops.	1
Mo	Male	13	Black British	Christian	Living in low-income, single parent household; accessing free school meals and local foodbank.	Identified as someone who was “extremely introverted”, socially isolated and might benefit from the workshops. Currently awaiting autism assessment.	1
Daniel	Male	12	White British	Christadelphian	Living in low-income household; accessing free school meals. Suspected “emotional neglect” at home.	Identified as someone who was socially isolated/ withdrawn and may benefit from forging peer connections.	1

Pseudonym	Gender Identification	Age	Ethnicity	Religion	Areas of Disadvantage	Reason for Group Referral	Research Site
Ruth	Non-binary	17	White British	Agnostic	Dropped out of school at 13. Living with a disability and identifies as neurodivergent.	Lonely and lacking social connections.	2
Rose	Transgender female	17	White British	Eclectic; believes in some sort of deity and God but outside the remit of mainstream religion.	Middle class background. Parents divorced when eight years old. Reports struggling with loneliness ever since.	Identifies as lonely and struggles to relate to others. Currently seeking an autism diagnosis.	2
Storm	Non-binary	13	White Irish	Atheist	Not reported.	Felt alone before the workshops and wanted to try something new.	3

Procedure & Ethical Approval

Once ethical approval had been obtained from the University Ethics Committee (Appendix L), the researcher liaised with a research associate who facilitated the 'Science4Friends' workshops. The research associate helped to identify potential participants, before gauging their interest and ensuring they had capacity to understand the study. The researcher attended two sessions within each workshop cycle; the first time was to introduce themselves, help out with the activities, and verbally promote the study, and the next was to conduct the interviews[16]. The study and its purpose were explained in simple language, so that an informed choice about participating could be made. Information sheets were then given to the young people who had expressed an interest (appendix M), and to their parents or guardians (appendix N). After communicating with the first research site, it was requested that the parent/guardian information sheet be condensed to be more accessible for its intended audience (Appendix O). Those who were still interested after reading the information or having it read to them, provided their assent to take part (Appendix P). Written, informed parental consent was also required for participants who were under the age of 16 (Appendix Q). Once the respective workshops had come to an end and consent forms returned, interview slots were allocated. Each participant was gifted a £10 gift voucher to compensate them for their time.

For each interview, a private space where the participant would not be interrupted, was identified in advance of the interviews by research site staff (e.g., teachers, youth workers). Before each interview, the researcher reminded participants of the study rationale and asked if they still wished to participate.

[16]*The researcher had no pre-existing relationship to any of the participants (or potential participants) and declared no conflict of interests.*

Data Collection

Data were collected via a semi-structured interview design, broadly following a pre-defined interview schedule containing a series of open-ended questions (Appendix R). Interview questions were designed to explore participants' perceptions regarding their identity after attending the Science4Friends workshops. They also reflected Duerden et al's (2012) framework insofar as being divided into sections that aimed to elicit responses around intrapersonal, contextual, and interpersonal factors.

Questions were reviewed by the research support team, to ensure that they accurately reflected the research question, and would be appropriate for capturing meaning and experiences. Next, the questions were piloted on two young people who were known to the researcher, aged 11 and 14 years old, respectively. Pilot interviews allowed the researcher to check that the questions were understandable for the intended age group, and enabled feedback to ensure face validity.

Participant interviews took place across the research sites and lasted between 26-36 minutes. A range of creative materials were made available, including paper and colouring pens, to enable young people to fully express their opinions. The researcher would then ask them about what they were drawing and what it meant to them, and this would serve as their response to the question. Interviews were recorded using a university-owned, password protected dictaphone.

Once interviews had been audio recorded, they were transcribed verbatim, alongside a reflective diary to document initial thoughts and highlight any preconceived biases or assumptions. Additionally, a research intern who sat in on the interviews made notes of their observations. The researcher then listened to the recordings one more time and checked the

transcripts for accuracy, changing all identifying information in the process and replacing names with pseudonyms that participants had chosen for themselves. Once the transcripts had been checked and anonymised, they underwent reflexive thematic analysis (RTA).

Analysis

RTA fits well with the chosen method of data collection and research question due to its emphasis on context-bound meaning-making (Braun & Clarke, 2019), while also capturing both individual perspectives *and* patterns of shared meaning across a heterogenous group. Another reason for choosing this methodology rests on its inductive nature and allegiance to theoretical knowingness. In other words, the researcher was fully aware of the theoretical assumptions informing their use of RTA, but their reasoning during analysis began with the data and participants' perspectives, and this was treated in a 'bottom-up' way that eventually moved up to the theoretical level. This allowed for more flexibility in interpretations (Sparkes & Smith, 2014), contrasting the more experimental methods that tend to start with theory and hypothesis testing.

In line with Braun and Clarke's (2006; 2013) recommendations for thematic analysis (TA), six steps were broadly followed, building from data familiarisation, through to coding and theme development (see Table 2.3). However, it is important to note that with this approach, reflexivity and engagement are prioritised over procedure, and analysis is not always linear. Overlap between steps is likely, and the generating of codes and themes was therefore performed as a recursive and fluid process that evolved as the analysis progressed. To facilitate transparency, an account of how the researcher personally approached each step and ensured reflexivity is detailed in Appendix S, and partially portrayed in Figure 2.2. Extracts from the coding process are presented in Appendix T, and the subsequently

developed thematic ‘maps’ in Appendix U.

Table 2.3

Reflexive Thematic Analysis (RTA) Steps

Step	Description	Example
1. Data familiarisation	Reading and re-reading the data and noting down initial ideas.	Carrying out interviews, followed by making notes of any observations (e.g., nonverbal cues). The researcher listened to the interview twice, the first time was to actively listen; the second time was to transcribe. The transcribed interview was read repeatedly to facilitate data immersion. Reflections were noted in the left-hand column (see Appendix U).
2. Generating initial codes	Systematically coding patterns of meaning across the data that might be relevant to addressing the research question. The aim is to summarise, no reduce the data; a code should be succinct but give enough information that if the raw data were removed, it would convey the same meaning.	Reading through the transcripts and, line by line, noting any patterns that were felt to be meaningful in specific words or phrases (codes). These were colour-coded and noted in two right-hand columns: one for semantic and one for latent codes. This led to the generation of 448 preliminary codes, which were categorised into ‘data domains’. Alongside this, the researcher began to draw diagrams to explore ideas within the data.
3. Generating initial themes	Organising codes into potential themes, collating all data relevant to each theme. Themes are also thought of as ‘creative stories’, produced at the intersection of the researcher’s theoretical assumptions, analytical skills, and the data set itself.	Codes were redefined within their data domains, leading to 147 iterations of the preliminary codes. Similar codes were developed into initial themes and subthemes, creating thematic ‘maps’ (Appendix V) to illustrate her thought process and develop ideas about how the identified patterns related to each other. Initially, seven provisional themes and eight subthemes were identified.

Step	Description	Example
4. Reviewing potential themes	Checking if the themes made sense in relation to the coded data extracts (Level 1 analysis), and the entire dataset (transcripts; Level 2 analysis). This was supported by creating thematic 'maps' of the analysis, to illustrate relationships within the data.	Repeatedly revisiting the transcripts to explore the 'fit' between provisional themes and the meaning expressed by participants, and to ensure the analysis remained grounded in the raw data. This also allowed the researcher to check important information had not been missed through the coding process.
5. Defining & naming themes	Continued analysis to refine each theme, and the overall story being told by the analysis, developing clear definitions and names for themes.	The researcher developed the thematic maps alongside revisiting the transcripts, which helped to refine theme ideas and establish the story she felt was being told by each theme. Data extracts that were felt to be compelling and relevant to the research question were selected to support each theme. The researcher then consulted her supervisor to sense check her ideas. Three final themes and four subthemes were identified.
6. Write-up	Selecting compelling extract examples to present in the final report. This means a final analysis of selected extracts, relating back to the research question and literature.	The analysis was presented using both analytic and illustrative approaches; some data extracts were presented alongside the researcher's analytic narrative, while others were not. This step also involved re-engaging with the previous literature and pulling out insights from the analysis that supported or deviated from it.

Note. Developed from Braun & Clarke (2006; 2013; 2019).

Figure 2.2

Sample of Researcher's Approach to Reflexive Thematic Analysis (RTA)

> I aimed to capture the diversity of perspectives contained within the data, while also identifying general patterns of meaning. At first, I focused on codes at the semantic level, before going back to the beginning of each transcript to focus on constructing deeper, more interpretative (latent) codes. However, over time these processes merged into one and both levels of coding were interpreted during the same read through.
>
> Due to the data being collected over a protracted period of time, and the quantity of data (42,523 words), this was a time-consuming, back and forth process, which meant needing to take a step back from time to time. This allowed me to pause and think about the story being told, before revisiting the transcripts with a refreshed focus. I intended to stay as close to semantic level meanings at first, in order to truly capture the children's voices, but over time, more latent codes were generated, and most of the codes became more like sentences than succinct labels. This was an independent process, but it was helpful at times to consult my supervisor and the research support team to discuss the meanings I had interpreted from the transcripts.

Ensuring Quality & Reflexivity

To enhance credibility of the analysis, consultation was provided through the research support team, comprising the researcher and other qualitative researchers at the university. This support came via weekly RTA workshops over the course of six months, and individual meetings between the researcher and her peers, both of which involved discussions around the development of codes and themes. Notwithstanding this, good quality RTA is not about achieving reliable coding or consensus between coders, as is typically seen with traditional TA approaches[17] (Braun & Clarke, 2019; Byrne, 2021). As its name suggests, RTA is more about the researcher's reflective, active and thoughtful engagement with the data and the analytic process (Braun & Clarke, 2019). That said, the group space was felt to be beneficial

[17]*Including coding reliability TA and codebook approaches.*

for enabling reflexive practice, by sense-checking ideas, exploring multiple interpretations of the data and highlighting blind spots.

Alongside the analysis, the researcher kept a reflective diary. As a Caucasian female in her mid-thirties, born to a middle-class family, she was mindful of her privilege and social GRRAAACCEEESSS[18] (e.g., Burnham, 1993; 2012), and how she might be perceived by children from more deprived backgrounds, likely to have ACEs. Further, with pre-existing experience and interests in working with children in a therapeutic capacity, the diary was used to monitor any strong feelings, thoughts or biases that came up, to help the researcher recognise when she might be inadvertently shifting into therapist mode.

[18]*Gender, Race, Religion, Age, Ability, Appearance, Class, Culture, Ethnicity, Education, Employability, Sexuality, Sexual Orientation & Spirituality.*

2.4 Results

The findings represent the perspectives and experiences of a diverse sample of participants, each of whom came with their own unique circumstances and story to tell. Nevertheless, there were a number of commonalities regarding the meaning they attached to these experiences, and in how they constructed a sense of identity following their participation in the Science4Friends programme. The analysis resulted in three overarching themes, from which four subthemes were developed (Table 2.4).

Table 2.4

Final Themes

Themes	Subthemes	Participants Voicing Themes
A Strengthened Sense of Identity Through Embracing Difference	Challenging the Status Quo	'Joshi', 'Ruth', 'Rose', 'Storm'
Who I am Depends on the Context I am in	Uncovering a Social Identity	'Nas', 'Joshi', 'Daniel', 'Ruth, 'Rose, ;Storm'
	Family Kinship	'Nas', 'Joshi', 'Mo', 'Rose', 'Storm'
	Barriers to Expressing Identity	'Nas', 'Mo', 'Storm'
A More Emotionally Attuned Self		'Nas', 'Joshi', 'Mo', 'Daniel', 'Ruth', 'Rose', 'Storm'

A Strengthened Sense of Identity Through Embracing Difference

Participants' narratives about difference led to the interpretation of one subtheme: *Challenging the Status Quo*.

The majority of participants described feeling isolated prior to the workshops, due to feeling different to others. For some, this was due to perceiving themselves as having unusual interests for someone their age or being "just a bit odd" ('Joshi', 12), while others seemed less confident in their assertions: "I can tell there's something different… I'm not sure what the difference is" ('Mo', 13). Others had specific ideas as to why; 'Rose' (17) attributed a felt "disconnect" to being transgender, and thus having a "very different experience of being" to her peers. She was also awaiting an autism diagnosis at the time of interviewing and referred to feeling sensory overload in group spaces. Taken together, these initial identifiers made it difficult for 'Rose' to relate to others. Others referenced their ethnic and religious identities in their constructions of difference:

> I felt different because of my ethnicity... in the whole school, I stick out like a sore thumb. Not in a bad way, but... there's me and a few other people... Sometimes I felt a bit awkward. When, they're like talking about their religion… [just] something in the back of my mind. ('Daniel', 12).

Notwithstanding these feelings, three participants alluded to feeling stronger in the way they construct their identity after participating in the workshops, which appeared to enable them to embrace their differences:

> It's made it, the way I feel about myself, stronger… it's made me feel better about the way I describe myself. … I used to feel like I was weird – but now I'm just like, everyone's weird in their own way! ... I also feel good about myself… I mean, it's good to have a place where you can just be yourself… ('Joshi', 12).

This strengthened sense of identity appeared to have been cultivated through being in an accepting group space; whereas other, perhaps more formal learning contexts may have instilled the belief that he had to conceal the "weird" parts of himself.

In a similar vein, ‘Ruth’ (17) appeared to embrace their differences in ability: "…my disabilities affect my personality a lot, but I think outside of that I try to be energetic…". Here, ‘Ruth’ implies that their identity has been shaped, but not hindered by, their disabilities; they acknowledge what makes them different, but does not feel limited by this. This was reportedly made “easier” by finding a place to connect with new friends who were also neurodivergent, which made them feel more “happy” and “confident”.

Additionally, ‘Rose’ (17) speculated that after attending the workshops, her peers might better understand her difference and how she is socially: “[they might]… get the nuance a bit more." It was also inferred that, though she does not generally experience much enjoyment within social contexts, this might have been countered by the learning aspect of the workshops, when she explained: “…I like learning and becoming more ‘you’.” This implies that, while ‘Rose’ struggled to construct a *social* identity, she was able to embrace her difference through the context of informal learning, which seemed to strengthen her sense of *personal* identity.

Challenging the Status Quo

To a lesser degree, some participants constructed an identity that went against the life path that might have been expected of them, from gender identification to their religious and educational choices. For example. ‘Storm’ (13) talked about how they have always attended a catholic school, but now identify as an atheist. They also recalled questioning the educational system from a young age: “…I just [did] like a Windows restart in my sleep… I woke up and was like *“is there any meaning to life?”*...” The metaphor of a Windows restart implied that ‘Storm’ felt they had been reprogrammed to start questioning their educational and religious

identity, and perhaps what was expected of them. ‘Ruth’ (17) similarly started to question their educational path:

> I dropped out of high school in year nine… I’m mostly doing art and music at the moment, because my mom’s an artist … I haven’t just dropped out ‘just because’, it’s ‘cause I’m able to… I don’t really need an education.

For these participants, it seemed as though they placed importance on exercising their choice about the systems they were raised in. ‘Rose’ (17) connected to this idea at a deeper level as she opened up about believing that knowledge was not about objective learning, but something bigger, learning about the world through “doing and discussion”.

Who I am Depends on the Context I am in

Each participant talked about who they were in the context of different relationships and settings, which led to the interpretation of three subthemes: (i) *Uncovering a Social Identity*, (ii) *Family Kinship*, and (iii) *Barriers to Expressing Identity*.

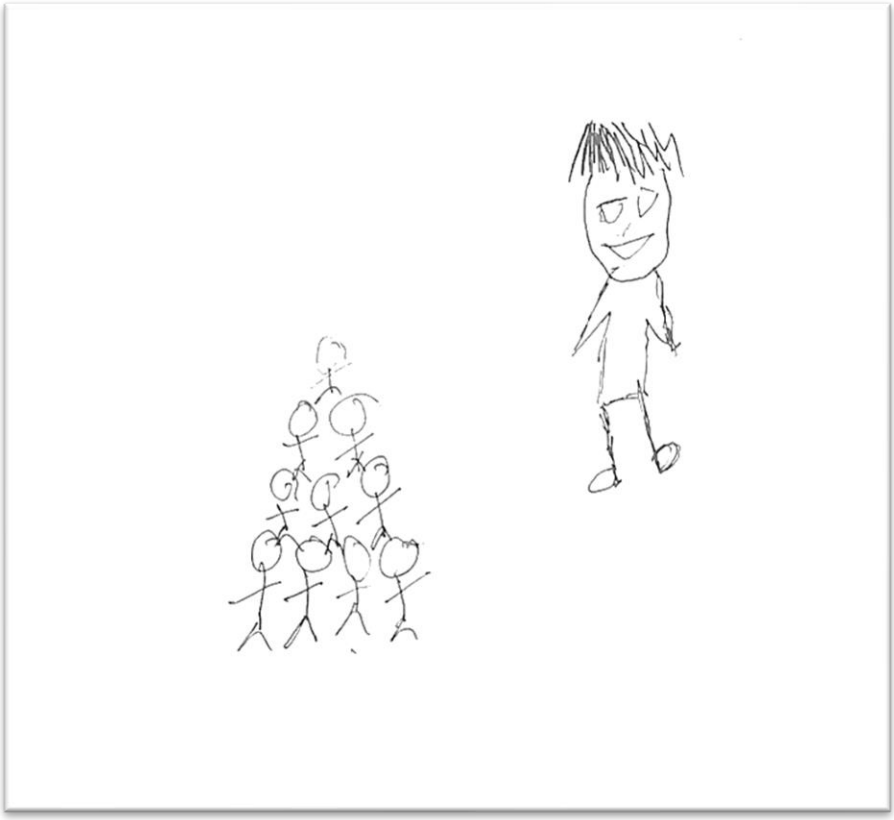
Uncovering a Social Identity

The uncovering of a social identity seemed to occur in participants who had initially felt disconnected, lonely, or anxious, only to discover their more sociable sides through engaging in competitive or team-based activities and building peer connections. With this in mind, it appeared as if participants’ social identity developed along a time continuum, from disconnected to connected. For example, ‘Nas’ (12) recalled being “quiet” and “sad” before the workshops, opening up about his experiences of being bullied by peers. After making new friends, however, he said he had become more “talkative”. When asked what came to mind when he thought about the workshops, ‘Nas’ began to draw a picture (Figure 2.3) and joked

that he was drawing his favourite ‘YouTuber’. However, it felt like the image was depicting himself as someone who once felt isolated from groups of people, and he was using humour to deflect from speaking about his sadder times. As he continued to draw, he talked about the activities he and his peers enjoyed within the group, before sharing what he had enjoyed the most: “…being with people, and that’s what I’m drawing”; a sentiment echoed across all participant accounts.

Figure 2.3

‘Nas’ Being with People



Correspondingly, while ‘Joshi’ did not recall feeling lonely prior to taking part in the workshops, he had been referred by teachers who perceived him as being socially isolated, and he had spoken of how he could see himself as being “quite solitary” in future. Moreover,

the meaning he attached to building strong peer connections within the group seemed to be a new experience to him. Reflecting on the friendships he had made, 'Joshi' (12) shared: "I feel good about myself and, to know that people *actually* enjoy spending time with me…". The use and emphasis of the word 'actually' implied that 'Joshi' was taken aback by the idea that people wish to be in his company, and hints at how meaningful these connections are to him. Corroborating this, he later explained: "…when I'm with a group of people that I really, like, know and stuff, I feel, at home? ... Safe…", suggesting that perhaps he had lacked safe connections prior to the workshops, perhaps explaining why he portrayed a more solitary persona to begin with.

'Ruth' and 'Rose' alluded to a lack of peer connections before attending the workshops, with 'Ruth' in particular explaining: "I didn't really have as many people in my life"; an issue likely compounded by having dropped out of school. The opportunity to connect with like-minded peers on a regular basis led 'Ruth' (17) to feel:

> Very, very happy… very confident… It's a very new thing. Like, very, very new... I've always thought I've been shy, like my whole life until like, these new friends that I've got … This [group] gave me a really, really nice opportunity to have something to say.

This newfound confidence was shared among participants, and most attributed this to having a small group in which they could open up about more intimate, meaningful subjects, thus giving them a voice. The importance of talking and being heard was also a recurring theme. For example, after reporting that she was "drifting away from people", 'Rose' (17) referred to a more social side that had evolved through talking about shared experiences and interests within the group. When learning that someone she might not have usually spoken to had been bullied in the past, she recalled:

> …just fleshing out that discussion, because um, [we're] very different people…, but we've had very similar experiences. So… when we actually get talking, it's nice to feel that relation… I've talked to him a lot more and feel like I get him a lot more.

This feeling of relatedness continued beyond the workshops, causing her to care more about certain peers and feel more connected.

Furthermore, some participants implied a 'hidden self', in the sense that people in other contexts, namely school, did not see their true self. 'Joshi' and 'Daniel' both implied that they could not be themselves at school. Similarly, 'Storm' (13) explained that they change "all the time", depending on who they are with, but they have always been quiet at school:

> Me, here, and like back home and with my friends is completely different from me in class… I do not talk in class at all… I'm quite bad at just going up to someone and becoming friends... [they] don't know what I'm actually like...

After attending the workshops, however, 'Storm' felt they had become "more sociable" and discovered that they enjoyed participating in competitive activities; a change they felt was for the better.

