



# Multiple Paths to Belonging That We Should Study Together

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## Abstract

We propose a broadened conceptualization of what it means to belong by reviewing evidence that there is more than one way to achieve a sense of belonging. We suggest four paths—a communal-relationship path, a general-approration path, a group-membership path, and a minor-sociability path—and review some evidence for the existence of each. We call for researchers to recognize that multiple paths to belonging exist and to study whether and how the paths combine and interact to influence people’s sense of belonging. Choosing the communal-relationship path and the general-approration path as an example, we highlight times when these paths may (a) mesh well and produce additive boosts to a person’s sense of belonging, (b) substitute for one another, and (c) conflict with one another and cause ambivalence. We further call for the development of refined measures of the need to belong and of having a sense of achieved belonging as well as new measures of striving to achieve belonging through specific paths. We suggest that broadening the conceptualization of belonging will help integrate existing literature and generate future research.

## Keywords

belonging, motivation, goals, responsiveness, self-presentation

Charlotte’s family has moved to a new state where she will start her junior year in high school knowing no one. She wants to fit in, to connect, and to feel she belongs and is accepted. She must start from scratch. Early in the school year, Charlotte is assigned to work on an English project with three other students. She begins meeting regularly after school with the other students to get the assignments done. It turns out that two of the students are planning a surprise birthday party for the third student. Charlotte offers to help make the food and works hard to make the event special. All are grateful. Soon they support her as well and throw her a birthday party. They now include Charlotte in their other activities and actively ask for her advice and support; likewise, Charlotte invites them to new activities and seeks and receives advice and support from them as she needs it. Now Charlotte has three good friends who understand her, accept her, and care for her (and vice versa). This boosts Charlotte’s sense of belonging.

Charlotte also has long been involved in swimming—a sport at which she excels. Early in the year, she tries out and is selected for the varsity swim team. Word

spreads through the school that her times outpace those of any other team member. With Charlotte on the team, the team experiences an unbroken string of wins that are reported in the community newspaper along with pictures of and praise for Charlotte. She is elected swim team captain for her senior year. The praise Charlotte receives for her swimming also heightens her sense of belonging.

Most students at Charlotte’s school share her racial, religious, and socioeconomic background. Because of this, Charlottes generally feels as if she fits in with the overall population of students. Being a student at the school becomes part of her identity. She also feels as if she fits in particularly well with the swim team. All members are athletic, and they participate in team

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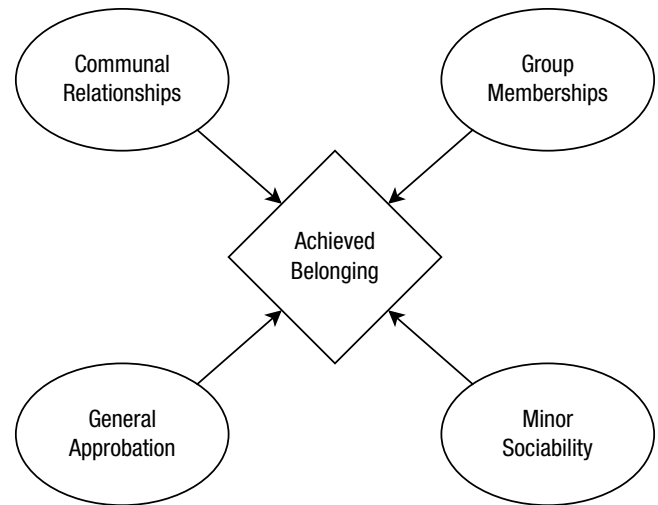
fund-raisers and enjoy group parties together. She feels especially similar to this subgroup, and they accept her and include her in activities. Being similar to and feeling accepted by groups big and small increases her sense of belonging.

Finally, as Charlotte has settled into the school she interacts daily in simple, friendly ways with many others whom she would describe as mere acquaintances. She greets the bus driver with a simple but warm hello when she boards the bus; he returns the greeting. When she gets off the bus she waves to the school security officer and they comment on the weather to one another. She makes eye contact with and smiles pleasantly at students and teachers in the school. They return the gestures. These regular, simple, daily interactions also make Charlotte feel she belongs.

When Charlotte first moved to town she felt a need to belong. By the end of the year that pressing need has receded because Charlotte does, indeed, feel she belongs. She met her initial need in at least four distinct ways. With the small group of students in her English class, Charlotte built mutually noncontingently responsive friendships. In this way, she acquired a social network of people with whom to give support and from whom to receive support and engage in mutually enjoyable activities, leading Charlotte to feel acceptance and belonging. Through her accomplishments in swimming, Charlotte also has acquired the praise and approbation of a large number of people in her school and even the wider local community. This boosts her confidence that she is a valued part of the community. Being a part of groups by virtue of being similar to and accepted by members of those groups also boosts her sense of belonging. Even being generally sociable and friendly in simple, seemingly superficial interactions with people whom she does not know well gives her a sense that her school and community accept her and, again, she fits in. For Charlotte, these four means of building a sense of belonging are additive and do not interfere with one another. Each has raised her sense of belonging. These four paths to achieving a sense of belonging are depicted in Figure 1.

### There Is More Than One Way to Fulfill the Need to Belong

More than 2 decades ago Baumeister and Leary (1995) published a landmark article asserting people have a fundamental need to belong. Attachment theorists (Bowlby, 1973, 1988; Carvallo & Gabriel, 2006), social baseline theorists (Beckes & Coan, 2011), self-determination theorists (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Ryan & Deci, 2000), and personality theorists (McClelland, 1985) all have noted and demonstrated this need as well. Attachment theorists discuss an



**Fig. 1.** Four paths to achieving belonging. Additional paths may exist. No assumptions are made that they are equally effective in achieving a sense of belonging either in the moment or over the longer term.

innate tendency for infants to attach to caregivers (and vice versa); social baseline theorists discuss humans (and members of many other species) being built to connect and to cooperate with one another; self-determination theorists postulate a universal need for relatedness; and personality theorists have focused on individual differences in this need. All agree that the need to belong is a central feature of the human experience.

Broadly, a sense of belonging involves feeling that one is accepted and valued by other people. One belongs when one believes others are (or would be) happy to include one as a valued part of those others' social worlds. We concur with many other scholars in believing that humans are social creatures built to form bonds with and to cooperate with one another as well as in believing that when a sense of belonging is missing or threatened, humans strive to belong. Self-esteem is considered by many to be an index of a sense of belonging—a sociometer (Leary & Baumeister, 2000; MacDonald & Leary, 2013)—and we agree that it is. So too are more positive (and less negative) emotional states and a sense of well-being markers of feeling that one fits in and belongs. Negative affect, in particular, has often been used as a marker of felt rejection (Williams & Nida, 2011), and drops in self-esteem and rises in negative affect often co-occur and signal felt rejection and a lack of belonging (Riva, Wirth, & Williams, 2011; Williams & Nida, 2011).<sup>1</sup>

Despite the fact that the need to belong cuts across psychological perspectives and theories, it was striking to us that pockets of research regarding how people strive to and actually achieve boosts to their senses of belonging, as indexed in a variety of ways, exist in

almost entirely independent literatures. Further, not all of this work is overtly conceptualized as relating to “belonging.” We think multiple paths to belonging should be explicitly recognized, the relevant studies should be integrated, and ways in which the paths combine and interact should be explicated.

