

WHAT MATTERS MOST:
A GROUNDED THEORY OF BELONGINGNESS AT WORK

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Abstract

In a world that is still adjusting to the realities of a global pandemic and its impact on the modern workplace, organisations are being forced to reckon with employee wellbeing as an ethical imperative. This is highlighted by the emerging trend of “the great resignation,” with individuals choosing to leave the workplace at unprecedented rates (Cook, 2021). A recent McKinsey study revealed that 51% of departing employees attributed their resignation to a lack of belonging (De Smet et al., 2021). The extant literature suggests that belongingness is a human imperative, a necessary element of a fulfilling life (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). Much of the organisational research has focused on mitigating negative relational outcomes such as loneliness and depression and to a lesser extent on exploring ways to maximise positive factors like belongingness (Cacioppo & Cacioppo, 2018; Park & Baumeister, 2015). While belongingness and its proximate constructs have been explored in a variety of contexts, a rigorous operational definition remains elusive, and gaps exist in the development of a nomological network that elucidates its precursors and outcomes. Thus, it makes sense to overlay the concept of belongingness on the workplace, a complex social environment where we spend much of our waking lives.

To frame the research, a review of the extant literature explores the historical underpinnings of belongingness and considers how the construct is understood in a variety of contexts, including the workplace. Two qualitative studies investigate employees’ experiences of belongingness at work. Data were collected from in-depth interviews of fifteen participants in the United States and New Zealand. Twelve participants were from large-scale organisations, and three additional participants were added in the second study to explore the emergent

themes in the context of small enterprises. A constructivist grounded theory approach is utilised to develop three theoretical categories identified as the unveiled self, the relational self, and the seen self. These 'dimensions of self' illuminate the importance of authenticity, meaningful workplace relationships, and recognition of unique contribution as pathways to belongingness at work. The data further reveals the ways in which employees covertly survey the organisational environment for cues and moderate their behaviour accordingly. Limitations of the studies are identified, in addition to recommendations for further research. Finally, this research offers practical implications for organisations seeking to cultivate and maintain cultures of belongingness.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Introduction

As the world enters what some social scientists are terming a “loneliness epidemic,” the value of relationships is catching our attention in unprecedented ways (Killeen, 1998; Murthy, 2017, 2021). The network of close confidants that was once relatively commonplace has become increasingly sparse, and the significant physical ramifications of loneliness have led it to be declared a public health issue (Cacioppo & Cacioppo, 2018). People who identify as being lonely are fifty percent more likely to die prematurely, and loneliness produces the startling equivalent to physical health as smoking fifteen cigarettes per day (Tiwari, 2013). Outside of these key health concerns, individuals who lack social connection are also more likely to experience psychological issues such as depression, anxiety, and low self-esteem (Park & Baumeister, 2015). While much of the media and research focus has been on the issue of loneliness itself, there has been less attention given to its positive counterpart: belonging.

Why Belongingness?

The examination of belongingness as a construct is a relatively recent field of study, with the original belongingness hypothesis suggesting that humans have “a pervasive drive to form and maintain at least a minimum quantity of lasting, positive, and significant interpersonal relationships” (Baumeister & Leary, 1995, p. 497). Much of the research to date has centred on conceptually and operationally defining belongingness (Stillman & Baumeister, 2009), developing valid measurement scales (Lee & Robbins, 1995; Malone et al., 2012), and exploring its association with individual characteristics and mechanisms, including gender (Baumeister & Sommer, 1997), self-esteem (Park & Baumeister, 2015), self-regulation (DeWall et al., 2008), and perceived meaning in life (Lambert et al., 2013; Zhang et al., 2018).

Stripped down to its most basic tenets, the current research suggests that belongingness is a human imperative, a necessary element of a fulfilling life (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). The literature has consistently demonstrated the beneficial health outcomes of belongingness in the form of social support (Ernst & Cacioppo, 1999; Gupta & Korte, 1994; Uchino et al., 1999), and positive social relationships are demonstrably imperative for happiness and wellbeing (Myers & Diener, 1995; Tomaka & Palacios, 2006; Vaillant & Mukamal, 2001). Thus, it makes sense to overlay the concept of belongingness on the workplace, a complex social environment where we spend much of our waking lives.

The study of belongingness in the realm of organisational settings remains sparse. Workplace belongingness has been framed as the degree to which an employee feels a sense of acceptance, respect, inclusion, and support from others in the organisational setting (Goodenow, 1993). The recent research dips a toe in the waters of belonging through discussions of inclusive workplaces (Shore et al., 2018), network commitment (Bruning et al., 2018), and the role of human resources in socialisation practices (Batistič, 2018).

The Nuance of Belongingness

Much of the organisational research has focused on mitigating negative relational outcomes such as loneliness and depression and to a lesser extent on exploring ways to maximise positive factors like belongingness (Cacioppo & Cacioppo, 2018; Park & Baumeister, 2015). While belongingness and its proximate constructs have been explored in a variety of contexts, a rigorous operational definition remains elusive, and gaps exist in the development of a nomological network that elucidates its precursors and outcomes. The following section

will explore the nuance inherent in the construct of belongingness to pave the way for deeper conceptualisation in the literature review.

The extant research has identified both direct and indirect positive effects stemming from a climate of belonging at work (Den Hartog et al., 2007; Gkorezis et al., 2013; Josling, 2015). However, it is important to exercise caution when extrapolating research insights from negative relational phenomena and assuming that they will apply to positive relational phenomena in similar ways. Belongingness is not merely the direct opposite of loneliness. While these constructs intersect in their focus on the importance of fulfilling relational needs for psychological and physiological wellbeing, there are points of departure in the means for achieving those aims. Both positive and negative aspects of belongingness at work are deserving of attention because they uncover the multi-dimensional nature of belongingness. It is useful to investigate both positive and negative relational constructs in occupational settings to fully understand intrapersonal and interpersonal phenomena in these environments.

The research examining the positive facets of belongingness is considerably more robust than the literature focused on the negative facets, with studies finding that cultivating prosocial behaviours can promote belongingness and boost the effectiveness of individuals and organisations (Podsakoff et al., 2009) and enhance openness to learning from negative feedback (Meglino & Korsgaard, 2004). However, some cautionary tales emerge about the contexts in which belongingness is prohibitive and may detract from individual advancement and wellbeing. For example, employees may feel pressured to engage in helping behaviours (Vigoda-Gadot, 2006) and ultimately relinquish their own best interests in unhealthy ways for the advancement of the group (Bolino & Turnley, 2005). Thus, belongingness is ostensibly

positive, but it has been linked to negative outcomes, which suggests we need to revisit the construct and acknowledge its disparate dynamics and effects.

The Bright Side of Belongingness

The existing research has identified both direct and indirect positive effects stemming from a climate of belonging at work, including the alleviation of depressive symptoms (Cockshaw & Shochet, 2010) and the mitigation of loneliness (Silman & Dogan, 2013). Factors like high-quality relationships with leaders, perceived organisational support, and trust have been linked to a climate of belongingness and lend themselves to better task performance and enhanced citizenship behaviour (Bauer et al., 2018; Colquitt et al., 2013; Eisenberger & Stinglhamber, 2011; Kurtessis et al., 2015). An increased focus on creating “psychologically healthy workspaces,” of which belongingness is a feature, has even yielded financial benefits by contributing to job satisfaction, productivity, and commitment to work (Catano & Morrow Hines, 2016).

There has also been extensive examination of leadership styles and their connection to a variety of factors linked to belongingness. Leaders play a critical role in the relational and cultural aspects of life at work. They bear responsibility for decision-making that has a direct, felt impact on employees and they model the behavioural tone for conduct among and between employees (Nishii, 2013; Randel et al., 2018). Some types of leadership in particular hold relevance for studies of belongingness. Charismatic leadership, for example, has been demonstrated to induce helping behaviours (Den Hartog et al., 2007), and leaders with high compassion promote feelings of value and reduce negative self-evaluation (Peng et al., 2017). The inclusive leadership style focuses on positive behaviours that foster connection among

work teams, while also allowing individuals to cultivate and maintain a sense of uniqueness (Randel et al., 2018). Thus, belongingness can be symptomatic of a healthy organisation and elicit positive individual and organisational outcomes.

The Dark Side of Belongingness

There is an emerging body of research highlighting the potential detriment of belongingness culture, with some scholars and practitioners arguing that emphasis on compliance and prosocial behaviours can lend itself to “good soldier syndrome” (Turnipseed, 1996) and prioritisation of helping others at the risk of important individual tasks that detract from personal advancement (A. M. Grant & Sumanth, 2009). Such emphasis on the greater good can compel employees to absorb too much responsibility, leading to overwhelm, stress, and even reduced performance (Bergeron, 2007; Bolino & Turnley, 2005). Similarly, high expectations of organisational citizenship may ultimately induce counterproductive work behaviour (Bauer et al., 2018). Studies on emotional intelligence have shown that it can be used strategically for manipulative purposes; for example, employees – often managers – may disguise or express emotions for personal gain, misattribute blame or recognition to “stir and shape” emotions, and control the flow of emotion-laden communication (Austin et al., 2007; Kilduff et al., 2010). The literature on workplace friendships suggests that the lack of clear definition around relationships in the workplace can lend itself to potential confusion and blurred behavioural boundaries (Berman et al., 2002). These relational factors can have a taxing and distorting effect on relationships that detracts from belongingness. Further, despite the predominantly positive effects of an experienced sense of belonging, negative outcomes may

arise from a conformity-focused culture of belonging, or from the organisation's inability to establish clear relational guidelines and boundaries.

A deeper understanding of belongingness at work would arguably benefit organisations and the people who comprise them. As we see shifts in what we value and ultimately seek in the domain of work, many organisations have a desire to create cultures that are cohesive, productive, and meaningful. Recent research on the expectations of millennial workers suggests an increased emphasis on meaningful work (Brack & Kelly, 2012) and recognition of humanness, reflected in qualitative studies finding that, "...beneath the storytelling we can see a strong desire to be seen and appreciated as a human being" (Kultalahti & Viitala, 2014, p. 577). These shifts in what is valued at work suggest that fostering positive relationships and belongingness will play an increasingly vital role in the zeitgeist of the modern workplace.

Yet, the understanding of belongingness at work, including the factors that shape it and its outcomes, relies on assessments derived from under-developed theory. On one hand, belongingness may alleviate depressive symptoms (Cockshaw & Shochet, 2010) and contribute to positive job outcomes and psychologically healthy organisational cultures (Catano & Morrow Hines, 2016). However, 'good soldier syndrome' can lead to an over-emphasis on compliance (Turnipseed, 1996) and employees may experience stress, overwhelm, and reduced performance when compelled to focus on the greater organisational good as an aspect of belongingness (Bergeron, 2007; Bolino & Turnley, 2005). Thus, belongingness at work must be revisited and its domain defined. A robust definition of the construct will shed light on its nomological network, inform measurement development and refinement, and add validity to future empirical research.

Research Aims

The first aim of this thesis is to conduct an in-depth investigation of the belongingness construct with the intent to refine its definition and to subsequently clarify the boundaries of the construct's domain. This examination will help us identify how belongingness is shaped and explore the construct's complexity given the myriad individual, interpersonal, and cultural factors that influence it. In essence, the first aim is to provide a more nuanced perspective of what belongingness *is*.

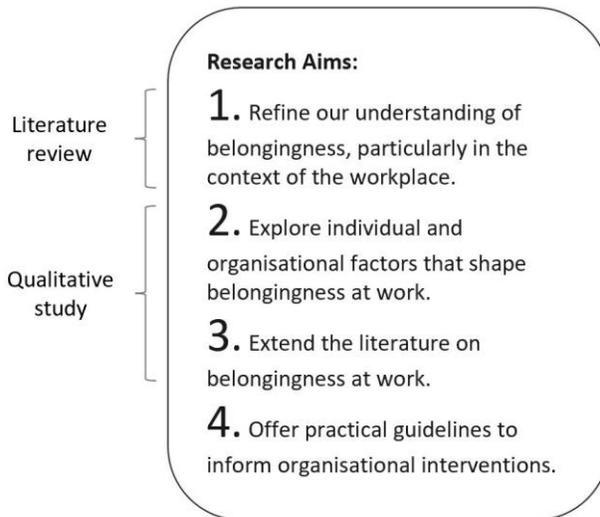
The second, related aim is to survey the literature in two key areas: the individual characteristics that shape belongingness, and the organisational factors that promote or undermine belongingness, including how this is uniquely manifested in employee behaviours and other outcomes. Using grounded theory methodology, this exploration will consider behaviours and characteristics of individuals, teams, and cultures in organisations where belongingness is valued and intentionally fostered and contrast them with organisational features where a sense of belongingness is noticeably absent. Through the qualitative studies undertaken as part of this thesis, variables pertaining to the structural-functional features of organisations as well as individual employee differences will be explored. While there is an extensive body of research on concepts related to belongingness, such as organisational citizenship behaviour (Smith et al., 1983), prosocial behaviour at work (Lee & Robbins, 1995), social exchange theory (Cropanzo & Mitchell, 2005; Kamdar & Van Dyne, 2007), and loneliness at work (Ozcelik & Barsade, 2018; Wright & Silard, 2021), this work will contribute to the literature on belongingness in the specific and nuanced context of the workplace.

The third aim of this work is to extend the literature on belongingness and relationships at work by examining both positive and negative lenses. The positive and negative dimensions of belongingness manifest in a few distinct and nuanced ways. The salient *experience* of belongingness as a first person is both positive and multi-faceted, as the forthcoming literature review will demonstrate. However, belongingness as a cultural aspiration of the workplace may produce both positive *and* negative outcomes, both of which will be explored further. Further, the need to belong on an individual level at work can also elicit positive or negative experiences, largely dependent on whether the needs are perceived to be met. Thus, belongingness retains its positive valence in contrast to negatively valenced feelings such as loneliness, but its felt experience in the context of work may be positive or negative, depending on the situational, organisational, and individual factors at play.

Finally, this research will provide guidelines for organisations to lay the groundwork for belongingness. This exploration will inform organisational practices and interventions aimed at enhancing belongingness at work and maximising its positive outcomes. Further, it will expand the operational definition of belongingness to support development and refinement of construct measurement for subsequent studies. Figure 1 summarises each of these four aims and draws attention to the phase of the research that will fulfil the objectives. To that end, the research relies on a qualitative study conducted in two phases, outlined in greater depth below.

