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Perspectives:  
Policy and Practice  
in Higher Education



**Higher Education Students: Barriers to Engagement;  
Psychological Alienation Theory, Trauma and Trust; a  
Systematic Review.**

Journal:	<i>Perspectives: Policy and Practice in Higher Education</i>
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Manuscripts

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3 *Data Sharing Statement – All Literature used to form the data collection for this systematic review*  
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5  
6 *journal article has been appropriately cited in the reference list and clearly marked. All the literature*  
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8  
9 *is accessible via academic databases or through open access databases as stated.*

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16 **TITLE:** Higher Education Students: Barriers to Engagement; Psychological Alienation Theory,  
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18 Trauma and Trust; a Systematic Review.

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24 **KEY WORDS:** Higher Education, Widening Participation, Barriers to Engagement, Psychosocial Self-  
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26 Concept and Academic Trust Alienation theory, and Trauma.

## 31 **ABSTRACT**

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34 This paper is a systematic review of the Widening Participation (WP), Higher Education (HE) student  
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36 demographic in the UK. It argues that the impact and presence of traumatic emotional experiences  
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38 in student populations connected to psychosocial and academic trust alienation theory, contributes  
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40 to WP engagement barriers in HE. Using PRISMA guidelines, 43 publications were screened based on  
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42 inclusion/exclusion criteria. This paper identifies the influence of WP students' experiences of trauma  
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44 and how this impacts on their HE educational engagement. Secondly, it encourages the HE community  
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46 to consider their commitment to the WP demographic, and thirdly it identifies strategies to support  
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48 WP student success and improve HE Institutions (HEI's) commitment to meeting WP agendas.  
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50 Additionally, it identifies gaps in knowledge regarding the complexities of the WP student  
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52 demographic considering educational and psychological links that have not previously been examined.  
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54 It encourages HEI's commitment to social mobility from both a political and institutional standpoint  
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56 specifically aligning to the WP student demographic barriers to engagement.  
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## INTRODUCTION

This paper's contributions, firstly, identify the influence of WP student's experiences of trauma and the impact on HE educational engagement. Secondly, it provides argument for HE community consideration of commitments to the WP demographic to meet social mobility targets. Thirdly, this paper provides strategies for supporting WP student success to demonstrate how HEI's can offer authentic commitment to the WP agenda. Additionally, it identifies gaps in knowledge regarding the complexities of the WP student demographic from educational and psychological viewpoints. The intention of this paper is to contribute original insight into the HE WP sector by addressing educational and psychological links.

The WP agenda spans many years thus demonstrating that this demographic has long been of interest to the UK Government. Connell-Smith and Hubble, (2018) state that, '*WP aims to address discrepancies in the take-up of HE opportunities between different underrepresented groups*' (ibid, p3). This includes students from disadvantaged backgrounds, specifically, those from lower income households; care-leavers, mature students, disabled students and some ethnic groups and refugees (ibid). Donnelly and Evans (2018, p97-98) add that WP has been '*..high on the agenda of UK governments in recent decades...and more recently, with policy debates about social mobility in the UK*'. The Social Mobility Commission (2017, 2019) highlight that WP students can miss places at top universities, potentially, due to early life disadvantage and low achievements hampering social mobility (Robinson and Salvestrini, 2020). In 2015, UK Government set two HE targets in terms of WP; to double the pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds and to increase by 20% the numbers of students from BME groups accessing HE, by 2020 (Connell-Smith and Hubble, 2018). Furthermore, Augar (2019, p97) states, '*our assessment of the current system is that it fails to fully support social mobility*'. In addition, Augar (2019) and Robinson and Salvestrini (2020) acknowledge that HEI's focus on entry into HE rather than committing to successful participation and engagement for the WP