We begin by defining four paths in more detail. We also briefly review some evidence from several different studies to illustrate that, indeed, more than one way to achieve a sense of belonging exists and to point out that distinct ways of belonging have largely been studied independently of one another. We then discuss just two paths (the communal-relationship and general-approbation paths) in further detail to illustrate the importance of integration, although any two paths might have been selected for this purpose. Finally, we conclude with a discussion of how the present theorizing has a bearing on measurement concerns and existing theories regarding belonging.

### ***The communal-relationship path***

Most writing that explicitly focuses on the need to belong—including the seminal Baumeister and Leary (1995) article—emphasizes the development of close, communal relationships characterized by secure attachment as key to feeling a sense of belonging (see Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007).<sup>2</sup> In fact, existing measures of the need to belong include items that tap into the desire for such relationships: “I need to feel that there are people I can turn to in times of need” and “Being apart from my friends for long periods of time does not bother me” (reverse-scored; Leary, Kelly, Cottrell, & Schreindorfer, 2013). So too do existing measures of achieved belonging include items indicating the role of such relationships: “These days, I am fortunate to have many caring and supportive friends” and “These days, I feel that there are people I can turn to in times of need” (Van Orden, Cukrowicz, Witte, & Joiner, 2012) or “I have close bonds with family and friends” and “I feel as if people do not care about me” (reverse-scored; Malone, Pillow, & Osman, 2012). These types of statements appear alongside items that simply indicate the respondents’ general sense of striving to belong (e.g., “I have a strong ‘need to belong’”; Leary et al., 2013) or of having achieved belonging (e.g., “I feel like I belong”; Van Orden et al., 2012).

Communal relationships require initiating and building bonds over time within which one tracks the other’s welfare (Clark, Mills, & Corcoran, 1989; Clark, Mills, & Powell, 1986) and acts responsively toward partners when addressable needs, desires, or special opportunities to recognize the other arise and one seeks responsiveness from one’s partner under the same circumstances

(Reis, 2012; Reis & Clark, 2013). One also engages in mutual activities that enhance each person’s enjoyment of life (Boothby, Smith, Clark, & Bargh, 2017). Engaging in mutual responsiveness requires a drop in self-protection (i.e., a drop in protecting oneself from possible social rejection should a partner not share an interest in intimacy), an increase of trust in partners, a willingness to be vulnerable with partners, and a willingness to accept responsiveness from partners (Clark, Beck, & Aragón, 2018)—or, in other words, to accept the risks involved in dependence (Murray, Holmes, & Collins, 2006). We call this the *communal-relationship path* to belonging.

These kinds of relationships take time and effort, but once established, evidence suggests that they do afford a sustained sense of belonging. As mentioned earlier, most researchers, ourselves included, interpret a person’s positive affective state and, especially, a person’s high self-esteem, as evidence consistent with the notion that the person is feeling accepted and that the person belongs (Leary & Baumeister, 2000; Leary, Tambor, Terdal, & Downs, 1995).<sup>3</sup> There is a great deal of correlational evidence that having close, communal relationships is positively linked both with better affect and higher self-esteem (e.g., Erol & Orth, 2017; Sasikala & Cecil, 2016; Shaver, Mikulincer, Sahdra, & Gross, 2016 and many other studies) as well as with higher life satisfaction and better physical and mental health (Holt-Lunstad, Smith, & Layton, 2010). In fact, a recent meta-analysis found consistent evidence that a communal motivation is associated with better subjective personal well-being (Le, Impett, Lemay, Muise, & Tskhay, 2018).

Experimental evidence also exists supporting the idea that thinking about close, secure relationships and/or taking action to form or to maintain such relationships leads to improvement in affect and self-esteem. Relationship researchers, for instance, have found that the noncontingent give and take that occurs within well-functioning communal relationships boosts people’s self-evaluations. For example, in one study, some participants were led to desire a communal relationship with a confederate and then given a chance to provide noncontingent help to the other person or not; participants who were able to help the confederate—as opposed to not being able to help—reported increases in positive self-evaluations (Williamson & Clark, 1989). Spending money on others has also been shown to boost the spender’s affect (Dunn, Aknin, & Norton, 2014). In another study, romantic couples discussed the personal goals of one member of the couple (the support recipient). When their partner provided responsive support—as opposed to unresponsive support—the self-esteem of the support recipient increased (B. C. Feeney, 2004). This pattern of results—responsive exchanges of support within the context of close (or

desired close) relationships increasing self-esteem—has been replicated in several studies (B. C. Feeney & Thrush, 2010; Gable & Reis, 2010). In addition, studies in which participants are experimentally induced to think of their relationships characterized by secure attachment (or not) show that those who think about secure relationships experience increases in positive affect (Rowe & Cernelley, 2003) and report higher self-esteem (Cernelley & Rowe, 2007; Gillath, Selcuk, & Shaver, 2008). Considered together, the correlational and experimental evidence coalesce on the conclusion that close, communal relationships boost feelings of acceptance and belonging as indexed by self-esteem and positive affect.

### ***The general-approbation path***

Meanwhile, other studies focus on people achieving acceptance and validation in a second, conceptually distinct way. These efforts involve people gaining others' admiration through achieving status and wider general approbation, typically without revealing vulnerabilities and without establishing communal relationships. In fact, some recent theorizing and some empirical work regarding self-regard as a hierometer support this notion (Anderson, Hildreth, & Howland, 2015; Mahadevan, Gregg, & Sedikides, 2018).<sup>4</sup> These strategies include striving for accomplishment; making it known that one is associated with successful, popular, or attractive other people or institutions to bask in their reflected glory; and avoiding associations with embarrassing others or institutions to avoid negative reflection (Cialdini et al., 1976). People also may gain approbation by joining or aiming to be elected to prestigious groups (Wright & Forsyth, 1997), advertising their accomplishments (Dalsky, 2011, but only for the Americans in the sample), acquiring materialistic goods (Jiang, Zhang, Ke, Hawk, & Qiu, 2015), or outperforming others (Festinger, 1954; Ratliff & Oishi, 2013; Wills, 1981). There are many such strategies. We suggest that achieving general approbation—regardless of the method—contributes to feeling accepted by others and that it heightens the sense that one belongs. Achieving a sense of belonging or acceptance in this way is not dependent on the establishment of communal relationships. We call this the *general-approbation path* to belonging.

