

Exploring the Role of Belongingness in Shaping Social and Personal Relationships

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Abstract

Belongingness, as a core psychological need, significantly influences an individual's emotional well-being and social/ personal relationship satisfaction. This need holds substantial importance in interpersonal relationships and social dynamics, rooted in Maslow's hierarchy of needs and Leary's belongingness hypothesis (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Maslow, 1943). This study employs a quantitative research approach using survey methodology to examine the links between belongingness, social and personal support, and self-esteem. The primary objective is to provide empirical data that enhances psychological models of belongingness, ultimately guiding future interventions to foster inclusivity and support within social and interpersonal relationships. Given the existing gap in quantitative research on belongingness, this study contributes valuable empirical insights into the field. In light of increasing social isolation and weakened interpersonal connections in recent years, understanding how belongingness influences individual well-being is both timely and relevant. By investigating the impact of belongingness, this study aims to offer a data-driven perspective to social psychology.

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INTRODUCTION

One of the most renowned and widely referenced theories of belongingness originates from Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (Maslow, 1943), which has served as a fundamental framework for subsequent research in this area. Maslow's theory emphasizes safety needs as the second tier in the hierarchy, highlighting the importance of physical, environmental, and personal security, such as protection from harm, a stable living environment, and moderate climatic conditions. Additionally, Maslow argues that the need to exist in an orderly, predictable, and structured world also falls under the category of safety needs. The human preference for stability and familiarity over uncertainty and the unknown is a manifestation of this need (Maslow, 1943).

Maslow provides an example of how humans rely on religion and philosophy to make sense of the world, organizing it into a coherent, meaningful whole. This inclination, he suggests, is partly driven by the need for security (Maslow, 1943). He also notes that neurotic individuals often express heightened security needs, sometimes seeking a protector or a stronger figure to serve as a source of stability (Maslow, 1943). This pursuit of a stable and controllable world can also be understood as a fundamental need for belongingness. In religious contexts, individuals find solace in feeling connected to a higher existence, while in philosophy, they construct theoretical frameworks and ideologies that provide a sense of understanding and affiliation with like-minded individuals. This not only alleviates their sense of isolation but also fosters a sense of belonging to intellectual and ideological communities.

At the beginning of this literature review, it is important to reference humanistic psychologist Erich Fromm. In his seminal work *The Anatomy of Human Destructiveness*, Fromm argues that humans experience an existential crisis, feeling as though they have been arbitrarily "thrown" into an unfamiliar world where they are isolated and disconnected from both nature and others. According to Fromm (1992), individuals struggle to define their place in the world and are forced to confront the inherent contradictions of human existence, an inescapable reality. Fromm's argument underscores the idea that, as intellectually superior beings, humans are also acutely aware of their limitations and insignificance, which leads to a profound sense of loneliness. As a result, individuals strive to understand themselves, define their sense of self, and seek belongingness as a means to counteract the distress of isolation. This aligns with Maslow's assertion that religion and philosophy serve as mechanisms for securing belongingness, allowing individuals to cope with loneliness and establish a sense of identity and purpose.

The third tier of Maslow's hierarchy is the need for love and belongingness, which directly addresses human desires for interpersonal connection and emotional bonds. This need manifests in the pursuit of friendships, romantic relationships, familial bonds, and a sense of belonging within social groups. Maslow notes that

many severe psychological disorders and maladjustments stem from frustrations of these needs (Maslow, 1943). Importantly, the need for love includes both receiving and giving affection, emphasizing that human needs are ongoing and persistent throughout life. Just as physiological needs require continuous fulfillment, the need for love and belongingness remains essential at all stages of life. Maslow also highlights the cultural influence of belongingness, asserting that human societies are structured, in part, to satisfy the fundamental psychological need for collective living (Maslow, 1943).

Another important theoretical pillar regarding the sense of belonging comes from Baumeister & Leary (1995). Their theory shares many similarities with Maslow's, yet it also offers deeper insights. Their fundamental assumption about belonging is that humans possess a universal and innate drive to form and maintain at least a minimal number of lasting, positive, and meaningful interpersonal relationships. This need is found in all individuals across all cultures, and fulfilling this drive is based on two criteria.

