

**UCL Institute of Education**

**Doctorate in Educational Psychology (Professional Educational,  
Child and Adolescent Psychology)**

**DEdPsy (PECAP)**

**A mixed methods exploration of the role of friends and identity in  
multiracial adolescent girls' mental health.**

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**Word Count: 37126**



## **Student Declaration**

I, Sarah Joyce Austin confirm that the work presented in this thesis is my own. Where information has been derived from other sources, I confirm that this has been indicated in the thesis.

## **Abstract**

This thesis used mixed methods to explore how peers and friends influence the ethnic identity and mental health of multiracial adolescent girls. This drew upon social identity theory and ecological theory to understand why multiracial girls may have different outcomes to their monoracial peers, and which factors in their environment can promote their identity and wellbeing.

Educational Psychologists (EPs) have a key role in supporting positive mental health for all children and young people. The multiracial population in the UK is growing. Historically multiracial groups have been overlooked in UK research, although some national studies show multiracial adolescents may be at greater risk of poor mental health. Little research has explored the role of friends and peers in multiracial adolescent mental health, despite the robust findings that peers become more important during adolescence.

In an ethnically diverse Local Authority in London, 109 mid-adolescent girls (mean age 13.9) from diverse ethnic groups took part in a questionnaire measuring ethnic identity, self-esteem, socio-emotional functioning, peer discrimination, friendship support and interethnic friendships. 12 multiracial girls with one black/multiracial and one white parent took part in semi-structured interviews.

The multiracial girls in this sample reported lower self-esteem and lower perceived friendship support than their monoracial peers. Multiracial girls held less positive feelings about their ethnic group (affirmation) than their BAME (black, Asian, minority ethnic) monoracial peers. Affirmation only predicted self-esteem when friendship support was included in the model. Many multiracial girls felt positively about their ethnic group, but this was not always accepted by their peers and some experienced identity invalidation and exclusion. Friends were important for validating identity and emotional support. The family emerged as important for providing cultural knowledge and identity validation.

This thesis highlights the importance of friendships and the peer context in multiracial adolescent mental health and informs EP practice.

## **Acknowledgements**

Thank you to my supervisors, Sally Palmer and Frances Lee, for all your support and encouragement over the last two years.

Thank you to all the young people for sharing your stories, and the school staff who made it all happen.

A final thank you to my fantastic TEP colleagues, my family and partner Arash for keeping me sane throughout the process!

**Half-caste**

*John Agard (2005)*

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## List of Acronyms and Abbreviations

BAME	Black, Asian and minority ethnic
BPS	British Psychological Society
CAMHS	Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services
CASSS	Child and Adolescent Social Support Scale
CYP	Children and Young People
DECP	Division of Educational and Child Psychologist
DfE	Department for Education
EP	Educational Psychologist
EPS	Educational Psychology Service
HCPC	Health and Care Professions Council
MEIM	Multi-group Ethnic Identity Measure
Ofsted	Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills
RSES	Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale
SDQ	Strength and Difficulties Questionnaire
SENCO	Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator
SEND	Special Educational Needs and Disabilities
SIT	Social Identity Theory
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UK	United Kingdom
US	United States
WHO	World Health Organisation

## Introduction

### Research Problem

Educational Psychologists (EPs) need to have a strong understanding of how diversity and ethnicity influences psychological wellbeing and mental health, and to use this knowledge to support pupils in schools (Health and Care Professions Council, 2015). Given that multiracial young people are the fastest growing ethnic group in the UK (Morley & Street, 2014), it is timely to explore and add to the evidence base in the UK regarding EP and schools understanding of the experiences of multiracial adolescents.

Research shows that adolescents from a multiracial background are performing well at school, achieving above or at the expected national average in GCSEs (DfE, 2017). In addition, research is beginning to challenge historical theories that multiracial adolescents are doomed to identity confusion trapped between two ethnic groups (Stonequist, 1937; Caballero, Haynes & Tikly, 2007). However, research in the US indicates that multiracial adolescents can present with poorer mental health outcomes than their monoracial peers and emerging research in the UK is beginning to replicate some of these results (e.g. Wong, Sugimoto-Matsuda, Chang & Hishinuma, 2012; Gutman, Joshi, Parsonage, & Schoon, 2015). Multiracial adolescents may experience social rejection from their peers, invalidation of identity and racial discrimination from members of both of their ethnic groups (Shih & Sanchez, 2005). Girls may be more likely to adopt a multiracial identity and may experience social aggression as more hurtful or thought consuming than their male counterparts (Kerwin, Ponterotto, Jackson and Harris, 1993; Paquette & Underwood, 1999). Evidence shows that positive mental health is important for academic achievement, peer relationships and long-term outcomes for all adolescents (Young Minds, 2017).

This thesis adopts a theoretical framework based on Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1986) and Ecological Theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1989) to help EPs understand which factors in the social environment may impact the outcomes of multiracial adolescent girls, and improve how they meet the needs of this group. The research aim is to explore the role of peers and friendship in multiracial mental health and identity formation, whilst recognising the role of other systems such as the family and school. Feeling that you belong to a social group is important for social relationships and developing high self-esteem (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). Peers and friendships become more influential during adolescence, yet despite these findings, very little research, particularly in the UK, has explored the significance of friendship and the peer

environment for multiracial young people (Echols, Ivanich & Graham, 2017; Deater-Deckard, 2001).

This thesis used a mixed methods approach to explore the challenges and protective factors for mental health in the social context of multiracial identity formation. It aims to provide a voice for multiracial adolescents to share their experiences about what helps them to cope and flourish. It also aims to inform and develop Educational Psychology and school practice by exploring what helps multiracial young people to build resilience in the face of adversity.

## **Definitions**

Ethnicity and race can be controversial variables in research; however, they are also vastly important to establish formal recognition of the diverse needs of children and adolescents in the UK (British Psychological Society; BPS, 2017). However, with no universally agreed definitions, it is important to clearly justify terminology decisions and outline how they will affect the research (Bhopal, 2004).

### **Race and ethnicity.**

*Race* is the classification of people according to the physical features, which reflect ancestry, such as skin colour (Bhopal, 2004). It is now understood that race is a social construction and a product of socio-political context and history. The modern use of the term race, particularly in the US, has come to emphasise social origins rather than biology, however the term is still connected to a history of ill-definition and prejudice (Bhopal, 2004). In the UK, researchers tend to use the word ethnicity rather than race. *Ethnicity* refers to a group of people with shared ancestry, language or culture, who share physical features that are traditionally associated with race (Bhopal, 2004).

The meanings of race and ethnicity, and the way in which they shape identity and everyday life, is likely to vary between multiracial individuals (Song, 2010). This thesis aimed to be sensitive to the varying significance multiracial adolescents may place on their ethnicity and aims to elicit the participant's own constructions.

### **Multiracial.**

This thesis used the term multiracial to describe adolescents with parents from different ethnic groups. There appears to be no neutral or uncontroversial term for individuals who belong to two or more ethnic groups and many historical terms are deemed offensive or inappropriate (Joseph, 2013). In addition, terminology varies between countries, disciplines and throughout history, which can make it difficult to evaluate

multiracial research. American researchers tend to use the term 'biracial' or 'multi-ethnic', whereas in the UK, researchers have started to use the term 'mixed-heritage'. Aspinall (2009) surveyed the terminology preferences of multiracial people in the UK using a sample of multiracial adults and young people (aged 18-25). For young people, the most popular term chosen was 'mixed-race' (53%), whereas fewer respondents selected the terms 'mixed-heritage' (18%) or 'mixed origins' (16%). This shows that attempts to introduce more politically correct terms, such as 'mixed origin' or 'mixed-heritage' are often deemed too unspecific and can be perceived as imposed terms, not originating from the group it aims to describe (Ifekwunigwe, 1997).

The category of 'mixed-race' was only added to the UK Census in 2001 illustrating how societal attitudes towards multiracial individuals have only recently changed. In a brief overview of the historical context, Tutwiler (2016) writes that historically multiracial people were initially viewed as problematic and they experienced rejection and social isolation. The civil right movement in the 1960s led to a surge in 'black pride' and it was believed that multiracial individuals should develop a healthy black identity. It was only until the 1980s-90s that the multiracial identity was recognised and legitimised by society. Yet, even today, multiracial individuals may experience struggles to validate their identity. In the US, the 'one-drop theory' remains influential, reflecting historical attitudes that a person with 'one drop' of non-white blood is considered 'coloured' and therefore, should identify as such. Today in the US, a multiracial individual who has observable black heritage may still be considered black, unless they declare otherwise (Khanna, 2010). Even in UK research, multiracial participants are often grouped into large categories or are represented as 'other'. Thus, research into the multiracial experience has severely lagged behind other ethnic groups and multiracial individuals are often a 'forgotten minority' in studies of race and ethnicity (Aspinall, 2017; Tutwiler, 2016).

I considered multiple terms whilst writing this thesis. Initially the term 'mixed-heritage' was used in line with other research conducted in the UK. However, as someone who identifies as mixed-race (see reflexivity section in the method) I found that this term was too far removed from my own experience. In addition, I felt that 'mixed-heritage' did not capture the societal impact of 'race'. As race and ethnicity are social constructions, there will be variations in how they are perceived and how they impact identity (Lerner & Steinberg, 2009). It is important to differentiate between people who are 'racially' mixed and individuals with diverse backgrounds (i.e. French and English). The latter are not equivalent to racial combinations in terms of their visibility in society and history of negative societal attitudes (Ifekwunigwe, 1997; Song, 2018). Even though 'race' is a

controversial term, society continues to classify individuals according to their appearance, which can have significant implications for multiracial adolescents. I then considered the term 'mixed-race', in line with my own preferences and that of multiracial people in the UK (Aspinall, 2009). However, I felt that the use of *mixed* held connotations with 'mixed up' which reflected a historical prejudice that multiracial individuals are inherently confused about their identity. I decided to use the term 'multiracial' to acknowledge the overlap between race and ethnicity and recognise that individuals can belong to more than two ethnic groups, whilst removing emphasis on the term 'mixed'. In interviews with young people, their preferred terminology will be used.

### **Ethnic identity.**

Identity is defined as an "internal, self-constructed, dynamic organisation of drives, ability, beliefs and individual history" (Marcia, 1980, p. 159). Marcia argues that the more stable and well developed an identity is, the more aware individuals are of their own strengths and weaknesses and their place in the world. This process of discovery occurs in various domains, including religious identity, gender identity, occupational identity and ethnic identity.

Ethnic identity is a multifaceted concept defined as a "feeling of belonging to one's [ethnic] group, a clear understanding of the meaning of one's [group] membership, positive attitudes towards the group, familiarity with its history and culture, and involvement in its practices" (Phinney, DuPont, Espinosa, Revil, & Sanders., 1994, p. 169). It is important to distinguish between ethnicity and ethnic identity. Every adolescent has an ethnicity, and can be assigned to an ethnic group using socially constructed categories. However, ethnic group membership is different to a sense of belonging and feelings of affirmation towards a group. These are all components of an ethnic *identity*. All adolescents have an ethnic identity, but it may be more salient for some depending on the societal context.

In this thesis, the use of 'ethnic group' refers to socially constructed categories representing ethnicity (e.g. white, black, Asian and multiracial) and 'ethnic identity' refers to the Phinney et al., (1994) definition, including self-identification to a group and evaluation of group membership. This is important, as the multiracial adolescents in this thesis may hold an ethnic identity different to their assigned ethnic group.

### **Mental health.**

This thesis used the definition of wellbeing outlined by Westerhof and Keyes (2010). There is no universal definition of mental health, and many existing definitions arise from a Western perspective. Many modern definitions tend to highlight the outcomes of positive mental health emphasising what children and adolescents are able to do when they are mentally healthy (Dogra, Parkin, Warner-Gale & Frake, 2017). This aims to address stigma around the term mental health and its negative connotations with illness. For example, the World Health Organisation (WHO) defines mental health as “a state of wellbeing whereby individuals recognize their abilities, are able to cope with the normal stresses of life, work productively and fruitfully, and make a contribution to their communities” (WHO, 2004, p. 7).

Westerhof and Keyes (2010) outline multiple components of mental health including, *Emotional wellbeing*, feeling happy, confident and satisfied with life, *Psychological wellbeing* feeling accomplished, accepting of the self and having satisfying personal relationships and *Social wellbeing* feeling a sense of belonging and social inclusion (Westerhof & Keyes, 2010). Mental health exists on a continuum between mental wellbeing and mental illness. All adolescents have a mental health, which encompasses the range of typical human experiences, and they may encounter problems along this continuum, which may or may not result in mental illness (Dogra et al., 2017).

The Westerhof and Keyes (2010) definition provides a framework for understanding the components in which an adolescent may be mentally healthy or experience problems. This definition enables a broad range of mental health aspects to be considered, such as feelings and emotions, peer relationships and prosocial behaviour. These relate to the components of the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ), which is used by Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) as a mental health screening tool and as an indicator of mental health in this thesis. In addition, due to the focus on identity, which is known to be related to one's self-esteem, this thesis will explore self-esteem as an aspect of psychological wellbeing. Self-esteem is defined as “a socio-psychological construct that assesses an individual's attitudes and perceptions of self-worth” (McMullin & Cairney, 2004, p. 76). This is relevant to this thesis as multiracial adolescents may compare and evaluate their social identities with others.

## **National and Local Context.**

### ***National context.***

Britain has been multicultural for centuries, and recent reports show even the first modern Briton had 'dark black skin' (Devlin, 2018). After World War Two, many people migrated to the UK initiating a pattern which continued throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Immigrant communities were encouraged to integrate and Britain prided itself on multiculturalism (Hirsch, 2018). Despite this, there persists a negative discourse in society around immigration. For example, the government's introductions of the so called 'hostile environment' policy instigated the Windrush scandal, where workers and families who travelled from former British colonies (such as the Caribbean, India and Kenya among others) as British citizens between 1948 and 1971, struggled to prove their immigration status to the authorities and risked deportation (BBC News, 2018). Unlike in the US, segregation between races was never an official law in the UK; however, the association of Britain with colonialism and slavery effects ideas around race and ethnicity. The social and historical context of the UK, and its differences with the US, is important to consider throughout this thesis on multiracial identity, particularly because this thesis draws on research from the US to inform its rationale and research questions.

This research is conducted in a Local Authority (LA) in London where I am on placement as a trainee Educational Psychologist. The LA area is culturally rich and diverse, with almost half the population having a black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) background. The LA is in the top third of the most deprived LAs in the country and almost a fifth of children and young people under 18 have a multiracial background (London Datastore, 2010). Ethnic diversity and socioeconomic demographics in this thesis' context are likely to affect how multiracial adolescents consider and evaluate their ethnic group and identity.

## **Implications for Educational Psychologists**

### **Equality and diversity.**

The Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC) states that EPs must have an awareness of how culture, equality and diversity can impact their practice and EPs must adapt how they operate to meet the needs of different groups (HCPC, 2015, Appendix A). The British Psychological Society (BPS) also reiterated that psychologists need to have a sound understanding of the discrimination experienced by people from diverse

backgrounds, be reflective of their own stereotypical assumptions, and awareness of the history of racism in the early development of Western psychology (BPS, 2017).

EPs also need to be aware of their legal duties in actively promoting racial equality and positive race relations. This includes adherence to the Equality Act (2010) which clearly refers to the multiracial group - "the fact that a racial group comprises two or more distinct racial groups does not prevent it from constituting a particular racial group" (p.6). Commitment to diversity and equality needs to occur in personal, professional and organisational levels of EP practice.

Abdi (2015) highlights the role of EPs in supporting positive ethnic identity formation. He states that EPs and schools have an important role to support children and young people to develop their ethnic identities. They need to challenge practices that may privilege ethnic majority groups and impose or negate ethnic identity. This thesis aimed to inform EP practice to recognise the variation in ethnic identity for multiracial adolescents, promote professional standards of ethics, effective service delivery, and encourage cultural competence. This includes recognition of the interaction between within-child and environmental factors that create disparities in ethnic group outcomes.

### **Supporting positive mental health**

Under the SEND Code of Practice (2015) EPs have a role in identifying children and young people who may have mental health difficulties, provide advice on how to support positive mental health and work as a multidisciplinary team to provide individual interventions (DfE, 2015). Underpinning this work is a need to have knowledge about risk and resilience factors for specific ethnic groups to inform evidence-based practice.

A recent report found multiracial children and young people are slightly over-represented in referrals to CAMHS (Children's Commissioner for England, 2016). In this thesis' Local Authority, 1 in 10 CAMHS community team users identify as multiracial (National Health Service [NHS] Foundation Trust, 2016). As multiracial young people begin to represent significant proportion of the Local Authority's population and CAMHS's service users, it is imperative that EPs have a thorough understanding of the strengths and needs of this group to promote pupil outcomes. This thesis aimed to provide clear EP implications for supporting multiracial adolescents.

## Research Questions and Aims

The research questions and aims of this thesis are based upon theory and a literature review. The overarching research question is: *Are friendships and identity important factors for multiracial female adolescents' mental health?*

1. Are there any differences between multiracial and monoracial girls in terms of their mental health outcomes, ethnic identity, peer relations and interethnic friendships?
2. How important are peer relations, interethnic friendships and ethnic identity for multiracial girls' mental health?
3. What are multiracial girls' views on protective factors for their ethnic identity and mental health?

The aims of this thesis are as follows:

- To research multiracial mental health using an approach that recognises the resilience of the multiracial girls in the face of challenges.
- To explore how friends and peers may influence ethnic identity. This is an under researched area in the literature.
- To provide multiracial girls with an opportunity to share their personal views on ethnic identity and their peers.
- To gather information about what helps them to cope with challenges to their mental health, including their self-esteem and wellbeing.
- To contribute to policy and practice that aims to address and understand the disparity in mental health outcomes between ethnic groups.
- To reiterate the need to address multiracial mental health and raise the profile of multiracial girls in mental health initiatives and Educational Psychology practice.

## Literature Review

### Introduction

The research in this literature review was sourced using the search strategy in Appendix B. It was intended to source all literature from high-quality peer reviewed journals, however due to the paucity of research on multiracial adolescents, some literature has been obtained from unpublished dissertations or government policy documents. This thesis focused on the experience of multiracial girls in mid-adolescence, yet the lack of literature necessitates this review to include research on general adolescence across both genders and includes some research conducted on early adolescent and young adult samples.

It is important to highlight that much of the research comparing multiracial adolescents to their peers arises from secondary analysis of national surveys in the United States. This has implications for the generalisability of these findings to the context in the UK. For instance, in the UK the American Indian-white multiracial group is not prevalent. However, in the US American Indians have faced significant discrimination and represent one of the biggest and most disadvantaged multiracial groups (Campbell & Eggerling-Boeck, 2006). This highlights the caution that must be taken when generalising US research to UK populations, as the historical and social context can be very different (refer to National and Local Context section).

Additionally, the geographic context of the UK is important. Research conducted in London has taken place in a large, urban and ethnically diverse environment, and therefore findings from these studies are likely to lack generalisations to smaller rural towns, cities consisting of mainly white majority ethnic groups or to all areas within London (Malek & Joughin, 2004).

This highlights the importance of conducting more research, to gain a greater understanding of the contextual factors influencing multiracial identity and mental health. This chapter includes 1) a brief overview of adolescence, gender differences and peer influences on mental health and identity 2) a review of the multiracial mental health literature, and 3) an introduction to this thesis' theoretical framework.

### **Adolescence.**

This thesis focused on adolescence as an important developmental period for identity, friendship formation and mental health. Adolescence is difficult to define because of individual experiences of physical, emotional and cognitive maturity. For example, girls

often undergo puberty earlier than boys, and experience some of the key physiological and psychological changes associated with adolescence before they are formally considered to be an adolescent (United Nations Children's Fund [UNICEF], 2011). There remains no internationally accepted definition of adolescence and the definitions that do exist are based on a range of restrictions, such as onset of puberty, minimum age thresholds and cultural initiation practices (UNICEF, 2011). It has recently been argued that the adolescent age range should be increased from 10 – 19 years, to 10 – 24 years to recognise modern changes in social roles (UNICEF, 2011; Sawyer, Azzopardi, Wickremarathne & Patton, 2018). Using this wider age range, adolescence can broadly be separated into three categories, early adolescence (age 10 – 13), mid-adolescence (age 14 – 16) and late adolescence (17 – 24).

Adolescence is often characterised as a transitional period of heightened vulnerability, accompanied by numerous risks to mental health, such as greater independence, sexual development, increasingly complex relationships and struggles with identity (Coleman & Hagell, 2007). Different brain systems mature at different times during adolescence, and there can be large discrepancies between behaviour, emotion and thought (Steinberg, 2005). Adolescence is when the stability of self, as experienced in childhood, becomes most under threat (Coleman & Hagell, 2007). By mid-adolescence, typically developing individuals have acquired the necessary cognitive functions to support identity development, such as greater self-awareness and self-evaluation.

Additionally, changes occur in the brain areas involved with social thinking. Children as young as three develop an awareness and knowledge that they belong to social groups (Nesdale, 2004). As they develop social cognitive skills, such as perspective taking and empathy, it becomes increasingly important to belong and feel accepted by peers. By early adolescence, fitting in with peers becomes a primary task and adolescents begin to distance themselves emotionally and physically from their parents (Fuligni & Eccles, 1993). Peers present adolescents with novel views of the self, which can be important for identity development during mid-adolescence (Coleman & Hagell, 2007).

This thesis explores how peers and friends influence identity formation and mental health for multiracial adolescents. Several studies have shown that having a friend is related to positive adjustment, such as protection against stress and increased self-esteem (Bukowski, Motzoi, & Meyer, 2009; Rubin, Bukowski & Laursen, 2011). This thesis used a definition of mental health that emphasises social wellbeing, which is the degree to which an individual feels a sense of belonging and social inclusion (Westerhof

& Keyes, 2010). The ability to feel integrated and valued by one's community and peer group is an important part of mental health.

The majority of research on adolescent friendship focuses on white-majority ethnic groups and there is little research exploring friendship specifically for multiracial adolescents. This is troubling given that peers are likely to be an important factor in identity formation. Research shows that ethnic identity formation may be more complex for multiracial adolescents as they belong to multiple ethnic groups, yet may feel they belong to neither or may face rejection from both (Fisher, Reynolds, Hsu, Barnes and Tyler, 2014; Shih & Sanchez, 2005). It is important to recognise that multiple factors are likely to interact to explain the relationship between ethnic identity, peers/friendship and mental health (Ifekwunigwe, 1997; Rosenthal, 2016).

### **Gender differences.**

This thesis focused on a sample of multiracial girls. Research based in the US shows that that girls are more likely than boys to identify as multiracial, which could suggest that girls are more aware of the complexity of their ethnic identity than boys (Doyle & Kao, 2007). Differences between genders can be explained using multiple psychological theories. Cognitive theory states that children form mental representations about gender which guide their behaviour, social learning theory states that children learn gendered behaviours by modelling same-sex others and social identity theory would suggest that the need to feel part of an in-group and devalue out-groups may enhance identification with gendered identities (Rose & Smith, 2009). Simultaneously, researchers note the importance of acknowledging within-gender variation (Rose & Smith, 2009). These theories may explain why research has observed gender differences.

An extensively researched area is gender differences in the perceived importance of physical appearance. Research shows that physical appearance may be more salient to identities for women than for men, and that adolescent girls are more likely to show higher levels of anxiety about their physical appearance and lower physical self-esteem than boys (Hagger & Stevenson, 2010; McMullin & Cairney, 2004). Given the heterogeneity of the multiracial population, it is likely that multiracial girls with the same ethnic-group combination may experience different peer interactions due to their appearance. Multiracial girls who resemble a monoracial ethnic group may experience a greater sense of belonging and acceptance within that group, whereas girls with a more ambiguous phenotype may experience greater rejection (Phillips, 2004). The salience of physical appearance for adolescent girls may mean that negative social

experiences based on appearance have a greater impact on self-esteem and mental health.

The nature of friendships has also been shown to differ between genders. As girls approach adolescence they tend to self-disclose more in their friendships compared to boys (Rose, 2002). This was found to have contradictory outcomes, in that self-disclosure was related to positive friendship adjustment, yet dwelling and discussing problems excessively led to emotional difficulties (Rose, 2002). This mirrors other research showing that although girls in mid-adolescence rated their friendships as more supportive than boys, they also rated them as more stressful (Thomas & Daubman, 2001). This could partly be due to gender differences in types of aggression. Paquette and Underwood (1999) found that social aggression, acts that damage reputation in a peer group, was perceived as more hurtful and time-consuming for girls compared to boys. This illustrates that peer relations and friendship may be a useful area of study for multiracial mental health. Particularly as multiracial adolescent girls have been shown to be more likely to experience more anxiety about social rejection than multiracial boys (Kerwin et al., 1993).

This research shows how multiracial individuals cannot be reduced to one category at a time. A multiracial girl is simultaneously positioned as multiracial, of one of many multiracial sub-groups, and as a woman with specific cultural, political, religious and social class differentiations. Such intersectionality shows the complex and rich effect which occurs when these multiple positionings intersect in specific contexts (Brah & Phoenix, 2004). Authors have argued that there often appears an endless list of social divisions (Butler, 1990). However, in certain situations or to specific people some social divisions become more important (Phoenix, 2006). In this thesis, it is not possible to explore a wide range of intersections. However, by focussing on the intersection of ethnicity and gender, whilst acknowledging the influence of other intersections such as culture and social class, this thesis aims to develop our understanding of multiracial identity and mental health and help to create meaningful recommendations for change (Rosenthal, 2016).

### **Influences of peers on mental health and ethnic identity.**

In this thesis, peers are used as an umbrella term to describe people in the school of a similar age or status to the multiracial adolescent. Therefore, in the school where this thesis is conducted, other adolescents would be described as peers. Friends are included in this umbrella definition. However, friends are peers with whom the

multiracial adolescent has a closer bond, greater feelings of affection towards and spends more time with.

Acceptance and belonging are important for adolescent wellbeing and mental health and rejection by peers can have negative effects on psychological wellbeing (Deater-Deckard, 2001). Achieving a sense of belonging can be difficult for multiracial adolescents. Qualitative research shows that multiracial adolescents experience rejection from both majority and minority ethnic peers and identify the lack of a clearly identifiable peer group as a pertinent issue (Shih & Sanchez, 2005; Morley & Street, 2014). Multiracial adolescents may adapt to these challenges in multiple ways, for example experimentation with racial stereotypes, embracing marginality by joining alternative peer groups or over conformity to majority-defined norms (Gibbs & Moscovitz-Sweet, 1991; Phillips, 2004). Multiracial adolescents can struggle to find racially similar peers who understand their experiences (Renn, 2000). Particularly as friendships are often based on homophily, the degree of similarity between potential friends, creating a tendency for peer groups to be ethnically homogenous (see Rubin, Wojslawowicz, Rose-Krasnor, Booth-LaForce, & Burgess, 2006).

Some past research appears to confirm the 'marginal man' hypothesis, which states that multiracial individuals live on the margins of both ethnic groups and they are accepted by neither (Park, 1931). However, recent research contests this theory. Doyle and Kao (2007) used data from a US national study to analyse the ethnicity of the best friend of 1200 multiracial adolescents, aged between 12 and 19. Multiracial friendships followed three patterns: *Homophily* (tendency for multiracial friends), *Blending* (friends with both of their monoracial counterparts), and *Amalgamation* (friends of one of their races more than the other).

Doyle and Kao (2007) found that all subgroups of their multiracial group exhibited signs of amalgamation, which contradict the marginal man hypothesis predicting multiracial individuals to be excluded from their racial groups. Using the same US data, Quillian and Redd (2009) investigated multiracial adolescent popularity and diversity. They found that multiracial adolescents were as popular as monoracial adolescents were and had racially diverse social networks. Whilst this research reveals more optimistic outcomes for multiracial adolescents, it doesn't imply that multiracial adolescents do not experience challenges with social adjustment and that further research is required to examine risk and protective factors against social exclusion. This thesis used questionnaires and interviews to further understand how or whether multiracial

adolescents experience difficulties with peers and aimed to explore these processes in greater depth using a focused mid-adolescent sample.

Despite the increasing importance of peers in adolescence, very few studies have explored the influence of peers on multiracial ethnic identity. Santos, Kornienko and Rivas-Drake (2017) used a sample of 1500 early adolescents across two schools in the US to examine peer network influences on three components of ethnic identity. These were: *Centrality*, the degree to which participants felt their ethnic identity was important, *Private regard*, how positively participants feel about their ethnic group (in this thesis, private regard is referred to as ethnic identity affirmation), and *Public regard*, how positively participants felt others view their group.

In both schools, adolescents' levels of these respective components became more similar to their friends over the course of a school year. For example, in one school pupils with low centrality who had friends with high centrality, moved towards their friends' levels over the course of a year. The magnitude of this peer influence did not vary considerably across ethnic group in either school. Although the researchers were not able to compare the direction of influence, their research shows how peer influence relates to shifts in ethnic identity.

Santos et al., (2017) could be strengthened by exploring other aspects of ethnic identity. Aldana, Rowley, Checkoway, and Richards-Schuster (2012) studied the impact of a dialogue programme in the US on changes in ethnic identity exploration and awareness. Their dialogue programme involved engaging adolescents in structured discussions about race-based topics with peers from diverse backgrounds. Their study found that discussion of racial issues with other ethnic groups increased participant's racial consciousness and they engaged in greater exploration of their ethnic identity. Their research was restricted by its small sample size and lack of longitudinal measures to examine the long-term effect of peer-socialisation. However, the study suggests that peers can be a source of racial socialisation, i.e. providing insight into an adolescent's heritage and prepare them for the potential discrimination.

Finally, it is important to understand how adolescents feel others view their group. During identity formation in adolescence there is a heightened awareness of the self and context (Spencer et al., 2006). Reflected appraisals are how an individual's self-views are influenced by their perceptions of how others view them (Wallace & Tice, 2012). This process may be particularly important for ethnic identity development. Khanna (2010) conducted interviews with multiracial Asian adults in the US, who reported that the reactions of others to their appearance and cultural knowledge

effected their ethnic identity and belonging. Separate US research shows that multiracial youth can hold negative reflected appraisals about their peers, despite actually being popular within their peer group (Quillian & Redd, 2009). However, very few studies have explored this process for multiracial adolescents in the UK, nor explored how these appraisals may influence mental health.

## **Ethnicity and Mental Health**

There is an ongoing conversation in UK mental health research about the disparities between BAME groups and the majority-white population (Sashidharan, 2003). Although there is still a paucity of research on BAME communities and mental health in the UK, a review from the Mental Health Foundation (2016) shows that BAME groups are more likely to be detained under the Mental Health Act and are less likely to have mental health problems detected by their GP. There is also an intersection of ethnicity and gender. Black women, but not men, are found to be more likely than white women to have mental health problems, such as depression and anxiety (Mental Health Foundation, 2016). The reasons for the disparity between ethnic groups is complex. Research shows that BAME communities face social exclusion, which vary according to socio-economic status, cultural and religious practices. Research shows families from BAME households are likely to have higher child poverty rates than the national average and live in areas affected by government cuts in funding, which is likely to exacerbate poverty (Beasor, 2011). Furthermore, BAME groups are likely to experience discrimination and institutional racism, both in the community and when in contact with agencies (Sashidharan, 2003), and the lack of understanding or stigma about mental health can be a barrier to accessing services (Lavis, 2014). Although there is variation between and within BAME groups, this research highlights the need for change in the system.