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3 student demographic, is contributing to this failing system. Augar (2019) goes on to further identify  
4 that HEI's with large WP populations are not necessarily resourced effectively and '*rely on too limited*  
5 *an evidence base of what works best*' (ibid). This highlights that the UK Government focus is on HEI's  
6 recruitment rather than considering the complexities of the WP student demographic in practice.  
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14 Furthermore, Robinson and Salvestrini (2020, p6) identify that there is '*...not enough research focused*  
15 *on vulnerable but overlooked groups...*' and this systematic review aims to provide original insights to  
16 identify students' trauma experiences as barriers to their engagement in HE. Robinson and Salvestrini  
17 also go on to purport that the government, '*...must facilitate greater tracking of the progression*  
18 *outcomes...*' of WP students (ibid, p6), and this systematic review provides strategies to contribute to  
19 the WP demographics long-term educational success. Likewise, there is a lack of research into the  
20 culture and class of academic staff. Binns (2019) suggests that WP students will progress when taught  
21 by WP and/or working class academic staff who have lived experience and are, therefore, more in  
22 tune with the needs of the WP students.  
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37 WP is a term that can be related not just to access for the more able and well qualified students from  
38 disadvantaged backgrounds, but also to those who may have suffered disadvantage through poor  
39 schooling and socio economic life chances (Vignoles and Murray 2016). Donnelly and Evans (2018,  
40 p102) explore the question of equality stating that, '*...ideas of equality of opportunity ...*' lend  
41 themselves to '*...opening up HE opportunities for groups of individuals [WP] under-represented in HE*'.  
42 They go on to propose that WP educational inequalities have originated from within the culture and  
43 tradition of HEI's, which are '*...not necessarily serving in an equitable way all groups within society*'  
44 (ibid). Reay (2018) purports that even though there are populations of WP students who are  
45 academically successful, despite this; they encounter more challenges within their HE experience than  
46 their middle and upper class equivalents. The Social Mobility Commission (2019, p86) also identify '*the*  
47 *scale of the social mobility challenge for Higher Education*', acknowledging that '*students from less*  
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3 *traditional backgrounds who do get in are more likely to drop out and less likely to end up in high skilled*  
4 *jobs*'. This points to the issues with retention, achievement and onward success for the WP student  
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6 group and highlights the justification of further evidenced-based research to address the difficulties.  
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8 This systematic review contributes to addressing these issues by identifying links between WP  
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10 students' past/present traumatic experiences as barriers to HE engagement and success based on  
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12 psychological alienation theory.  
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18 The motivation for this research arises from the consideration of barriers to student engagement  
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20 within a HE WP context. Gaps identified connect to barriers to student engagement associated to  
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22 trauma, psychosocial and academic trust alienation theory (Jones, 2017). Xerri, Radford and Shacklock  
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24 (2017) identify the ongoing relevance of student engagement in HE and identify the work of Kahu  
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26 (2013, p590) in relation to the '*...psychosocial influences on student engagement...*' as being causative  
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28 factors in this debate. However, there is no current literature available, which connects WP HE  
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30 students to the psychosocial and academic trust alienation theory, together with the impact of past  
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32 and present trauma. This identified gap between disciplines is investigated throughout this systematic  
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34 review.  
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40 Furthermore, Xerri, Radford and Shacklock's (2017) findings identified the importance of relationships  
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42 within HE and for HE students who have experienced trauma; there may be implications for their  
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44 perception of self. This impact on self-perception, to varying degrees, associates with the type of  
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46 trauma and the centrality of trauma (Keshet et al 2019) experienced. Harms (2015) identified  
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48 relational and social dimensions that can be influenced by trauma, along with other dimensions in a  
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50 multifaceted structure. This highlights the potential impression on a student's sense of self and holistic  
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52 well-being within HE contexts to support the formation of trusting relationships that affect WP  
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54 engagement.  
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## METHODS

This systematic literature review explored literature following PRISMA guidelines; identification, screening, eligibility and inclusion methods from Education and Psychology disciplines (Shamsheer et al, 2015). According to Dakduk and González (2018, p2), '*Literature reviews are a useful method for summarising large volumes of research to establish what has been studied and to identify gaps that guide future research*'. Using PRISMA as a method shows thorough consideration of the research intention, minimising researcher bias and contributes to review validity and reliability (Jahan et al, 2016). The research question was constructed using SPICE as a tool (Jahan et al, 2016):

**Setting** - HE sector

**Population** - WP Students

**Intervention** – Trauma

**Comparison** - Psychosocial and academic trust

**Evaluation** – Reduction of WP HE students' barriers to engagement

The eligibility criteria used focused on key words; Widening Participation, Higher Education, Barriers to Engagement, Psychology, Trauma, Alienation, Psychosocial, Academic Trust and dates from 1950 to 2019. This was to explore the contribution to the field of WP HE Students; Trauma as a Barrier to Student Engagement and Connection with Alienation Theory; Psychosocial and Academic Trust.