Family Kinship

When asked to describe themselves, most participants spoke about their role within the family, their closeness to certain family members, and how they were similar or different to their family. 'Nas' and 'Mo' both gave the impression of a good, protective older brother, citing their relationships to their younger siblings as being the closest. 'Nas' (12) added that spending time with his family made him feel better about himself, despite feeling like his sporting preferences set him apart from the rest of his family: "We always play football…

[but] the thing is, I support a whole different team than my family". Though a seemingly trivial difference, it seemed like 'Nas' attached a lot of meaning to who he was in the context of his family connections, which came across when he listed every family member he felt connected to. He later voiced his wishes to remain connected to his family culture, by visiting Pakistan when he is older.

Both 'Joshi' and 'Storm' referred to how they were similar to their family, leading 'Storm' (13) to state: "I'm becoming more and more my dad as the years – actually, months go by." 'Joshi' in particular constructed an identity that was shaped by the interests he shared with his father and grandfather; the same interests that made him feel different from his peers.

> Model trains! Me and my papa both love them... I build the tracks… You wouldn't usually think of a 12-year-old boy… like, properly building stuff. I can only think of one or two kids that have been featured in 'Railway Modeller'… the rest of them are like 30!

As with previous themes, *Family Kinship* was interpreted as reflecting a continuum of experiences, from shared interests and the close bonds that are known to be crucial for identity development, to an absence of these relationships. For example, 'Rose' (17) talked about childhood experiences and her parents divorcing when she was eight years old. From this point, she described difficulties with finding herself, in the context of living in what she described as "not the best family situation". When she came out as transgender, this was not well received by her family, which furthered her feelings of loneliness before attending the workshops. These early family experiences likely influenced how 'Rose' constructs her identity in the present, which is as a person who is yet to find her 'people', and who wishes to gain a deeper understanding of the meaning of life by studying philosophy in future.

Barriers to Expressing Identity

Another context in which participants constructed their identity, separate from the workshops and other contexts, was within the interview space itself; a place where they could verbalise who they were. The researcher then noted the *way* participants voiced their perspectives, including nonverbal cues and perceived defences, which felt especially meaningful for those who struggled to articulate verbal responses.

For instance, 'Mo' (13) presented as introverted throughout his interview and seemed unable to portray a sense of identity, answering most questions with "I'm not sure". When asked what words he would use to describe himself, he said "I would use 'unsure' as one of the words… a person". This literal response suggested that not only was he unsure about how to talk about himself, but he was generally unsure of himself as a person, including his personality traits, relationships, and future hopes. Notwithstanding this, at the end of his interview, without prompting, 'Mo' felt it was important to disclose: "I want to say, I'm not really good at making eye contact with people... like right now." This was something the researcher had noticed, but had not realised that 'Mo' too, was aware of, indicating more self-awareness than had been expressed in words. It was also inferred that he might have shared this because he wanted some aspect of his identity, and his communication style, to be understood after all.

Another way in which participants communicated was with self-deprecation and using avoidance to deflect from talking about more emotive subjects. For example, when asked how his friends might describe him, 'Nas' said: "One of them might say I'm annoying. The thing is, I agree with that." This was not discussed further, but it was felt that 'Nas' used humour as a defence mechanism at several points throughout the interview. Further, before he broached his past experiences of being bullied, he repeatedly stated that he did not have a

good memory and could not remember why he had been referred to the workshops. However, with time to sit with his response, he corrected himself: "Yeah I do know… I was getting bullied, and he [the pastoral manager] told me to go." 'Daniel' (12) also came across as self-deprecating in his self-identity narratives; however, this seemed to be less a form of humour and more his negative self-perception. This was interpreted through comments such as: "…my parents say I'm quite clever, but I guess that's what parents say".

In sum, while participants offered many insights into who they were in different contexts, covering the '*who*', the '*where*', the '*why*' and the '*what*', this subtheme addresses the question of '*how*' they constructed their identity after attending the workshops, acknowledging the nuances in their responses.

A More Emotionally Attuned Self

A unanimous finding across participant accounts was that learning about the science of emotions influenced a deeper understanding of themselves and others, from recognising the different *types* of emotion that can arise in different situations, to feeling better able to *manage* and *express* these. 'Joshi', 'Ruth', and 'Storm' each voiced their surprise at learning about the range of emotions one can experience and how these can present differently between individuals:

> There's a lot more than I thought… more, like, subcategories of bad. Not just like, sad, or annoyed … I have found that I'm a lot more aware… instead of just being confused when I can't tell people are like, confused, excited, or… the weird halfway ones that aren't quite sad or happy. ('Ruth', 17).

For ‘Ruth’, this learning seemed to bring a sense of perspective of how others might express different emotions. Similarly, ‘Daniel’ spoke of how he understood emotions more now and was more aware of how his words and actions may influence how others perceive him.

‘Nas’ talked about how his learning went beyond the understanding of emotions, but alongside his developing peer connections, enabled him to communicate his feelings. Reflecting on how he would have managed his emotions prior to the workshops, he explained:

> It was bad for me because I wasn’t able to, like, express my feelings... So if I was feeling sad, I wouldn’t – everyone wouldn’t be able to tell. [Now] I can show my emotions… I can show people if I’m sad now. (‘Nas’, 12).

As alluded to previously, it was felt among participants that the workshops offered a safe, accepting space, which may have enabled ‘Nas’ to express more difficult feelings. ‘Ruth’ added that, outside of the group, too many young people trivialise conversations about emotions and mental health, often coping with the topic by using humour. However, the structure and informal nature of the workshops afforded a space where feelings and experiences could be shared seriously, and participants knew that they would be understood. This implied a sense of unity and togetherness when sharing emotions, that most had not experienced previously. Reflecting on conversations about how the brain works and their understanding of where these emotions come from, ‘Ruth’ shared: “I can see I feel happier”, suggesting that engaging in activities that promote emotional awareness may also improve emotional wellbeing. Similarly, ‘Daniel’ (12) referred to how he felt “a bit more confident, in everything”, after the workshops, while ‘Mo’ (13) verbalised an awareness of how to have “good mental health” by talking and investing in the “things that make us happy”.

‘Rose’ reflected on how it was helpful to talk about the fight-flight response and thereby have her emotional reactions normalised. She recalled: “I remember quite vividly… how the emotional response works… the explosiveness of it, of just how fast it can act”. She then explained how this could help her to accept her own emotions:

> …they’re outside of your control, but it’s what you do with them… It’s good to acknowledge that they’re going to come, they’re going to go, but… it is a waste of your time to try and suppress them... (‘Rose’, 17).

This hinted once more at ‘Rose’s developing personal identity, as she became more accepting of her emotional side and the ebb and flow of different feelings that were outside of her control. Overall, learning about the science of emotions was found to be a compelling factor underpinning the development of a more emotionally attuned identity for all participants.

2.5 Discussion

Summary of Findings

The present study aimed to understand how young people from disadvantaged backgrounds construct a sense of identity after participating in an informal learning programme, specifically designed to reduce loneliness. RTA led to the interpretation of three overarching themes: *A Strengthened Sense of Identity Through Embracing Difference*, *Who I am Depends on the Context I am in*, and *A More Emotionally Attuned Self*. These comprised four subthemes, each of which detailed the shared and differing experiences of participants (see Table 2.4). The findings indicated that informal learning programmes may influence the construction of more social, emotional and personal identities; taken together, these contribute to a whole identity that celebrates difference.

Connection to Existing Theory & Research

The overarching themes are discussed in the context of existing theory and research, considering similarities, differences, and the generation of any new insights into the population of interest.

A Strengthened Sense of Identity Through Embracing Difference

Most participants felt, or were perceived as being, socially isolated before the workshops, which was largely attributed to their feelings of being different. The group context did not shift these feelings of difference; rather, it seemed to reduce loneliness through enhancing peer connectedness. Subsequently, this evoked feelings of being accepted and empowered participants to embrace who they are. In keeping with the previously

reviewed literature, research has attested to the impact of peer connectedness on reducing loneliness (Haslam et al., 2017; Hare-Duke et al., 2019; Turner, 2019). Moreover, Mitic et al. (2021) found a sense of identity to be a core determinant of peer connectedness. In the context of the present study, the reverse was also found to be true. That is, many participants joined from a position of loneliness because of their differences; however, they came to accept themselves and felt a strengthened sense of identity *after* building peer connections, suggesting a bidirectional link between identity and peer connectedness.

While no *known* research directly addresses how embracing difference might strengthen a sense of identity, it is implied across research concerning personal identity development from the past 10 years (Branje et al., 2021). Developing a personal identity, or coherent sense of self, is a key developmental task of early adolescence; a time when young people begin to question their identity as they become aware of their uniqueness from others (van Doeselaar et al., 2018). Additionally, they are becoming aware of their similarities across different contexts and domains over time, including education, gender, ethnic, and religious identity domains (Branje et al., 2021). However, individuals do not necessarily experience continuity across all domains at the same time, especially during adolescence, when identity is still under construction. In theory, this explains the pronounced feelings of difference for some participants, especially in relation to gender, ethnic, religious and ability domains. In turn, peer connectedness may have served as an integral mechanism, underpinning the shift in perspective for participants who came to accept their differences, thus strengthening how they constructed their personal identity.

Furthermore, some participants appeared to embrace their difference through challenging the path that might have been expected of them in regard to identity domains of religion, gender and education. Until recently, Western society has operated in a traditionally

binary thought system (Elizabeth, 2013); however, almost half of the participants challenged this through their gender identity constructions. One hypothesis supporting the way in which participants constructed their multiple identities was that the workshops and subsequent research sites were seen as inclusive spaces where youth voices and true identities were enabled, not silenced (e.g., Kizel, 2016). The same participants talked about their decision to drop out of school, or at least question the education system, which may be understood in the context of the limited research concerning school engagement and identity construction in 'non-conforming' youth (Harnischfeger, 2015)[19]. After accessing an alternative education programme, Harnischfeger's (2015) participants voiced the need for more flexible and creative practices within schools, that are centred within the unique needs and learning styles of diverse students. The current findings may therefore be viewed as an extension of this research, given the clear parallels regarding marginalised youth, and the focus on identity construction through the context of informal learning.

Who I am Depends on the Context I am in

Most participants referred to how they were quiet, lonely or anxious prior to engaging in the workshops. However, through participation in team-based, competitive activities, and meaningful group discussions, they discovered their sociable side; a side that had not emerged in other contexts. This indicated the evolution from a shy, 'hidden self' to a more social identity. The phenomenon of finding a social identity through group membership is well documented, perhaps most notably in Tajfel and Turner's (1979) social identity theory (SIT). In accordance with this theory, the process of developing a social identity within a group is an important source of self-esteem (McLeod, 2019). Though self-esteem was not

[19]*School engagement was found to be influenced by students' perceptions of themselves as 'outsiders'.*

explicitly named during the interviews, it was implied by participants who voiced feeling ‘good’ about themselves after spending time with friends. Correspondingly, and reflecting the previously reviewed literature (Cicognani et al., 2014; Evans, 2007), the opportunity to engage with informal learning outside of school seemed to strengthen social identity by increasing feelings of connection and belonging, as was indicated by participants who referred to feeling ‘safe’ and like ‘home’ when with the group.

Similarly, SIT supports the idea that people may act differently depending on the groups they belong to, including family. In the current study, participants emphasised their family relationships when constructing a sense of who they are. A substantial body of research has promoted the importance of supportive family relationships for creating a secure base, from which young people can make sense of their experiences and generate more meaningful and coherent identity narratives (Branje et al., 2021; Koepke & Denissen, 2012). This was implied across participant accounts; however, not all participants contextualised their identity within family relationships. One opened up about their adverse family experiences, yet they were able to construct a coherent narrative about past, present and future versions of themselves.

A More Emotionally Attuned Self

Participants unanimously reflected that learning about the science of emotions contributed to a greater emotional awareness. In line with published research, learning about different emotions and how these can present, led participants to feeling more attuned to their feelings and those of others (Năstasă et al., 2021). The same research also drew attention to the benefits of adolescents accessing experiential learning interventions to better manage their emotions. Comparably, participants within the current study verbalised an improvement

in their ability to express how they are feeling, explaining that before the workshops, they were not able to tell others when they felt 'sad'. This corroborates literature that has linked learning to notice and voice difficult emotions with the development of healthier relationships, emotional intelligence (EI) and thus, a stronger emotional identity (Dellifield, 2021; Mayer and Salovey, 1997[20]). This developing EI seemed to serve as an important resource for participants, from which they were able to attach new meaning to their experiences, including a better sense of why they feel and act the way that they do. The wider literature highlights identity construction as a key normative developmental task of adolescence, in which EI plays a pivotal role (Maher et al., 2017). Therefore, as the current study sought to capture the voices of those who may have encountered non-normative developmental experiences (e.g., 'disadvantaged'), these findings may add another layer of meaning to the existing literature.

In addition, participants reported that having the space to engage in healthy discussions about emotions and mental health had a positive impact on their mood and overall wellbeing. This finding is consistent with studies that have linked social and emotional learning interventions with improved levels of wellbeing in school children (e.g., Rivers et al., 2013). Further, such learning programmes have been found to not only aid the development of a more flexible 'learning self-identity' for adolescents who had believed they were not natural learners (Kolb & Kolb, 2009), but improve empathy and subjective wellbeing (Chan et al., 2021). In keeping with experiential learning theory (Kolb, 1984), this is thought to be facilitated by being in a learning space that feels safe and characterised by unconditional positive regard (Rogers, 1951), which seemed to be the case within the current study. Participants reflected on how it felt to have a space where they could share their

[20]*Mayer and Salovey's (1997) four-branch model structures EI around abilities in (i) accurately perceiving emotions, (ii) using emotions to facilitate thoughts, (iii) understanding emotions, and (iv) managing emotions.*

feelings without judgement, knowing that they would be heard and taken seriously; something that had not felt safe to do outside of the group.

Clinical Implications

This study advocates for the use of young people's own narratives as a source of understanding identity construction, and how these might inform the development of future informal learning programmes for disadvantaged populations. Consistent with previous research, which called for more flexible and creative learning spaces outside of the school context (Harnischfeger, 2015), the current findings underscore the importance of having a safe, inclusive space to learn and connect with peers. This study also highlights the key components for creating such a space, including opportunities to participate in team-based activities, learning about the science of emotions, and meaningful group discussion.

Additionally, participants explicitly voiced how their family relationships impacted who they are today, highlighting how some may be able to confidently construct a coherent self-identity narrative against the context of an unaccepting family and an absence of peer connections, contrary to existing theory and research (Branje et al., 2021; Koepke & Denissen, 2012). Others were less coherent in their narratives; not voicing any family tensions yet struggling to articulate who they are. Together, these findings may bear important implications for professionals working with young people who display such nuances in their social interactions, or who are known to come from unsupportive homes.

Future Research

This research effort advances knowledge that is related to a relatively disadvantaged adolescent population who have been underrepresented in previous identity research. The

findings highlight the ways in which informal learning based on the science of emotions can influence the construction of stronger personal, social and emotional identities within this population, while identifying several areas for further research. First, as this was not an intervention study, it is impossible to comment on the subjective effectiveness of the workshops or whether the mechanisms of change for participants were rooted in the experience of emotional learning, team activities, or whether it was a result of being part of an accepting group space and building peer connections. It is likely a combination of these factors; however, future research might explore group effectiveness specifically, using a repeated measures design to supplement more in depth, qualitative accounts

Secondly, the relationship between peer connectedness, identity and reducing loneliness has become well expounded within recent research (Haslam et al., 2017; Hare-Duke et al., 2019; Mitic et al., 2021; Turner, 2019), and the current study contributes to this understanding. However, identity construction in adolescent development, and the role of emotions in this process, is under-studied, especially in non-Western cultures. It is worth noting that while the participants represented a diverse ethnic population, they all lived and had been raised within the same suburb within the UK. Therefore, to expand on the evidence base, an interesting line of inquiry may be to replicate the current study in different cultures, to cultivate new understandings of identity construction on a wider, more diverse scale.

Strengths & Limitations

The study adhered to several aspects of the American Psychological Association's (APA, 2018) Journal Article Reporting Standards for Qualitative Research (JARS-Qual). For example, the researcher was transparent about her interests in working with young people and how this might influence the research, clearly describing how this was managed through

keeping a reflective diary. Furthermore, methodological integrity was preserved through the provision of direct participant quotes and relevant contextual information to support findings, which ensured that claims made through the analysis were warranted and grounded in the data.

A potential limitation of the present study is the approach used for sampling, which relied on participant interest and availability, as opposed to data or theme saturation. Data saturation has been referenced as the 'gold standard' across qualitative literature (Guest et al., 2006). However, this promotes the view that there is a fixed end point that can be reached during analysis; the point where one determines that 'nothing new' can be found in the data. This has since been described as an "impoverished view" of the potential of qualitative approaches (Braun & Clarke, 2021, p.210), and incompatible with the assumptions of RTA, which is more concerned with the meaning that can be derived from the dataset, and the interpretative process, than the number of participants or interviews.

Furthermore, it should be noted here that given the small sample size (n = 7), and the fact that all participants had participated in the same programme, with a specific focus on the science of emotions, the findings may not be transferable to other populations or learning settings. That said, the inclusion of data from different perspectives, by not limiting the participant sample by gender, background or type of disadvantage, is considered a strength as it allowed for a rich and varied understanding of experiences and how identity is constructed across a diverse sample of individuals.

Given the reflexive nature of this research, it would be appropriate to evaluate the researcher's position and role in generating the data and analysis. One reflection concerns their developing interview skills. After transcribing the first interview, the researcher noticed that she did not follow-up in areas that she would do now, in hindsight, or indeed how she did

in subsequent interviews. For example, she could have allowed for longer pauses between questions, sat with difficult feelings (e.g., sadness), and enquired about what these feelings looked like and meant for the participant.

Additionally, it is worth commenting on how the researcher's own 'lens' may have affected her interpretation of participant narratives. For example, when noting participants' use of avoidance when broaching more emotive topics, as captured in the subtheme *Barriers to expressing identity*. This may have been an accurate representation, but it may have also been shaped by the researcher's own experience of feeling 'different' as an adolescent, and her tendency to use humour as a defence mechanism. During the process of data collection and analysis, the researcher kept a reflective diary in which she described feeling as though she could understand participants' loneliness, as if she really knew how they were feeling (Appendix V). However, she also thought about how this interpretation might be influenced by a privileged 'lens' and may not reflect the participants' truth. Having achieved a high level of education and engaged in personal therapy, the researcher was afforded opportunities to develop self-awareness; opportunities that children from disadvantaged backgrounds would not have had. Notwithstanding this limitation, the researcher ensured that the analysis was firmly grounded in the data, acknowledging any biases along the way and remaining mindful of her epistemological stance. That is, holding in mind that one cannot know another's reality with certainty, and representations can vary based on individual psychological processes and contexts.

Conclusion

The findings of this study are consistent with previous research and theory, advocating the need for safe, inclusive, and informal learning spaces to enhance peer connectedness, reduce loneliness, and thus influence the construction of personal, social and

emotional identities. However, the findings are unique insofar as having captured the voices of those who are typically under-represented in the identity literature, providing insights into how disadvantaged populations might construct identity during adolescence and the key components underpinning this. In particular, opportunities to participate in team-based activities, emotional learning and meaningful group discussion may lead adolescents to simultaneously experience improvements in confidence, self-esteem and feelings of being accepted. The latter in particular may encourage young people to embrace their differences, rather than feel marginalised by them within social contexts.

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Chapter 3. Press Release for the Literature Review

"First Day I Feel Like a Lone Person… I Feel Now Like I Belong in this Country": Exploring how Child Refugees & Asylum Seekers Find a Sense of Belonging Post-migration

Refugees and asylum-seekers represent a growing population worldwide, of which almost half are children. These children, whether fleeing their home countries alone or with family members, will have left behind their homes, loved ones, and the land they know. For many children, this is a necessary transition and they have been forced to escape due to persecution, conflict, abuse, poverty, natural disasters, and/or deprivation of their human rights. The struggle does not stop once they have fled; it is common for children to experience life-threatening escape journeys, only to then face uncertainty regarding their legal rights, and very real fears about their safety and security in the country they have arrived in. The process of adjustment for these young people can lead to numerous psychological difficulties, including anxiety, depression, post-traumatic stress and loneliness.

Before this vulnerable population arrive in their host country, they are often already perceived as 'victims'; a label which may go on to shape their future prospects. In addition, the majority of these children will be carrying the trauma of their experiences while attempting to adapt to a new culture. This often involves having to integrate into a new school, residential or community setting, learn new cultural 'norms' and the local language, placing them in a unique and marginalised position compared to their non-refugee peers. Despite these challenges, there is very little research concerning the needs of young refugees, and even less that seeks to understand their story in their own words. As a result, it is not clear how this vulnerable population experience their resettlement and specifically, how they come to belong in their new culture.

In an attempt to understand what might help refugee children to feel like they belong in their new country, Lead researcher Emily Trotter, from the University of Birmingham, reviewed and synthesised the available studies that explored children's first-hand experiences. With support from other qualitative researchers at the School of Psychology, all available research in the area from the last 10 years was gathered, systematically screened and assessed for quality. In this wat, eight primary studies were identified. These involved 254 participants who had migrated from one of at least 22 countries in the Eastern world, to one of six Western countries, within the last five years. Participants spoke about their personal experiences of resettling within a new school, residential home, local community and/or service organisation. The findings from each study were compared for similarities and differences before they were merged and considered as one 'whole'.