The over-representation of BAME groups in adult mental health services suggests a lack of early intervention or access to services (Malek & Joughin, 2004). There is a need for more UK research on mental health of young people and children from BAME groups, considering the intersection between ethnicity and gender. There is very little research on the mental health of adolescents from a multiracial ethnic background in the UK (Zilanawala, Sacker, Nazroo & Kelly, 2018). Most research tends to be conducted in the US and uses nationwide survey and census data (Aspinall, 2017). The needs of multiracial girls remain even less understood than other groups (Lavis, 2014).

### **Multiracial mental health.**

This section critically examines current research about multiracial adolescent mental health. It is organised into specific issues and explains how these have been addressed in this thesis.

### ***Multiracial subgroups.***

There are numerous combinations of multiracial categories. A limitation of research into multiracial mental health is the tendency to amalgamate participants into a single multiracial group rather than consider the heterogeneity of the multiracial sample. Patalay & Fitzsimons (2017) analysed data from the Millennium Cohort Study, a large-scale longitudinal project funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) and Government departments. The sample follows 19,000 children born in the UK in 2000-01. The most recent publication, conducted at age 14, compared ethnic group differences in self-reported depression. At age 14 gender differences were most pronounced compared to data collection at age 11, with girls more likely to show symptoms of anxiety or depression than boys. Using the self-report measures, they found that multiracial and white girls were more likely than other ethnic groups to report high depressive symptoms. This thesis is focussed on girls in mid-adolescence, as a particularly vulnerable group as illustrated in this research. However, Patalay and Fitzsimons (2017) did not differentiate between different multiracial sub-groups, which has been shown to be important in other research.

For example, Zilanawala et al., (2018) differentiated between multiracial sub-groups also using data from the Millennium Cohort Study. They examined ethnic group differences on behaviour problems, which they measured using the total difficulties score from the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire. This includes peer problems, conduct disorders, hyperactivity and emotional problems. Although unclear from their brief paper, the authors appear to have categorised multiracial children according to their ethnic minority-white heritage. By age 11, they found that Indian-white and Black African-white children had fewer behaviour problems than their monoracial peers, whereas Pakistani, Bangladeshi and Black Caribbean-white multiracial children had more problem behaviours. This research highlights the importance of acknowledging the heterogeneity of the multiracial population, as different sub-groups may have different outcomes.

Further support comes from US research. Wong et al., (2012) conducted a national study in the US exploring the link between ethnicity and suicide risk. They found that when multiracial adolescent groups were amalgamated, they had higher suicide risks than other minority groups. However, separate analysis showed that multiracial

adolescents identifying as part-Hispanic reported a lower prevalence of suicide consideration compared to their non-Hispanic multiracial peers. Campbell and Eggerling-Boeck (2006) explored ethnic group differences in depression, social acceptance and connection to school. They sampled over 1000 multiracial adolescents (mean age 15) using a national US survey. Importantly, they included detail on multiracial sub-groups in their sample and the breadth of their study allowed them to analysis sub-groups individually. They found that multiracial participants had more negative mental health and social adjustment outcomes than monoracial groups, but these were mainly driven by the significant disadvantages of the American Indian–White multiracial group. In addition, they found that Black-white adolescents were also less likely to feel socially accepted, but this was limited to females. This reiterates this thesis' aim in exploring the intersection between gender and multiracial ethnicity.

A common feature of these studies is the large sample size and national representation. Due to the small-scale nature of this thesis, it may not be possible to run statistical analysis using multiracial sub-groups. However, the qualitative phase of this thesis will focus on the experiences of adolescent girls with a black-white multiracial background. This will allow a deeper exploration of the mechanisms between ethnic identity peers and mental health for this sub-group and avoid over-generalisations.

#### ***Accurate reporting of multiracial identification.***

How the ethnic group and ethnic identity is identified is a crucial issue in multiracial research. Ethnicity can either be measured by self-report from participants or by operational measures, such as parent ethnic group (Aspinall, 2017). The way participants are identified can have various implications. Parental definitions allow the researcher to explore the influence of ethnic group on outcomes. Whereas, self-identification allows research to understand the implications of multiracial ethnic identity. A combination of both allows research to examine the outcomes of multiracial adolescents whose ethnic identity do not align with their ethnic group.

Fisher et al., (2014) explored the relationships between ethnic identity, anxiety and depression, and school diversity. This US-based study surveyed over 4700 young people, with average age 16. They found that self-identified multiracial adolescents had higher levels of depressive symptoms than their BAME monoracial and white-majority monoracial peers. However, this research did not specify multiracial sub-group and did not use parental definitions of ethnic group. This is important as research shows that the use of parental- or self-identification of ethnic group can impact findings.

Lusk, Taylor, Nanney & Austin (2010) examined this distinction using a multiracial sample in the US. They surveyed 74 black-white multiracial individuals, average age 23, using the ethnic identity categories outlined by Rockquemore and Brunnsma (2002) and measures of ethnic identity, self-esteem and depression. They found that multiracial participants who identified as multiracial had higher self-esteem and lower depression scores, compared to those who identified as monoracial. The authors note the consequences of self-identifications are likely to be dependent on social context. This is illustrated in Campbell and Eggerling-Boeck (2006). They found that for most multiracial participants, identification method did not correlate with different outcomes. However, the American-Indian/white multiracial group felt more socially accepted when they self-identified as white compared to when they identified as multiracial. The authors report that American-Indian populations have a long history of interethnic marriage and discrimination, and that American-Indian/white adolescents may be especially affected by identity invalidation when they identify as multiracial.

These studies show the importance of collecting ethnic group and ethnic identity measures and considering the social and historic context. This thesis used mixed-methods to explore the impact of different identification methods whilst acknowledging the social context. The benefits of mixed methods research are outlined below.

### ***Methodology.***

Particularly in the US, many studies exploring multiracial mental health aim to compare outcomes between different groups. This is important for raising the profile of multiracial samples in research and recognising where multiracial individuals may have similar or different outcomes to other ethnic groups. However, the over-reliance on quantitative methodologies to answer this research question has several limitations. Shih and Sanchez (2005) found that quantitative data often provided an unclear picture of multiracial mental health because results were heavily dependent on the outcome measured. Multiracial adolescents tended to fare worse than their monoracial peers on measures of sexual activity, substance abuse and problem behaviour. However, multiracial adolescents were reported as doing just as well, if not better in measures of school performance (Shih, Bonam, Sanchez & Peck, 2007) and relationships with peers (Cauce et al., 1992).

Additionally, most of the data comparing multiracial to monoracial peers uses secondary analysis of large national surveys (Zilanawala et al., 2018; Patalay & Fitzsimons, 2017). Such secondary analysis studies tend to have high power because they can control variables, such as socio-economic status and home context, and the

large representative sample sizes enhance generalisability. However, the reliability of the instrument design can be a limitation for some large-scale studies. The breadth of the questionnaire in Campbell and Eggerling-Boeck (2006) meant that no intact scales were used and many variables were measured with single items. For example, the binary question 'I feel socially accepted' was used to measure social acceptance. The use of such general questionnaires reduces the reliability and validity of the results and restricts opportunities to grasp deeper meaning in the data. Many researchers call on the use of qualitative data to greater understand the mechanisms and contextual issues which underlie ethnic group differences.

Qualitative research into mental health tends to explore multiracial identity development and the contextual factors that influence development. Basu (2003) interviewed 18 multiracial women to explore the relationship between social context and identity. The study showed that a range of contexts, including school diversity, parents, siblings and multiracial mentors impacted their identity development. This reflects the ecological approach used in this thesis. Qualitative research also has strengths in identifying positive outcomes and protective factors, such as the multiracial identity being viewed as a positive way to move easily between different peer groups (Lewis, 2016). Qualitative studies are useful for deepening our understanding of the multiracial experience, however it can be difficult to unravel whether the mental health outcomes mentioned in these studies are unique to having a multiracial background or BAME status in general and there is an over-reliance on unpublished doctoral theses in this area.

This thesis used a mixed-methods approach to highlight whether there are intergroup differences in mental health, peer relations and ethnic identity, but also explore more deeply the potential mechanisms behind these differences. This aimed to highlight this issue to promote more research in this area.

### **Risk and protective factors.**

Although very few studies have looked specifically at multiracial mental health, many explore multiracial issues in general. This provides some evidence as to the processes that may underlie the relationship between multiracial background and mental health outcomes. This section does not intend to provide a comprehensive overview of the literature. However, it examines significant and current research influencing this field. Importantly it evidences the role of environment and social interaction in mental health, using ecological systems theory as a framework. This research has been chosen to provide a context for this thesis, illustrate the complexity of multiracial mental health

and identity development, and provide rationale for greater exploration of the role of peers and friendship for multiracial adolescents.

### ***School and community.***

A significant contributor to child development is the influence of school and the wider community. Several studies have explored how the ethnic diversity of the neighbourhood and community influences identity development and emotional wellbeing of multiracial individuals. Morley and Street (2014) conducted a qualitative narrative study asking 21 participants, aged between 21 and 56, to reflect on their childhood experiences of growing up multiracial. They elicited a common theme from the third of participants who lived in London, particularly in London areas with high ethnic diversity, that they felt less 'different' and could enjoy opportunity to feel anonymous. Nevertheless, living in London did not necessarily prevent them from experiencing social isolation, as many reported rejections from both black and white groups. The authors are also wary of generalising their results to the current context, as many of their participants were older and were reflecting back to experiences over ten years ago.

Other research has explored how the diversity of a school effects identity development and mental health. Fisher et al., (2014) found that although school diversity was related to mental health, this was only applicable for white students, who actually had worse mental health outcomes the more diverse the school. However, the authors noted that the majority of multiracial adolescents in their sample attended diverse schools, which made it difficult to obtain enough variation to test their hypothesis. Further research has examined the impact on school diversity on identity. Nishina et al., (2010) found that when multiracial adolescents shifted to a monoracial identity, they were more likely to identify with the largest monoracial group in the school. They suggest that ethnically diverse schools may provide exposure to multiple racial groups and greater flexibility in identity choice.

Tizard and Phoenix (2002) found a weak relationship between attending a diverse school and a positive multiracial identity. However, it was difficult to examine trends due to the variability in the extent of diversity in schools and difficulties differentiating between school diversity and socio-economic status. Most adolescents from low income backgrounds in their sample attended diverse schools and were more likely to adopt a black identity. Echols et al., (2017) suggested further research could be more meaningful by investigating the diversity of more proximal environments. They studied how multiracial adolescents in the US changed their self-identification over time and

context. They found that as participants aged, the ethnic diversity of their friends had a greater influence on whether their self-identification changed compared to the ethnic diversity of their classmates. This thesis focused on the proximal systems of school peers and friendship groups. However, as it uses an ecological approach, the influences of more distal environments, such as neighbourhood diversity, will also be considered, particularly during the qualitative interviews.

### ***Ethnic-racial socialisation***

Ethnic-racial socialisation practices are interactions with family members, mainly parents, which provide insight into an adolescent's heritage and prepare them for potential discrimination or prejudice that they may face. This includes implicit and explicit messages about the meaning and significance of race and ethnicity (Neblett, Rivas-Drake & Umaña-Taylor, 2012). There has been a breadth of research looking at parents' ethnic-racial socialisation practices, particularly in ethnic minority monoracial families, where it has been shown to be common practice (Neblett, et al., 2012). Family socialisation is often described as the most important process in understanding how young people can be supported to negotiate ethnically diverse contexts, develop positive ethnic identity and manage social inequalities (Hughes et al., 2006). Adolescence may be a particularly important stage, as young people may be more likely to initiate ethnic-racial socialisation processes as they begin to explore their identity (Hughes & Johnson, 2001). In the review of the literature, Hughes et al (2006) outlined four key descriptions of ethnic-racial socialisation practices. These are:

- cultural socialisation (teaching children about their ethnic heritage and history and promoting cultural, racial, and ethnic pride),
- preparation for bias (highlighting the existence of inequalities between groups and preparing youth to cope with discrimination),
- egalitarianism (emphasising individual character traits such as hard work over racial or ethnic group membership),
- promotion of mistrust (conveying distrust in interracial communications).

Ethnic-racial socialisation has been associated with a range of outcomes. Research shows that cultural socialisation has been consistently associated with higher self-esteem, better academic outcomes and fewer externalising behaviours (Hughes et al., 2006). There is mixed evidence regarding the other types of ethnic-racial socialisation practices. For example, preparation for bias has been linked to discrimination coping skills (e.g. Phinney & Chavira, 1995). However, when preparation for bias is communicated in isolation, it may contribute to low self-esteem by instilling a lack of

control over their environment (Hughes et al, 2009). There has also been some research exploring potential gender differences in ethnic-racial socialisation practices, given that boys and girls are likely to have different experiences related to their ethnicity. Some studies have shown that girls receive more messages about racial pride, and boys regarding racial barriers (e.g. Thomas & Speight, 1999). However, these results are inconsistent and are likely to be influenced by a complex array of additional factors, such as discrimination experiences and community context.

Despite the research interest in ethnic-racial socialisation, the majority of the literature focusses on monoracial African-American families. In different ethnic groups, specific practices may have different meanings and therefore different outcomes for the young person. Diverse ethnic groups may vary in their beliefs about how ethnicity should be communicated to children and ethnicity may be more salient for some groups rather than others. Additionally, very few studies have looked at how parent's ethnic identities shape their ethnic-racial socialisation practices (Hughes et al., 2006). This is important for the current thesis, because of the diversity within multiracial households. For multiracial young people, parents own experiences of race may have a part to play in the nature of ethnic-racial socialisation practiced, and in a multiracial family the ethnic identities are likely to differ, not only between the parents, but also between the parents and the adolescent themselves.

Due to the complexity of ethnic-racial socialisation in multiracial families, there has been a range of published research. As this is not the focus of the current thesis, this is only a brief overview of some recent studies. Rollins and Hunter (2013) conducted interviews with mothers and their multiracial children (aged 12). They found that the ethnic-racial socialisation practices of parents of multiracial adolescents did not differ from parents of monoracial adolescents. Their thematic analysis found that mothers used a range of strategies, such as strengthening the child's sense of self, preparing them for experiences with racial discrimination and providing information about their heritage. However, other research shows less positive ethnic-racial socialisation experiences. Morley and Street (2014) found that participants differed as to the degree of familial support experienced. Several participants reported that their families had little knowledge about the multiracial experience and some experienced rejection and hostility from extended family. Nadal, Sriken, Davidoff, Wong and McLean (2013) described the micro-aggressions that multiracial participants experienced from their families. Micro-aggressions are defined as everyday comments that communicate hostile racial messages to an individual, but are often communicated subconsciously and are rationalised by the communicator as having a different intention or meaning

(Sue, et al., 2007). Participants gave examples such as feeling less favoured by their extended family or witnessing racist actions from their white-majority family members. Participants cited the impacts of these events on their mental health. This shows how the family can both promote and threaten positive ethnic identity development and mental health.

Other research has explored non-familial sources of ethnic-racial socialisation practices. An increasing number of qualitative studies using multiracial samples have shown that multiracial adolescents learn about their ethnic background from their peers and have shown that friends can supplement the role of parents in ethnic-racial socialisation. Tizard and Phoenix (2002) conducted a comprehensive qualitative study interviewing 58 Black-Caribbean, White-British and Black-White adolescents in London. Half of multiracial participants highly rated friends as important to their identity and sense of who they are. Lewis (2016) conducted interviews and in-depth case studies with multiracial black/white adolescents and young adults in the UK. One multiracial participant, aged 22, reflected on how he looked towards his male friends at school for emotional support when his white father died, and reported that his friends provided guidance on 'how to be a mixed-race man' after the loss of his role model. The influence of peers on ethnic identity development and ethnic-racial socialisation remains an under-researched area, particularly for multiracial groups. This thesis used mixed-methods to understand better how peers influence and interact with multiracial ethnic identity, and examined the resulting impact on mental health.

### ***Discrimination.***

Ethnic discrimination has been shown to predict negative mental health outcomes for BAME young people, such as depression and lower self-esteem (Wong, Eccles, & Sameroff, 2003). Research shows that multiracial adolescents are likely to have experienced race-based discrimination (Csizmadia, Brunsma & Cooney, 2012). Brackett et al., (2006) found black-white multiracial college students in the US were more likely to report experiences of racial prejudice than their white or black monoracial peers. The authors suggest that multiracial young people may experience discrimination from members of both their ethnic groups, which reflects literature showing that mixed-race individuals are likely to experience rejection from both majority and minority peers (Shih & Sanchez, 2005).

Cooke, Bowie and Carrère (2014) examined how perceived discrimination is related to the mental health outcomes of multiracial children. Their US sample size was small (N=88) and they did not specify the heritage of the multiracial sample, albeit with a

large proportion were multiracial families (N=30), and the average age was 11 years. They found no differences in perceived discrimination between African American children and multiracial participants. However, they found that for multiracial children, perceptions of discrimination at school and its correlations with self-esteem and interpersonal relationships, were significantly greater compared to children of other ethnic groups. The authors suggest that because of their more variable ethnic identity relative to other groups, the experience of discrimination may interfere more with peer relationships. Therefore, although the multiracial girls in this sample may not necessarily experience more discrimination than monoracial ethnic minority peers, the type and impact of this discrimination may differ. One multiracial specific type of discrimination is identity invalidation.

### ***Identity invalidation.***

Identity *validation* occurs when others accept and celebrate the identity choice of a multiracial individual. In contrast, identity *invalidation* occurs when others categorise a multiracial individual into an ethnic group that is at odds with how they personally identify. Ethnic identity invalidation can be a tense and stressful experience for multiracial individuals (Franco, Katz & O'Brien, 2016). Shih & Sanchez (2005) state that multiracial individuals often must justify their identity choices, whereas monoracial individuals do not. This means that multiracial individuals may tend to question their own judgements about identity more often. In a series of interviews by Root (1998), multiracial individuals reported that the process of invalidation from peers was often traumatic. Participants shared that they were often subjected to authenticity tests, such as cultural knowledge or conformity to music, which pressured them into submission or negating the self (Root 1998).

Research shows that identity invalidation has a negative effect on identity development and mental health. Lou, Lalonde, and Wilson (2011) found that compared to those whose multiracial identity was not validated by others, individuals whose multiracial identity was validated by others had higher levels of identity integration and more consistent beliefs about the self. Additionally, Townsend, Markus and Bergsieker (2009) investigated the effect of invalidation by giving self-defined multiracial US undergraduate students a demographic survey where they were forced to either choose one ethnic background or choose from a range of backgrounds. They found that those who were forced to choose a monoracial identity had lower self-esteem and lower agency. They were also more likely to state that although identifying as multiracial, they experienced the world as monoracial.

The multiracial adolescents in this thesis may experience identity invalidation, which may decrease self-esteem, increase feelings of a lack of control over their environment and activate acknowledgement that their own identity is incongruous to that assigned by others. This research is unclear on how experiences of invalidation would affect those who identify as monoracial or how adolescents at earlier stages of identity development would respond (Townsend et al., 2009). This thesis focused on a younger age range (mid-adolescence) and included multiracial adolescents who may not self-identify as multiracial to address these issues.

Recently research has explored how multiracial individuals respond to invalidation. Tran, Miyake, Martinez-Morlas and Csizmadia (2016) explored the consequences of racial identification questions for self-defined multiracial American university students. Racial identification questions, such as “what are you?” can be invalidating because they assume that the multiracial individual is an outsider and they are different. It represents an attempt to categorise multiracial people and potentially objectifies them. Participants in the study gave negative appraisals towards these questions, such as feeling discomfort, offense and hostility. However, there were also multiple positive appraisals, such as feeling calm, pride and strength, which actually outweighed the negative appraisals. This highlights that potential for resilience and positive identities of multiracial individuals. Therefore, participants in this thesis may present feelings of discomfort around their identity, and/or of pride. Both have implications for their mental health.

Indeed, Franco et al., (2016) carried out a qualitative study looking at how multiracial college students viewed the effect of invalidation on their emotions and self-perceptions. The study focussed on the negative impact of invalidation and included only one theme on protective factors. These mitigating factors were a stable sense of self and identity affirming relationships, suggesting the importance of identity development and positive interactions with others around them. Tran et al., (2016) argue that by only seeing racial identification questions as stressors, which cause negative outcomes, you ignore the resilience of the multiracial person in the face of these experiences. Despite the important implications of this research, these studies are limited by the age of the participants and the reliance on using short interviews and open-ended questionnaires.

## **Theoretical Framework**

Developmental and social psychological theories are often used in ethnic identity research (Phinney & Ong, 2007). Developmental theories, such as the Psychosocial

Theory of Ego Development (Erikson, 1968), are relevant for this thesis because ethnic identity formation occurs over time and ethnic identity exploration peaks during adolescence. The influence of psychosocial theory is outlined and recognised in this literature review, yet Social Identity Theory and ecological theory are the chosen theoretical frameworks to guide and develop this thesis (Tajfel & Turner, 1986; Bronfenbrenner, 1989).

Although psychosocial theory provides a useful framework for understanding multiracial identity development, this thesis places greater emphasis on peers and social processes. Additionally, contemporary research has emphasised the role of ecological theories in ethnic identity research as they allow exploration of the range of factors that can influence ethnic identity formation in various social environments (Echols, Ivanich & Graham, 2017). This is important because although this thesis focusses specifically on the roles of friends and peers in the school context, there are likely to be interrelations between factors at the community, school and family level.

### **Psychosocial theory.**

Developmental theory, also known as *stage models*, is not the theoretical framework in this thesis. However, developmental theory is widely referred to in ethnic identity literature and is a relevant foundation to this thesis. Erikson's seminal work on the Psychosocial Theory of Ego Identity (1968) is one of the most prominent developmental theories on identity. Psychosocial Theory informed the choice of mid-adolescence for the focus of this thesis and it highlights the relationship between identity and mental health. This theory consists for four key concepts:

1. There are normative stages of identity development and all individuals pass through these in discrete steps.
2. Adolescence is a key period for identity development. During adolescence, young people become more aware of roles in society and their place in society. This creates a tension between 'who I am' and 'who I want to be'.
3. The concept of an identity crisis. Resolution of the identity crisis results in a secure identity, whereas failure to resolve an identity leads to role confusion and a weak sense of self.
4. Achieving a stable and well-developed identity is the final and most desirable stage of development. A secure identity enables an individual to organise previous skills and experiences in a way that helps an individual to cope with future challenges.

Psychosocial Theory has been applied to ethnic identity as a specific domain. Phinney (1989) has been influential in this area, building on the work of stage models (Erikson, 1968; Marcia, 1966). Phinney (1989) proposes that individuals also work through normative stages of development to form an ethnic identity. Individuals begin with a lack of awareness or understanding about their ethnic group, the *unexamined* stage. As an individual approaches mid-adolescence, they enter a period of ethnic identity *exploration* as the individual learns more about their ethnic group and searches for a sense of self. Exploration peaks in mid-adolescence, before decreasing as individuals reach the *achieved* ethnic identity stage, where they have a clear sense of belonging based on their understanding of the meaning and implications of their group membership (Phinney, Jacoby & Silva, 2007).

Research has supported that notion that identity exploration is a normative component of ethnic minority adolescents' development (Quintana, 2007). Pahl and Way (2006) carried out a longitudinal study of ethnic identity in the US. They use the Multi-group Ethnic Identity Measure (MEIM) to measure the ethnic identity of 135 Black and Latino adolescents over four years, from a mean age of 15 to 18. They found that ethnic identity exploration peaked in mid-adolescence, followed by a decline by age 16. This mirrors the theorised trajectory of an initial search for a sense of self, followed by finally feeling secure and confident in ethnic group membership. Relatively little research has explored ethnic identity development for white monoracial groups. It has been argued that as white monoracial adolescents in the UK and US primarily operate in a white-majority society, issues of race and ethnicity are less pertinent for them. However, as our societies become more ethnically diverse, ethnicity may become more salient for dominant groups who may begin to explore their own ethnic identity (Hughes, Witherspoon, Rivas-Drake, & West-Bey, 2009).

However, there are issues applying stage models based on monoracial development to multiracial groups. Here it is important to consider historical and cultural attitudes towards multiracial identity. In the 1960s, research on multiracial development was dominated by the *equivalent* approach. Researchers using this approach expected multiracial people to choose between one of their monoracial identities (Cross, 1971). In the US especially, little distinction was made between multiracial and black identity, they were seen as equivalent, and it was assumed that monoracial identity models could simply be applied to multiracial identity development (Tutwiler, 2016). In the 1980s and 1990s, there was a shift in research to adopt the *variant* approach to multiracial identity. This validated the multiracial identity in its own right and multiple models were created specifically address the development of a multiracial identity

(Kerwin & Ponterotto, 1995; Poston, 1990). Although the models present a framework for understanding multiracial identity, there are multiple limitations.

Firstly, such stage models suggest that there is a final desirable stage of identity. To 'achieve' an identity suggests that identity is somehow finalised during adolescence. However, research shows that multiracial identity is likely to change over a lifetime. Hitlin, Brown and Elder (2006) measured the multiracial self-identification of 14 to 18-year olds over a five-year period. They found that participants were four times more likely to have changed their identification than reported the same identity over time. Additionally, what distinguishes multiracial individuals from their monoracial counterparts is the choice between identities. Brunnsma, Delgado and Rockquemore (2013) suggest that multiracial individuals with black and white heritage have a choice between a *singular identity* (e.g. solely black or white), *border identity* (exclusively multiracial), *protean identity* (shifting identity depending on the situation), or *transcendent identity* (does not classify self by race).

The link between developmental theories and multiracial mental health can also be problematic. Research shows that ethnic minority adolescents at achieved stages of ethnic identity development are more likely to have positive psychological outcomes. Yasui, Dorham & Dishion (2004) found that African American adolescents at later stage of ethnic identity, were less likely to display symptoms of depression, anxiety or aggressive behaviour, when compared to African American adolescents at earlier stages of ethnic identity. Although correlational, this supports the notion made by Erikson that a stable and well-developed identity is important for psychological outcomes.

Regarding multiracial identity, stage models of multiracial identity development are characterised by identity confusion like Erikson's theory (Kerwin & Ponterotto, 1995; Poston, 1990). However multiracial models also highlight the intense pressure that multiracial people experience in choosing between their available identities. This pressure could lead to confusion, guilt and self-hatred. This feeds into the 'tragic mulato' narrative around multiracial identity. Tragic mulato is a discriminatory term that states that multiracial people are doomed to psychological confusion. Only when a multiracial individual could integrate both parts of their heritage that a stable and well-developed identity could be achieved. However, modern researchers in British and the US have challenged these views. They have provided accounts showing multiracial individuals generally view their identities as stable, multiple and context-dependent (Caballero, Haynes & Tikly, 2007). It is argued that no one ethnic identification is more

advantageous over the other, rather it is the invalidation of a chosen identity by others which has the greatest effect on wellbeing (Rockquemore & Laszloffy, 2003).

Finally, such models fail to consider the processes and social factors involved in identity development. Although Eriksson's initial theory does highlight that identity crisis occurs when an individual faces tension between their personal and social self, little is in place to explain the social processes active during these stages. Individuals from ethnic minority backgrounds are not only tasked with following normal identity development, but they also need to contend with societal pressures, such as discrimination, which other groups do not (Ruble et al., 2004; Phinney, 1996). Multiracial individuals will in turn have unique societal pressures compared to monoracial groups. This thesis considers the contextual and social processes involved in multiracial identity and mental health. Social Identity Theory was adopted as a framework in order to address some of these issues.

### **Social identity theory.**

Social Identity Theory (SIT – Tajfel & Turner, 1986) consists of three core and related concepts:

1. *Social identity*, which is a person's sense of self according to the knowledge that they belong to a social group.
2. *Social categorisation*, which is the tendency to sort the environment around us into social categories. We then use these to categorise people into groups to which we belong and into groups that are different to us.
3. *Social comparison*, which is the process of comparing groups and evaluating their value. For example, skin tone only becomes significant by perceiving differences between groups and placing societal value on these differences.

As children transition into adolescence, their awareness of social groups increases as they develop social-cognitive skills and have increasing contact with multiple groups. Throughout development, children attach meaning to group membership, begin to recognise which social groups have higher status and become progressively motivated to belong and feel accepted in a group (Nesdale, 2004; 2008). A positive sense of belonging to a group, and positive views towards group membership, act as a source of self-esteem (Tajfel, 1981). Adolescence becomes a key stage in development where children try to understand where they 'fit' within their wider peer group. As multiracial individuals can belong to two or more ethnic groups, the action of 'fitting in' becomes less straightforward. Peer decisions about whether multiracial individuals are in-group or out-group members may depend on multiple contextual factors, such as appearance, behaviour and ethnic identity disclosure (Wilton, 2011). This can make group belonging more a complex process for multiracial adolescents.

Whilst psychosocial theories focus on the development of identity, SIT places more emphasis on its affective elements and content. Umaña-Taylor, Yazedjian and Bámaca-Gómez (2004) argue that an achieved ethnic identity does not necessarily equate to positive feelings about that identity (ethnic identity affirmation). An individual may have explored and feel committed to their ethnic identity; however, they could still feel negatively about their ethnic group. This has implications for the multiracial girls in this thesis, as even if they feel committed to an ethnic identity, their choice may not be supported by their peers or valued in society, lowering their ethnic identity affirmation. This also has repercussions for mental health because ethnic identity affirmation has been reliably linked to positive psychological adjustment (see Rivas-Drake et al. 2014 for review). Ethnic identity affirmation has been shown to be a protective factor against

the effects of peer discrimination on self-esteem and psychological functioning (Greene, Way, & Pahl, 2006; Sellers, Copeland-Linder, Martin, & Lewis, 2006). Rather than exploring how identity develops over time, this thesis focusses on how interactions with peers and friends influence how multiracial girls feel about their ethnic group.

SIT is not without its limitations. SIT has been critiqued for its overemphasis on the processes between groups without recognising variation in individuals within groups (Hornsey, 2008). To address some of these limitations, Oakes, Haslam, and Turner (1994) highlighted that individuals belong to multiple social categories and in certain or times different social categories will be more salient. Santos et al., (2017) found that ethnic identity was more central to adolescents' sense of self when they lived in an area of high ethnic discrimination. In these contexts, ethnic identity may be highlighted more often on a day-to-day basis due to a hostile environment in the community.

This has implications for this thesis as it has been researched in an ethnically diverse school and community. The extent to which individuals feels others view their ethnic group positively or negatively (reflected appraisal) and the degree to which these views are internalised, are likely to impact the relationship between ethnic identity and functioning (Umaña-Taylor, Wong, Gonzales & Dumka, 2012). If ethnic identity is made more salient for the multiracial girls in this thesis, negative social experiences that relate to their identity, such as peer discrimination, may be more impactful on their mental health and self-esteem.

A strength of SIT is that it highlights the adaptive function of identity. For multiracial girls, different aspects of their ethnic identity may be more significant or functional to them depending on the social context they find themselves in (Rockquemore, Brunisma & Delgado, 2009). Exposure to a range of ethnic groups may provide more opportunities to build a healthy multiracial identity. The use of SIT as a framework in this thesis helps to frames ethnic identity as an active process which has a functional role in the environment. As research has indicated, the influence of peers in this thesis is likely to be affected by the wider community and school context (Santos et al., 2017). So, in addition to SIT, this thesis will also use an ecological approach to acknowledge these broader contexts.

## Ecological theory.

Since 2000, there has been increased interest in ecological models. These aim to capture the range of contexts and systems that influence both monoracial and multiracial ethnic identity development (Brittian, 2012; Root, 2003; Gonzales-Bracken, 2013). Such models build on Bronfenbrenner's (1989) Ecological Theory of development (Figure 1). This states that surrounding a child/adolescent are complex and embedded systems which relate to each other and the wider environment. These interacting systems, or levels, impact on the development of an individual, in this case an adolescent, to form an *ecosystemic model*. These relationships are reciprocal such that the individual influences the environment, and the environment influences the individual. A range of systems surrounds an adolescent, termed the *micro-system*, *mesosystem*, *exosystem*, *macrosystem* and *chronosystem*. The microsystem is the most proximal, or closest, context to the adolescent and the macrosystem at is the most distal, or outer, context. According to ecological models, the more proximal the environment, and the more complex and continuous the social interaction, the more likely it will influence development (Bronfenbrenner, 1989; Echols et al., 2017). These are termed 'proximal processes'.