The information sources were accessed from academic library search engines and databases for Education and Psychology using Boolean operators. Advance search limiters helped to narrow the search result by focusing on full text and peer reviewed articles only (Jahan et al, 2016). This is a critical element when filtering and locating research, as it enables precise and relevant research to be

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3 detected. For this systematic review, the following search terms and their results are detailed in Figure  
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For Peer Review Only



**Figure 1:** Key Terms Eligibility Search Criteria Results – Education Databases

Key Terms Search Criteria Academic Education Databases	Results	Key Terms Search Criteria Parameters *Full texts and peer reviewed*	Screening/Eligibility	Weak/Moderate/Strong
Widening Participation <b>AND/OR</b> Higher Education	1,903	2014-2019	Many relating to the Nursing/Medical Sector of Higher Education	Weak
Widening Participation <b>AND/OR</b> Higher Education <b>AND/OR</b> Barriers to Engagement	682 405	2014-2019 2016-2019	Many relating to Australian HE sector.	Weak
Widening Participation <b>AND/OR</b> Higher Education <b>AND/OR</b> Barriers to Engagement <b>AND/OR</b> Alienation	17	2016-2019	Again, many articles relating to Australian HE sector. Once screened only 2 publications picked as suitable to the research intention.	Moderate
Widening Participation <b>AND/OR</b> Higher Education <b>AND/OR</b> Barriers to Engagement <b>AND/OR</b> Alienation <b>AND/OR</b> UK	7	2016-2019	All articles scrutinised in line with PRISMA and SPICE tools and either discounted (x 5) as not relevant or included (x 2) as pertinent to the research intention.	Strong

**Figure 2:** Key Terms Eligibility Search Criteria Results – Psychology Databases (PsycInfo Database)

Key Terms Search Criteria Academic Psychology Databases	Results	Key Terms Search Criteria Parameters *Full texts and peer reviewed*	Screening/Eligibility	Weak/Moderate/Strong
Widening Participation <b>AND/OR</b> Higher Education	172	2000-2019	Many relating to broad subject areas-leadership, attainment and subject specific areas.	Weak
	34	2016-2019	Some of the articles related to the topic and student experiences but others were not specifically focused on trauma	Moderate
				Strong
Widening Participation <b>AND/OR</b> Higher Education	2	2016-2019	Both articles relevant located in England and relate to the experience of identity influences and trauma in HE students (as barriers to engagement).	
<b>AND/OR</b> Barriers to Engagement	154	1983-2019	Many relating to diverse topic areas that were broad.	Weak
Trauma Experiences in Higher Education Students	68	2016-2019	Still broad but relevance for the dates and regency of the findings, with varied HE student experiences of trauma and impacts	Weak/Moderate
Trauma Experiences in Higher Education Students <b>AND/OR</b> Barrier to Engagement	0	2016-2019	Showing a gap for this area of research and focus	Strong
Trauma Experience in Higher Education Students <b>AND/OR</b> Alienation	0	2016-2019	Showing a gap for this terminology and link to the experiences of exclusion/trauma reported.	Strong
Trauma Experience in Higher Education Students <b>AND/OR</b> Self- concept	2	2016-2019	1 article included in the research due to subject relevance and 1 discounted due to irrelevance and a preview document.	Strong

**Figure 3:** Key Terms Eligibility Search Criteria Results

Government Policies, Publications, Higher Education/Psychology Sector related open access database publications

