SENSE OF BELONGING IN SCIENCE UNDERGRADUATES

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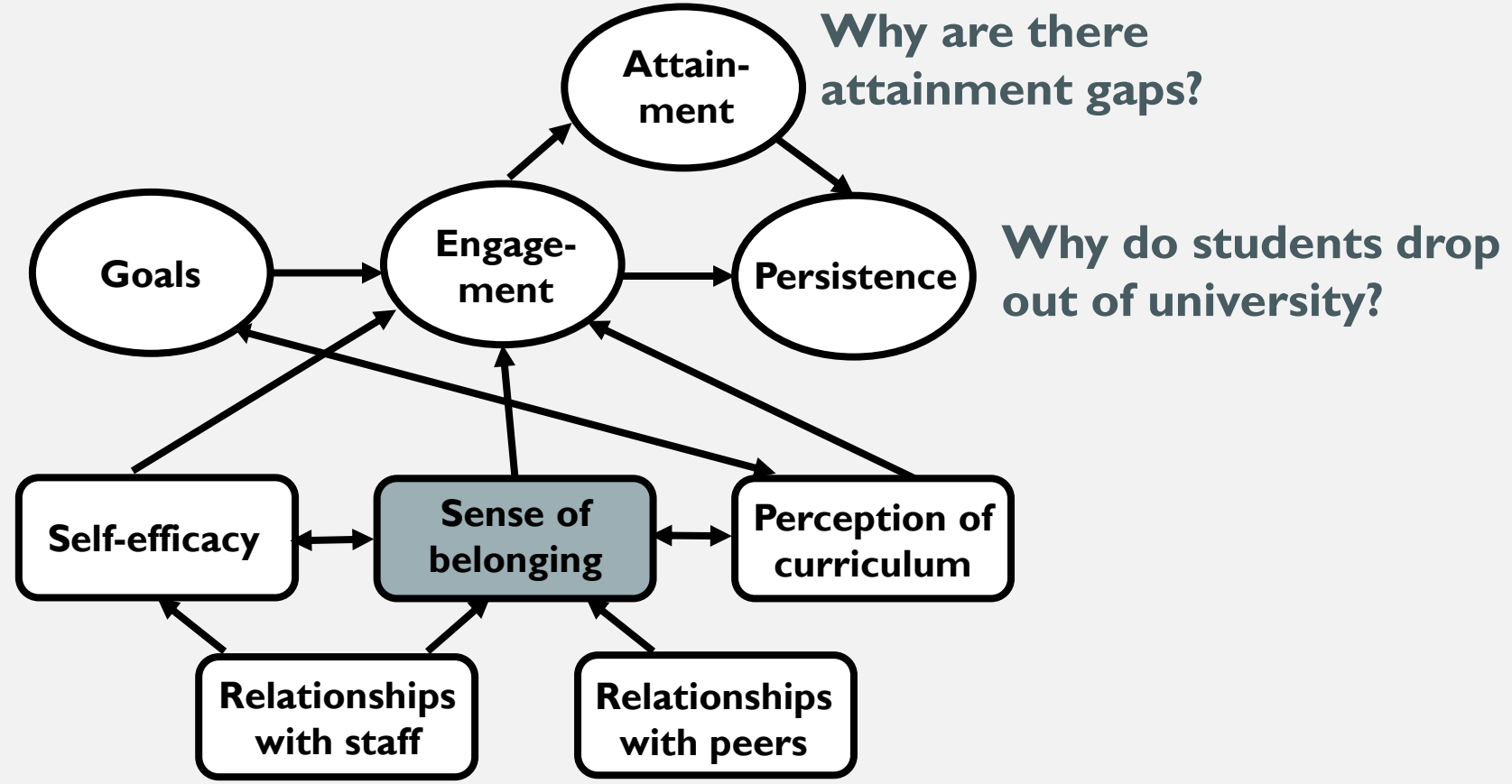
Thanks to
MEd staff and fellow students
MBB students