Taken together, the findings revealed a number of important processes that facilitated a sense of belonging for participants. These included: (i) *Experiences of Inclusion and Support*, (ii) *Family Connectedness*, and (iii) *Adaptive Responses to Resettlement*, all of which were underpinned by the wider context of *Migratory Loneliness and Societal Isolation* that young refugee populations come with. Within each of these processes, the researcher described how participants valued having peers to protect them and translate for them, feeling seen and accepted by teachers in their new schools, and being able to maintain their cultural identity.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, the studies also featured accounts of what got in the way of child refugees finding a sense of belonging in their new country, which ranged from an absence of meaningful relationships to language barriers and feeling misunderstood. Participants' experiences seemed to be influenced by their age at migration, and the context they were resettling in. For example, children who had migrated during their primary school years were more likely to learn the local language, make friends, and adjust. Older children and adolescents on the other hand, resettling in secondary school, community or organisational

settings, may have struggled more with this huge transition and culture shock. In addition, older children appeared to be introspective about what they had lost or had to leave behind, and more aware of stigma and prejudices directed towards them in their local community.

Given the impact of migration on what is a growing, yet hard-to-reach population, these findings offer valuable, timely information about how different contexts could support young refugees and help them to establish a sense of belonging, as well as increasing the visibility of young refugees.

3.1 Further Reading

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Chapter 4. Press Release for the Empirical Paper

"It's good to have a place where you can be yourself": Exploring how Young People from Disadvantaged Backgrounds Construct a Sense of Identity

Loneliness is considered one of the greatest public health challenges of our time, with young people reported to be among the worst affected. Adolescence has long been considered a period of life when loneliness can be particularly prevalent; however, it is only in recent years that this has been linked to the challenges of constructing a sense of identity.

Identity construction is understood to be a key developmental task of adolescence, a time when youth start to ask life's big questions, such as: "who am I?", and "who will I become?" This is already a confusing time, made more challenging by the physical, mental and emotional changes associated with puberty. However, we know very little about how developing a sense of identity might differ for young people from disadvantaged backgrounds.

'Disadvantage' is a broad and relative term that may be used to describe young people who were born to economic and social deprivation, or those with a history of difficult family relationships or early trauma. Moreover, the term can be used to cover children in the care system, experiencing social isolation, discrimination or school exclusion, and those living with physical or mental health difficulties, and/or neurodevelopmental conditions. In any case, this population are likely to struggle more with feelings of loneliness and, therefore, finding a sense of themselves in the world. It is surprising, then, that limited research has focused on identity construction in people from disadvantaged backgrounds, nor is there any *known* evidence to suggest how reducing feelings of loneliness might influence identity construction.

Traditional identity research has typically focused on individual development, but in reality, people are influenced by a range of contexts and relationships. Limited research has

found that informal learning outside of school settings may help young people to feel more connected, and thus may reduce loneliness. With this in mind, the current study aimed to understand how disadvantaged young people constructed a sense of identity, through the context of an informal learning programme that was specifically designed to reduce loneliness.

Lead researcher, Emily Trotter, supported by colleagues at the University of Birmingham, explored the perspectives of seven young people, aged 12-17 years, based within a deprived suburb in the UK. Interviews were carried out to gain insight into participants' experiences and to identify shared patterns of meaning across their responses.

The research findings highlighted a number of different ways in which participants constructed and strengthened their sense of identity. The first was having a diverse and accepting space in which they could embrace their differences; differences that had made them feel isolated before attending the programme. One participant exclaimed: "…it's made the way I feel about myself stronger... I used to feel like I was weird, but now… everyone's weird in their own way!"

Participants also discussed how they felt and acted differently between varying social contexts. Most described themselves as quiet, anxious or lonely before, especially at school, but through participating in team-based, and competitive activities, and meaningful group discussions, they uncovered a 'hidden self', or social identity they had not been aware of before. Family relationships also represented an important context that shaped identity construction. Additionally, attention was given to the *way* that participants described themselves, including their nonverbal cues and perceived defence mechanisms during the interviews.

Participants praised the learning aspect of the programme for contributing to a more emotionally attuned identity. Specifically, by learning about the full range of different emotions

and how these might look, participants unanimously reported feeling more aware of their own emotions and those of others, while feeling better able to express and manage difficult emotions.

The findings are consistent with previous research and theory regarding the importance of having a safe and accepting space to learn and connect with peers outside of school, which may influence the construction of stronger personal, social and emotional identities. However, it also offers interesting insights into the perspectives of disadvantaged populations, who are typically under-represented in identity research. The study advocates the need for increasing access to such learning spaces for disadvantaged youth. Lead researcher Emily Trotter says that this should be somewhere they can "…embrace their differences, rather than feel marginalised by them".

4.1 Further Reading

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Appendix A

Defining Refugees

The term ‘refugee’ is highly disputed, with some suggesting that it is used by host countries as a means of separating and containing those defined by the term, while others view it as more of an administrative label used in place of a lost identity (Crawford, 2017). In actuality, being a refugee or asylum seeker is not a lifelong identity, but a transitional process; however, the term can be politically and socially constructed by others (e.g., the government, policies, or through media stereotypes), and can often be imposed on displaced people who may have stopped identifying themselves as refugees long before others do.

Generally speaking, ‘refugee’ is intended to describe those who have involuntarily migrated and are resettled in a country where the government has agreed to accept them. The term asylum seeker describes those who are still undergoing the formal process of seeking refuge and protection in a new country, typically due to fear of persecution in their home country (Hastings, 2012; Kumi-Yeboah et al., 2020).

Young refugees have been described as “victims of their own past” (Korjonen-Kuusipuro et al., 2019, p.551); a label which can go on to define their care needs in numerous institutional settings, from school to the care system or social services. UASC in particular often live in an open-ended ‘limbo’ state of being and waiting for several years. It is well documented that these young people have limited opportunities to live like their non-refugee peers, who are unlikely to relate to the overwhelming and uncertain experience of having to flee their home and seek asylum in a new country. These experiences are commonly linked to loneliness, post-traumatic stress, and other psychological conditions (Reinelt et al., 2016; Van os et al., 2020).

Appendix B

Table B1

PICOS Model

P	Population, patient, or problem (e.g., age, gender, disorder/disease)	Child refugees or asylum seekers, including UASC, resettled in any host country that is not their country of origin. Child refugees and asylum seekers are defined as children, aged 18 years old and under, who have migrated to other countries due to fear of persecution in their country of origin due to factors such as race, religion, nationality, or political opinion (UNHCR, 2022b).
I	Intervention, exposure, variable(s) of interest, or risk/prognostic factor(s)	This review will focus on research that attempts to describe the belonging experiences of children who have been exposed to migration/resettlement, as opposed to a specific intervention. These experiences might be described in the context of relationships with family/peers/wider systems within their host country, or the new cultural 'norms' and expectations they are adjusting to.
C	Comparators/comparison or control	Predominantly interested in belonging experiences, rather than comparing outcomes between groups. Therefore, this review will not involve a control group. Studies that have used control groups in their efforts to enhance understanding of belonging experiences will be considered for review.
O	Outcome(s)	The primary outcome is a sense of belonging. This will be assessed via first-hand accounts gathered through self-report measures (e.g., semi-structured interviews, focus groups). As belonging is a fluid concept, a range of terms that capture its essence are felt to be necessary when conducting the search. Search terms will be simple and broad, to capture all potentially relevant studies.
S	Study design/type	Due to the exploratory nature of this review and interest in lived experiences, a qualitative approach is considered most appropriate. Analysis will be in the form of a meta-synthesis, guided by meta-ethnography, guided by Noblit and Hare's (1988) steps.

Note. Introduced by Richardson et al. (1995), updated by Moher et al. (2009)

Appendix C

Figure C1

Conceptual algorithm to optimise selection of a knowledge synthesis method for answering a research question (Kastner et al., 2016)

Appendix D

Screen Captures of Study Screening Process

Figure D1

Screen Capture of Initial Title Level Screen

	Intern 1			Intern 2			Intern 3			
Paper Title	Include for Abstract Search?	Inclusion Reasons	Exclusion Reasons	Include for Abstract Search?	Inclusion Reasons	Exclusion Reasons	Include for Abstract Search?	Inclusion Reasons	Exclusion Reasons	Agreements
Aarsaether, F. (2021). "Learning environment and social inclusion for newly arrived migrant children placed in separate programmes in elementary schools in Norway." Cogent Education 8(1): 16.	Yes	migrant children	may not be refugees	Yes	Migrant children		Maybe		"Migrant children" are not necessarily forcibly displaced	
Abu El-Haj, T. R. and E. Skilton (2017). "Toward an awareness of the "colonial present" in education: Focusing on interdependence and inequity in the context of global migration." Curriculum Inquiry 47(1): 69-79.							No		Without clear/explicit focus on child refugee populations + migration/resettlement experiences	
Adebayo, K. O. and F. O. Omololu (2020). "'Everywhere is home': The paradox of 'homing' and child upbringing among Nigerian-Chinese families in Guangzhou city." International Sociology 35(3): 241-259.							No		No obvious mention of refugee/asylum seeking status	
Alarcon, X., et al. (2021). "Inclusive Settlement of Young Asylum Seekers in a Rural Region: The Role of Informal Support and Mentoring." Sustainability 13(9): 15.	Yes	young asylum seekers	doesn't specify age and may not be refugees	Yes	Young Asylum seekers		Yes		Without clear/explicit focus on child refugee populations + migration/resettlement experiences	
Alarcon, X., et al. (2021). "Mentoring for Improving the Self-Esteem, Resilience, and Hope of Unaccompanied Migrant Youth in the Barcelona Metropolitan Area." International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health 18(10): 25.	Yes	migrant youth	doesn't specify age and may not be refugees	Yes	Migrant Youth		Maybe	Could mention experiences of belonging	"Migrant youth" does not specify if forcibly displaced	
Alcantara-Hewitt, A. A. (2014). "Migration and schooling: The case of transnational students in Puebla, Mexico." Dissertation Abstracts International Section A: Humanities and Social Sciences 75(2-A(E)): No-Specified.							Maybe	Could mention experiences of belonging	No obvious mention of refugee/asylum seeking status - Most likely related to experiences of school	

Note. 'Traffic light' system to indicate individual decisions to include a study (green), exclude (red), or seek further information (amber) via an abstract or full text screen, or further consultation with the group.

Figure D2

Screen Capture of Full Text Screen

	Research Interns decisions/comments										Researcher decision/comments	
	Intern 1			Intern 2			Intern 3					
Paper Title	**Include for Abstract Search?**	**Inclusion Reasons**	**Exclusion Reasons**	**Include for Abstract Search?**	**Inclusion Reasons**	**Exclusion Reasons**	**Include for Abstract Search?**	**Inclusion Reasons**	**Exclusion Reasons**	**Initial agreements**	**Inclusion/ exclusion reasons**	**Final decision following re-review and group consultation**
Amina, F., et al. "Belonging in Australian primary schools: how students from refugee backgrounds gain membership." Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development: 24.	Yes	primary school refugees		Yes	Primary school students from refugee backgrounds		Yes	Refugee background youth's experiences of belonging			Agree	
Archambault, J. and G. M. D. Haugen (2017). Belonging and Identification: Challenges and Negotiations in Refugee Children's Everyday Life in Norway. Singapore, Springer-Verlag Singapore Pte Ltd.	Yes	refugee children		Yes	Child refugees		Yes	Experiences of belonging in youth refugees			I had excluded this as it is a book, not a peer reviewed journal article	
Chen, S. and R. D. Schweitzer (2019). "The experience of belonging in youth from refugee backgrounds: A narrative perspective." Journal of Child and Family Studies 28(7): 1977-1990.	Yes	young refugees	might be retrospective	Yes	Refugee youth		Yes	Experiences of belonging in youth refugees			Agree	
Chowdhury, S. K., et al. (2021). "Multi-vocal voices of refugees: A case study of Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh." International Sociology 36(6): 868-886.	no		doesn't specify age			Not age specific	No		"Multi-vocal voices", does this have any focus on belonging?		Having completed data extraction with this paper, I have decided to eliminate it due to a broader focus on refugee voices; the core focus is not on children's experiences.	
de Anstiss, H., et al. (2019). "Relationships in a new country: A qualitative study of the social connections of refugee youth resettled in South Australia." Journal of Youth Studies 22(3): 346-362.	Yes	young refugees	doesn't specify age	Yes	Refugee youth		Yes				Agree	
Due, C., et al. (2018). ""This reminds me of my country": Exploring experiences of belonging at school for young children with refugee backgrounds." Pathways to belonging: Contemporary research in school belonging.: 83-104.	Yes	refugee children	might be retrospective	Yes	Child refugees		Yes	Experiences of belonging in youth refugees			Excluded due to being a book chapter	
Hastings, C. (2012). "The experience of male adolescent refugees during their transfer and adaptation to a UK secondary school." Educational Psychology in Practice 28(4): 335-351.	Yes	young refugees		Yes	Adolescent refugees		Yes	Youth refugees forcibly displaced/fled war-torn countries			Agree	
Jarlby, F., et al. (2021). "Attempts to "forget": unaccompanied refugee adolescents' everyday experiences of psychosocial challenges and coping upon settlement." International Journal of Migration Health and Social Care 17(2): 181-195.	Yes	refugee teens		Yes	Refugee teen and everyday experiences		Yes	Youth refugees forcibly displaced/fled war-torn countries		Initially mixed decisions. Clarification needed.	Wondering about AT's initial maybe (as opposed to yes) and CP's exclusion reason? I will re-read/review once your full text screen is complete, to see if an agreement can be reached.	

Appendix E

Table E1

18-item Integrated Quality Appraisal Checklist

	Checklist item	Sub questions
1.	Are funding and/or sources of conflict clearly acknowledged?	
2.	Is there an abstract?	*Does the abstract adequately describe the study's aims, design, and main implications and/or significance?* *Does the abstract state the question/objective?* *Does the abstract adequately describe the study design?* *Does the abstract list the analytic strategy?* *Does the abstract list the main implications and/or significance?*
3.	Theoretical approach: Is a qualitative approach appropriate?	*Is a rationale given for using a qualitative approach?* *Is it clear how prior understandings of the phenomena under study were managed and/or influenced the research?*
4.	Theoretical approach: Is the study clear in what it seeks to do?	*Does the study have a clear rationale and aim?* *Is the approach to inquiry clear?*
5.	Ethics	*How clear and coherent is the reporting of ethics?*
6.	Concepts: Is belonging defined?	
7.	Concepts: Is refugee/asylum seeker/unaccompanied child, etc. defined?	
8.	Study design: How defensible/rigorous is the research design/methodology?	*Is the choice of method clearly described?* *Is the design appropriate to the research question?* *Are there clear accounts of the rationale/justification for data collection and data analysis techniques used?* *Is the selection of cases/sampling strategy*

Checklist item	Sub questions
	theoretically justified?
	Are intended participants clearly defined?
	Is the recruitment process clear?
9. Data collection: How well was the data collection carried out?	*Is the data collection strategy clear?*
	Were the appropriate data collected to address the research question?
	Were the mean and range of time duration for interviews and other data collection tools clear/appropriate?
	Is the procedure reliable/dependable?
	Were coders and analysts and their training clearly described?
10. Trustworthiness: Is the role of the researcher clearly described?	*Is the role of the researcher clearly described?*
	Does the paper describe how the research was explained and presented to the participants?
	Has the relationship between the researcher and the participants been adequately considered?
	Was researcher bias considered?
11. Trustworthiness: Is the context clearly described?	*Are sampled participants clearly defined?*
	Are the demographics and/or cultural information, perspectives of participants, or characteristics of data clear and appropriate?
12. Trustworthiness: Were the methods reliable?	*Was data collected by more than 1 method?*
	Do the methods investigate what they claim to?
13. Analysis: Is the data sufficiently rigorous?	*Is the process of analysis clear?*
	Is it clear how the themes and concepts were derived from the data?
	Is the procedure reliable/dependable?
14. Analysis: Is the data rich?	*Has the researcher discussed contradictory data (or suggested why there is none)?*
	How well has the detail and depth been demonstrated?
	Are responses compared and contrasted across groups/sites?
15. Analysis:	*Were softwares that were used indicated?*

Checklist item	Sub questions
Is the analysis reliable?	*Did more than 1 researcher theme and code transcripts/ data?* *Did the researchers make clear how differences, if at all, would have been resolved?*
16. Results: Are the findings convincing?	*Is the reporting clear and coherent?* *Are the findings convincing?* *Were findings clearly presented?* *Are the research findings compatible with the study design?* *Are extracts from the original data included?*
17. Results: Are the findings relevant to the aims of the study?	*Were the findings grounded in the evidence?* *Did the data adequately capture forms of diversity most relevant to the question, research goals, and inquiry approach?*
18. Conclusions: Are the conclusions adequate?	*Were similarities and differences from prior theories and research findings identified?* *Did researchers make clear how findings were or can be best utilised?* *Were any reflections made on alternative findings?* *Have alternative explanations been explored and discounted?* *Does this enhance understanding of the research topic?*

Note. Adapted from APA (2018) JARS-Qual. and NICE (2012) guidance.

Figure E1

Screen Capture of Quality Appraisal Process

Study identification	**Are funding and/or sources of conflict clearly acknowledged?**	**Abstract:** *Does the abstract adequately describe the study's aims, designs, and main implications and/or significance?*	**Theoretical approach: Is a qualitative approach appropriate?**	**Theoretical approach: Is the study clear in what it seeks to do?**	**Ethics:** *How clear and coherent is the reporting of ethics?*	**Concepts:** *Is belonging defined?*	**Concepts:** *Is refugee/ asylum seeker defined?*	**Study design** **How defensible/rigorous is the research design/ methodology?**	**Data collection:** **How well was the data collection carried out?**
Author (year): Amina et al. (2021)	Yes	Yes; the study contains an abstract which is written clearly,	Yes. The study reports its employment of a	Study has clear rationale, aim and approach to	Clear. Ethical approval obtained before	Yes	Yes	Choice of method is clearly described and the arts based	Clear data collection strategy, and appropriate
Author (year): Chen & Schweitzer (2019)	Yes	Yes; study contains an abstract which clearly states its	Yes. Rationale given; authors explain that	Study has clear rationale and aim. Approach to	Clear statement to confirm receipt of ethical approval.	Yes	Vaguely, but more in terms	Choice of using a novel methodology (digital	Clear data collection strategy, and appropriate
Author (year): De Anstiss et al. (2019)	Yes	Yes; abstract included and objective outlined. States that	Yes; a qualitative approach is appropriate.	Yes the study is clear on what it seeks to do as the	Clear statement on receipt of ethical approval, but no	Yes, but referred to as	Yes	Choice of method described and in keeping with aim to	Clear data collection strategy, and focus groups
Author (year): Hastings (2012)	No	Yes; abstract included and objective described. States use	Yes. A clear rationale is presented, stating that	Yes, very clear rationale and aim. Approach to	No mention of ethical approval, and no reference	Yes, but not until the results	Yes	Choice of method/design and analysis clear and justified;	Clear data collection strategy, and semi-
Author (year): Jarlby et al. (2021)	Yes	Yes; abstract included, with purpose/aims clearly described.	A qualitative approach is appropriate as the	Clear aim/rationale, and approach(es) to inquiry	Clear statement on how code of ethics were	Yes, but not until the	Yes	Clear choice of method, and design seems to fit with	Data collection strategy clear and triangulation
Author (year): Maadad & Matthews (2020)	Yes	Yes; abstract included with focus of attention described. Qualitative interview design	Yes; qualitative method appropriate and justified as authors were	Yes. Rationale/aim clear, approach to inquiry clear (open-ended interviews	Authors refer to strictly following ethical protocols, though **no specific**	No. Referred to but not defined or used	Yes	Choice of method and design clearly described, and in line with research question ("How	Data collection srategy somewhat clear and the data collected (from open-
Author (year): Mitchell & Bateman (2018)	Yes	Yes; abstract included and study focus/rationale outlined. **Study design, analysis and results**	Yes; a qualitative approach is appropriate for exploring feelings of	Clear rationale/aim and approach to inquiry (thematic and	Clear. Statement referring to ethical approval, including referring to	Yes	Yes	Clear choice of method, and design seems to fit with research objective. Clear	Data collection strategy mostly clear. Data collected was appropriate
Author (year): Osman et al. (2020)	Yes	Yes; abstract included and clearly written, outlining study	Yes; qualitative method is appropriate given its	Yes; the study has a clear rationale and aim and the	Clear statement of obtaining ethical approval,	Yes	Yes, vaguely	Clear choice of method and exploratory, qualitative	Data collection strategy clear and data collected
Author (year): Szlyk et al. (2020)	Yes	Yes; abstract included and aims clearly stated.Study design	Yes. Qualitative approach appropriate	Clear rationale, aim and approach to inquiry	Vague mention of ethical procedures; authors state	Vaguely, but refers to the	Yes, but more of a general	Clear choice of method, with clear justification for using	Data collection strategy clear, and the data
Author (year): Weine et al. (2014)	Yes	Yes; abstract included and clear. Study purpose and design	Yes. Qualitative approach appropriate	Clear rationale, aims and approach to inquiry	Yes, clear reference to written consent as	Yes, but included as	Yes, but more description of	Clear choice of method and longitudinal, ethnographic	Data collection strategy clear. Data collected

Appendix F

Reducing Themes into Key Conceptual Categories

1. **Concept of support and inclusion**
2. **Concept of exclusion**
3. **Seeking protection**
4. **Helping others**
5. **Family connectedness**
6. **Severed relationships & disconnection**
7. **Shared activities**
8. **Recommendations for teachers**
9. **Concept of language and culture: facilitators *and* barriers to belonging?**
10. **Financial burden**
11. **Maintaining connections to country of origin**
12. **Recreating feelings of family and home**
13. **Belonging to a shared earth**
14. **Concept of gratitude**
15. **Migratory loss and loneliness**
16. **Coping strategies**
17. **Stigma, discrimination & societal isolation**
18. **Gender inequalities**
19. **A sense of identity**
20. **Distrust of services**
21. **Physical and emotional impact of resettlement**
22. **Thinking about the future**
23. **Being seen (added by reviewer 1)**
24. **Being infantilised, underestimated and dehumanised (added by reviewer 1)**
25. **Words of encouragement (added by reviewer 2)**

Appendix G

Translating Studies Into One Another

Findings from study one (Amina et al., 2021) show that both peers and teachers can support the process of belonging for newly resettled primary school children. This was facilitated through offering support with language development, inclusion in games by peers or in class discussions by teachers. For some, inclusion fostered feelings of safety and protection, too. On the other hand, these same facilitators to belonging could also serve as barriers, with some participants describing experiences of being excluded by other children, feeling unable to enjoy activities due to the language barrier, or feeling "invisible" to teachers, when compared to their non-refugee peers. The children's specific cultural practices and financial circumstances were also factors in their resettlement, with some referring to not being able to afford food in the canteen or find the appropriate food for their culture.