There is much correlational evidence that a sense that one does not belong or fit in<sup>5</sup> is associated with acquiring material goods (Braun & Wicklund, 1989; Chang & Arkin, 2002; Kasser, Ryan, Couchman, & Sheldon, 2004; Norris, Lambert, DeWall, & Fincham, 2012; Park & John, 2011; Richins & Dawson, 1992; Solberg, Diener, & Robinson, 2004; Yurchisin & Johnson, 2004), bragging (Palmer, Ramsey, Morey, & Gentzler, 2016), seeking out relationships and connections that reflect on one

positively and avoiding those that do the opposite (Cialdini et al., 1976, Study 2), and engaging in behaviors showing that one is a good or likeable person by becoming what is known as a “people pleaser” in common language (Aube, 2008). We believe that these results are consistent with the idea that people with a heightened need for belonging seek approbation to fulfill that need (for additional evidence consistent with this belief, see Yurchisin & Johnson, 2004). In other words, people may often engage in these processes because they think it will help boost belonging.<sup>6</sup>

Consider a bit of this evidence in more detail. Some research, for instance, suggests that men who wish to “fit into” social situations (i.e., high self-monitors) are especially likely to seek out physically attractive romantic partners (Snyder, Berscheid, & Glick, 1985). Such partners may be desirable for many reasons, but given that self-monitoring predicts especially high preferences for beautiful partners, our guess is that this reflects an effort toward gaining general approbation. Sigall and Landy (1973) provide experimental evidence that men who were seen as being associated with a beautiful woman were, in fact, subsequently viewed in more positive ways by third-party judges (showing that reflection processes actually can boost general approbation). This work also includes evidence that the men were aware that this is true.<sup>7</sup>

Cialdini et al. (1976) provide further evidence that people are motivated to engage in reflection to boost self-esteem. They explored the extent to which students temporarily manipulated to feel lowered or enhanced self-esteem engaged in reflection processes relative to the performance of their university's football team. They randomly assigned participants to manipulations of self-esteem by providing feedback to participants that they had done poorly or well on a test—lowering or raising self-esteem, respectively (their Study 2)—or by having participants think of their team's failure or not—lowering self-esteem or not, respectively—before answering the study questions (their Study 3). In both studies, lowering self-esteem (relative to raising it or not manipulating it) before measuring reflection significantly increased participants' tendencies to promote positive reflection, as indicated by those participants saying “we won,” and to avoid negative reflection by saying “they lost,” when talking about their team's wins and losses. In addition, Tesser and his colleagues have written extensively about and have provided evidence for the relevance of seeking positive reflection and avoiding negative reflection in maintaining positive self-evaluations and esteem (see, e.g., Tesser, 1999; Tesser, Millar, & Moore, 2000). Notably, Tesser and colleagues also have written about and provided evidence for the relevance of seeking out positive social comparisons and avoiding negative ones in

maintaining positive self-evaluations and esteem (see, e.g., Tesser, 1999; Tesser, Millar, & Moore, 2000). We view both strategies as ones aimed at acquiring general approbation.

In research on materialism, several studies have shown that experimental inductions of self-doubt and insecurity cause measurable increases in materialism (Chang & Arkin, 2002). Acquiring material things may indicate a desire to gain approval and acceptance by others.<sup>8</sup> Other work shows that increasing participants' sense of acceptance and belonging by having them receive compliments or praise caused a subsequent reduction in overt materialistic expression (Chaplin & John, 2007). Sheldon and Kasser (2008) also report evidence that experimentally induced threats to acceptance caused greater endorsement of goals of financial success as well as attractiveness and social popularity, which are all general-approbation goals.

Taken together, these general-approbation processes seem likely to be driven, at least in part, by a low sense of belonging. Further, there is evidence that the link between higher status and higher self-esteem is independent from the link between greater social inclusion and higher self-esteem (Mahadevan et al., 2018), suggesting that the general-approbation path is unique and independent from the communal-relationship path.<sup>9</sup>

### ***The group-membership path***

Still, other studies highlight a third path to belonging: being a member of a group. The group may not be one that one intentionally joins. For example, one may feel that one belongs in a community because one shares demographic characteristics with most others in that community. The group also may be one intentionally joined because one shares attributes, interests, or identities with its members (e.g., a book club, sports team, or professional organization) or, perhaps, simply because one wishes to be associated with a particular group. We call this the *group-membership path* to belonging.

The literature supporting the existence of group membership as a path to belonging emphasizes how being a member of a group provides a valued identity (Brewer, 1991; Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, & Wetherell, 1987) and that in-group favoritism is positively associated with an enhanced sense of belonging (Hunter et al., 2017). Heightening belongingness needs increase self-reported conformity to group norms (Morrison & Matthes, 2011), strengthen members' certainty in majority opinions but not in minority opinions (Clarkson, Tormala, Rucker, & Dugan, 2013), and trigger minority opinion holders to hesitate to express those opinions (Rios & Chen, 2014, Study 4). Further, engaging in behaviors that support one's in-group and harm an out-group can lead to

enhanced feelings of belonging (Hunter et al., 2017). Some studies suggest that membership in groups may be an especially important source of a sense of belonging for males relative to females (see, e.g., Gardner & Gabriel, 2004).

One might ask whether groups afford a sense of belonging mainly because people in groups commonly have dyadic, communal relationships with members within that group. In other words, one might question whether a group-membership path and a communal-relationship path are truly distinct paths to belonging. Certainly, group members often do form communal relationships with one another, and the mutual and unconditional support derived from such within-group relationships would fall into the communal-relationship path. However, Easterbrook and Vignoles (2013) provide evidence that, controlling for such ties, feeling that one is in a group whose members are similar to oneself independently conveys a sense of belonging.

Group membership, we suspect, can afford a sense of belonging for either or both of two reasons. The first is that groups provide a social identity. One is similar to and thus fits in well with other members of a shared group. The second, and distinct, reason is that groups often provide a venue for enacting social behavior that is shared (e.g., members of a book club read and discuss a particular book, members of a sports team participate in their sport together). In other words, group membership often ensures opportunities to share activities with others and this inclusive social interaction can provide a sense of belonging. Neither a social identity nor inclusive social interaction requires a commitment to mutual care (the communal-relationship path) or the group to be one of high status or prestige (the general-approbation path). Thus, the group-membership path to belonging, as discussed here, is conceptually distinct from the communal-relationship path and the general-approbation path.

### ***The minor-sociability path***

At an even broader social level, merely connecting briefly with others (including mere acquaintances and even strangers), being pleasantly social with them, and receiving pleasant responses from them may be a fourth distinct contributor to a sense of belonging (Sandstrom & Dunn, 2013, 2014; Wesselmann, Cardoso, Slater, & Williams, 2012). Sociologist Kurth (1970) long ago dubbed these "friendly relations" as opposed to friendships. We call this the *minor-sociability path* to belonging.

Recently, evidence for minor social interactions in our day-to-day social lives boosting belonging has emerged. Consider, for example, a study by Wesselmann et al. (2012), who sent a confederate out on a college

campus and had that confederate engage in one of three actions when passing another person who was walking alone, undistracted: The confederate either made eye contact with the person, made eye contact and smiled at the person, or focused at the same level as the person's eyes but gazed past them, aiming the gaze at the other's ear as if gazing through the person and at something else. They also included a control condition in which no confederate passed the person. Soon afterward an experimenter, unaware of the experimental condition, approached the person and asked, "Within the last minute, how disconnected do you feel from others?" The researchers considered lower scores to indicate higher levels of connection. We consider this a measure of belonging. Eye contact with or without a smile resulted in self-reports of greater feelings of connection than did "looking through and past the person" or the absence of a confederate.