SENSE OF BELONGING IS CRUCIAL FOR ACADEMIC SUCCESS

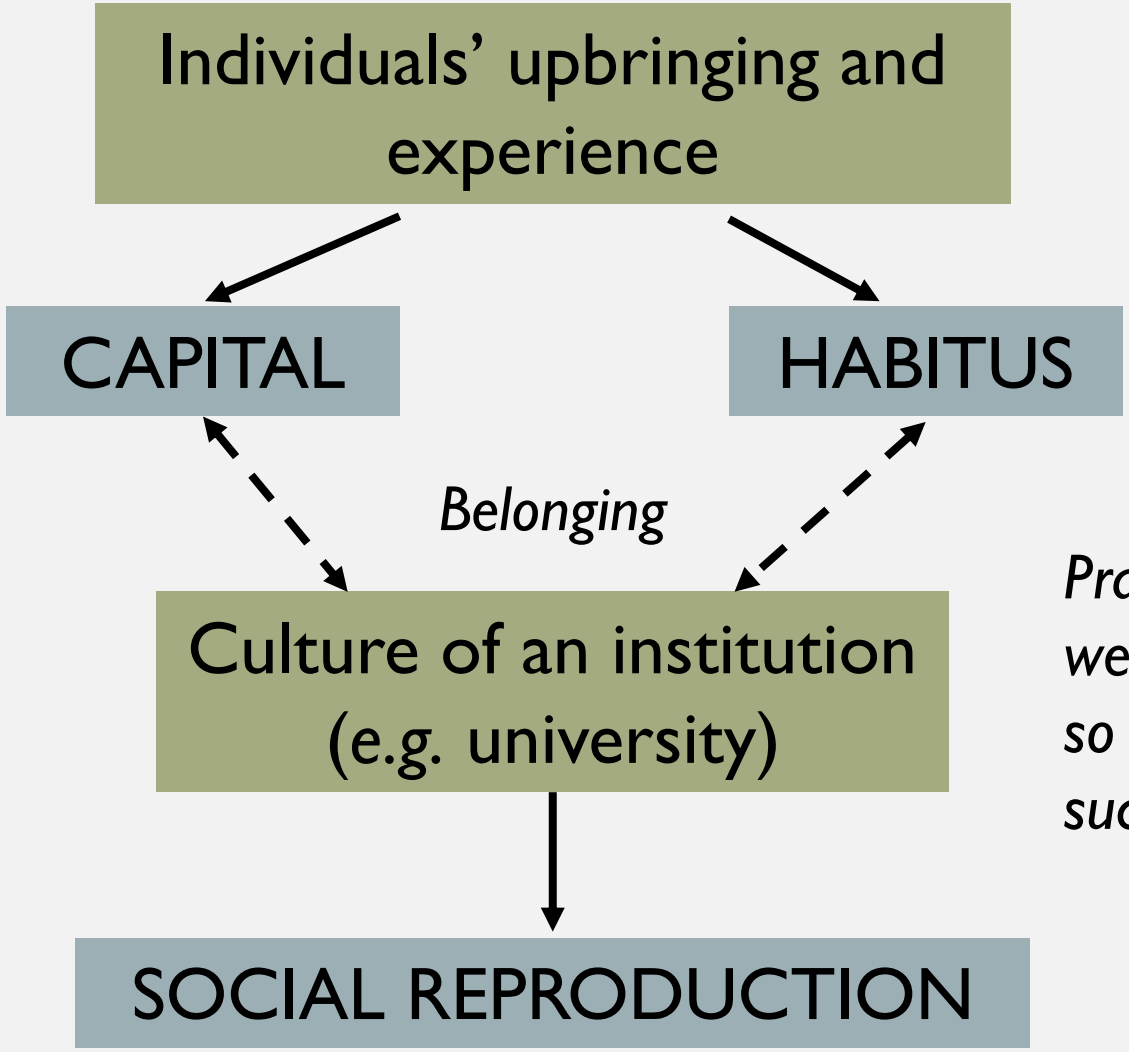


Adapted from Vincent Tinto

Academic belonging: *"students' sense of being* ***accepted, valued, included, and encouraged*** *by others (****teacher and peers****) in the academic classroom setting and of feeling oneself to be an important part of the life and activity of the class. More than simple perceived liking or warmth, it also involves support and respect for personal autonomy and for the student as an individual"*

Carol Goodenow 1993

BOURDIEU AND UNIVERSITIES



Practical question: how can we change the institution so that everyone can succeed?