Similarly, study two (Osman et al., 2020) found that support from teachers was essential for their adjustment to a new school. However, with its focus being on secondary school and participants who migrated during their adolescent years, many referred to it being harder to resettle. This was attributed to finding it harder to learn the language than if they had migrated at a younger age, experiences of being discriminated at school, and a feeling of falling in-between cultures. A recurring theme was the lack of adult support available to participants, both at home and at school, differing somewhat from the first study. This study also went beyond the remit of study one by exploring coping strategies that helped children adapt to a new culture, including acceptance, hope, and gratitude for the opportunities they now have, which contrast with how life might have been if they had remained in their war-torn home countries. They also took responsibility for creating integration experiences, suggesting a sense of agency that the primary school participants in study one did not refer to.

Correspondingly, study three (Chen & Schweitzer, 2019) took place within a school setting, and found the support of others, namely teachers, and help with learning English, to be important for a sense of belonging. Comparable to study one, feelings of safety and protection through inclusion were also mentioned. However, this study differed from the previous two in terms of the participant accounts that alluded to belonging to a larger entity (the earth, nature, the present moment, past memories, objects, spirituality, etc.). A similarity between this study and the first two studies was the polarised accounts of participants. For some, relational bonds (e.g., friends and family) underpinned the process of belonging to a new school and culture, but for others, who had been separated from friends and family, the feelings of loss and yearning for these people served as a barrier to belonging.

Study four (Jarlby et al., 2021) differed from the previous studies in terms of context, a residential setting. Like previous studies, it spoke to the importance of building connections and engaging in shared activities to build a sense of belonging. However, it also described instances of social withdrawal in response to language barriers and perceived stigma, thus positioning themselves as 'outsiders'. Feelings of stigma, difference and loneliness were referred to more than in any other study, with the metaphor of a boat at sea being used to describe being alone. As with other studies, these factors served as potential barriers to belonging. This study also referred to experiences of societal exclusion (e.g., prejudices and racism).

Study five (de Anstiss et al., 2019) differed from studies 1-4 due to being based in the local community. However, like the previous studies, it highlighted the importance of family, peer and community support, only with more emphasis on the voices of those experiencing a *lack* of support. Experiences of intense conflict, abuse and violence reported and attributed to the stress of displacement, and parents struggling to belong while their children adjust to their new culture (creating a distance within families). This stirred up references to bicultural identities, similar to study two. Like study one, participants within this study spoke more about their financial circumstances and the effect of these on their ability to resettle. Unlike the previous studies, study five commented on a general distrust towards service providers due to fears of being misunderstood. Gender roles and inequalities were also referenced in this study.

Study six (Mitchell & Bateman, 2018), like studies 1-3, took place in an early childhood education centre, and predominantly focused on welcoming newly resettled children; thus supporting the concept of support and inclusion. This was facilitated through shared activities and attempts to maintain participants' home country connections (e.g., by speaking to them in their home language, using greetings from their culture).

Study seven (Weine et al., 2014) similarly noted the importance of support ('protective agents) from family members, refugee communities, church, school, and the local community. Barriers to belonging were not alluded to.

Study eight (Hastings, 2012) also found help from teachers, peers and family to be of the utmost importance, especially during the beginning of resettlement. As with studies one, three, and seven, themes of seeking safety and protection were noted, especially in relation to bullying experiences. The paper concluded that peers may also be a barrier, as well as facilitator, to belonging experiences. In addition, a finding shared with all previous studies was that learning the English seemed to support the development of belonging in their host country.

Table G1

Collaborative Translation of Studies

Key Concepts	First Order Constructs (Participant Quotes)	Second Order Constructs (Primary Authors' Interpretations)	Researcher 1 Interpretation	Reviewer 1 Interpretation	Reviewer 2 Interpretation	Collaborative Interpretation (Third Level Constructs)
Concept of support & inclusion	"I feel included because of my friends. It is because, in the beginning, I felt very nervous going to school and staying there, but with the help of friends, I feel less nervous, when they are around I feel less nervous…My classmates invite me to the activities that they are doing, so that helps me feel adjusted, friends are important for me because they play with me." "I feel included in my school because of my friends, they support me, they help me. My friends make me more comfortable at school than my teachers because teachers are not always there for me but my friends are especially when we are playing outside,	The findings indicate that peers play a key role in helping young people from refugee backgrounds feel included and safe, and enable them to participate in classroom activities through linguistic brokering (translating). Teachers also play a vital role in creating a sense of belonging (e.g., through praise and recognition of participants' knowledge, skills and interests). The use of the same word, 'included', when discussing the role that their friends/classmates provide in giving them a sense of emotional stability. Participation in different activities alongside others and with the help and support of friends ensures that... (they) feel part of the classroom or social field.	Both peers and primary school teachers can support the process of belonging for newly resettled primary school children. This was facilitated through offering support with language development and inclusion in games by peers or being included in class discussions by teachers. Secondary school children felt there was a lack of adult support at school and at home, expressing a need for more support in their local community for newly resettled refugee	I wonder how participants differed the experience of words of encouragement from low expectations and being infantilised (below).	I'm wondering if confidence is a byproduct of supporting or not. When I read the first order, I felt that the refugees need to build confidence with their peers and teachers during the process of adjustment. I would say building confidence is a part of the process of adjustment and belonging. When I tried to adjust to some groups or cultures with which I'm not familiar, I would be afraid of making mistakes because I don't understand their	Peers, teachers and members of the host community may facilitate processes of belonging in child refugees, through inclusions efforts, words of encouragement, and offering support with development opportunities (e.g., language development). This may also enable children to build their confidence while adjusting to a new culture. A lack of these supportive figures may have the opposite effect. That is, not having family (or a supportive family), supportive teachers, etc. may be a barrier to belonging.
Concept of exclusion	"... I am very sad that my friends ignore me." "Mostly teacher doesn't care if I am included or understanding whatever she is writing. Although I am sitting in front of her, it seems I am invisible. I don't like this.	Peers can create a sense of social capital, yet they can also take it away. For participant XXX, his emotional wellbeing, expressed on a scale from happiness to sadness, was determined by the acknowledgement and attention he received from his peers.	Peers and can be the facilitators to a sense of belonging during resettlement, but for some they can be the barrier. I agree with the authors'	Agree with this category. Added extra quote for exclusion "because teachers are not always there for me"	I agree with your interpretation. Maybe you could add "teacher" in your interpretation. Moreover, I was thinking if it is also a concept of peer rejection.	Peers and teachers can also serve as barriers to belonging. Experiences of exclusion may create feelings of rejection too.
Seeking protection	"My friends make me more comfortable at school than my teachers because teachers are not always there for me but my friends are especially when we are playing outside, friends are there to protect me." [Parent]: "When my kids arrived and we arrived, ... opened the door for them… and they were in peace, and they were safe, and they like the school". [Teacher] "new arrivals are not at risk for	Friends provide a sense ofcomfort and protection, which teachers cannot provide, at least with the same consistency as friends. 'Outside' the classroom appears to be a domain where teachers may not always be present but friends will be... For P5, friends are the constants who provide comfort and security, for P6, friends are determining factors of school belonging. They can make you feel like you belong or solidify the feeling of being disconnected and alone. - Amina et al. (2021) Participants described comfortable feelings of being	This seems to go beyond belonging due to shared language and being made to feel emotionally comfortable, but a matter of protection and security (is this a physical need for protection due to past-based fears or more of an emotional vulnerability? Peers may be a barrier to belonging when it comes to traumatic bullying experiences		I'm not sure but do the words "protection" and "accompaniment" mean the same? If they are different words, I felt that participants were not only seeking protection but also accompaniment" in their daily life	Participants sought a sense of comfort and protection within their host community. For most, this was an emotional protection that was facilitated through feeling connected to others, especially friends who were seen as 'constants'. For others, this extended to seeking physical protection, as if needing security against school bullies, or peers, who facilitated feelings of being alone, disconnected, rejected and vulnerable, reminding them of their migratory trauma.

Helping others, feeling needed and appreciated	"Once I helped my friend and my teacher appreciated me a lot. At that time I felt that I am part of this class and I belong. I felt very happy about it…" "If society accepts you… you feel included and can contribute to positive things."	The participants wanted their teachers to not only notice them but also acknowledge and recognise their knowledge, behaviours, skills and interests. Being acknowledged by the teacher communicated to these learners that the teacher knows, understands and cares for these students, and more importantly, that they hold their rightful	Participants not only feel a sense of belonging in response to their teachers praise and inclusion efforts, but there is something here about paying it forward and wanting to help others, to make sure their peers also feel a sense of belonging. Similarly, some child refugees	There is something about being appreciated or the act of appreciation that facilitates belongingness. Appreciation can include being rewarded, feeling proud, respecting personal space and need for solitude vs under appreciation which	I agreed with you that the participants wanted to make sure their peers feel a sense of beloning and contribute to society. Is it possible the participants wanted to meet their needs to be needed? They wanted to be accepted by society, teachers, peers,	Amended this conceptual category to 'Helping others, feeling needed and appreciated', following reviewer 2's suggestions. Also added the new conceptual category 'Being seen', which seems to go beyond just being appreciated and being more about feeling understood and recognised.
Family connectedness	"...I have something, some [things I] remember about my country. My friends, my family". "Because my family stay in my life all my life now and my family lives with me here in Australia, and really help me for everything, and when I'm sad or like this, my family stands up behind me, of course." "family relationship is the most important thing that is affecting each and every aspect of our life"	Many highlighted the importance of family bonds, denoting membership to the family unit and encounters of kinship. - Chen & Schweitzer (2019) Family bonds, especially with parents, offer a sense of security, belonging and identity Many reported limited connections beyond the family; mostly limited to close peers only, with some refraining from further community involvement.	Maintaining a sense of family connectedness in host country was an important factor underpinning a sense of belonging. Some adolescent refugees struggled to extend this connectedness beyond the family, perhaps due to the uniqueness of their experiences and responsibilities within the family, that same-aged peers would not relate to? Easier to develop a sense of			Family connection and cohesion within the host community is an important factor underpinning processes of belonging. esepcially given the unique but shared experiences they will have gone through together (experiences that peers will not understand). The reverse is also true, insofar that those who migrated without their families (e.g., UASC) or who do not have supportive families, may struggle to feel a sense of belonging.
Severed relationships & disconnection	"It is kind of the Somali culture to yell at children when they earn a grade of F, [parents] expect you to be mentally strong." "There are not so many adults who are involved in the lives of the youth.... If you have dreams, there is no one who can guide you."	Children reported a lack of supportive adults, often due to their parents not being proficient in the local language, or having minimal levels of education, causing a parent-child divide in many families. For this reason, some expressed a need for further support that parents and teachers could not offer.	This could be categorised under numerous concepts, including how cultural expectations and stigma from the Eastern world had migrated with children and their families (e.g., needing to be mentally "strong"). In the context of this study it mostly speaks to the high expectations of parents			This could fall under the above category, reflecting the 'flipside' of family connectedness for those who have been separated from their families or do not have supportive families. This includes experiences of trauma, abuse and conflict that are maintained in some families due to the stress of displacement.

Shared activities	"To increase my confidence, my teacher sometimes involves me in dance practice. I feel very happy when this happens…" "Through activities such as sports, you learn how to adapt to society. Playing football with native youths in schools helps you get to know them and make friends, which, in turn, helps you feel happy and able to manage every hardship."	School inclusion can be promoted through activities inside and outside of school hours. - Osman et al. (2020) Interacting with others close to them was another way through which youth experienced belonging through immersion in the present moment. In these interactions, the youth perceived not only interpersonal connections, but	The opportunity to nurture passions (new and old) and participate in a group can promote a sense of belonging. This may be furthered by building friendships with peers with shared interests. Doing things with others creates a sense of normality. A sense of camaraderie through		You pointed out that the participants might be influenced by their families and something was decided by their parents. I agreed with you. When we move to a new environment, we prefer to spend our time with someone closer to us (to the participant, they are their families, same ethnic group). Therefore, it makes	Shared interests and activities with others (peers, teachers and/or families) may create more meaningful experiences, and support the development of a sense of belonging during resettlement. This is not necessarily the same as those who participate in groups with their families/refugee communities only, which may position them as 'outsiders' in their host community.
Recommendations for teachers	"It's only sometimes, but my teacher doesn't answer my question. She is busy with other kids. She kind of ignores me…My suggestion for my teacher would be please don't always pick the same person just like from your background, pick all people. She should include everyone in discussions and activities, not just the local students. I think she assumes I don't know the answer".	Participant XXX expresses how classroom time is extremely difficult as she feels invisible and she desperately does not like how it makes her feel. One of the ways in which she feels invisible is the teacher's inability to ensure that she understands what XXX is saying or attempts to actively include her in classroom activities. Similarly, participant XXX feels ignored, particularly when considering how the teacher responds and interacts with local,	Participants recalled experiences of 'othering' (e.g., non-belonging) in the classroom specifically, even if this was unintentional. Many of them were able to identify ways in which they think teachers could alter their approach to working with newly resettled children. There seems to be a sense of existing knowledge and agency	Teachers' low expectations of and confidence in newly resettled children could also cause them to feel infantilised.	The children felt that they didn't get respect from their teachers. They expected that the school/ teacher should provide them with a safe place where they are respected, they are understood, they are not different from other children (the local children)	Added new conceptual cateogory 'Being infantilised, underestimated and dehumanised'. Reviewer 1 suggested being infantilised, and reviewer 2 added 'underestimated' to capture feeling disrespected and teachers having low expectations of participants. The researcher then reflected on how participants had also commented on not being seen as human by their teachers.
Concept of language & culture	"For me, fitting in means to speak in Dari with my friends who are from the same backgrounds." "In this picture, I drew that whatever teacher writes on the board, I do not understand it, because it's a new language for me, I mostly ask from my class fellows".	For participants XXX and XXX, friends give them a sense of safety in that they invite them to join in activities and they can speak to them in a common language if they are from the same linguistic background. In addition, classmates play a critical role because they broker linguistic boundaries, particularly in helping translate and/or explain what the	Peers with shared languages can help to foster a sense of belonging in a context where teachers seem to do the opposite. Belonging is not only shaped by whether you can speak the same language, but through the practical and cultural			Shared language and cultural practices as a facilitator for belonging (e.g., peers who speak the same language or make efforts to). The opposite is also true, and being unable to speak the host country language or being penalised for speaking their native language, may further feelings of marginalisation.

Financial burden	"...in our canteen there is some halal food but they cost too much money. Food is expensive and I cannot enjoy that, when everyone else is enjoying food from canteen I feel left out." "...I am sad and tired and have no money and no family…" "They think…when you come (to host country), you find a crate of money out the back of your house. You just go and pick it, put it in a packet, post it to Africa. People need to work but they're not going to understand that.	Although seemingly simple, the offerings at the school canteen can create opportunities for belonging or ignite feelings of exclusion. - Amina et al. (2021) Financial responsibilities also affected relationships and belonging, with some participants being left without food/clothing/school bus tickets and basic necessities, and thus being faced with competing choices (e.g., not eating in order to let parents eat)	A child's financial circumstances can either facilitate a sense of belonging or hinder the process. Children's financial circumstances are widely misunderstood and part of the stigma and 'othering' refugee children/families are subjected to.			A person's financial circumstances and responsibilites may develop or hinder feelings of belonging. Some could not afford food at their school canteen, while others had increased responsibilities in their host country due to taking on roles their parents could not do (e.g., due to children typically being more literatate, proficient in the local language and generally more able to acculturate than their parents, or being alone if UASC and having to support themselves somehow).
Maintaining connections to country of origin	"In Iran, we have a special place. It's about, I think, one thousand years ago. And one thousand years ago, we had a big country. Iran was very big, and I think they made some big buildings with something like this art. It's a big horse, with stone and iron. This is something we have now, it's some point from my past. Now I can think about this horse, what happened in my past and what we have now." "things that remind you of, to your…	Paricipants described a deep experience of the present, through the connections and personified meanings they attached to their environments. This was about more than a physical space, but a body of memories and representations of what it meant to experience belonging. A sense of belonging was conveyed as an experiential experience where various affective states and memories were activated, and senses engaged. These processes allowed the youth to fully	Maintaining attachment to country of origin and cultural identity. A sense of belonging was not just about the present space, but remaining connected to past, sensory memories that serve as a cultural anchor. This was a poignant experience for those who had been separated from their families, and so these memories were all they had. I.e., past reminders can be pleasant or painful.	Makes sense. I wonder if migrating implies that there is something unsafe or dangerous about home and therefore they want to emphasise their appreciation for home and maintain their connections for things that did make them feel safe.	I agree with your interpretation. I think that the parents (first-generation immigrants) worried that the next generation would forget where they are originally from. They used some ways to make the next generation could remember their home countries and hoped that the children could be proud of their home culture.	A sense of belonging is also supported if/when able to maintain connections to their home culture. The experience of displacement can cause child refugees to view their home country as unsafe, but they may still wish to feel connected to their cultural roots and practices promoted by their parents, so that they do not forget where they came from. Something about pride here but perhasps also humility?
Recreating feelings of family & home	"second family" "When I am with my friends, I feel like I'm home… They make me feel home, they make me feel better than ever" "I saw then that the school gives us education, gives us whatever we need,	Parents too described a sense of integration in their children, who they saw as becoming part of the community and developing feelings of kinship in the new environment. One said that people at school facilitated a sense of belonging in her child through functioning as a "second family".	A sense of belonging is fostered by being welcomed into a local community and forging close relationships with peers, creating feelings of home and family.			This could fall under the category of support and inclusion, or the above category of maintaining connections to their home country. These factors may be promoted through building new friendships that make them feel more supported in their resettlement and nurture feelings of 'home and family'.