Key Terms Search Criteria Open Access Journals/Sources	Results	Key Terms Search Criteria Parameters *Government Policies, Publications, Higher Education/Psychology Sector related publications*	Screening/Eligibility	Weak/Moderate/Strong
Widening Participation and Higher Education	17,000	2015-2019	Search results were vast and needed to be filtered down to be manageable.	Weak
Widening Participation, Higher Education and Barriers to Engagement	16,100	2015-2019	Many relating to worldwide approaches to the HE sector.	Weak
Widening Participation, Higher Education, Barriers to Engagement, Alienation	15,354	2015-2019	Again, many articles/texts relating to worldwide HE sector. Further filtering needed to ascertain links to the research question and UK.	Weak
Widening Participation, Higher Education, Barriers to Engagement, Alienation <b>and</b> UK	12,600	2018-2019	Search results were vast and needed to be filtered down to be manageable.	Weak
Widening Participation, Higher Education, Barriers to Engagement, Alienation, Trauma	6,160	2018-2019	Many publications/texts aligned to specific areas eg. autism or disability rather than past/present trauma.	Moderate
Widening Participation, Higher Education, Barriers to Engagement, Alienation, Trauma, psychosocial self-concept			Again, publications relating to non-related subject such as 'African Americans experiences of Family Therapy'.	Moderate

<p>1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22 23 24 25 26 27 28 29 30 31 32 33 34 35 36 37 38 39 40 41 42 43 44 45 46</p> <p>Widening Participation, Higher Education, Barriers to Engagement, Alienation, Trauma, psychosocial self-concept and academic trust</p>	<p>323</p>	<p>2018-2019</p>	<p>Publications not relevant to the research intention eg. 'Education and Attachment: Guidelines to Prevent School Failure'.</p>	<p>Moderate</p>
<p>Widening Participation, Higher Education, Barriers to Engagement, Alienation, Trauma, psychosocial self-concept and academic trust</p>	<p>263</p>	<p>2018-2019</p>	<p>Again, many non-relevant publications filtered through this search process, resulting in 11 publications for inclusion following further scrutiny against eligibility criteria.</p>	<p>Strong x 18</p>
<p>Widening Participation, Higher Education, Barriers to Engagement, Alienation, Trauma, psychosocial self-concept and academic trust in the UK</p>	<p>185</p>	<p>2018-2019</p>	<p>Again, many non-relevant publications filtered through this search process, resulting in 11 publications for inclusion following further scrutiny against eligibility criteria.</p>	<p>Strong x 18</p>

For Peer Review Only

Using key term eligibility search criteria led to the study selection being further streamlined by adding additional parameters of 'UK', which resulted in a reduced and rationalised selection of literature. After conducting the initial search, many of the journals were not relevant, so the search was limited to full text, academic journals; peer reviewed and published date filtered to 2014 onwards, and further narrowed to 2016 onwards for contextual currency. From the search, results aligned to the key terms search criteria and across the two disciplines were identified (see Figure 1, 2 and 3).

The key questions asked of literature identified were:

1. Does the literature focus on HE and WP?
2. How relevant is the literature to the research intention?
3. Does the literature add insightful contributions to the research intention?
4. How relevant is the context of the literature in terms of current day thinking?

These questions enabled the reviewers to screen each item identified for eligibility and inclusion or exclusion in this systematic review (Shamsheer, 2015, O'Brien and McGukin, 2017).

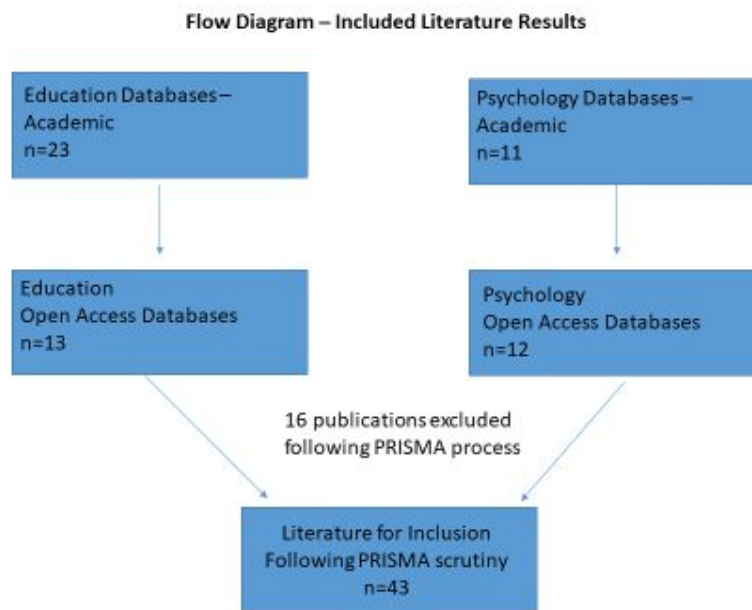
#### **Identification, Screening, Eligibility, Included**

Records identified through database searching consisted of 23 for Education (n=23) and 11 for Psychology (n= 34) and additional records were searched via government policies and subject specific publications across both disciplines (n= 59).