Figure 1

Summary of Research Aims



Qualitative Study Phase 1

The first phase of the study investigates the experience of belongingness at work, as well as the antecedents and outcomes of a culture of belongingness from the perspective of employees in mid- to large-sized organisations. It relies on in-depth, open-ended qualitative interviews of twelve employees to uncover their experience of belonging at work, the factors that impact it, and their insights on the degree to which their organisation’s climate fosters positive relationships at work.

This phase of the study maps the nomological network of belongingness by preliminarily identifying its outcomes and the structural-functional factors that may undermine or enhance belongingness in organisations. The interview content is guided by a literature review on the predictors and outcomes of belongingness that may enhance or mitigate a sense of belongingness in the workplace. Themes are identified around specific practices organisations

engage in to create and cultivate belongingness. The subsequent analysis examines the positive and negative aspects of belongingness, from felt emotions to workplace outcomes.

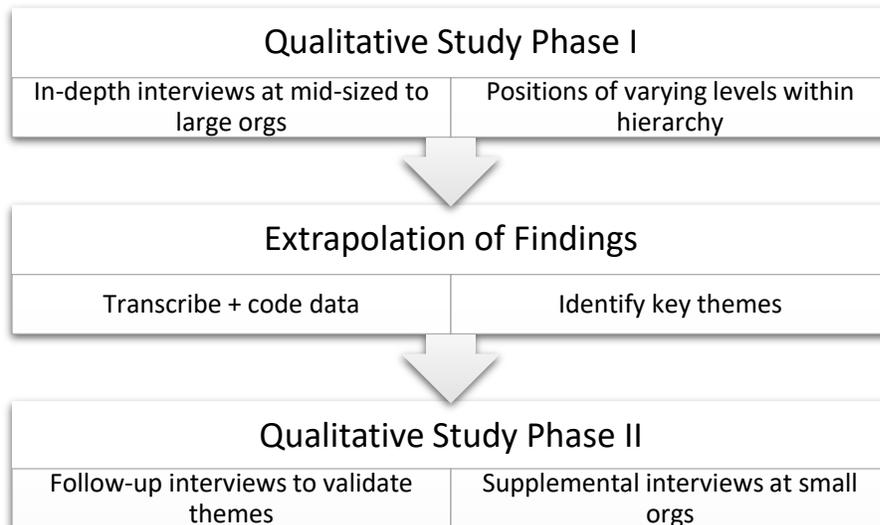
Interviewees are selected from workplaces in New Zealand and the United States to allow for an exploration of belongingness at work through a cultural lens.

Qualitative Study Phase 2

Phase 2 deepens the exploration from Phase 1 through secondary interviews of the same participants to draw out additional themes and validate existing ones. Additional interviews of employees in small-scale organisations determine whether similar themes emerge in the context of small enterprises. The over-arching process of this research is further illustrated in Figure 2 below.

Figure 2

Project Trajectory



Research Design

To further the aims illustrated above, grounded theory methodology (GTM) is the selected design for this thesis. Grounded theory methods set forth rigorous strategies for conducting sound qualitative research, and perhaps equally importantly, promote a design that makes the analytical process stimulating and enjoyable (Charmaz, 1996). GTM is particularly useful when approaching complex constructs which require greater theoretical enhancement (Strauss & Corbin, 1994) and when working with rich qualitative data (Charmaz, 1996), both features of the present study.

Thesis Structure

This thesis consists of six chapters, summarised in greater depth below.

Chapter 1 provides a road map for the thesis with a brief background on the construct of belongingness, in addition to a description of the research aims, study design, and introduction to the chosen methodology.

Chapter 2 examines the existing literature and foundational basis for the construct of belongingness, relationships at work, and key structural and functional factors in organisations that are tied to these areas. In keeping with contemporary modalities of grounded theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1994), the purpose of the literature review in this context is not to establish a framework for empirically based hypotheses, but instead to provide an overarching view of the existing research that currently defines the construct of belongingness, and to identify gaps and conflicting evidence that require further enquiry.

Chapter 3 elaborates on the choice of grounded theory as the selected methodology for this research. The philosophical underpinnings of methodology and the craft of qualitative

research are explored, in addition to the operational definitions and typology of grounded theory as a backdrop for the contemporary methods employed in this research.

Chapter 4 elucidates the data analysis process by describing the process of participant selection and data collection, including the procedures used for constructing and conducting the qualitative interviews in both studies. Detail is provided around the procedures associated with analysing data in keeping with grounded theory methodology, such as memoing, various stages of coding, and beginning to identify emergent themes to undergird theory development.

Chapter 5 explores the findings of the two qualitative studies. This chapter centres on the three key themes or “dimensions of self” that emerged from the data, first from the initial interviews and subsequently affirmed and expanded by the second round of interviews.

Finally, Chapter 6 highlights the implications of the findings and makes recommendations for future research and the potential practical application for organisational leaders and their employees.

Chapter Summary

This thesis explores the experience of belongingness in the workplace by examining the perspectives and experiences of employees. It expands on the existing body of belongingness literature and contributes to the research on relationships in the workplace. This work further examines the influence of leadership and the functional and structural elements of organisations on employees’ experiences of belongingness.

Given the sparsity of practical heuristics for promoting belongingness in the workplace, this research will lay the initial groundwork of actionable steps in support of that aim. By considering the foundational definitions of belongingness, what it means in the workplace, and

how we can reasonably expect to infuse it into organisational cultures, we come full circle. It brings us one step closer to producing meaningful tools that foster healthily functioning organisations and cultivate climates that enhance individual fulfilment and wellbeing.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

While the world has steadily changed around us for millennia, there has been one constant: human relationships. Researchers have explored this complex phenomenon through the lens of nearly every scientific discipline, including psychology, sociology, biology, anthropology, and philosophy. The enduring steadfastness of our sociality as a species carries through to the world of work, and research in this domain is consistent in its perspective that relationships are essential for getting work done (Heaphy et al., 2018).

To adequately frame this thesis and studies therein, this chapter will review the literature to more concretely bound the construct of belongingness through, a) an exploration of the theoretical underpinnings of belongingness and the existing methods of measurement, b) an examination of belonging-adjacent variables and their relevance, c) an illumination of the contexts through which belongingness has been socially constructed, and d) an investigation of belongingness through the theoretical lens of the organisation, including research gaps and implications that provide direction for the studies presented in this thesis.

Defining Belongingness

In their seminal work on the belongingness hypothesis, Baumeister and Leary (1995) suggest that we have a “pervasive drive to form and maintain at least a minimum quantity of lasting, positive, and significant interpersonal relationships” (p. 497). They set forth two criteria for satisfying the need to belong: first, that engagement with other people must be frequent and pleasant, and secondly, that those interactions are couched in a lasting framework of mutual concern (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). Acknowledging the reluctance of modern social psychologists to adopt sweeping statements about the nature of theoretical and empirical

phenomena, they take the opposite tact in their theory about belongingness, arguing that most of behaviours, emotions, and thoughts can be explained by this underlying drive. This is a relatively contentious position given previous research that points to other critical human needs, such as self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985a, 2000) and the hierarchy of needs model (Maslow, 1968). In the simplest terms, they suggest that “much of what human beings do is done in the service of belongingness” (Baumeister & Leary, 1995, p. 498). From an anthropological perspective, they posit that social culture has been significantly influenced by the motivation to belong and that we are innately driven to achieve and sustain belongingness. They go further in stating that belongingness is “...almost as compelling as the need for food” and classify it as a *need*, not merely a want (Baumeister & Leary, 1995, p. 498).

To validate these expansive claims, they undertake a systematic approach to evaluate the conditions of their hypothesis by identifying and exploring eight key metatheoretical criteria. Table 1 outlines each of these criteria in turn, with a brief description of each as explored in the literature .

Table 1

Baumeister & Leary’s Metatheoretical Criteria

	Criterion	Definition
1	Produce effects readily under all but adverse conditions	Forming social bonds and not breaking bonds; suggests that a fundamental motivation should operate in a wide variety of settings. Certain circumstances may retard or prevent its motivating mechanism, but generally, the more widely it can produce effects, the stronger its claim to being a fundamental motivation.
2	Have affective consequences (emotion)	Cognitive and emotional responses reflect subjective importance and concern. Most motivational and drive systems involve hedonic consequences that alert the individual to undesired state changes that motivate behaviour to restore the desired state.
3	Direct cognitive processing (cognition)	

4	Lead to ill effects when thwarted	Failure to satisfy a fundamental motivation should produce ill effects that go beyond temporary affective distress. If belongingness is a need rather than simply a want, then people who lack belongingness should exhibit pathological consequences beyond mere temporary distress.
5	Elicit goal-oriented behaviour designed to satisfy it (satiation and substitution)	If the need to belong is a fundamental need, then belonging to one group should satisfy it and hence obviate or reduce the need to belong to another group. People may be driven to form social bonds until they have a certain number, whereafter the drive to form attachments would presumably subside. Attachment partners should be to some degree interchangeable.
6	Be universal in the sense of applying to all people	Any motivation that is limited to certain human beings or certain circumstances, or any motivation that is derived from another motive, cannot be regarded as fundamental. Universality can be indicated by transcending cultural boundaries.
7	Not be derivative of other motives	If the motivation operates in a broad variety of situations without requiring particular, favourable circumstances, then it may be presumed to be fundamental. If the evidence contradicts evolutionary patterns to indicate physiological mechanisms, then the hypothesis of universality or innateness would lose credibility.
8	Affect a broad variety of behaviours	The more behaviours that appear to be influenced by a particular motive, the stronger its case for being one of the fundamental motives. A fundamental motive should have implications that go beyond psychological functioning. If a motivation is truly fundamental, it should influence a broad range of human activity, and should be capable of offering viable, consistent interpretations of patterns observed in historical, economic, or sociological studies.

Note: Adapted from “The Need to Belong: Desire for Interpersonal Attachments as a Fundamental Human Motivation,” by R. Baumeister and M. Leary, 1995, *Psychological Bulletin*, 117(3). Copyright 1995 by the American Psychological Association, Inc.

While other scholars had examined the construct of belongingness, Baumeister and Leary’s hypothesis was the first to make such broad and sweeping claims about the imperative nature of human relationships and the drive to seek and maintain these connections. In doing so, they laid the groundwork for subsequent exploration of belongingness across disciplines, within specific populations, and relative to a host of corresponding constructs and variables.

Prior to Baumeister & Leary’s work, one of the earliest definitions found in the literature is Anant’s 1966 description of belonging as a “sense of personal involvement in a social system

so that persons feel themselves to be an indispensable and integral part of the system” (p. 21). In this view, having a sense of belonging inferred being recognised and accepted by other members of a group. Anant (1967, 1969) also established a relationship between belonging and variables such as anxiety and self-sufficiency in subsequent studies, although the validity of the measurement was later called into question for potentially conflating dependency with belonging. While it served as some of the seminal research on the topic, the focus of this work was less descriptive and more evaluative in nature, as it looked to understand mental health and mental illness through the relational lens of belongingness (Anant, 1966, 1967, 1969). More contemporary definitions of belongingness can be loosely categorised into three primary domains: connection, fit, and support.

In the development of a scale for measuring belongingness, Lee and Robbins (1995) set forth three components that capture a sense of being part of an experience or connected to a group: companionship, affiliation, and connectedness. Tackling the challenge of creating language for an ineffable construct, they aptly describe the feeling of belonging as being “human among humans” (Lee & Robbins, 1995, p. 233). Further, in a study of Peruvian high school students, belongingness in the educational sphere was described simply as the extent to which students felt socially connected (Cueto et al., 2010).

Other early research explored belongingness from the perspective of the *absence* of connection. In a qualitative study of Israeli soldiers who experienced mental breakdowns, Dasberg (1976) pointed to a lack of belonging as a common variable, in addition to their descriptions of feeling “cut off and uprooted, abandoned, rejected, and psychologically severed” (Hagerty & Patusky, 1995, p. 9). Another study exploring the experiences of child

survivors of the Holocaust found that many felt they did not belong anywhere from the standpoint of age, social group, or country. This led researchers to identify belongingness as an integral component of identity and object relationship, and one which is developed as a tether “not only to the family, but to the community, the nation, and a cultural group” (Kestenberg & Kestenberg, 1988, p. 536).

In the psychology literature, the four criteria of membership, influence, fulfilment of needs, and shared emotional connection are identified as central to the experience of community (Chavis et al., 1986). In this context, belonging to a community is characterised by mutual concern, connection, loyalty, and trust that personal needs will be met (Chavis et al., 1986).

Hagerty et al. (1992) furthered the construct of belongingness in their exploration of sense of belonging as a key mental health concept. They defined belonging as “the experience of personal involvement in a system or environment so that persons feel themselves to be an integral part of that system or environment” (Hagerty et al., 1992, p. 173). Two dimensions to sense of belonging were identified: *valued involvement*, that is, feeling valued, needed, accepted; and *fit*, described as the individual’s perception that their characteristics are congruent with the environment or system (Hagerty et al., 1992). Through concept analysis utilising a literature review and clinical case studies, they posited that three key antecedents undergird sense of belonging, including energy for involvement, the potential and desire for meaningful involvement, and the potential for shared characteristics. Finally, their suggested consequences of belongingness included psychological, social, spiritual, or physical involvement and attribution of meaningfulness to that involvement (Hagerty et al., 1992). This work served

as an important contributor to the early development construct of belongingness. However, it was not as strongly couched in the literature as Baumeister & Leary's later theory and lacked compelling empirical evidence to validate the identified antecedents and outcomes of belongingness.

Other definitions of belongingness have arisen from the transdisciplinary literature. The educational research in particular has explored this construct in depth, as the dynamics of student relationships and social groups are rich fodder for examining belongingness and adjacent concepts such as group membership, identity, and cohesion. A frequently cited definition comes from the work of Goodenow (1993) in which psychological membership and sense of belonging are defined as "the extent to which students feel personally accepted, respected, included, and supported by others" (p. 80). In another exploration of community as a construct, a study examining the interplay between sport and belonging found that belonging was equated with social support and a sense of looking out for one another (Walseth, 2006).

Finn (1989) viewed belongingness as the degree to which students feel respect, support, and personal membership in the school environment and related belonging to feelings of congruence with self and the institution. Sedgwick and Yonge (2008) suggested that belonging offers "a shared sense of socially constructed meaning that provides a sense of security or relatedness" (p. 3). Other definitions from the educational journals focus on the concept of individual perception, equating belongingness to perceived sense of cohesion (Museus & Maramba, 2010) and perceived sense of integration (Strayhorn, 2008).