Sandstrom and Dunn (2013, 2014) also suggest that minor social interactions with acquaintances in classrooms and in broader communities are linked with a greater sense of belonging as well as greater happiness. In one study, undergraduate students in large classes were sent text messages after their class meetings asking students to report with how many people in that class they had interacted, no matter how minimal the interaction. They also responded to a single-item measure ("I feel like I belong here") from a Sense-of-Community scale (Davidson & Cotter, 1986) as well as a measure of how happy they felt at the time. Interacting with more people was linked with greater feelings of belonging and happiness even after controlling for extraversion. Moreover, within-person effects emerged as well: Individuals felt more belonging and happiness on days on which they had more interactions. Some of the interactions, however, may have been with people with whom they had strong ties (communal relationships), but the effects held even when the authors controlled for self-reports of people having friends within those classes—meaning the effects were the same whether or not people reported having friends in the class. Two follow-up studies (another tapping classroom interactions and one tapping community interactions) in which the authors separated counts of interactions with close others versus those with weak ties showed the same linkages. Both between-person and within-person positive links between social interactions and a sense of belonging and happiness emerged.

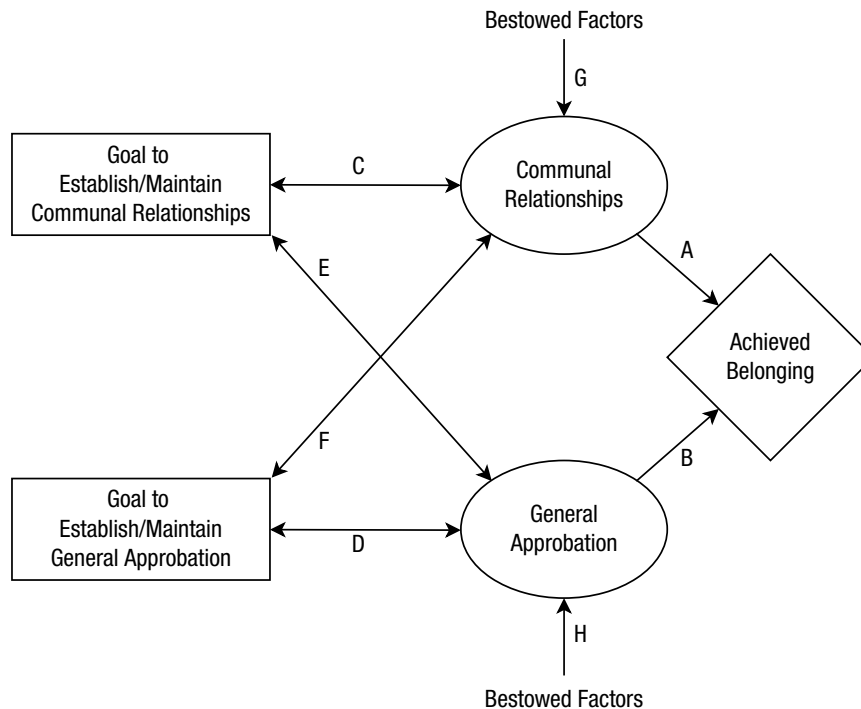
### **A Need for an Integrated Study of the Paths**

Stepping back from our discussion of these paths, we believe that psychologists in general and relationship researchers in particular ought to work toward integrating

extant domains of work on each path (see Clark, Von Culin, & Hirsch, 2015 for similar suggestions). It is straightforward to recognize in real-world examples, as in our hypothetical Charlotte's life, how there is more than one way to pursue and/or achieve a sense that one belongs. Yet this has not been mirrored in psychological research.<sup>10</sup>

Achieving belonging often has been considered a product of having close, responsive relationships with others. For example, the authors of the most prominent article on belonging (Baumeister & Leary, 1995) emphasize this path. Moreover, scales designed to assess belonging feature items tapping having close, caring relationships alongside items that simply ask respondents if they feel they belong (e.g., Malone et al., 2012; see full discussion later in this article). Other studies relevant to the general-approbation, group-membership, and minor-sociability paths to belonging exist (as discussed above) and, occasionally, researchers have discussed or alluded to two of these paths in conjunction. But in none of these studies, to our knowledge, do researchers explicitly state or consider the possibility that four paths (and possibly others) might exist and that all might contribute to an overall sense of belonging.

Our major aim is to shed light on the likely overlap in these studies. We have made a distinction among four paths to belonging—the communal-relationship path, the general-approbation path, the group-membership path, and the minor-sociability path.<sup>11</sup> Considering each path in isolation, as has typically been the case to date, limits an understanding of each (assuming that they often interact and influence one another, which is an assumption we make here). That likely lack of independence among paths to belonging is exactly what caused us to ask why researchers have not discussed these distinct determinants of belonging together and, more importantly, why they have not been studied in concert with one another more often. To fully understand the need to belong, we firmly believe we must study these paths together. We suggest that these paths sometimes are simply additive, sometimes substitute for one another, and sometimes conflict with one another, thereby causing people to feel ambivalence when choosing how to behave. To exemplify this point, we have chosen, just as an example, to focus on how the communal-relationship path and general-approbation path may relate to one another in each of these ways. This exercise could be done with any combination of two paths, but we have chosen to consider evidence relevant to the communal-relationship path and general-approbation path to make these broader points. We start with Figure 2 to illustrate how two of the four proposed paths relate to each other and to belonging more generally.



**Fig. 2.** Two (of four) proposed paths to belonging with their antecedents and possible connections indicated. Connections can be positive (promote belonging) or negative (detract from belonging). Likewise, bestowed factors can be positive (promote) or negative (detract). Establishing communal relationships (Line A) and acquiring a sense of general approbation (Line B) boost a person's sense that they belong. This can occur through goal striving (Lines C and D) or can be bestowed or given, absent individual goal striving (Lines G and H). Establishing communal relationships and acquiring a sense of general approbation may trade off with one another (Lines E and F).

## An Overview of Figure 2

Lines A and B of Figure 2 depict our proposition that having established communal relationships and having acquired a sense of general approbation, respectively, boost a person's sense that they belong. Having communal relationships or having general approbation can occur for individuals through goal striving (Lines C and D) or be bestowed or given, absent individual goal striving (Lines G and H). In other words, we do not believe that the sequence to achieving belonging through these paths (or through the group-membership path and minor-sociability path for that matter) is always that of people feeling a need to belong, which leads to intentionally striving along one or more of these paths to belong, which then leads to a sense of belonging. That sequence likely often happens but other sequences of events (or nonevents) may also occur.

Consider the absence of goal striving first. People may find themselves within a communal relationship (Line G) or having achieved general approbation (Line H) simply as a matter of circumstance rather than through their own goal pursuit. Consider Line G for

instance. Most children's parents are responsive to their children's needs and desires from birth, creating an asymmetrical (at first) communal relationship that ought to provide a sense of belonging (Bowlby, 1969, 1973; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2013). To give another example, infants and young children typically possess facial attributes of cuteness (e.g., large eyes, forehead, small chin) that have been shown to elicit attentiveness (Hildebrandt & Fitzgerald, 1981), protectiveness (Alley, 1983), warmth, and care (Sherman, Haidt, & Coan, 2009). Thus, the mere fact of being cute can bestow on infants and the young a sense of belonging through eliciting a relationship characterized by responsiveness. Next consider Line H. Beauty in adults, as well as in children, simply in the sense of faces being "average," also elicits approbation from many—including strangers—without the beautiful person striving to attain this (Dion, Berscheid, & Walster, 1972; Langlois & Roggman, 1990). This should, itself, elicit a sense of acceptance or belonging.