RESEARCH PROJECT

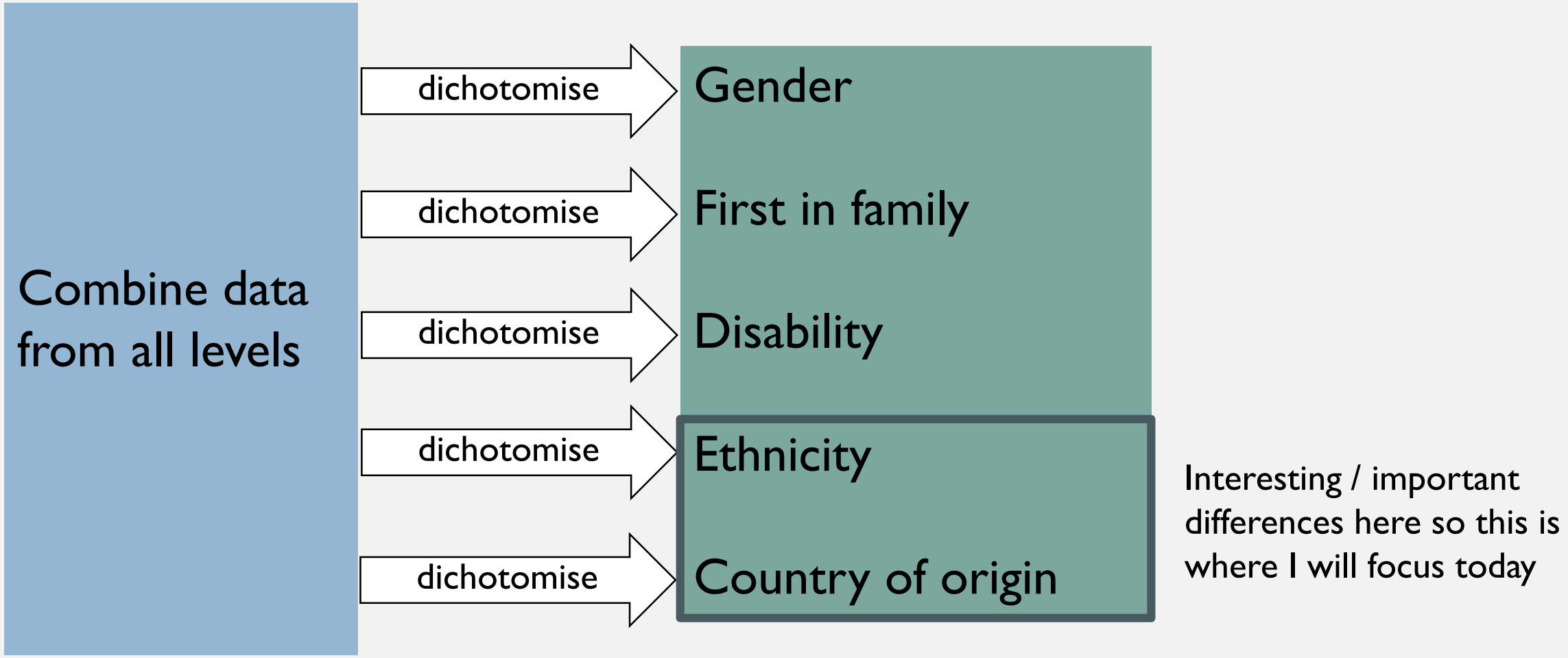
My sample = Russell Group Science students:

- About 150 students in each year group
- About 50-50 male-female
- Very few mature students
- 80% UK students