Definitions of belongingness are also explored through proximate constructs in the literature such as community, inclusion, and integration. In the political science literature,

Crowley (1999) points out that discussions of belonging are often at the centre of migration issues, with effects on both social inclusion and exclusion. While there are no direct ties between formal membership (such as citizenship) and belonging, membership is inextricably “tangled with social constructions of belonging that make it meaningful” (Crowley, 1999, p. 38). Following this thread, belonging has also been taken to involve subjective and discursive dimensions of commitment, loyalty and common purpose for immigrant communities (Gustafson, 2005). In this context of macro-level belonging to a nation or a place, belonging is further described as *practical nationality*, that is, “the practical deployment and significance of nationality in the social – how people experience and deploy their claims to national belonging in everyday life” (Hage, 2000, p. 50). Hence, belongingness can be conceptualised at the collective level. This has implications for organisational contexts and the ways in which employees may experience belonging not merely as an individualised phenomenon, but as a part of the collective whole.

Recent literature reviews have attempted to synthesise the definitions of belongingness across the transdisciplinary research. In their work aimed at creating a conceptualisation of belongingness, Mahar et al. (2012) distilled the constructs and language used in descriptions of belonging to arrive at a definition that could be used to guide measurement and evaluate community-based programmes for people with disabilities. Their discussion pointed at recurrent themes in the literature, such as connectedness, feeling valued and respected, identifying reciprocal feelings or beliefs, and noting a “necessary harmony of characteristics” between an individual the group (Mahar et al., 2012, p. 4). These identified commonalities were refined into five key themes running through the belongingness literature: *subjectivity*, the

individuality of belonging and its unique experience to each person; *groundedness*, the need for a referent anchor for the perceived sense of belonging and having something to belong to; *reciprocity*, the shared sense of connectedness inherent to belongingness; *dynamism*, the interaction with physical and social environments that inhibits or contributes to sense of belonging; and *self-determination*, the right to choose to what or whom belongingness is attached (Mahar et al., 2012).

This distillation of constructs from across the literature allows one to tie common threads between the many and varied perspectives on what belongingness is and how it is understood in numerous contexts. In conjunction with this exploration, Mahar et al. (2012) contribute their own definition of belongingness, describing it as:

...a subjective feeling of value and respect derived from a reciprocal relationship to an external referent that is built on a foundation of shared experiences, beliefs or personal characteristics. These feelings of external connectedness are grounded to the context or referent group, to whom one chooses, wants and feels permission to belong. This dynamic phenomenon may be either hindered or promoted by complex interactions between environmental and personal factors (p. 6).

Exploring these definitions from the perspective of various fields and schools of thought illuminates the contextual element of belongingness. The ways in which belongingness is constructed, valued, and operationalised may vary based on the traits and needs of the population as well as the nature and intent of the domain to which they belong. This further underscores the need to broaden the understanding of belongingness in the specific framework of the workplace.

The definitions that undergird belongingness as a construct provide one with a clearer lens through which to view the origins of the belongingness hypothesis, the early literature that

laid the groundwork for its claims, and the wide variety of transdisciplinary contexts in which it is explored. This journey through the literature demonstrates that while the conceptualisations of belongingness are many, the cogent, consistent definitions are few, a fact that can be ascribed to its complexity and cross-over with other constructs. Its underlying facets and mechanisms may be context-dependent, and the forthcoming exploration of belongingness against the backdrop of specific settings contributes to a deeper understanding of its dimensions and broader significance.

Historical and Theoretical Underpinnings

The earliest origins of belongingness as a construct in the psychology literature can be traced to the Freudian theory that humans do indeed have an internal drive for relationship with other humans. While Baumeister & Leary's hypothesis aligns with Freud (1930) in the sense of viewing this driving psychological force as innate and universal, there is a departure in their perspectives on the source of that drive. Freud saw the inherent nature of the need for belonging as a derivation from sex drive and the maternal bond, or the lack thereof; in other words, it had a clear external source. Baumeister and Leary (1995) note this departure in their own hypothesis, stating that, "unlike the Freudian (1930) view that regarded sexuality and aggression as the major driving psychological forces, and unlike the most ambitious behaviourist views that considered each newborn a tabula rasa, this view depicts the human being as naturally driven toward establishing and sustaining belongingness" (p. 499).

Conceptualisation of the need for belonging is also found in Maslow's (1968) hierarchy of needs, a frequently referenced and oft-criticized model of self-actualisation. Maslow (1968) places love and belongingness in the middle of his hierarchical model of human motivation,

suggesting that these needs for relationship, affection, and community only emerge once basic physiological needs are satisfied, and they may contribute to the achievement of self-esteem and self-actualisation. His work departs from the theories of Freud and Baumeister & Leary in viewing belongingness as important, but not imperative or innate. Although influential and longstanding in its era, Maslow's work in this domain has subsequently been dismissed by many psychologists as being conceptually arbitrary and lacking empirical evidence (Neher, 1991; Wahba & Bridwell, 1976). In her own criticism of Maslow's work, Rutledge (2011) suggests that the growing complexity and interconnectedness of modern society casts a new light on the importance of belonging, arguing that, "Belongingness is the driving force of human behavior, not a third tier activity" (p. 2).

Bowlby's attachment theory posited that we have a need for the formation and maintenance of relationships (Bowlby, 1969, 1973). Similar to Freud, his early work suggested that the need for attachment is tied to maternal bonds and that sense of belonging in adulthood is an attempt to recapture the intimacy of that relationship, influencing the way we interact in work groups, religious settings, and other social contexts. In later thinking, his perspective shifted to regard attachment as a distinct and innate need separate from the filial bond, purporting that maternal relationships are merely an influential blueprint for attachment (Bowlby, 1969, 1973). This subsequent line of thought was more closely aligned with Baumeister & Leary's views of belongingness as an internal drive that is not tethered to a specific locus of affiliation.

Several other concepts from Bowlby's work bolstered the theoretical evidence for the belongingness hypothesis. For example, he posited that infants begin to form caregiver

attachments long before they have executive functioning skills and are able to calculate the benefits of relationship formation (Bowlby, 1969). He further noted that children who do not receive sufficient attention in their formative stages manifest emotional and behavioural pathologies (Bowlby, 1969, 1973), a phenomenon that was corroborated by experiments with primates (Harlow et al., 1971). The evolution of Bowlby's thinking around attachment theory contributed to the development of the belongingness hypothesis decades later in integral ways, particularly in its view of the need for human relationships as innate and all-encompassing.

Attachment theory is not without its critics. Harris (1998) posits that parents or other caregivers have less influence over the development of children than attachment theory suggests. Rather, she ascribes greater importance of both inherent personality (the *nature* argument) and the influence of peers in shaping character and wellbeing. T. Field (1996) further notes that the attachment model as developed by Bowlby and Ainsworth accounts little for the nature of interactions during enduring "natural and nonstressful" situations and limits the focus of attachment behaviours to the primary caregiver (p. 543).

The need for affiliation is one of three implicit motivational needs traditionally described in the literature, alongside power and achievement. These implicit motives are viewed as "dispositional capacities" that yield positive or negative feelings and are understood to be subconscious and influential on behavioural outcomes (McClelland et al., 1989; Schultheiss, 2008). Affiliation motive in particular is frequently defined as the ability to derive satisfaction from the formation and maintenance of positive relationships, and further, to experience the loss or separation of those relationships as aversive, wherein stronger motives yield stronger affective states (Schultheiss, 2008; Weinberger et al., 2010). Veroff and Veroff

(1980) described the need for affiliation as a personality attribute that corresponds to the desire for social relationships. Stated simply, we generally want to be with people who are friendly and accepting, and we tend to distance ourselves from those who are not (Winter, 1996).

In the context of work, need for affiliation is commonly discussed alongside concepts such as leader-member exchange. Employees who demonstrate high affiliation motive are likely to seek relationships with their immediate supervisors to establish leader-member exchange opportunities (Cole et al., 2002). However, the motivation is lessened when group cohesion is high (Cole et al., 2002), suggesting that sense of belonging can be sought from and satisfied by different sources in a social system. Kong et al. (2017) also link the need for affiliation and belongingness indirectly with 'voice behaviour,' a term used to describe the phenomenon of employees' willingness to express their opinions and suggest organisational changes (Morrison et al., 2011).

Past literature suggested that a high affiliation motive may make for a poor manager given its demands for enforcing accountability and making personnel decisions (McClelland & Boyatzis, 1982; McClelland & Burnham, 2003). Newer research, however, purports that affiliation motive may actually be a compelling ingredient of effective leadership in the context of the contemporary workplace where social attentiveness is often highly valued (Steinmann et al., 2015).

The view of affiliation motivation as a trait or element of personality sets it apart from the need to belong, which sees the desire for relationship as an inherent need and not a set of characteristics. The need for affiliation is also one of three motives theorists point to as

underlying social behaviour, whereas the belongingness hypothesis suggests that the need to belong stands alone. Further, affiliation motivation exists on a spectrum, as previously noted, wherein the motivations of one individual may be greater or less than that of another. The belongingness hypothesis makes no such distinction in its view of this drive as universal and all-encompassing.

In spite of these differences, need for affiliation bears similarities to the belongingness hypothesis in the mutually held perspective that the drive to seek and maintain relationships is both imperative and inherent. There is also a parallel tension between the need for affiliation and our understanding of belongingness. Some organisational scholars have noted the complex mechanisms underlying the affiliation motive; a high need for affiliation can be adaptive in the sense that it increases the likelihood of capitalising on connections and increasing social resources (Den Hartog et al., 2007), but it can also reflect anxiety about displeasing others and concern about disrupting social harmony (Weinberger et al., 2010). This tension is similar to the paradox in the belongingness literature wherein the desire to maximise social exchanges may at times clash with the disavowing of individuality in favour of group cohesion. Both theories would suggest, however, that the motivation for social connectedness is a “central influence on human behavior” (Hill, 1987, p. 1008), and one that has important implications for the ways in which we understand and interpret relational behaviour at work.

This exploration has outlined the operational definitions of belongingness to clarify how it is currently understood in the context of work and to illuminate existing gaps. Further, exploring the historical underpinnings of belongingness has revealed its theoretical origins in Freudian views of filial bonds, Maslow’s hierarchy of needs, Bowlby’s attachment theory, and

McClelland's need for affiliation. It has further demonstrated the ways in which these concepts align with or diverge from the individual and relational facets of belongingness. This lays the groundwork for a discussion of additional constructs in the extant literature that broaden the understanding of belonging as a whole and as a particularly useful concept for the modern workplace.

Related Constructs

Armed with a clear sense of the various definitions used to characterise belongingness, it is useful to turn attention to some of the constructs discussed alongside it in the literature. There are numerous avenues that could be travelled in the realm of social psychology, anthropology, and even philosophy. For the purposes of this exploration, the focus will be on attachment, bonds, social support, and group membership. A basic understanding of these concepts and how they are approached will help to frame later discussions about the nature of belongingness in various contexts. This exploration of the belongingness construct in relation to associated constructs serves to identify well-established ideas that have informed the current understanding of belongingness while highlighting the conceptual and operational distinctions between them.

Attachment

As previously noted, there are several points of intersection between belongingness and attachment theory as posited by Bowlby. This seminal work was cultivated from Bowlby's work as a child psychiatrist in London in the 1930s, where he noted the influence of the maternal relationship on the social, emotional, and cognitive development of children. This experience shaped his thinking about the impact of separation in early infancy. In collaboration with James

Robertson, Bowlby observed the anxiety experienced by children when separated from their mothers, as well as the continuation of that distress even when fed by other caregivers (Bowlby & Robertson, 1952). These observations ultimately led to Bowlby's formulation of attachment theory.

In Bowlby's early writing, attachment was defined as a "lasting psychological connectedness between human beings" (Bowlby, 1969, p. 194). Attachment in this sense was not intended as a blanket perspective of every aspect of the parent-child relationship, nor was Bowlby's use of the term attachment designed to be a synonym for social bonds. Rather, attachment theory in its foundational stages explored the emergence and subsequent evolution of these early parent-child relationships, as well as the ramifications of the absence of healthy attachment (Bretherton, 1985). Bowlby (1958) further posited that attachment could be understood through an evolutionary lens rather than a behavioural one; namely, that the infant receives safety and security from the attachment figure, enhancing the likelihood of survival. Other research bolstered these views, suggesting that infants possess an innate drive to form attachments, and that behaviours such as crying, smiling, and other interactions will produce a caregiving response. In this way, it is responsiveness that serves as the determinant of attachment (Harlow et al., 1971; Harlow & Zimmermann, 1958; Lorenz, 1935).

The belongingness hypothesis is informed by and congruent with attachment theory in several ways. The integral nature of relationships – including the formation and sustainment of those connections – serves as the theoretical foundation of both ideas. The constructs of belongingness and attachment accept the need for human relationship as both innate and evolutionary, an all-encompassing drive that is in-born. Further, there is empirical evidence to

suggest that the absence of these connections is linked to depression, poor wellbeing, and a host of other physiological and psychological challenges (Argyle, 1987; Freedman, 1978; Myers, 1992), a central tenet in both the belongingness hypothesis and attachment theory.

There are also several points of departure between attachment and belongingness. Baumeister and Leary (1995) address this in their seminal article, noting that attachment theory differs from their view of belongingness in two ways. First, attachment theory distinguishes between *styles* of attachment, and the literature in this realm has continued to explore and focus on these differences (Fraley & Roisman, 2019; Hazan & Shaver, 1994; Shaver et al., 1988). In contrast, the belongingness hypothesis emphasises the “commonality of the overarching need to belong” and views the need to belong as universal (Baumeister & Leary, 1995, p. 500). Second, attachment theory focuses on emotional needs and the fulfilment of those needs as being implicit in specific types of relationships (particularly the child-caregiver relationship) whereas the belongingness hypothesis suggests it is “at least plausible that the need to belong could be satisfied in other ways” and purports that the emotional aspects of belongingness can be understood as mediating mechanisms versus essential properties (Baumeister & Leary, 1995, p. 500). More recent literature has also pointed to differences between attachment and belonging. For example, the clinical psychology research notes that attachment theory, despite its recognition of the ability for multiple attachments in children, is primarily concerned with individual relationships (Hindley, 2019; Waters et al., 2005). Belongingness, by contrast, provides a broader, more nuanced field than attachment theory through which to conceptualise and understand social existence (Hindley, 2019) and emphasises the role of the collective, in contrast to the focus on individual relationships in attachment theory. The writings

on attachment theory also do not suggest that it must be reciprocal; a person may have an attachment that is not shared (Bowlby, 1969). Constructs of belongingness, however, generally include reciprocity that is characterised by “shared experiences, understandings or behaviors between the individual and the group” (Mahar et al., 2012, p. 4). This further emphasises the contextual nature of belongingness and the need for considering setting to broaden the understanding of what it means to belong.