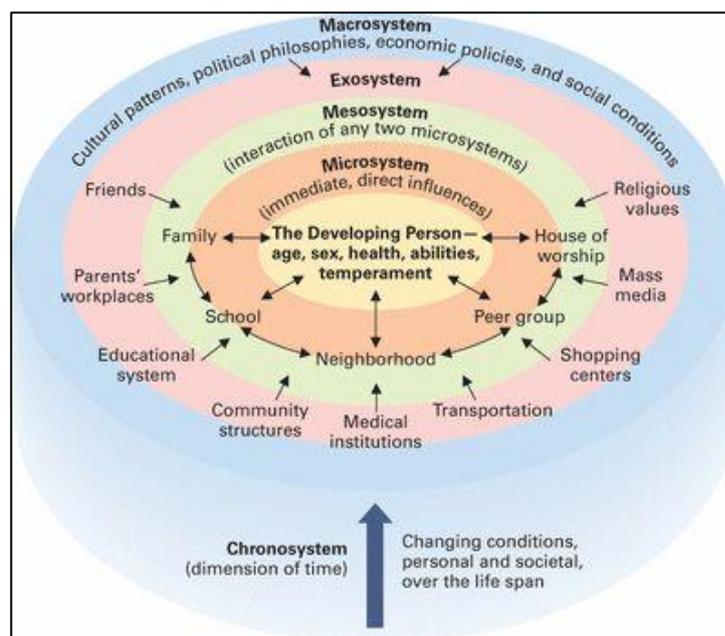


Figure 1 Bronfenbrenner's (1989) Ecological Theory of development (image adapted from Berger, 2015).

The adolescent is placed at the centre of the system at the *individual* level, which includes characteristics such as gender, race and ethnicity. This thesis focused on adolescent girls, who may have different experiences to their male counterparts (Kerwin et al., 1993). In addition, physical appearance may be a significant factor for adolescent

girls (McMullin & Cairney, 2004). Appearance may affect how much discrimination an adolescent faces or, if their appearance is more consistent with one group over another, how much their chosen ethnic identity is contested and becomes more salient in their environment.

The *microsystem* contains the most proximal contexts, such as the family, peers and school. This thesis focused on the impact of peers, as they become a more important context for development during adolescence (Fuligni & Eccles, 1993). The *mesosystem* illustrates the connections between micro-system. Of relevance to this thesis is the likely interaction between peers and school diversity. The ethnic diversity of the school may influence the diversity of the peer group, which may promote or restrict ethnic identity exploration (Nishina, Bellmore, Witkow & Nylund-Gibson, 2010). The *exosystem* contains more distal contexts that do not directly interact with the adolescent. For example, mass media and religious practices. For the multiracial girls in this thesis, their ethnic identity development is likely to be influenced by messages in the media (McArthur, 2016).

The most prominent recent example of an influential exosystem is the royal wedding of Prince Harry and Meghan Markle, who identifies as 'mixed-race'. Multiracial young people may feel pride at having their ethnic group recognised in the royal family. On the other hand, they may recognise, as Prince Harry described, the 'racial undertones' in the press and negative discourses about her representation of BAME and multiracial groups in the UK. The *macrosystem* is the most distal system, and contains factors at the wider societal level. This may include societal beliefs about ethnicity and government policy about race and diversity. Societal beliefs could influence multiracial identity formation by promoting negative or positive values about ethnic groups, which can impact how an adolescent feels about their ethnic identity. The recent example is the government policy on immigration and the impact on the Windrush generation (BBC News, 2018). Finally, the *chronosystem* illustrates how these interactions change over time. Although this thesis is cross-sectional in design, it is important to acknowledge how past experiences may have affected multiracial identity and how peer interactions may have changed over time.

Authors have critiqued ecological theory for its overreliance on context and lack of attention on the individual (Christensen, 2016). It is argued that this model does not account for a person's ability to change their environment or account for how some people can flourish despite unfavourable environments. Even Bronfenbrenner acknowledged that discounting the role a person plays in their own environment was

an oversight in his earlier theories (Bronfenbrenner, 1989). Multiracial girls may exist in an environment which may place their mental health at risk, however they can still have agency in their development within this environment. Later theories of ecological development have highlighted the fundamental role of enduring interactions between the person and their immediate environment (Bronfenbrenner, 1989). These models emphasise how an individual brings personal characteristics into any social situation which enables them to change their context (Tudge, Mokrova, Hatfield, & Karnik, 2009; Tudge et al., 2016). This is important to consider in the current thesis, as protective factors for multiracial mental health may exist both in the social context and in the individual.

Further research is needed which positions multiracial young people at the centre of social interactions, thus providing professionals and educators with a reconceptualisation of what it means to be multiracial (Tutwiler, 2016). Ecological models of multiracial development are still in their infancy. Gonzales-Bracken (2013) produced a recent ecological model devised to include contexts specific to multiracial development (see Figure 2). This focuses specifically on the proximal processes involved in ethnic identity development, including physical appearance, familial and non-familial ethnic-racial socialisation practices, discrimination and parent-child relationships. This model is a helpful start, however lacks some detail about the specific social interactions which may influence multiracial development. It also omits detail about the influence of peers. Research shows that friends can have a significant influence on multiracial identity. I argue that peers can be a threat to multiracial mental health, as perpetrators of invalidation and discrimination, but also that peers hold the potential to mitigate against these risks.

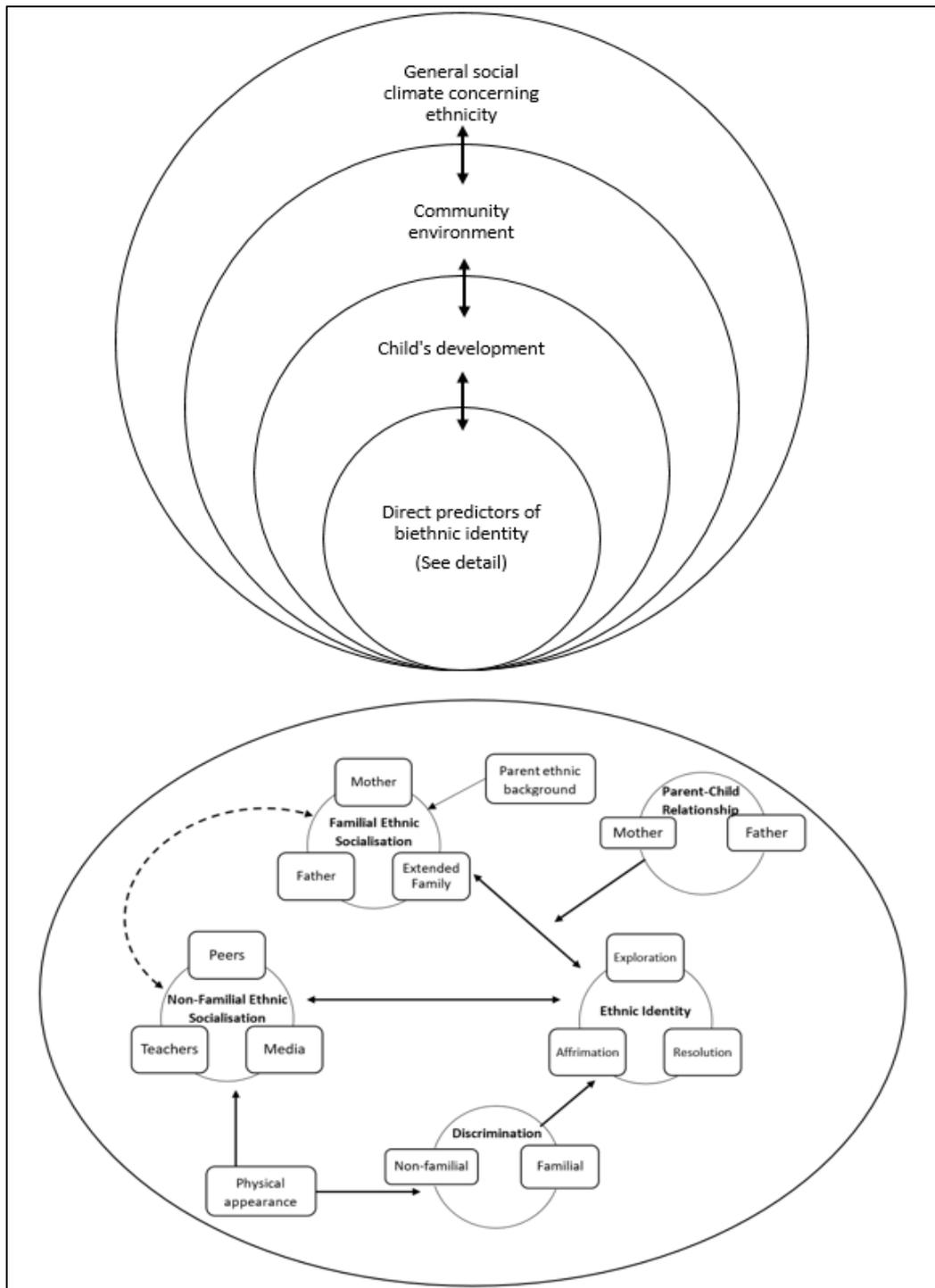


Figure 2 Ecological model of multiracial identity formation (reconstructed from Gonzales-Bracken, 2013).

## Summary

This chapter has illustrated that ethnic group differences in mental health outcomes are caused by an interplay between environmental and cultural factors, and a lack of early identification and support. Existing standards of practice already require EPs to have an awareness of the systemic and environmental contributors to the mental health of people from a variety of ethnic backgrounds (HCPC, 2015). However, within the EP profession there is little training about the specific processes in multiracial mental health. This is in part due to the limited available research in the UK and how multiracial individuals have been a 'forgotten' ethnic group in diversity research and training. This section has provided a brief overview of research outlining unique contributors to multiracial mental health. It has discussed factors at different levels of the ecosystem and how peer interactions may impact ethnic identity.

This section has also shown the clear social aspect of multiracial mental health, particularly as multiracial identity is often challenged or discriminated against. This literature review establishes the application of Social Identity Theory and ecological theory to help us understand how interactions with others impact mental health. However, this section also stresses the need of more research and the EP role to highlight the resilience of multiracial young people despite these challenges.

## Method overview

### Philosophical Assumptions

All research is underpinned by assumptions that guide the way data are collected and interpreted. It is paramount that researchers have a clear understanding of the assumptions they bring to their research and how it affects their procedures (Creswell & Clark, 2011). Philosophical assumptions vary according to *ontology*, how the researcher views the nature of reality, and *epistemology*, the relationship between the researcher and participants (Creswell & Clark, 2011).

The philosophy underlying this thesis is pragmatist. Pragmatism is concerned with creating practical solutions to social issues and focuses on the outcome of research. This approach emphasises the importance of the research question, and lends itself to a methodology which best informs our understanding of a problem. This allows for flexibility in researcher ontology and epistemology, according to the needs of the research. Pragmatism has been critiqued for its lack of specific ontology or identification of specific groups to which the research aims to benefit (Shannon-Baker, 2016). To address these critiques, I will outline the specific groups this thesis aimed to benefit and the research ontologies.

Pragmatism underlies this thesis, because has been orientated to provide practical implications for EPs to support individuals working with adolescents. The research questions lead themselves towards different ontologies and the assumptions will likely shift throughout the research phases. To explore the extent to which multiracial girls have different outcomes to their peers, a positivist assumption is adopted. This is because specific variables and measures are used and predictions from Social Identity Theory are examined. However, to understand how multiracial adolescents view their identity and friendships, a constructivist assumption is adopted. This is because to fully appreciate how multiracial adolescents construct their identity and interact with their environment, it is necessary to elicit participant views and acknowledge the nature of multiple realities. This is particularly true for the multiracial population, which is extremely diverse due to the multiple possible ethnic identities. Without this closeness to participants, it will be difficult to understand the unique resources they use to cope with challenges to their mental health. This could not be achieved with a pure post positivist approach, which emphasises distance and impartiality.

## Mixed Methods Research Design

The pragmatist world view permits flexibility in research methods in order to fit the consequences of the research. Mixed methods have been adopted in this thesis for two key reasons. Firstly, the social phenomenon of identity and wellbeing is interactive and multi-determined; therefore, an approach that uses multiple methods is more effective in capturing these complexities. Secondly, a mixed methods approach is suited for answering the different research questions – the first research questions involve group comparisons and predictions, the final research question involves eliciting participants' views.

Quantitative methods were chosen for several reasons. Firstly, questionnaire analysis allows relationships and predictions to be examined across many participants. This will enable the researcher to explore the separate and combined influence of different variables on mental health. Secondly, a questionnaire allows a larger sample size of participants to be surveyed. This will allow sampling of multiracial adolescents who may identify as monoracial and allow comparisons of mental health outcomes between multiracial and monoracial groups. It is important to emphasise that this research is exploratory and does not seek to establish or confirm hypotheses about how multiracial adolescents fare compared to their monoracial peers. This tendency to group and categorise participants fails to acknowledge the overlap between cultures and, consequently, can pathologise cultural variation (Fields, 2010). However, this research aimed to highlight social factors that may explain differences or similarities between multiracial adolescents and their monoracial peers.

Semi-structured interviews were chosen as the research tool to broaden and deepen the findings in the quantitative phase. Semi-structured interviews provide a set of topics determined by the researcher for discussion, whilst also allowing freedom in how the questions are sequenced, the wording of questions and the amount of time spent on each topic (Robson, 2011). In this way, questions in the interview can be structured around similar topics to the questionnaire, but the flexibility of the semi structure interview allows new themes to arise if they are deemed important for the participant. Therefore, participants are given a space to share their social constructions of the multiracial ethnicity and its influence and meaning in their lives. This will develop and enrich the quantitative findings. Focus groups were considered as a method. Focus groups encourage participants to interact to generate data (Kitzinger, 1995). However, it was felt that some of the topics discussed may be sensitive in nature and adolescents

may be uncomfortable discussing their identity in front of their peers due to fear of judgement.

There are multiple methods of qualitative analysis, which differ in emphasis and underlying assumptions. Thematic analysis aims to identify themes and patterns of meaning across a dataset. Thematic analysis can be critiqued for its lack of theoretical direction and overreliance on description rather than interpretation. However, in this thesis, the theoretical flexibility of thematic analysis is an advantage as using a pragmatic approach requires flexibility in methods in order to answer the research questions. In addition, the use of Social Identity Theory as a theoretical framework allows the interpretation of themes rather than presenting individual accounts. Perhaps the greatest disadvantage of thematic analysis is the possibility of losing the individual 'voices' of participants during analysis due to the emphasis on patterns across the dataset (Braun & Clarke, 2013). However, in the context of a mixed-methods thesis, thematic analysis was more appropriate for addressing significant quantitative findings. In addition, other considered analysis methods tend to emphasise psychological rather than socio-contextual interpretation, which does not align with the frameworks used in this thesis (Braun & Clarke, 2013).

This thesis is exploratory in nature. The research is conducted in two phases, where the qualitative data is used to build upon and deepen the findings from the quantitative data (Creswell & Clarke, 2011). The philosophical assumptions shift from post positivist in phase one, to constructivist in phase two.

## **Research Considerations**

### **Choice of research tools.**

This thesis explores the complex topic of ethnicity and mental health. Therefore, it was important to think carefully about the social context and aims of the thesis and the resulting implications for the research tools used.

Firstly, I reflected on how the questionnaires and semi-structured interviews could be developed to adapt to the specific cultural characteristics of the participants. This cultural tailoring considers characteristics such as the values, beliefs and traditions of different cultures within the sample (Pasick, D'onofrio & Otero-Sabogal 1996). Therefore, it was important to pilot both the questionnaires and interviews, to use my existing knowledge of the community and to undertake informal interviews with the school to greater understand the social context and adapt the research tools accordingly. The mixed methods approach to this thesis means that the quantitative

phase is used alongside qualitative information. This provides an opportunity to incorporate the individual's cultural background to the data collection. To recognise the importance of culture on assessment further, this thesis sample has been fully identified and is referred to throughout the analysis and discussion. This is to avoid over generalising results beyond what is represented in the current cultural context (Awad, Patall, Rackley & Reilly, 2016).

Several considerations were taken to ensure the research tools were culturally sensitive. As suggested in reviews of effective practice in multicultural assessment, all questionnaires chosen have been standardised on a wide range of ethnic groups (Suzuki & Pontoretto, 2008). The focus on ethnic identity in this research means the questionnaire and interview measures needed to allow people to classify themselves meaningfully according to whatever criteria they choose (Nazroo, 2006). To measure ethnic group, I used an adaption of the official classification system (the UK Census) to allow comparisons with other research. To explore the dimension of ethnic identity, I also asked participants to answer an open box question "what is your ethnic group". This allowed the current issue of ethnic identity to be explored separately. For a more 'objective' measure, I also gathered parent ethnic group. I also changed the wording of interview questions about ethnicity after the pilot study to allow participants to speak about their identity more meaningfully.

Secondly, research tools were selected for their application for EP practice. This thesis is part of a doctoral qualification in educational psychology and is required to have direct implications for EP practice. A variety of questionnaires was considered to measure mental health outcomes. Subscales of the Resiliency Scales for Children and Adolescents were considered as it is regularly used by Educational Psychologists in the UK, and focusses on strengths. In addition, 'How I Feel About Myself and School' questionnaire (McLellan & Steward, 2014) was considered as a well-rounded instrument of wellbeing. However, these tools were discarded due to either excessive length or lack of cultural standardisation and the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) was selected. The SDQ is a brief behavioural screening questionnaire that provides an indication of conduct problems (e.g. aggression), hyperactivity, emotional symptoms (e.g. anxiety), peer problems and prosocial behaviour. The SDQ scale is often used by EPs to develop a picture of a child's social, emotional and mental health needs and is routinely used by CAMHS as part of their referral process. It is regularly used with children and young people in the UK and contains a self-report component to be used with adolescents. The SDQ has a positive component of social functioning, the prosocial scale, whilst still being brief enough to

administer as part of a wider questionnaire. This thesis will also include a measure of self-esteem. Self-esteem has been shown to be an important contributor to positive mental health and resilience (Fergus & Zimmerman, 2005) and plays a significant role in social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1986).

When negotiating the research with secondary schools, it was important that the questionnaire was brief and accessible. This was to ensure that the questionnaire did not interrupt pupil learning and where possible, shorter versions of the scales were chosen where necessary. Otherwise, scales were condensed to enhance accessibility but remain valid and reliable. Questionnaires that had been adapted or created for children were prioritised to be accessible for adolescents with a wide range of learning needs.

### **Defining a 'friend'.**

In research, it is important to define clearly how friendship is conceptualised as friendship can range in quality from distant acquaintances to best friends (Rubin et al., 2011). Participants need to be directed towards certain types of relationships and towards the number of friends they can nominate. In addition, the effects of demand characteristics need to be reduced. Demand characteristics occur when a participant names a greater number of friends or greater closeness to friends than they actually perceive, to appear favourably to the researcher. Quantitative research investigating adolescent friendship often places limits on the type and number of friends a participant can nominate in a questionnaire (Rubin et al., 2011). Berndt & McCandless (2009) suggest that when asked to name their three best friends, children tend to name the three peers whom they have the closest relationship. However, limiting the number of friendship nominations can lead to errors, as a child may have more than three best friends, or may only have one best friend (Rubin et al., 2011).

For this thesis, I decided to devise a questionnaire to consider these limiting factors. Pupils will be asked to nominate *up to* five best friends during the quantitative phase. Nominating up to five friends will allow more data variance, which is important when studying the diversity of a friendship group, yet limiting the number of nominations to up to five will increase the closeness felt to each friend. In addition, a five-friend limitation is small enough to analyse, but big enough to avoid errors in identification. Reminding pupils that they can nominate up to five friends and that the research is confidential aims to reduce demand characteristics. Furthermore, perceived friendships will be collected, rather than matching up peer nominations, in an aim to increase the number of friendships that can be analysed. In the qualitative phase, open-ended

research tools will be used to explore the range of friendships that the adolescent has. This will allow for deeper discussions about the quality and characteristics of these friendships.

## **Reflexivity**

Yardley (2000) states it is ineffective to attempt to remain objective during data collection and analysis. Individuals communicate to have specific effects on one another and meanings are co-constructed throughout a conversation. Therefore, it is important to consider the social context between the researcher and the participants. Certainly, even the choice of thesis topic and reviewed literature are in some-way shaped by the researcher's beliefs, assumptions, knowledge and worldview (Braun & Clark, 2013). Appendix H outlines how the researcher has demonstrated reflexivity throughout the thesis and the reflective box (Figure 3) outlines the researcher's position in the research.

### Researcher positioning

I self-identify as 'mixed-race' and my physical appearance generally categorises me as an individual with black and white racial heritage. My own self-identity has led me to select multiracial identity as a research topic and may influence how I select and interpret theory. My interest in this topic peaked when conducting an essay on the EP role on mental health, where I researched the disparity in mental health outcomes between ethnic groups. My own identity and appearance may affect participant responses and interpretations of my questions during interviews. It is also important to consider the intersectionality between race, gender and power. I enter this thesis as a female researcher with a position in the local authority. Therefore, my position within this research requires me to engage in reflexive practice about my motives and potential bias and to be mindful of participant perceptions of me.

### Researcher beliefs

I believe that there prevails a deficit view of mental health in society, which can take a 'within-child' stance without considering the impact of socio-cultural factors. I believe that the mental health of BAME groups is underrepresented in UK research and professional training. I believe that EPs have training in ecological models of child development and are well placed to promote change in interacting systems, such as the family and school. I believe it is important to gain the voice of young people about their mental health, and elicit coping mechanisms in addition to challenges.

### Positioning in the school

As the school's Educational Psychologist, I regularly meet with the SENCO and school staff to assist them in supporting the needs of pupils with Special Educational Needs. I also carry out assessments and observations of individual pupils. Part of my role is to challenge practice which may be detrimental to the learning and wellbeing of these pupils, and therefore I may have been viewed by those in the school as an agent of the local authority. Similarly by pupils, I may be viewed as a psychologist who is there to diagnose problems or conduct assessments. Therefore, when obtaining consent from the school, parents and participants, I clearly stated both my duty of care and role as a researcher independent from the local authority. I was also very clear about my academic, professional and personal interest in the research project, in order to enhance transparency. It was also important to reflect on the extent to which my existing knowledge of the school context affected the research and my interactions with participants.

*Figure 3 Researcher positioning*

## Questionnaires: Method

### Participants

In total, 109 adolescent girls from Year 9 took part in the questionnaire data collection. The mean age of participants was 13.9 years (SD = 0.34). Demographic information is found in *Table 1* and Figure 11 (Appendix J) shows sub-groups for the 22 multiracial participants.

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Table 1 Frequencies and percentages showing the prevalence of each ethnic group in the total sample.

<u>Ethnic group</u>	<u>Frequency</u>	<u>Percentage</u>
White	37	34
Black	32	29
Multiracial	22	20
Asian	11	10
Other	5	5
Arab	2	2

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Note. Ethnicity determined by parent ethnic group.

### ***School context.***

Initially it was hoped to recruit both the single-sex girls' and boys' school in the local authority. This would have allowed greater exploration and comparison of gender differences in the thesis' research questions. Although both schools obtained parental permission only the girls' school, where I am on placement as their trainee EP, participated in the final thesis. The boys' school was undergoing multiple systemic issues and changes and therefore did not have the capacity to participate in the thesis at the time.

The lack of school recruitment was disappointing; however, containing the research to a single school is advantageous. In this way, the findings can be grounded in a specific context, there is less variation between participants and data collection is more practical for the researcher. To acknowledge the social context of this thesis, it is important to

provide a detailed and anonymised description of the school and its surrounding area. This can be found in Appendix O.

## **Procedure**

### **Ethical considerations.**

Ethics procedures were followed as per the approved ethical process at UCL (See Appendix F) and in accordance with the BPS (2009) and the HCPC (2016) codes of ethics.

### ***Informed consent.***

The Head Teacher was fully briefed as to the purpose of the research and research arrangements. Information letters were also sent to all parents in Year 9 to outline the research purpose and what their children would expect during the questionnaire (Appendix G). Consent was designed in an 'opt out' approach, so parents only returned the form after two weeks if they did not wish their child to be involved. No parents decided to opt-out their child from the thesis.

Pupils were provided with a description on the purpose and content of the questionnaire (Appendix C). The school requested that the questionnaire be distributed during form time. To ensure pupils did not feel they had to take part, form tutors were provided with a detailed set of instructions regarding informed consent and a PowerPoint to explain the aims of the thesis to the class. Written reminders were placed throughout the questionnaire reiterating that involvement was voluntary and the right to withdraw. In addition, I attended each form time session to reiterate the ethical considerations and answer any questions. Pupils were required to answer six yes/no questions to indicate if they gave informed consent.

### **Data collection.**

Pilot study information can be found in Appendix M. The data for the main thesis was collected during July 2017. All questionnaires were completed during form time in class sizes up to 30 pupils. The questionnaires were completed over two form time sessions, if the pupils required extra time. Most pupils finished the questionnaire in one session. Pupils were required to provide a code name consisting of their initials and date of birth. This enabled their questionnaire to be identified if they wished to withdraw or if any safeguarding concerns arose, but ensured their answers remained anonymous.

### **Materials.**

### ***Demographic information.***

The full questionnaire can be found in Appendix C. Ethnicity was measured by both self-identified ethnic identity and parent ethnic group. Participants were assigned to the multiracial group if their parents belonged to two different ethnic groups, or if at least one of their parents had a multiracial ethnicity. Participant age was calculated from their code name, which contained their date of birth.

### ***Mental health.***

Two measures of mental health were included in the questionnaire, in accordance with the definition provided by Westerhof and Keyes (2010) provided in the introduction. These are the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES) and the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ). The two scales were presented separately due to the different rating scales.

#### *Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale.*

The RSES (Rosenberg, 1979) is a 10-item measure assessing levels of global self-esteem. The four-point Likert scale ranges from 1 (strongly agree) to 4 (strongly disagree). The scale comprises of five positively worded items, for example 'I feel that I have a number of good qualities', and five negatively worded items, for example 'I feel I do not have much to be proud of'. The RSES was developed using adolescents in the US and is generally viewed as a reliable tool for assessing self-esteem cross-culturally (Schmitt & Allik, 2005). Previous research has reported the alpha reliability of the scale to be between .85 and .90 (Bagley, Bolitho & Bertand 2007). One self-esteem variable was created after reverse coding the negative items and averaging across the items. In this thesis, this variable had an alpha reliability of 0.89, indicating that the scale had good reliability. A higher score indicates greater self-esteem.

#### *Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire.*

The English version of self-report SDQ for 11–17-year-olds (Goodman, 1999) is a 25-item measure assessing social, emotional and behavioural functioning in children and adolescents. The questionnaire is often used as a screening tool and covers four clinical areas: hyperactivity, emotional problems, peer-relationship problems, and conduct problems. It also includes a positive domain: prosocial behaviour. The three-point Likert scale ranges from 1 (not true) to 3 (true). An example hyperactivity item is 'I am restless, I cannot stay still for long'. The SDQ has been tested in a wide range of clinical, cultural and mainstream contexts and the psychometric properties are viewed to be satisfactory across domains (Vostanis, 2006).

Table 2 compares the consistency coefficients of the scale in this thesis to the results from a large-scale study conducted in Britain (Goodman, 2001). Cronbach's alpha coefficients of 0.70 are generally regarded as showing good scale reliability, and in the social sciences a coefficient of 0.50 is acceptable (Brace, Snelgar, & Kemp, 2012). As seen in Table 2, many of the coefficients in this thesis are similar to those reported in Goodman (2001). However, the prosocial and conduct scale have particularly low reliability. This may indicate that the items did not tap into the relevant constructs for adolescents in this particular context, for example 'I usually share with others' or 'I take things that are not mine' may be perceived as more relevant for younger children.

Table 2 Reliability coefficients of the self-report SDQ

<u>SDQ Scale</u>	<u>Goodman (2001)</u>	<u>Present thesis</u>
Prosocial	0.66	0.51
Hyperactivity	0.67	0.75
Emotional Problems	0.66	0.75
Conduct Problems	0.60	0.52
Peer Problems	0.41	0.56
Total Difficulties	0.80	0.77

Note. SDQ for 11–17-year-olds from this thesis compared to Goodman (2001) Cronbachs alpha coefficients (2.d.p)

Items were reverse coded and averaged to create separate hyperactivity, emotional problems, peer-relationship problems, and conduct problems variables, where a higher score indicates greater difficulties in these areas. Items across these variables were averaged to create one total difficulties variable, where higher scores indicate greater total difficulties. Items were reverse coded and averaged to create one prosocial scale, where higher scores indicate more prosocial behaviour.

### ***Ethnic Identity.***

#### *Multi-group Ethnic Identity Measure.*

The Multi-group Ethnic Identity Measure (MEIM; Roberts et al., 1999) is a measure of ethnic identity that can be used across diverse ethnic groups. This is a condensed 12-item version of the original MEIM questionnaire (Phinney, 1992). The condensed version has been selected due to its brevity and because it measures the two factors of ethnic identity relevant to this thesis. These two factors are exploration (5 items) and

affirmation (7 items). The exploration factor includes items measuring attempts to learn more about one's ethnic group and involvement in cultural activities, for example 'I have often talked to other people about my ethnic group'. The affirmation factor includes items measuring positive evaluations of one's group and a clear sense of commitment, for example 'I feel good about my cultural or ethnic background'.

Items are rated on a 4-point Likert scale, with responses ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 4 (strongly agree). Although reliability coefficients have not been conducted for the adolescent UK population, the scale has high internal consistency for an ethnically diverse population of adults in the UK (alpha 0.89; Gaines et al., 2010). In this thesis, the alpha reliability of the 5-item exploration scale is 0.67 and the 7-item affirmation scale is 0.90. Items were reverse coded and averaged to create one ethnic identity affirmation variable, where higher scores indicate more positive feelings towards your ethnic group, and one ethnic identity exploration variable, where higher scores indicate greater exploration of ethnic identity.

### ***Peer relations.***

#### *Social Support from Close Friends.*

The Child and Adolescent Social Support Scale (CASSS; Malecki, Demaray, Elliott & Nolton, 2000) is a measure of students perceived social support. The original scale consists of 60 items measuring four types of perceived support (emotional, informational, appraisal and instrumental) across five different sources (parents, teacher, classmates, close friends and school). In this thesis, only close friends were used as a source. The scale consisted of 12 items, three items corresponding to each of the types of support, for example my friends 'help me when I'm lonely; give me ideas when I don't know what to do; share their things with me; nicely tell me the truth about how I do on things'. Students read each statement describing a specific supportive behaviour and respond by rating how often they receive that support from that source (frequency ratings).

The Likert scale was adapted in this thesis in order to be consistent with the other scales, to create a 4-point-scale ranging from 1 (never) to 4 (always). Malecki and Demaray (2003) found the alpha reliability ranged from .83 to .88. In this thesis, alpha reliability of the 12-item scale was 0.92, indicating that the scale had good reliability. Items were reverse coded and averaged to create one friendship support variable, where higher scores indicate more perceived support from close friends.