First, individuals require frequent and emotionally pleasant interactions with a select but consistent group of people. Simply knowing that a connection exists, without frequent interactions, may provide some emotional reassurance, but it does not offer a complete sense of belonging. Second, these interactions must occur within a relatively stable context that prioritizes the emotional well-being of both parties. If the people involved in the interactions keep changing or if frequent interactions are lacking, the relationship will not be satisfying. Many human behaviors, emotions, and thoughts stem from this fundamental motivation for belonging, and those who lack a sense of belonging face serious deficiencies that can lead to various adverse effects (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). As John Donne famously stated, "No [person] is an island" (Donne & Raspa, 1987).

Baumeister & Leary further note that while many psychologists have theorized about belonging, not all of them have predicted that this need necessitates a combination of frequent interaction and ongoing care. They continue by stating that to achieve a sense of belonging, one must believe that the other party cares about their well-being, likes or loves them, and ideally, that this feeling is mutual.

Baumeister & Leary also reviewed previous studies and found that people can form cooperative and friendly relationships even with former competitors, adversaries, or those with prejudices against them. People generally tend to seek connections, and the motivation for social bonds and belonging can overcome established intergroup biases and stereotypes. Furthermore, the specific nature of these relationships may sometimes be less important than simply having close interpersonal connections, which are essential for personal well-being. A lack of close social ties is strongly associated with unhappiness, depression, and other forms of distress.

Their article then explores the relationship between the loss of belonging and both physical and mental health. It highlights that loneliness is linked to weakened immune function, particularly a decrease in natural killer cell activity and elevated cortisol levels. Psychologically, children who experience rejection have a higher incidence of psychopathology compared to healthy children. In psychiatric hospitals, admission rates are highest among divorced and separated individuals, followed by single people, and lowest among married individuals. The likelihood of developing a psychiatric disorder is at least three times higher for divorced individuals compared to married ones. The article also uses the example of soldiers, noting that veterans with strong social support networks are significantly less likely to develop post-traumatic stress disorder than those with weaker social support (Baumeister & Leary, 1995).

What happens when a person falls into a state of utter despair, helplessness, and brokenness? The most extreme answer may be death and suicide. The importance of belonging is so profound that it can determine whether someone chooses to continue living. As the discussion on mental health progresses, Baumeister & Leary's article suggests that suicide can be interpreted as a consequence of social integration failure, with individuals lacking social relationships being at a higher risk of suicide (1995). The hypothesis of social support is directly related to the need for belonging because social support is built upon interpersonal relationships. When discussing social support, some might assume that the only benefit it provides comes from tangible, material assistance gained through social networks. However, this is not the case. While both tangible help and emotional companionship are valuable, companionship may be even more critical, particularly concerning mental health, social satisfaction, and stress management (Baumeister & Leary, 1995).

At the beginning of their article, Baumeister & Leary outlined the two conditions necessary to fulfill the need for belonging: first, frequent and emotionally pleasant interactions with a few stable individuals, and second, interactions occurring within a relatively stable context that prioritizes both parties' emotional well-being. They then explored the consequences of meeting the second condition while lacking the first.

They used the example of non-custodial divorced parents and their children. A lack of interaction and contact with their children often leaves these parents feeling deeply distressed. Children who have the freedom to interact with their non-custodial parent tend to experience less psychological trauma following their parents' divorce. Most children also express a desire to maintain contact with their non-custodial parent and often feel that their level of interaction is insufficient. When these children lose contact with their non-custodial parent, in a certain sense, their connection is severed, even though most still believe that their bond persists (Baumeister & Leary, 1995).

Next, they examined the consequences of fulfilling the first condition but lacking the second. Loneliness is not merely a longing for companionship; it is largely unrelated to the quantity of social interactions a person has. Rather than seeking numerous brief or superficial encounters, people desire deeper, more intimate relationships. They used the example of sex workers, who sometimes describe their work as an opportunity to meet different interesting people, unlike monotonous jobs. If mere intimate interactions were enough to satisfy social needs, this profession would bring great happiness. However, in reality, sex workers often find these interactions unsatisfactory and instead seek and cultivate lasting emotional bonds with others. The desire for sustained relationships can easily lead to attachment toward clients and other men (Baumeister & Leary, 1995).