This exploration of the nature and origins of attachment theory serves to illuminate the integral role it played in the foundation and evolution of the belongingness hypothesis. The shared emphasis on relationship as a *need* is at the heart of both attachment and belonging, and researchers have used similar arguments from evolutionary and social psychology to further these theories. At the same time, there are several points where the constructs diverge, and these distinctions elucidate the unique attributes of belongingness to provide a better understanding of how it is placed in the socio-relational context of organisations explored in this thesis.

Social Support

Social support is also frequently discussed alongside belongingness in the social psychology literature. The following exploration will consider how social support is described in the literature, how social support is formed, and its relevance to the belongingness hypothesis. While there are numerous definitions of social support, some commonalities can be identified among the definitions. Lindgren (1990) suggests that social support “allows one to believe that he or she is cared for and loved, esteemed and valued, and belongs to a network of mutual obligation” (p. 469). In a similar vein, social support has been equated with sense of belonging

and feeling loved (Steinkamp & Kelly, 1987). Social support is also connected to the degree of cohesion reflected in a community or group, and this can manifest in normative outcomes such as trust, engagement, cooperation, reciprocity, and openness (Haslam & Haslam, 2019). In a study on the nature of belonging in team sports, Walseth (2006) further argues that social support is inherent in normative experiences of belonging, particularly those in traditional communities formed on the basis of shared activities.

Social support becomes an integral concept in the framework of belongingness when considering whether receiving help from a social network is the impetus for seeking to form and maintain relationships. The behaviours associated with giving and seeking support underlie the broader need for belongingness, including the motivation to grow and sustain social connections for future satisfaction of belongingness needs. These needs are satisfied in part by social support, as represented by a set of behaviours and the corresponding assessment of whether such behaviours have occurred. The overlap between belongingness and social support occurs along the lines of behavioural perception, and to some extent, the discrepancy is reflected in the fact that belongingness also entails a sense of acceptance and fit within the group.

In a study aimed at distinguishing social support from companionship, Rook (1987) sought to parse out whether the behavioural aspect of social support from the expressive aspect of companionship. While both elements help to create the social fabric of relationships, companionship was found to be more integral to wellbeing, social satisfaction, and coping with stress. This suggests that the tangible assistance people derive from social networks, while important, is not the primary driver for the development of relationship and social bonds.

Baumeister and Leary (1995) echo this sentiment in their comment that “practical help is secondary (except in extreme circumstances in which major assistance is needed), whereas belongingness is highly beneficial by itself” (p. 510). They further posit that any benefits derived from social support would serve to confirm the belongingness hypothesis, in the sense that both social support and belongingness are founded on positive interactions. Indeed, the beneficial outcomes associated with social support and positive relationships are well-founded, and the literature spanning several decades has confirmed their buffering effect on stress and adverse life events (Appau et al., 2019; Brewin et al., 2000; Charuvastra & Cloitre, 2008; Cohen et al., 1986; Cohen & Wills, 1985; Ozer et al., 2003).

Group Membership

In simple terms, group membership pertains to “the rights and obligations that accompany association with others” (Gilbert, 1989, p. 204) and is often associated with similar constructs such as social solidarity and collective belongingness. Hochschild (2010) distinguishes between group membership and belongingness in the way they are described and experienced; whereas group membership denotes the type of integration, collective belongingness pertains to “an affective state that group members experience intersubjectively” (p. 621).

Within the literature, explorations of belongingness are generally concerned with the ways in which it can be achieved and the key outcomes, whereas the group membership literature, particularly in economic theory, looks to make sense of inter-group behaviour. For example, Charness et al. (2007) suggest that individuals within salient groups orient their decision-making to be more favourable for the collective, concluding that “groups profoundly

affect individual behavior in social situations” (p. 1350). These findings are bolstered by other research showing that group membership reduces the relevance of separateness or interpersonal distinction (J. C. Turner et al., 1987). This view aligns with the evolutionary perspective of the belongingness hypothesis in which inclusion in a group equates to safety, and with potentially perilous consequences for exclusion (Baumeister & Leary, 1995).

In the context of organisations, group membership is integral for effective change management as it imbues a sense of identity that can serve to mitigate uncertainty (Haslam & Haslam, 2019; Hindley, 2019). In addition to reducing uncertainty, identifying as a group member provides a sense of order that eliminates the ambiguity inherent in the pathways of change, paving the way for more efficient integration of new policies or processes (F. Grant & Hogg, 2012). The research has also found that a sense of belonging within social groups lends meaning in life through avenues such as providing stability, creating shared identity, and allowing the pursuit of higher collective aims (Iyer et al., 2009).

Thus, an exploration of these related constructs furthers the understanding of the broader belongingness domain and these comparisons serve to highlight important facets of the construct. Group membership and belongingness depart from one another in the essence of what they respectively describe. Group membership defines the nature, or the *demonstration* of the phenomenon of being included, whereas belongingness speaks to its affective dimension – the *felt* experience of such inclusion. A further point of tension between group membership and belongingness is the sense of identity and safety gleaned from group membership resulting from in-group and out-group dynamics, which may be at odds with the aspirational aspect of belongingness for broader, collective acceptance within the complexity of

social systems. In line with this thinking, Hogg (2001) suggests that social identity and personal identity are distinct forms of self, in which personal identity is crafted within the framework of social identity, effectively establishing group membership and the individual self as independent of one another. However, based on the evidence outlined above, it is conceivable that the social inclusion inherent in both belongingness and group membership could produce similar benefits in organisational settings.

Belongingness in Context

Next, it is helpful to shift attention to the contexts through which belongingness is framed – that is, the vistas from which one can more clearly elucidate how we have arrived at the current understanding of belongingness in the institutional, societal, and cultural domains. This includes settings such as education, healthcare, religion, and socio-cultural contexts. While each of these areas could easily yield a deep and multi-faceted exploration, for the purposes of this work, three primary aspects will be considered. First, the *key players*: What does belongingness look and feel like from the vantage point of the people who have a vested interest in each of the arenas examined? Secondly, the *locus of belongingness*: What relationships create the foundation for belonging? Finally, the *demonstrated impact*: What are the outcomes of belongingness (positive or negative) or the lack thereof within these contexts? Thus we will come to understand how views of belongingness in the workplace have been shaped by research in social and organised environments across sectors and socio-cultural contexts.

Belongingness in Education

There is a broad span of literature relative to belongingness in the educational sphere, primarily through the lens of positive student outcomes. In direct alignment with the belongingness hypothesis, Osterman (2000) suggests that achieving a sense of belonging to a community is a basic psychological need. The evidence for belongingness as a desirable outcome in the school setting is robust, with positive links to variables such as grades, perceived competence, and psychological adjustment, including feelings of self-worth (Pittman & Richmond, 2007). Other studies have identified a relationship between students' perceived belonging and academic motivation (Faircloth & Hamm, 2011), academic aspirations, choices, persistence, and performance (Murphy & Zirkel, 2015), along with positive social and emotional outcomes (Appleton et al., 2006). Beyond academic achievement, there is sound evidence that a sense of belongingness contributes to psychological wellbeing (K. A. Allen & Bowles, 2012; Jose et al., 2012; Pittman & Richmond, 2007). The reverse is also true; the literature demonstrates that a low sense of school belonging leads to feelings of alienation, ultimately translating to poor achievement and drop-out (Cueto et al., 2010).

The nature of relationships internal and external to the educational setting also has relevance to the understanding of belongingness. A variety of individual, social, and environmental factors relate to children's sense of school belonging, with teacher support being the strongest indicator (K. A. Allen & Bowles, 2012; Rejaan et al., 2021). Perhaps most compellingly, having a sense of belonging within a school community, particularly when there is a cohesive teacher relationship, can serve as a buffer for negative interactions with peers and parents (Hamre & Pianta, 2001). This finding has important implications for the protective value

of belonging in an educational context (Rejaan et al., 2021) and is further echoed in the organisational literature that emphasises the importance of the supervisor relationship to sense of belonging (Ferris et al., 2009; Gottfredson & Aguinis, 2017; Randel et al., 2018).

While a great deal of research focus is directed at the experiences and perceptions of students, there is also evidence to suggest that teachers benefit from school belongingness. Some studies argue that creating a 'village of learning' for student teachers leads to a greater sense of belonging, accomplishment, and inclusion (Ussher, 2010). Gillies (2017) illustrates the importance of sound school-based relationships between students and teachers alike in her recommendations for 'whole schooling' principles, one of which includes facilitating feelings of belonging. She advocates for the deep and deliberate crafting of individual, personal relationships between teachers and students, noting that the belonging resulting from these positive and affiliative relationships promotes the creation and maintenance of a classroom community that is caring and acceptive (Gillies, 2017). Taking this notion a step further, Loreman (2011) promotes a 'loving pedagogy' wherein acceptance, relationship, and love between students is at the centre of the curriculum. In so doing, Campbell-Gibson (1997) suggests that this maximises learning opportunities through provision of the "all-important human infrastructure" (p. 8). Similar principles could prove to be beneficial in organisational settings by placing a greater emphasis on the development of meaningful, connective relationships that lay the groundwork for positive work outcomes.

Belongingness and Religious Affiliation

The literature on religious affiliation demonstrates myriad benefits to wellbeing. People who identify as being religious tend to be healthier, live longer, and experience overall

increased levels of subjective wellbeing (Myers 2000; Pargament 1997; Sherkat and Ellison 1999; Mochon, Norton, and Ariely 2011). Placing religious affiliation in the framework of the present discussion, the literature suggests that some of these benefits may stem from the higher sense of belonging reported by those who are affiliated with a religious organisation.

Some researchers posit that the group membership dimension of religiosity provides the fodder for belongingness. Saiz et al. (2020) contend that simply identifying as belonging to a church or religious organisation is not a predictor; that is, when examined independently of spirituality, it did not produce positive health-related outcomes. Belongingness in a religious context is a more complex construct, shaped by factors such as one's behavioural interplay with the congregation, perceived support from fellow parishioners, and levels of attendance (Krause & Wulf, 2005).

Following this thread, and echoing the theme noted in the discussions of education and healthcare, the literature on religious membership also suggests that having a sense of belonging to a smaller group within the larger context of the church takes precedence over belonging to the church or religion itself. In other words, it is easier to experience a sense of belongingness within a small unit than within a large one. For example, Schulz (1992) found that members who participated in small groups such as church-sponsored Bible study groups or specific social groups reported higher levels of belongingness and investment in church activities. Thompson and McRae (2001) set forth a similar finding in their analysis of seven congregations in the Black church tradition, noting that church membership may reflect the need to belong *within* a group rather than *to* a group. Similar phenomena arise in organisational settings, where the sense of belongingness described and aspired to by

employees is often within the context of the team and may lead to enhanced job confidence (Sedgwick & Yonge, 2008).

Sense of belonging to a religious organisation may also be influenced by interpersonal factors like personality. Sibley and Bulbulia (2012) found that New Zealand Christians who went to church more frequently experienced higher levels of social belongingness. However, this was mediated by personality attributes such as neuroticism; Christians who scored high in neuroticism experienced the greatest social belonging, leading the researchers to conclude that “those who wish to promote religion for social belonging would be wise do consider personality differences” (Sibley & Bulbulia, 2012, p. 29). This finding underscores the broader need to consider individual characteristics that impact experiences of belongingness in a variety of contexts.

Thus, it follows that the experiences and benefits of religious belonging are not universal. The notion of thwarted belongingness is central to the literature on suicide and mental health, and it carries over to aspects of religious belongingness as well. A recent cross-sectional study noted that thwarted belongingness can be experienced as abandonment by God, and this factor was found to have a significant relationship with adolescent suicidality (Dyer et al., 2017). Thwarted belongingness also has implications in an organisational context, as explored later in this chapter.

In this exploration of the nuances of religious belongingness, we see how it is construed, studied, and experienced differently across various populations and milieu. In an eloquent distinction between religious group membership and social group membership, Hogg et al. (2010) note that a unique feature of religious groups is the way in which they “call up on the

sacred and the divine to provide prescriptive moral guidance for behavioral choices, sacred rituals and quests, and daily life” (p. 73).

Belongingness in the Military

The belongingness literature in the military domain is somewhat polarising in the sense that it couches belonging as either the saviour or the demon on the shoulder of military personnel. Much of the research focuses on the concept of thwarted belongingness, a term constructed from the belongingness hypothesis (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Lambert et al., 2013) and the current psychological thinking about loneliness (Cacioppo & Cacioppo, 2018; Cacioppo & Patrick, 2008). Thwarted belongingness is framed as a “psychologically painful mental state that results when the fundamental need for connectedness is unmet” (Van Orden et al., 2012, p. 2). The theory suggests that social isolation is associated with suicide, including factors such as living alone (Heikkinen, Aro, & Lönnqvist, 1994), loneliness (Honkanen et al., 2001), and low social support (Qin & Nordentoft, 2005; Sourander et al., 2009; Turvey et al., 2002) as indicators that the need to belong has been thwarted (Van Orden et al., 2012).

Numerous studies have examined the role of thwarted belongingness in the experiences of military personnel, particularly in light of the high rates of mental illness and suicide among active-duty members and veterans. Thwarted belongingness is an important risk factor for suicide, and it interacts with other variables such as aggression and experiences of betrayal (Martin et al., 2017). This has led to calls for evidence-based preventative strategies that account for the uniqueness of military culture (Bryan & Heron, 2015; Bryan et al., 2012; Bryan et al., 2013).

Military personnel experience unique challenges of belonging as they navigate between the distinct worlds of civilian and military life. Martin et al. (2017) note that this can diminish the degree to which they are able to fully integrate in either world, particularly for those who operate in non-deployed branches such as the National Guard (in the United States). This factor can lead to an ebbing and flowing of belongingness during the transition from military to civilian life, a shift that is notoriously rife with challenge and often ill-supported. Albertson (2019) terms this concept “disenfranchised grief” and suggests there is a need for a more valued veteran citizenship status to mitigate the acquisition, loss, and reformulation of a sense of belonging experienced by military personnel across a life course.