#### *Ethnic discrimination.*

Perceived discrimination by peers were measured using a scale developed by the staff of the Maryland Adolescents Development in Context (MADIC) study (Wong et al., 2003). Perceptions of peer discrimination was used in this thesis. The adolescents reported the frequency with which they experienced negative treatment at their school because of their race by their peers. The perceived discrimination by peers scale included three items that asked about the frequency they felt they got into fights, were socially excluded, or not picked for particular activities because of their race.

Cronbach's analyses showed that this scale was internally consistent, with an alpha reliability of 0.86. The original measure used a 5-point scale. In this thesis, a 4-point-scale was used for consistency with the other measures. These were 1 (never), 2 (rarely), 3 (often) and 4 (almost always). Pupils were also asked about how stressful they found the discrimination by peers on a scale of 1 (other kids do not do these things) to 4 (extremely stressful). Items were averaged to create one peer discrimination variable, where higher scores indicate higher perceived discrimination from peers, and one stress from discrimination variable, where higher scores indicate greater perceptions of stress from peer discrimination.

#### ***Interethnic friendship.***

Pupils were asked to 'think of your best friends at school, choose as many or as few best friends as you like (up to five)'. Drawing on results from the pilot study, participants were asked to think of their best friends before providing the ethnicity of each friend from a list (white, black, Asian, Arab, multiracial, other, don't know). The racial composition of friendships was collated into a single measure of friendship heterogeneity based on Moody (2001).

One variable for interethnic friendship was created by calculating the proportion of friends from each ethnic group, excluding 'other' and 'don't know' responses. This measure ranges from 0, when all friendships are of the same ethnic group, to 0.80 in the five- ethnic group case, when the proportions of friends from each ethnic group are roughly equal. Therefore, a higher score indicates more inter-ethnic group friendships.

## Data Analysis

Data analysis was conducted using IBM SPSS Statistics 22 software. For additional details about the exploratory analysis and assumptions testing, refer to Appendix I. A range of statistical tests was used depending on the research question.

*RQ1: Are there any differences between multiracial and monoracial girls in terms of their mental health outcomes, ethnic identity, peer relations and interethnic friendships?*

The dependent variables in this analysis were mental health, ethnic identity, peer relations and interethnic friendships. The discrete groups were ethnicity (white, BAME and multiracial). To examine this research question, an Analysis of Variance (one-way ANOVA) was conducted to determine if there was a significant difference in the mental health, ethnic identity peer relations or interethnic friendships by ethnic group.

*RQ2: How important are peer relations, interethnic friendships and ethnic identity for multiracial girls' mental health?*

Due to the lack of research investigating influences on mental health for multiracial adolescents, the following analyses was conducted on the multiracial sample only. To investigate whether there was a relationship between ethnic identity, peer relations and interethnic friendships and mental health, a Pearson product-moment  $r$  correlation was conducted.

To test whether ethnic identity and peer perceptions could predict mental health, a multiple linear regression was conducted. Standard multiple linear regression (enter method) was used as it is not clear whether ethnic identity, peer relations or interethnic friendships will create the best prediction model. Ethnic identity, peer relations and interethnic friendships were evaluated by what they added to the prediction of mental health over and above the other.

## Questionnaires: Findings

### Research Question 1

*Are there any differences between multiracial and monoracial girls in terms of their mental health outcomes, ethnic identity, peer relations and interethnic friendships?*

#### **Preliminary data analysis.**

Self-reported ethnic identification was compared to parent defined ethnic group, to see if the two measures corresponded to each other. Comparisons showed that ethnic group and self-identification were in total agreement for the monoracial groups. However, of the multiracial group, five of the twenty-two in the sample self-identified differently than their ethnic group. One of the black-white participants and two of the black-mixed participants self-identified as black; the white-other participant and the white-mixed participant self-identified as white. Analysis was consistent using either self-identification or parent-defined ethnic group. Therefore, parental definitions of ethnic group are used throughout this analysis.

Due to the small sample size in this thesis, comparisons between subgroups were not possible. The participants have been amalgamated into an overarching 'multiracial' group.

Figure 14 (Appendix J) shows the distribution of sub-groups for the 22 multiracial participants.

Table 3 illustrates the mean scores and standard deviations of the research variables across the sample. Comparisons are made between the three ethnic-groups. The first group comprised of participants with a white ethnicity, this was termed the 'white monoracial' group (n=37; 34%). The second group contained participants with a black, Asian, Arab or other ethnicity. This is termed the black, Asian and minority ethnic 'BAME monoracial group' (n=50; 46%). The final group comprised of multiracial participants, termed the 'multiracial' group (n=22; 20%).

Table 3 Mean scores and standard deviations of mental health outcomes, ethnic identity, peer relations and interethnic friendships, for each ethnic group and the total sample

	<u>White</u>		<u>BAME</u>		<u>Multiracial</u>		<u>Total</u>	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
Mental health								
Self-esteem	2.81	0.48	2.95	0.55	2.57	0.56	2.82	0.54
SDQ (Total difficulties)	1.58	0.29	1.61	0.28	1.63	0.25	1.60	0.28
Hyperactivity	1.76	0.59	1.82	0.45	1.94	0.46	1.83	0.51
Emotional problems	1.89	0.52	1.85	0.52	1.80	0.56	1.85	0.53
Conduct problems	1.26	0.20	1.38	0.30	1.40	0.33	1.35	0.28
Peer problems	1.29	0.22	1.39	0.43	1.38	0.28	1.35	0.35
Prosocial behaviour	2.59	0.26	2.58	0.35	2.52	0.26	2.57	0.31
Ethnic identity								
Affirmation	2.84	0.62	3.38	0.55	2.91	0.60	3.10	0.63
Exploration	2.13	0.46	2.69	0.62	2.40	0.55	2.44	0.60
Peer relations								
Friendship support	3.22	0.50	3.35	0.54	2.97	0.57	3.23	0.55
Peer discrimination	1.15	0.23	1.33	0.44	1.14	0.24	1.24	0.36
Stress from disc.	1.56	0.88	1.71	0.89	1.70	0.98	1.66	0.90
Interethnic friendships	0.44	0.21	0.51	0.21	0.64	0.08	0.51	0.20

Note. Parental ethnic group determines ethnicity. All scales use a 4-point Likert scale, other than the SDQ scales, which use a 3-point Likert scale, and diversity, scored from 0 to 0.8.

## **Mental health.**

### ***Self-esteem.***

To test whether self-esteem differed according to ethnic-group, a one-way ANOVA was run, with self-esteem as the dependent variable and ethnic-group as the independent variable. Self-esteem scores differed significantly across ethnic groups, [ $F(2,103)=3.89$ ,  $p=.024$ ]. Tukey post-hoc analysis showed that the multiracial group ( $M=2.57$ ,  $SD=0.56$ ) had significantly lower self-esteem than the BAME group ( $M=2.95$ ,  $SD=0.55$ ;  $p=.018$ ). There were no significant differences in levels of self-esteem when comparing the other groups (see Table 1).

### ***Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire.***

To test whether SDQ scores differed according to ethnic-group, a one-way ANOVA was run, with total difficulties as the dependent variable and ethnic-group as the independent variable. There were no significant differences in total difficulties scores when comparing between ethnic-groups, [ $F(2,106)=.227$ ,  $p=.797$ ] (see Table 1). In addition, there were no significant differences when exploring the SDQ sub-scales individually (see Appendix K).

## **Ethnic identity.**

### ***Affirmation.***

To test whether ethnic identity affirmation differed according to ethnic-group, a one-way ANOVA was run, with affirmation as the dependent variable and ethnic-group as the independent variable. Affirmation scores differed significantly across ethnic groups, [ $F(2,103)=10.297$ ,  $p<.001$ ]. Tukey post-hoc analysis showed that the multiracial group ( $M=2.91$ ,  $SD=0.60$ ;  $p<.01$ ) and the white group ( $M=2.84$ ,  $SD=0.62$ ;  $p<.001$ ) had significantly lower ethnic identity affirmation than the BAME group ( $M=3.38$ ,  $SD=0.55$ ). There were no significant differences in levels of affirmation between the white and multiracial group.

### ***Exploration.***

To test whether ethnic identity exploration differed according to ethnic-group, a one-way ANOVA was run, with exploration as the dependent variable and ethnic-group as the independent variable. Exploration scores differed significantly across ethnic groups, [ $F(2,103)=10.243$ ,  $p<.001$ ]. Tukey post-hoc analysis showed that the white group ( $M=2.13$ ,  $SD=0.46$ ) had significantly lower ethnic identity exploration than the BAME group ( $M=2.69$ ,  $SD=0.62$ ;  $p<.001$ ). There were no significant differences in levels of exploration when comparing the other groups (see Table 1).

## **Peer relations.**

### ***Friendship support.***

To test whether friendship support differed according to ethnic-group, a Kruskal-Wallis test was run, with support as the dependent variable and ethnic-group as the independent variable. Perceptions of support differed significantly across ethnic groups [ $\chi^2(2) = 8.833, p = .012$ ]. Pairwise comparisons showed that the multiracial group ( $Mdn = 3.04$ ) had significantly lower perceptions of friendship support than the BAME group ( $Mdn = 3.58; p = .01$ ). There were no significant differences in levels of support when comparing the other groups (see Table 1).

### ***Peer discrimination.***

To test whether peer discrimination differed according to ethnic-group, a Kruskal-Wallis test was run, with discrimination as the dependent variable and ethnic-group as the independent variable. There were no significant differences in levels of perceived discrimination when comparing between ethnic-groups [ $\chi^2(2) = 3.372, p = .185$ ]. (See Table 1).

Inspection of the histograms showed that the discrimination data across all ethnic-groups was positively skewed, indicating that regardless of ethnic-group, many participants reported that peer discrimination 'never' or 'rarely' occurred. Due to the small sample of participants who perceived peer discrimination, it was not possible to test whether stress from peer discrimination differed according to ethnic-group.

### ***Interethnic friendship.***

To test whether interethnic friendship differed according to ethnic-group, a Kruskal-Wallis test was run, with interethnic friendship as the dependent variable and ethnic-group as the independent variable. Interethnic friendship differed significantly across ethnic groups [ $\chi^2(2) = 9.587, p = .008$ ]. Pairwise comparisons showed that the multiracial group ( $Mdn = .64$ ) had significantly more interethnic friendships than the white group ( $Mdn = 0.48; p = .006$ ). The multiracial group also had significantly more interethnic friendships than the BAME group ( $Mdn = .48; p = .027$ ) when an uncorrected significance level was used. (Due to the low sample size, the Bonferroni correction may have exacerbated the low power in this thesis; Nakagawa, 2004).

## **Research Question 2**

*How important are peer relations, interethnic friendships and ethnic identity for multiracial girls' mental health?*

### Self-esteem.

To explore the relationship between self-esteem, ethnic identity affirmation, ethnic identity exploration, friendship support, peer discrimination and interethnic friendships, a Pearson's product-moment correlation was run. There was a strong positive correlation between friendship support and self-esteem,  $r(21) = .652, p < .01$ , with friendship support explaining 42% of the variation in self-esteem. No other significant correlations were found (Appendix L).

To test the extent to which ethnic identity affirmation, ethnic identity exploration, friendship support and peer discrimination could predict self-esteem, a multiple linear regression was run. Interethnic friendship was not included in any regressions due to its weak loading on the self-esteem. The model containing ethnic identity, friendship support and peer discrimination as independent variables significantly predicted self-esteem [ $F(5, 14) = 4.091, p = .017, \text{adj. } R^2 = .449$ ]. As illustrated in Table 4, affirmation ( $p=.047$ ) and friendship support ( $p=0.003$ ) contributed significantly to the prediction. This suggests that ethnic identity affirmation and friendship support add to the prediction of self-esteem differently from the other predictors in the model. This model accounted for 45% of the variance in self-esteem. As affirmation was not significantly correlated to self-esteem outside of the regression, this suggests the predictive power affirmation increases when other the other variables are taken into account.

Table 4 Summary of multiple regression analysis testing the extent to which ethnic identity affirmation, exploration, friendship support and peer discrimination predict self-esteem

Variable	B	SE <sub>B</sub>	β
Intercept	-.993	1.040	
Affirmation	.727	.334	.690*
Exploration	-.117	.291	-.121
Friendship support	.646	.182	.656*
Peer discrimination	-.326	.256	-.297
Stress from discrimination	.140	.163	.235

**Note.** \*  $p < .05$ ; B= unstandardized regression coefficient; SE<sub>B</sub>= Standard error of the coefficient; β = standardised coefficient. All measures use a 4-point Likert scale.

### **Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire.**

To explore the relationship between ethnic identity affirmation, ethnic identity exploration, friendship support, peer discrimination and SDQ scores, a Pearson's product-moment correlation was run. Affirmation had a strong negative association with total difficulties [ $r(21) = -.518, p = .019$ ]. Perceived peer discrimination had a strong positive association with conduct problems [ $r(21) = .558, p < .01$ ]. Stress from perceived discrimination had a moderate positive association with total difficulties [ $r(20) = .492, p = 0.028$ ] and conduct problems [ $r(20) = .499, p = 0.025$  respectively]. No other significant correlations were found (Appendix L).

To test the extent to which ethnic identity affirmation, ethnic identity exploration, friendship support and peer discrimination could predict SDQ scores, a multiple linear regression was run. The model containing ethnic identity affirmation, ethnic identity exploration, friendship support and peer discrimination significantly predicted total difficulties [ $F(5, 13) = 3.765, p = .025, \text{adj. } R^2 = .434$ ]. However, none of the variables added statistically significantly to the prediction. Additionally, models containing ethnic identity and peer perceptions did not significantly predict the SDQ sub-scales.

## Semi-structured Interviews: Method

### Participants

Although multiracial participants will be identified by parent-defined ethnic group, both ethnic group and ethnic identity have theoretical importance (Campbell & Eggerling, 2006, p.163). Therefore, the interviews included participants who are multiracial by parent-defined ethnic group but not necessarily self-defined ethnic identity. In total, 12 participants from the Year 9 sample took part in the interviews (mean age of 14.3, standard deviation 0.31). Ethnic group characteristics can be found in Table 5.

Table 5 Demographic information for interview participants

#	<u>Pseudonym</u>	<u>Mother's ethnicity</u>	<u>Father's ethnicity</u>
1	Beatrice	White	Black
2	Claire	White	Black
3	Demi*	Black	White
4	Ellie	Multiracial	White
5	Hannah	White	Black
6	Jane	White	Black
7	Jelly*	White	Black
8	Joyce	Black	White
9	Mary	White	Black
10	Millie	White	Black
11	Olivia	White	Multiracial
12	Sally	White	Black

\* Due to family breakdown participant is unsure of the exact ethnicity of one or more of their parents.

## **Procedure**

### **Ethical Considerations.**

Ethics procedures were followed as per the approved ethical process at UCL (See Appendix F) and in accordance with the BPS (2009) and the HCPC (2016) codes of ethics.

#### ***Informed consent.***

As conducted for the questionnaire phase, the Head Teacher was fully briefed as to the purpose of the research and research arrangements. Parents of the pupils identified for interview were sent detailed information letters about the interview and an 'opt-in' consent form (Appendix G). Of the 15 letters sent out, three participants did not bring back the parent consent form.

A learning mentor with black-white multiracial heritage was informed about the purpose of the thesis. He was a well-established member of the school community and had built positive relationships with the pupils in the school. He discussed the research with the pupils before the interview and picked up the pupils at the end of the interview. He was informed about confidentiality and did not discuss the contents of the interview.

At the start of the interview, I explained the purpose of the research and what was going to happen during the interview. We read through the information sheet together and left time to ask questions. Participants were provided with a consent form in a checklist format (Appendix E). They were informed that they could withdraw from the interview and research at any time. At the end of the interview, time was dedicated for a full debrief. This included information about further support and signposting to appropriate organisations. Participants had the opportunities to discuss any concerns, comments or questions they had about the interview process.

Feedback to the school was arranged through the SENCO, including a brief report and I offered to feedback the findings to the students.

#### ***Interview environment.***

I was aware that speaking about their own identity, experiences of discrimination and wellbeing could produce some uncomfortable feelings for the participants. As a result, several provisions were put in place, including information about the right to withdraw and informed consent, signposting to relevant services and my contact details were provided to the school.

In addition, I endeavoured to ensure that participants felt comfortable during the interview process. This included offering light refreshments, such as drinks and snacks, to create a welcoming environment. The interview schedule included an introduction, warm-up and cooling down period to help participants ease into the interview and finish the session on a positive note (Robson, 2011). Rapport was developed at the beginning of the session to help participants open up about their experiences. Feedback from the participants was positive, and several stated that although they were nervous at the beginning, it wasn't as difficult as they thought it would be.

### **Data Collection.**

Pilot study information can be found in Appendix M. Interviews were conducted in November 2017. I met the participants on school premises, and the interview took place in an empty and quiet room. Each interview lasted between 20 and 45 minutes.

I planned only to interview participants who completed the questionnaire, however due to the low sample size of black-white questionnaire participants, the sample for the interviews was widened to include the whole year group. For the purpose of this thesis, multiracial participants are defined as having parents from two different ethnic backgrounds. It was decided to only invite participants with black-white heritage to interview because this sub-group of the multiracial population is the largest multiracial group in this Local Authority and nationally. This increased the sample size available for the research, therefore impacting the generalisability of the results. Additionally, it is important to distinguish between sub-groups of the multiracial population when conducting research, as the heterogeneity of this ethnic group means different subgroups may have diverse experiences, which cannot be generalised (Wong et al. 2012; Campbell & Eggerling-Boeck, 2006). The more homogenous the sample for interviews, the more likely common themes can be identified during analysis.

### **Materials.**

Interviews were recorded using two electronic recording devices. These were uploaded onto a password protected computer in password protected files.

A relationship circle activity was used to facilitate discussions around friendship. The relationship circle is a graphic of concentric circles where a person records the names of people they know; in this case, participants were asked to record the name of their friends. The closer circles represent friends who are most important to the individual. This activity helps to identify the nature, development and impact of these friendships in the participant's life (Sanderson & Goodwin, 2007). A full interview guide, including

instructions on how to use the relationship circle, can be found in Appendix D. Two examples of relationship circles completed in the interviews can be found in Appendix P. This visual tool was useful for opening up the discussion and providing a framework from which to explore a range of different friendships.

## **Data Analysis**

### **Quality assessment.**

There are likely to be common themes in the participants' interviews, however one interview is likely to be very different from the next. The criteria used to judge the reliability and validity of quantitative research would not be appropriate to apply to qualitative methods.

Yardley (2000) suggested criteria which can be used to assess the reliability of qualitative research. The ways in which this thesis has met these criteria is outlined in Appendix H.

### **Phases of analysis.**

Braun and Clarke (2006) produced a set of guidelines around the thematic analysis process to ensure it is undertaken in a way that is theoretically and methodological sound. These steps are described below with a description of how they were implemented in this thesis. A worked example moving from raw data to theme can be found in Appendix N.

#### *1. Familiarising yourself with the data*

I conducted the interviews and transcribed them verbatim. Only the parts relevant to the research question and of value were transcribed in line with advice from McClellan and MacQueen (2003). This is because less text is required in thematic analysis due to the focus on patterns and themes rather than exhaustive descriptions. Transcripts were checked back against the original recording for accuracy. To further immerse myself in the data, I repeatedly read the transcripts before the formal coding process began. Informal notes were taken to generate ideas for coding.

#### *2. Generating initial codes*

Each transcript was given full and equal attention during the coding process. Atlas.ti qualitative analysis software was used to generate codes. The pragmatist approach in this research allows for flexibility in data analysis, and a mixture of deductive and inductive approaches were used in the thematic analysis. The interview transcripts were

coded inductively (bottom-up) to generate analysis from the data. This allowed me to stay as close to the data as possible, reflecting a constructivist philosophical assumption. I coded for multiple potential themes and patterns, anticipating unexpected themes to emerge. I kept a note of tensions and inconsistencies during coding and reserved divergent accounts. To retain context, parts of the surrounding data were kept in place.

I engaged in peer review when creating the codes. This included joint coding and discussions about the codes with my supervisor and other colleagues on the course. It should be noted that peer review was conducted to gain a consensus about the codes, rather than strict inter-rater reliability – due to the social constructed nature of the coding process.

### *3. Searching for themes*

I sorted codes into potential themes and collected the data extracts within them. The theming of the data was guided by theoretical concepts to answer the research question, but there was flexibility for unexpected emerging themes. Therefore, although the research questions influenced the analysis, the themes were also strongly linked to the data themselves to provide a voice for multiracial young people.

### *4. Reviewing themes*

Themes were refined to ensure that the data within a theme cohered meaningfully and that separate themes were clear and distinct from one another. Data extracts were read to ensure they fit the coherence of the themes. If this was not the case, either the themes were reworked or the extract was moved or removed. In addition, the entire dataset was re-read in order to confirm whether the themes fit the data and to code any additional data that may have been missed. This is in line with the recursive process of thematic analysis. In addition, codes and themes were discussed with my research supervisor to ensure themes were clear and distinct from one another.

### *5. Defining and naming themes*

I named the themes and sub-themes based on what aspects of the data each of them encapsulated, what was of interest about them and why. A detailed analysis was written for each theme, in order to identify how the themes fit within the greater narrative of the data and research questions. This ensured that there was not too much overlap between themes. Overall, three overarching themes, seven themes and sixteen sub-themes were generated.

## 6. Writing the report

The themes are organised into three overarching concepts: 'ethnic identity', 'social context' and 'resilience and support'. The results section describes the themes in turn and their related sub-themes. Under ethnic identity, the theme '*constructing identity*' describes how the participants conceptualise and embrace their ethnic group. It has three sub-themes: '*balancing multiple identities*', '*significance of the secondary transition*' and '*centrality of identity*'.

Responses were quantified numerically, however it should be reinforced that frequency does not equate to value (Braun & Clarke, 2013). Each interview analysis includes a short interview extract that functions as an illustrative example. These extracts include pseudonyms, often chosen by the participant, to identify their quotations and safeguard their anonymity. Quotes have interview and line numbers to reference the original transcript.

## **Semi-structured Interviews: Findings**

There are several important points, which add context to the findings. The participants had been carefully selected to have one parent from a black African/Caribbean/multiracial ethnic group and one parent from a white ethnic group. However, the sample remained heterogeneous in terms of their family structure, family income level and cultural heritage. There was variety in the way participants described their ethnic identity and experiences at school. For some, their experience of being multiracial made life difficult for them, whereas others felt their ethnicity had a positive or no impact on their lives.

Additionally, it is important to note that the participants were interviewed in Year 10 but completed the questionnaires in Year 9. Throughout the interviews participants often reflected on Year 9 as a turbulent year for both mental health and peer relationships. A further point is that some of the themes do not relate exclusively to peers or friendships. The semi-structured nature of the interview and emphasis on rapport building meant that participants were able to explore different aspects which were significant to them. Although the themes are distinct, many of them overlap reflecting the interactive and reciprocal nature of ecological models of development.

The themes have emerged from the participant views; however, they have been organised in a way to answer to research questions. Each theme is presented in turn and is broken down into separate sub-themes. The theme names are often derived from direct quotes from the participants. Evidence of the analysis is provided with quotations, identified by a pseudonym and transcript index. There are three overarching themes (refer to Figure 4).

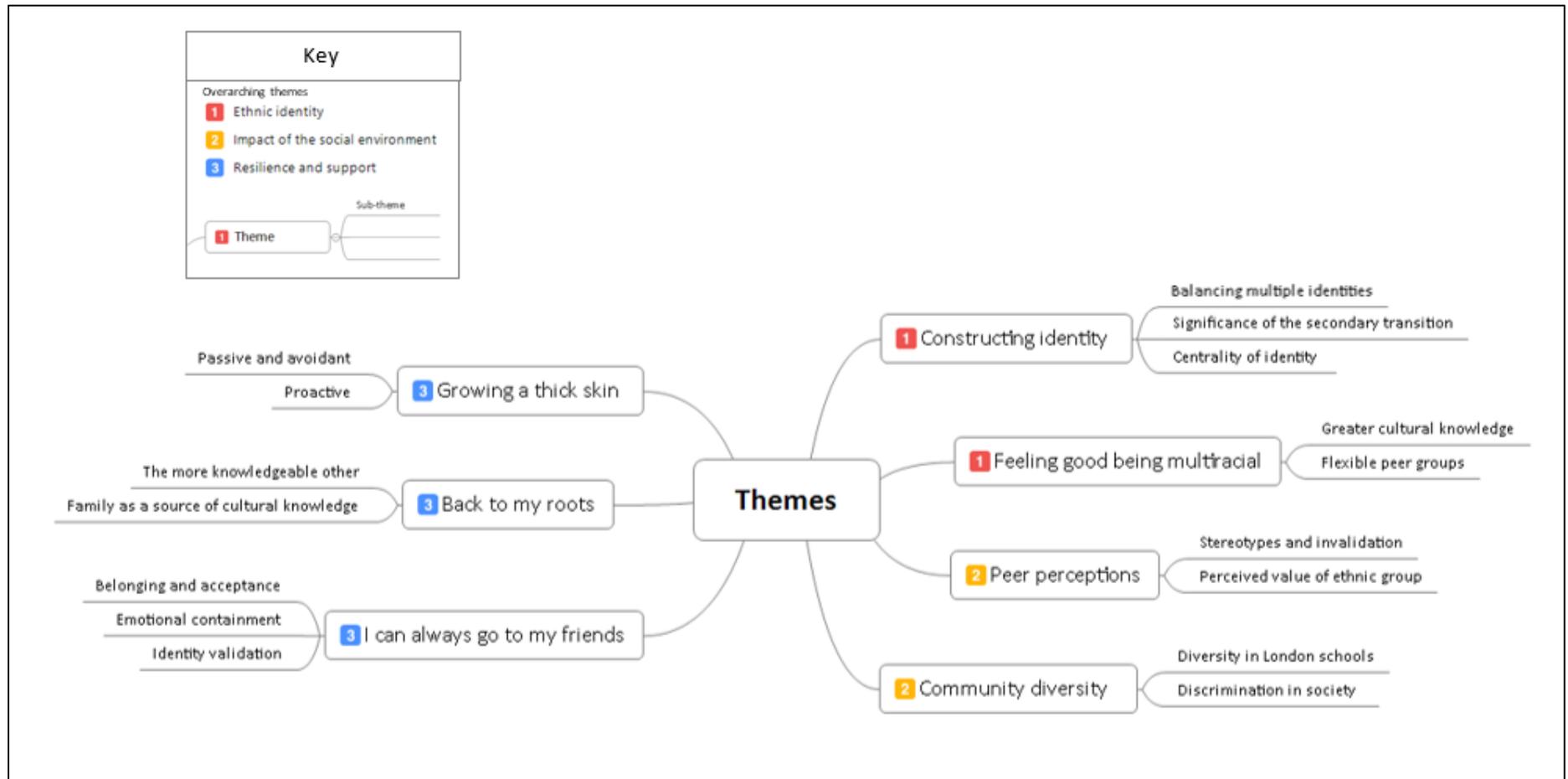


Figure 4 Overarching themes, themes and sub-themes from the Thematic Analysis

The overarching themes are ethnic identity, impact of the social environment and resilience and support:

- *Ethnic identity* captures participants' constructions of a multiracial identity. Although this thesis does not aim to examine ethnic identity from a developmental perspective, changes in identity over time emerged as important for the participant's construction of self. There are two ethnic identity themes, loosely based around ethnic identity exploration and affirmation.
- *Impact of the social environment* depicts how interactions with peers and the wider community influence multiracial mental health. The different systems around the young people are captured in two themes. These show the influence of proximal environments, such as peers and friendships, to more distal environments, such as societal attitudes towards race and ethnicity. This illustrates how the construction of multiracial identity, and its impact on mental health, does not take place in isolation and is influenced by multiple factors in the adolescent's ecosystem.
- *Resilience and support* captures how multiracial young people in this sample develop positive emotional, psychological and social wellbeing (mental health; Westerhof & Keyes, 2010). The term *resilience* highlights how the multiracial young people interviewed coped, and even flourished, despite the challenges within their social environment. Three sources of *support* emerged from the interviews: friends, family and personal resources, which form the basis of the three themes.

## Theme 1: Constructing Identity

*Constructing identity* is subsumed within the overarching theme 'ethnic identity'. This theme highlights how multiracial young people conceptualise and embrace their ethnic group. It captures some of the tensions and pressures participants felt to integrate their white and black heritage, and the role of the social environment in creating these pressures. This theme highlights how differently the participants engaged in the identity development process and how perceptions of identity differed both between and within participants over time. There are three sub-themes (Figure 5).

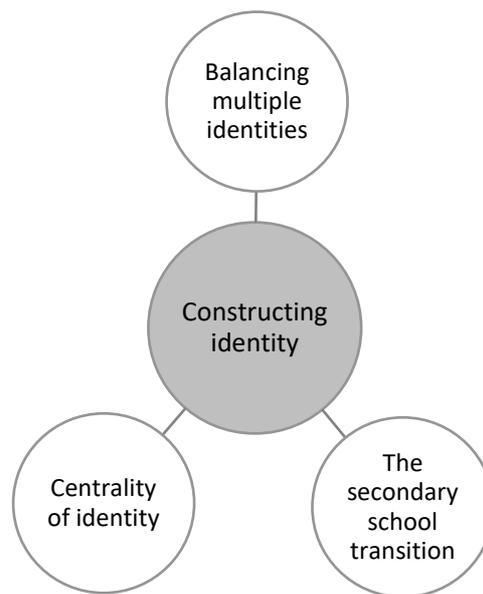


Figure 5 *Constructing identity sub-themes*

### **Sub-theme: Balancing multiple identities.**

Eight participants aligned themselves to an exclusive multiracial identity, describing themselves as “mixed-race”. The remaining four participants described their ethnic identity differently. Millie identified with a singular black identity. Jane and Mary identified with a British identity, and Sally identified as African and mixed. It is important to note participants used these terms inconsistently even within the interview.

Five participants felt that it was important to them that they encompassed all parts of their heritage. They described having different ‘sides’ to their identity, and were against the idea that they had to choose between these sides. This suggested that for these participants, holding a multiracial identity meant being true to all parts of your heritage, and there was a sense of duty that one shouldn’t hold a preference for one ethnic group over another. Even

Millie, who identified as black, wanted to make it clear that she wasn't "rejecting" her white European side by aligning with a black identity.

*"It's really important to keep touch with both sides of it... I don't like to say, I'm not one thing I always embrace everything I am, two very different sides but, yeah okay I'm both, so I'll do this and then I'll do this as well"–  
Ellie (4:43)*

Two participants recognised that despite wanting to hold an integrated identity, there continued to be pressures from the environment that made them feel less secure. Claire described a situation when her Geography teacher assumed that she knew about a Caribbean custom. This instilled a sense of duty within her and a pressure that she should know about both parts of her culture equally. This led to greater exploration and uncertainty about her ethnic identity.

*"It was automatically called out, 'do you know what that is, [and] do you celebrate that?' And it's just its really weird because I live with my mum we don't do things like that.... then it makes me question should I know that? ... Should I dig deeper into that side?" – Claire (2:40)*

#### **Sub-theme: Significance of the secondary transition.**

Four participants discussed how their identity had changed throughout their lives, and a sub-theme about the transition from primary to secondary school emerged. Participants reflected on how they struggled with their identity when they were younger. Joyce reflected on how her peers in primary school segregated themselves by race, which made it difficult for her, as she did not fit into either monoracial group. She reflected on how that impacted her in her early stages of identity development as she wondered which group she should belong to. This relates to the idea that younger children tend to use physical criteria to categorise people into racial groups and can be literal in their understanding of race (Quintana, 1998). This can be difficult when your own physical appearance does not easily lend yourself into one group or another, particularly for girls who may be socialised to hold greater meaning on physical appearance from a young age. Claire and Hannah discussed having different hair to their white monoracial peers, which made them overly conscious about their appearance. For Joyce, using physical criteria to categorise in her childhood stimulated her own explorations of ethnic identity, as she tried to find her place in the social world.