Research carried out during the 2018-19 academic year

- Survey: questions taken from
  - What Works? project (Yorke 2016): 16 questions on belonging, engagement, self-confidence
  - Ribera et al (2017) looking at different elements of belonging
- Free writing exercise on belonging

ANALYSIS OF SURVEY DATA



ETHNICITY AND BELONGING

- Most research on race / ethnicity and belonging is from the US - lower belonging for students of colour in majority-white institutions ("demographic isolation")

- Yorke shows that White British students have significantly higher belonging than the counter-group at 11/13 institutions
- Cureton and Gavestock (2019) use the same questions at Wolverhampton to show lower belonging in all other ethnicities compared to White

ANALYSIS OF SURVEY DATA

Ethnicity

Country of origin

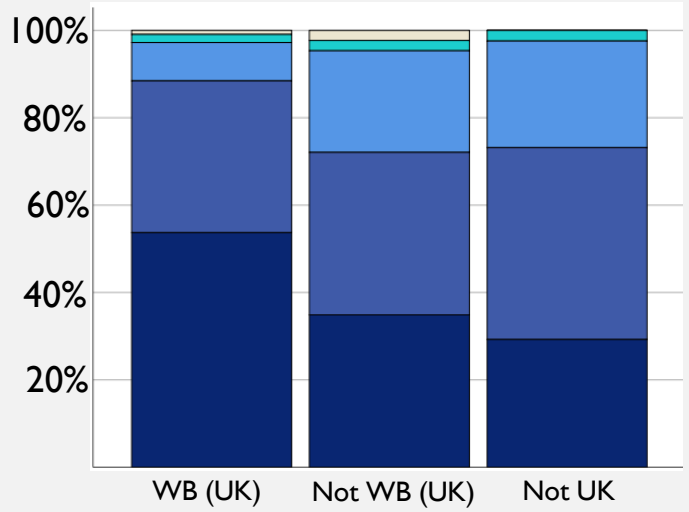
- UK – White British
- UK – Not White British
- Not from the UK

Likert scale

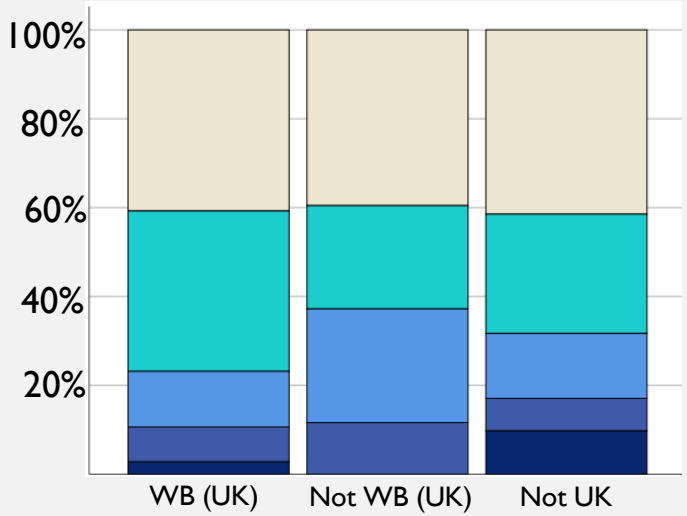
- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

SENSE OF BELONGING BY ETHNIC GROUP AND COUNTRY

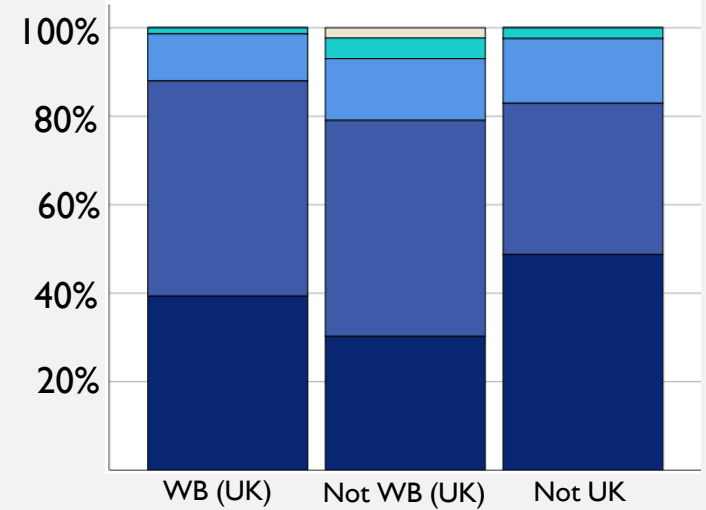
"I feel at home in this university"