On the bright side of belongingness as it relates to the military, numerous studies have shown that a sense of belonging may protect against depression across all phases of the deployment cycle, from pre-deployment through to the post-deployment adjustment period (Bryan & Heron, 2015). Importantly, a sense of belonging has been found to buffer suicidal ideation, particularly among those who have experienced high levels of combat (Bryan et al., 2013).

Socio-Cultural Contexts of Belongingness

When exploring the construct of belongingness from the vantage point of communities, the lines begin to blur along the broad spectrum of places to which we can belong, from neighbourhoods to nations. Before one is even aware of what it means to be a citizen, a designated member of a particular locale, they are imbued with allegiance to the place in which history deemed fit to put them. Kestenberg and Kestenberg (1988) note that as children grow, they inherently develop a sense of belonging that extends beyond families and into the heart of

the communities, nations, and cultural groups of which individuals are an integral part. In the context of culture, belonging allows one to “be part of a universe of shared meaning” and to glean “a certain language, a certain social horizon, world-view, or set of beliefs, a certain way of interpreting or defining situations, of coping with uncertainty, and of emitting signals” (Therborn, 1991, p. 182). This cultural membership allows for the construction of meaning, and thus, belongingness, in particular ways. At the same time, another key aspect of cultural belonging is that the nature of sharing an identity with some people means they are differentiated from others (Therborn, 1991).

The national-cultural issues surfaced by immigration issues highlight the non-duality of belonging. Castles (2002) notes that migrants are burdened with the expectation of settling in a new country and transferring their allegiance and sense of belonging from their country of origin to their new home. It has been argued that national belonging is indivisible; in other words, one can only fully belong to one country at a time (Gustafson, 2005). Others suggest that national belonging should involve “the choice and desire to belong to a culture, a history, a social pattern, a context of life” (Stenius, 1999, p. 12). This ideology represents a dichotomy between political belonging and cultural belonging, and the way that immigrants reconcile these differing ideas bears influence on the ways in which they construct their identities (Brettell, 2006). Brah (1996) summarises this succinctly with the argument that people just want to *be*, and not be forced to choose just one of multiple identities that feel resonant.

These same issues transfer to the felt sense of belongingness in organisational settings. Whether in a civic community or a work group, we are multi-dimensional creatures with numerous, storied identities that comprise the contextual fabric of what it is to be inherently

us. To bridge these parts of oneself, and to feel them valued and accepted in comparable ways, is to create the social link from *self* to *other*.

Belongingness in Healthcare: A Bridge to Organisational Belongingness

The literature is rife with studies of belongingness in healthcare settings, particularly as it relates to the dynamics of nursing work environments and clinical learning programmes. When nursing students are in the training stage, belongingness has been described as a “prerequisite” for their learning experience (Levett-Jones et al., 2009; McKenna et al., 2013). It has been suggested that in order for nursing students to gain full competence, they must progress through their own needs hierarchy of sorts, gaining physical and psychological security, experiences of belonging, and a healthy self-concept (Levett-Jones et al., 2009). Not surprisingly, students feel greater confidence and security when the clinical learning environment is friendly and welcoming (Spouse, 2001). Thus, it follows that sense of belonging has been found to be an integral component of nursing students’ success (Sedgwick & Yonge, 2008). Vinales (2015) advocates for the use of mentorship as a means of achieving belongingness in the learning phase through mentors’ inclusion and socialisation of students and further points to its effectiveness in clinical learning outcomes.

Several studies elucidate the challenging nature of the nursing environment as a multi-disciplinary, energy intensive, and high-risk profession. In the service of ‘fitting in,’ nurses may mask their insecurity with false projections of competence and self-confidence (Andersson & Edberg, 2010), creating a self-imposed impediment to true belonging. In further illustration of the demanding nature of the clinical environment, Malouf and West (2011) note that nursing students prioritise social bonds and seek to avoid feelings of shame and “the appearance of

being stupid” in their transition from student to registered nurse. The intensive culture is such that Levett-Jones and Lathlean (2009) found the need to fit in and be accepted was deemed *more* important than quality patient care. This evidence led Vinales (2015) to conclude that, “If a student nurse does not fit in and does not feel part of the team, this has the potential to hinder his or her learning and ability to progress from the theoretical elements of nurse education to the practical elements of nursing in the real world” (p. 534).

Similar to the findings in the education literature, the healthcare research suggests that demographic variables do not factor into nurses’ experiences of belonging. Rather, it is staff relationships and the fulfilment of environmental needs, such as the provision of adequate resources to perform the job, that predict a sense of belonging (Levett-Jones et al., 2009). In support of this line of thought, Groff Parris and Terhaar (2010) found that several practical aspects of the healthcare environment enhance sense of belonging for nurses, including reasonable work schedules, breaks between shifts, appropriate nurse-patient ratios, job autonomy, and collaborative team dynamics. Parker and Gadbois (2000) offer up the antidote of belonging (through the lens of community) to temper the demanding nature of clinical cultures:

So what is the constant that they can use to keep a steady course through all the chaos? We suggest the overarching constant is "community in the workplace." Although community building may have both short-and long-term benefits, it is not a strategy but a career-long philosophy to help managers tie together all the facets of their daily work into a more meaningful and satisfying purpose (p. 466).

Workplace Belongingness

As demonstrated in the foundational review above, the literature on belongingness within social groups and in settings such as schools and healthcare facilities is relatively robust.

However, there is a sparsity of evidence-based research that considers belongingness in the workplace. The following section will explore the specific domain of workplace belongingness by examining its operational definitions, various precursors to and outcomes of belongingness at work, and the nuance and multi-dimensionality of this construct when viewed through the specific lens of the organisational setting. Using this literature as a backdrop, a theoretical framework will subsequently take shape through an investigation of the functional and structural features of organisations as they relate to the construct of belongingness in the qualitative studies conducted for this thesis.

Operational Definitions

In addition to the general definitions of belongingness previously described, belongingness in the specific context of work has been described as the degree to which individuals feel personally accepted, respected, included and supported by others in the organisational environment (Goodenow, 1993). Further, belongingness influences social relationships that exemplify an employee's status and level of fit within an organisation (Rupp et al., 2006). In perhaps the simplest terms, Chin (2019) says in the socio-political literature that, "To belong is to feel natural and unthreatened in a group. It is to understand and be understandable to other members of that group; to be able to recognize and be recognized within" (p. 717). While these definitions provide a general foundation from which to understand the construct, there is room for further exploration to more effectively define belongingness within the specific domain of the workplace.

Antecedents and Outcomes

Belongingness plays a role in the workplace in indirect ways through its influence on factors such as group membership, creativity, and meaning. For example, emotional experience (and belongingness as a by-product) has been found to predict levels of creativity at work through its effect on belongingness (James et al., 2004). Belongingness also promotes a sense of meaning through mechanisms such as social identity, inclusion, and the pursuit of valued goals (Moynihan et al., 2017).

In addition, the proximity and frequency of contact most co-workers experience can be a significant factor in the organic formation of relationships; in other words, people often create bonds through the simple act of being near each other (T. J. Allen, 1986; T. J. Allen & Fustfeld, 1975; T. J. Allen & Henn, 2007; Festinger et al., 1950; Kabo, 2017). In doing so, individuals are more likely to develop positive views of those they spend time with even if they were previously viewed unfavourably or identified as an out-group (Pettigrew, 1997; R. N. Turner et al., 2008; Wilder & Thompson, 1980). Being a member of a group also reduces the degree of perceived uncertainty by providing a sense of structure and perception of access to resources, which can serve as a useful mechanism in organisational settings during periods of change or ambiguity (F. Grant & Hogg, 2012).

A final consideration of belongingness at work is the role it plays in mental health. While this research will not place considerable focus on issues relative to mental health at work, it is worth noting that belongingness (or the lack thereof) is a strong risk indicator for symptoms of depression, and organisations who foster workplace belongingness have the ability to cultivate environments that are innately less risk-heavy for depressogenic factors (Cockshaw & Shochet,

2010). Thus, we see that despite the paucity of existing research on belongingness in the sphere of the workplace, there is emerging evidence to suggest that it bears influence on mental health both directly and indirectly.

Thwarted Belongingness

Thwarted belongingness in the transdisciplinary literature is addressed primarily in the context of suicide, particularly in military settings, as discussed earlier in this chapter. However, burgeoning research has begun to examine the pertinence of this theory for organisations as the focus shifts to mental health concerns and prevention of suicide in the workplace (Ross et al., 2021). A brief review of the key definitions of thwarted belongingness as well as some seminal studies will serve to highlight the increasing relevance of this concept to the world of work.

Thwarted belongingness arises when an individual must dedicate “mental and emotional effort to processing, interpreting, and understanding the causes and implications of being socially excluded” (Thau et al., 2007, p. 841). This leads to a series of detrimental outcomes, including negative emotional, cognitive, and behavioural outcomes (Gere & MacDonald, 2010) as well as the broader inability to function optimally (Baumeister & Vohs, 2007). Threats to belongingness can also impede the achievement of long-term goals by inhibiting self-regulation of socially accepted behaviours (Blackhart et al., 2006).

It is a short line between these harmful consequences and the potential impact of thwarted belongingness in the workplace. For example, the experience of ostracism, a manifestation of thwarted belongingness, has a negative impact on belongingness and ultimately contributes to lower performance and higher withdrawal (O'Reilly & Robinson,

2017). Workplace incivility also has ties to thwarted belongingness, and positive experiences of belongingness have been demonstrated to be a mediating factor between incivility and beneficial work outcomes (Gkorezis et al., 2013). While the literature on thwarted belongingness in the context of work remains sparse, these early studies suggest that the broader negative implications of experiencing thwarted belongingness logically extend to organisational settings.

Multi-Dimensionality of Workplace Belongingness

As demonstrated in the preceding discussion, belongingness is not a one-dimensional construct, and this is further illustrated by the broad spectrum of its influencing factors. The existing research relies largely on linear frameworks of belongingness at work, and in doing so, it paints the construct as simply fitting in, being supported, or feeling connected, without exploring its evolution in social environments. For instance, the literature neglects matters of self and identity in belongingness, which are essential to understanding relational dynamics and person-organisation interactions.

Just as there is no one way to forge a relationship or seek meaning in work (Berg et al., 2013; Moynihan et al., 2017), the avenues through which belongingness is pursued are many and varied. The felt experience of belongingness results from an interweaving of individual, relational, and contextual factors and is therefore best explained by attending to self, relational, and person-organisation dynamics. There are four domains through which to gain a more nuanced understanding of the source and nature of belongingness. First, the domain of the *self*, considers the ways in which individuals see themselves and asks how their identity influences their ability or desire to belong. Secondly, the relation to the *other* considers how

the nature and quality of relationships promote or thwart belongingness. Thirdly, the *environment* influences the degree to which one is impacted by external relationships and events and the ways in which it enables or limits the experience of belongingness. Finally, and importantly for this thesis, the domain of the *organisation* looks at the functional and structural features of an organisation as a harbinger of the ability to intentionally cultivate belongingness.

These domains further illustrate the multi-dimensionality of belongingness and underscore the fact that the organisational lens is not the only one through which one should seek to understand this construct. However, a deep exploration of individual and environmental factors (such as the influence of familial relationships, external relational networks, and attachment styles, for example) is outside the scope of this thesis. Therefore, this exploration will focus on the individual perspectives of organisational belongingness in keeping with the bounded nature of the present research.

The Theoretical Lens of the Organisation

With a clearer lens on the definitions of belongingness, the historical and theoretical underpinnings, as well as the relevance it has in the modern workplace, attention can now be turned to the specific role organisations play in fostering a climate of belongingness. This discussion will explore several theoretical areas and the impact they may have on belonging, including inclusive workplaces, psychologically healthy workplaces, corporate social responsibility, and socialisation tactics. The functional and structural features of organisations with these characteristics and practices provide insight on the importance of relationships, interpersonal connection, and the hallmarks of workplace belongingness.

Inclusive Workplaces

The literature on inclusive workplaces bears examination as a contributor to the role organisations can play in contributing to the health and happiness of employees. Inclusive workplaces are described as settings in which “people of all identities and many styles can be fully themselves while also contributing to the larger collective as valued and full members” (Ferdman, 2017, p. 235). Leaders in particular contribute to this dynamic through behaviours that catalyse perceived belongingness in work groups while also recognising uniqueness and individual contribution within the group. They can facilitate and maintain achieved belongingness through actions such as demonstrating support for group members, advocating for equity, and creating space for shared decision-making (Randel et al., 2018). Further underscoring the critical role of inclusive leadership, Ashikali et al. (2021) found that team diversity does not inherently lead to inclusive climates, making inclusive leaders an integral component of organisational climates wherein team members are valued for their distinct contributions.

Belongingness and uniqueness have both been demonstrated to be necessary components of inclusive work groups, and the cultivation of these environments contributes to increased job satisfaction, organisational citizenship behaviour, performance, and overall wellbeing (Randel et al., 2018). Given its close ties to loneliness, it is perhaps not surprising that exclusion has been found to have an impact on wellbeing, producing negative effects on physiological and psychological health (Shore et al., 2018). Shore et al. (2018) also recommend several practices for organisations seeking to reorient themselves to a more inclusive culture, including: developing a pipeline of diverse talent, addressing unconscious bias and micro-

aggressions, creating systems of accountability for diversity and inclusion, providing adequate training on relevant topics, and utilising peer support for inclusion initiatives.

Psychologically Healthy Workplaces

The more recent concept of psychologically healthy workplaces also has application to belongingness at work in light of its focus on establishing practices centred around employee growth and development, recognition, and engagement (Kelloway & Day, 2005). With some similarities to organisational support theory (Eisenberger et al., 1986; Eisenberger & Stinglhamber, 2011; Shore & Shore, 1995), in psychologically healthy workplaces, employees begin to establish a viewpoint about the level of value an organisation places on their contributions and general wellbeing (Kurtessis et al., 2015). Beyond the benefits to company reputation and employee wellbeing, there is also a financial advantage to organisations in the form of positive outcomes like enhanced productivity, job satisfaction, and commitment to work (Catano & Morrow Hines, 2016). Thus, it behoves organisations to cultivate psychologically healthy cultures for their role in belongingness and the corresponding impact on the wellbeing of employees, as well as for the psychological and performance benefits they produce.