In the study by Allen et al. (2021), a framework for understanding belongingness was proposed, consisting of four interrelated components. These components stem from and are supported by the systems in which individuals reside: the capacity for belonging, opportunities for belonging, motivation for belonging, and the perception of belonging.

The first component is *capacity*, which refers to the ability to form connections and experience a sense of belonging. A lack of social competence, in turn, can lead to limitations in social relationships and their quality. The second component is *opportunity for belonging*, referring to the availability of groups, people, places, time, and space that enable belongingness to occur. If opportunities for connection are lacking, then having the capacity to belong is meaningless.

The third component is *motivation*, which pertains to the fundamental need to be accepted by others, seek social interactions, and establish connections. A lack of motivation may, in part, stem from repeated experiences of rejection and frustration in relationships, competence, and autonomy. However, even in the most distressing circumstances, individuals may still feel driven to seek connection with others (Allen et al., 2021).

The fourth component is *perception*, which relates to the subjective experience and cognition of belongingness. Even if an individual possesses the necessary skills, opportunities, and motivation for belonging, they may still feel dissatisfied. Most people, consciously or unconsciously, assess whether they fit in with those around them. Someone who has experienced repeated rejection and exclusion is likely to question their sense of belonging or seek it through alternative means (Allen et al., 2021).

Another concept closely associated with the need for belonging is *relationship satisfaction*. A study by Verhagen et al. (2018) examined the relationship between these two factors. They found that an individual's level of belongingness needs, whether high or low, is not directly linked to well-being indicators. However, when relationship satisfaction is poor, both high and low belongingness needs can negatively impact a person's well-being. The most adverse outcomes are observed

in individuals with a high need for belonging but low relationship satisfaction. Conversely, as long as they have fulfilling interpersonal relationships, a high need for belonging does not necessarily lead to negative effects. The reduction in well-being is not caused by the need itself but by the *unmet* need (Verhagen et al., 2018).

One of the most significant sources of strong interpersonal relationships is *friendship*, which plays a vital role in fostering a sense of belonging. Taniguchi (2015) explored the relationship between close friendships and well-being. Many positive aspects of friendship—such as understanding, similarity, sincerity, mutual acceptance, helping behaviors, and self-disclosure—are positively correlated with well-being. The quality of friendships also has a significant impact on an individual's life. Receiving support in times of need is the most likely factor to enhance well-being (Taniguchi, 2015). Furthermore, the study suggested that friendships are linked to *self-acceptance* and *positive self-evaluation*. A sense of self-importance comes from both giving and receiving friendship, and gaining a sense of uniqueness and self-worth through friendship is crucial. Since self-worth is positively correlated with well-being, fostering meaningful friendships contributes significantly to a person's happiness (Taniguchi, 2015).

In their study on social support, Feeney & Collins (2014) emphasized that most research on interpersonal relationships and health has focused on how relationships play a crucial role in times of stress or adversity. However, they shifted the focus to how social support *promotes well-being and thriving* even in the absence of specific stressors. Their study introduced an essential concept: *thriving*, which can be conceptualized as comprising five key aspects of personal well-being. (1) *Hedonic well-being*: The perception of life satisfaction, (2) *Eudaimonic well-being*: Personal growth, the realization of one's potential, the accumulation of life wisdom, and the pursuit of meaningful goals, (3) *Psychological well-being*: Positive self-regard, self-acceptance, and a constructive belief system, (4) *Social well-being*: Deep and intimate relationships, trust in others, and a sense of belonging, (5) *Physical well-being*: Good physical health and the absence of illness.

Theoretically, individuals can achieve optimal thriving only when they function well in both *adverse* and *opportunistic* situations. Well-functioning intimate relationships and social support are the foundation of thriving. Even in the absence of adversity, social support is crucial for growth and well-being. To fully thrive, individuals must embrace life and its opportunities.