Once duplicates were removed and following scrutiny, screening and investigation (n=56). At this point further records, 5 academic records for Education and 3 for Psychology were excluded because

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3 of relevance related to the eligibility criteria (n=48), full-text articles were accessed for eligibility and  
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5 a further 5 articles were discounted (n=43). This meant that 43 items of literature were included  
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7 (n=43). The inclusion and exclusion criteria was established prior to the systematic review, driven by  
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9 the research question and key terms (Xiao and Watson, 2017). This meant that the reviewers were  
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11 able to draw valid and reliable conclusions based on the established pre-set key term study selection  
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13 process (Jahan et al, 2016). Whilst O'Brien and McGukin (2017, p4) state, '*...it must be noted that this*  
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15 *[systematic literature review] approach does not completely eradicate the risk of bias, it simply reduces*  
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17 *it'* , every effort has been made through this research strategy to maintain a balanced approach to the  
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19 research intention. This process has also enabled the reviewers to focus their search efforts to locate  
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21 and analyse literature based on the most credible primary and secondary sources available (Mulrow  
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23 and Oxman, 1997 cited in O'Brien and McGukin, 2017), see Figure 4.  
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## SYSTEMATIC LITERATURE REVIEW - RESULTS



**Figure 4:** Results of literature for inclusion in this systematic review following the PRISMA scrutiny, screening and exclusion process.

## SYNTHESIS OF RESULTS

Some students entering HE contexts from WP demographics may have been exposed to higher levels of trauma as a consequence of varied factors (Harvey, McNamara, Andrewatha, Luckman 2015; Lehr, 2018; Reay et al 2010; Stevenson and Wilcot 2007; Wiehn, Hornberg and Fischer 2018). These factors could potentially result in specific presentations within the educational setting, eg Greenberg (2006) highlighted the presence of intrusive thoughts, when trauma has been experienced, and these may prevent access to learning. Whilst Aquarone, Goodwin and Richardson (2017) identify the difficulties of identifying and working with dissociation and complex trauma. Ultimately, any experience of trauma can affect student learning. Furthermore, Christie et al (2008) suggest that entering into the University system can be an emotionally difficult process for WP students, suggesting that the HE process may contribute to further traumatic experiences for some students. Mallon (2016) and Goldstein (2017) highlight that early attachment experiences influence adjustment and vulnerability within the early adulthood phase and thus student adjustment to University life. Equally, Goldstein (2017) notes that attachment styles correlate with emotional regulation, relational functioning, and how students manage transitions. This emphasises practice where HEI's provide a secure, supportive and safe base and access to counselling support services that aid students.

Acknowledgement of adverse childhood experience influencing later educational experiences (Smith 2018) has been researched prolifically, but this data is not captured within the HE student populations. The implementation of trauma focused educational approaches within primary schools (Smith 2018) has been conducted and this leads to the suggestion that there is a necessity to consider this within the University context. If early adversity can correlate with potential trauma presentations for individuals then having knowledge and understanding of the impact of trauma on the WP demographic may help to reduce barriers to student engagement that arise from the psychosocial and academic trust alienation theory (Jones, 2017). Furthermore, Stansfield and Bell (2019, p4) acknowledge that *'the combined effect of stressors and trauma on population mental and physical health and well-being is substantial'*. It could be argued, that many of the WP population have been exposed to stressors and potentially traumatic experiences, eg. Mulrenan et al (2018) presents findings of homelessness being a barrier to engagement within Higher Education. Equally, the influence of students' identities on HE engagement, when having experiences of disadvantage, were found to link with negative experiences affecting attendance (Thiele et al 2017).