Corporate Social Responsibility

Corporate social responsibility has been defined as “a business organisation’s configuration of principles of social responsibility, processes of social responsiveness, and policies, programs, and observable outcomes as they relate to the firm’s social relationships” (D. J. Wood, 1991, p. 693). In simpler nomenclature, it is the way in which a company creates its ‘corporate culture’ and social consciousness (Rupp et al., 2006). This has particular relevance

for the study of belonging, as the ways in which companies organise and form their culture (intentionally or otherwise) bears influence on the social fit an individual feels. Employees may use corporate social responsibility as a means of assessing the degree to which the organisation places value on relationships, and the perception of high levels of CSR contributes to belongingness needs being met (Rupp et al., 2006). In addition to serving as a benefit to existing and potential employees, corporate social responsibility can also enhance the reputation of an organisation and its perception as a desirable place to work (Catano & Morrow Hines, 2016).

Socialisation Tactics

Finally, it is useful to consider the role organisations play in socialisation tactics, which can be viewed as an integral component of creating a sense of belonging. The foundational research on organisational socialisation describes it as the process by which an individual acquires the social knowledge and skills necessary to assume an organisational role (Van Maanen & Schein, 1979). Organisational socialisation furthers the understanding of the influential nature of early career experiences on outcomes such as job performance, satisfaction, and retention (Korte et al., 2015). When employees are effectively socialised, it can contribute to job fit and retention; when ineffectively socialised, it can lead to premature turnover, disruption of work flow, and increased costs as a result (Fisher, 1986).

New employees who are well-socialised are likely to be more loyal, skilled, and well-trained, giving organisations who focus on this tactic a competitive advantage (Batistič, 2018). Recent literature has provided practical guidance on how organisations can contribute to effective socialisation through tactics such as considering how to address uncertainty, providing appropriate resources on a day-to-day basis, and organising welcoming activities to motivate

new employees to build relationships (Batistič, 2018). In their work on newcomer socialisation, R. Field and Coetzer (2011) advocate for organisations to efficiently and effectively help new employees build important relationships and gain an understanding of organisational culture. Korte and Lin (2013) further suggest that the development of high-quality relationships for new employees plays a pivotal role in their ability to develop camaraderie and a sense of belonging. In this way, newcomer socialisation contributes to the learning and adjustment of the new employee, the development of healthy, sustainable employer-employee relationships, and positive job outcomes (Cooper-Thomas et al., 2004; R. Field & Coetzer, 2011; Filstad, 2004). These processes have implications for belongingness in their emphasis on the formation and maintenance of relationships as important to employee experience and satisfaction.

Measuring Belongingness

Since the establishment of the theory of belongingness, several scales have been developed to measure it as a construct. A reductionist perspective on belongingness and ill-defined domain and scope result in construct misspecification, and this has implications for the validity of measurement tools. Scales of measurement are often based on narrow definitions of belongingness, despite its complexity. Conversely, the loose boundaries of the construct render the existing measures susceptible to overlap with adjacent constructs such as inclusion or cohesion. While measurement of belongingness is not in the scope of this qualitative thesis, a brief exploration of the challenges inherent with existing scales is useful as a means of identifying gaps in the framework and issues with the operationalisation of the concept, while setting the stage for future research in this realm. The quantitative research relies on linear frameworks of belongingness at work, and in doing so it frequently portrays the construct as

simply fitting in and feeling connected, without exploring its facets or meanings and how they evolve in social environments. [A full list of scales can be found in Appendices A through G.]

One of the challenges inherent in the existing methods of measurement is their limitation in capturing the multi-dimensionality of belongingness. For example, the Need to Belong Scale (Leary et al., 2013) contains ten items, most of which focus primarily on the acceptance or rejection of others and the respondent's affective response. The General Belongingness Scale looks at achieved belongingness as a distinct construct from the need to belong, but similarly centres on the facets of acceptance and rejection (Malone et al., 2012).

Other measurement scales incorporate aspects of belongingness along with items that signal related yet distinct constructs. Jena and Pradhan (2018) created a twelve-item workplace belongingness scale, and several of the items on the scale conflate other variables, such as emotionality, goal orientation, job satisfaction, and fairness, among others. An additional scale of relevance to this work is the Loneliness in the Workplace Scale (LAWS), a tool designed to assess factors of loneliness at work through sixteen self-reported items categorically related to emotional deprivation or social companionship (Wright et al., 2006). While this tool is centred on loneliness as opposed to belongingness, there are strong ties between the constructs being measured, such as workplace relationships, disconnection from co-workers, inclusion in social aspects of work, and social companionship (Wright et al., 2006). However, similar to the challenges posed by other measures of relational constructs, many items conflate antecedents of loneliness with the experience itself.

Finally, some scales measure precursors and outcomes of belongingness rather than evaluating the construct itself. One of the earliest scales, the Sense of Belonging instrument,

was intentionally designed for this purpose, containing two variants: one focused on psychological experiences of belonging as precursors (SOBI-P) and the other focused on antecedents to belonging (SOBI-A) (Hagerty & Patusky, 1995). Similarly, the Social Connectedness and Social Assurance scales are designed to measure belongingness but do so only through the dimensions of companionship, connectedness, and affiliation (Lee & Robbins, 1995).

As demonstrated in the preceding discussion, there are several existing methods for measuring belongingness, but there are various issues related to how each measure defines the construct of belonging, the wide array of dimensions being measured as components of belonging, and the validity of measures all purporting to measure the same construct in different ways. Outside of these specific methods of measurement, belongingness is often gauged through other constructs and their corresponding scales, such as connectedness, social support, or group membership.

While these measures may be valid in themselves, that validity may not extend across the domain due to the limited construct definition against which to validate. The broad and often unspecified domain of belongingness, particularly in a workplace context, is largely accountable for the development of measurement tools with limited content and construct validity. This highlights the need to further explore belongingness in the workplace, as theory development informs measurement refinement. Thus, there is a clear need for a cogent method of measuring workplace belongingness, and the qualitative exploration of this work lays the foundation for future scale development in subsequent research.

Chapter Summary

This chapter has explored definitions of belongingness across the transdisciplinary literature as a means of setting the stage for a more robust discussion of this construct as we currently understand it. Then, this chapter has located belongingness in the current literature by looking at its historical and theoretical underpinnings and examining gaps in the existing methods of quantitative measurement. Concepts related to belongingness, including attachment, social support, and group membership further bounded the construct. Additionally, belongingness was examined in the contexts through which it has been socially constructed, such as institutions, communities, and cultures. Finally, and importantly for the focus of this thesis, workplace belongingness was explored by outlining the construct definitions and nomological network of belongingness presented in the organisational behaviour literature.

In following the thread of belongingness across disciplines, timespans, and domains, we still arrive at a place of complexity and ineffability when seeking to create consistent language and thinking around what it truly means to belong. Belongingness is by its nature intangible and contextual. The very language we use in the literature points to this using the phrase “sense of belonging,” emphasising that it is not a phenomenon we can neatly pin. In their discussion of a similarly elusive construct, relationship closeness, Berscheid et al. (2004) note that there is not – and cannot be – a correct or incorrect conceptualisation. Rather, we have only to follow the fundamental principles of doing good science, which require that a construct be clearly defined, couched in an accessible, observational base, and critically, that it is purposeful in advancing an understanding of the concept (Berscheid et al., 2004).

John Dewey famously reminded us that, “In the absence of actual certainty in the midst of a precarious and hazardous world, men cultivate all sorts of things that would give them the feeling of certainty.” While it is tempting for the modern qualitative researcher to craft a wieldy definition as an offering to the annals of academia, the aim of this work was not primarily to cement a definition of belongingness, but rather to understand it more deeply – that is, to cast it in the nuanced light of how it impacts us on a human level.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

When embarking on the journey of research design, methodology provides the foundation upon which the enquiry rests. Thus, it is useful to briefly explore the philosophy of research methods and the means through which research techniques may be evaluated and selected, along with several of the key methodologies frequently utilised by qualitative researchers. This chapter will further investigate the particular choice of methodology for Studies 1 and 2 and couch it in the broader framework of this research. Finally, some discussion of the practical realities and inherent biases of qualitative research will illuminate the caution this methodology requires, as well as the colour and nuance it lends to the corresponding analysis.

Methodology Matters: Philosophical Underpinnings

At its most basic level, methodology has been defined as “a theory of how inquiry should proceed” (Schwandt, 2007, p. 193). While the importance of exercising diligence in the art of scientific enquiry is not to be overlooked, it is equally imperative that researchers do not lay the story itself on the altar of methodology. Bazeley (2013) makes the point that there is often a great deal of ‘posturing’ surrounding methodology. The term *methodolatry* was coined to depict the “preoccupation with selecting and finding methods to the exclusion of the actual substance of the story being told. Methodolatry is the idolatry of method, or a slavish attachment and devotion to method, that so often overtakes the discourse” (Janesick, 2000, p. 390). Bazeley (2013) recommends avoiding such over-concentration on methodology by returning again and again to the original premise of the research question by completing the simple sentence, “The purpose of this study is...” (p. 8). This simplification of the enquiry

process does much to enhance the quality and impact of the story that is unearthed by the research.

Choice of Qualitative Research

When embarking on this research, a mixed methods methodology was intended, with an initial qualitative study consisting of in-depth interviews designed to uncover employees' experiences of belongingness at work in large-scale organisations, and a subsequent quantitative survey to further validate themes revealed by the first study. However, after conducting the initial round of interviews and reviewing the findings with the supervisory team, we agreed that the richness and nuance of the data called for a change of tack to a fully qualitative exploration. Choy (2014) notes that a qualitative approach lends the ability to "probe for underlying values, beliefs, and assumptions" (p. 102), which is a key aspect of this research, and one more effectively achieved with an open-ended, exploratory methodology. Further, qualitative research is particularly useful in the absence of a pre-established, clearly defined construct (Yauch & Steudel, 2003), and the lack of a cogent definition for belongingness at work as described in the preceding chapter further illustrates the alignment of this research with qualitative methods.

The types of methodology available to the qualitative researcher are many and varied, including processes such as ethnography, phenomenology, narrative analysis, discourse analysis, grounded theory, and case studies. Approaches based on language (such as discourse analysis, symbolic interactionism, and ethnography) centre on the way in which subjects use language to describe phenomena and may be less concerned with building theory (Bryman & Burgess, 1994). An interpretive approach (life history studies, for example) seeks to create a

“coherent and inclusive account” of a subject or group through their particular lens (Tesch, 1991). One of the early qualitative research methodologies, analytic induction, selects and reviews cases with the aim of crafting a hypothetical explanation. Additional cases are examined to determine whether further data align with the hypothesis; if they do not, the hypothesis is reconstructed and the process begins again (Robinson, 1951). Used less frequently today, analytic induction is a methodology of exceptional rigour and one that many researchers find “extremely demanding in that the appearance of a single case that is inconsistent with a hypothesis (or a reformulated one) necessitates further revision of the hypothesis and a return to the field” (Bryman & Burgess, 1994, p. 4). This stands in contrast to the more flexible qualitative methodology of grounded theory.

Choice of Grounded Theory

With some perspective on what methodology is (and is not), this chapter now turns to the specific methodology utilised in this analysis: grounded theory. An exploration of its definition, origins, and techniques will elucidate why it stands as an appropriate choice for this research.

At its most basic, grounded theory methodology (GTM) is the cultivation of theory from data (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). It sets forth a consistent process for data collection and analysis, employing inductive strategies to synthesise and understand the data (Charmaz, 1996). GTM focuses on the evolution of theory during the research process through a ‘constant comparative method,’ an ongoing interplay between the collection of data and its corresponding analysis (Strauss & Corbin, 1994).

Grounded theory methodology differs from other modalities in its treatment of theory generation and practical research as two parts of a whole in the enquiry process (Glaser, 1978). It does not relegate analysis to the final stages of a research project, but rather integrates such exploration into the research process itself (Burgess, 1984). Bogdan and Biklen (1982) note that this requires researchers to be interacting with the data continuously. This engagement can take the form of strategies such as revisiting field notes, honing the focus of the research question, and testing nascent ideas (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982). The specific steps involved in GTM (such as the intricacies of memoing and coding) as they relate to this research will be expanded upon in the proceeding *Data Analysis* section.

Highly focused on the practical, GTM gives researchers an opportunity to produce theory that is digestible while also furthering their own understanding of the data with which they are interacting (B. A. Turner, 1983). Grounded theory is, in a sense, a living process that allows for dynamic interplay between the data and the emergent, evolving hypothesis. As it has evolved in the decades since its inception, grounded theory has become widely utilised and respected as a methodological tool, and it is often viewed as “an approving bumper sticker in qualitative studies” (Richards & Richards, 1991, p. 43). Ylona et al. (2019) note that grounded theory is particularly useful when “little is known about a phenomenon; the aim being to produce or construct an explanatory theory that uncovers a process inherent to the substantive area of inquiry” (pp. 1-2).

Originally developed as a means of addressing perceived gaps in the epistemological rigour of sociology research in the 1950s and 1960s, grounded theory was one of the first methodologies to bridge the theoretical and the practical (Gibson & Hartman, 2013). The

advancement of quantitative methods in that era largely reduced the study of human experience to statistical variables, and logico-deductive models of enquiry inhibited the development of new theory (Charmaz, 1996). In their foundation of the theory, Glaser and Strauss (1967) challenged five key areas of the existing methodology of the era: a) the separation of theory from research, b) the view of quantitative research as the more rigorous methodology in comparison to qualitative enquiry, c) the notion that qualitative methodology was connotative and lacked systematism, d) the division between the collection and analytical stages of research, and e) the supposition that case studies (and not theory development) were the only available outcome of qualitative research (Charmaz, 1996). The conception of GTM was further influenced by the sociological framework of symbolic interactionism, which, succinctly summarised, purports that social understanding is constructed through everyday interactions and their subsequent interpretation (Blumer, 1969; Calman, 2006).

After crafting grounded theory in tandem, Glaser and Strauss later parted ways in their furtherance of the methodology. Some researchers have suggested that their differences were evident from the inception of GTM (Stern, 1994) but the divergence became more broadly recognised with Strauss' publication of a detailed guide to the mechanics of grounded theory (Strauss, 1987; Strauss & Corbin, 1994). Strauss and Corbin's (1990) development of definitive analytic techniques drew criticism from other theorists who suggested that such specificity created an element of rigidity antithetical to the very nature of grounded theory (Heath & Cowley, 2004; Keddy et al., 1996; Robrecht, 1995). Glaser (1992) commented that the new Straussian interpretation of GTM was no longer grounded theory, but rather "full conceptual description" (p. 6).

