

“It is sort of nice to know it’s not just me” Shaping Research Culture through Shared Experiences

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1) INTRODUCTION

Shared Experiences are becoming increasingly recognised as a way to improve student belonging, with research demonstrating that belonging depends heavily on relationships and feeling connected to peers and staff through shared learning activities and social events^{1,2,3}. This study focuses on the implementation of a Shared Experience Series (Figure 1) as a strategic intervention aiming to support and strengthen postgraduate research culture at a Higher Education Institution.

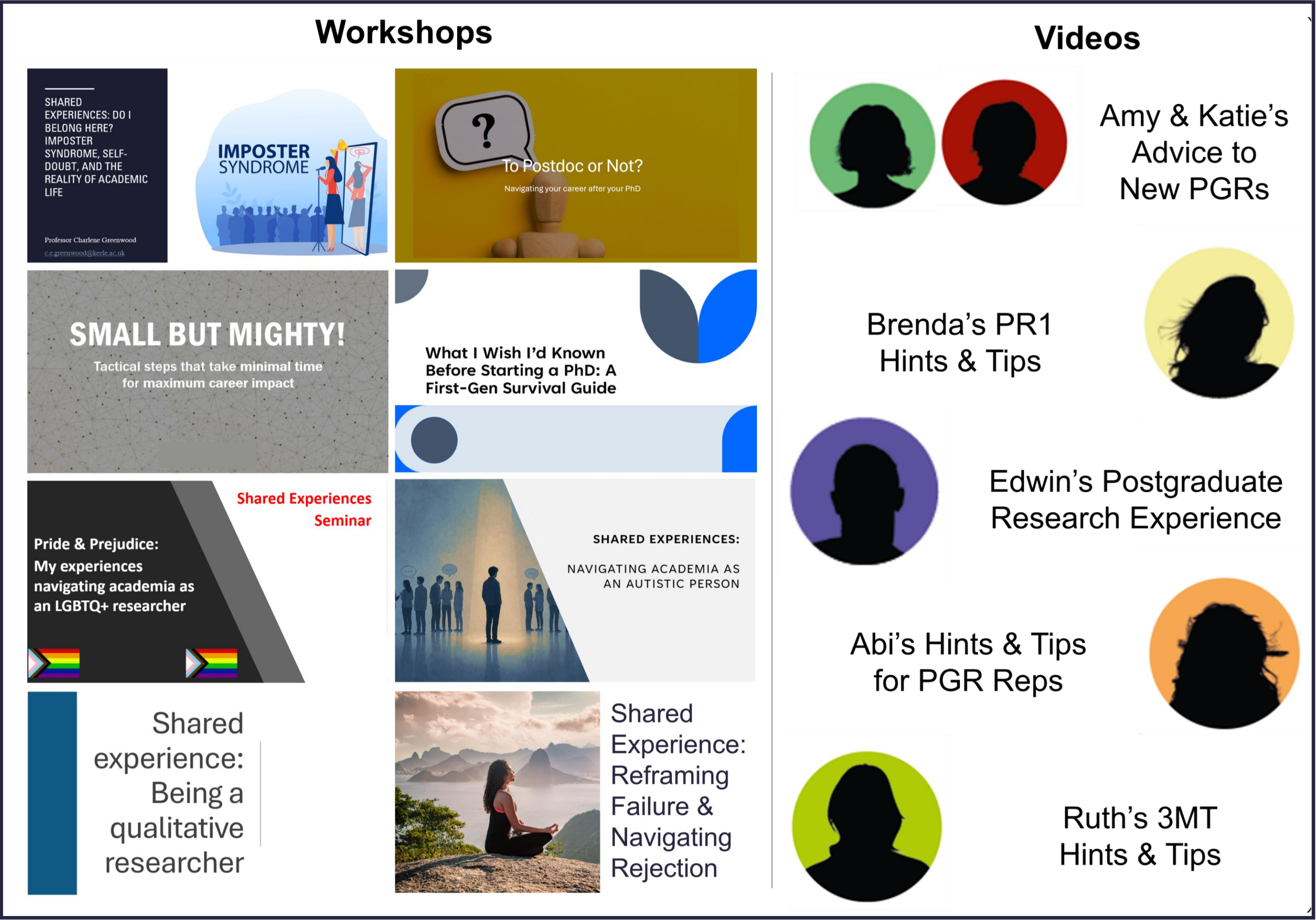


Figure 1: Examples of the Shared Experiences Workshops and Videos which took place.

2) SHARED EXPERIENCE SERIES

The series was designed to create opportunities for Post Graduate Researchers (PGRs) to hear genuine and honest shared experiences from the wider research community. The initiative aimed to:

- Improve PGR confidence and wellbeing
- Reduce feelings of isolation
- Strengthen belonging in the PGR Community
- Normalise research challenges
- Provide practical advice and tools for navigating research

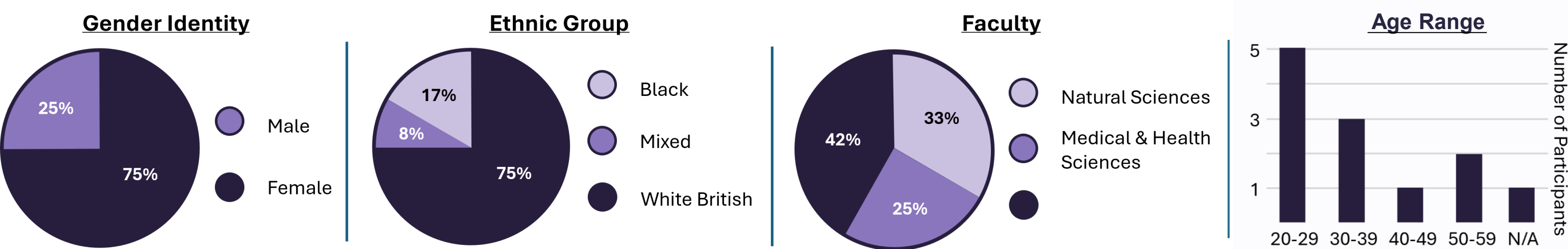
The overall aim was to demonstrate “we are all human”, highlighting that challenges, setbacks and uncertainty are common experiences in research.

The series combined:

- Monthly workshops in which a researcher shared their lived experience of a key topic
- Short videos featuring PGRs giving advice, hints and tips to fellow researchers.

3) METHODS

Participants were recruited through faculty and doctoral academy channels. Following the call, **12 PGRs** were onboarded to the study. Participants then completed a **short demographic questionnaire**, followed by an **online survey containing both Likert-scale and open-ended reflection questions**. Participant characteristics were as follows:



A mixed methods approach was used for data analysis. Quantitative Likert-scale data were analysed using descriptive statistical analysis^{4,5}, and qualitative data were analysed using reflexive thematic analysis^{6,7,8}.

4) PRELIMINARY RESULTS

86% of responses were positive (Figure 2) indicating the Shared Experience Series helped doctoral researchers' sense of belonging, while normalising academic challenges, amplifying diverse voices and perspectives, and supporting confidence and future career development skills.