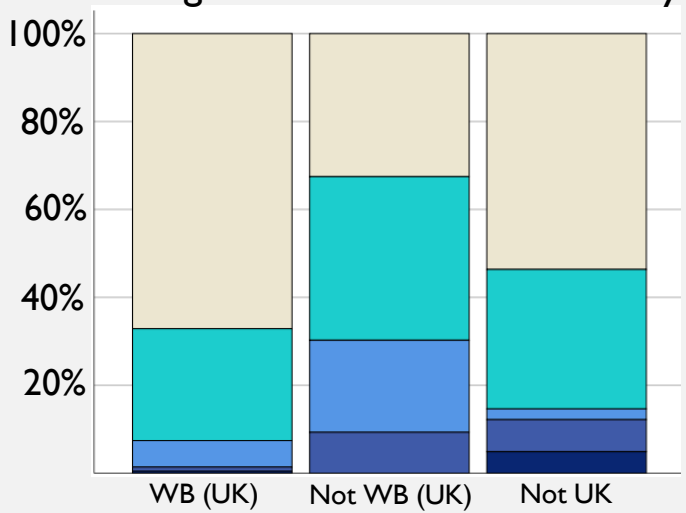
"Sometimes I feel I don't belong in this university"



"I have found this department to be welcoming"



"I wish I'd gone to a different university"



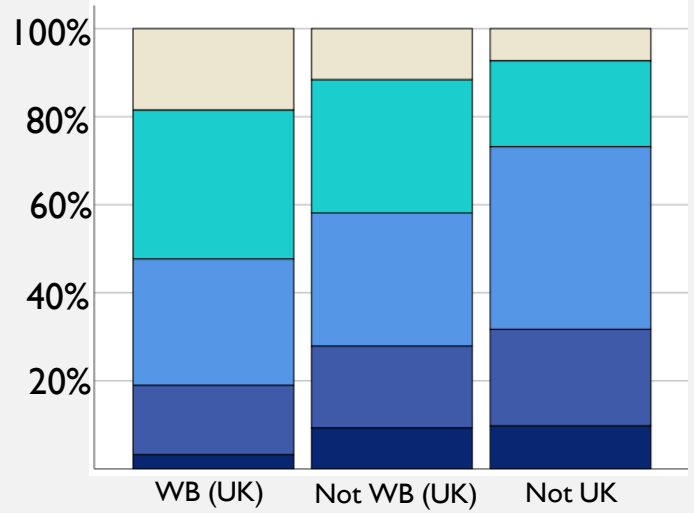
Interesting differences between "feeling at home" and "feeling [they] don't belong"

British BAME students feel less at home, find the Department to be less welcoming, and wish they'd gone to a different uni more than their White British counterparts

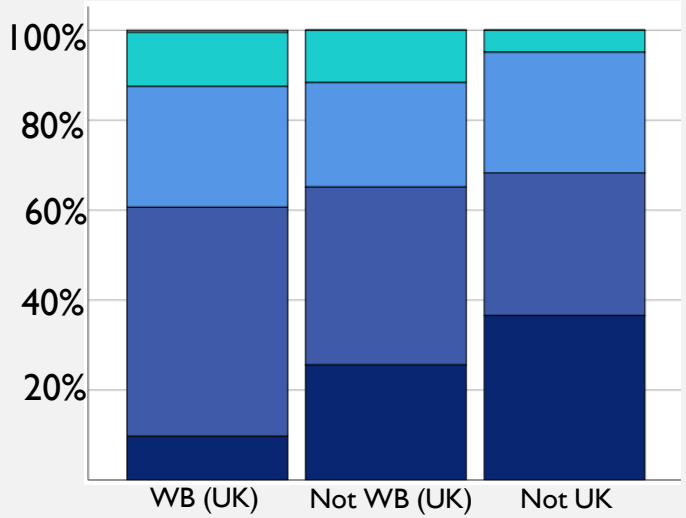
International students feel less at home but more welcome than British students