This perspective is based on *attachment theory*, particularly the concept of *secure attachment*, which supports autonomy and exploration outside of a relationship (Feeney & Collins, 2014). With a secure attachment, individuals can explore, create, and realize their potential while knowing they have a safe base to return to for comfort and support when facing setbacks. In such circumstances, a supportive partner can affirm their loved one's goals, dreams, and aspirations, encouraging them to challenge themselves and seize opportunities. A supporter may

also recognize unique qualities in the individual that others have overlooked, thereby fostering personal growth. Those receiving support should experience an increase in *self-acceptance*, *self-efficacy*, and *perceived control* over their lives. Responsive support is positively correlated with a recipient's ability to achieve their goals, self-confidence, and self-esteem. Having a close companion can make the world feel less intimidating (Feeney & Collins, 2014).

Feeney & Collins further pointed out that most research on social support and well-being has focused on the *benefits* received by the support recipient. However, optimal well-being theories also acknowledge the significance of *giving* support. As part of the *thriving framework*, providing support is just as essential for the well-being and flourishing of the *provider*. Those who offer effective support and see their efforts succeed, while feeling appreciated, experience benefits such as positive emotions and a sense of purpose in life. Supporting loved ones enhances self-esteem, strengthens social connections, and fosters satisfying, trusting, and close relationships (Feeney & Collins, 2014).

However, *non-reciprocal support* should also be considered. In Hupcey's (1998) study, negative aspects of social support were highlighted, with non-reciprocal support being one of them. The study identified two types of non-reciprocal support. The first occurs when an individual feels that they provide more support than they receive, which can lead to exhaustion and imbalance. The second occurs when someone receives significantly more support than they give, which can also have negative consequences. The recipient may feel pressured or undeserving, leading them to either avoid seeking support or refuse it altogether (Hupcey, 1998).

The previous literature review explored various aspects of the significance of belongingness as a fundamental human need. This section will focus on the negative impacts of a lack of belongingness on individual well-being.

Leary (1990) discusses the core propositions of the social exclusion theory and examines the relationships between social exclusion and social anxiety, jealousy, loneliness, and depression. He proposes three fundamental principles of the theory. The first is that humans have a basic motivation to avoid being excluded from important groups. However, people do not simply seek to coexist with others indiscriminately. Instead, they selectively strive to gain and maintain membership in their chosen family, professional, peer, and social groups (Leary, 1990). The second proposition is that many human social behaviors reflect efforts to enhance one's social status. Many seemingly different interpersonal behaviors serve the same function of promoting inclusion and avoiding exclusion. The third proposition states that perceiving one's level of inclusion within an important group as lower than expected leads to negative emotions (Leary, 1990).

Social anxiety, jealousy, loneliness, and depression are common emotional responses triggered by low inclusion status or social rejection. Notably, Leary suggests that individuals do not evaluate their inclusion status based solely on their

actual position within a group or relationship. Instead, they assess their potential likelihood of being included or excluded, which can lead to social anxiety. The connection between jealousy and social exclusion is direct—jealousy arises when an individual perceives a valuable relationship as being threatened by someone else. Jealousy is typically characterized by diffuse emotional distress, including anxiety, depression, and anger, with the core cause being the fear of exclusion. Loneliness reflects an individual's subjective perception of a lack of social relationships, along with the belief that their inclusion status in relationships is lower than expected. Depression can be influenced by various social and non-social factors, but being excluded from a group is undoubtedly one of them (Leary, 1990).

Furthermore, these emotional responses often co-occur—socially anxious individuals are also likely to feel lonely and depressed; jealous individuals often experience anxiety and loneliness; and lonely individuals are typically both anxious and depressed. These reactions are also negatively correlated with self-esteem. From the perspective of social exclusion theory, almost all events that enhance self-esteem also increase an individual's likelihood of being included, and vice versa. Leary further argues that people engage in self-esteem maintenance behaviors not simply for the sake of self-esteem itself, but to reduce the risk of being ignored or rejected (Leary, 1990).

In their study, Wickramaratne et al. (2022) reviewed numerous past research articles examining the relationship between social support and mental health. Their findings indicate a strong correlation between the two across various aspects of life. The level of perceived support in the workplace is associated with the severity of depressive symptoms, and social support has also been found to serve as a "buffer" in mitigating the relationship between involuntary unemployment and depression. Among international students, there is a short-term reciprocal relationship between social support and depressive symptoms. Additionally, insufficient family support has been identified as a predictor of substance use (Wickramaratne et al., 2022).