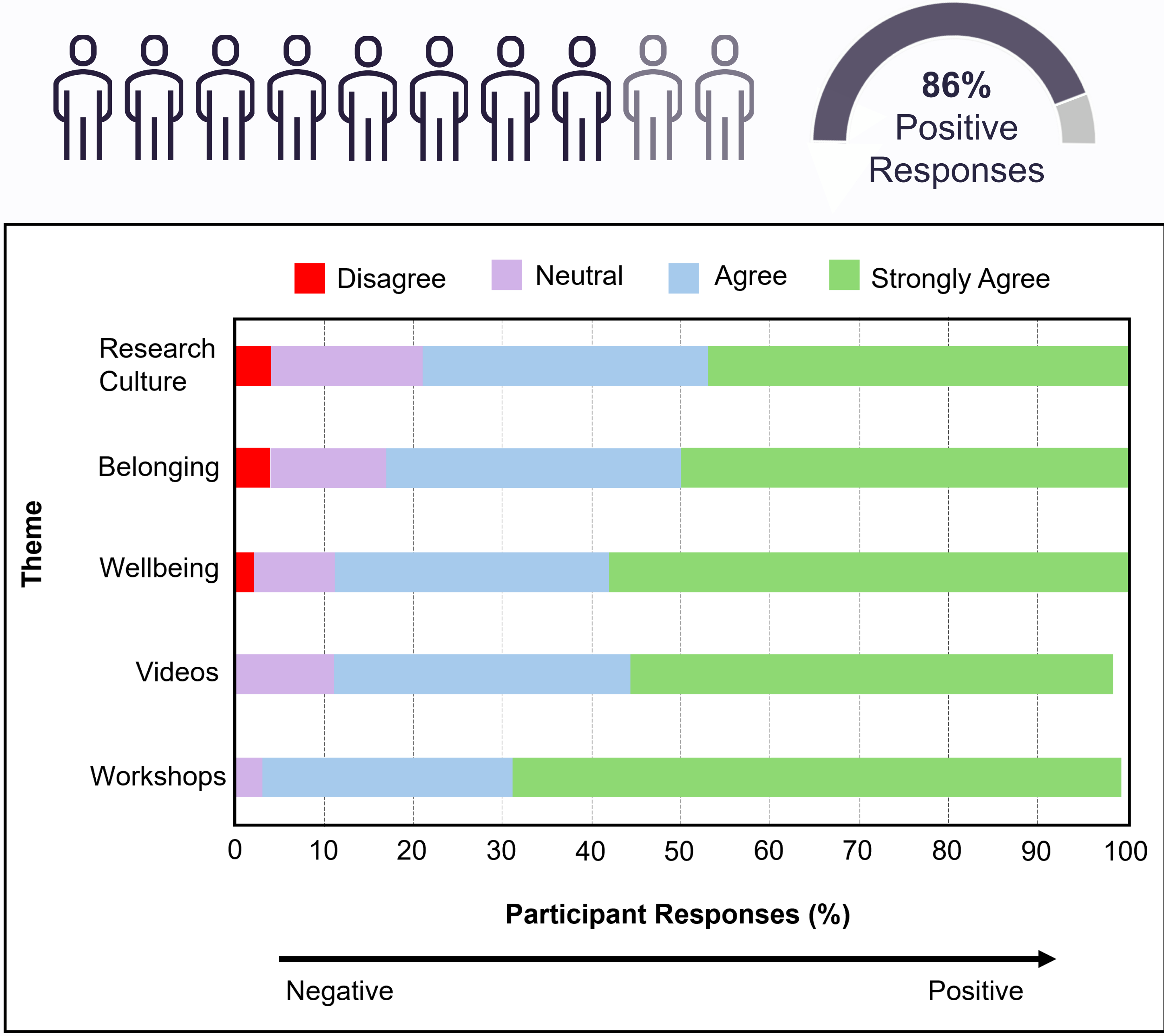


Figure 2: Distribution of Likert-scale responses, grouped by question theme.

Reflexive thematic analysis of the qualitative data identified the following **4 Themes**:



5) KEY IMPACTS OF THE SERIES:

- Topics were relevant and engaging
- Challenges of doctoral study were normalised
- Feelings of isolation were reduced, and wellbeing improved
- Increased sense of belonging to wider research community
- A more supportive and inclusive research culture was promoted

6) FUTURE WORK:

- Expand the series (including adding new videos and broadening the range of topics within the series).
- Gather pre and post series data to fully evaluate the impact of the series.



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Scan for References:



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