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3 HE specific findings indicate that on-campus bullying experiences can also affect HE student learners  
4 (Cowie and Myers 2018). Traumatic presentations may be as a consequence of current/recent  
5 scenarios whereas some may be historic trauma memories. Irrespective of the cause of trauma, the  
6 student's psychology can be influenced, suggesting a potential impact on their ability to engage and  
7 develop trusting relationships (Jones 2017). This could, for some students, affect attainment,  
8 achievement and aspiration (Adams, 2019; Hinton-Smith 2012) if they are socially excluded from  
9 accessing academic content, which could impact on retention, progression and achievement in an  
10 increasingly marketised HE sector (Social Mobility Commission, 2017, 2019).  
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18 The consequence of trauma manifests in specific ways, however, it must be acknowledged that  
19 students from the WP demographic are more likely to have experienced trauma within their lives  
20 (Harvey, McNamara, Andrewatha, Luckman 2015; Lehr, 2018; Reay et al 2010; Stevenson and Wilcot  
21 2007; Wiehn, Hornberg and Fischer 2018). Trauma can be defined in numerous ways and Harms (2015,  
22 p14) '*encourages us to see trauma not just as an inner world experience of psychological symptoms or*  
23 *as an outer world experience caused solely by the social environment*'. She asserts a multi-dimensional  
24 approach for conceptualising trauma (Harms 2010) and this most definitely may support the WP aims  
25 for HE contexts and acknowledge the students entering this HE frame. Therefore, the idea that early  
26 child/adult trauma can influence students' psychosocially affecting academic trust within a HE context  
27 creating barriers to engagement for the WP demographic can be asserted. This emphasises the  
28 necessity for deeper understanding of the holistic needs of the WP HE student.  
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38 According to Hannon et al (2017) if WP students have the opportunity to develop cultural and social  
39 capital and are supported with agency, then this can lead to increased aspiration and progression. This  
40 indicates the necessity for student agentic opportunities that can support resilience in overcoming  
41 potential barriers: early adverse trauma can co-align with the psychosocial and academic trust  
42 alienation theory (Jones 2017). Equally, there is currently a campaign for looking after students'  
43 mental health that advocates the importance of counselling provision within academia (Reeves 2018)  
44 and Robinson and Salvestrini (2020) identify that mentoring and counselling contribute to positive  
45 outcomes for WP students. However, trauma experiences are not always disclosed. Currently, there  
46 is an expectation that students self-refer/or are referred by tutors for counselling support within HEI's,  
47 but this may not always be interpreted, implemented or accessed. Lehr (2018) highlights the  
48 importance of integrating trauma informed practices within HE and De Thierry (2018) asserts some  
49 practical considerations within seminar delivery and the importance of staff perceptions of students  
50 being in recovery from trauma as opposed to behaviour management approaches. Ultimately,  
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3 research recognises the essential component of trauma training and awareness raising. Students could  
4 develop psychosocially with HEIs enabling students to build trusting relationships within and across  
5 the University. These suggested practices would align with Government agendas of increasing uptake  
6 by the WP demographic, and evidence commitment from HEI's (Connell-Smith and Hubble, 2018).  
7 This means much more discussion and reflection, with practical steps being implemented by HEI's to  
8 support the WP demographic. Purely offering places on programmes is not enough and HEI's are  
9 being encouraged to consider trauma management training (Dunkley 2018). Robinson and Salvestrini  
10 (2020) acknowledge that counselling and '*...relatable...*' role model interventions within HE help to  
11 increase student's confidence, aspirations and success, suggesting that trusting student/staff  
12 relationships are key.

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22 Chowdry (2013 cited in Younger, Gascoine, Menzies and Torgerson 2018) explains that low  
23 achievements from secondary school could be associated with WP students' lack of engagement also  
24 contributing to engagement barriers. Younger et al (2018, p2) add that '*prior academic attainment is*  
25 *certainly a factor in HE participation, but the causal process is not straightforward*'. This indicates that  
26 barriers to student engagement for WP students can be driven by many complex causal factors which  
27 impact on progression. However, the psychological status of WP HE students is currently not taken  
28 into account as part of their profile. Case (2007) built upon the work of Mann (2001) with regard to  
29 student learning and alienation theory, demonstrating embryonic links of alienation via brief  
30 acknowledgement of the psychosocial work of Seeman (1959, 1983, and 2001). Case (2007) does not  
31 entertain much focus on this idea leading to the assumption that there is further scope to address the  
32 gaps relating to barriers to learning, alienation and psychosocial factors.