Their study also collected multiple articles on the relationship between social support and depression during pregnancy and postpartum. Women in this stage of life are particularly vulnerable, as they may experience a range of social and psychological stressors. Postpartum depression in both partners has been linked to inadequate social support during pregnancy and frequent conflicts (Wickramaratne et al., 2022).

Recent studies have examined the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and its aftermath on university students' sense of belonging, academic stress, loneliness, social connectedness, and life satisfaction. Dost (2025) demonstrated that pandemic-related stress adversely affected both the campus community and degree-specific belonging. Loneliness emerged as a critical mediator, particularly among international students and male students. Academic anxiety exacerbated feelings of isolation and undermined self-efficacy, effects that were especially

pronounced in female undergraduates. Overall, undergraduates appeared more vulnerable to pandemic-induced declines in belonging, whereas graduate students' academic performance and social relationships were more severely impacted by loneliness. Dost (2025) noted that the unprecedented stressors introduced in 2019 profoundly disrupted students' academic and social experiences, thereby weakening their sense of belonging and impeding the formation of academic and social networks. During the pandemic, many students reported feeling isolated and disconnected from their academic communities, with markedly reduced participation in departmental, collegiate, or institutional activities. Decreased self-efficacy further heightened anxiety and depressive symptoms, negatively affecting both academic outcomes and overall well-being. The detrimental impact of pandemic stress on university belonging was significant across undergraduates, international students, and female students, all of whom reported feeling disconnected from peers and the broader campus environment. More than graduates, undergraduates relied heavily on institutional support and peer networks to adapt successfully to their studies. Moreover, pandemic stress exerted a significant negative effect on academic anxiety across all student groups—undergraduate, graduate, male, female, domestic, and international (Dost, 2025). Collectively, these factors markedly undermined students' sense of belonging.

Avcı (2023) conducted a study at a Turkish university to adapt and validate the University Belonging Questionnaire. The author hypothesized that students with stronger belonging would report higher levels of social connectedness, which in turn would be associated with greater life satisfaction. Consistent with expectations, significant positive correlations were found among belonging, social connectedness, and life satisfaction. Social connectedness proved essential for students' well-being, and during the pandemic, students who actively fostered social ties beyond the confines of their institutions mitigated declines in their university belonging. The pandemic also had far-reaching effects on students' living conditions, learning opportunities, and resource availability, all of which influenced their sense of belonging (Avcı, 2023).

Together, these two studies (Avcı, 2023; Dost, 2025) illustrate how, under conditions of heightened isolation and reduced interpersonal interaction during and after the pandemic, the impact of belonging on life satisfaction and academic outcomes was magnified—further underscoring the critical importance of belongingness in interpersonal and educational contexts.

This literature review explores various aspects of belongingness and its related theories, covering foundational and authoritative perspectives on belongingness theory, relationship satisfaction, social support theory, and the connection between belongingness and mental health. It also explored belongingness in the Post-COVID-19 university context. These discussions provide a solid theoretical foundation for the subsequent empirical research in this study.

Belongingness theory posits that the need for belonging is one of the most fundamental intrinsic human needs. After fulfilling basic physiological (food, water) and safety needs, the drive for belonging becomes one of the most powerful motivators of human behavior. The formation of friendships, social relationships, group affiliations, the desire for intimate partners, and the pursuit of family life all stem from this fundamental drive.

A strong sense of belonging helps individuals endure adversity and, in non-adverse conditions, allows them to explore their potential and pursue personal aspirations, ultimately leading to a flourishing life. In relationships, both giving and receiving support are equally important and beneficial for personal growth. An ideal relationship is built on reciprocity and mutual support.

Individuals with a strong perception of social/ personal support tend to exhibit greater self-acceptance, confidence, and higher self-esteem. Conversely, a lack of belongingness and interpersonal support can lead to various negative mental health outcomes, ranging from anxiety, loneliness, depression, and low self-esteem to feelings of inferiority, jealousy, and anger.

There are several objectives in this current study is (1) quantify belongingness levels in social and personal support across diverse demographic groups, (2) examine the relationship between belongingness and self-esteem, (3) the study analyzes the impact of belongingness on perceived social and interpersonal support. The research questions of this study are: (1) To what extent is belongingness positively correlated with self-esteem in my sample population?, (2) how well does belongingness predict perceived social and interpersonal support?, (3) what are the average belongingness scores among my sample population? The hypothesis of this study is that participants belongingness scores will be positively correlated with and predict (in a simple linear regression) their perceived social and personal support and self-esteem.