Belonging to a shared earth: 'We are one'	“When I look at the stars in the night time, it makes me feel happy, the shining of the stars. Yes, it makes me very comfortable”	Hence the experience of belonging took on a transcendent quality, in which youth from refugee backgrounds connected with their surroundings through embodied physical space and feelings of	Belonging is about more than a physical space or one moment in time, but being part of something bigger; one earth, one sky, nature, time; aspects that are shared by	“We are one” concept? could be that belongingness means connecting on the shared or the universalities of human experiences and		Adjusted name of conceptual category from 'Belonging to a shared earth' to incorporate idea that 'we are one'
Concept of gratitude	"[Our parents] left their home country for us to get better opportunities. … In Sweden, you have free education, free healthcare, so it is good here." “I saw then that the school gives us	All pariticipants expressed gratitude for the opportunities given by their host country and their parents, which contrasts with how life may have been if they had remained in war-torn Somalia.	A sense of gratitude upon reflecting on the life and world they left behind, and how things could have been so much worse for them.			A sense of gratitude upon reflecting on the life and world they left behind, and their new opportunities. Things could have been so much worse for them.
Migratory loss & loneliness	[Explaining their drawing] "The boat is me. The ocean is the world."... "Just the world [.. .] but it does not mean (that I am) free [.. .] it is difficult".... “sometimes the sun is painful, as is your life”	Feelings of fear and loneliness were prevalent during the early stages of resettlement - Hastings (2012)	Feeling like a boat being alone at sea, and the sea resembling the rest of the world - but this is a metaphor for being alone, rather than free			A possible theme or subtheme here, the metaphor of the boat alone at sea. This could reflect being alone, but also afraid, misunderstood and cast aside from the rest of the world.
Coping strategies	"Integration is not only about immigrant youths integrating into native groups; both should try to understand each other, and school is a good place to do that."…	Participants stressed the bidirectional nature of acculturation. With this, adolescents found acceptance and self-reliance to be important.	Belonging is bidirectional and requires a degree of resilience and acceptance; accepting personal responsibility to adapt into their new culture, and		Besides the coping strategies, I think there is another concept "encouragement". In the first five quotes, the participants	Added new concept 'Words of encouragement'.
Stigma, discrimination & societal isolation	"There are a lot of teachers who joke about the girls’ veils and ask why they do not take off their veils. They say, for instance, “Isn’t it warm?” They ask all those stupid questions, and then everybody looks at [the girls] and laughs." "If you wrote everything correctly in your task and the exam, the teachers would not believe that you did it, and they think that someone else helped you". "[The] same [thing] happened to me.	School was a prominent setting for direct and indirect experiences of discrimination. Participants also expressed feeling discouraged by teachers. These experiences posed as barriers to acculturation and left participants feeling vulnerable, excluded and sometimes angry. Participants reported feeling stressed, hopeless and lower in confidence, and some referred to their friends who had dropped out of school in response to discrimnation. - Osman et al. (2020)	Some children felt discriminated due to their migratory status, either through comments on their appearance or being underestimated and discouraged with regards to their academic potential and future hopes, which affected the process of belonging at school. This seemed pronounced by comparisons to their non-refugee peers, who seemed to be treated more fairly. Perceived stigma around experiencing mental health			Stigma, discrimination and societal isolation' captures experiences of racism, exclusion, shame around mental health diffciulties and feelings of marginalisation. This overlaps with many other concepts relating to language and cultural differences, migratory loneliness and exclusion. This also maps onto the metaphor of being a boat alone at sea. However, it feels like a powerful concept in its own right given its impact on belonging experiences. I feel this will be a theme in its own right, or at least a sub theme

Gender inequalities	"...that's the culture that they have. Girls can't do anything but boys can do anything they want." "Like sometime I get home around 4.30pm and I have to work in my house. And (then I have to) go over to my brother's house. Four boys in the house, they are not married and yeah. I have to go and cook. I am the youngest. I have to go and prepare some things, clean the house and go back. Yeah and then (I have to go and do the same with) my cousin…and (then) … I come home and cook. Yeah	Many reported gender differences and inequalities typical of their home country, that seemed to migrate with them. E.g. their brothers could go out "whenever they wanted", with "whoever they wanted", but the girls were expected to stay home, cook and clean. Many from the female groups reported living a dual life, one of which their parents knew nothing about. Most female groups also described parenting double standards against the backdrop of gender inequality in their broader communities, where women had fewer rights/freedoms than men	Gender inequalities migrated with some of the participants in a way that negatively impacts their feelings of belonging within a new community. Being subject to the gender roles of their country of origin means they are unable to escape their oppressive past lives. A learned helplessness/hopeless acceptance (that's just the way it is)			For some participants, gender stereotypes and inequalities appeared to migrate from their country of origin alongside them. Young female refugees were expected to fulfil certain roles in the home and were not allowed the same rights or freedoms as their male siblings, for example. Moreover, male participants felt the pressure of their gender in not being able to voice their mental health difficulties (e.g.. being a man means you have to be strong).
A sense of identity (belonging between cultures)	"I do not know which country I belong to or which culture I have,"... "I did not grow up in Somalia, and here, I do not celebrate the Swedish midsummer." "I feel like I have to be a different person"	Not all participants felt accepted in Swedish society, but felt they would no longer be considered Somali if they returned to their home country either. Instead, they would be people of the 'diaspora'. - Osman et al. (2020) Some groups suggested that parents did	Participants referred to falling between the gaps of belonging to their host country and their country of origin. For some this felt like an identity crisis, and for others a dual life, where they could be one person with their families and another outside of the home.			The term 'cultural inbetweenness' captures this well, I feel. A feeling of not belonging to one's country of origin or their host country, and at the same time trying to acculturate but wanting to maintain their cultural identity. This could come under the concept of 'maintaining connections to country of origin'.
Distrust of services	"...nobody knows. Most of the people, they don't know" "'who's gonna keep what is told (to) them private?" "they don't understand your problems", "they don't help", "they just want to talk" and "offer advice". "You wouldn't even think of it. For example, if a Sudanese girl thinks she's pregnant or something and then	Many reported that neither they nor their friends went beyond their peer networks for help, despite sharing many personal (family/social) problems for which settlement and mainstream services are available. Participants knew little of these services or did not seem to understand the role of services they knew about. Perceptions of services were also impacted by the broader politcal climate. E.g., Muslim participants reported that	Participants voiced a general distrust of services, based on fears of not being understood, and doubts about confidentiality. Cultivation of fear and marginalisation within and from services.			Feelings of fear and marginalisation were futhered by not feeling able to access or trust services (e.g., health services, community support agencies, interpreters, etc.) Participants doubted that their disclosures would be kept confidential and were certain professionals would not be able to help them due to their unique, traumatic experiences so many others would not be able to relate to. This also hints at feeling helpless.

Physical & emotional impact of resettlement	"I feel unwell and I am sad and tired and have no money and no family. Everything at once [.. .]If I am not happy, why go to school? [.. .] You cannot learn anything if you are worrying and tired [...] My support person (social worker) does not understand me. She does not understand why I cannot attend school" "It makes me sad) When I am having a hard time, and they (people in general or social workers) do not understand that I am having a hard time now. They say, 'you are not social, you should be social' [...] They do not understand that I have problems now.	Adolescents expressed feeling misunderstood... experiencing that they could not live up to a dominant cultural norm or standards of 'normal' adolescence, e.g., being social or attending school due to their mental health difficulties… Feeling misunderstood and experiencing overly high expectations from others may contribute to and be reinforced by a perceived stigma related to "mental health difficulties", i.e. feeling different due to experiences of emotional distress and thus, contributing to a vicious cycle of being an "outsider". ...poor mental health was described as a	The impact of migration on physical and mental health made it harder to adjust and resettle, in a way that professionals could not see or understand (feeling misunderstood). This was exacerbated by the uncertainty surrounding their circumstances and futures.		I'm not sure if there are differences between emotional and mental here, or you might want to emphasize the emotional impact. I would say that mental impact is a concept including emotional impact, and I also think the participants mentioned the issues with not only emotion but also mental health	The emotional impact of migration on physical and mental health made it harder to adjust and resettle, in a way that professionals and peers could not see or understand, causing participants to feel misunderstood and alone. This was exacerbated by the uncertainty surrounding their circumstances and futures. This conceptual category overlaps with the concept of stigma, discrimination and societal isolation in many ways, as well as the concept of migratory loneliness. This does feel like an important concept in its own right however, and could be a theme or subtheme.
Thinking about the future	"If you have dreams, there is no one who can guide you." "I am also very happy about the future because when we go to school, we get an education, we have a dream [.. .]"	A lack of supportive adults affected participants' acculturation efforts. - Osman et al. (2020) A large proportion of participants valued learning English in particular, but also learning in general/receiving an education. Some reflected hopes for the	Feelings of hope or hopelessness about the future impacted participants' thoughts about the future. Similar to the concept of gratitude, some indicated feeling hopeful with the new development opportunities they now had and skills they could develop through shared activities.			This may be better termed as 'feelings of hope or hopelessness', and overlaps with the concept of gratitude as well as concepts relating to shared activities and language development. Unsure if this could become a theme or subtheme in its own right.
Being seen	"Once I helped my friend and my teacher appreciated me a lot. At that time I felt that I am part of this class and I belong. I felt very happy about it…"	The participants wanted their teachers to not only notice them but also acknowledge and recognise their knowledge, behaviours, skills and interests. Being acknowledged by the teacher communicated to these learners	Added by reviewer 1	Being "seen" that is a part of belongingness that is quite different than just giving someone attention.		Being seen is about being acknowledged and having their efforts and development recognised. It is also about having a legitimate place in their new community and being accepted.

Being infantilised, underestimated and dehumanised	"I think that a more competent and knowledgeable teacher can help you to adjust, do you understand? It is important to have a teacher who thinks more of you as a human being"	Participants named school as an important area for facilitating belonging, with some suggesting that the difference in a teacher's approach to newly resettled refugees is the difference between being viewed as a human or not.	Added by reviewer 1/researcher This seems to be linked to wanting to be understood and respected, too.	See above re. how low expectations and confidence may cause refugees to feel infantilised.	I googled the word "infantilize", and according to the Cambridge Dictionary, it said, "to treat someone as if that person were a child, with the result	Both 'feeling infantilised' and 'feeling underestimated' seem appropriate here.
Words of encouragement	"Integration is not only about immigrant youths integrating into native groups; both should try to understand each other, and school is a good place to do that."… "but we are the one who came to this country, and we should try to integrate, isn't it?" "There are challenges and changes in	Participants stressed the bidirectional nature of acculturation. With this, adolescents found acceptance and self-reliance to be important. Many believed it was their responsibility to acculturate - and self-reliance would be their remaining support in the absence of other forms of support (e.g., school, family, society). Some also cited religion				A possible subcategory within coping strategies, added by rewiewer 2. The researcher had also noted reccuring 'words of encouragement', but had treated this as a descriptive, rather than a conceptual category. The collaborative process concluded that this could be a standalone conceptual category.

Appendix H

Table H1

Synthesising Translations

Study / Key concepts	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	No. of instances	Shared patterns of meaning (synthesising translations) and quotes for potential theme names
Support & inclusion									7	Feeling included/a felt sense of inclusion because of friends and appreciation from teachers. Authors interpretation: a sense of emotional stability through inclusion, help and support of friends.
Exclusion									8	Feeling unsupported at school. Feeling ignored, invisible and like teachers don't care, "It seems I am invisible"
Seeking protection									4	Friends are protectors/ Friends provide comfort and protection. Family bonds also offer security.
Helping others, feeling needed & appreciated									5	Feeling appreciated for helping others/ Feeling able to contribute to society if accepted… "if society accepts you, you feel included and can contribute to positive things". Wanting to help others in same position.
Family connectedness									4	Importance of family bonds/membership for creating a sense of security and belonging/togetherness. "family relationship is the most important thing that is affecting each and every aspect of our life".
Severed relationships & disconnection									3	A felt sense of distance, disconnection and yearning through physical separation from family. Or feeling disconnected from families due to a lack of support and differing attitudes to adjustment.

Study / Key concepts	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	No. of instances	Shared patterns of meaning (synthesising translations) and quotes for potential theme names
Shared activities									3	Inclusion and confidence promoted through shared, meaningful activities and group membership. A strategy which "helps you feel happy and able to manage every hardship", and "learn how to adapt to society". Despite the word inclusion this feels separate to the support/inclusion category, and a meaningful translation in its own right (e.g., helpful adjustment strategies).
Recommendations for teachers									5	Suggestions for teachers based on exclusion experiences and feeling ignored. Merged into exclusion category and held in mind for later discussion.
Concept of language & culture									6	Fitting in means speaking in the same language as my friends who are from the same backgrounds. Importance of shared language, linguistic brokers or opportunities to learn language are important for inclusion (merged into support/inclusion category). However, three of these studies (1, 2 & 8) also acknowledged language and cultural barriers; something that can promote feelings of being alone and an outsider.
Financial burden									2	Feelings of increased responsibility to look after family during resettlement - and competing choices. For some, this was more about the a need to look after oneself if alone.
Maintaining connections to country of origin									7	Maintaining cultural identity, or maintaining attachment/connections to country of origin. [Belonging means to] "belong to my country"… "It's something special about my country. I love my country. I think I've learnt [many things in] my country, and I have something, some [things I] remember about my country. My friends, my family".
Recreating feelings of family & home									2	"When I am with my friends, I feel like I'm home… They make me feel home, they make me feel better than ever"… "…the school gives us education, gives us whatever we need, so then they are part and parcel of our family" (merge into support/inclusion).
Belonging to a shared earth: We are one									1	Belonging as a transcendent quality, or belonging to a larger entity.

Study / Key concepts	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	No. of instances	Shared patterns of meaning (synthesising translations) and quotes for potential theme names
										"It doesn't matter if you are from Africa, Asia, Europe, South America. Just we are people and we live only in one earth". "Being part of a place. The people accept you. It doesn't matter if you are from outside of Australia and you're from Africa, Asia, just you are belonging here"… Another strategy?
Concept of gratitude									1	A felt sense of gratitude/the ability to dream and look forward... "(our parents) left their home country for us to get better opportunities"
Migratory loss & loneliness									2	"Being a foreigner"/"Being a refugee"/"Being an outsider"… "The boat is me, the ocean is the world". Feelings of fear, loneliness and being misunderstood…. "I feel like I have to be a different person"…"You always be thinking of going back home cos nobody wants you here". "First day I feel like a lone person, like I don't feel like I belong to this country. When I learn all the laws and about all the people's behaviours, like I feel now like I belong in this country now."…. "I cannot tell them about my life…".
Coping strategies									6	Belonging as a bidirectional effort/Belonging works both ways/ A sense of responsibility and self-reliance in resettlement (e.g., acceptance, gratitude, engaging in activities, forming relational bonds with others). Helpful strategies. On the other hand, some tried to cope through acts of disremembering, or attempts to forget (e.g., self-harm). I.e., unhelpful coping strategies (merge with impact of resettlement on physical and mental health?)
Stigma, discrimination & societal isolation									4	Direct and indirect experiences of discrimination/racism and unfairness, in schools and the community. Feeling vulnerable, excluded, angry, stressed and hopeless. Could merge into exclusion category – though this maps into several categories (e..g., being an outsider/foreigner/refugee… feeling alone/misunderstood).

Study / Key concepts	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	No. of instances	Shared patterns of meaning (synthesising translations) and quotes for potential theme names
										This also included feelings of shame and stigma around mental health. "We will be seen as extremely scum in their mind"… "nobody wants you here"/"nobody wants you around"… ""I don't wanna be known as the freak from another country that can't do anything"… "politicians and the government do not see the human being…"
Emotional impact of resettlement on physical and mental health									1	Feeling tired, angry, misunderstood and low in self-esteem/ Feeling unable to communicate with peers… "And that's when we start thinking that we are just the most useless thing on the planet." Perceived stigma relating to mental health difficulties. Shame and wanting to conceal problems…coping through "acts of disremembering" or attempting to forget (e.g., through self-harm, drinking, dropping out). Merges with coping strategies (unhelpful).
Distrust of services										Negative perceptions of services… /Fear of further marginalisation through accessing services (shaped by cultural expectations and shame around disclosing personal problems outside of the family, and political climate about extremism fears)… "who's gonna keep what is told (to) them private?"… "they don't understand your problems", "they don't help"… This may fall under 'migratory loneliness'/feeling misunderstood.
Gender inequalities									1	Double standards against the backdrop of gender inequality in their broader communities. Women have fewer rights than men, who can do what they want – but men also have to be "tough", they can't show weakness. The data supporting this may also fit into stigma, discrimination & societal isolation (though more about societal expectations than isolation). This concept in itself may not be translatable.
A sense of identity (falling between cultures)									3	Cultural identities changed by migration/ Feeling rejected in host culture/society… "I do not know which country I belong to or which culture I have"… "I feel like I have to be a different person".

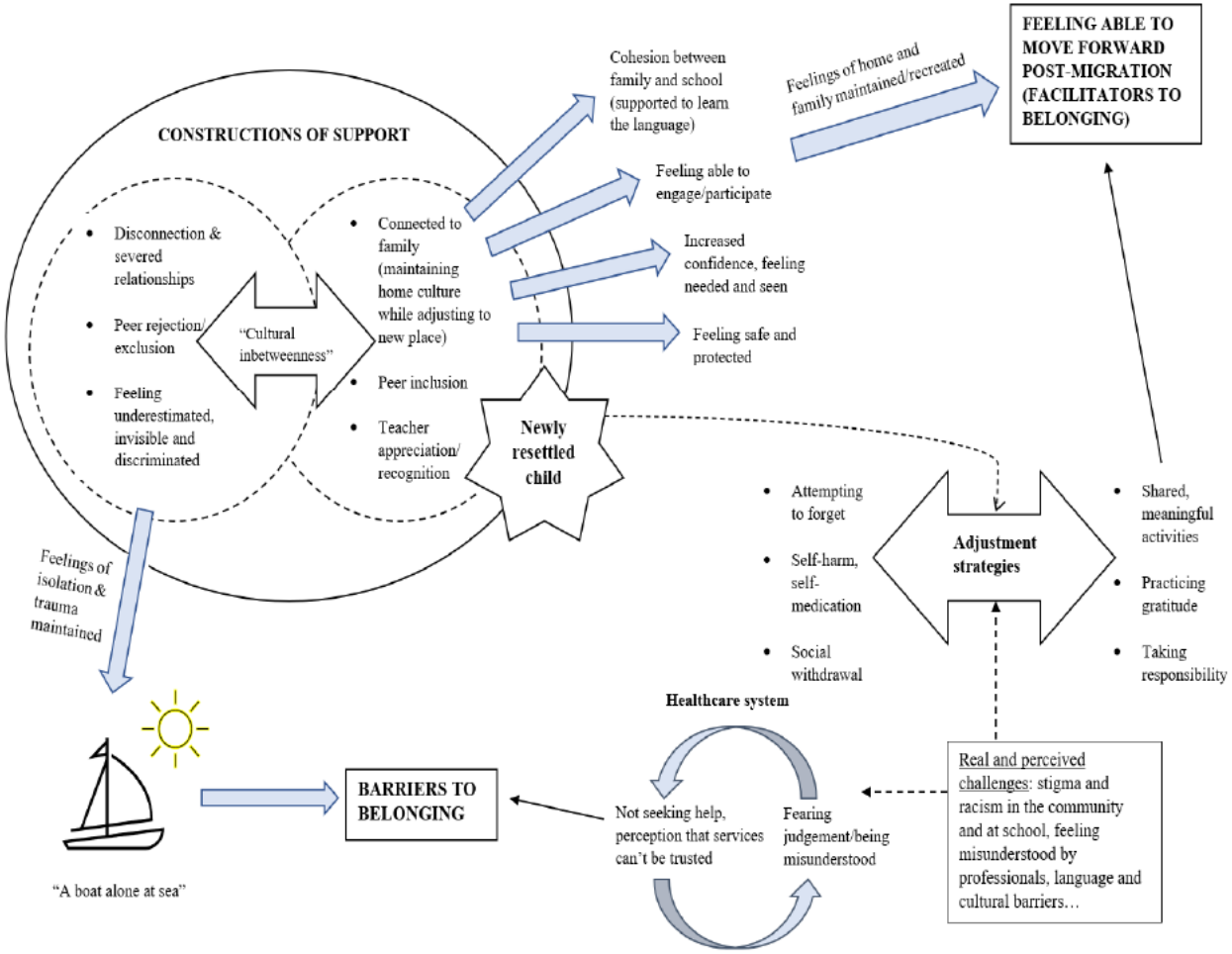
Study / Key concepts	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	No. of instances	Shared patterns of meaning (synthesising translations) and quotes for potential theme names
										Conflicting attitudes towards home culture/first language; emotional attachment vs. barrier to adjustment. Merge with maintaining cultural identity.
Thinking about the future									3	Hope for the future/ Setting goals for the future/ Embracing prospect of future opportunities – facilitated by opportunities to learn the language and develop new skills. education in host country. Merge with concept of gratitude and coping strategies (e.g., Feelings of hope, or strategies for moving forward?)
Being seen									1	Being acknowledged and recognised by teachers/ Being appreciated for helping others. Merge with support/inclusion.
Being infantilised, underestimated & dehumanised									2	The difference in a teacher's approach to newly resettled refugees is the difference between being viewed as a human or not.
Words of encouragement									1	Merged with coping strategies.

Appendix I

Creating Visual 'Maps'

Figure I1

Researcher Visual 'Map' & Textual Line of Argument



The newly resettled child who migrates with good support structures in place is likely to experience more family-school cohesion and thus feel supported to adjust and move forward in their new culture, which includes learning the language. They may also feel more able to participate in shared activities with peers, which can instil confidence, feelings of protection, and comfort, being seen by others, and a sense of feeling at home. If these structures are in place, the child is more likely to engage in meaningful group activities, and opportunities to learn and grow, which taken together, can create a sense of belonging.