Now consider goal striving. People may desire close, communal relationships and strive to achieve them by being noncontingently responsive to partners and seeking and accepting similar responsiveness from them

(Line C), as Charlotte did with her project group. Alternatively, people may strive for competence in an activity they enjoy or see as beneficial for the future, succeed, and achieve general approbation as a result (Line D). That, in turn, should increase their sense of belonging even if that was not their original intent. It is also possible, of course, that they strive directly for a sense of general approbation as a goal, say by bragging or name-dropping to show their association with a famous person. See, for instance, Canevello and Crocker's (2010, 2011) discussions of having explicit self-image goals; if not pursued in an artful manner, striving toward such goals may backfire (not depicted in Fig. 2), but if done well such striving might succeed.

There are important distinctions to be made regarding the types of goals pursued within Lines C and D. For instance, people might pursue communal relationships (Line C) through strengthening family relationships, forming new friendships, and/or maintaining romantic relationships. Or, considering the general-approbation path, people might strive for competence in a domain they enjoy (e.g., swimming), and approbation may be the result. Alternatively, people might strive to self-present specifically to gain general approbation (Line D) through materialism, being especially charitable, bragging, performing a job or athletic endeavor better than other people and thereby eliciting social comparison favorable to them, and/or basking in the reflected glory of other people. Whereas such distinctions exist, are worth studying, and have been studied, our current point is that different strategies within the communal-relationship path cohere amongst themselves in that they involve mutual responsiveness, the development of intimacy, and a willingness to be dependent on and to reveal vulnerabilities to another person. In contrast, different strategies to gain general approbation cohere amongst themselves by involving gaining status or prestige, specifically without any necessary commitment to mutual responsiveness, intimacy, dependency, and vulnerability. Although people may achieve a sense of belonging through either or both of these broad paths, they are conceptually distinct.

We will now highlight three potentially fruitful areas of future research that can be fully understood only with an integrative approach: (a) the conditions under which these paths mesh well and are additive (Lines A and B being positively valenced and both promoting a sense of belonging by effects adding together); (b) times in which they may trade off with one another, with achievement of belonging through establishing communal relationships being associated with reduced efforts to achieve belonging through striving for general approbation or vice versa (Lines E and F); and (c) times when pursuing one path may interfere with the pursuit

of and success of the other (also Lines E and F), potentially resulting in unresolved ambivalence.

## Potential Fruitful Areas for Future Research

### ***Identifying the conditions under which these two paths mesh well and produce additive (or even multiplicative) boosts to belonging***

We propose that strategies associated with both the communal-relationship and general-approbation paths to belonging can fruitfully coexist and that each can contribute to boosting self-esteem in an additive fashion (Fig. 2; Lines A and B). For instance, a person with good friends and family relationships might work simultaneously toward maintaining and growing such relationships and toward winning a prestigious award for accomplishments in, say, her journalism career that will gain the approbation of many outside her close relationships. For such a person both forming caring relationships and acquiring the award may boost her sense of belonging in an additive fashion. Neither may interfere with the other goal. In general, pursuing both the communal-relationship and general-approbation paths should produce additive effects when there is nothing in the nature of the pursuit of each, in isolation, that interferes with the pursuit of the other. If, on the whole, these paths are pursued separately with their own unique benefits (and risks), it is understandable that they have long been disconnected in the literature.

Consider Charlotte's situation, for instance. She had time both to foster friendships and to compete on the swim team, and there was nothing intrinsic to each activity that interfered with the other. An additive boost to belonging can also occur within a single context assuming that that context permits the advancement of both communal relationships and general approbation. For instance, imagine Charlotte conveying excitement over her recent swimming race win to her friend Cecilia. Cecilia may, indeed, be impressed, which can boost Charlotte's self-esteem through the general-approbation path. So too might Cecilia, hearing the good news, celebrate for and with Charlotte, capitalizing on her success. This might cause Charlotte's felt approbation to rise, and the capitalization may simultaneously make Charlotte feel like Cecilia has been a responsive friend, which promotes the growth and strengthening of the friendship (Gable & Reis, 2010; Gable, Reis, Impett, & Asher, 2004). Indeed, Cecilia may feel especially responsive herself as a result of the self-perception of her own celebration of Charlotte's success, meaning that this single interaction may also boost both Charlotte's and



Cecilia's felt belonging through the communal-relationship path. Meanwhile, if Cecilia basks in Charlotte's reflected glory, she may experience a boost in her own felt general approbation as well. In other words, a single swimming success for Charlotte might facilitate a boost to belonging in both a communal-relationship and general-approbation way for both Cecilia and Charlotte.

Note that general success in pursuing one path may even bolster the effectiveness of the other path, leading the effects to combine successfully not only in an additive fashion but also an extra facilitative one. For instance, successful pursuit of the communal-relationship path may result in including the other in the self (Aron, Aron, & Smollan, 1992). When one includes the other in the self, attributes of the other—including the other's successes—feel like attributes of the self. Therefore, including the other in the self should increase the boost in self-esteem that comes from the general-approbation strategy of basking in one's partner's glory (see Tesser, 1988). In other words, having a sense of belonging from the communal-relationship path can boost one's acquisition of belonging through the general-approbation path.

### ***Identifying the conditions under which these paths may substitute for one another***

An alternative way these paths to belonging may mesh is that one may substitute for the other. Increases in successfully attaining belonging via one path may decrease motives to attain belonging through the other path (Fig. 2; Lines E and F). This type of coexistence, however, can be fully understood only by integrating research surrounding the communal-relationship path and general-approbation path.

Theory on motivation and goal-directed behavior emphasizes that when a goal is unfulfilled, goal-directed motivations and behaviors are active. Once a goal is satisfied, motivation and behavior to achieve the goal ceases (Förster, Liberman, & Friedman, 2007; Förster, Liberman, & Higgins, 2005).

Notably, there is supporting evidence regarding the substitutability of goal-focused striving toward belonging within the general-approbation path (see Tesser & Cornell, 1991; Tesser, Crepaz, Collins, Cornell, & Beach, 2000). Specifically, Tesser and Cornell (1991) reported three studies, all of which demonstrated that if a person's self-esteem was boosted via a boost of general approbation (e.g., providing a self-affirmation, making salient past instances of successfully basking in another's reflected glory, or benefiting in some social comparisons), this resulted in reduced propensities to engage in other efforts to boost self-esteem via increasing general

approbation. Because these behaviors serve the same overall goal, successfully engaging in one behavior—therefore accomplishing the goal—turned off the motivation to engage in these other goal-directed behaviors.