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42 To support students' resilience and the ability to thrive in HEI environments, strategies need to be in  
43 place. Perhaps consideration of counselling support as advocated by Reeves (2018), and Robinson  
44 and Salvestrini (2020) and a multi-dimensional approach for trauma support (Harms 2010) are  
45 essential features for a more inclusive, less alienating experience for some HE students. If the  
46 acknowledgement of trauma presence is not conducted then students may feel alienated. According  
47 to Çağlar (2012) alienation is evidenced when students display negative attitudes towards their  
48 educational experiences and towards the institution. He goes on to explain that these attitudes impact  
49 on institutions being able to achieve their overall objectives and further highlights that middle and HE  
50 sectors are most affected by this notion of alienation (Tezcan, 1997 cited in Çağlar 2012). Çağlar's  
51 (2012) ideas of alienation provide a natural pathway to the assertion that these negative student  
52 attitudes create barriers to learning and student engagement, they also prevent institutions from  
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3 achieving their overall goals and educational objectives. Therefore, it is in the best interests of both  
4 the student and the HEI to attempt to investigate these issues and try to find solutions. Although,  
5 further investigation into WP students psychological wellbeing is essentially required. Prior trauma  
6 can influence an individual psychosocially, affecting abilities to trust, which can hamper students'  
7 abilities to embrace programmes of study and ongoing success. This in itself poses a barrier to student  
8 engagement and HEI's need to invest in and evidence their own corporate responsibility to this  
9 student market. By not solely recruiting students to evidence how they have met Government targets,  
10 but by investing in support and resources to enable WP students to succeed and achieve their  
11 aspirations (Augar, 2019, Robinson and Salvestrini, 2020).

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20 However, the challenges of WP within HEI's are evident in the difficulties experienced when  
21 attempting to engage students within their programmes of study (Vignoles and Murray, 2016). Many  
22 of the challenges can relate to students having lower attainment grades from school at point of entry.  
23 In addition, students' barriers to engagement through their psychosocial and academic trust levels  
24 appear to be creating further challenges (Mann, 2001 and Jones, 2017). Vignoles and Murray (2016,  
25 p2) add that, '*Students need to aspire and have the self-belief to go to University; qualities that will*  
26 *likely motivate them in their studies once there*'. This means that WP students need the drive and the  
27 desire to succeed and progress within HE once they are part of the process, despite any lower levels  
28 of academic achievement at point of entry. However, there is an identified gap between the low  
29 attainment levels at point of entry, and the WP students' aspiration to succeed. Kenner (2019) has  
30 called for research to focus on [students] identities and for the creation of spaces to discuss identities  
31 to enable a more inclusive HE experience.

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42 A wide range of alienation theories are encountered by teaching staff (Mann, 2001 and Jones, 2017),  
43 indicating more is to be done to bridge gaps and although foundation Years have been introduced to  
44 address some of these barriers for WP students, the success of these are yet to be demonstrated.  
45 Whilst this is a step in the right direction, there are still many variables that need to be considered.  
46 Connell-Smith and Hubble (2018, p16) highlight that, '*Increasing the numbers of students from under-*  
47 *represented groups in higher education has been stubbornly difficult to achieve*'. It also has to be  
48 acknowledged that there is some distance between recruiting WP students and how successful these  
49 students are within their chosen programme of studies.