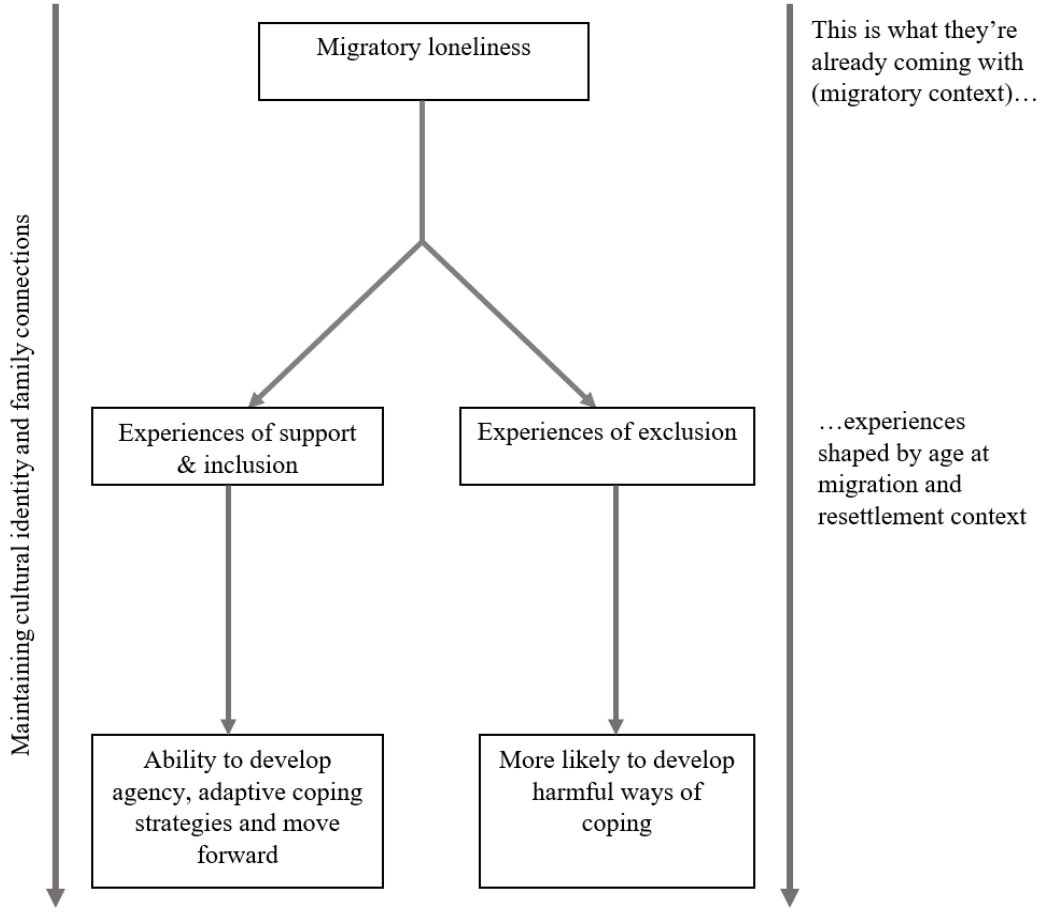
Those who migrate *without* family, or those who migrate with a family struggling to adjust, are more likely to struggle in the context of an unsupportive, disconnected home environment. This means family-school cohesion is less likely, regardless of whether teachers are supportive or not. For many, teachers and peers would exclude them based on their appearance or language difficulties, and some reported experiences of bullying and discrimination. These experiences are more likely to further feelings of marginalisation and vulnerability (e.g., feeling like a "boat", alone and fearful at sea), as well as feeling invisible, dehumanised and misunderstood. In some cases, this can lead to harmful coping strategies, such as self-harm, and drinking.

Age and context run alongside these possible scenarios/structures, insofar as those who migrated as young children, and were studied within an early childhood centre or primary school context, were more likely to adjust to their new culture, learn the language and cultural expectations, and form relational bonds. Older children or adolescents, however, studied in secondary school, family homes, local community or service organisation contexts, reported finding it harder to adjust, learn the language and noted greater frictions between their home life and educational or community life. Adolescents were also more vocal about the reasons they were being discriminated and would encounter direct experiences of stigma and racism in the street; they also had fixed views about services in their new culture, which created feelings of being alone, misunderstood and served as a barrier to belonging. This stopped them from seeking help if needed, and furthered feelings of isolation through their social withdrawal.

However, for some older children, regardless of the context they were placed in, there was a sense of agency and gratitude for the opportunities they have now that they are in a safer country and have left their past lives behind. Some mentioned how it was their responsibility to make the effort to learn in their new culture and integrate, and this seemed to instil feelings of hope for the future and a sense of belonging

Figure I2

Research Support Team Visual 'Map' & Textual Line of Argument



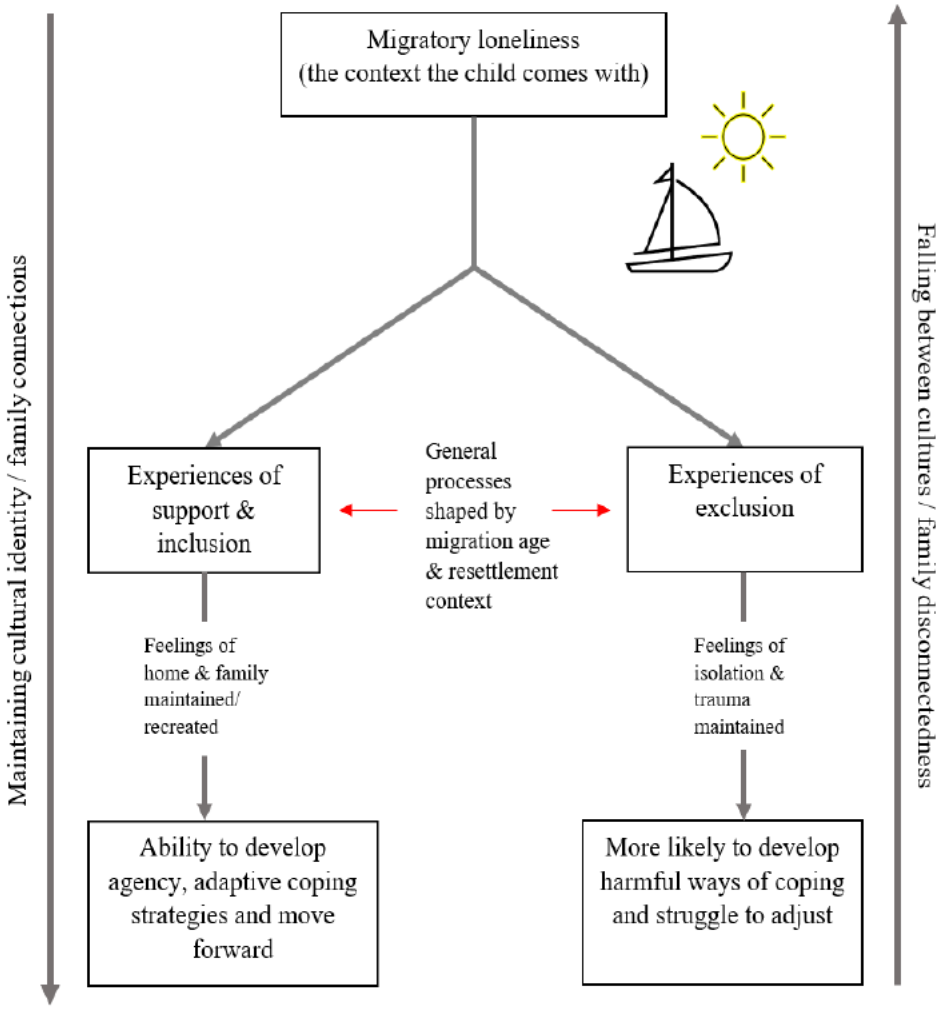
There seems to be a migratory context (migratory loneliness) that young refugees already come with, and then there seems to be a fork in the road where they go on to experience general processes of adolescence.

For some, this may include supportive, inclusive experiences (e.g., friendly peers and teachers who recognise and appreciate them), while others encounter more experiences of exclusion and discrimination (e.g., peer rejection and bullying, teachers who seem to ignore them). These processes seem to be shaped by their age at migration and the context they are resettling in (e.g., younger refugees at primary school find it easier to resettle, learn the language and make friends compared to those resettling during adolescence, at secondary school, the local community or in services).

Running alongside these processes is the idea that some young refugees remain connected to their family and country of origin, and thus maintain their cultural identity, but others feel a sense of falling between cultures and may be disconnected from their family. These experiences then lead to their ability to develop adaptive coping strategies or unhealthy ways of coping.

Figure I3

Collaborative visual 'map & textual line of argument



'Migratory loneliness' represents the context that child refugees come with. Then, there seems to be a fork in the road where they go on to experience general processes, where some will experience supportive and inclusive environments, where they encounter friendly peers and teachers who recognise and appreciate them. Others encounter more experiences of exclusion, from peer rejection and bullying to feeling invisible to teachers.

These experiences seem to be shaped by age at migration and the context children are resettling into. For example, younger children resettling in primary school or early education settings may find it easier to adapt, make friends and learn the language, compared to older children resettling in secondary schools, residential settings, the local community or service organisations. Older children may find it more difficult to learn the language and meet cultural expectations. Furthermore, they were more vocal about political issues and instances of racism and discrimination being directed at them.

Running alongside these processes is the idea that some young refugees are still connected to their family and country of origin, and thus find it easier to maintain their cultural identity. On the other side, others may have been physically separated from their family or they may feel disconnected from families that have migrated with them, but have not been supportive and, for some, this has included abuse and ongoing conflict. For these children, there may be a sense of falling between cultures and not feeling like they belong anywhere.

These processes then lead to the ability to either develop agency and adaptive coping strategies, or unhealthy ways of coping, both of which will determine whether a sense of belonging is established, or migratory loneliness enhanced.

Appendix J

Childhood Loneliness in context

The growing concerns around loneliness in childhood have been recently enhanced in the context of covid-19 and, specifically, the distress caused by stay-at-home regulations that were enforced around the world. Such regulations led to 1.5 billion students to experience school closures (Hards et al., 2021), and reports of children and young people feeling three times lonelier than they had done prior to the pandemic (Mental Health Foundation, 2021). Moreover, global evidence has linked these changes to significant harm and a range of unmet health and social needs, including increased trauma experiences, many of which may have gone missed due to a reduction in child protection referrals, less access to social support, the curtailment of mental health services, and a rise in suicide rates (Ford et al., 2021; Viner et al., 2021).

Appendix K

Table K1

Science4Friends Workshop Content

Session	Content Summary	Aim of session
1	• Introductions and facial expressions - Setting group and individual goals related to social connectedness and confidence - Young people introduced to facial expressions and play team games ('emotional charades') involving expressing and interpreting emotional expressions	- Understanding why we feel emotions, where they come from and how to manage them - Working as a team and developing interpersonal competencies - Developing skills in planning (e.g., goal setting)
2	• Emotions and the body - Labelling emotions - Learning about the fight or flight response through role playing different hormone responses - Changing stress levels experiment (supermarket shopping game)	- Normalising emotions and how they present in the body - Learning how to reduce stress through relaxation - Exploration of science-based skills and knowledge (e.g., learning how the brain, body and mind interact to produce emotions) - Problem-solving in the moment
3	• Emotions and the brain - Building a model brain out of playdough - Introduction to different neurotransmitters and their roles, followed by memory game	In addition to understanding how the brain is related to emotions, to enhance critical thinking and creativity skills.

Session	Content Summary	Aim of session
4	• Mindfulness and gratitude - Introduction to mindfulness; in pairs, exploring techniques using 'quick mindfulness stations' (e.g., mindful walking, square breathing, grounding exercise, and using bubbles to focus on breath) - Mindfulness card sorting - Defining and practicing gratitude - Reviewing personal goals set in week 1	Learning how to regulate emotions through mindfulness. To develop skills in creativity, teamwork and critical thinking.
5	• Emotions and research - Discussing some of the scientific research around emotions and mental health - Barometer group exercise ('strongly agree' to 'strongly disagree' in response to numerous controversial statements about mental health) - Affirmations experiment - Increasing confidence experiment (e.g., deep breathing, laughing, smiling, playing a game, being complemented, positive affirmations, etc.)	Reducing loneliness through normalising difficulties with mental health. Connecting through shared experiences.
6	• Risk-taking behaviour and happiness - Consequences of risk-taking - Risky balloon pump exercise - Discussion around what influences risk-taking - What is happiness? Discussing the factors that lead to happiness (e.g., physical exercise, connection to nature, social relationships, kindness, purpose in life, etc.) - Activity for mental wellbeing (e.g., happiness mood board, potting a plant, or planning a community event).	To understand what factors might help a young person to lead a meaningful life.
7	• Drama exercise/ Movie night	To increase social connection through shared interests.

Session	Content Summary	Aim of session
8	• ‘Varia-balls’ game - In teams, young people play basketball. When they score, they only get the point if they, or someone in their team, can name one of the factors that lead to happiness. - Video exercise. Young people watch a clip from the film ‘Spirited Away’, and record their thoughts, emotions, bodily sensations and behaviours throughout the clip	Understanding link between thoughts, feelings and behaviours.

Appendix L

Confirmation of Ethical Approval

22nd March 2021

Dear Dr Woodcock

Re: "Exploring/Understanding how inclusive community youth programmes influence identity development through social connectedness in children and adolescents from disadvantaged backgrounds: a qualitative study."

Ethics application ERN_ 19-1520AP9

Thank you for your application to use the above Programme of Work, which has now been considered by the Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics Ethical Review Committee.

The Committee has requested further information and amendments in relation to the following issues, to enable it to reach a decision on your application:

- In the application, it is proposed that participants will be contacted weekly in relation to consent. It was felt that the original proposal of one telephone follow up would be preferable.
- Please amend the participant information sheets for both children and parents to explain that confidentiality may have to be breached if there are any safeguarding concerns.

I look forward to your response to the points above.

Kind regards

Susan Cottam
Research Ethics Manager
Research Support Group

C Block Dome

Aston Webb Building
University of Birmingham
Edgbaston B15 2TT

Tel:
Email:

Web: https://intranet.birmingham.ac.uk/finance/RSS/Research-Support-Group/integrity-ethics-governance/Research-Ethics/index.aspx

29th March 2021

Dear Susan,

Re: "Exploring/Understanding how inclusive community youth programmes influence identity development through social connectedness in children and adolescents from disadvantaged backgrounds: a qualitative study."
Ethics application ERN 19-1520AP9

Thank you for getting back to us regarding the progress of my application to use the above programme of work.

Further to your request for more information, I have amended the application as follows:

- It is now proposed that participants will be contacted once, by telephone, as a follow-up in relation to gaining their consent. This change has been made and is highlighted on page 10 of the attached Word document.
- The information sheets for both children and parents now explicitly state that confidentiality may have to be breached if there are any safeguarding concerns. This amendment is highlighted on pages 29 and 31 of the attached Word document.

I have also attached a pdf version of the amended application, without the highlighted sections.

I am happy to provide any additional information, or make more amendments if needs be.

Best wishes,

Emily Trotter
Trainee Clinical Psychologist
University of Birmingham

Appendix M

Information Sheet for Young People

<u>Project focus:</u> How do the Science4Friends workshops help young people with their self-identity, by taking part in activities designed to tackle loneliness

Hi!

We are researchers from the University of Birmingham…

Emily Trotter is a Trainee Clinical Psychologist, working on this piece of research as part of her Doctorate course.

Dr Kate Woodcock is a Senior Lecturer, Emily's research supervisor and will be working on the project with Emily.

The goal of the study is to find out how the Science4Friends workshops you attend through All Saints Youth Project might help young people develop their self-identity, by targeting loneliness in their workshops. We are interested to hear about your experience of attending the programme and what being part of a group means to you. We think it is really important to give young people a voice to find out what may feel helpful and what may not feel helpful to you.

What happens if I decide to take part?

If you would like to be involved with the study, you will be required to attend one interview on your own, for about 45-60 minutes. This will involve about 10-15 questions only, but you can pause for a time out if you need it during this time! You can also request to have someone with you if you would like their support. There are no right or wrong answers to interview questions, we are just interested in hearing about your thoughts and experiences.

We are hoping interviews will be held at ASYP, a place that you know and feel comfortable, but if this is not possible with the Covid-19 situation, we will hold them over a video call (Zoom).

Interviews will be sound recorded to help us remember what was said, otherwise we may not remember when it comes to writing up the study. Once I have written down everything that was said and deleted your name from this, the sound recordings will be deleted too.

A few weeks after the interviews, you will be invited to a focus group to talk about some of the things that came up in the interviews. This will be an opportunity for you to tell me if I have got anything wrong! You do not have to attend the focus group if you don't want to. If you do come along, it will run for about 30-45 minutes and will be held either at ASYP or on Zoom. This will be with your peers who also attended the Science4Friends workshops, which means we can't guarantee that the things you discuss will be kept confidential.

Main points

- It is completely up to you whether you want to take part or not.
- If you do take part, you might find some of the questions to be a little confusing or upsetting. If this is the case, it is okay to take time out or ask me what I meant by the question.
- If you still feel uncomfortable, you can choose not to answer a question.
- If you do take part, we are the only people (you, us researchers, your ASYP workers and parent/guardian) who will know.
- Your involvement in the study could help other children and the development of future learning workshops.
- We will use your interview answers to write up a report, but your name will not be included in this and no one will know it was you.

- If you attend the focus group, make sure you only say what you are comfortable saying out loud. We cannot be sure that your peers will keep what you say private.

- If you take part and we become worried about any risk to you or anyone around you, we will have to tell someone at ASYP about our worries to make sure you are safe. This means we can't promise to keep everything you say confidential (private) if there are any safeguarding concerns.

- If you decide you want to take part but then change your mind, that's okay! Just tell me or someone at ASYP. You can also change your mind even after you've had your interview… you have two weeks to let me know and I will be able to delete your interview recording. Although I won't be able to do this after two weeks.

Any questions?

If you have any questions after reading through this, just telephone us on [redacted] (Kate), or email: [redacted] (Emily)

[redacted] (Kate)

If you would prefer for your parent/guardian to speak with us, that's absolutely fine. You can of course also speak with someone at ASYP if you feel more comfortable doing this. Their number is 0121 443 1842, or info@asyp.org.uk

You can also call the Samaritans: 0121 666 6644 or Childline: 0800 1111 if you feel upset at any time during the study. This will put you through to someone who is trained to listen and support you over the phone.

What happens now?

If you wish to take part in the study, please let me, Kate or an ASYP worker know so we can give you a consent form for you and your parent/guardian to fill in. Once this has been done, we can arrange your interview time.

Appendix N

Information Sheet for Parents or Guardians

<u>Project Title:</u> Addressing self-identity through loneliness in young people

Introduction

We would like to invite your child/child under your responsibility to take part in a research project being carried out by a researcher at the School of Psychology, University of Birmingham. It is being run by Emily Trotter, a Trainee Clinical Psychologist who will be running the project at All Saints Youth Project (ASYP). Emily is supervised by Dr Kate Woodcock, who is already known at the ASYP. There is no pressure for any of the young people to take part and it is entirely up to you whether your child takes part or not.

If you have any questions, please call or email Emily or Kate using the following contact details:

Tel.

Email: (Emily)

(Kate)

As the study will involve your child/child under your care, it is important that you both understand as much as possible about the project and what taking part will involve. It is also important that your child is happy to take part based on an understanding of what this means. A separate information sheet has been written for your child to help them to understand what the project involves. Please ensure they have read this or had this read to them, so they have all the information available.

Summary of the study

1. Your child's participation is **completely voluntary, there is no pressure to take part.**

2. The study aims to explore how specific learning programmes such as those run at ASYP might influence self-identity in young people, by targeting loneliness in their sessions.

3. Taking part in the research will involve attending a one-to-one, one-off interview (45-60 minutes), and at the end of the study, one focus group (30-45 minutes). If you are happy for your child to participate, they don't have to attend the focus group if

they would rather not. The interview will be the main source of collecting information for the research.

4. **All personal, identifiable information will remain confidential**. Only the researcher will know it has come from your child. Interviews will be audio recorded but transcribed within two weeks. Once transcribed, the recording will be permanently deleted, your child will be given a pseudonym and their interview responses will be **completely anonymous.** Some of your child's answers may be quoted within the study write up, which means it will not be 100% confidential, but no one will be able to identify your child from the information used for the study.

5. We may also have to breach confidentiality if any safeguarding concerns arise.

6. The focus groups will involve other children. Therefore, we cannot guarantee that peers will keep your child's responses confidential. Your child will be reminded of this before taking part in the group.

7. Once the study is completed, data taken from the interviews will be shared with other researchers and reports shared with the public. However, by this stage all information will be completely anonymous and it will not be possible to trace your child's interview responses back to them.

8. **Your child can withdraw from the study for up to two weeks after the interviews have taken place, without any adverse consequences and without having to give a reason.** If they wish to withdraw after the two-week time frame, their data will already be anonymised, and it would not be possible to identify or remove their influence from the study. Data from the focus group will not be deleted as it would not be possible to separate the written conversations between peers.

9. In order to take part, **we will need your written consent and the assent of your child**. This can be provided via a handwritten form, an email, or a text message if easier. If you provide your consent, we will then ask your child to provide their assent in writing before any research begins.

Aims of the study

This study is about developing a sense of identity in childhood and adolescence; a time in life when people often start asking the big and meaningful questions, such as "*who am I?*", "*where do I belong?*" and "*who am I going to be?*" Research has found a sense of identity to be important in reducing loneliness, something which has been a growing concern in young people with complex needs and/or potentially living in difficult circumstances.

We would like to learn how the 'Science4Friends' workshops, which were designed to promote social connection and defeat loneliness, might also influence identity development in young people. We believe this could be an important piece of research in general, but that it will also be helpful when developing future programmes held at the ASYP.

Where will the research take place?

It is hoped that the research will take place at ASYP (drop-in or gateway session), as this will be a familiar environment for your child. However, if Covid-19 prevents this, interviews will take place via a remote, secure platform such as Zoom Pro.

Who will be involved in collecting the data?

Emily Trotter (the researcher) and her supervisor, Dr Kate Woodcock. Emily will run the interviews alone.

What kinds of information will be recorded and what will we do with it?

- **Name and contact details**
    - These details will be on the consent form you and your child sign. These will be kept securely on a password protected electronic drive at the University of Birmingham for at least 10 years. The paper original copies will be confidentially shredded.
- **Audio recordings**
    - Interviews will be audio recorded only using a digital recorder. These will be stored securely on the University of Birmingham's research data store for two weeks. After two weeks, the recordings will have been transcribed, anonymised, and permanently deleted. The written transcripts will not contain any information that could link the data back to your child.

Are there any risks that individuals taking part in the study might face?