*"My primary school was quite, like say Caucasian people would be with Caucasian people and black people would be with black people and it's just like who do I go with because there wasn't many mixed people in my*

*primary school... especially when I was quite young as well it was quite weird because I had questions like does it mean that I am more something than I'm not." – Joyce (8:40:43)*

Interestingly, for those who experienced greater discrimination in secondary school, such as Demi and Beatrice, primary school was viewed as a more accepting place where race and ethnicity was less of an issue. Beatrice felt her perceptions of a neutral approach to race in primary school had a direct effect on her emotional wellbeing, which contrasted to her experiences in secondary school.

*"Primary school as well I was, it was different to this they were more accepting, I don't think anyone cared about my race... [And did you like primary school?] Yeah I loved it. Yeah less stressed." – Beatrice (1:103)*

### **Sub-theme: Centrality of identity.**

Ten of the twelve participants thought that their ethnicity was important to them and had an impact on their lives, whether positive or negative. Four participants felt their ethnic identity was especially central to their sense of self. Olivia in particular shared that her multiracial background was something she valued.

*"When someone else asks me what's your favourite thing I would just say that [being mixed-race]." – Olivia (11:9)*

Two noticeable interviews were that of Jane and Mary, who did not think that their ethnicity was central to the self. These two participants also chose to describe themselves as 'English' and it was clear from the rest of their interview that they did not feel their ethnicity impacted their lives. They tended to view ethnicity as objective and distant from their lived experience.

*"I don't feel like impacts my life in a negative or positive way. I just think it's not that important at the moment... Just like, when you hear about stuff in the news, they usually identify people by their race. So it may impact my future, but I don't know" – Mary (9:6)*

#### Researcher Reflections

Mary's interview was among the shortest because she did not feel her ethnicity played an important role in her life. As we spoke, I was highly aware of the language I used, as I wanted to explore her own constructions of race and ethnicity without imposing my own assumptions.

## Theme 2: Feeling Good about Being Multiracial

*Feeling good about being multiracial* is also subsumed within the overarching theme 'ethnic identity'. It captures positive evaluations of a multiracial identity and explores how ethnic identity affirmation may influence self-esteem and mental health. This theme explores how knowledge of ethnic background and fluidity between peer groups influenced participants' ethnic identity affirmation. This theme is useful for understanding why multiracial young people feel good about their ethnic group. There are two sub-themes (Figure 6).

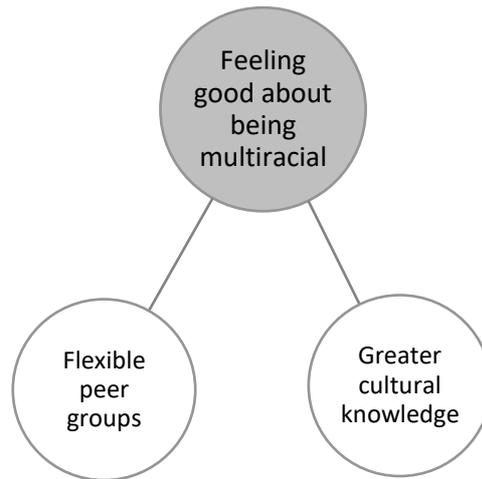


Figure 6 *Feeling good about being multiracial* sub-themes

### **Sub-theme: Greater cultural knowledge.**

Five participants valued holding in depth knowledge about their heritage and culture. They held a sense of pride about this knowledge and participants enjoyed sharing what they knew during the interview. This ranged from awareness of food and dress, to language and music. A couple of participants had conducted DNA tests with their families and enjoyed being able to explore their nuances of their heritage. These participants have attempted to understand the meaning of their ethnic group membership, and have a clear sense of belonging based on their knowledge. This sense of belonging helped them to develop positive feelings about their ethnic group. Millie shares how she identifies with both Nigerian, German and Spanish groups, and how her cultural knowledge was a significant contributor to her sense of belonging. This may explain the quantitative finding that ethnic identity affirmation predicted self-esteem.

*“I probably identify with Nigerian and Spanish the most, like the culture, because we always go on holiday to Spain so I can speak Spanish which is quite nice. And I always try and identify with like traditional clothing because I really like the flamenco dresses and the dirndl dresses, which*

*are really nice from Bavaria Munich. And from Nigeria I've got lots of African dresses because my dad brings them over from Nigeria sometimes, so that's quite nice". – Millie (10:20)*

On the other hand, three participants felt that they lacked cultural knowledge. Especially when they only had access to one side of their family.

*"It's more, say like if I'm with my great nan I'll call her yia-yia because that's the word for grandma in Greek so she'll like cook different foods like these Greek meatballs and rice, so she cooks different kinds of foods but back home my mum's just, I don't think, it's not that she doesn't embrace it but she's more of like stuck in her own ways, so she doesn't really do things like that" – Joyce (8:21)*

### **Sub-theme: Flexible peer groups.**

Eight participants reflected on the challenges and advantages of being multiracial and fitting in with their peers. Five participants recognised that being multiracial made them feel less restricted about social groups. They felt that their multiracial identity helped them to “merge” with different ethnicities, and so they could relate to more people and belong to more groups than their monoracial peers. This illustrates how different aspects of the multifaceted multiracial identity becomes more salient in different social contexts. For some participants the ability to go between groups and have diverse friends contributed to positive feelings about their ethnic group.

*"Sometimes people feel like if they are white, they have to identify with the white group, and if they are black they have to identify with the black group. I feel like when you're mixed race you can just do whatever you want." – Sally (12:56)*

Seven participants referred to the challenges of trying to ‘fit in’ when you had a multiracial identity. For most participants, they recalled a sense of ‘feeling different’ from their peer group. Related to the previous sub-theme, some participants felt their lack of cultural knowledge made it difficult to initiate friendships. Claire discussed how her peers would lose interest in her if she couldn’t maintain conversations about her culture, due to her family upbringing. Whilst being able to move between ethnic groups was a potential source of ethnic affirmation, it may also reflect a quest to find a social group to belong to.

*“It’s not hard making friends but you have to think about will I fit with them or not because you’re different. But usually I just fit in with them its fine” – Millie (10:47)*

### Theme 3: Peer Perceptions

*Peer perceptions* is subsumed within the overarching theme ‘Impact of the Social Environment’. This illustrates how participants’ beliefs about how their peers view them play an important role in their ethnic identity development and mental health. Two sub-themes explore peer perceptions. The first, *stereotypes and invalidation*, explores peer perception of whether the participants conform to ethnic group stereotypes and the implications for group belonging and mental health. The second, *perceived value of my ethnic group*, explores perceptions of whether it’s valued to have multiracial identity and how valued-based judgements are internalised (Figure 7).

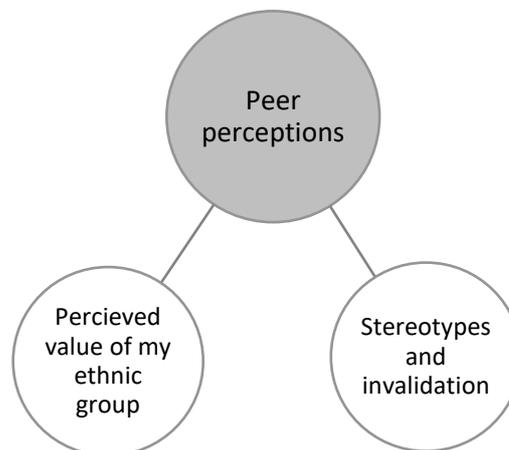


Figure 7 Peer perceptions sub-themes

#### **Sub-theme: Stereotypes and invalidation.**

Five participants recalled how their peers would comment on whether they act like a stereotypical black or white person. In accordance with Social Identity Theory, this reflects the categorisation process of forming in-groups and out-groups based on socially defined criteria. These judgements ranged from the food participants ate, to their music taste and the type of slang they used. Peers would make judgements about whether or not the participants were part of the ‘in-group’ or not, and therefore whether they were ‘allowed’ to act in a certain way. Two participants felt they didn’t feel able to join in with jokes and conversations about race with their monoracial peers because of this ‘out-group’ status. These reflected appraisals were particularly significant for Beatrice. She reflected that her old friends would comment that Beatrice ‘thought’ she was more one race than another. Subsequently they would ‘remind her’ of her multiracial status.

*“People would be like to me “oh you think you’re more of this race than that race” because I’m mixed race so people say, ‘you think you’re more black than white’ or the other way around, stuff like that.... they’ll be like “oh you’re so black” or “oh you think you’re black but you’re forgetting that you’re half white”” – Beatrice (1:33)*

An unexpected finding was the emergence of a new social group – the ‘mixed-race girl’. Three participants described the defining characteristics of the ‘mixed-race girl’ stereotype. This was an interesting finding given that the literature stresses that multiracial young people have to choose between, in this case, their black or white ethnic groups (Kerwin & Ponterotto, 1995; Poston, 1990). The emergence of a new ‘mixed-race’ group provides a new dimension to this theory. It contradicts the marginal man hypothesis, by suggesting that rather than being cast between groups a new group can emerge. This may also reflect the diversity of the school, as there were enough multiracial pupils to form and recognise a ‘mixed-race’ social group. Nevertheless, with all social groupings there are stereotypes, some of which were negative and detrimental. Demi felt that because her peers felt she didn’t act or dress like a “*proper*” multiracial girl, she didn’t belong into to the multiracial group either. This may reflect the social pressure adolescent girls face regarding body image and appearance. Through these reflected appraisals, Demi’s self-esteem may be affected as her physical appearance becomes more salient to her identity. If she does not feel that her appearance fits into the “mixed-race girl” stereotype, this has implications for mental health according to Social Identity Theory as self-esteem is bound by group identity and belonging.

*“There’s other light skinned girls<sup>1</sup> in our year that do the perfect, they do their hair, they dress the perfect way, they’re wearing light lip gloss and everyone is like ‘see you should dress like her, because then you’d be a proper light skinned’” – Demi (3:36:38)*

Four participants reported how their peers would have strong opinions on how they should identify and often doubted the participants’ identity choice. Jelly explained that her Caribbean ancestry is not immediately obvious. She identifies as ‘mixed-race’, yet her identity is often invalidated and she regularly defends her ethnic identity. This is made even more complicated because she is adopted. In addition, two participants felt their identity was invalidated due to the ethnicity of their parents and stereotypes about multiracial families. They discussed the

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<sup>1</sup> Demi sometimes referred to herself as light-skinned, sometimes mixed-race

assumptions that living with a white mother meant that you have been brought up and so must identify with a white background.

*“I think I’m both, but because people think you live with your mum, they think all of the family is white. So they think you’re more in the white culture, but I think I’m in both of them.” – Hannah (5:53)*

#### Researcher Reflections

It was interesting to recognise the ‘in-group out-group’ processes in play as participants discussed navigating their peer group. I expected some comments about ‘feeling different’ and ‘fitting in’. However, the idea that some participants did not feel they fit into the multiracial group, in addition to the black and white groups, struck me. Ellie’s repetitive use of the phrase ‘not enough’ to describe her ethnicity, particularly stood out to me.

Ellie has a white father and a multiracial mother and her peers told her she wasn’t multiracial “*enough*” to belong to the ‘mixed-race’ social group. Ellie described how she battled with this reflected appraisal of herself for a long time before beginning to embrace her multiracial identity. She described the negative impact that had on her self-esteem and how it affected her interactions with her peers, illustrating the effect that identity invalidation can have on multiracial mental health.

*“I’d say I’m mostly mixed race but there’s some argument about that... I feel a bit irritated really because I don’t feel it’s their place to tell me who I am and how I identify. And it’s just I’m used to it, because it’s sort of like, throughout my life”– Ellie (4:8:25)*

This illustrates how identity invalidation can be an ongoing source of stress and a risk to mental health and identity development for some multiracial young people.

*“It’s just um, it doesn’t make me feel angry. It’s just tiring.” – Jelly (7:27:33)*

*“Like my friend said yesterday ‘no matter even if you’re friends, everybody makes jokes about it and that’s it’. [When you say you don’t like it?]. They just say, you’re just acting too prestige, they just tell me to shut up.” – Demi (3:81)*

### **Sub-theme: Perceived value of ethnic group.**

Four participants described how their multiracial heritage was interesting to other people. This relates to the potentially more affirmative side of reflected appraisals - the degree to which your peers view your ethnic group positively. Positive peer appraisals may also affect participants' ethnic identity affirmation, as they feel like their ethnic group is valued, and acts as a source of self-esteem.

*“I think people find it quite interesting to find out about here you're from and stuff.” – Sally (12:62)*

Olivia felt that people viewed her ethnicity positively and she internalised those views into her sense of self and self-esteem. The extent to which young people depend on these appraisals for self-esteem may be significant, particularly as appraisals can be both positive and negative.

### **Theme 4: Community Diversity**

*Community diversity* explores wider systemic influences on multiracial young people. This reflects the ecological model of identity development illustrating how an individual interacts with the distal and proximal environments around them. The two sub-themes capture how participants felt their identity and mental health was influenced by the ethnic composition of their environment and narratives about multiracial identity (Figure 8).



*Figure 8 Community diversity sub-themes*

### **Sub-theme: Diversity in London schools.**

Three participants mentioned the unique properties of living in London. Hannah spent most of her secondary school education in the South of England where there were very few people from ethnic minority backgrounds. She reflected on the differences between there and London, and how more diversity in London helped her to feel a greater sense of belonging as she didn't feel so different.

*"I just think maybe, being mixed-race or even just black, just any other cultures outside of London or like a big city, is so different from being inside it... It's quite difficult when you're outside of that [multicultural] place." – Hannah (5:101)*

The diversity of the school was valued by several participants. Five participants described that attending a school with lower diversity would have had a negative impact. They described situations where they have been in monoracial schools and felt very different from their peers. This had an impact on their sense of inclusion and social wellbeing in the school. Hannah described that she felt misunderstood by her peers, for example when they touched her hair or asked her questions about her race. In contrast, four participants felt that attending a diverse school was a positive experience. This was generally because being multiracial "*didn't matter*" because there were so many other ethnic groups. In this way, social wellbeing increased because they felt less isolated and had other people to relate to. Mary described that this was one of the reasons she felt her ethnicity didn't impact her life.

*"I feel like in school it's very, everyone is different so it's easy to fit in. Which sometimes sounds weird, but because everyone comes from different places, it doesn't make a difference to anyone really." – Mary (9:5)*

School diversity also had an impact on ethnic identity exploration for Sally. She felt the range of ethnic groups at school helped her develop an interest in her background, suggesting exposure to more ethnic groups can provide more identity choices. Mary in particular stood out as the only participant whose closest friends were white-monoracial despite attending an ethnically diverse school. She also identified as British rather than "mixed-race".

*"When I lived in Spain, I didn't know that much about my background and because I was only surrounded by one type of people. But then, when I came here, I realised there were so many people like me and different to me, so I had more of an interest in my background and stuff". – Sally (12:62:71)*

Five participants felt that in this school, black pupils had higher status and that it was desirable to belong to the black community, particularly for white pupils. Interestingly the narrative around black pupils in these interviews was around 'power' rather than academic progress. The school demographics are unrepresentative of the UK in that white pupils are the minority group. This could reflect that the BAME group is valued more in the school, than the multiracial or white group, which has implications of ethnic identity affirmation and self-esteem.

*“People who are white in our school, people say that when they have a black family, they like to say how they try to use it to make themselves more black. Because white girls are supposed to be seen to try to make themselves more black”. – Demi (3:99)*

### **Sub-theme: Discrimination in society.**

Despite living in a diverse and multicultural area, ethnic discrimination still occurred and participants were influenced by racial narratives in the wider society. Although most participants did not feel that they faced direct racism or discrimination at school, four participants identified negative interactions they had within their community. Ellie describes how she had experienced racism from individuals from both sides of her background. In addition, Jelly and Hannah spoke about how their families had been targeted in the community because of their race. These indirect interactions may be internalised by multiracial young people as confirmation that their group is not valued or accepted, thus impacting identity development and affirmation and hence self-esteem.

*“Racism is always a thing isn't it? Like, sometimes it's from white people and sometimes it is from black people as well. Like people don't really agree with it or think enough but yeah it's okay really, it's not that bad, it's not bad here. But like just out and about sometimes... I did run into someone who was still in the whole impurity thing, like 'oh you shouldn't be mixed'” – Ellie (4:33:37)*

Four participants felt they were treated differently due to social meanings associated with their skin colour. Colourism is defined as “the tendency to perceive or behave toward members of a racial category based on the lightness or darkness of their skin tone” (Hochschild & Weaver, 2007, p. 646). Three participants reflected on the dominant discourse that people with lighter skin tones were both attractive but also aloof and egotistical.

*“I've seen posts on Instagram about light skinned. Some people put a bad name sometimes, because they think they have all the prestige and that they think they're the best... That's what the black community think light*

*skinned people are like. You're always chatting up people and this and that... I've seen it all over social media.... It's like 'I don't like all you light skinned'... There is always some sort of fight going on. It's implicit. It's like in-between the black and mixed race community. It's always sinister." – Jelly (7:40:99)*

Demi and Beatrice felt objectified because of colourism. They described comments from their peers about boys wanting to only have relationships with “*light-skinned mixed-race girls*”. Demi discussed her experiences of harassment, based on her skin colour, when walking to and from school. This objectification affected her identity as she felt that her peers weren't interested in other aspects of herself, such as her personality or achievement, but only focussed on her appearance. Beatrice appeared to feel resentment and shame about her skin tone, and there was a sense of conflict about its ‘privileges’ that she had inherited. This illustrates how societal and historical views at the wider level can influence peer interactions in more proximal environments to effect multiracial experiences. It also shows the interaction between ethnicity and gender on race-based peer interactions. The degree to which these views are internalised may in turn effect multiracial mental health and identity.

*“Like it's always something about my colour and it's not like who you are it's about what you look like”. – Demi (3:29)*

The participants in this thesis varied in appearance and skin tone. Hannah described herself as “*dark mixed race*” and felt that many people saw her as a black person. In her interviews, she mentioned being treated differently by her white, but not black peers. This demonstrates how societal attitudes about appearance can affect how multiracial young people are categorised into in-group, out-group status and effect how they interact with their environment.

### Researcher Reflections

I noticed that when the interviews turned towards issues of colourism and objectification I became very aware of my own positioning within the interview. For example, when Demi was describing the typical multiracial appearance, she referenced having “light eyes, kind of like yours”. I immediately became aware of her perceptions of me throughout the interview, and wondered how the interview would differ if I was not multiracial.

The term ‘light-skinned’ had not been used towards me until I had moved to London. This interview led me to reflect on the impact of colourism and terms such as ‘light-skinned’ in the mixed-race community and my own reactions to the term.

The sub-theme of colourism was difficult to write. I wanted to portray the complexities of how the participants felt about being ‘light-skinned’, but also did not want to negate the experiences of people with darker skin tones.

## **Theme 5: I Can Always Go to My Friends**

*I can always go to my friends*, captures the integral role of friends in helping participants to feel included, happy and to develop a sense of self. Previous themes in this analysis highlighted the discrepancy between how peer perceptions produced distress for some of the participants as they found it difficult to develop a coherent sense of self and affiliation with a social group. “*I can always go to my friends*” was named using a quote from one of the participants, Joyce. It captures how possession of identity validating and supportive friends contributes to positive emotional, psychological and social wellbeing (Figure 9).

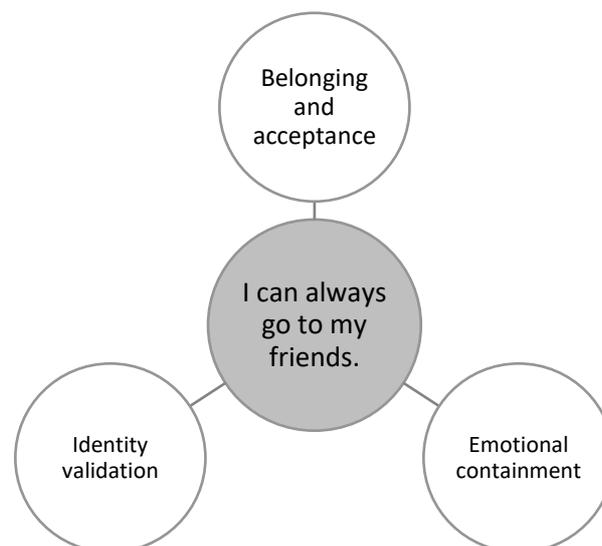


Figure 9 *I can always go to my friends* sub-themes

***Sub-theme: Belonging and acceptance.***

Four participants commented that friendship conflict was a common feature at the school, and Demi and Jelly specifically attributed this to it being a girl's school.

*“Boys, because I have an older brother and he goes to [Boy's school], they would fight, fight, fight and then be best friends and play football. Girls would just kill your social life.” – Jelly (7:8)*

Seven participants felt that a defining feature of friendship was to have common interests or attitudes. For example, interests in certain TV programmes or attitudes towards school. This created belonging by increasing group cohesion. Six participants noticed that having friends with similar cultural or racial backgrounds made it easier to relate to them and fostered a sense of belonging. Jelly described how she felt greater affiliation to BAME groups because of being able to talk and relate to people with a similar background to hers. On the other hand, Mary felt that the ethnicity of her friends didn't really make a difference to her, and she was more interested in personality. This is interesting considering the lack of centrality of ethnic identity to Mary's sense of self.

*“The friends I hang around with I'd say the majority of them are black or mixed or Asian. I have a few white friends. Some of them, some people, I tried to sit with them in year 7 but I didn't get along with them, I couldn't relate to them. Because they talked about stuff and I was like – what? I don't follow.” – Jelly (7:34)*

The diversity of the friendship group was also an important factor in belonging. Five participants shared that belonging to a diverse friendship group helped them feel included and no longer the “*different one*”. Finding a peer group who are ethnically diverse or contains more multiracial individuals, acted as a source of acceptance and belonging for the participants. This acceptance may make it easier for the participants to accept and embrace themselves and safely explore their identity. Beatrice described her journey through the peer environment. Her previous homogenous black friendship group left her feeling rejected and isolated. She was often marginalised and belittled for her multiracial heritage. This lack of social inclusion and connectedness led her to seek a new ‘in-group’ that may have had implications for her self-esteem.

*“We are all different but the same... we understand each other” – Olivia (11:45)*

*“It’s just for me personally [this new group] is better, and I feel more accepted in [this] friendship group because I was the only one in [my old] friendship group that had white in them”. – Beatrice (1:72)*

This shows how multiracial young people have a range of friendship patterns, from white majority, BAME to ethnically diverse, and each group served a different function depending on how the girl identified and her previous peer experiences.

### **Sub-theme: Emotional containment.**

Ten out of the twelve participants mentioned that their friends supported their emotional wellbeing in some way. They highlighted the importance of intimate relationships, where you feel you can be honest and open with your friends and feel that you can share personal thoughts and feelings. This may reflect the characteristic of self-disclosure common in girls’ friendships. Three participants mentioned that their relationships with their friends were different to their parents. They felt their friends were more relatable and they had more in common with their friends than their parents.

*I think like friendship is different to like a family relationship like I think you confide more in your friends and they’re always there for you and you’re similar you like the same things, you can trust them you can be honest with them. – Ellie (4:33)*

A recurring theme through the interviews was the concept of emotional containment. This term was introduced by Bion (1962) through work examining the psychoanalytic relationship between a therapist and their client. Containment is the role of another to act as containers for unmanageable feelings, thus allowing the individual to manage their feelings and think coherently about a situation. Eight participants reported that their friends were available to listen to their concerns or reassure them. Joyce felt that friends were good at helping her to make sense of her feelings and that by talking to her friends she didn’t need to hold too much in mind. By simply being there, her friends were able to transform her feelings into something she could cope with. This peer support and guidance helped Joyce to develop her own resiliency skills by reminding her about her inner resources and potential to overcome her challenges.

*“I couldn’t just sit here like with all this feeling and not discuss it ... I spoke to [my friend] about it and was like ‘I don’t know why I feel like this’...she said the same thing I said to myself like ‘you have all these great things around you.... after that... I just started like putting more positive thoughts into my head rather than negative ones.” – Joyce (8:21)*

A common feature shared by nine participants was the value of dependable and stable relationships. Two participants commented that arguments with friends were a common occurrence at the girls' school. However, this desire for stability may also reflect the particular challenges that multiracial adolescent may have finding an accepting peer group. Alternatively, the stability of friendships may tie in with self-worth as peers continuing to want to be friends with you reflects your importance in the group.

*“When we had an argument with other people in our school. They are always there, they didn’t leave and go to the other people. They were always there.” - Jane (6:62)*

### **Sub-theme: Identity validation.**

Ellie and Beatrice discussed how their friends defended them when peers invalidated or discriminated against their chosen identity. In this way, friends were important for preserving a stable sense of self and providing them with a sense of agency. Ellie felt that that her friends helped to put a stop to people saying that she wasn't mixed-race “*enough*” and helped build her confidence to defend her own ethnic identity choices.

*“Yeah they helped because I have this really diverse group of friends, no-one really, everyone’s fine with it. But when someone else has something to say about it, they’re really defensive and supportive. They’ll speak out about it, they’ll probably argue even more than I would! They’ll become more offended. But it’s nice that they don’t let it pass over, they don’t ignore it” – Ellie (4:135)*

Another way friends helped to develop a coherent sense of self was by providing opportunities for the participants to learn about their culture. Eight participants felt that having a diverse group of friends helped them to be more open minded and learn about different perspectives. Three of these felt their friends directly helped them to learn about their own culture. For Sally and Claire, this was particularly important, as they did not have contact with both parts of their culture due to family breakdown. In this way, friends provided them with opportunities for racial socialisation. This could be important for developing ethnic identity affirmation and self-esteem.

*“I was raised by my mum and then as well because the Jamaicans are raised by their parents and Jamaican families and things like that, so they have like wider ranges of different music they want to listen to or talk about or like different celebrities... you kind of talk about and get introduced to it and it’s just all these new things” - Claire (2:80)*

## Theme 6: Back to my Roots

*Back to my roots* captures the unique role of family for advice and cultural knowledge. Using an ecological approach, this thesis recognises the range of interacting and encompassing systems that can influence multiracial mental health. Although the focus of this research was on the role of peers and friendships, the impact of family emerged as a consistent theme during the participant interviews. *Back to my roots* captures the role of family in mental health, by providing advice and experience and ethnic-racial socialisation practices (Figure 10). This section will also explore how the family system interacts with the peer system to influence wellbeing.

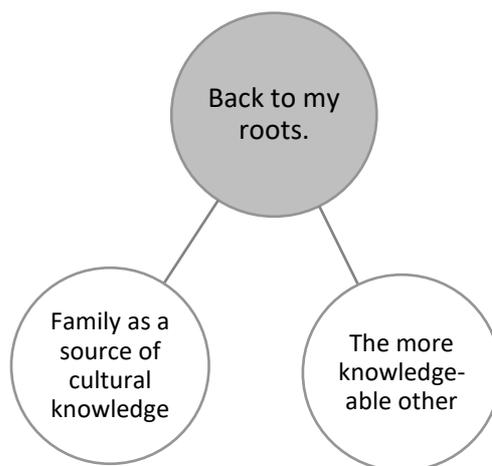


Figure 10 *Back to my roots* sub-themes

### Sub-theme: The more knowledgeable other.

Six participants shared that they would go to their parents for help with their mental health. There was variation in the type of support participants gained from their parents. Some of this mirrored the support from friendship, such as emotional containment. A distinction was the use of parents as a more experienced source and someone from whom they would gain practical advice in addition to containment. This relates to Vygotsky's zone of proximal development, where support from a *more knowledgeable other* is required to make progress (Vygotsky, 1978). However, whereas participants tended to describe their friends as relatable and comfortable, there was a sense that for parents to provide the same level of emotional support they also needed to be open and accessible. Other participants, such as Beatrice, felt that she wouldn't talk to her parents in the fear that they would "*make things worse*". Sally discussed how her mum helped her through her struggles with body image. Through this quote runs the themes of emotional containment, highlighted as important for friendships too, but also the importance of speaking to someone with experience.

*“I feel like if I didn’t have that conversation with my mum, it would have gotten worse instead of better, because I would have kept it in... my mum helped me find ways in which I can deal with it. But then, it just makes me think, some people can’t have those conversations with their parents. Because they are not as close to them or something, and it just make me think how they are coping ..... It doesn’t even have to be with your mum, just having someone, older who has been through it themselves” – Sally (12:106)*

Additionally, she points out that it’s important to have someone who can relate to your experiences. Although monoracial parents were able to offer some advice, for example, Jelly discussed how her dad had taught her not to use racial slurs, Ellie and Hannah shared the value of having a multiracial family member who could draw on their direct experiences, such as a parent or a sibling. They felt that these family members could use their familiarities to provide advice and support. Hannah mentions how integral her sister was when she moved to a majority monoracial part of the UK. This ties in with research showing that multiracial people will look for racially similar peers in the absence of an obvious peer group. This has implications for selecting mentors with experience or knowledge of multiracial issues with whom multiracial young people can come to for advice and support.

*“There was no-one else really mixed race or black there. And me and my sister, we could talk about it and stuff like that.... I felt like I could talk to someone about it. Because if I said to one of them, oh it really gets on my nerves when you touch my hair I would feel like I was being a bit rude or something.” - Hannah (5:37:67)*

### **Sub-theme: Family as a source of cultural knowledge.**

Six participants shared that their learned about their heritage from their families. This ranged from types of clothing and food, to subtle knowledge such as cultural jokes and mannerisms. Four participants shared that being brought up in a multiracial family directly influenced how they interacted with their peers. Hannah shared that she could joke about having a Jamaican family to her friends. There were also more subtle ways that a multiracial family upbringing affected peer interactions. Sally shared her multiracial family background meant that she was able to do things that her monoracial friends could not. This led her to have a closer relationship to another multiracial girl in her friendship group.

*“I’m closest with XXX, because I feel like our mum’s are similar because they let us do things. But the rest of them, XXX and stuff, they’re from an African background, so I guess their parents are more strict, so they are*

*not allowed to do as much as us. Maybe it's a stereotype, but my friends who have white mums are allowed to do more things.” – Sally (12:86)*

Whereas Sally felt that her background meant that she could still have meaningful relationships with monoracial peers, Beatrice felt that their backgrounds had an integral effect who she chose to interact with. Even within this quote, you can recognise the tension Beatrice feels about distancing herself from one part of her cultural upbringing and using negative stereotypes to describe part of her family.

*“And like with these ones we're from like different backgrounds we've been brought up differently like. If, I don't know how to put this, they're more like aggressive... As in like we've kind of been we've been brought up the same” – Beatrice (1:74)*

## **Theme 7: Growing a Thick Skin**

*Growing a thick skin* captures how participants demonstrate personal resilience in the face of adversity. The final theme captures the personal resources the participants used to support positive mental health. Throughout the interview, participants discussed a range of risks to their mental health, most of which could be experienced by adolescent girls regardless of ethnicity. These included pressure to perform in exams, falling out with friends and struggles with body image. *Growing a thick skin* captures the strategies the participants used to build resilience and the social environments that aided this development. The strategies related to multiracial identity challenges will be emphasised, although it is difficult to tease apart coping strategies relevant to general mental health challenges and those related to multiracial issues (Morley & Street, 2014). This theme consists of two sub-themes illustrates two conceptual coping styles (Figure 11).