For the purposes of this research, GTM is an appropriate methodology given the contextual nature of the data gleaned and the absence of robust existing theory on the nature of belongingness at work. Grounded theory “gets through and beyond conjecture and preconception” to investigate what is *actually* happening so interventions can be crafted with confidence (Glaser, 1998, p. 5). This makes GTM a particularly apt choice for the present studies in light of the cloudiness of the current understanding of belongingness at work.

This stands in contrast to other qualitative approaches deemed less appropriate for the nature of this research. Language-based approaches, such as discourse analysis, ethnography, and symbolic interactionism are less focused on building theory and more attuned to specific use of language (Bryman & Burgess, 1994). Given the focus on developing a theoretical grounding for belongingness at work, these approaches were not a sensible fit for this research. Likewise, interpretive approaches are more concerned with particular subject or group dynamics (Tesch, 1991) and may have limited the scope of this broader exploration of belongingness. Analytic induction, while potentially a fit from the perspective of its aims for building a hypothesis from collected data (Robinson, 1951), centres on a particularly demanding procedural process of returning to the field and continuously reconstructing the developed hypothesis (Bryman & Burgess, 1994) which extends beyond the time-bounded nature of these studies. The qualitative approaches described here are less context-sensitive than grounded theory and potentially less likely to yield meaningful results when applied to multi-level phenomena. Thus, grounded theory stands as an appropriate methodological fit for gathering and making sense of the rich and complex data yielded by the exploration of belongingness at work.

Crooks (2001) further notes that grounded theory is particularly useful for the exploration of social relationships and group behaviour with little contextual evidence of the influencing variables, criteria very much in keeping with the attributes of this topic. A further investigation will elucidate the particular brand of grounded theory that is most suitable for this research, justify the somewhat unconventional inclusion of a literature review in a grounded theory study, and set the stage for the subsequent discussion of process.

Constructivist Grounded Theory

Grounded theory has arguably aged well in the half of a century since its development. What Charmaz (2008) terms 'the qualitative revolution' spread widely, with GTM providing a blueprint for a robust and approachable methodology that allowed for rigorous investigation of elusive qualitative phenomena. However, it has not been without its detractors as postmodern perspectives led to scrutiny of the residual positivism evident in early grounded theory (Ellis, 1995; Richardson, 1993). As a result, GTM branched into several distinct approaches.

While contemporary theorists vary in the terminology ascribed to each, this discussion will briefly explore three of the more widely recognised approaches: classic, Straussian, and constructivist. Feminist (Keddy et al., 1996; Kushner & Morrow, 2003) and post-modern approaches (McCreddie & Payne, 2010) have also emerged, but they are outside the scope of the current investigation. It is worth noting the element of irony surrounding the analytical discussions of grounded theory, as they are generally deliberated by everyone other than the authors themselves. Indeed, Glaser (2007) notably said, slightly tongue-in-cheek: "I don't know what objectivism or post-modernism or modernism is" (p. 35).

Before embarking on a journey through the distinguishing factors of each methodological perspective, it is also useful to consider where they intersect. There are several features universal to all grounded theory: the continuous interplay between the collection and analysis of data; construction of analytic codes and categories derived from data; recognition of basic social processes that exist in the data; inductive creation of abstract groupings; theoretical sampling to further develop and refine categories; memo writing between the coding and writing processes; and the integration of the established categories into a theoretical framework (Charmaz, 2008; Heath & Cowley, 2004).

The distinguishing characteristics of grounded theory can be categorised in three particular domains: philosophical ideology, use of the literature, and analytical process (Kenny & Fourie, 2015; Santos et al., 2018). These are illustrated further in Table 2 below.

Table 2

Approaches to Grounded Theory Methodology

Common Characteristics	GT approaches	Differentiating characteristics		
		Philosophical basis	Use of Literature	Coding system
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Theoretical sampling • Constant comparative analysis • Memos • Substantive theory vs. formal theory 	Classic	Moderate positivism	Only at the end	Original to discover the theory
	Straussian	Post-Positivism and Symbolic Interactionism	Throughout all stages	Rigorous to create the theory
	Constructivist	Constructivism and Symbolic Interactionism	Throughout all stages and compiled at the end	Open to develop the theory

Note: From “Data Analysis: Comparison Between the Different Methodological Perspectives of Grounded Theory,” by J. Santos, et al., 2018, *Journal of the School of Nursing, University of Sao Paulo*, p. 3. CC BY.

Philosophically, classic grounded theory does not speak directly to its underpinnings; rather, it is classified as a general method to be utilised in nearly any context, irrespective of theoretical leanings (Glaser, 1978, 1992, 2007). However, positivism is broadly considered to be the foundation of classic GTM (Kenny & Fourie, 2015). Symbolic interactionism undergirds Strauss and Corbin's (1994) post-positivism views as evidenced in their suggested methodology. Charmaz is critical of the systematic nature of the coding procedure in the Straussian approach, emphasising the meaning, language, and interaction that connect grounded theory to a constructivist interpretation (Santos et al., 2018).

A constructivist approach was adopted for this research, embracing the inherent entanglement between a researcher's identity and their collection and interpretation of the data with which they interact. Charmaz (2000) contrasts this approach with other (primarily objectivist) grounded theory methodologies that see the external world as predictable, or at least explainable, while a constructivist view "recognizes that the viewer creates the data and ensuing analysis through interaction with the viewed" (p. 523). The findings derived from the research do not constitute an existing, discoverable reality, but rather represent the mutually constructed reality of the researcher and the subject (Wertz et al., 2011).

Relevance of the Literature Review

Grounded theory is not universal in its perspectives on the role of the literature, as demonstrated in the previous discussion of differing approaches. Thus, it is useful to provide a degree of justification for the literature review that frames this thesis.

Glaser and Strauss recognise that researchers will not undertake their study free of their own ideas, but they differ in their approaches to how the literature should be utilised. Glaser (1978) suggests that any prior understanding of the phenomenon should be centred on the broader topic, and a more focused exploration should occur only after the emergence of theory. Strauss (1987) acknowledges the influence of understanding derived from both experience and literature and suggests that it can be utilised to generate theoretical sensitivity.

In the constructivist view, Charmaz (2006) echoes the acceptance of literature and further suggests that it be compiled as a dedicated section and dispersed throughout the work where appropriate. She argues that a literature review of this nature enhances the researcher's credibility and the strength of the subsequent framework, while also providing justification for rationale in the later chapters of the thesis. This position holds with constructivist views, which laud the acceptance of a researcher's nuanced viewpoints and knowledge as a contextual imperative for good qualitative enquiry (Kenny & Fourie, 2015).

Symbolic interactionism, and thus, grounded theory, view researchers as social beings with thoughts, experiences, and opinions that create their understanding of what they observe (Baker et al., 1992). It would be impossible to enter the research domain unfettered by ideas stimulated by what has been absorbed in the literature and through first-person experiences. In handling the data, one cannot discount individualised understanding, and some researchers suggest that attempting to distance one's self from such preconceptions and values is a fundamentally flawed approach (Heath & Cowley, 2004). Cultural positioning will inherently act as a filter for any thinking on a given topic (Ashworth, 1997). Even if it were possible to suspend these intrinsic perspectives, Morse (1994) purports that it does not provide a demonstrable

benefit to evaluating the data, as ignorance is not synonymous with creating a unique understanding. Dey (1999) further reminds grounded theorists to strive for an open mind, not an empty head. As such, existing knowledge can be utilised to inform and contextualise the approach to the data, rather than direct it (Heath & Cowley, 2004).

The Craft of Qualitative Research

Given the qualitative lens of this study, it is worthy of a brief exploration of the nature and evolution of qualitative research in the context of modern organisational psychology. As with any methodology that seeks to create order or typify the observation of human behaviour, qualitative research is a slippery construct. Wolcott (1992) elucidates this more eloquently by stating:

When such everyday behaviours as watching and asking become the basis for a role definition as 'qualitative researchers,' small wonder that we look for impressive sounding labels that help to validate us as the self-appointed observers of our fellow humans (pp. 23-24).

In a similar vein, Stake (2010) notes that the act of investigating qualitative data is in many ways a simple extension of the everyday analysis we undertake as human beings. We cannot separate the self as researcher and the self as human; it is inevitable that the sediment of experience will seep into one's perspective and colour the way they see the world as a whole, as well as the data they investigate. Rather than viewing this lived experience as an obstacle to overcome, it can be viewed as a means of preparing for the "struggle with meaning" that comes with making sense of human experience (Bazeley, 2013).

The topics researchers choose to study often arise from personal interest or experience, and this can serve as a catalyst for seeking to validate and share the findings of their

exploration. Bazeley (2013) notes that, “We seek through the research to better understand our own experience” (p. 7). Thus, it becomes the duty of the responsible researcher to both embrace their passion-born curiosity *and* to hold an ever-present awareness of its potential contribution to bias in their work. In doing so, the value of the theory built from enquiry is not diminished. Theories are by their very nature interpretive, and Strauss and Corbin (1994) make the point that to acknowledge the fallibility of theory as such does not deny its usefulness.

Researchers are also products of the place and time in which they undertake their study. Their ideas and conclusions are inevitably reflective of the zeitgeist of the period in which they are produced; after all, researchers are “not gods, but men and women living in certain eras, immersed in certain societies, subject to current ideas and ideologies” (Strauss & Corbin, 1994, p. 279). The singularity of lived experience creates a dichotomy of sameness and uniqueness. In this way, interpretive qualitative research seeks to “uncover this complex interrelationship between the universal and the singular, between private troubles and public issues in a person’s life...all interpretive studies are biographical and historical” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2001, p. 39).

Qualitative research in a modern context has shifted from rote investigation to social process (Bryman & Burgess, 1994; Carter et al., 2008; Korstjens & Moser, 2017). No longer are researchers bound by “a slavish adherence to methodological rules;” instead, they can mould their chosen methodology to the demands of subject and setting (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 5). When they eschew the bounds of mechanical procedure and welcome the inherent “messiness” that may arise in the collision of the conceptual and theoretical, it allows for flexibility and creativity of thought (Bechhofer, 1974). Bazeley (2013) notes that qualitative

research is not a straight road, but rather a *pathway* into analysis, in which theorists “read and reflect, explore and play, code and connect, review and refine” (pp. 14-15).

Going a step further, Miles and Huberman (1994) describe qualitative data as *sexy*, in that they provide rich, thematical exploration in an approachable context. They argue that sound qualitative data lends itself to serendipitous findings and unique integrations that allow researchers to transcend preconceptions and reach more evolved theory. Hence, accepting the inherent contextual bias and corresponding complexity of lived experience can in fact be a useful contributor to the research itself. Being a human and a researcher at the same time is not a conundrum to be grappled with but rather a reality to be embraced for the rich, contextual perspective with which it colours the work.

Researcher Profile

In keeping with the preceding discussion of the need to embrace the inherent fallibility and humanness in approaching qualitative research, it is useful to provide a contextual description of myself as a researcher in acknowledgement of the particular perspectives, experiences, and relationships that I carried into this work. Eschewing any claims to produce sterile, purely objective outcomes, this demonstrates an acceptance of the advantages and impediments inherent in the collection and analysis of qualitative data, while still embracing its epistemological rigour.

Motive

Prior to undertaking this research, I worked in two American organisations over the span of a decade: a small consulting firm with 300 employees, and one of the country’s largest healthcare companies with nearly 300,000 employees. When I became an eager young

manager in my early 20s, I turned to the popular business books of the time to help me decipher how to shepherd my teams in ways that simultaneously embraced humanism and produced positive performance outcomes. My experiences as a leader of large teams led me down alternating paths of triumph and frustration, and ignited a zeal for testing the concepts I was reading about in the pragmatic (and often different) halls of the workplace. Not until I undertook my Master's degree studies did I discover there was a name for the field of enquiry that had so enamoured me: organisational behaviour. Thus, many years later, I came to approach the present research with a keenness to turn an academic lens to the ideologies and interventions I had tinkered with for years to determine if and how they may yield effective practical theory.

Perspective

As previously discussed, it is not possible (nor desirable) to surrender the mantle of one's own perspective when undertaking qualitative research (Bazeley, 2013; Denzin & Lincoln, 2001; Strauss & Corbin, 1994). Rather, it is useful to acknowledge these ways of looking at the world to better understand how it may colour interpretations of the data.

My own ideology is influenced by the field of thought around humanistic management, the emerging concept that organisations are more than their mechanics, and even more than their cultures; they can instead be viewed as a "real community of persons" (Mele, 2003, p. 77). Before I encountered the terminology to aptly describe it, I had an inherent belief in the value of seeing employees as human beings and fostering authentic relationships as the bedrock for doing good work together. The seminal work of Barsade and O'Neill (2014) describes a culture of companionate love, hallmarked by affection, compassion, and tenderness for one's

colleagues. They further show that an organisational culture of this nature yields higher employee satisfaction and enhanced teamwork, while mitigating negative outcomes such as emotional exhaustion and absenteeism. Beyond the implications for life at work, a culture of companionate love also has a positive association with life satisfaction, mood, and quality of life (Barsade & O'Neill, 2014).

A sample memo from Phase 1 included below further demonstrates this personal bent for humanistic, relationship-focused thinking.

Transcription	Researcher Memos
<p><i>Margot:</i> Yes, I keep asking questions. But also, make the time, like make it a priority. Because relationship-building is not valued as work. It is valued as, like, fluffy stuff.</p> <p>But I actually feel like if more people could bring exactly who they are into the meeting, then we could probably have more interactions. I remember once...</p>	<p><u><i>Quest for relationship</i></u> Fits with recurring theme of employees wanting to, a) build relationships, and b) see the practice of relationship-building hold perceived value, especially among leadership. Has ties to concepts from the literature such as friendship at work and companionate love.</p> <p><u><i>I want to be 'me'</i></u> Margot's language here is consistent with other participants who reference the inability to be themselves. There is an underlying sense of possibility – what might it be like if I could bring my 'whole self' to work and be accepted for it?</p>

Relationships

The forthcoming chapter on data collection will detail the interview process and the specific strategies utilised to solicit rich data. As a precursor to that exploration, it is useful to disclose the existing relationships I had with some of the interviewees in this research. The nature of these relationships can be categorised in four ways: 1) I had a *previous supervisory relationship* with three of the interviewees who were part of my teams at various points. We

maintained contact after I left the organisation and had a cordial relationship at the time of data collection wherein we exchanged periodic messages with brief updates on our personal lives. 2) One of the interviewees was a *former colleague* at a similar level of the organisation; we worked closely but did not have a supervisory relationship. 3) I had a *friendship or acquaintance* with four of the interviewees, but limited familiarity with the intricacies of their work in an organisational setting. 4) There was *no prior relationship* with four of the interviewees. They were referred to me for this project by other acquaintances in my network.