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57 Younger et al (2018, p29) state that there is currently a '*...lack of evidence of robust UK based*  
58 *interventions for WP HE students*', although they do suggest there is some evidence of effectiveness  
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3 of '*...black box WP programmes...*' meaning '*...intervention packages with multiple elements in a single*  
4 *programme ....*'. Although, Robinson and Salvestrini (2020, p6) add that, '*...there is a need for more*  
5 *robust research on the impact of black box interventions...*'. It could be that multiple and complex  
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7 barriers to student engagement exist, and strategies to support students to successfully complete  
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9 their programmes of HE study need to be implemented. Suggesting a need for cross-collaborative  
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11 considerations of techniques for student support to promote deeper understanding and better  
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13 practice for the WP demographic.  
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## 16 17 **CONCLUSION**

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21 This systematic review paper presents evidence to suggest that WP students' disadvantaged status  
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23 can have associations with higher exposure to traumatic experiences. These traumatic experiences be  
24 they impersonal, interpersonal, relational or attachment related (Jordan, 2012), can have a direct  
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26 influence on the student psychosocially affecting academic trust. Thus leading to barriers to  
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28 engagement based on the collaborative links between trauma and the psychosocial and academic  
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30 trust alienation theory (Jones, 2017). This paper argues that to decrease these barriers, a focus on the  
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32 psychological well-being of WP students combined with collaborative HEI strategies could improve the  
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34 recruitment, retention and ultimate success of WP demographics. This systematic review further  
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36 asserts that deeper understanding of the complexities of WP student demographics needs to be  
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38 embedded within HE teacher training programmes and curriculum delivery. Extending teaching skills  
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40 to embed psychological understanding and practice delivery skills would not only work to meet  
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42 Government targets but also raise the aspirations and aim to improve social mobility '*... with the right*  
43 *approach, the transmission of disadvantage from one generation to the next can be broken*' (Social  
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45 Mobility Commission, 2017, p8).

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47 It is clear that HEI's have a corporate responsibility to drive the success of WP students. Augar (2019)  
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49 acknowledges the financial commitment that is needed by HEI's to support the growth and  
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51 development of UK social mobility for the WP demographic and Robinson and Salvestrini (2020)  
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53 identify the need for progression via research. This systematic review argues that there is further  
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55 investigation to be undertaken, to truly invest in this important demographic to instigate much needed  
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57 social mobility changes. Although, the Social Mobility Commission (2019, p86) recognise that, '*...the*  
58 *need for universities to stay afloat amid this competition for students is sometimes resulting in perverse*  
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60 *incentives being offered to disadvantaged students to take up places on courses and at universities*  
*which are not the most suitable for them*'. Dangerous tactics, which are potentially damaging for social

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3 mobility and not least for each potentially vulnerable student. Suggesting that a moral duty of care  
4 needs to be higher on the political and HEI strategic agenda for this demographic.  
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8 Echoing Donnelly and Evans (2018, p102) this paper contends that HEI's do not necessarily need to  
9 adopt a uniformed approach to the HE experience for WP students, more that they focus on '*...  
10 orientation towards equality of outcome...*' that becomes visible and embedded in HE practice  
11 ultimately '*...changing the HE system to enable a diversity of learners to enter it*'. Asserting that there  
12 is scope for HEI's to do more to serve the WP population in practice, rather than putting the onus on  
13 the student to fit with current HE and Government policies. A commitment to supporting the WP  
14 student population to thrive and succeed throughout their HE journey is needed using informed  
15 methods and true understanding of the educational and psychological needs of this demographic.  
16 Only then will we see effective social mobility in terms of HE outcomes.  
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25 Furthermore, to support WP students there is a need to identify the lived experiences of WP/working  
26 class academic staff, suggesting a current mismatch in culture and class as a contributing barrier  
27 aligned to psychological alienation theory, trauma and trust (Binns, 2019, Jones 2017). Meeting the  
28 multifaceted needs of the vulnerable WP student group, could be more effectively addressed by HEI's  
29 diversifying their academic workforce to specifically include WP/working class academics (Binns,  
30 2019). Academic staff who have similar WP lived experiences are, therefore, more able to connect  
31 with this WP student demographic, leading to decreased barriers in engagement in relation to the  
32 psychosocial alienation theory, trauma and trust (Binns, 2019, Jones 2017).  
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40 This systematic review has identified gaps in current research relating to cross collaboration between  
41 the disciplines of education and psychology. Meaning, specific data capture is now needed within a  
42 HE context for these complex alienation theoretical notions aligned to the WP HE student  
43 demographic. A stronger understanding is needed to fully drive change and improvement  
44 encompassing the elements discussed within this systematic review as a starting point.  
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