The interview questions will be based on personal concepts, thoughts, and feelings, which may cause discomfort or distress for some. However, the process will only go ahead if you, your child and their ASYP worker feel your child would be able to manage the interview situation well. Emily is experienced in working with a range of distressed individuals and

feels well equipped to help your child to feel safe and heard during the interviews and focus group. Questions will be asked clearly, slowly, and sensitively. Your child will also be given the option to pause and take time out if they feel they need it. Finally, an ASYP worker will be available to speak with your child after the interviews if they need any support.

What are the potential benefits for participants from taking part?

It is hoped that the study findings will tell us if and how the ASYP informal learning workshops influence identity development in young people. Taking part in the research will give your child the opportunity to have a voice and potentially make a change to future learning programmes.

If you and your child/child under your responsibility decide to participate, what will happen after that participation?

Once data has been collected and analysed, ASYP will be given a summary of findings and you will also be able to access this.

Confidentiality

Your child's identity will be protected throughout the research process. All information we collect will remain confidential and anonymised data will only be linked to your child's personal contact details via a unique identification code, which will be assigned to them at the beginning. Their personal information will be saved to a separate file to that containing their transcribed interview responses.

One exception to confidentiality lies with the University's Child Protection procedures. The researcher has a duty of care to disclose any concerns about the welfare of children to the safeguarding leads at the ASYP. This would mean confidentiality being broken to ensure the safety of the child and those around them. Similarly, if your child discloses any risk of harm to themselves or others, this information will need to be shared with the researcher's supervisor and appropriate procedures will need to be followed.

Consent

If you wish to find out more before consenting for your child to take part, please contact Emily or Kate using the contact details provided at the beginning of this information sheet. If you decided you would like to take part, you and your child will need to complete the written consent/assent forms. Alternatively, you can consent via email or text message. Before their

interview and before the focus group takes place, your child's understanding of the study will be checked and they will be asked to sign an assent form if they wish to continue.

Withdrawal

Both you and your child are able to withdraw from the study at any time up to two weeks after the interviews have taken place, without being asked to provide any information if you don't wish to do so. Even after you have given your consent, you or your child can cancel their participation without any adverse consequences. It will not be possible to destroy your child's interview data after this two-week time frame as it will have already be transcribed and anonymised. It will not be possible to destroy any information collected from the focus group, if your child/child under your responsibility chooses to attend this.

What if there is a problem?

Should you encounter any problems or have any further questions/concerns about the study, please contact Dr Kate Woodcock on [redacted] or at [redacted] in the first instance.

Review

The work will be reviewed by the Ethical Committee at the University of Birmingham.

Further information

In addition to being able to contact the research team, you may also contact ASYP on 0121 443 1842, or info@asyp.org.uk

Appendix O

Amended Information Sheet for Parents or Guardians

Project Title: Addressing self-identity through loneliness in young people

Introduction

We would like to invite your child/the child you care for to take part in a project being carried out by a researcher at the University of Birmingham. The research is based on the workshops your child has been attending on Mondays, after school. A separate information sheet has been written for your child.

If you have any questions or require a longer version of this information sheet, please contact Emily Trotter or Kate Woodcock using the following contact details:

[redacted] (Emily)

[redacted]. (Kate)

Key points

1. Your child's participation is **completely voluntary, there is no pressure to take part.**

2. The study aims to explore how learning programmes that are designed to strengthen social connections, might influence identity development in young people.

3. Taking part will involve your child attending a 1:1 discussion with a researcher (45-60 minutes), either at Moseley School – or online if preferred. At the end of the study, one discussion group (30-45 minutes) will be held. If you are happy for your child to participate in the 1:1 discussion, this does not mean they are expected to attend the discussion group if they would rather not.

4. **All identifiable information will remain confidential**. Only the researcher will know it has come from your child. All information provided by your child will be **completely anonymous.**

5. We will have to breach confidentiality if any safeguarding concerns arise.

6. The group discussion will involve other children. Therefore, we cannot guarantee that peers will keep your child's responses confidential. Your child will be reminded of this before taking part.

7. **Your child can withdraw from the study for up to two weeks after the interviews have taken place, by contacting Emily, Kate, or Alison, who is leading the workshops. They can withdraw without any adverse consequences and without having to give a reason.**

9. In order to take part, **we will need your written consent and the assent of your child**, before any research begins. This can be provided via a handwritten form, email, or a text message if easier.

10. **Are there any risks that individuals taking part in the study might face?**

The interview questions will be based on personal thoughts and feelings, which may cause discomfort. Questions will be asked clearly and sensitively. Your child will be given the option to pause and take time out if they feel they need it.

11. **What are the potential benefits for participants from taking part?**

Taking part in this will give your child the opportunity to have a voice and potentially make a change to future learning programmes.

Appendix P

Assent Form for Young People

Please fill in this form if you would like to take part in our research and you have told your parent(s) or guardian(s). Please write your initials in either the YES or NO column, for each question.

If you would prefer to email us or send a text message to give your consent instead, please find information at the end of this form on how to do this.

Study Topic: *Looking at how ASYP learning programmes influence identity development and loneliness.*

Please write your initials in the correct column to answer the questions.

	YES	**NO**
1. Have you read the information about our project or asked someone else to read it to you?		
2. Do you understand what the project is about?		
3. Have you asked all of the questions you want?		
4. Has someone answered all your questions, and do you understand their answers?		
5. Do you know who you should ask if you think of any more questions about the project?		
6. Do you understand that it is your choice to take part or not, and that nobody else can decide for you?		
7. Do you understand that even if you decide you would like to take part now, you can still change your mind and stop for up to two weels after the interviews happen?		
8. Do you understand that you can ask us to throw away the information we have collected from your interviews for up to two weeks after you have taken part?		
9. Do you understand that we can throw away your interview answers if you no longer want to take part in the study, but if you have taken part in the focus group too we will not be able to throw away this information.		
10. Do you understand that we will use the information we have collected to write reports and tell other people about what we have found, but your name will not be in any of this information?		

11. Are you happy to take part?		

If any of your answers are a 'no', don't sign your name!

Please write your name below **only** if you want to take part or ask someone to write it for you.

Your name: _____

Today's date: _____

As you are under the age of 16, please ask your parent/the person who is responsible for you to sign here, to show that they agree that you understand all of the information and want to take part – and that they are happy for you to take part.

Full name (please print): _____

Signature: _____

Today's date: _____

At the end of the information sheet we gave you, we explained that you can provide your consent for us to keep your contact details after the end of the study to let you know about future research. **Are you willing for us to keep your contact details after the end of the study? (please circle)**

YES NO

Signature on behalf of the researchers

Name (please print): _____

Date: _____

Signature: _____

Appendix Q

Consent Form for Parents or Guardians

Participant Identification No: _____

Title of study: *Exploring how inclusive programmes within community youth groups influence identity development, by targeting loneliness in children and adolescents from disadvantaged backgrounds. A reflexive thematic analysis.*

Please write your initials in each box to indicate your agreement with the following statements. Do not tick any of the boxes. If you would prefer to provide consent via email or text message, there is information on how to do this at the end of this form.

1. I confirm that I have read the information sheet dated _____ for the above study. I have had enough time and opportunity to consider the information, ask any questions and I feel these have been answered satisfactorily. ☐

2. I understand that my child/child under my legal responsibility is voluntarily taking part in this study and that I or they are free to withdraw from the study for up to two weeks after their interview takes place, without having to give a reason and without any negative consequences. ☐

3. I understand that if my child/child under my legal responsibility does withdraw from the study, I cannot request that the information collected during their focus group participation is destroyed. ☐

4. I understand that if my child/child under my legal responsibility does withdraw from the study, I can request that any information collected from their interview is destroyed. I have up to two weeks from the date of the interview to request that it is destroyed. ☐

5. I understand that information my child/child under my legal responsibility shares during the focus group will be immediately available to other members of the group and the research team cannot guarantee that this will be kept confidential. ☐

5. I understand that the information collected about my child/child under my legal responsibility may be used to support other research in the future, and may be shared anonymously with other researchers at the University of Birmingham (so it will not be possible to link the information back to me or my child) ☐

6. I understand that my child's/child under my legal responsibility's All Saints Youth Project (ASYP) worker will be informed of their participation in this study. ☐

7. I agree for my child's/child under my responsibility's interview to be recorded using an audio recording device. I am also aware that the recording will be deleted once the data has been transcribed (within two weeks after the interview). ☐

8. I agree for my child/child under my responsibility to take part in the above study. ☐

_____	_____	_____
Name of participant (young person)	Date	Signature

_____	_____	_____
Name of person giving consent (parent/carer/legal guardian)	Date	Signature

Please only sign this form after you have initialled all of the boxes to indicate that you agree with the statements on the previous page.

Name (please print): _____

Address:

_____

_____

Telephone number (landline): _____

Mobile telephone number:

Is it okay to leave a voicemail: Yes ___ No ____?

Email address: _____

Relationship to the child I care for: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

At the end of the information sheet, we explained that you can provide your consent for us to keep your contact details after the end of the study to let you know about future research.

Are you willing for us to keep your contact details after the end of the study? (please circle)

YES NO

Signature of behalf of researchers: _____

Email or text consent protocol for parents/guardians

Alternatively, the following e-mail may be sent to parents to obtain consent:

Dear [name of parent],

Thank you for your interest in this research project with the University of Birmingham.

For more information and what that would entail for you and your child/child under your responsibility, please read the parent/guardian information sheet and consent form attached. Please don't hesitate to contact us if you have any questions about the study.

If you would like to provide consent for your child/child under your responsibility to take part, but you would prefer to do this via email or text message, please copy and paste the consent statement below, or write it out in your text message:

> ***"I confirm I have read the information sheet and consent form about this research and I consent to take part".***

We have also attached a child information sheet. As your child will be involved in the research activities, we require their assent to take part too. Please use this sheet to help explain the research to your child. If they are happy to take part, please include the following statement in your response to this email, or text message:

> **"*I can confirm I have explained the research to my child as far as is appropriate given their age/understanding, and to the best of my knowledge, they are happy to take part".***

Finally, please tell us whether you would be willing for us to keep your contact details after the end of the study using the following statement (deleting as appropriate):

> ***"I would/ would not be willing for you to keep my contact details after the end of the study."***

When we receive a response to this email or a text message with these statements, we can use this as your official consent and your child's assent to take part in the study.

Again, if you have any questions, please get in touch.

We look forward to hearing from you in due course.

Kind regards,

Emily Trotter

Postgraduate Researcher/
Trainee Clinical Psychologist

[redacted]

[Telephone number to text]

Dr Kate Woodcock

Senior Lecturer

[redacted]

Appendix R

Semi-structured Interview Schedule

These questions will be used as a guideline for the interviews conducted during this study. Additional questions may be asked based on young people's responses. Specific examples will be requested whenever appropriate.

For younger participants, creative materials (e.g., toys, playdough, pens, and paper) will be provided in order for them to articulate themselves where it might be difficult to verbalise their responses. Those who choose to answer creatively will be asked about what they are making or drawing, or why they have chosen a specific toy and how it links to the workshops they have attended. Their responses to *these* questions will be the analysed data.

Opening statement: "Thank you for taking part in my project. I am interested in finding out if the workshops you have attended with All Saints can help with self-identity and help to stop young people feeling lonely. I want to ask you some questions today about yourself. If there are any questions you don't want to answer, that is okay, just let me know."

Section 1: Demographics

- Age, gender, ethnicity, religion, education, socioeconomic status

Section 2 (intrapersonal): I would like to ask you some information about yourself.

1. Tell me a bit about yourself. (Prompts: How would you describe yourself? What sort of words would you use? Use pictures or offer craft materials for building if easier to articulate answers in this way).

2. Do you like to spend time in groups of people? Or do you prefer spending time on your own? (Prompts: Are you a sociable person? Do you have friends you like to spend time with? How do you feel about yourself when you are with these people?)

3. How would your friends describe you? (Prompt: What sort of person would they say you are? Use materials as above if easier)

4. What kind of things do you enjoy doing? What do you think you are good at? (Prompts: sport, reading, dancing, drawing, puzzles. Do you prefer doing things on your own or with other people?)

5. Is there someone famous who you really admire or would like to be like (ideal self)? (Prompts: This could be a television, film, or book character. What is it you like/admire about them?)

6. How did you feel about yourself before attending the workshops? Did you ever feel lonely? Did you feel connected to other people in your life?

7. How do you imagine yourself in 5/10 years' time? (Prompts: What will you be doing? Where will you be living? What will your life be like?)

<u>Section 3 (context):</u> Now I would like to ask you some questions about the workshops you attended.

1. How did you hear about the workshops?

2. What was your overall impression of the Science4Friends programme?

3. What made you want to start going to the workshops? (Prompts: Did someone ask or tell you to go? Can you describe the situation in when they told you? What else was happening in your life at the time, and what was that like for you?)

4. What was the best thing about coming along/taking part? What made the most sense to you? (Prompts: What did you enjoy the most? Who was there? Are there any specific memories or activities that come to mind?)

5. What was the worst/hardest thing about coming along/taking part? What didn't make sense to you? (Prompts: What helped? What made this more difficult? Who was there? Were there people to talk to if you needed support?)

6. What were some of the skills/emotions/abilities you learned in the sessions?

7. When you think of the workshops you went to, what comes to mind? (Prompts: draw this or build something if easier)

<u>Section 4 (interpersonal):</u> Questions that connect identity formation and the young person to the workshop learning and social connectedness.

1. Has the group changed the way you feel about yourself or describe yourself as a person? (Prompt: Can you give me an example? Do you feel differently as part of a group?)

2. Has the way you relate to others changed since attending the workshops? Or do you think this has stayed the same?

3. Was your life different before you started going to the workshops? If so, in what way? Has it affected the way you live your life? (Prompts: Has attending the group changed your life in any way? How connected to others do you feel? Have your relationships changed at all? If so, in what way? Tell me something you do/talk about with friends now that you might not have done before?)

4. What would your friends/family say about you after attending the group? Will they think you have changed in any way?

5. Have the workshops helped you to feel closer/more connected to others? Less lonely? (Prompts: Which activities/learning made you feel closer to others? Have your relationships with others changed since attending the group? If so, how?)

6. Have the workshops helped you to think about any problems/difficult areas in your life and how you would manage these? Would you manage these differently to how you would have done before the workshops?

7. Was there ever a time during the workshops where you felt different to everyone else, or felt lonely? If so, when was this? What was going on at the time?

8. Do you think attending the 'Science4Friends' workshops is helpful for young people, like you, to learn more about themselves and feel closer/more connected to other people?

Closing statement: Thank you so much for talking with me today and answering my questions. Was there anything else you wanted to say? Is there anything else you'd like to tell me, that might help me to understand you better?

Do you have any questions for me?

How was it talking with me today?

Check in on wellbeing and offer opportunity for continued debrief/alternative emotional support if needed.

Appendix S

The Researcher's Approach to Reflexive Thematic Analysis (RTA)

1. Data Familiarisation

By developing the interview schedule, carrying out interviews, and then repeatedly listening to the recordings through the transcription process, I was fully immersed in the data from the outset, and before actively engaging with the analysis. I also felt that carrying out the interviews gave me the opportunity to really engage with the children's stories and get a sense of who they are. I did not take any notes at this point, or during the first play back of the audio recordings, to ensure I was actively listening. This also meant I could notice (in the moment), or recall, any gestures, mannerisms and nonverbal cues that might not have been picked up on if I had been writing notes.

Next, transcribing, reading and re-reading the data was particularly helpful for data immersion as it allowed me to slow the interviews down through being able to pause, make notes and check the recordings again if needed. This allowed me to note anything that may have been missed during the interviews. During the transcription process, I completed a line-by-line analysis to capture a familiar sense of surface (semantic) meanings, staying as close to participant perspectives as possible. Any reflections and statements of personal interest were noted in the left-hand margin and attended to during later stages. After transcribing each interview, I made preliminary notes at the bottom of each transcript in an attempt to capture my sense (at the time) of the story being told by each participant. I then took a step back and started to consider what these might mean in relation to the research question.

2. Generating Initial Codes

I began coding by reading through the data and, line by line, noting any patterns that I interpreted to be meaningful in specific words or phrases. These were colour-coded, before being noted in the right-hand margins of the respective transcripts, to facilitate a transparent analysis (Appendix U). Throughout this process, I held in mind that this stage is more about summarising than reducing data; the codes should be succinct but give enough context that if the raw data were removed, it would convey the same meaning. For example, a code such as "*a sense of identity*" would be vague and meaningless, but "*feeling more like myself when around peers*", would say more about the data and be a closer reflection of participant voices.

I aimed to capture the diversity of perspectives contained within the data, while also identifying general patterns of meaning. At first, I focused on codes at the semantic level, before going back to the beginning of each transcript to focus on constructing deeper, more interpretative (latent) codes. However, over time these processes merged into one and both levels of coding were interpreted during the same read through.

Due to the data being collected over a protracted period of time, and the quantity of data (42,523 words), this was a time-consuming, back and forth process, which meant needing to take a step back from time to time. This allowed me to pause and

think about the story being told, before revisiting the transcripts with a refreshed focus. I intended to stay as close to semantic level meanings at first, in order to truly capture the children's voices, but over time, more latent codes were generated, and most of the codes became more like sentences than succinct labels. This was an independent process, but it was helpful at times to consult my supervisor and the research support team to discuss the meanings I had interpreted from the transcripts.

Next, the semantic and latent codes were collated on a Microsoft Word document and categorised under each participants' pseudonym, as exemplified in Figure T1. This led to the development of 448 preliminary codes. When noticing patterns between codes and participants, I started to explore ideas within the data by drawing out diagrams to show the relationship between codes, which were later used for creating thematic 'maps' (Appendix V).

Figure S1

Sample of Preliminary List of Codes

Interview 2: 'Joshi' (80 codes)

Identifies as male (S)

Identifies as white British (S)

Identifies as Christian (S)

Identity constructed through describing personality traits – "quirky", "a bit weird" (S)

Identifying as different from others – "not like most people", "just a bid odd", "…the kind of music I like" (S)

A need to fix and correct things and people if they are wrong (S); Caring about order and safety (L)

Feeling the need to hide aspects of self at school (L)

Avoiding getting into trouble at school (S); A fear of authority (L)

Identity construction starts with likes and dislikes (S); Viewing likes and dislikes as something that makes you different to others (L)

Abstracting to a wider, imaginary audience – presuming what other people see/think, making claims to what other children are like in year eight (e.g., "most kids…"), taking perspective of others around what might be expected of a 12-year-old boy (S); A strong sense of meta perspective and awareness (L)

Note. The letter 'S' denotes semantic codes, while 'L' refers to latent codes.

3. Generating (Initial) Themes

Generating themes from the data initially involved combing through the codes to look for any repeated ideas or patterns of meaning. I did this by merging similar codes into data domains, or categories, on a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet, which resulted in eight domains and 147 iterations of the preliminary codes (Figure T2). Though there were individual differences within the data, and each participant had their own story to tell, this organised the codes in a way that captured similarities in participants' perspectives. In addition to going through the codes themselves, I repeatedly revisited the raw data, the diagrams I had drawn, and my reflective diary, to keep developing ideas about the patterns I had identified within the data. This ensured that my analysis remained grounded in the raw data, and that my interpretations were not limited by my pre-existing biases or ideas. For example, when exploring the data it predictably fell into the domains determined through the interview questions and how identity was conceptualised for the purpose of this study (i.e., intrapersonal, interpersonal and contextual facilitators of identity construction). However, I was mindful that these were pre-determined (e.g., theoretical knowingness), and I wanted to ensure that my reasoning began with the participants' voices and my analysis was truly inductive, before working up towards the theoretical level.

Similar codes were developed into initial themes and subthemes, creating thematic maps to illustrate my thought process along the way. I reviewed the data to find examples relevant to the initial themes and was open to creating additional themes where necessary, whilst rejecting themes that were felt to be insufficiently evidenced. This led to the interpretation of seven provisional, initial themes, and eight subthemes. I defined these independently, before consulting my supervisor to discuss and refine my ideas.