METHOD

Participants

The participants for this research were comprised of Wenzhou-Kean University students, including domestic and international students, all aged above 18 and from different years of study and majors. A total of 179 students participated in the study. Convenience sampling was employed. Recruitment occurred via an online survey flyer distributed through WeChat groups and the WKU SONA (Psychology Research Participation System) website. Additional participants included architecture majors from a single classroom and graduate students in psychology. Participation was entirely voluntary, and no payment or other incentives were provided. Research participants received the informed consent statement and agreed to these terms before they started the survey. In addition, the participants had the right to withdraw from the survey when they felt so. The survey has been approved by the

ethics committee; the IRB number of this study is WKUIRB2025-064. The survey took participants less than 10 minutes.

Participants were recruited via an online survey flyer, distributed through WeChat groups and campus social networks. The flyer contained a link directing participants to the Qualtrics survey. Participation was completely voluntary and anonymous.

Materials & Procedure

The study used an online survey composed of 3 different existing scales of the Social Support Scale (SSS) and Need to Belong Scale (NTBS) (Leary, 2017; Santiago et al., 2023; Sarason et al., 1983), accessible at any time and from any location. The survey included 24 closed-ended multiple-choice questions that employed a 5-point Likert-scale items measuring perceived belongingness, social/ personal support, and self-esteem.

The primary independent variable was belongingness, which was operationalized as the composite score across the 24 survey items, representing each participant's overall level of perceived belonging. Two dependent variables (DV) were examined. The first DV was Perceived Social/ Personal Support, which reflected how much help and advice participants felt they could receive in social, personal, and family contexts. The second DV was Self-Esteem – indicating participants' global sense of self-worth as embedded in their relationships.

Ethical Considerations

This study involved only adult university student participants and consisted of an online survey. The survey questions were free of technical jargon and were easy to understand for participants who are unfamiliar with the field of psychology. The survey took no more than 10 minutes to complete. Given the nature of this study, there were minimal known or potential risks to the participants. The survey was non-invasive and did not involve any physical contact or intervention procedures. The participants were able to complete the survey at a time that was convenient to them and in their own environment. This further minimized potential discomfort or anxiety.

In addition, the survey was anonymous, and the data gathered were strictly confidential. This further reduced any potential risks to the participants, and their privacy and confidentiality were protected. The participants were free to leave the study at any time they chose, and this further reduced any concerns. It involved minimal risk to the participants and strictly adhered to ethical guidelines for research involving human subjects.

Data Analysis and Scoring Procedures

Survey data were exported from Qualtrics and analyzed using SPSS Version 30.0.0. Descriptive statistics (means, standard deviations, and frequencies) were

computed to summarize the sample characteristics and overall survey responses. The primary focus was to examine the relationship between belongingness and measures of social and personal support through Pearson correlation and multiple regression analyses.

The 5-point Likert scale ranged from Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree, where agreement showed a higher level of belongingness and social/ personal support. Several question items were scored reversely to account for response bias, for example the items “No one I know would throw a birthday party for me.” and “I think that my friends feel that I’m not very good at helping them solve their problems.” were phrased in a manner where agreement shows a lower level of belongingness and social/ personal support. These items, along with other similarly constructed items, were inverse-scored before analyzing.

RESULTS

Scale Reliability and Descriptive Statistics

The hypothesis of this study was that participants’ belongingness scores would be positively correlated with and predict (in a simple linear regression) their perceived social and personal support and self-esteem. The 24-item composite belongingness scale demonstrated acceptable internal consistency (Cronbach’s $\alpha = .768$). According to conventional psychometric guidelines, an $\alpha \geq .70$ is considered acceptable for research purposes, indicating that the questionnaire items consistently measure the same underlying construct (George & Mallery, 2003). Moreover, given the substantial number of items in the scale, an $\alpha \geq .70$ demonstrates good inter-item homogeneity without suggesting redundancy. Descriptive statistics for the key variables are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics for Belongingness, Self-Esteem, and Social/ Personal Support