There is also evidence for this substitutability principle within the communal-relationship path. For example, as responsive friendships and romantic relationships develop in adolescence, attachment transfers from parents (primarily mothers) to friends and romantic partners (J. A. Feeney, 2004; Fraley & Davis, 1997; Markiewicz, Lawford, Doyle, & Haggart, 2006). In general, it seems obvious that as new relationships form throughout adolescence and adulthood that that sometimes occurs at the cost of leaving past relationships (often with no bitterness involved). For instance, when one moves to a new school or city, one develops relationships with people from the new area while spending less time maintaining old relationships from the area in which one once lived. Investment in and commitment to older relationships decreases as they become more costly to maintain (Oswald & Clark, 2003; Shaver, Furman, & Buhrmester, 1985) and, we believe, because one's social goals are being fulfilled in the new relationships, motivation to invest in the older relationships may be turned off or tuned down. Gere and MacDonald (2010) directly review evidence supporting a similar goal-turnoff conclusion—once the need to belong is satisfied, the motivation to build other social connections disappears. For instance, they cite work by DeWall, Baumeister, and Vohs (2008) demonstrating that performance on a task people believed was diagnostic of social skills was worse when people were told they would have good future social relationships compared with a future alone or no feedback. We note that this supporting evidence addresses how the motivation to build social connections—in a communal-relationships way only—disappears or is diminished once the need to belong through that same path has been assured.

In addition to studying the substitutability of goals and goal striving within paths, we advocate studying how such substitutability may occur between the two paths to belong. To our knowledge, the substitutability of the two paths to belonging has not been explicitly tested; here, however, we interpret some existing literature through this lens to highlight the potential of this theorizing.

Some evidence that this substitutability may occur can be found in work on the monetary value people place on goods they own (Clark et al., 2011). In a series of studies, participants were primed (or not) with attachment security and asked to place a value on items they own (a pen given to them as a gift during the study in one study, the quilt or cover currently on their bed in another study). Those primed with attachment

security placed less value on their possessions. The priming manipulation presumably worked as a reminder to the participants that they have close, communal relationships, thus boosting their feelings of belonging in the moment. Placing materialistic value on their possessions is, by our logic, another way to boost feelings of belonging. Because this goal was satisfied to a greater degree for those in the security-priming conditions than for those not in those conditions, security-primed participants placed less value on their possessions. Other studies on materialism show the same pattern, suggesting that security in a communal relationship can lessen (and insecurity can increase) materialism. Norris et al. (2012) found that anxious attachment was positively associated with measures of materialism in several separate samples and that the link was mediated by loneliness. They speculated that materialism fills a social void.

A recent program of research led by Reis suggests that boosting feelings that a person is embedded in responsive communal relationships may make that person more intellectually humble—or, in other words, less in need of presenting the self positively to the world as a way to gain general approbation. Specifically, in a series of studies, Reis, Lee, O’Keefe, and Clark (2018) have shown that leading people to think of responsive close partners reduces their tendencies to engage in overclaiming contributions to joint tasks, presenting themselves as “better than average,” and engaging in hindsight bias wherein they claim having known something all along that, in fact, they did not know.

Finally, additional work suggests that perfectionism (seemingly a sign of consistent striving for general approbation) is negatively correlated with secure attachment (a sign of a communal relationship; Chen, Hewitt, & Flett, 2015) and, in at least one study (Chen et al., 2015), evidence was presented supporting that the link was mediated by a need to belong.

In suggesting that we investigate times that communal-relationship and general-approbation strategies can and do trade off, we are not suggesting that the communal-relationship and general-approbation paths are completely interchangeable. Indeed, an optimal sense of belonging likely requires some contribution from both paths and perhaps others as well. For instance, having some communal relationships may be necessary for a person to achieve a sense of belonging in terms of having someone who will accept the person in good times and bad, someone to whom to turn in times of weakness or exposed vulnerabilities. Yet establishing these kinds of relationships involves a lot of investment as well as the risks associated with one’s vulnerabilities and needs being ignored or exploited. On the other hand, attaining some amount of general

approbation can garner a sense of belonging based on the knowledge that even if one or more of one’s admirers moves away, many others can provide the same sense of belonging. At the same time, being admired by many may cause one to fear that a misstep or error poses greater risks to losing their acceptance than a similar misstep might pose to a communal relationship. The point is that each route to belonging can boost self-esteem but also has its own associated and often distinct benefits and risks.

Returning to the question of when we, personally, think these paths may substitute for one another, we can rely only on existing data. The samples in the studies we cited providing evidence for trade-offs between paths were not selected in terms of people being high in tendencies to adopt one or the other path. Thus, our best guess is that when people have achieved a sense of belonging through either path—a situation that is likely true for most people—moderate boosts in success through one path can moderately reduce the drive to achieve it through the other path. Finally, in talking about trade-offs between paths to belonging, it is worth pointing out something quite simple—both seeking, building, and maintaining communal relationships and seeking, building, and maintaining general approbation take time and effort. People have limited time and effort. The more time and effort one puts into one path, generally the less time and effort one will have to pursue the other. This alone may produce some natural trade-offs between the paths.

We suspect some people have largely given up on one path or another. For instance, attachment theorists have provided extensive evidence that perhaps as many as 20% of people have an avoidant attachment style, meaning they have largely given up on achieving high-quality communal relationships and do not desire the intimacy that comes from such relationships (e.g., Shaver et al., 2016). Other people may have largely given up on achieving general approbation from others. For such people, success (or failure) in the preferred channel may have little bearing on strivings through the nonpreferred channel (and vice versa).

***Investigating times when pursuing one path will interfere with the pursuit and success of pursuing the other, potentially resulting in ambivalence in decision making, and pursuit of one path damaging the other***

Whereas pursuing the communal-relationship and general-approbation paths ought to often be compatible, that will not always be the case. Here, we suggest

that there are likely to be situations in which both cannot be simultaneously pursued—when such situations arise, painful ambivalence will often arise. In other words, the pursuit of one path may interfere with the pursuit of the other (Fig. 2; Lines E and F), and we believe it is well worth investigating the situations in which this kind of crossover influence may occur. There also may be people who do not have a clearly preferred strategy and, for these people, such ambivalence may be more common than for others.

Perhaps most obvious in this regard is the fact that, as mentioned earlier, establishing a sense of belonging in each of these ways requires commitments of time, effort, and resources. Conflicts between being, say, an optimal spouse (and achieving a communal relationship) versus being an optimal employee (and achieving general approbation) likely frequently occur. There will be times at which what one is pulled to do to maximize the communal-relationship path conflicts with what one is pulled to do to maximize the general-approbation path (e.g., spending quality time with one's spouse vs. spending that time getting ahead at work).