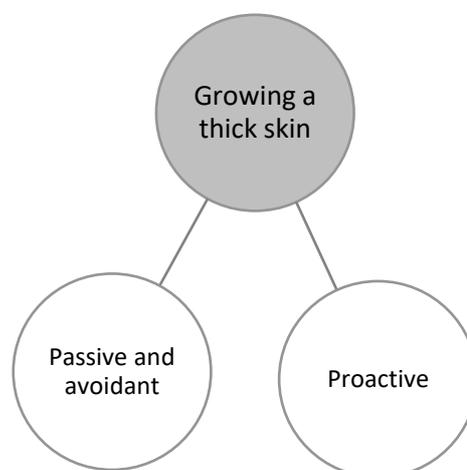


Figure 11 *Growing a thick skin* sub-themes

### **Sub-theme 1: Passive and avoidant.**

Six participants referred to passive or avoidant coping strategies. For example, ignoring stressful situations or accepting them as part of life. Perhaps of interest to multiracial mental health, and particularly social wellbeing, was the ways in which participants reacted to negative peer interactions. Those who adopted passive coping strategies were more likely to ignore the peers (such as Jelly and Claire) or adopt a learned helplessness stance (Demi and Beatrice). Claire generally had a negative perception of her peer group and her response was to socially withdraw from her peer group. Beatrice had several experiences of identity invalidation and race-based social exclusion from her peers. There was a sense she had a lower sense of agency about how she would approach conflict.

*“If you try and make it a situation over here people will automatically assume you just want a fight or something... I kind of just taught myself how to ignore it” – Claire (2:63:93).*

*“It’s hard to deal with it. It’s actually hard to deal with it because like, erm, there’s nothing much I can do...I have to act like I’m alright with it because she’s quite a, she’s strong” – Beatrice (1:63)*

### **Sub-theme 2: Proactive.**

Nine participants out of twelve used proactive coping strategies to address challenges to their mental health. The imbalance between the number of passive and proactive strategies shows the flexibility of resilience skills. Active coping strategies included recognising and using social support, goal orientated planning and making active changes your environment or approach to a situation. Only Demi and Ellie described proactive approaches directly related to multiracial issues. They discussed how they had begun to stand up for themselves which peers invalidated their identity or discriminated against them. Demi described how with age she made the conscious decision to “*speak back to them*” and avoid people “*stepping all over her*”. The source of her determination appeared to derive from her own personality and maturing. Ellie, on the other hand, described how her personal resources were influenced by the others around her, such as her supportive friends and multiracial mother. Both Ellie and Demi’s response to adversity had implications for their confidence and self-esteem.

*“I grew a thick skin then I started speaking up for myself. I was arguing back and like ‘right you can’t say this to me’ ... So it’s good to just get it over with, so it helps it builds up your self-esteem and confidence just speaking out... I’m not so worried about what people are going to say anymore.” – Ellie (4:57:129)*

## Discussion

### Interpretation of Key Findings

This thesis aimed to explore the role of peers and friendships in multiracial adolescent ethnic identity and mental health. This chapter begins by answering the research questions using the questionnaire and semi-structured interview findings, relating these to relevant theory and existing literature.

#### **Research question 1.**

*Are there any differences between multiracial and monoracial girls in terms of their mental health outcomes, ethnic identity, peer relations and interethnic friendships?*

#### ***Mental health outcomes.***

In this sample, multiracial girls had significantly lower self-esteem than their BAME monoracial peers did and lower self-esteem than their white monoracial peers. There were no ethnic group differences on the mental health screening tool (SDQ). In the interviews, multiracial girls generally reported risks to their mental health reflective of adolescent girls regardless of ethnicity. Although many participants did not feel like their ethnicity affected their mental health directly, after deeper exploration more subtle effects of the interactions between ethnicity and environment emerged.

The similarity in SDQ scores between the multiracial and monoracial groups contrasts other research showing that multiracial girls are at greater risk than some other ethnic groups of having mental health difficulties (Patalay & Fitzsimons, 2017). This illustrates that despite challenges to their mental health, multiracial girls may not differ greatly from their monoracial peers in mental health outcomes. However, the difference in self-esteem and the subtler risks outlined in the interviews suggests that risks to mental health may be related to self-concept and its interaction with the environment.

#### ***Ethnic identity affirmation and exploration.***

In this sample, multiracial girls were significantly less likely to feel good about their ethnic group than BAME monoracial girls, but were more likely to feel good than white monoracial girls. The theme 'Community Diversity' illustrated girls with black monoracial heritage as being ascribed greater value than other groups in the school, illustrated in the quote "*white girls are supposed to be seen as wanting to be black*". In contrast, some participants were aware of negative discourses in their peer group about the multiracial ethnic group. Additionally, the theme 'Feeling good about being multiracial' showed some multiracial girls felt they lacked

knowledge about their ethnic group, which was in part due to lack of access to their African/Caribbean family members and multiracial role models.

The higher ethnic identity affirmation in the BAME group compared to other groups can be related to social identity theory. The tenet of social identity theory is that our feelings about our ethnic group can be influenced by reflected appraisals, the extent to which we perceive our group is viewed positively by others, and whether we internalise these views into our own evaluations of our ethnic group (Tajfel & Turner, 1986; Wallace & Tice, 2012). According to ecosystemic models (Bronfenbrenner, 1989), narratives within the school context may influence how participants feel about their ethnic group, which are in turn likely to reflect wider societal attitudes. McArthur (2016) notes how black women are creating new narratives about the black identity using social media. Hashtags such as #blackgirlmagic and the celebration of the black female characters in movies such as *Black Panther*, illustrate how social narratives are establishing positive definitions of what it means to be a black woman, aiming to empower and challenge stereotypes (McArthur, 2016; Stanton, Jerald, Ward & Avery, 2017). In this way, positive narratives about the black identity in the wider context may have influences in more immediate contexts, such as schools and peer narratives, hence having a positive effect on BAME monoracial girls' ethnic identity affirmation.

The reports from some participants that they felt they had little knowledge about their ethnic group because of their familial experiences reflects other literature showing that multiracial individuals differ as to the degree of familial support experienced and that families may have little knowledge about the multiracial experience (Morley & Street, 2014). This may contrast the experiences of BAME monoracial girls, who may have more access to family members who share their heritage and transmit greater cultural knowledge. Having knowledge about our ethnic group and feeling as if we belong has a positive impact on self-esteem (Phinney, 2002).

In this thesis, multiracial girls had higher levels of ethnic identity affirmation than the white monoracial group, although this did not reach significance. The theme 'Feeling good about being multiracial' shows many multiracial young people had a deep sense of pride about their heritage and 'Constructing Identity' shows how important this pride was for their sense of self. Although most participants identified as multiracial, there was a range in self-identification, with some multiracial girls choosing to identify as British while others as black or African. Research shows that what distinguishes multiracial individuals from their monoracial counterparts is the choice between identities (Brunsma et al., 2013). Multiracial girls with black-white heritage may align with national or white ethnic identities, and therefore hold an ethnic identity resembling that of their white majority peers.

The lower ethnic identity affirmation in the white monoracial group may reflect literature showing that because white monoracial adolescents in the UK and US primarily operate in a white-majority society, issues of race and ethnicity are less pertinent for them (Hughes, et al., 2009). Girls who identify as white monoracial may struggle to answer the ethnic identity questions in the questionnaire (Phinney, 1992). However, given the ethnically diverse context in this school, ethnicity may become more salient for the white monoracial groups who may begin to explore their own ethnic identity. They may recognise the value of the black identity in this school context, thus reducing their own ethnic identity affirmation through reflected appraisals.

A surprising finding was that the multiracial girls in this sample did not significantly differ from their monoracial peers in their exploration of ethnic identity. In 'Constructing Identity' some participants reflected on their struggle to form an ethnic identity when they were younger, particularly highlighting the transition from primary to secondary school as a turbulent period. However, there was also a contradiction in that multiracial girls should choose between and simultaneously know everything about both sides of their heritage. These types of contradictions increased ethnic identity exploration for some and uncertainty about identity for others.

Although this research was cross-sectional, only carried out at one point in time, this suggests that multiracial girls in mid-adolescence experience similar exploration of identity to their monoracial peers. This may indicate that multiracial adolescents are not necessarily more likely to search for a sense of self due to difficulties constructing an identity, counteracting some psychosocial developmental models of multiracial ethnic identity characterised by identity confusion (Kerwin & Ponterotto, 1995; Poston, 1990). This suggests that being multiracial in itself does not result in confusion about identity, but it is how society and peers view that identity which may create identity instability.

### ***Peer relations.***

Multiracial girls had significantly lower perceptions of friendship support than their BAME monoracial peers did and lower perceptions of friendship support than their white monoracial peers. This contradicted the interviews in some ways, as the theme 'I Can Always Go to My Friends' showed how multiracial girls valued their friends' emotional, practical and social support. Conversely, in 'Peer Perceptions' participants reported that their friends were less likely to support their ethnic identification. This was particularly pertinent for multiracial girls whose physical appearance did not align with multiracial girl stereotypes and those whose parent's ethnicities did not conform to conventional monoracial black-white interrelationships

(for example, having a multiracial parent). These girls felt under increased pressure to justify and 'prove' their multiracial identity.

These types of interactions may be less likely to occur for BAME monoracial groups, and to an extent white monoracial groups. Monoracial girls are more likely to resemble members of their ethnic group, therefore their ethnic group membership is more prominent and they do not have to justify their identity choices to the same extent (Shih & Sanchez, 2005). Multiracial adolescents are likely to have ambiguous physical features and may experience increased pressure to justify and define the self, in comparison to monoracial peers (Gillen-O'Neel et al., 2015). This may have significant implications for multiracial girls, because their physical appearance may already be a salient issue due to gendered socialisation practices (Hagger & Stevenson, 2010). Research shows that girls, more than boys, are socially judged based on what they look like and through reflected appraisals, this impacts their self-esteem (McMullin & Cairney, 2004). This thesis seems to provide support for this interpretation based on participants' reports about colourism and objectification (Hochschild & Weaver, 2007). Identity validation based on physical appearance may be specifically detrimental for multiracial girls' self-esteem.

A surprising finding was that regardless of ethnic group, girls in this sample perceived low levels of ethnic discrimination from their peers. Indeed, most multiracial girls interviewed did not feel like they faced direct racism or discrimination at school. Although this appeared to be a positive finding, in the interviews most multiracial participants described persistent low-level discrimination. This included invalidation of identity, negative stereotyping, and deficit discourses about the multiracial ethnic group in their wider community.

This reflects literature on subtle racism or 'microaggressions' that permit negative attitudes towards minority ethnic groups (Sue, et al., 2007). Microaggressions are defined as everyday comments that communicate hostile racial messages to an individual, but are often communicated unconsciously and are rationalised by the communicator as having a different intention or meaning (Sue, et al., 2007). The low report rates may reflect research showing that with age such discrimination becomes normalised for adolescents, which can be concerning given the potential impacts on mental health (Palmer, Cameron, Rutland & Blake, 2017; Huynh, 2012). This thesis reiterates research showing multiracial adolescents experiences specific microaggressions based on their identity choices (Franco et al., 2016; Shih & Sanchez, 2005). This illustrates how discrimination in schools today may be different to its traditional representations. School practitioners, EPs and young people need greater awareness of these subtler discriminatory practices so that they can be challenged effectively.

### ***Friendship diversity.***

Multiracial girls had significantly more interethnic friendships than BAME or white monoracial groups, who tended to have more ethnically homogenous friendship groups. In the 'Feeling good about being multiracial' theme, multiracial girls felt that their multiracial ethnic identity made them feel less restricted about social groups and facilitated friendships with girls with varied ethnicities. In 'I Can Always Go to My Friends', participants valued diverse friendship groups because they were more accepting, they could relate to similarities in cultural upbringings, or because they had experienced rejection from their monoracial peers and they felt 'less different' in more diverse friendship groups.

This reflects the findings of previous research showing that multiracial adolescents tend to have ethnically diverse friendship groups. (Quillian & Redd, 2009). This may reflect the advantage of the multi-faceted multiracial identity, as different aspects of their ethnic identity may be more significant or functional to them depending on the social context they find themselves in (Rockquemore et al., 2009). A multiracial adolescent who self-identifies as multiracial may feel a greater sense of belonging to more ethnically diverse groups, in contrast to adolescents from a monoracial background. Research shows that multiracial adolescents can find it difficult to find racially similar peers who understand their experiences (Renn, 2000). Particularly, as this thesis also found, because of the tendency for monoracial peer groups to be ethnically homogenous (see Rubin et al., 2006). The greater diversity of friendship groups may be a protective factor as multiracial girls pursued homophily (a degree of similarity) in terms of a peer group where everyone is different.

### **Research question 2.**

*How important are peer relations, interethnic friendships and ethnic identity for multiracial mental health?*

For the multiracial girls in this sample, there was a strong positive relationship between friendship support and self-esteem. The regression analysis indicated that increases in friendship support significantly predicted increases in self-esteem. In 'I Can Always Go to My Friends' participants described how their friends supported their mental health and identity development. This included space to share worries, social acceptance after being rejected by other peers, sharing of cultural knowledge, validation of their identity choices and dependability. Joyce described how her friends helped her recognise her inner strengths and resources, and in 'Growing a Thick Skin' Ellie described how her friends helped her build confidence to stand up to discrimination.

This reflects research showing that quality friendships are associated with positive adjustment (Bukowski et al., 2009; Rubin et al., 2011). The emphasis in interviews on being able to confide in their friends and talk to them about their problems, reflects research showing conversation and disclosure as common features of female friendships (Raffaelli & Duckett, 1989). Although self-disclosure can be associated with negative outcomes, particularly when conversations involve extensive discussion and re-visiting of difficulties (Rose, 2002), the multiracial girls described how their friend helped them overcome problems.

As these results are correlational, it could be argued that high self-esteem helped participants to find more supportive friends. In this way, high feelings of self-worth may cause multiracial girls to choose friends who maintain their positive sense of self. The emphasis on stability as an important characteristic of their friendships may reflect the turbulent nature of friendships in a girls' school, as girls report social aggression to be more hurtful and time-consuming than boys (Paquette & Underwood, 1999). Alternatively, these features may be particularly important for multiracial girls in this sample who may have faced increased social rejection from their peer group. More exploration of this interpretation is required through future research.

An unexpected finding was that ethnic identity affirmation only became an important predictor of self-esteem when included in a model containing friendship support and peer discrimination. Here it is also important to highlight that in 'Peer Perceptions' positive peer perceptions of the multiracial ethnicity acted a source of self-esteem for participants who felt they belonged to the multiracial group. Where participants felt that their peers valued their ethnic identity, participants were more likely to feel positive about their ethnic group, which had implications for their self-esteem and wellbeing.

This highlights the importance of friendship as a proximal influence on the development of multiracial ethnic identity formation and self-esteem (Bronfenbrenner, 1986). Townsend et al., (2009) found that identity invalidation decreased perceptions of control, and so supportive friendships may be able to restore some agency. It also helps to validate the multiracial adolescent's identity choice, which has been related to higher levels of identity integration and more consistent beliefs about the self (Lou et al., 2011). Indeed, research shows that identity affirming relationships help to mitigate against the effects of invalidation.

### Research question 3

*What are multiracial girls' views on protective factors for their ethnic identity and mental health?*

The findings from the pupil interviews have been interpreted to show the perceived protective factors for positive ethnic identity development and mental health. The focus of this thesis was on the role of friendship and peers. However, it became clear from the interviews that family was an important context for multiracial identity formation and influenced the friends/peer context. So, this section outlines additional findings, which did not relate directly to the research question.

The findings have been framed using ecological theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1989). This aims to capture the interacting proximal and distal influencers identified in this thesis and illustrate the importance of examining multiple systems, which support the development of healthy ethnic identification and positive mental health outcomes.

#### ***Individual level.***

In 'Growing a Thick Skin', there was the underlying assumption that threats such as discrimination or identity invalidation were a part of their day-to-day experience, indicating how discrimination can become a normalised experience for some ethnic minority groups (Palmer et al., 2017). To protect against these threats, some changed their peer environment by either social withdrawal or finding new friendship groups. Others confronted the invalidators and defended their ethnic identity choices. There was an assumption that personal resilience against chronic microaggressions builds over time (i.e. chronosystem), either through maturation or with the support of family and friends. The implications were increased confidence or possession of a more accepting peer group, both of which may have positive implications for self-esteem. Therefore, although multiracial girls may exist in an environment which places their mental health at risk, they can still have agency in their development. Individual characteristics can enable multiracial girls to change their context and influence their own development (Tudge et al., 2009; Tudge et al., 2016). This reflects the position of Tran et al., (2016) who argue that only by seeing challenges to the multiracial identity as causing negative outcomes; you ignore the resilience of the multiracial person in the face of these experiences.

'Peer Perceptions' suggested that it may be important to consider how these peer perceptions interact with an individual's contingent self-esteem. Contingent self-esteem is the extent to which someone's self-esteem is dependent upon the evaluations made by the others (Moore & Smith, 2018). If a multiracial individual has high contingent self-esteem, positive peer

appraisals of her ethnic group will increase her self-esteem. Naturally, this has favourable implications when peer perceptions are positive, however contingent self-esteem can be detrimental when peer perceptions are negative. The extent to which multiracial girls internalise the views of others may be an important mechanism for understanding the link between ethnic identity and self-esteem.

### ***Microsystems and mesosystems.***

A key theme was 'Community Diversity', where participants felt that a key protective factor was the high diversity of the school. For the participants, the greater diversity meant that there were more multiracial peers and their ethnic group was less obvious in their environment. The implications of this were that there were more people they could relate to and who understood the multiracial experience. This perhaps invited less questions about their ethnicity, compared to experiences of those who attended less diverse schools. This reflects research showing that London can provide a sense of anonymity for multiracial individuals (Morley & Street, 2014).

The interviews suggest that due to the high ethnic diversity in the school and community context, there may have been enough multiracial girls to form a new social group – the 'mixed-race girl'. This clear definition of a social group may be a double-edged sword. On the positive side, it could increase ethnic identity affirmation as there was a clear group to belong to which was validated in the community. However, the stringent stereotypes associated with this group, primarily around appearance, were not necessarily positive, especially for multiracial girls who did not meet 'the criteria'.

A further key theme was the role of the family and how this interacted with friendships and peer relations. In the interviews participants shared how the families shared knowledge about heritage and encouraged the multiracial girls to be proud of their heritage, which enabled the girls to feel a greater sense of belonging to their ethnic group. This process is termed racial socialisation, and such practices helped the multiracial girls to relate to peers from different ethnic groups as they shared common cultural knowledge. Rollins and Hunter (2013) conducted interviews with mothers and their multiracial children (aged 12) and found that mothers used a range of strategies, such as strengthening the child's sense of self, preparing them for experiences with racial discrimination and providing information about their heritage. In this thesis' interviews, participants valued access to a multiracial family member who was also able to draw from their direct experience of having a multiracial identity. This suggests that the family is an important protective influence on multiracial mental health by validating their identity and providing cultural knowledge to help them navigate diverse friendship groups.

However, some participants lacked access to familial sources of ethnic-racial socialisation due to their family structure, which made them feel more vulnerable defending their multiracial identity. In addition, research also shows that multiracial adolescents can experience micro-aggressions from their families, such as feeling less favoured by their extended family or witnessing racist actions from their white-majority family members (Nadal, Sriken, Davidoff, Wong & McLean, 2013). The interviews showed that friends play an important role in these cases by providing ethnic-racial socialisation processes, such as helping the adolescent learn more about their heritage, which has been shown to increase identity exploration (Aldana et al 2012) or helping them respond to discrimination. This illustrates how family and peer context interact to support the development of positive ethnic identity formation.

The multiracial participants interviewed had a range of friendship patterns. A potentially important feature is the ethnic identity and family upbringing of the multiracial girl's friends. Some participants shared that they were drawn to Black or Asian monoracial friends as they shared similar experiences. Participants who explored their identity more when in a diverse environment may reflect have friends who have higher ethnic identity centrality. Additionally, participants who self-identified as British tended to have homogenous white monoracial friends. Although this thesis did not explore the relationship between individuals and friend's ethnic identity, these patterns seem to reflect research showing how components of ethnic identity may resemble peers over time (Santos et al., (2017); Echols et al., 2017). Additionally, how diverse friendship groups can expose multiracial young people to a greater range of perspectives and ethnic identities, which helps to encourage the identity exploration process (Nishina et al., 2010).

## **Implications of Thesis**

### **Implications for EP practice.**

Educational Psychologists work in collaboration with schools and parents to support children and young people to make the best out of their learning. As EPs are not full members of the system surrounding the child, they are in the unique position to adopt an external perspective of the wider system (Beaver, 2011). Given the ecosystemic approach adopted in this thesis, Figure 12 illustrates Gonzales-Bracken's (2012) model of multiracial identity formation, which has been updated with the findings from this thesis.

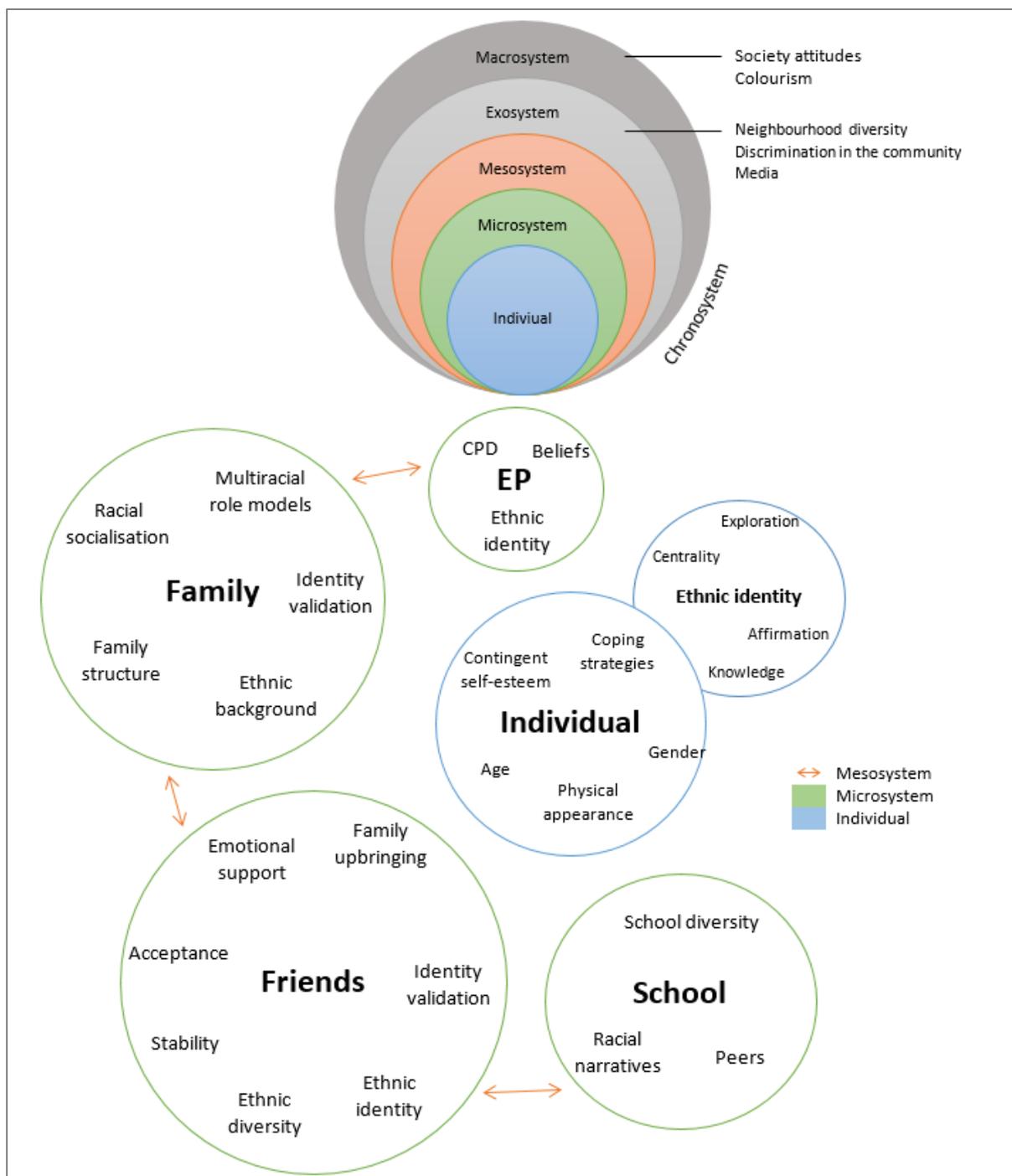


Figure 12 Adaption of Bronfenbrenner's ecological system and Gonzales-Bracken (2013) ecological model illustrating the potential protective factors around multiracial ethnic identity formation and mental health

This model can be used by EPs as a framework to explore the factors in a multiracial adolescent's system which may influence their development. Alongside other hypotheses, the model directs the EP to consider additional factors specific to multiracial mental health, thus informing culturally competent practice. For an example of how this model could be used in practice, refer to the case study 'Emma' below (Figure 13). The remainder of this section goes into detail about how an EP can use the findings from this thesis and this model to gather information about these hypotheses and inform interventions at the individual, microsystem, exosystem and macrosystem levels.

### Case Study

Emma is a 13 year old girl with Black-Caribbean and White-British heritage. She lives with her mother, who is White-British, and a step-brother, also White-British, in a small village in Hampshire. Her father, who is Black Caribbean, lives in Birmingham.

Emma was referred to the Educational Psychology service due to concerns about her lack of progress. Despite being academically able, Emma appears withdrawn and lacks confidence. Occasionally, she has refused to come into school. Emma has a few close friends and a learning mentor who she sees weekly.

### Hypotheses generated using the model

*Neighbourhood diversity:* How does the neighbourhood diversity affect the salience of Emma's ethnicity? Has she or her family experienced discrimination in the community?

*School diversity:* How ethnically diverse is the school population (including pupils, teachers, and support staff)? How is ethnic diversity and/or discrimination addressed in the school?

*Physical appearance:* To what extent does Emma resemble her other family members, peers and teachers (etc)? How may this impact the interaction between Emma and her environment? To what extent may Emma be affected by colourism?

*Family structure:* Does Emma have access to multiracial role models? What are the ethnic-racial socialisation practices in her current family structure? What access does Emma have with her extended family? What is the nature of the relationship between Emma, her mother and her father?

*Friendships:* How does Emma view her friendships? What is the nature of these friendships (e.g. extent of emotional disclosure etc.)? How diverse is her friendship group?

*Ethnic identity:* How does Emma ethnically identify? How important is her ethnicity to her? To what extent is Emma exploring the meaning of ethnicity in her life? How has this changed over time?

Figure 13 Case study (Emma)

### ***Individual.***

This thesis suggested that although multiracial girls may not differ from their peers on clinical screening tools such as the SDQ, they may experience specific challenges to their self-esteem. Therefore, self-esteem may be an important area for intervention for multiracial girls. In their review of the literature, Bos, Muris, Mulkens & Schaalma (2006) outline that self-esteem interventions focus on either developing competencies in areas where there are large discrepancies, or changing attitudes and perceptions. Before an intervention is started, EPs need to have a clear insight into the environmental factors that cause the discrepancy in self-esteem.

This thesis suggests that multiracial girls' low self-esteem compared to monoracial BAME groups may reflect low ethnic identity affirmation because of lack of familial ethnic-racial socialisation practices. The findings also showed that multiracial girls may be dependent on appraisals of their ethnic group from peers and wider society for their self-esteem, particularly if they have high levels of contingent self-esteem (Moore & Smith, 2018). Finally, multiracial girls may feel positively about their ethnic group, however lack the support from their friends and peer group. Multiracial girls interpret whether social messages accept or reject their chosen identity, which can affect their ethnic identity affirmation and self-esteem (Csizmadia, 2011). This thesis has shown that support from friends is important in the link between ethnic identity and self-esteem.

Self-esteem interventions could focus on developing social support from families through EP work at the family level or signposting to relevant services who are able to provide psycho-education about multiracial identity development. A key area for intervention may be to support multiracial girls to develop cognitive reframing strategies to influence how multiracial young people process social messages and build resilience (Csizmadia, 2011). Adolescents with low self-esteem may be more likely to make internal attributions for the difficulties they face, and one strategy could be to reframe the attributions. A self-esteem programme could help multiracial girls establish personal ideals, rather than the ideals of others, and emphasise their individual efficacy in producing positive outcomes (Bos et al., 2006). EPs are well positioned to deliver and train others to deliver such interventions. EPs have training in therapeutic techniques, such as Cognitive Behavioural Therapy which focuses on coping strategies, cognitive restructuring and emotional regulation, and can signpost to relevant therapeutic services. Alternatively, where possible, it may be beneficial to encourage the multiracial girls to evaluate the support received from their friends and focus on their role in finding a more supportive peer group, as this was a strategy adopted by multiple multiracial girls in this thesis.

Finally, EPs have a unique role in being able to use psychological techniques to gather the adolescent's constructions of their identity. EPs will need to have confidence to ensure ethnic identity exploration is an important part of their holistic assessment, as the emphasis on schools as stakeholders can detract away from this type of individual work. Types of ethnic identity assessments which may be useful include visual techniques, such as the Tree of Life (Ncube, 2006) and Drawing the Ideal Self (Moran, 2002), or questionnaires such as the Multi-group Ethnic Identity Measure (MEIM; Roberts et al., 1999) or the Survey of Biracial Experiences (SBE; Rockquemore and Brunsma, 2002).

### ***Microsystems and mesosystems.***

#### *School context.*

This thesis showed that the development of a healthy multiracial identity with positive psychological outcomes occurs in a context of interacting systems, including the school, family and wider community. In the school context, participants experienced microaggressions from peers based on their ethnic identity. They were likely to experience invalidation of identity by peers, based on their ethnic background and adherence to in-group out-group stereotypes. EPs could have a role in delivering whole school approaches which aim to address these issues within the school. Umaña-Taylor, Kornienko, Bayless & Updegraff (2018) explored the efficacy of a universal ethnic identity intervention, which focused on ethnic identity formation in all adolescents, regardless of ethnic group, to develop an inclusive ethnic school climate. The 'Identity Project' was delivered in a US high school to 218 mid-adolescents with monoracial Black, Latino, Asian, American Indian or White ethnic backgrounds. The project involved eight sessions introducing concepts of race, ethnicity, stereotypes and discrimination. These were designed to help adolescents understand between and within-group differences and understand how groups have been marginalised throughout history. Additionally, activities facilitated exploration of a student's own ethnic identity e.g. creating family trees or interviewing family members.

The project enabled adolescents to engage in more ethnic identity exploration and a greater sense of clarity about their ethnic identity. Changes in ethnic identity exploration and clarity positively predicted lower depressive symptoms, higher self-esteem, and better grades one year after the intervention. They found that changes in ethnic identity were the main mechanism for positive outcomes. This may be important for multiracial adolescents who may experience greater changes in identity and are therefore most likely to benefit from such an intervention. This thesis did not measure whether this intervention influenced the degree of peer discrimination or microaggressions in the school, such as identity invalidation, which this thesis has shown to be important factors for multiracial mental health, and important areas for

whole school intervention. In order for EPs to deliver this whole school intervention effectively, they would need a sound understanding of ethnic identity development, including multiracial development, and the social factors within the school. This illustrates the importance of including research similar to this thesis in EP training programmes.

