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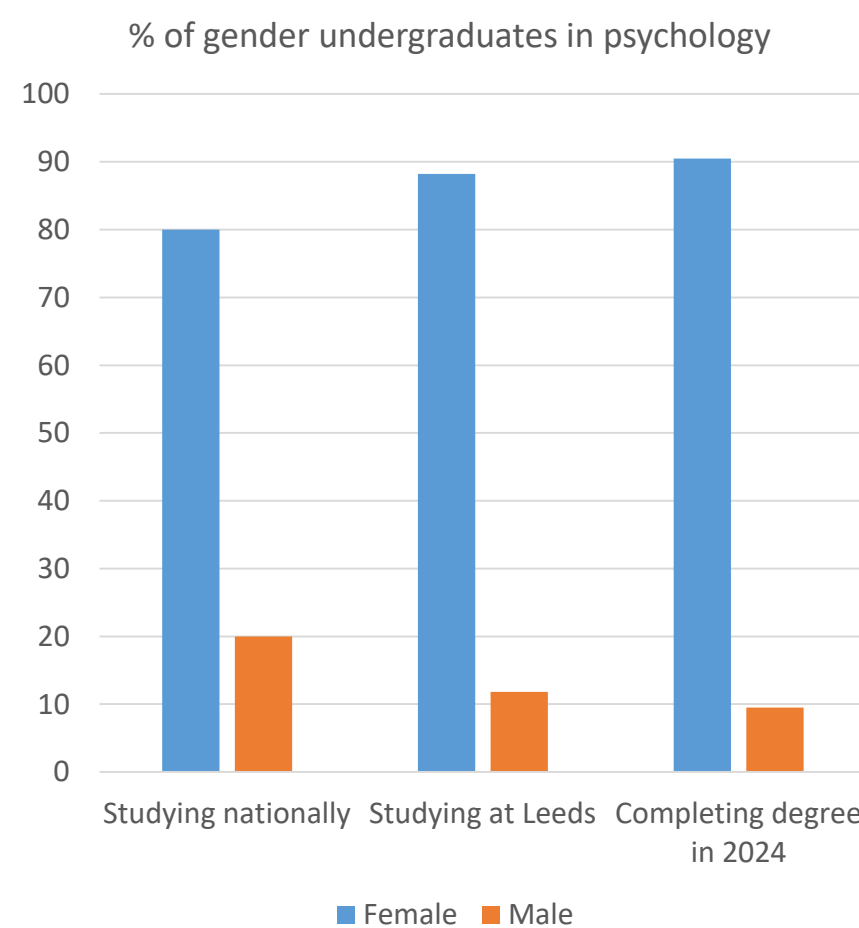
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Sense of belonging (or not) for male students in psychology

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Abstract

Males are 11% of the cohort in Psychology at Leeds. They are less likely to complete their studies and more likely to achieve lower grades than females. This has implications for them and the psychology profession. Belonging at university has long been seen as important for academic success. To understand male student sense of belonging, 5 males were interviewed about their belonging using photo-elicitation as a prompt. The interview transcripts were analysed using thematic analysis. Key findings were that belonging for male students comes mainly from friendship but this friendship takes effort when in a minority. The findings have created change in the School with more males in 1st year tutor groups to initiate early belonging. More data is being gathered to understand this concept further. Retention and attainment will be measured in three years along with interviewing about belonging.



Background and research question

20% of clinical and educational psychologists are male 'Clients like to see people who look like them' Willyard, 2011.

Gender balanced teams work more effectively in the workplace

Belonging

Subjective feeling – feeling valued – from shared experiences and beliefs

Enables feelings of safety and comfort from wider community

Desire to form relationships can be considered innate, transferring from parent to friends during adolescence.

What happens when there is no-one to transfer relationships at university?

Limited literature with male students beyond "I kind of felt left out at times" and 'difficulties forming friendships'.

Research question

What is the sense of belonging for males in psychology at Leeds?

Method

Five male 2nd and 3rd year psychology undergraduates were asked to bring photographs of times they felt belonging at university. In the interviews the content of the photos was discussed supplemented with a semi-structured interview schedule.

Data was analysed using Braun and Clarke's 2006 Thematic Analysis

Key themes: Belonging

One student said they did not belong at any time in the 4 years

The other 4 said

People:

Belong when I know people and they know me

Feeling comfortable with people

Belong with friends where I don't need to make an effort

Identify with social group

Places

Comfortable, familiar, identify with university culture

Other key themes

A-level to degree transition challenging

No male friends

Effortful friendship making

One friend can make a difference

Small focused interactions lead to connections

Male role models



'Football is a way to start conversations'

Discussion

Four of the five men found belonging through friendship. However, the fifth man did not at any time in his degree.

Friendships made a lot of difference and were initially difficult but three findings have created change. 'Effortful friendship making', 'One friend can make a difference' and 'Small focused interactions lead to connections' were included in the recent successful Athena Swan school submission.

The belonging literature points to a need for transfer of relations from parents at university. The practice in the school was to allocate a single male to each tutor group. Based on this research, the allocation was changed this year to allocating men in threes to tutor groups to facilitate friendship making. We are hoping that this creates an environment for relationship transfer.

This academic year, we are extending this study to as many men as we can recruit to build a bigger picture. Then in two academic years' time, repeat the research with males from tutor groups with multiple men to see what difference this made.

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