Conflict can also occur in ways unrelated to trade-offs in terms of time spent pursuing different paths. For example, in a well-known study, Tesser and Smith (1980) found that when playing a verbal game—whose outcome was believed to be irrelevant to one's own self-esteem (it was just a game the outcome of which indicated little)—with a friend or a stranger, one acted in a way such as to help the friend more than the stranger. This makes good sense from a communal-relationships perspective. Yet when the game was believed to be relevant to a domain in which one personally strives to excel (and achieve approbation), the results reversed, and one helped a friend less than a stranger. According to Tesser and Smith, the reason was that when performing a task relevant to the self—and we would say relevant to general approbation—social comparison concerns kick in. They suggest that these concerns are especially strong when the other is a friend. One wishes to look good to the wider world; thus, one helps a friend (the most relevant social comparison) less than others. Tesser and Smith predicted this finding (on the basis of their self-evaluation-maintenance theory) but did not explicitly note what we note here. That is, participants in the self-esteem-relevant condition faced a dilemma—should they pursue the communal-relationship path to belong (and help their friend) or the general-approbation path to belong (and strive to outdo their friend)? They picked the general-approbation path and, interestingly, may have sacrificed some of their belonging from the communal-relationship path in the process, although this outcome was never measured.

Are such situations always resolved in favor of the general-approbation path? No. Tesser and Cornell (1991) later showed that the effect of “sometimes helping a stranger more than a friend” disappeared when participants had their self-esteem boosted in another general-approbation way (experiencing a self-affirmation manipulation).

We can think of many situations in which such ambivalence produced by a conflict between the communal-relationship path and general-approbation path arises. Imagine finishing up your undergraduate degree at the same time as your significant other and applying to graduate schools at the same time. Further, imagine that you get accepted to your top three schools while your partner only gets into your third-ranked school. To optimize your communal relationship, it would be best for you to both go to your third-ranked school. To optimize general approbation, you should go to your highest-ranked school. Assuming you highly (and equally or nearly equally) value both your relationship and your education, you will probably feel ambivalence about your choice.

This, we believe, is an area in which there is much research to be done. In doing so, we would note that ultimate decisions regarding how to behave may not reveal the ambivalence, but reaction-time measures and mouse tracking (Freeman & Ambady, 2010) used to capture the decision-making process may be useful in tapping ambivalence. Ambivalence may not be revealed in the behavior of a single situation, but it may be measurable when looking at aggregate patterns of relevant behavior over time—ambivalence would lead to inconsistent behavior in particular types of situations over time, whereas a unidirectional motive would lead to a consistent pattern of behavior (McClure, Bartz, & Lydon, 2013).

### **Does a Sense of Belonging Come About as a Result of Actual, Interpersonal Belonging or Through Intrapsychic Processes?**

Traveling each path to belonging can occur in both intrapsychic and interpersonal ways. For instance, one may work to establish and maintain communal relationships by actually giving and receiving support, leading to a truly strengthened communal relationship and a rising sense of belonging among both people involved in the relationships. Alternatively, one might project one's own high communal feelings onto a partner (e.g., Lemay & Clark, 2008; Lemay, Clark, & Feeney, 2007), and that intrapsychic process might also heighten feelings of belonging. Note that these processes may interact. For instance, projecting communal feelings onto a

partner appears to give people the courage to act on their feelings, which may then result in actual, interpersonal belonging (Lemay et al., 2007). Or to give another example, one might enter competitions, outperform others, and receive actual approbation from those who surround you, as did Charlotte in our example. One's sense of belonging may rise as a result. Alternatively, one might engage in intrapersonal downward social comparison, perhaps by looking at one's teammates' swim times on the Internet and relishing the fact that one swims so much faster than a particular teammate does. This will not result in actual increased approbation in others' minds, but it might make one think that has happened and doing so might increase a sense of belonging in that way. Of course, much remains to be studied in this regard.

### **Rethinking Existing Measures of Achieved Belonging and of a Need to Belong**

In addition to thinking carefully about how different paths to belong combine in additive (even multiplicative ways), how they may substitute for one another, and how they may interfere with one another, we advocate for some rethinking of existing measures of the need to belong and of an achieved sense of belonging. We define a sense of belonging as feeling that one is (or would easily be) accepted and valued by other people—however that is accomplished.

Several sets of authors have worked toward developing measures of achieved belonging (e.g., Hagerty & Patusky, 1995; Lee & Robbins, 1995; Malone et al., 2012; Van Orden et al., 2012). Some items on the resulting scales do have face validity for tapping belonging at a broad level (e.g., "I feel accepted by others"; Malone et al., 2012), and that seems wise to us. Yet, as already noted earlier, other items appear to tap having achieved a sense of belonging, specifically through the communal-relationship path (e.g., "I have close bonds with family and friends"; Malone et al., 2012). If there are distinct paths to achieving a general sense of belonging, as we suggest here, then we advocate for some revised or completely new measures. A general measure of achieved belonging as free as possible from tapping achievement through one particular path would have value for studies assessing the overarching state of a person's achieved belonging. Such a scale might make use of items from existing measures that are likely path-general (e.g., "I feel accepted by others"; Malone et al., 2012) paired with a few new items, all of which are then properly evaluated for good psychometric properties. So too might studies of belonging benefit by the existence of other measures of having achieved belonging by pursuing the

specific paths (e.g., communal relationship, "I have close bonds with family and friends"; general approbation, "I am widely admired by other people"; group membership, "I belong to groups in which I feel accepted"; minor sociability, "I feel connected with acquaintances whom I see day to day").

So too does it make sense to think carefully about the existing and well-validated measure of the need to belong (Leary et al., 2013). Some items tap the broad need to belong (e.g., "I want other people to accept me"). Others, however, as discussed earlier, tap a need to be accepted in a particular sort of way, such as wanting to be with communal partners (e.g., "Being apart from my friends for long periods of time does not bother me"; reverse-scored). It also will likely prove useful to develop measures of a need to belong generally as well as a need to belong through particular paths. Having conceptually clearer measures of both the need to belong and of achieved belonging should help in constructing new, more nuanced studies of belonging.

### **Fitting Our Views With Other Perspectives**

Before concluding, it is worth briefly commenting on how the views expressed here relate to two models that have proposed distinct paths to belonging, specifically those of Lavigne, Vallerand, and Crevier-Braud (2011) and Canevello and Crocker's (2010, 2011) discussion of eco-focused and ego-focused strivings, as well as to some aspects of Deci & Ryan's (1985, 2000) self-determination theory and Mahadevan et al.'s hierometer theory (Mahadevan et al., 2018; Mahadevan, Gregg, Sedikides, & de Waal-Andrews, 2016).

First, Lavigne et al. (2011) proposed a Belongingness Orientation Model that includes more than one path to belonging. They postulated two orientations: (a) a growth orientation involving a strong desire for close interpersonal relationships characterized by high commitment and revealing vulnerabilities without a fear of rejection, and (b) a deficit-reduction orientation, presumably arising from a heightened need for social acceptance, fear of rejection, strong desire for attention and acceptance from others, social anxiety, and general relational insecurity. We do not doubt that some people have a growth orientation toward achieving belonging, whereas others are more focused on avoiding a lack or loss of belonging by avoiding rejection and focusing on repairing relationships. From our perspective, however, a growth or avoidance strategy might be applied to any of the four paths we have discussed, and who does so and under what circumstances remains a question for future empirical research.