### *Families.*

Although not the focus of this thesis, participants described the family context as an important influencer of their identity formation. They described how families used ethnic-racial socialisation practices to strengthen pride in their identity, develop their cultural knowledge, validate their identity choices and provide strategies to deal with peer discrimination. This corresponds with existing literature on ethnic-racial socialisation, showing that parents teach their children about their heritage and prepare them for bias (Hughes et al., 2006). Many of these practices reflect common practices in monoracial families. However, what this thesis shows is that parents of multiracial girls may also have a role in validating their identity choices and specifically supporting them to negotiate identity invalidation. This echoes research from Csizmadia (2011), who argues that parents of multiracial adolescents could approach ethnic-racial socialisation differently to monoracial adolescents, proposing that parents focus on helping multiracial adolescents cognitively reframe negative social interactions such as social rejection and invalidation. Considering the relative importance of both parental and peer influences in supporting multiracial adolescents is a key area for future research.

EPs work extensively with families as part of their work using a consultation model. The consultation model involves information gathering, hypothesising, agreeing outcomes and engaging with adults in the immediate environment of the adolescent (Beaver, 2011). In this way, EPs are able to facilitate change in the systems which have the most immediate impact for individual functioning. EPs have skills in making sense of complex situations and providing psychological knowledge. In consultation with multiracial families, EPs can use a range of techniques to build rapport and gather information about family functioning. Genograms, which are a type of family tree, can be used to identify all the people in a family system and help explore the relationships between family members (Beaver, 2011). With permission, or working collaboratively with the adolescent, the EP can also share the adolescent's constructions of their identity with the family to develop a shared understanding of the individual's experience as a multiracial girl and highlight the ethnic-racial socialisation practices that can support positive identity formation. This can be helpful in understanding the adolescent's ethnic heritage, exploring how family interactions could be supporting or hindering their ethnic identity formation and signposting the family to relevant resources (see websites in Appendix E). Research has shown that the types of ethnic-racial socialisation

messages families provide can influence how adolescents respond to discrimination (Palmer et al., 2017). EPs can share how, although peers become more important during adolescence, families continue to act as a protective system for multiracial mental health.

The interviews indicated that some multiracial girls might not have multiracial role models in the family, who understand their experiences. This reflects previous research showing that some multiracial young people may feel that their families have little knowledge about the multiracial experience (Morley & Street, 2014) or experience microaggressions or discrimination from their own extended family (Nadal et al., 2013). When required, schools may wish to match multiracial girls with mentors who also have a multiracial background. Research shows that mentors can act as important role models for minority ethnic groups (Demie, 2005). However, as this thesis illustrates, role models alone are insufficient without support from peers.

#### *Educational Psychologists.*

This thesis showed the tendency for adolescents to categorise individuals into in-groups and out-groups. This social categorisation was particularly stressful for some multiracial girls as their ethnic identification did not always align with peers' stereotypical judgements about their ethnic group. As social categorisation is a normative process, this has important implications for EPs and reflective practice. The BPS guidelines state that one of the key processes in applied psychology is to have "a complex understanding of the self in the context of others" (BPS, 2017, p 11). EPs need to have awareness of the stereotypes and assumptions they may hold about multiracial groups and how these may influence their interactions with multiracial young people. This may include the assumption that multiracial girls will necessarily identify with a multiracial identity (Rockquemore et al., 2009).

EPs also need to be aware of how their own ethnocentricity acts as a frame of reference and how socially conditioned prejudice towards ethnic groups may influence their interactions with multiracial young people (BPS, 2017, p 33). Awareness of the ethnic-congruence between the multiracial adolescent or family and the EP may also be important, particularly as the individual may interact differently with the EP depending on whether they perceive them as an in-group member. Professional supervision becomes a key process in developing awareness of these biases and how they inform practice. It is recommended that considerations of race and ethnicity become a staple part of supervision to extend reflective knowledge when working with adolescents from monoracial and multiracial ethnic groups.

In addition to reflective practice, there is a need for EPs to engage in regular Continued Professional Development (CPD) to extend their knowledge and skills working with different ethnic groups. A report from the Division of Educational and Child Psychologist [DECP]

Working Party on Anti-Racism in EP practice emphasised the need for CPD to dispel myths about BAME communities (DECP, 2006). The significantly higher self-esteem reported by the monoracial BAME group compared to other groups in this thesis contradicts myths that black children and young people have lower self-esteem and negative self-image (Owusu-Bempah, & Howitt, 1999). Additionally, findings that the multiracial group engaged in comparable ethnic exploration dispels myths that multiracial individuals are doomed to psychological confusion (Poston, 1990). This thesis also highlights unique social interactions which can act as a risk, and importantly protective factors, for multiracial identity development. EPs need to be aware of inadvertent collusion with deficit narratives about ethnic groups and be prepared to counteract these during consultation with evidence-based knowledge using systemic thinking.

### ***Exosystems and macrosystems.***

Over time, EPs have been continuously reconstructing their roles in schools and their wider systems, and recently there has been an emphasis on work at the organisational level (Fox, 2004). Organisational involvement can include strategic input in local authority policy and school improvement plans, EP support in staff development through training and supervision, and action-based research to evaluate and improve outcomes (DECP, n.d.). Caballero et al., (2007) highlight that since the introduction of the 'mixed-race' category into the UK Census in 2001, there has been greater interest in researching multiracial identities, however multiracial pupils continue to be invisible at a policy level. The authors state that although it is important to include multiracial pupils within BAME policies, this risks dismissing the specific challenges that face multiracial pupils.

EPs have an important role in ensuring that monoracial terminology in school policies are expanded to recognise multiracial groups. This thesis showed that participants felt attending a school with high ethnic diversity was a protective factor for their mental health. Therefore, comprehensive and inclusive policies may be even more important in ethnically homogenous schools where issues of ethnic identity may be less salient. In addition, EPs have a role in challenging and supporting schools' race and discrimination policies.

Research shows that although many mid-adolescents oppose racial discrimination, they may view microaggressions as unimportant and show concern that overt challenge may result in social exclusion (Mulvey, Palmer & Abrams, 2016). This illustrates the need for schools to highlight the impact of microaggressions, including invalidation of ethnic identity. In addition, pupils may require training on how to challenge subtle discrimination. EPs could do this by providing psychoeducation about group norms and reiterate the positive consequences of challenging microaggressions (Mulvey et al., 2016).

These principles also apply to policies and organisational systems within the Educational Psychology Service (EPS). The DECP (2006) have provided a self-assessment checklist to be used by an EPS to evidence good practice in relation to race equality. They recommend that EPS's monitor referrals by ethnic group including reasons for referrals, that each service has a racial equality policy which is considered when developing other policies and that the service supports research in this area of work. The checklist recommends, "policy explicitly covers members of all ethnic and national groups including Travellers, asylum seekers and refugees" (p20). However, this does not explicitly mention multiracial groups, who have historically been invisible in local authority policy (Caballero et al., 2007). Although I recognise that this may be true for other ethnic minority groups, this thesis aimed to show how such factors specifically impact support for multiracial pupils. In addition, the checklist could be expanded to highlight the importance of celebrating ethnic identities during casework (i.e. positive ethnic identity as a protective factor) and consultation, in addition to recognising the challenges these groups might face.

The DECP (2006) also administered questionnaires and interviews from EPs about practices that they thought might perpetuate inequality. Participants recognised the lack of emphasis on ethnic and cultural diversity in their EP training, which impacted a lack of knowledge about cultural groups. This suggests there needs to be change at the wider system level about incorporating new research about BAME monoracial and multiracial groups in training for EPs and teachers, to ensure that knowledge is infiltrated throughout the system.

### **Implications for theory and field of research.**

This thesis provided support for several aspects of social identity theory. Pupil interviews illustrated awareness of different social group stereotypes. These were used to categorise multiracial pupils into different in-groups and out-groups. For example, if *Beatrice* behaved a stereotypical way in front of her peers, they would comment that she was 'acting black' or 'acting white'. This illustrates *social categorisation* in effect during peer interactions. Additionally, I hypothesised that the higher ethnic identity affirmation and self-esteem of the BAME monoracial group may be explained by the higher perceived value of this social group in the school context. This illustrates that adolescents may have awareness of which social groups are better off through a process of *social comparison*, which may in turn effect individual self-esteem based on their belonging to the in-group or out-group. This corroborates the assumptions of social identity theory.

However, this thesis extended SIT in several ways. Firstly, I found that belonging and feeling good about an ethnic group positively predicted self-esteem, consistent with SIT, but only when friendship support was included in the model. Using an ecological systems approach,

this shows how vital friendship support is for multiracial adolescents' identity and self-esteem. This is important for further research applying SIT in adolescent development and outcomes. Applying ecological theory alongside SIT, develops a greater understanding of the complex social processes involved in the relationship between social identity and self-esteem.

Finally, SIT suggests that multiracial adolescents may struggle with positive identity formation because they are not easily assigned to an ethnic group. This thesis extended this notion, showing that in this thesis' diverse school context a new social group emerged, the "mixed-race girl", which came with its own group classification system (or stereotypes). As the multiracial population in the UK expands, multiracial girls may no longer have to contend with issues about whether they belong more to the white, black or Asian (etc.) ethnic groups, as multiracial identities become more widespread and accepted in wider society. This does not suggest complacency, as we still need to have a better understanding of the meanings and variation of the multiracial experience and its implications for the individual and society.

## **Reflections**

### **Personal reflections.**

As I continue to work as the link EP in the school, this thesis has impacted how I work in several ways. Firstly, many of my referrals from this school concern social, emotional and mental health needs. Since conducting this thesis, I am more aware of the importance of ethnic identity in my casework as a hypothesis for understanding mental health. This includes for participants with white-monoracial heritage as the increased salience of race and ethnicity in this school context, in addition to participant's perceptions about differing value of ethnic groups, may mean that the white-monoracial group explores their ethnic identity more. I look forward to disseminating the results of this thesis with the school, offering to feedback to the participants and discussing with my SENCO its practical implications for creating a more identity inclusive school community and better understanding the needs of their multiracial pupils.

## **Research reflections.**

### ***Strengths.***

The mixed-methods research design allowed for a deeper understanding of the psychological and social processes in multiracial mental health. The questionnaires enabled group comparisons to show the potential challenges and resilience factors that multiracial girls may face in contrast to their monoracial peers, hopefully illustrating this topic as an area needing further research. Interviews allowed the multiracial girls to share their own constructions of identity and highlighted the different contexts of the ecosystem. This allowed flexibility, thus the admission of the family context into the thematic analysis. A final strength was the focus on protective factors and how healthy ethnic identity formation can be promoted for multiracial girls. This moves away from deficit narratives around multiracial identity and mental health.

### ***Limitations.***

It is important to contextualise these findings in this thesis and be cautious of generalising these findings to the UK population. It must also be emphasised that the interviewed participants were of black-white heritage and due to the small scale of this thesis the multiracial group was amalgamated in the questionnaire analysis. I wish to make it clear that whilst I do not equate multiracial groups to black-white heritage, this represented the largest multiracial sub-group in the UK and within the school used in this thesis. Although this thesis may not represent the views of all multiracial groups, male or female, it hopes to provide some insight into the challenges and protective factors in the ecosystem of multiracial adolescents and stress the need for more research in this area.

Secondly, although multiple measures were taken, the questionnaires were administered by the class teacher during form time. Although I was able to attend all form time sessions and reiterations of the right to withdraw were displayed throughout the questionnaire, the interactions between the class teacher and the pupils were not controlled. Additionally, although administered to the same year group, the questionnaire and interviews were conducted at different times of the year. This may have affected the triangulation of the data. For example, some participants explained they had changed friendship groups during this time. However, the flexibility of the semi-structured interviews allowed participants to reflect on current and previous experiences.

Thirdly, it is important to recognise power in relation to the EP role. My personal status as a multiracial woman could be perceived positively by participants, as we may have commonalities in our experiences. However, I am also both a researcher and a trainee Educational Psychologist and therefore held greater power during the data collection. This power imbalance could have affected the amount of agency participants had about

participating in the questionnaires and interviews. Although every measure was taken to increase their agency, such as transparency about research aims, informed consent and reminders of their right to withdraw, the impact of the participants' lower power status is an important factor to consider.

Finally, due to the need for a brief questionnaire, which could be administered during form time, some measures were not included. It would have been useful to collect data on socio-economic status or social class, to understand the extent to which ethnic group differences could be affected by income differences.

### **Directions for Future Research**

There is a need to explore whether the ethnic group differences in self-esteem are replicated in different populations and different contexts in the UK. For example, researchers should choose schools, which vary in ethnic diversity, conduct research where BAME groups are the minority or majority group in the area, and examine findings in different regions of London and different parts of the UK. This may establish whether this thesis' findings generalise in contexts where ethnic identity is less salient or where ethnic groups may have perceived greater value, as hypothesised to effect ethnic identity affirmation.

Participants highlighted the transition into secondary school as an important phase for ethnic identity. Future research could explore the role of peers and friendships using a developmental perspective. This could show whether the importance of peer support on the relationship between ethnic identity affirmation and self-esteem changes over time. Additionally, it could illustrate which type of friendship support is most beneficial at different stages of adolescence.

This thesis highlighted the impact of subtle discrimination and microaggressions on multiracial girls' wellbeing and identity. The use of more sensitive measures of peer discrimination in research could show the impact of these low level/subtle interactions on multiracial mental health. Existing measures for monoracial populations exist and measures specifically to address multiracial microaggressions are being developed (Nadal, 2011; Franco & O'Brien, 2018). These can provide greater insight on how these types of interactions affect healthy identity formation and how they can be challenged.

This thesis highlighted the role of parents; however, their influence was not covered in detail as part of the research questions. Wider research illustrates the importance of parents in adolescent identity development and wellbeing (Palmer et al., 2017; Rollins & Hunter, 2013; Csizmadia, 2011). This area requires further research to illustrate the relative importance of peers and family for multiracial groups, particularly as multiracial individuals may have complex family structures where they lack access to ethnically similar role models. Further

research could explore whether other people in an adolescent's ecosystem could provide these socialisation practices, such as teachers and learning mentors.

Finally, additional research is needed to explore the role of peers and friendships in different multiracial populations, such as males and different multiracial ethnic group combinations. These groups are likely to have varied experiences, based on factors such as gendered socialisation, their representation in society (such as minority-minority mixed groups) and the socio-historical context of their ethnic group membership. The influence of friends and peers may be different for these groups.

## **Conclusion**

This mixed-methods thesis has highlighted the range of challenges and protective factors influencing the identity formation and mental health of multiracial girls. It has illustrated the importance of friends and peers in developing a positive ethnic identity, and subsequent benefits for mental health. Additionally, the role of family and parents in this process has emerged, indicating the need to explore multiple parts of the ecosystem.

By examining the intersection between ethnicity and gender, this thesis intends to broaden our understanding of multiracial girls' identity and mental health, and encourage further research in this area. This thesis aims to encourage EPs to promote the wellbeing of the multiracial and other minority ethnic groups, by addressing the structures and conditions that may produce negative outcomes and ensuring multiracial groups are not ignored in discussions of race and ethnicity.

Finally, it is hoped this thesis contributes to the changing discourse around multiracial identity and mental health. Thus, recognising the strengths multiracial adolescents possess despite the challenges they face and the EP role in celebrating ethnic identity and diversity.

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## Appendix

### A) Standards of Proficiency for Practitioner Psychologists

Table 6 Standards of Proficiency for Practitioner Psychologists

<u>Standard</u>	<u>Description</u>
5.1	Understand the impact of differences such as gender, sexuality, ethnicity, culture, religion and age on psychological wellbeing or behaviour.
5.2	Understand the requirement to adapt practice to meet the needs of different groups and individuals.
14.58	Be able to develop and apply effective interventions to promote psychological wellbeing, social, emotional and behavioural development and to raise educational standards.
14.60	Be able to adopt a proactive and preventative approach in order to promote the psychological wellbeing of service users.

*Note. (Health and Care Professions Council, 2015, p.8-25)*

## B) Search Strategy

To gather an overview of the literature, a range of academic databases and search engines were used, including ERIC, Web of Science, PsychINFO, Google Scholar and UCL explore. No specific inclusion criteria was used, however articles were evaluated for quality and relevance according to the guidelines set out by Coughlan, Cronin & Ryan (2007) and Ryan, Coughlan, & Cronin (2007). The search terms (and potential combinations) are outlined below and these were examined throughout the thesis.

- multiracial OR “multi-ethnic\*” OR biracial OR “bi-ethnic” OR “mixed-race” OR “mixed-heritage” OR “mixed parentage”
  
- “mental health” OR “psychosocial health” OR psychological OR “well-being” OR “general psychological functioning” OR resilience
  
- “ethnic identity” OR “racial identity”
  
- children OR “young people” OR adolescen\*

## C) Questionnaire

### Who is doing this research?

I am an Educational Psychologist. We work in schools and colleges with children, young people and their families and teachers to find ways of supporting them. I am doing some research with University College London and I would like to ask you to take part.

### What is this questionnaire about?

The research is about how schools can support pupils from different backgrounds to feel good about themselves. This questionnaire asks about how you feel about yourself, your friendships, your experiences at school and your ethnicity.

### How long will it last?

The questionnaire will last about 30 minutes.

### Is it a test?

No, I am interested in what you think, so there are no right or wrong answers.

### Do I have to do it?

You decide if you want to take part, you can drop out at any time. You only have to answer questions that you feel comfortable with, and if at any time you don't feel comfortable, stopping the questionnaire is okay. You will not be in trouble.

### Who will see my answers?

Your answers will be kept private, unless what you write puts you or someone else in danger. **No one** will see your specific answers. We do need to identify your questionnaire (if you decide to withdraw your answers or if what you write puts you or someone else in danger). Provide your **Initials** and **Date of Birth**.

Your initials are the first letters of your first and last name, e.g. John Smith = JS.



Your Initials:

Your date of birth

D	D	/	M	M	/	Y	Y	Y	Y
---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---

### Pupil Consent<sup>2</sup>

If you want to take part in the study and are willing to answer some questions about yourself, your school and friends, then please complete this form. Tick the boxes that apply to you.

1. I have listened any information about the project and I understand what it is about.

YES



NO



2. I understand that I can stop the questionnaire if I want to

YES



NO



3. I understand that I do not have to answer any questions if I do not want to

YES



NO



4. I understand that what I write will be kept private unless what I say puts someone else or myself in danger

YES



NO



5. I understand that I can change my mind about taking part at any time.

YES



NO



6. I agree to take part in the research

YES



NO



If you do not agree to take part in the research, please return this questionnaire to your teacher now.

If you do agree to take part, please begin the questionnaire.

---

<sup>2</sup> All pupil consent checklists adapted from Mohammed (2012)

How people feel about themselves is really important as it affects lots of things in life.

We would like to find out what students really feel about themselves. It will help us to understand students better and, longer term, suggest ways schools can make things better.

We are going to ask you some questions. There are no right or wrong answers. Please answer as honestly as you can.

We realise that some of these questions may be sensitive and you are welcome to skip any questions you find uncomfortable. Your answers will be kept private.

### How I feel about myself

1. How do you identify your gender?

- Male  
 Female  
 Other

Below is a list of statements about your general feelings about yourself. Read each sentence carefully, and circle one answer for each question.

	<b>1: Strongly Disagree</b>	<b>2: Disagree</b>	<b>3: Agree</b>	<b>4: Strongly Agree</b>
2. On the whole, I am satisfied with myself	1	2	3	4
3. At times I think I am no good at all	1	2	3	4
4. I feel that I have a number of good qualities	1	2	3	4
5. I am able to do things as well as most people	1	2	3	4
6. I feel I do not have much to be proud of	1	2	3	4
7. I certainly feel useless at times	1	2	3	4
8. I feel that I am a person of worth, at least equal with others	1	2	3	4
9. I wish I could have more respect for myself	1	2	3	4
10. In general, I feel that I am a failure	1	2	3	4
11. I take a positive attitude towards myself	1	2	3	4

Next is a list of things that happen to people and that people think feel or do. Read each sentence carefully, and circle one answer for each question

	<b>1: Not true</b>	<b>2: Somewhat true</b>	<b>3: True</b>
12. I try to be nice to other people. I care about their feelings	1	2	3
13. I am restless, I cannot stay still for long	1	2	3
14. I get a lot of headaches, stomach-aches or sickness	1	2	3
15. I usually share with others (food, games, pens etc.)	1	2	3
16. I get very angry and often lose my temper	1	2	3
17. I am usually on my own. I generally play alone or keep to myself	1	2	3
18. I usually do as I am told	1	2	3
19. I worry a lot	1	2	3
20. I am helpful if someone is hurt, upset or feeling ill	1	2	3
21. I am constantly fidgeting or squirming	1	2	3
22. I have one good friend or more	1	2	3
23. I fight a lot. I can make other people do what I want	1	2	3
24. I am often unhappy, down-hearted or tearful	1	2	3
25. Other people my age generally like me	1	2	3
26. I am easily distracted, I find it difficult to concentrate	1	2	3
27. I am nervous in new situations. I easily lose confidence	1	2	3
28. I am kind to younger children	1	2	3
29. I am often accused of lying or cheating	1	2	3
30. Other children or young people pick on me or bully me	1	2	3
31. I often volunteer to help others (parents, teachers, children)	1	2	3
32. I think before I do things	1	2	3
33. I take things that are not mine from home, school or elsewhere	1	2	3
34. I get on better with adults than with people my own age	1	2	3
35. I have many fears, I am easily scared	1	2	3

36. I finish the work I'm doing. My attention is good

1 2 3

In this country, people come from a lot of different cultures and there are many different words to describe the different background or *ethnic groups* that people come from. Some examples of the names of ethnic groups are White-English, Asian-Indian, Black-African etc.

These next questions are about your ethnic group and how you feel about it.

### My ethnic background

37. In terms of my ethnic group, I consider myself to be...

Read each sentence carefully, and circle one answer for each question.

**1: Strongly disagree    2: Disagree    3: Agree    4: Strongly agree**

- |   |   |   |   |   |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 38. I have spent time trying to find out more about my own ethnic group, such as its history, traditions, and customs | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 39. I am active in organisation or social groups that include mostly members of my own ethnic group                   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 40. I have a clear sense of my ethnic background and what it means for me   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 41. I think a lot about how my life will be affected by my ethnic group membership.                                   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 42. I am happy that I am a member of the group I belong to  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 43. I have a strong sense of belonging to my own ethnic group.  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 44. I understand pretty well what my ethnic group membership means to me  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 45. To learn more about my ethnic background, I have often talked to other people about my ethnic group               | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 46. I have a lot of pride in my ethnic group and its accomplishments  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 47. I participate in cultural practices of my own group, such as special food, music, or customs.                     | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 48. I feel a strong attachment towards my own ethnic group  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 49. I feel good about my cultural or ethnic background.   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |

Use the numbers below to answer the following questions.

1: White (e.g. English/Welsh/Scottish/Northern Irish/British/Irish/Other)

2: Asian (e.g. Indian/Pakistani/Bangladeshi/Chinese/ Other)

3: Black (e.g. African/ Caribbean/Other)

4: Arab

5: Mixed (e.g. White and Black Caribbean/ Other)

6: Any other ethnic group

7: I don't know

50. My ethnicity is  (choose a number from the list above)

51. My father's ethnicity is  (choose a number from the list above)

52. My mother's ethnicity is  (choose a number from the list above)

Next you will be asked to respond to sentences about your close friends. No one will tell your school, friends or teachers what you think. You can stop the questionnaire at any time.

### About my friends

Think of your best friends at school. Choose as many or as few best friends as you like (up to five).

Use the numbers below to answer the questions about your friends' ethnicities.

1: White (e.g. English/Welsh/Scottish/Northern Irish/British/Irish/Other)

2: Asian (e.g. Indian/Pakistani/Bangladeshi/Chinese/ Other)

3: Black (e.g. African/ Caribbean/Other)

4: Arab

5: Mixed (e.g. White and Black Caribbean/ Other)

6: Any other ethnic group

7: I don't know

Choose as many or as few best friends as you like (up to five).

53. Best Friend 1  (choose a number from the list above)

54. Best Friend 2  (choose a number from the list above)



### What school is like for me

Read each sentence carefully, and circle one answer for each question.

**1: Never      2: Rarely      3: Often      4: Almost always**

In the last school year, how often did you feel...

- |  |   |   |   |   |
|--|---|---|---|---|
| 70. ...that teachers call on you less often than they call on other kids because of your ethnicity?    | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 71. ...that teachers grade you harder than they grade other kids because of your ethnicity?            | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 72. ...that you get disciplined more harshly by teachers than other kids because of your ethnicity?    | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 73. ...that teachers think you are less smart than you really are because of your ethnicity?           | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 74. ...that teachers discourage you from taking certain subjects because of your ethnicity?            | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 75. ...like you are not picked for certain teams or other school activities because of your ethnicity? | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 76. ...that you get in fights with some kids because of your ethnicity?                                | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 77. ...that kids do not want to hang out with you because of your ethnicity?                           | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |

78. How stressful is it for you when teachers at your school treat you in these ways?

My Teachers Do Not

Do these things

Not at all stressful

A little bit stressful

Extremely stressful

1

2

3

4

79. How stressful is it for you when other kids treat you in these ways?

Other Kids Do Not Do

These Things

Not at all stressful

A little bit stressful

Extremely stressful

1

2

3

4

## D) Interview Guide

### General warm up

*Example questions...*

- When did you join this school? Why did you choose to come to this school?
- Can you tell me three things you like about this school?
- What is your favourite subject at school? What do you like about that subject?
- Do you do any clubs at school? (sports/ interests/ after school/ lunchtimes)
- What are your interests outside of school? (clubs/ weekends/ music/ hobbies)

### Ethnicity

In this country, people come from a lot of different cultures and there are many different words to describe the different ethnic backgrounds people have. Some examples are White-English, Asian-Indian, Black-African etc.

- How would you describe your ethnic background?
  - Have you always described your ethnic background that way?
- Could you tell me how other people would describe your ethnic background?
  - How do you think your friends/ teachers/ strangers would describe your ethnic background?
  - Why do you think people view your ethnicity differently?
- In terms of your ethnic background - what things matter to you?
  - Is there anything about your ethnic background that is important to you?
  - Is there anything about your ethnic background not important to you?
- How do you feel about being your ethnic background?
  - Do you ever wish you were from a different ethnic background?
  - Is there anything you like about your ethnic background?
  - Is there anything you don't like about your ethnic background?
- Do you think your ethnic background affects your experiences at school?
  - Could you tell me about this?
  - Are there any positive effects of being your ethnic background at school?
  - Are there any negative effects of being your ethnic background at school?

### General Friendship Questions

*I'm going to draw three circles. This middle circle represents your friends who are closest/most important to you. The outside circle represents friends who are still important, but you are not as close to them. It's split into 'inside school' and 'outside school'.*

- Can you tell me about this person? Why are they there? How do you know them?
- What does friendship mean to you?
  - What comes to mind when you think of the word 'friend'?
  - [Of these] what do you think is the most important to you and why?
- How do you feel about your friendships at school?
  - Is there anything you like about your friendships?
  - Is there anything you don't like about your friendships?
  - Are there any people or groups that you don't get on with?

### Friendship Diversity

- Can you tell me about the ethnic backgrounds of your friends inside school/ outside school?
  - How did these friendships develop?
- Can you describe what your friendships is like with your ... friends?
  - How do you feel about your friendships with your ... friends?
  - Would you say there are differences between your friendships with your ... friends compared to your ... friends?
  - Would you say there are similarities between your friendships with your ... friends compared to your ... friends?
- Can you describe what your friendships is like with girls/boys?
- Do you think having friends with a ... ethnic background(s) is important?

### Mental Health and Wellbeing

- There is often a lot of confusion about what we mean when we talk about mental health. What comes to mind when I say the term 'mental health'?

Many people immediately start thinking about mental health problems or mental illness – but this is only one part of the picture... Everyone has 'mental health' and this can be thought of in terms of ([www.rethink.org](http://www.rethink.org)):

- how we feel about ourselves and the people around us
- having the strength to overcome the difficulties and challenges we can all face at times in our lives

It is quite normal to sometimes feel worried, anxious or upset when things don't go as you hope – everyone faces pressure in their lives at certain times.

- Can you think about a time when you have been stressed, worried or upset?
  - Imagine that you have a big test tomorrow/ a really strict teacher/ you're joining a new school
- How did you respond to the [event]?
  - What did you do when the event happened? How did you feel? What did you think?
  - What helped you deal with the event?
  - Did anyone help you deal with the event?
  - Did any of your friends help you with this? Which friend? Why do you think this friend would help you?

Thank you for sharing some of those stressful events. That must have been hard, so thank you for being so open.

## E) Pupil Interview Information and Consent Forms

Adapted from McLean (2016)

### Participant Information Sheet

#### **Who am I?**

My name is Sarah Austin and I am training to be Educational Psychologist at UCL Institute of Education. Educational Psychologists work in schools and colleges with children, young people and their families and teachers to find ways of supporting them. As part of my studies I am doing some research and I would like to ask you to take part.

#### **Information Sheet.**

To help you make a decision about taking part it is important that you understand why I am doing this research, and your part in the research. If anything is not clear or you have some questions that I haven't managed to answer, please let someone at the school know and they can get in touch with me. The interviews are completely voluntary. **You can stop at any time.**

#### **What is the Study about?**

I am doing this research so I can learn from the experiences of young people with a multiracial background. This means their parents have different racial backgrounds.

My mum is Black-African and my dad is White-English, so I have a multiracial background too. I wanted to do this research because multiracial people all have different experiences, and I would like to know more about what it's like for multiracial teenagers.

I would like to hear your story in your own words about your personal experiences at school. I'm interested in how you feel about your ethnic background, your friends at school and their ethnic backgrounds, and how you respond to difficulties you might face at school and what helps you cope with these difficulties.

#### **What will happen if you take part?**

At the beginning, I we will spend some time getting to know each other and you can ask any questions. If you want to take part, you will need to sign a form to state that you wish to take part in the study.

Our conversation will probably last about 30 -45 minutes. I am interested in what you think, so there are no right or wrong things to say. **You only have to talk about the things that you feel comfortable with**, and if at any time you don't feel comfortable then **you can stop at any time.**

Hopefully you will find the interview interesting. I want to get this work published so that schools and other adults understand what it's like to be a teenager with a multiracial background.

#### **Will I be recorded? How will the recordings be used?**

During the interview, I will record our conversation using a voice recorder and I may write a few notes. This is to help me remember the conversation afterwards.

#### **Confidentiality.**

All of the information I collect will be kept confidential. You will not be identified by anyone else. To make sure of this, you will be given a false name so that you cannot be recognised in anything I write. You can choose this name.

Your interview will be kept **private**. However, if you tell me something that makes me worried about **your safety or the safety of others**, I would have to pass this information on.

### What will happen at the end of the research?

The research will go into my research report. This will be examined by my tutors, and other people studying at University may read it. It is possible that later, it may be published somewhere else, in a book. I can send you a short summary if you like. I may ask to meet with you again to check if I've understood what you've told me.

### Pupil consent to interview

If you want to take part in the study and are willing to answer some questions about yourself, your school and friends, then please complete this form. Tick the boxes that apply to you.

1. I understand what the project is about.

YES



NO



2. I understand that I can stop talking about something if I want to.

YES



NO



3. I understand that I do not have to answer any questions if I do not want to.

YES



NO



4. I understand that what I say will be kept private unless what I say puts someone else or

YES



NO



myself in danger.

5. I agree to take part in the interview and be audio recorded.

YES



NO



Sign here:

---

## Debrief Form

Thank you for your taking part in this research! Your participation is greatly appreciated.

### *Purpose of the Study:*

I informed you that the purpose of the study was to find out about experiences of young people with a multiracial background. The goal of the research is to find out what multiracial young people think about their ethnic background, their friendships and how you cope with life's difficulties and challenges.

### *Confidentiality:*

You may decide that you do not want your answers used in this research. If you would like your answers removed from the study and permanently deleted, please let the school SENCO know and she will tell me.