Variable	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Belongingness	179	3.34	0.42
Self-Esteem	179	3.49	0.62
Social Support	179	3.64	0.72
Belongingness	179	3.34	0.42

The X in this study was the composite Belongingness score, which was 3.34; the Ys in this study were Perceived Social/ Personal Support, which was 3.64, and Self-Esteem, which was 3.49. The standard deviation for the belongingness score was 0.42, which tells us that most participants’ scores fell within about ± 0.42 points of the mean. The standard deviation for Self-Esteem and Social/ Personal Support was 0.62 and 0.72, which tells us that most participants’ scores fell within about $\pm 0.62/0.72$ points of the mean. The M (Mediator) of this study was none; this study did not test any intervening variable between belongingness (X) and the outcomes (Y). The frequencies were 179, all “Yes” to consent, and 100% completion rate

among those who began the survey; the responses with “No” to consent and those who didn’t fully complete the survey were being cleaned out.

Correlational Analyses

Pearson correlations were computed to examine the relationships between the composite belongingness score, self-esteem, and social/ personal support. Belongingness and Self-Esteem: $r(177) = .650, p < .001$

Belongingness and Social/ personal Support: $r(177) = .785, p < .001$

These results indicate a strong, positive association between belongingness and perceived social/ personal support, and a moderate, positive association between belongingness and self-esteem. Results supported the hypothesis of this study.

Regression Analyses

Two simple linear regression models tested how well belongingness predicts (a) social/ personal support and (b) self-esteem.

(a) Predicting Social/ Personal Support

$R^2 = .616, F(1, 177) = 284.13, p < .001$

$\beta = 1.345, SE = 0.080, t(177) = 16.81, p < .001$

Interpretation: Belongingness explained 61.6% of the variance in social/ personal support. A one-unit increase in belongingness was associated with a 1.345-point increase in social/ personal support (on a 1–5 scale). Results supported the hypothesis of this study.

(b) Predicting Self-Esteem

$R^2 = .423, F(1, 177) = 129.79, p < .001$

$\beta = 0.955, SE = 0.084, t(177) = 11.37, p < .001$

Interpretation: Belongingness accounted for 42.3% of the variance in self-esteem. A one-unit rise in belongingness corresponded to a 0.955-point increase in self-esteem. Results supported the hypothesis of this study.

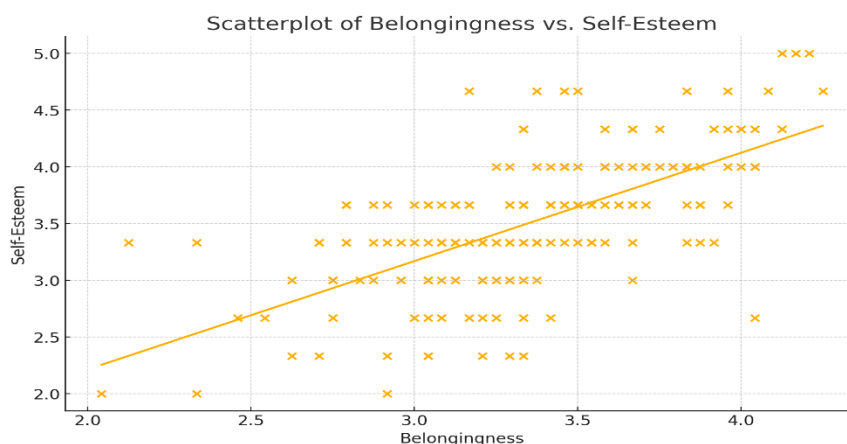


Figure 1. Scatterplot of Belongingness and Self-Esteem (N = 179).