Canevello and Crocker (2010, 2011) distinguish between having compassionate goals that involve

focusing on partners and their well-being—which a reader might equate with the proposed communal-relationship path—and having self-image goals—which a reader might equate with the proposed general-approbation path. Yet the communal-relationship path involves more than having compassion for others; it also involves achieving relationships in which the self can count on the partner as well as reveal vulnerabilities while still expecting to receive understanding, validation, and care from another person. Moreover, striving along the communal-relationship path can and often does involve self-image goals of a particular sort. For instance, people may intentionally present themselves as caring persons to others with whom they wish to establish a communal relationship in a bid to win them over. Indeed, this is likely a normative part of relationship initiation (Beck & Clark, 2009; Beck, Clark, & Olson, 2017; Clark et al., 2018) and, we suspect, one that often works. Beyond this, gaining acceptance through general approbation may or may not involve intentionally striving to present oneself in a positive light. Mastery of a domain such as swimming may gain one general approbation and felt belonging even though one did not set out to improve one's swim times to boost one's image. So too do we believe efforts to present a positive self-image may succeed or fail to gain general approbation. We acknowledge there can be unhealthy ways to pursue self-image goals, as Canevello & Crocker (2010, 2011) have demonstrated, but we believe there can be healthy ways as well. Bragging about one's accomplishments (to achieve general approbation) is likely to backfire, but striving to be seen as a caring, nice, considerate person (to form communal relationships) may well work.

Finally, consider Deci and Ryan's (1985, 2000) self-determination theory and Mahadevan and colleagues' distinction between the sociometer and hierometer theory (Mahadevan et al., 2018; Mahadevan, Gregg, Sedikides, & de Waal-Andrews, 2016). They, like us, postulate that people strive for both relatedness and competence/status goals and that achieving each is associated with greater well-being and self-regard. We agree and simply add that both types of goals are a part of our model of how people achieve a sense of belonging generally. In other words, we believe that striving for competence/status goals is often closely tied with an affiliation (belonging) goal.

## Conclusion

In this article we proposed that there exist multiple ways to achieve a sense of belonging, highlighted existing work that supports this proposal, and made the point that considering these paths in more depth—including considering more than one path to belonging

at the same time—will almost certainly help to integrate extant literature on belonging while opening doors to new and intriguing research questions of broad importance to psychologists. These efforts can begin by bringing together existing knowledge about how people pursue the need to belong in a theoretically informed and integrated way. Doing so will allow us to identify gaps in current understanding and to develop new hypotheses and work toward testing them. Perhaps the four paths we have identified here are all important ones; perhaps not. Perhaps there are additional paths we have not yet identified. We should find out.

To effectively work toward a better understanding of the human need to belong, we have also emphasized the need to refine and develop a general measure of a need to belong and a general measure of achieved belonging, as well as measures of striving to (and achieving) belonging along particular paths. In addition, considering the issues raised here from an individual difference/personality perspective raises questions about whether there might be chronic individual differences in how people strive to and achieve (or fail to achieve) a sense of belonging; we believe there are. Further, we believe it is important to consider these issues from a cross-cultural point of view and to consider the development of people's styles of striving to belong.

In sum, we ought to leverage existing knowledge about how people pursue the need to belong by framing these processes in an integrated way. We believe they are related and that by considering just how, when, and why these paths complement and/or interact with one another new areas of research will open up.

## Action Editor

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The author(s) declared that there were no conflicts of interest with respect to the authorship or the publication of this article.

## Notes

1. We note that self-esteem, well-being, and affect are indices of belonging and not the same construct as belonging. Each has multiple determinants. None is a pure index of belonging.
2. Work by a few authors represent exceptions to this rule. First, Lavigne et al. (2011) have explicitly proposed two orientations toward achieving a sense of belonging: a *growth orientation*, involving building close relationships, and a *deficit-reduction orientation*, involving interpersonal deficit and repair. The authors link these orientations to other studies. Second, Easterbrook and Vignoles (2013) discuss how groups defined

by social networks of dyadic relationships and groups defined by similarity of members may lead to a sense of belonging through distinct paths. Finally, Canevello and Crocker (2010, 2011) set forth a distinction between pursuing compassionate and self-image goals in relationships in efforts to be accepted and link their measures of these goal strivings to well-being. We acknowledge these efforts. All differ conceptually from the positions taken here despite some overlaps that are discussed later in this article.

3. A few measures of having acquired a sense of belonging per se have been developed (Hagerty & Patusky, 1995; Lee & Robbins, 1995; Malone et al., 2012; Van Orden et al., 2012). We believe they have value but also need some refinement. We return to this issue later in this article.

4. One note regarding the hierometer theory is that its proponents suggest the pursuit of status addresses the fundamental need for status and that the pursuit of social inclusion (i.e., sociometer theory) addresses the fundamental need to belong. In other words, the pursuit of status does not address the need to belong, and hierometer theory and sociometer theory are complementary approaches to the function of self-regard. On the surface, this is counter to our present theorizing. However, proponents of hierometer theory conceptualize the need to belong as being fundamentally relational and, therefore, it makes sense that this would be conceptually distinct from status goals. Yet the point of the present article is to propose a broadened conceptualization of the need to belong. With this in mind, both status and social inclusion represent belonging and, therefore, we believe the work from hierometer theory presents compelling evidence of the role of status for self-regard.

5. This has been indexed by a variety of constructs such as self-esteem, well-being, and narcissism.

6. Of course, it is possible that causation flows in the reverse direction. People may strive for general approbation, but doing so may sometimes backfire and drive belonging down. For example, a person may brag because they think they will be accepted by getting others to admire the self, but in reality, the bragging may actually cause people to dislike and avoid a person (Scopelitti, Loewenstein, & Vosgerau, 2015).

7. The literature reviewed in this paragraph is heteronormative. From a theoretical standpoint, we do not believe this process is limited only to men who are attracted to women.

8. It is also possible that consuming or using goods assuages distress in the moment or serves as an escape from self-awareness (Donnelly, Ksendzova, Howell, Vohs, & Baumeister, 2016) and that is why materialism occurs.

9. We note here that our proposed general-approbation path to belonging includes two strategies that Tesser and his colleagues (e.g., Tesser, 1988) have discussed in detail as techniques people use to achieve and to maintain positive self-evaluations. We benefit from and incorporate this theory in our own but emphasize that, ultimately, it is belonging that people seek.

10. That is not to say researchers have overlooked consideration of, say, communal-relationship goals and self-presentation goals within the same context. Extensive work within self-determination theory has pitted intrinsic aspirations (communal-relationship goals) against extrinsic aspirations (self-presentation goals) to highlight how the former, but not the latter, contributes positively to a variety of well-being outcomes

(see Ryan & Deci, 2000 for a review). Similarly, Canevello & Crocker (2010, 2011) explore compassionate goals (communal-relationship goals) versus self-image goals in a close relationship context. At the end of this article we discuss how the proposed model integrates these models.

11. The four paths we have suggested are not necessarily an exhaustive list. We further note that Derrick, Gabriel, and Tippin (2008) and Derrick, Gabriel, and Hugenberg (2009) discuss how involvement with fictional television programs or written narratives may serve as a social surrogacy as well, providing a sense of belonging that may substitute for other paths. We restrict our discussion to nonfictional links between people.

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