INTERACTIONS WITH STAFF

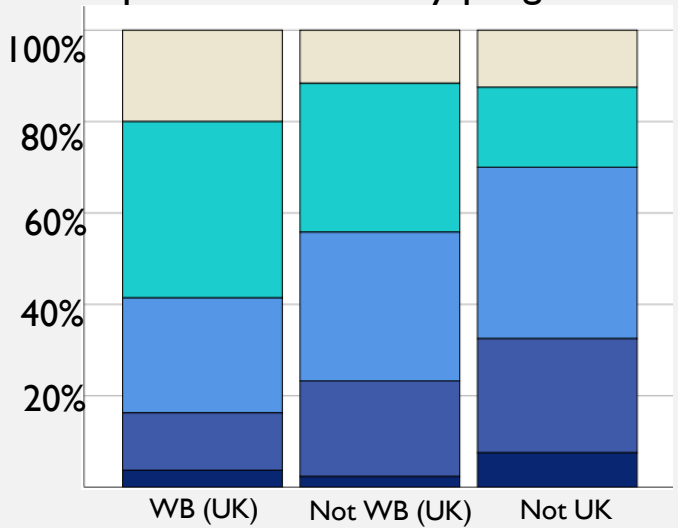
"Academic staff have got to know me and my background"



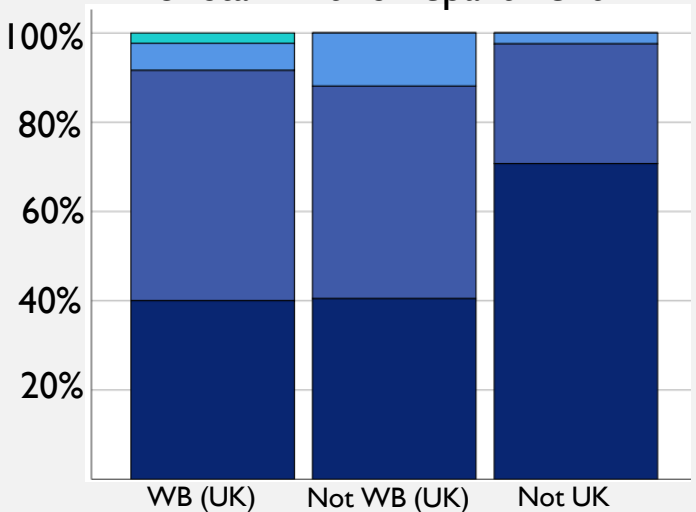
"I can have quality interactions with academic staff"



"I seek out academic staff in order to discuss topics relevant to my programme"



"I am shown respect by members of staff in this department"

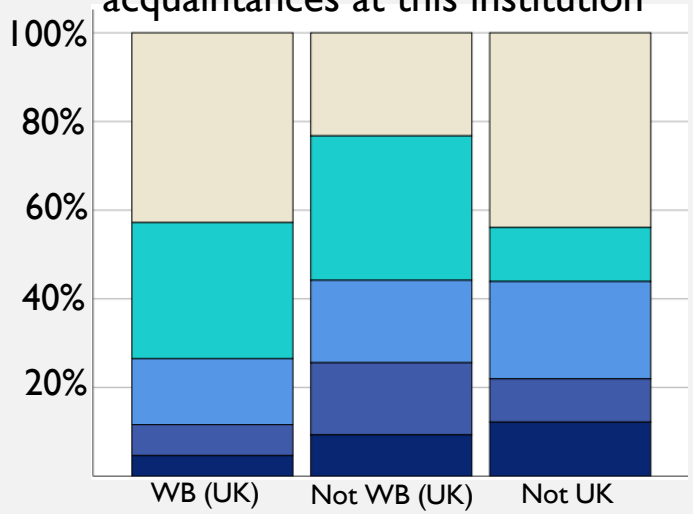


British BAME students report *better* interactions with staff than do White British students