Figure S2

Sample of Coding Iterations

Coding categories (data domains)	**Nas** *(22 iterations)*	**Joshi** *(21 iterations)*	**Mo** *(15 iterations)*	**Daniel** *(21 iterations)*	**Ruth** *(20 iterations)*	**Rose** *(27 iterations)*	**Storm** *(21 iterations)*
Initial identifiers	**Identifies as a boy** **Identifies as pakistani** **Identifies as Muslim**	**Identifies as male** **Identifies as white British** **Identifies as Christian**	**Identifies as male** (unsure of other identity descriptors)	**Identifies as male, British (S)** **Cultural identity partially constructed through older generations – "I might have a bit of Welsh in me" (S)**	**Identifies as nonbinary (S)** **Identifies as white (S)** **Identifies as agnostic (S)**… Does not identify with absolutes or one particular belief – e.g., male-female,	**Identifies as a transgender female,** an important part of identity but an isolating experience (S) **Identifies as white British (S)**	**Identifies as nonbinary (S)** **Identifies as Irish (S)** Went to church as a child and educated at catholic schools, but **identifies as an atheist (S)**
Intrapersonal: past	**A life "without bullies or anything, it would have been amazing" -** overlap with interpersonal	Does not recall feeling lonely before (though others perceived him to be socially isolated) **-** something about solitude/social isolation being	Cannot recall feelings before attending the group (S); **Struggles to reflect on and connect with past emotions** (L)	Sometimes felt lonely before taking part, depending on what was happening at the time (S); Dichotomous responses may mean	**Felt lonely before going to the workshops (S)**… Socially isolated before attending the group "I was just doing nothing all	**Identity constructed through adverse experiences** (L)… Identifies with feeling lonely – link to other loneliness codes (S)…	Did alright in primary school, "then I got really bad" after "…like a windows restart in my sleep", and started questioning **"is there any meaning to**
Intrapersonal: present	**Identity construction starts with likes and dislikes -** often expressed with binary descriptions,	**Identity construction starts with likes and dislikes (S);** Viewing likes and dislikes as something that makes	**Likes and dislikes – link to previous P1/2 codes (S); Easier to list likes and dislikes than describe**	**Identity partially constructed through likes and dislikes – link to previous codes (S).** E.g., Likes	**Link to previous codes about personality traits and identity** (S)/… Identifies as a lonely person	**"In my head, I've got loads of different branches of like potential 'me's' I could become**	**Id constructed through traits/descriptors of self**. E.g.…. Identifies as being ahead of their time
Intrapersonal: future	**Future intentions are relevant to self-descriptions in the here and now**, e.g., intentions regarding appearance, intentions regarding actions, study and career plans (S)	**Future intentions are relevant to self-descriptions in the here and now** – education, location, career, link to P1 code (S); Specific ideas about the future/Knowing what he	Unable to imagine a future self (S); **Not sure what kind of person he would like to be, or of future aspirations** (L)Likes fictional characters but does not aspire to be	**Future aspirations** revolve around friends from church and educational hopes (S); Identity constructed through social context of church/religion – link to previous	**Future intentions -** link to previous (S)/... Places more importance on art and creativity than formal education. Does not ascribe to a set out plan for herself	**Future aspirations** – link to previous code (S)… Wants to learn about the world, not logical, objective things, like maths (S)/...Constructing a future identity	**Future aspirations based on appearance, work and friends – link to previous (S)**/...Future plans/hopes projections of what has been learned on TV (S)
Interpersonal: past	Notable **longevity in peer connections** (L); referring to	**Longevity of peer connections** – referring to examples from primary				**Bullied in the past**	
Interpersonal: present	Declaring **key relationships** and connections to describe own identity... identity construction	**Spending time in a group** can be better than being alone, depending on the task (S)… E.g., Watching films	Prefers to be alone – not a sociable person (S); No social identity outside of school (L)/… Does not know how	**Being with a group of friends feels good** – link to previous code (S)/ A preference for spending time	**Likes to spend time in groups of people – link to previous codes (S)**/... Spends a lot of time alone,	**Identifying with more of an online social scene – more connected/of a sense of**	**"I'm becoming more and more my dad as the years go by**. Actually, the months go by." (S); Identity
Interpersonal: future	If life was, like, if it wasn't with bullies or anything, it would have	**Aspiring to be like** Grandfather and follow in his footsteps (L)					
Context	**Group/Informal learning context facilitates emotional awareness, expression and management.** E.g.... It's good to be able to express strong feelings to other people (S); Participating in a group can develop communication skills and aid emotional expression (L)... The most memorable activities are those that nurture self-esteem (L)	"It's good to have a place where you can just be yourself"… Importance of feeling able to express own identity, and not having to hide or manage this (L). E.g… Engaging in informal learning programmes facilitates identity construction by being an accepting space (L)/ Opportunity to bring own difference, or "weirdness", into a group space (S); Acceptable to be true to self	Not sure of his thoughts about the group (S); No confidence in own beliefs or assumptions (L)... Attended group due to boredom, not loneliness (L)/ Unsure of own feelings after attending workshops (S); Lacking insight into own feelings (L), but then… **The best thing about taking part was seeing different people, including new people you might not have recognised or said**	**Attending workshops was fun but did not change view of self** (S) **Spending time with peers made the workshops fun** (S) **Doing stuff that wasn't only fun, but it was interesting and made you think about it** (S)… Workshops helped with critical thinking skills and constructing	**"I didn't really know what to do with myself" before the group…** felt lonely and anxious before... a sense of purpose?/The group reduced feelings of loneliness (L)...Excited to join a youth group after seeking one out, but sceptical at first (S)/...Drawn to workshops due to perceived mental health benefits and relaxed atmosphere (L)/...Being in the workshops made	**Came to group for support** as being trans an isolating experience - link to previous (S)/..."This sort of thing came at the right time for me" (S) "I found myself in the past couple of years" (S); Link to previous code about being comfortable in being lonelier… not with her people yet but **found herself after**	Less talkative before going to the workshops, easier to have a conversation now (S); Group has helped with developing a more social identity (L)/...Really enjoyed how competitive the group was (S)/...**The group changed the way I feel about myself – more sociable now and more competitive** (S); The group brought out aspects of self that don't come out in other contexts

4. Reviewing Potential Themes

This involved the back-and-forth process of revisiting the transcripts and exploring the 'fit' between provisional themes and the meanings expressed across the participant accounts, much like a quality control process. This was to ensure that the coding stage did not miss any meaningful aspects of the data, themes had not 'drifted' from what was said within the transcripts, and that the analysis provided as thorough and representative an account of the full data set as possible. This stage involved revision of the provisional themes and development of subthemes, using quotes to illustrate my ideas. Any themes that did not add anything to the overall analysis were discarded. The crucial part of this stage was to bear in mind how well and meaningfully themes answered the research question, while staying true to the raw data. For example, with my provisional theme: *'Loneliness Exacerbated by Early Experiences'*, it was relevant to the literature reviewed, but did not really answer the research question (e.g., how do young people construct a sense of identity having attended the Science4Friends workshops?). That said, I still considered this theme to be meaningful, and felt it had a better fit within the subtheme of '*Uncovering a Social Identity*', which captures the evolution from being a lonelier person, to a more sociable person. I kept coming back to my thematic 'maps' during this stage, to identify any overlapping or contradicting ideas, and to consider how themes related to one another.

5. Defining & Naming Themes

Developing the thematic maps and repeatedly revisiting the raw data allowed me to identify overlapping areas, which helped with refining ideas and determining the exact story I felt was being told through each theme. I selected which data extracts to present and why I felt these were relevant and compelling for the research question. At this stage, I found myself becoming fixated on the idea of getting this 'right' or 'wrong', despite knowing that this is a subjective process. For this reason, it was really helpful to sense check ideas and articulate my thought process with my research supervisor. This allowed me to refine my themes by clarifying the differences between ideas and think about where related ideas fit together into subthemes. At this stage, with support of my supervisor, I also decided which themes were not as good a 'fit' with the data or did not adequately address the research question. This led to three final themes, and four subthemes.

6. Write-up

Presenting the analysis involved both analytic and illustrative approaches. Some data extracts were presented alongside the researcher's analytic narrative while others were not. This step also involved re-engaging with the previous literature and pulling out relevant insights from the analysis that correspond with or deviate from it. This helped me to question my interpretation of the data, and to expand upon my understanding of participants' narratives. This was more of just a final stage of the process, but a final chance to refine ideas by revisiting earlier phases and checking that the presented ideas closely represent the data and meet the research aim.

Appendix T

Extracts of the Preliminary Coding Process

Figure T1

'Nas' Transcript

Observations/initial thoughts (Researcher and Research Intern)	Transcript	Semantic coding	Latent coding
Here I noticed a slight shift from surface level, humorous answers, to going a little deeper into the meaning behind his experiences. He appears aware of his personal growth within himself during these workshops. In hindsight, I see that here I could have probed a little more and stayed with what this sadness was like for him,	**P1:** At first I was quiet, but now I know how to, like, communicate with other people. **R:** Okay. So how did you *feel* about yourself? You said that you were quite quiet. Do you remember how that felt? **P1:** Yeah. It was like, it was bad, for me. Because I wasn't able to, like, express my feelings to other people. **R:** Okay? **P1:** So if I was feeling, like, sad, I wouldn't, everyone wouldn't be able to tell. **R:** Okay. **Pause**. So you could hide that quite well, could you? **P1:** I can, I can be angry easily. **R:** Mmm **P1:** But that's just me. **R:** And do people know when you're angry? **P1:** Yes **R:** But they don't know when you're sad? **P1:** No. **R:** Okay. Did you ever feel lonely before you went to the workshops? **P1:** **Shakes head**.	Code 12:, It's good to be able to express strong feelings to other people	Something about how he has changed after engaging with the group, to open up his communication skills and express emotions more clearly. Seems to be directly linked to how he views his identity "It was bad for me…. I was quiet, but now I know how to… express my feelings to other people"… "I can show people my emotions" (need to condense this into neater and concise latent code. Perhaps: Group participation develops communication skills and aids emotional expression)

Figure T2

'Joshi' Transcript

	P2: So like, I used to feel like I was **pause** weird – **R:** Mmm? **P2:** …but now I'm just like, everyone's weird in their own way. **Laughs**. **R:** Okay, so it has changed things a little bit? P2: Yeah. **R:** Okay. Any other examples? **P2:** Not necessarily, no. **R:** Okay. And do you feel differently when you're part of a group? **P2:** **Pause**. I feel, ahh what's it called? Like, when I'm with a group of people that I really like know and stuff, I feel like **pause**, at home? **R:** Mmm **P2:** If you know what I mean? **R:** Yeah. **Pause**. What's that like?		Strong sense of identity before participating, but something about the space, time or activities cemented his views of himself as quirky, weird etc. – which seems to have positively impacted his self-esteem. Something about embracing difference and not needing to need suppress it within group context.
Better sense of belonging, sense of fitting in? Or awareness of his place in the world.		Code 26: Being with people he knows feels safe and like home (Link to p1 code: 'Spending time in a group is better than spending time on your own, when you're with people you know'?)	

Appendix U

Creating Thematic 'Maps'

Figure U1

Exploring Ideas Within the Data

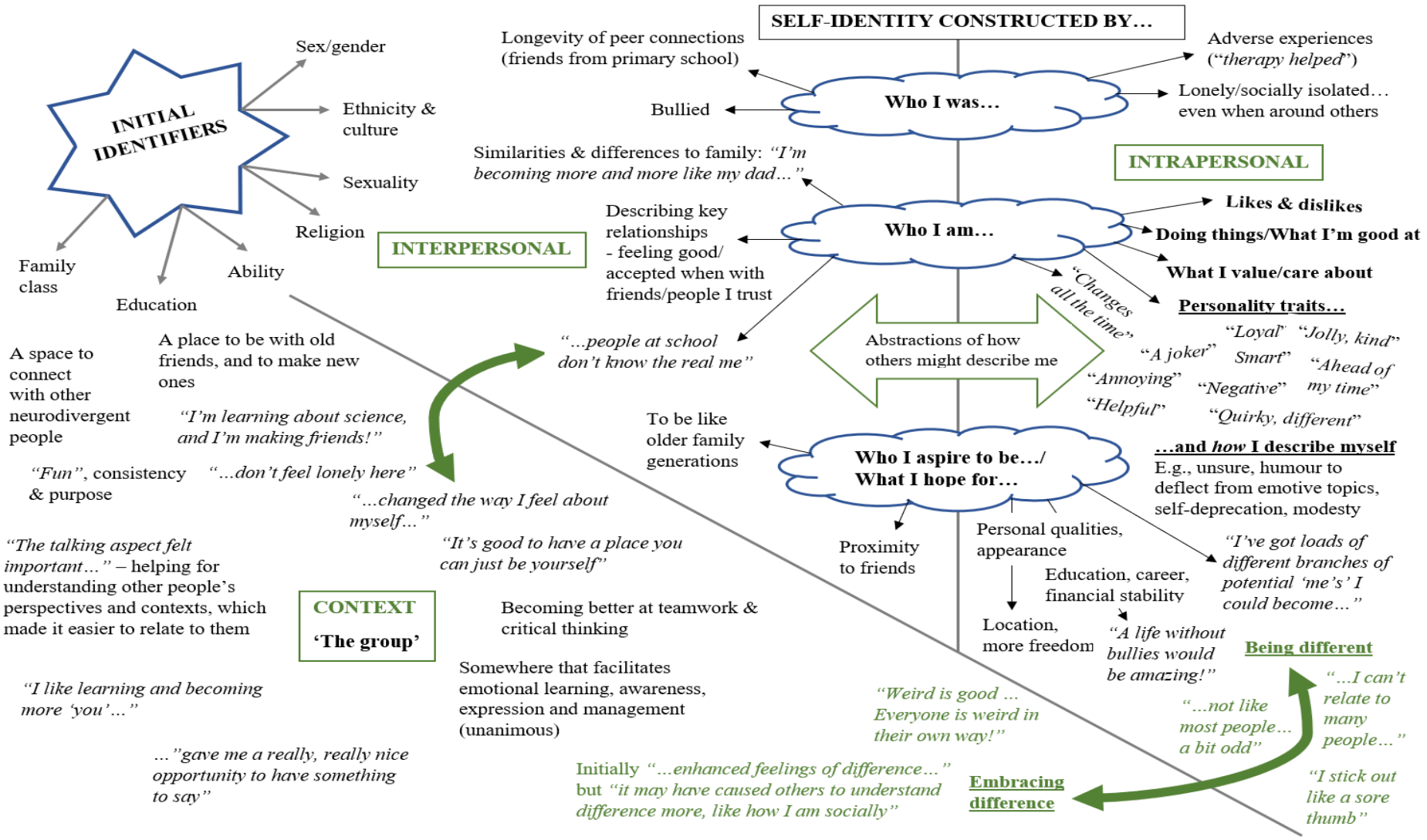


Figure U2

Early Thematic Map

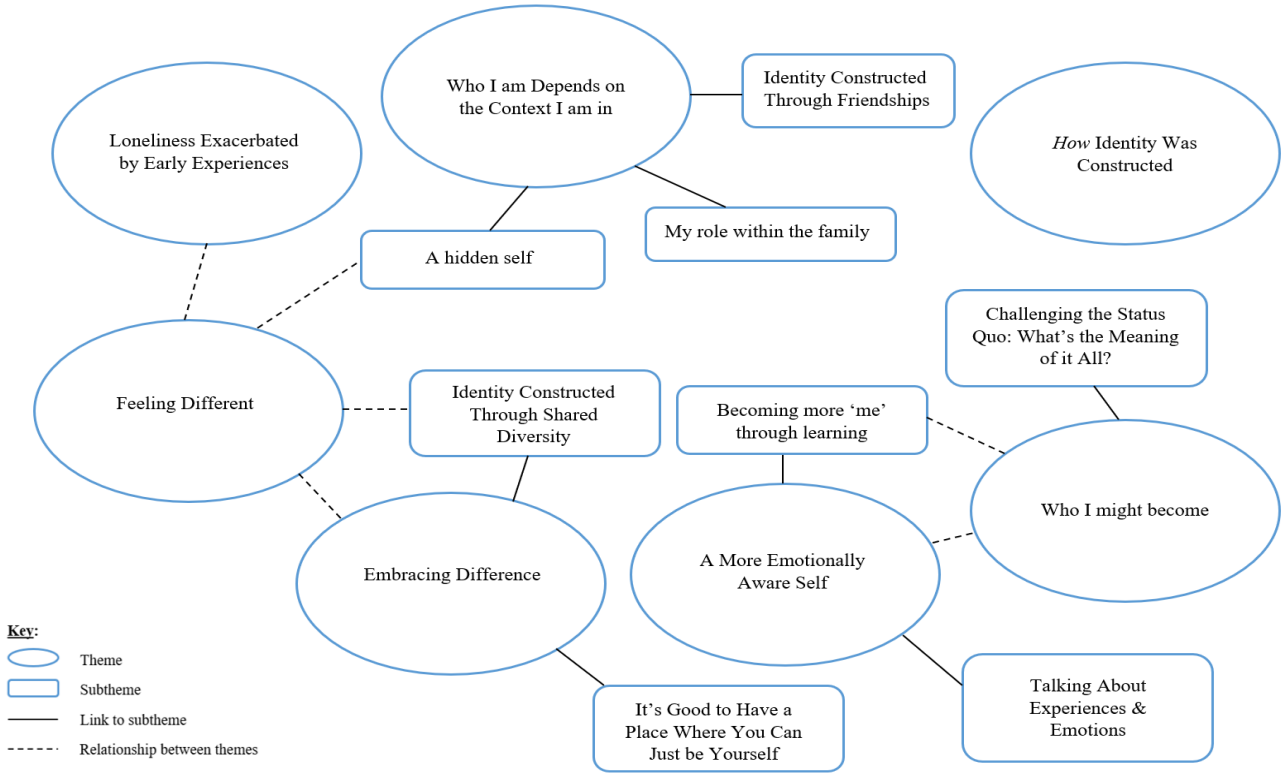
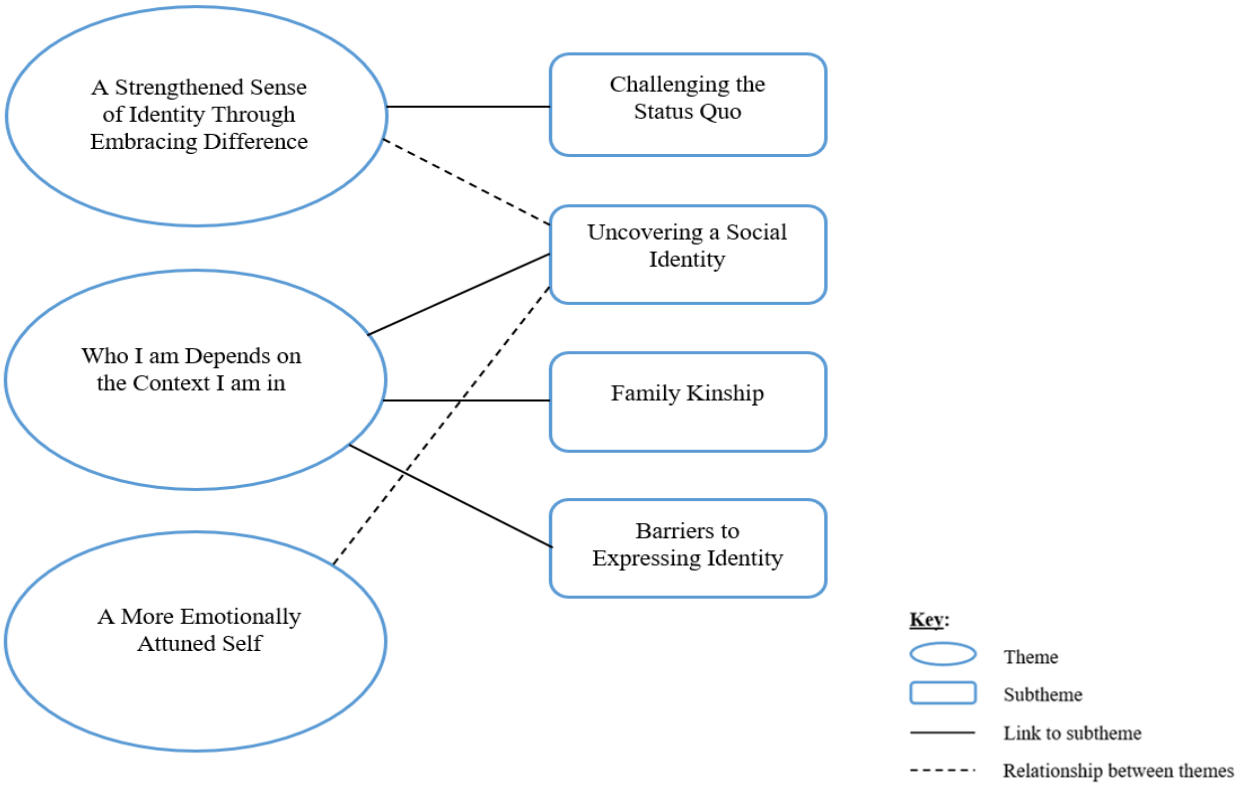


Figure U3

Final Thematic Map



Appendix V

Reflective Diary Excerpt

On the one hand, I feel like I can relate to these children… I was born to a relatively privileged, middle-class, supportive family, but I found adolescence really hard. I can relate to experiencing loneliness and really struggled with who I was at that period of my life. I felt uncomfortable in my own skin. This experience is something I feel I wear well now, and I think people would be surprised if they knew how I felt as a teenager. I am socially confident now and embrace my quirks and flaws. What I used to call self-esteem now seems to translate into using humour as a defence mechanism, alongside self-deprecation and intellectualising. I think my awareness of this makes me feel like I could relate to participants as they spoke about feeling different or being singled out by peers… as if I really know how they are feeling.

On the other hand, I also recognise that I am assuming this through a 'lens' of privilege. My experiences do not necessarily reflect *their* truth. As an adult who has been privileged to achieve a high level of education, I have trained extensively in psychology, engaged in reflective practice groups *and* personal therapy… so I have come to get to know my defences and blind spots. In other words, I *think* I know how young people feel because I have "been there" – but really, my perceptions are rooted in my own defences that I am now aware of, not theirs. Maybe the use of humour in the first interview wasn't actually a defence or form of avoidance, but just snippets of the participants personality, being a 'joker' and, of course, a child! Alternatively, perhaps I really *can* relate to participants and their experiences, but that does not automatically mean that they will find it easy to open up to me… this stranger who is carrying out doctoral research and has asked them to take part of an interview. How formal and daunting! Ultimately, no matter how much I want to understand their world view(s), what do I really know about disadvantage?