The solid line shows the linear regression fit: $\text{Self-Esteem} = 0.955 \times \text{Belongingness} + 0.304$, $R^2 = 0.423$, $p < .001$.*

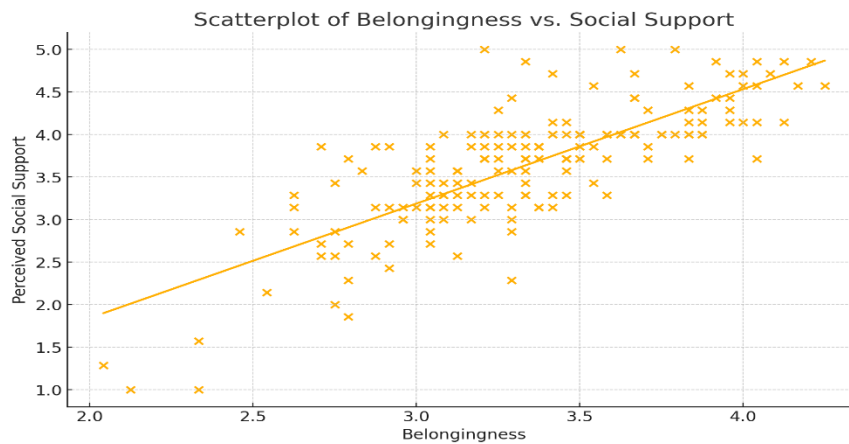


Figure 2. Scatterplot of Belongingness and Perceived Social/Personal Support (N = 179).

The solid line shows the linear regression fit: $\text{Social Support} = 1.345 \times \text{Belongingness} - 0.848$, $R^2 = 0.616$, $p < .001$.

Summary of Findings:

The results supported the hypothesis of this study, which is that higher feelings of belongingness not only co-occur with greater social/ personal support (correlation) but also significantly predict increases in support and self-esteem (regression). These findings underscore the central role of belongingness in shaping social and personal relationships.

DISCUSSION

General Conclusions

This study used an online survey as the method and found that belongingness ($\alpha = .768$) was strongly associated with social and personal support ($r = .785$, $p < .001$) and moderately associated with self-esteem ($r = .650$, $p < .001$). Belongingness accounted for 61.6% of the variance in relationship support and 42.3% of the variance in self-esteem. These findings align with the study's original objectives to examine the links between belongingness, social and personal support, and self-esteem. They support Maslow's assertion that belongingness and interpersonal connection constitute a core human need, the frustration of which underlies many psychological disorders (Maslow, 1943). They also resonate with Fromm's existential insights into human connectedness (Fromm, 1992).

Moreover, the results corroborate Baumeister and Leary's hypothesis that social affiliation and belongingness promote emotional and psychological well-being (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). They further bolster Feeney and Collins's thriving framework (2014), particularly its components of psychological well-being—positive self-regard, self-acceptance, and a constructive belief

system—and social well-being—deep, intimate relationships, trust in others, and a sense of belonging. As Feeney and Collins note, well-functioning intimate relationships and robust social support form the foundation of human thriving (Feeney & Collins, 2014). In this study, higher levels of belongingness were concomitant with greater relationship support, underscoring the bidirectional nature of these constructs.

Limitations

The use of convenience sampling may limit the generalizability of these findings to other populations. Reliance on self-report measures introduced the potential for common-method bias and social desirability effects. Furthermore, data were collected at a single university, so cultural, environmental, and institutional factors unique to that setting may have influenced the results.

Because this study didn't collect demographic information (e.g., gender, academic major, year), we were unable to describe the participants' compositions or produce demographic charts. This will be addressed in future research.

Implications For Future Research

Based on the explorations and findings of this study, several recommendations can inform future research. Subsequent studies should consider employing longitudinal experimental designs to track changes in belongingness, social/interpersonal support, and self-esteem over time, thereby allowing for the examination of causal relationships and their stability. Qualitative supplements, such as in-depth interviews focused on specific groups, could also yield richer insights into individuals' lived experiences and perceptions, facilitating a deeper exploration of the nuanced and complex interplay between belongingness and interpersonal relationships. Finally, researchers should aim for more diverse sampling frames, including non-student populations, individuals from varied cultural backgrounds, and those with different types of psychological conditions (e.g., autism spectrum disorders).

Concluding Remarks

By quantifying belongingness and demonstrating its robust associations with both social/ personal support and self-esteem, this study reinforced belongingness as a cornerstone of social and personal well-being. It provided empirical data that enhances psychological models of belongingness and offered a foundation for future interventions aimed at fostering inclusivity and support within social and interpersonal contexts. Given the growing prevalence of social isolation and weakening individual connections in recent years, further exploration of belongingness and its impact on personal health is both timely and relevant.

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