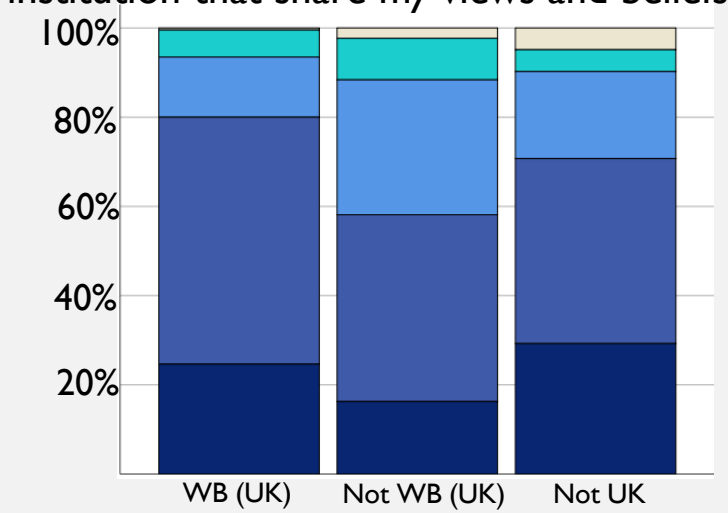
International students better than both

INTERACTIONS WITH OTHER STUDENTS

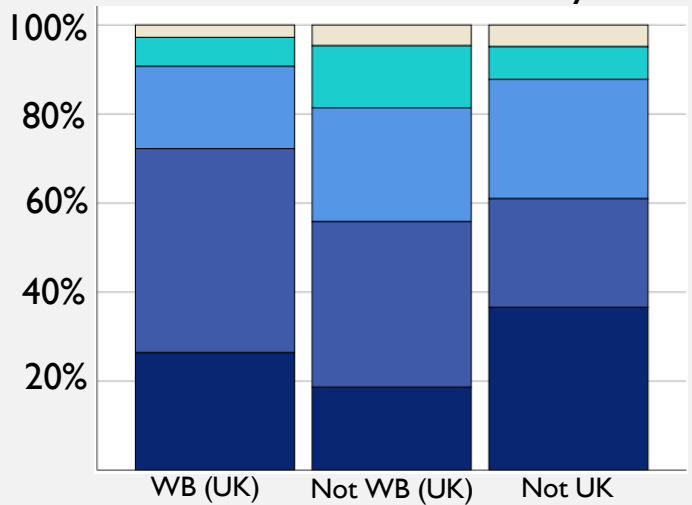
"I have very few friends or acquaintances at this institution"



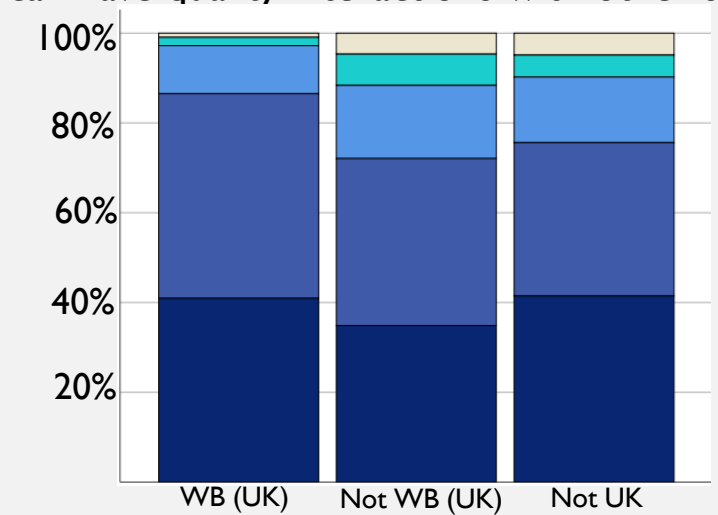
"There are other students at this institution that share my views and beliefs"