### *Final Report:*

If you would like to receive a summary of the findings when it is completed, please feel free to let the school SENCO know and she will contact me.

### *Useful Contact Information:*

We realise that some of the questions asked may have started some strong emotions. If you feel like you would like to talk to someone about what we have spoken about, please speak to the school SENCO (XXX) or you can use [www.kooth.com](http://www.kooth.com) which is an online service where you can talk to a counsellor through your phone, tablet or computer.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this research, please feel free to ask your SENCO and she will get in contact with me.

### *Further Reading(s):*

If you would like to learn more from other people who have a multiracial background, please see the following website

[www.youngminds.org.uk](http://www.youngminds.org.uk)

[www.mix-d.org.uk](http://www.mix-d.org.uk)

[www.relate.org.uk](http://www.relate.org.uk)

[www.intermix.org.uk](http://www.intermix.org.uk)

[www.themix.org.uk](http://www.themix.org.uk)

[www.pih.org.uk](http://www.pih.org.uk)

**\*\*\*Please keep a copy of this form for your future reference. Once again, thank you for your participation in this research!\*\*\***

## F) Ethical Approval

### Ethical approval granted

Rensimer, Lee

Tue 14/03/2017 16:54

To: Austin, Sarah <sarah.austin.10@ucl.ac.uk>;

Cc: Baines, Ed <e.baines@ucl.ac.uk>;

Importance: High

Dear Sarah,

I am pleased to inform you that your research project '**The experiences of mixed-race adolescents at school**', for the year 2 research project on the Doctorate in Professional Educational, Child and Adolescent Psychology, has been given ethical approval. If you have any further queries in this regard, please contact your supervisor.

Please note that if your proposed study and methodology changes markedly from what you have outlined in your ethics review application, you may need to complete and submit a new or revised application. Should this possibility arise, please discuss with your supervisor in the first instance before you proceed with a new/revised application.

Your ethical approval form has been logged and will be uploaded to the UCL IOE database.

Good luck with your data collection.

Kind regards,

Lee

Lee Rensimer

Programme Administrator

Doctorate in Professional Educational, Child and Adolescent Psychology

Psychology & Human Development

UCL Institute of Education

20 Bedford Way London WC1H 0AL

## G) Parent Consent Forms

Dear Parent/ Carer,

I am a trainee Educational Psychologist on placement at XXX Local Authority. I am conducting a research project as part of my Doctorate in Education and Child Psychology at UCL Institute of Education.

The aim of the research is to understand how schools can support pupils from different ethnic backgrounds to develop positive mental health and wellbeing. The findings will inform evidence based practice used by Educational Psychologists and schools.

Your child will be given a questionnaire asking about their wellbeing, friendships, experiences at school and their ethnicity. It will take about 30 minutes each for pupils to complete.

The participant responses will remain anonymous and confidential, and at the end of the project I will collate responses and present general findings specific to individual schools. This will be available upon request. The research has been approved by the UCL ethics committee and is supervised by Dr Sally Palmer.

Your child's participation is voluntary. Your child can decide if they want to take part and even if they say 'yes', they can drop out at any time, or say that they don't want to answer some questions and not have to give a reason why. I will share with them the details of the research, and if they are willing to take part, I will ask them to sign their own consent form.

If you **DO NOT** give permission for your child to take part, fill out the form below. Return the form to your child's form tutor by Tuesday 11<sup>th</sup> July.

Kind Regards,

Trainee Educational Psychologist  
 Doctorate of Educational Psychology (UCL)  
[sarah.austin.10@ucl.ac.uk](mailto:sarah.austin.10@ucl.ac.uk)

Dr. Sally Palmer  
 Research Supervisor (UCL)  
[s.palmer@ucl.ac.uk](mailto:s.palmer@ucl.ac.uk)

---

### Opt-out form

Only fill out this form if you **DO NOT** give permission for your child to take part.

I **DO NOT** give permission for my child (name) \_\_\_\_\_ to participate in the 'Identity and Wellbeing in Adolescence' research.

Your Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Relationship to Child: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Dear Parent/ Carer,

I am a Trainee Educational Psychologist on the Doctorate of Educational and Child Psychology course at the Institute of Education (UCL). I am on placement at XXX Local Authority.

I am conducting some research to learn more about the experiences of children with a multiracial background. I have a multiracial background myself and aim to do this research to learn more about the experiences of multiracial teenagers at school. This project has received ethical approval from the Institute of Education (UCL).

I would like your permission to talk to your child for a short time, approximately 30-45 minutes, at school during the school day. Your child will be asked to share their experiences at school in relation to how they feel about their ethnic background, their friends at school and their ethnic backgrounds, and how they respond to and cope with difficulties they might face at school.

The conversation will be recorded and made anonymous. The interview is completely confidential and your child will not be identified. The findings will go into my research report. A short summary is available upon request.

I hope that your child will find taking part in the research interesting and will enjoy talking about their experiences. The research aims to help schools to support multiracial young people.

Please sign this letter at the bottom in the space provided and return it to XXX or XXX (SENCO) by Friday 20<sup>th</sup> October if you are willing for your child to take part.

Thank you very much,  
Sarah Austin

Trainee Educational Psychologist  
Doctorate of Educational Psychology (UCL)  
[sarah.austin.10@ucl.ac.uk](mailto:sarah.austin.10@ucl.ac.uk)

Dr. Sally Palmer  
Research Supervisor (UCL)  
[s.palmer@ucl.ac.uk](mailto:s.palmer@ucl.ac.uk)

-----  
I **DO** give permission for my child to participate in this research.

Your name \_\_\_\_\_

Your child's name \_\_\_\_\_

Your child's form teacher \_\_\_\_\_

## H) Quality Criteria

Table 7 Quality criteria for qualitative and quantitative research

<u>Criteria</u>	<u>Evidence criteria has been met</u>
Commitment and Rigour	<p>The researcher has shown commitment to the research in a number of ways. All the interviews have been conducted, transcribed, coded and analysed by the researcher. Thematic analysis has been completed by the researcher before using Atlas.ti software, and the researcher drew upon well established guidelines for conducting thematic analysis (Braun &amp; Clarke, 2006). Commitment is also shown indirectly through the completion of analysis in its entirety and use of supervision to reflect on the research as a whole.</p> <p>Rigour is demonstrated by the use of semi-structured interviews to ensure that each participant has the opportunity to contribute to the same research areas. The sample has been rigorously selected (please refer to method chapter) to ensure that all the information is supplied for a comprehensive analysis. Finally, the researcher engaged in peer review when creating the codes and collaborated with their supervisor. It should be noted that peer review was conducted to gain a general consensus about the codes, rather than strict inter-relator reliability – due to the social constructed nature of the coding process.</p>
Sensitivity to Context	<p>To provide a balanced review of the academic and historical context, a broad and critiqued literature review was carried out. This helped the researcher to develop an awareness of the different perspectives which could be used to analyse the data. The literature review was also used to link the codes and themes to relevant findings from other research, therefore situating the findings in context.</p> <p>The researcher kept a record of inconsistencies that arose during coding and individual interviews which deviated from the dominant discourse in the thematic analysis. This ensured sensitivity to the data, and meant that unexpected findings could be examined and understood.</p> <p>Measures were taken to develop awareness of the socio-cultural context of the research. The researcher conducted informal interviews with key members of staff to gain an understanding of contextual issues which could arise during the interviews. In addition, the researcher drew upon their own knowledge of the local authority, having lived and worked there for a number of years. This allowed the interpretations from the analysis to be contextualised within the socio-cultural environment and provide alternative explanations for the findings.</p>

---

Coherence, Transparency, Objectivity

The researcher intended for the philosophical assumptions and research questions to inform the theoretical framework, method and analysis. This was achieved by continuously reviewing each section and examining consistency. This provided a coherence to the thesis and aimed to present a meaningful account of multiracial mental health to the reader.

Transparency is illustrated by detailing all aspects of the data collection and analysis.

The researcher has continuously reflected on how their assumptions, interactions and actions may have affected the research. This is detailed in the reflexivity section in the method chapter. The researcher has engaged in regular formal supervision with their supervisors and has had informal discussions with family and friends as part of the reflexivity process. Furthermore, a research diary has been maintained throughout the research. This has been particularly important during thematic analysis where the researcher has taken an active role in identifying patterns and themes, through iterative processes of constructing an understanding of the data. Key researcher reflections are included throughout the written findings as illustrated in McLean (2016).

---

Impact and Importance

This thesis is part of a Doctoral course in Educational Psychology and therefore needs to have clear applications for professional practice. The research aims (please refer to the literature review) clearly outline the objectives and applications of this thesis, in addition to highlighting novel perspectives on multiracial mental health. The thesis aims to contribute to societal shifts in the way multiracial mental health is talked about and approached in professional practice.

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*Note. (Yardley, 2000)*

## I) Exploratory Analysis and Assumptions

Firstly, missing values were identified in the data. Missing values were retained in the data set because items were averaged into single variables. Pairwise deletion was used to treat missing values within a variable; therefore, only specific missing variables were removed from the analysis, not the entire participant. This resulted in different sample sizes for each analysis, however it is important to retain as much data as possible as the sample size in this thesis was so small. In some cases, missing data was replaced by mean values and this is highlighted in the results. To examine which analysis would be most appropriate, the researcher produced box plots and histograms to explore the distribution of data for each variable. This showed where most of the values were and gave an impression of the shape of the data. The distributions of the data were also examined according to ethnic group. To decide how to deal with outliers, the outlier was checked to determine whether it was due to entry error or errors in measurement. If the outlier was not due to incorrect entry or measurement, the analyses were run with and without the outlier to see if it affected the results and assumptions. The results were then compared and the researcher decided whether the two results differed sufficiently to draw different conclusions. If the conclusions were essentially the same (e.g., both result in a statistically significant result), the outlier was kept in the data.

The assumptions of normality and homogeneity of variance were assessed for the ANOVA. Normality assumes that the scores are normally distributed (bell-shaped) and was assessed using the One-Sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov test. Homogeneity of variance assumes that both groups have equal error variances and was assessed using Levene's Test for the Equality of Error Variances. The *t*-test was two-tailed with the probability of rejecting the null hypothesis when it is true was set at  $p < 0.05$ . This ensures a 95% certainty that the differences did not occur by chance (Laerd Statistics, 2016).

The assumptions of multiple regression (linearity, homoscedasticity and multicollinearity) were also assessed for the regression. Linearity and homoscedasticity was assessed by examination of a scatter plot. The absence of multicollinearity assumes that predictor variables were not too related and was assessed using Variance Inflation Factors (VIF). VIF values over 10 will suggest the presence of multicollinearity. High leverage points and highly influential points was identified using the leverage and Cook's Distance values (Laerd Statistics, 2016).

Table 8 Description of findings from the exploratory analysis and test assumptions

<u>Statistical test</u>	<u>Findings</u>
Self-esteem (one-way ANOVA)	There were no outliers, as assessed by boxplot; the data was normally distributed for each group, as assessed by Shapiro-Wilk test ( $p > .05$ ); and there was homogeneity of variances, as assessed by Levene's test of homogeneity of variances ( $p = .715$ ).
Total difficulties (one-way ANOVA)	There were no outliers, as assessed by boxplot; the data was normally distributed for each group, as assessed by Shapiro-Wilk test ( $p > .05$ ); and there was homogeneity of variances, as assessed by Levene's test of homogeneity of variances ( $p = .797$ ).
SDQ subscales (Kruskal-Wallis)	The data for the subscales of the SDQ were not normally distributed for each group, as assessed by the Shapiro-Wilk test ( $p < .05$ ). Histograms were produced to explore the distribution of the sub-scale data for each ethnic group. Inspection of the histograms revealed that in all groups, the conduct problems data was positively skewed, such that all groups generally reported lower conduct problems. This may reflect the low reliability of this construct as indicated in the method. Furthermore, inspections of the histograms for peer problems shows some differences in distribution between the monoracial and multiracial groups. Neither the white group ( $p < .01$ ) nor the BAME group ( $p < .01$ ) had a normal distribution of scores. The histogram showed that the data for these groups was positive skewed, such that these groups generally reported fewer peer problems. However, there was a normal distribution in the multiracial group.
Ethnic identity affirmation (one-way ANOVA)	The data was not normally distributed for each group, as assessed by Shapiro-Wilk test ( $p < .05$ ). The histogram showed that the EI affirmation data for the BAME group was negatively skewed. Attempts to transform the data did not meet the assumptions of normality. Maxwell & Delaney (2004) state that non-normality does not affect Type I error rate substantially and the one-way ANOVA can be robust to non-normality. There

was homogeneity of variances, as assessed by Levene's test of homogeneity of variances ( $p = 0.99$ ).

Ethnic identity exploration (one-way ANOVA)	I removed outliers based on the rationale set out in the data cleaning stage, as assessed by boxplot. The data was normally distributed for each group, as assessed by Shapiro-Wilk test ( $p > .05$ ). There was homogeneity of variances, as assessed by Levene's test of homogeneity of variances ( $p = 0.218$ ).
Peer support (Kruskal-Wallis)	The peer support data was not normally distributed for each group, as assessed by the Shapiro-Wilk test ( $p < .05$ ). The data in the BAME group was negatively skewed, indicating that this group generally reported higher levels of peer support. Pairwise comparisons were conducted using Dunn's 1964 procedure with a Bonferroni correction of $p = 0.01$
Peer discrimination (Kruskal-Wallis)	<p>The peer discrimination data were not normally distributed for each group, as assessed by the Shapiro-Wilk test (<math>p &lt; .05</math>). However, distributions of peer discrimination scores were similar for all groups, as assessed by visual inspection of a boxplot.</p> <p>The data for all groups was positively skewed, indicating that all groups tended to perceive little discrimination from their peers based on their ethnicity (see Table 1).</p>
Friendship group diversity (Kruskal-Wallis)	<p>The distributions of the stress scores were not similar for all groups, as assessed by visual inspection of a boxplot. The box plots indicate that most pupils did not experience stress from ethnic discrimination from their peers.</p> <p>The peer group diversity data were not normally distributed for each group, as assessed by the Shapiro-Wilk test (<math>p &lt; .05</math>). Pairwise comparisons were conducted using Dunn's 1964 procedure with a Bonferroni correction of <math>p = .0167</math>.</p> <p>Inspection of histograms indicated that monoracial groups tended to have diversity scores of 0 (indicating all friends had</p>

the same ethnicity), whereas the data for the multiracial group was skewed towards higher diversity. The BAME had the largest distribution, indicating a range of scores from 0 to the highest levels of diversity (each friend being a different ethnicity).

#### Correlation matrix

Preliminary analyses showed the relationship to be linear with most variables normally distributed, as assessed by Shapiro-Wilk's test ( $p > .05$ ). I removed outliers after inspecting the scatter graphs.

Cohen's standard was used to evaluate the correlation coefficient, where .10 to .29 represents a weak association between the two variables, .30 to .49 represents a moderate association, and .50 or larger represents a strong association.

#### Self-esteem regression

To preserve the sample size, for this analysis I replaced missing values with the mean. There was linearity as assessed by partial regression plots and a plot of studentised residuals against the predicted values. There was independence of residuals, as assessed by a Durbin-Watson statistic of 2.213. There was homoscedasticity, as assessed by visual inspection of a plot of studentised residuals versus unstandardized predicted values. There was no evidence of multicollinearity, as assessed by tolerance values greater than 0.1. There were no studentised deleted residuals greater than  $\pm 3$  standard deviations, and values for Cook's distance above 1. There were several large leverage values. Therefore, I removed cases with leverage values greater than 0.5 from analysis as they can distort the analysis (Laerd Statistics, 2016). The assumption of normality was met, as assessed by a Q-Q Plot.

#### SDQ regression

There was linearity as assessed by partial regression plots and a plot of studentised residuals against the predicted values. There was independence of residuals, as assessed by a Durbin-Watson statistic of 2.213. There was homoscedasticity,

as assessed by visual inspection of a plot of studentised residuals versus unstandardized predicted values. There was no evidence of multicollinearity, as assessed by tolerance values greater than 0.1. There was one studentised deleted residuals greater than  $\pm 3$  standard deviations (this was removed from analysis as it also had a large leverage value), and three values for Cook's distance above 1 (they were also removed). There were several leverage values greater than 0.2. I removed cases with leverage values greater than 0.5 from analysis as they are considered dangerous (Laerd Statistics, 2016). The assumption of normality was met, as assessed by a Q-Q Plot.

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*Note.* Templates for APA reporting style were adapted from Laerd Statistics (2016)

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## J) Prevalence of Multiracial Sub-Groups in the Questionnaire Sample

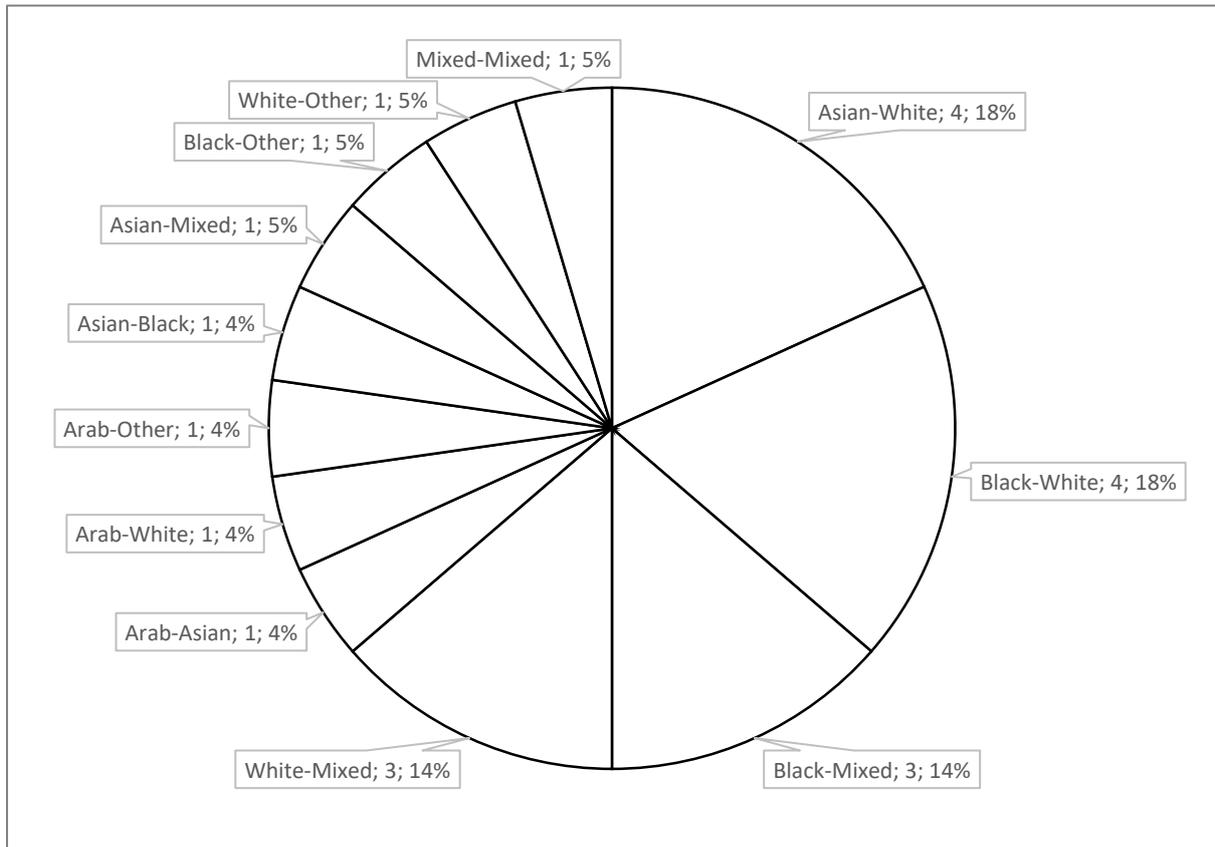


Figure 14 Pie chart showing prevalence of multiracial sub-groups in this thesis

## K) Ethnic Group Differences in SDQ Subscales

Table 9 Kruskal-Wallis H test of ethnic-group differences in the SDQ sub- scales

<u>Measure</u>	<u><math>\chi^2</math></u>	<u>df</u>	<u>p</u>
Prosocial behaviour	1.227	2	.542
Hyperactivity	2.854	2	.240
Emotional problems	0.561	2	.755
Conduct problems	0.665	2	.717
Peer problems	0.680	2	.712

Note. \*. Difference is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed); \*\*. Difference is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

## L) Correlation Table

Table 10 Pearson's correlations for the multiracial sample.

	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>13</b>
1. Self-esteem	1	-.58**	.15	.02	-.73**	-.25	-.34	.14	.25	.65**	-.19	-.36	-.16
2. Total Difficulties		1	-.35	.59**	.73**	.56**	.47*	-.52*	-.19	-.18	.35	.49*	-.26
3. Prosocial behaviour			1	-.54*	.01	-.54**	.14	.23	.42	.08	-.09	-.41	.12
4. Hyperactivity				1	.02	.56*	-.11	-.33	-.20	.25	.22	.17	-.15
5. Emotional problems					1	.07	.47*	-.36	-.17	-.30	.17	.44	-.18
6. Conduct problems						1	-.06	.07	.02	-.18	.56**	.50*	-.09
7. Peer problems							1	-.16	-.04	-.22	-.10	.06	-.29
8. EI Affirmation								1	.49*	-.36	.02	-.15	.09
9. EI Exploration									1	.03	.33	.12	.41
10. Peer support										1	.02	-.16	-.39
11. Peer discrimination											1	.57**	-.14
12. Stress from discrimination												1	.11
13. Peer group diversity													1

Note. \*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed); \*\*. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

## **M) Pilot Study Implications**

### Questionnaire

The questionnaire was piloted to ensure that the measures could be understood and to determine clarity and length. Two multiracial adolescents, two members of the researcher's lab group and a trainee Educational Psychologist completed the questionnaire. Minor changes were made to improve validity and understanding:

- The wording of some questions were changed to make them easier to understand and bring them up to date e.g. "I feel that I am a person of worth, at least on an equal plane with others" was found to be confusing for the adolescents.
- The feel and structure of the questionnaire was changed by removing dual-rating scales.
- The questionnaire initially require participants to nominate five best friends and their ethnicities. The ordering of this friendship measure was subsequently changed to reduce social desirability. One adolescent commented, "I tried to think of my black friends because I thought it would be useful for your study". Therefore, participants were asked to think of their best friends before providing the ethnicity of their friends.
- The friendship support scale of the questionnaire required participants to read a statement describing a specific supportive behaviour and respond by rating how often they receive that support from that source (frequency ratings) and how important that support is to them (importance ratings). From the pilot phase, participants found the dual nature of this scale too confusing and the importance ratings were deemed unnecessary to answer the research questions. Therefore, this thesis only used the frequency ratings.
- The questionnaire took between 15-20 minutes to complete. Therefore, shorter versions of all measures were used to reduce the time taken to complete the questionnaire. Subsequent versions took an adult 10 minutes to complete.

### Semi-structured interview

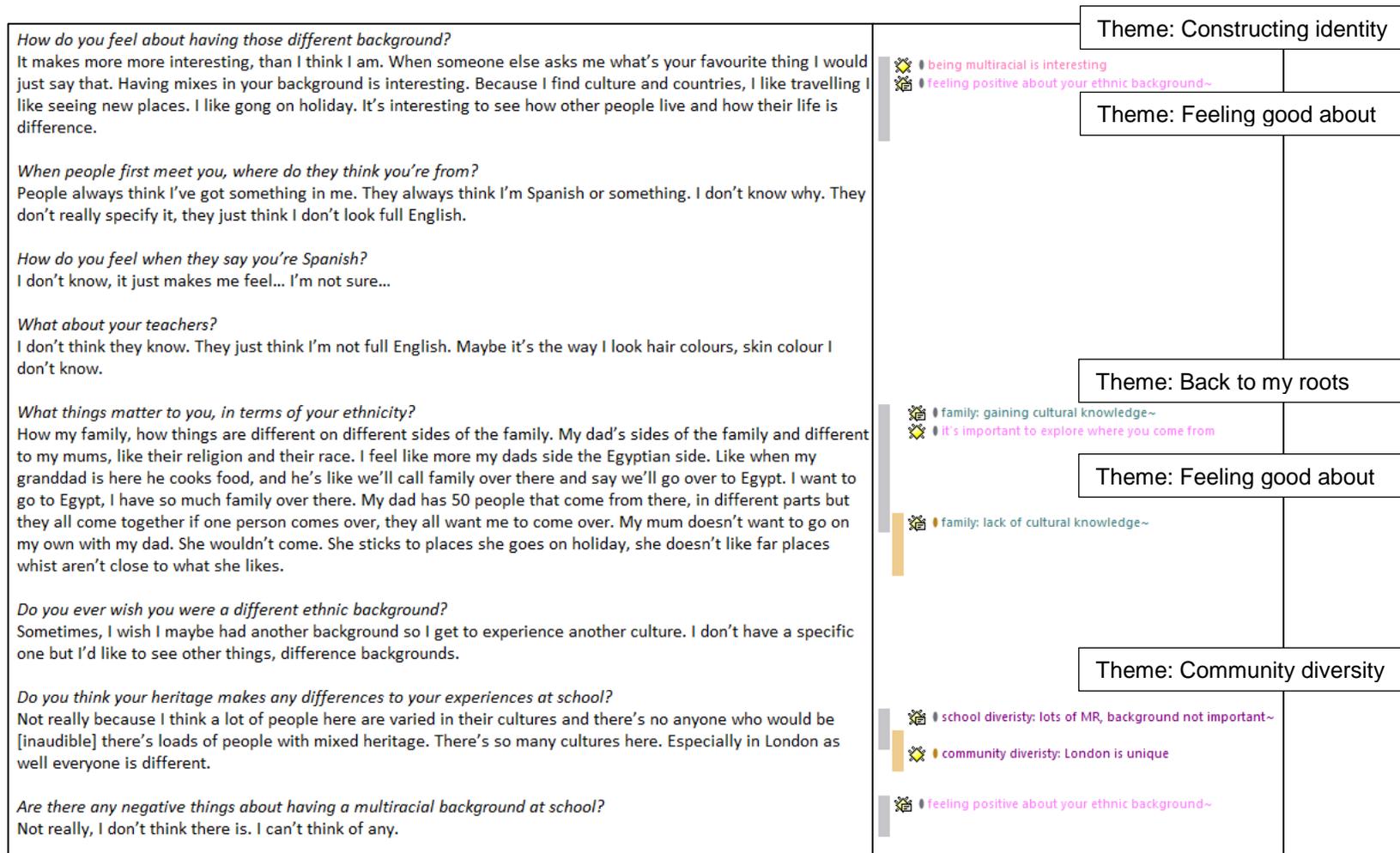
The semi-structured interview was piloted with two multiracial adolescents and one multiracial adult. To create the interview guide, questions were adapted from previous research papers (e.g. Adapted from McLean, 2016); however, most were created in conjunction with my research supervisors and trainee EP colleagues. These questions were shaped into categories based upon the research questions and areas covered in the questionnaire. The interview is semi-structured to allow flexibility to respond to initiatives from the interviewee.

Prompts were provided to guide and deepen the conversation. Minor changes were made to improve validity and understanding:

- The questionnaire began with more general questions about experiences at school. These were followed up by questions that are more sensitive. For example, mental health was asked about later in the guide.
- The guide was more child-led - beginning with general questions and following the experiences of the child by asking follow up questions based on the themes.
- A script was created to explain the concept of mental health to the young person.
- Questions were changed to avoid assumptions. Rather than asking about 'what helps you cope with your worries', young people were asked what helps them overcome things more generally, thus avoiding assumptions that the child has worries.
- The interview guide was altered to create a more concise guide to follow, including greater clarity over follow up questions.

## N) Example Transcript from Olivia's Interview

Interview questions have been shortened during transcription. Initial codes are on the right hand side and resulting themes are in the text-boxes.



*Are there any positive things you can think of?*

I think its having, if your speaking with friends about their family... all my friends are from different places. And we'll just talk, like oh yeah yeah that's like my family and the similarities and differences between how their families are.

*Tell me about your friends*

I have these friends are the closest friends. I've been friends since year 7 and one of them is my best friend, I met her before Year 7 a little bit and found out she was going to this school. And ever since Year 7 we've been a group and stuff together. We've all got different backgrounds. Everyone has a different culture. The ones outside are newer friends I've made. The ones who I've met from other people and I speak to them a lot, but I wouldn't consider them as close as them.

*When I say the word friendship, what comes to mind?*

People who stick by my side and have my back and who are close to you and you can ave fun with and meet on the weekends and go out.

*What's the most important?*

I think the trust and having your back, because otherwise what good friend are they? I think XXX I speak to her the most about problems and everything.

*What do you like about your friendships?*

I like how we are all close to each other, there's no one person who doesn't like someone. We are all different but the same. Different in their cultures, they are their own person, but we are so similar, we understand each other. We like the same things and stuff like that.

*Is there anything you don't like?*

Sometimes how some people I chat to outside, but there's some people at school I don't really speak to. But then they are still my close friends.

*Are there any groups that you don't get on with?*

Not really, I feel like as a group we get on with other groups. Everyone has their friendship group, I don't think there's any people we don't get along with.

*Are there any differences in your friendships with people from one culture over another?*

I think some would be able to go out on the weekends. Whereas some have more strict rules to them. Maybe how they see things. How they have opinions on things different to someone else who doesn't have strong opinions. Like say if you can't wear ripped jeans or something like a crop top, I don't think its right to show your skin and things like that. I think its their cultures and the ways they've been brought up and how they've learnt what's right and what's wrong.

*Do you think its important to have friends from different backgrounds?*

I don't think it matters, you're friends with who you like. I think its interesting to have differences and interesting things about your friends.

*Do you think it makes difference having friends who also have a multiracial background as well?*

No I don't think it really matters.

🗨️ # friend diveristy: can relate~

Theme: Feeling good about

🗨️ # env\_diverse: everyone is different~

Theme: Community diversity

🗨️ # fr\_pos: emotional\_support~

🗨️ # fr\_pos:common interests~

🗨️ # fr\_pos:dependable~

Theme: I can always go to

🗨️ # fr\_pos:common interests~

🗨️ # friend diversity: gaining knowledge~

Theme: I can always go to

🌟 # positive peer relations

🗨️ # diversity\_personal: different perspectives~

Theme: I can always go to

🗨️ # diversity\_personal: different perspectives~

🗨️ # diversity: not that important~

## **O) School Contextual Information**

The school is a larger than average secondary girls' school and shares a sixth form with the local boys' school. In its most recent Ofsted report (Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills), the school continued to be rated as Good and was praised for their safeguarding, development of teacher skills and support for pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds and Special Educational Needs. The proportion of pupils with a SEN is below the national average. The school have progress and attainment scores above the national and local authority average. The proportion of pupils on Free School Meals (FSM) and who speak English as an Additional Language (EAL) is above average, and over 70 languages are spoken in the school.

According to the Ofsted report, the proportion of pupils from BAME backgrounds in this school is classified as 'high', reflecting the demographics of the local area. Due to its location in London, the school in which this thesis is based has a school population where white pupils are the minority ethnic group. This pattern is not reflected in Britain generally, however allows the research to explore the impact of majority status on outcomes and perceptions. The number of ethnic minority staff of Asian, African and African-Caribbean heritage has increased in recent years. The school's Equal Opportunities policy aims to 'promote race, class and religious equality relations, and eliminate any racial, class and religious discrimination', however there is a lack of specific information about how this is achieved in practice. The Ofsted report states that school leaders recognise a need to engage further with families, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds.