"I fit in with the other students at my institution"



"I can have quality interactions with other students"



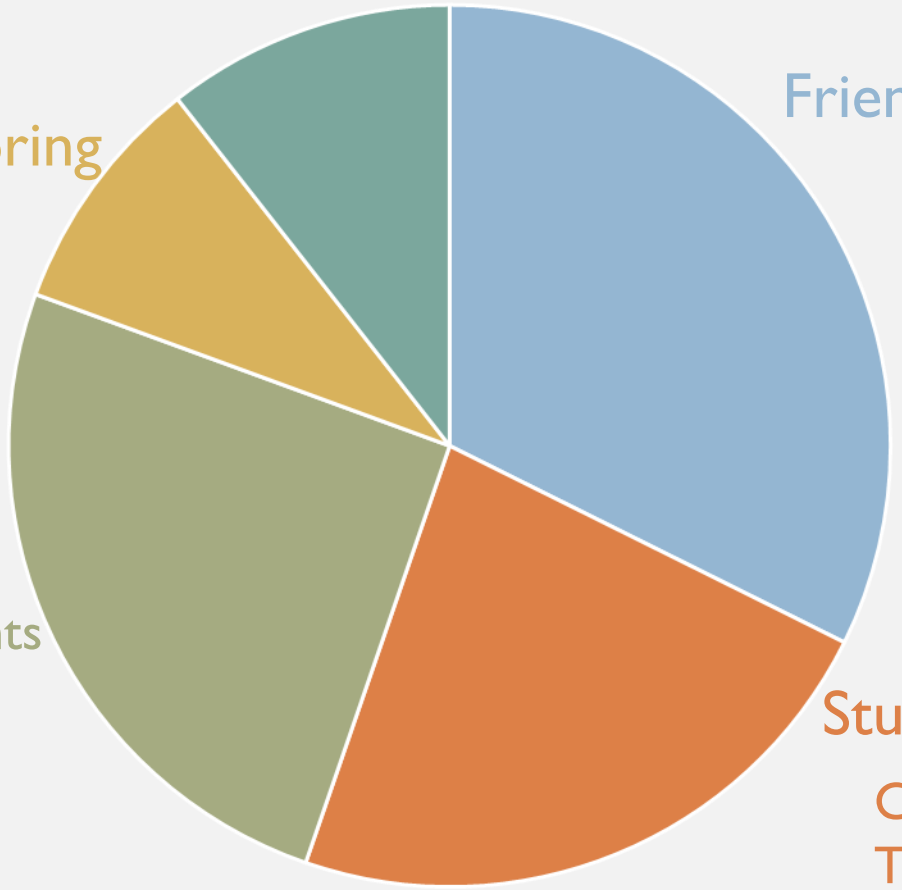
British BAME students are less likely than White British students to form good relationships with their peers

The situation for international students is better

WHAT MAKES STUDENTS FEEL LIKE THEY BELONG?

Free writing task: "things that have made me feel a sense of belonging since I arrived at university"

Thematic analysis of responses:



Miscellaneous

Friends

Inc coursemates, flatmates
People going through similar things
Support network

The City / Exploring

Department

"Forced contact" with other students
Interesting content / good lecturers
Approachable / friendly staff

Students' Union

Clubs / societies / volunteering
The building itself

Departmental Society

RESULTS SUMMARY

- Surveys show that British BAME students have lower sense of belonging than their White British counterparts
- Related to relationships with other students rather than with staff
- Thematic analysis reiterates the importance of peer relationships

FUTURE WORK

- Surveys to compare with a London post-92 university
- Focus groups across a whole Faculty to talk to British BAME students about their experiences in more detail

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- Resources for staff with practical tips