The memos below provide further insight into the nature of some of these relationships and demonstrate the increased richness of the interview data that may have resulted from the existence of a trusted connection.

Transcription	Researcher Memos
<p><i>Patrick</i>: I don't have as many like-minded people as when I first started. You were huge in terms of being a like-minded person. There's certainly no one at the company that is like you now.</p> <p><i>Natasha</i>: Thank you, thank you. Assuming that's a compliment anyway. [laughter]</p> <p><i>Patrick</i>: Oh, absolutely. Absolutely. Like we would, we would talk about these ideas and these, you know, motivations and things that would energize me, so that was like a super – it was like a perfect fit. You were on the same wavelength as I was.</p>	<p><u><i>Affection and reflection</i></u></p> <p>A lovely moment in the interview with Patrick. He became nostalgic talking about some moments from the “good old days” and we briefly reminisced about shared experiences. Reflects the value he ascribes to openness and like-mindedness in stimulating ideas and feeling understood. Possibly some undertones of grief that he is not understood in the same way now within the context of the organisation in the absence of that relationship.</p>
<p><i>Amelia</i>: ...And then there's you, and I know you're in New Zealand but I still consider you to be in my, like, innermost circle, so yeah. And who can really actually say that they've got like three or four super, super close friends? It's such a beautiful thing.</p>	<p><u><i>Deep disclosure</i></u></p> <p>Willingness to demonstrate emotion and share personal thoughts and feelings beyond basic descriptions of phenomena. Attributed to our pre-existing friendship and previous supervisory relationship.</p>

<p><i>Nicole</i>: I kind of get embarrassed by it, but – [pause] Oh, you know who I am. This is like a whole therapy session. [laughter]</p>	<p><u><i>Deep disclosure</i></u> Some discomfort here about sharing vulnerabilities; this reflected a point where Nicole seemed to shift from viewing me as ‘the interviewer’ to relaxing into the conversation at the level of friendship</p>
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Chapter Summary

The preceding exploration of methodology has illuminated its basic philosophical underpinnings and further considered the art of doing good qualitative research. A look at grounded theory methodology has demonstrated its soundness as a choice for this research, in addition to the particular alignment with a constructivist approach. Finally, I provided a brief researcher profile as a means of disclosing the motivations, perspectives, and relationships that may colour the collection and analysis of the data. It seems apt to bridge this discussion with the following chapter on research process with a reminder from Glaser (1998), who suggested that researchers quit talking about grounded theory and “get on with doing it.”

CHAPTER 4

DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

Introduction

The two studies included in this thesis explore themes of belongingness in the workplace and identify some of its key predictors and outcomes. This research investigates experiences of belongingness, the factors that contribute to this experience, and outcomes of belongingness from the perspective of employees in mid- to large-sized organisations. By conducting in-depth, open-ended qualitative interviews of organisational employees, trends are identified around their experience of belonging at work, the factors that impact it, and their insights on cultivating an environment that fosters belongingness.

This chapter outlines the procedures that were utilised to glean this information, including the process of selecting participants, crafting the interview guide, conducting the interviews, and transcribing data. In accordance with the selected methodology of constructivist grounded theory, the specific steps for extracting meaning from the data will be discussed, with examples of memos and coding to elucidate my thinking and arrival at the emergent themes discussed in Chapter 5.

Participant Selection

Participants were selected using purposive sampling through my own professional and personal networks in New Zealand and the United States. This sampling technique, also known as judgment sampling, is frequently used in qualitative studies to identify cases that are likely to be data-rich (M. Q. Patton, 2002). Put another way, it is an intentional choice stemming from the particular traits or qualities the participant possesses (Etikan et al., 2016) and ensures the inclusion of individuals who are likely to be insightful and informed on the topic of study (Cresswell & Plano Clark, 2011). For the purposes of this work, I was interested in recruiting

participants who were likely to be adept at using language to describe the abstract elements of belongingness and its companion concepts in a thoughtful way, an assessment made primarily based on my prior professional and personal communication with them. The participants I did not know personally were recommended to me by colleagues who understood the parameters of my research and the reflective nature of the data required. In qualitative research, it is essential for the quality of the data to select participants not only for their availability and interest, but also for their aptitude at communicating their lived experiences and opinions thoughtfully and expressively (Bernard, 2002).

I contacted potential interviewees via email to gauge their interest and availability for participation. They were provided with an information sheet outlining the aims of the research, time requirements, and other details. [Refer to Appendix H.] In some cases where I knew the potential participants were particularly well-connected professionally, I also asked for referrals to other individuals within their networks who may be interested in participating. The purpose of this solicitation was to include at least a small sample of participants with whom I had no prior acquaintance or familiarity with their work. I also provided stipulations about the time-bounded nature of the interviews to ensure they would align with my research deadlines. All participants that I solicited agreed to participate, and I subsequently began the process of scheduling interviews.

A summary of participants' geographic locations, organisational industry and size, and job roles can be found in Table 3 below. A total of twelve participants were selected: six identified as men and six identified as women, all from mid- to large-sized organisations of 1,000 employees or greater. The interviewees' tenure in their organisations varied from less

than one year to over thirteen years. They were employed in a variety of industries ranging from healthcare and government to manufacturing and transportation. Some interviewees worked in the same organisation but sat in separate departments or branches of the company. Variability also existed in their roles, not only in terms of the job requirements, but also in the hierarchical levels. For example, the least tenured employee had transitioned from an intern position to his first professional role within six months of being interviewed. The most senior-level employee had nearly twenty years of industry experience with executive-level responsibilities and several direct reports.

Table 3

Research Participants

Location	Industry	Org Size (approx.)	Role
USA	Healthcare	1,000	Business Analyst
USA	Healthcare	1,000	Director of Compliance
New Zealand	Energy	1,000	Business Analyst
New Zealand	Government	3,500	Event Coordinator
USA	Healthcare	1,000	Account Specialist
New Zealand	Government	10,000	Project Specialist
New Zealand	Transportation	11,000	Recruiter
New Zealand	Government	3,000	Innovation Manager
USA	Transportation	11,000	Solutions Architect Manager
USA	Manufacturing	9,000	Business Analyst
USA	Manufacturing	9,000	Collaborative Services Manager
New Zealand	Government	3,500	Programme Manager
New Zealand	Healthcare	10	Physician
New Zealand	Software	50	Business Analyst
New Zealand	Retail	15	Retail Associate

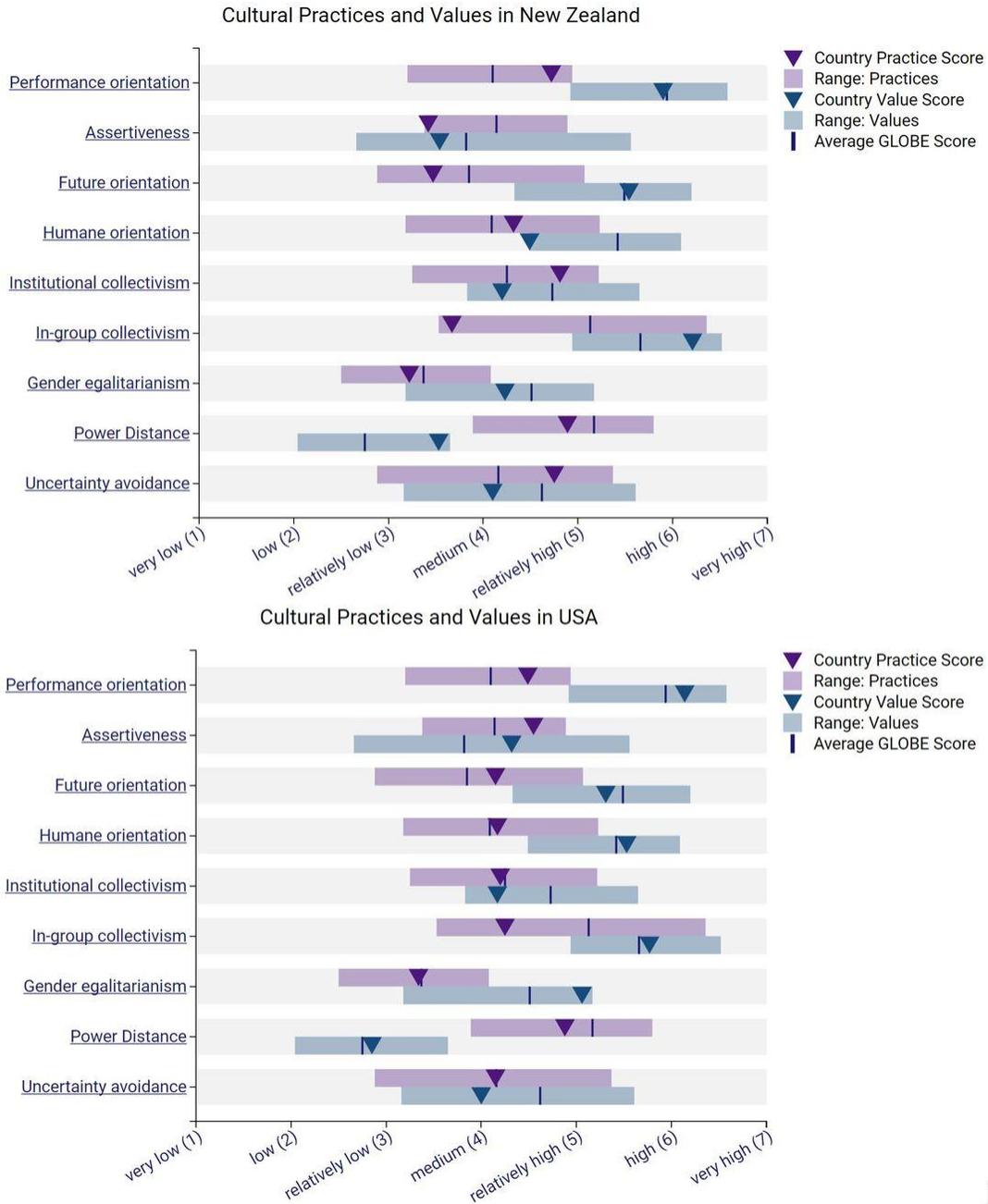
The choice of interviewees from both New Zealand and the United States was also deliberate. While both countries are Westernised, there are notable cultural differences that would seep into workplace culture. For example, one study found New Zealand students were more tolerant of ethical constructs such as coercion and self-interest compared to students from other Westernised societies (Okleshen & Hoyt, 1996). On a broader scale, the GLOBE project examines organisational, cultural, and relational variables across 62 nations and has illuminated the demonstrable influence of cultural context on organisational behaviour (House et al., 2004). New Zealand and the United States are both categorised in the Anglo cultural group, but a few notable differences exist, as demonstrated in Table 4 below.

Perhaps the most notable difference between the cultural practices and values between the two societies is in the domain of assertiveness. While some of the other variables contain differences between either the practice or the ascribed value, assertiveness varies on both, with Americans rating assertiveness higher than the GLOBE average and New Zealanders rating it lower than the average. This finding was informally validated by my interviewees, particularly those who had experience with both work cultures.

Two of the participants who are currently residing in New Zealand migrated from the United States and also shared their anecdotal perspectives on the differences they have observed between the two cultures, including attributes such as communication style, authenticity, and the cultural norms around work-life balance. Hence, selecting participants from two unique countries allows for a degree of generalisation of the study results to Western countries as a group, with acknowledgement of idiosyncrasies that may exist among them.

Table 4

GLOBE Study Comparison of New Zealand and USA



Note: Adapted from *The GLOBE Study of 62 Societies*, by GLOBE: Global Leadership and Organizational Behavior Effectiveness, 2004. (https://globeproject.com/study_2004_2007). Copyright 2016-2020 GLOBE.

It is worth noting the acknowledged bias in psychology research toward samples from “WEIRD” (Western, educated, industrialised, rich, democratic) nations that came into public consciousness with the research by Henrich et al. (2010). Their analysis found that 96% of samples in psychology research came from countries with only 12% of the world’s population. A subsequent study in 2018 found that over 80% of studies in the *Psychological Science* journal still utilised WEIRD samples, and perhaps more concerningly, several did not disclose the origin of their samples (Rad et al., 2018). While this research falls into the majority statistic of studies utilising WEIRD participants, the preceding discussion provides full transparency about the selection and origin of the sample. Further, the findings shared in subsequent sections are not intended to be transmutable to cultures or societies outside the ones in which they originate.

Data Collection

Charmaz (2006) notes that when grounded theory is used optimally, it allows the researcher to focus on what is transpiring in the data without sacrificing the necessary and colourful detail of its source. She likens it to a camera with multiple lenses that first provides a “broad sweep of the landscape” and subsequently brings more intricate scenes into view with corresponding shifts in perspective (Charmaz, 2006, p. 14).

This is not unlike the grounded theory approach to the process of data collection itself. The construction of the interview questions begins more generally, progressively narrowing where appropriate to zoom in on areas ripe for further exploration. Likewise, engaging in the investigative conversation with interviewees requires a broad start with a corresponding ability to follow the nuanced lines of thought that allow for various concepts to emerge from the data. The following section explores these ideas in greater depth by examining the procedures for

crafting the interview guide, conducting the interviews, and transcribing and storing data as they align with the particular ideology and methodology of grounded theory.

Crafting the Interview Guide

The interview guide [see Appendix I] was guided by the in-depth literature review discussed in Chapter 2. The aim of the interviews was to verify the experiences of belongingness that have been identified in the literature, and to explore additional factors previously unexamined in order to identify themes around the experience of belongingness as well as specific practices organisations engage in to create and cultivate belongingness.

A grounded theory approach to data collection must account for theoretical sensitivity, a multi-dimensional construct that considers the researcher's depth of insight into the subject matter, their level of attunement to the nuances of the participants' responses, and their capacity to distinguish what is relevant and what is not (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Glaser's (1978) claim that traditional grounded researchers must be a *tabula rosa*, a blank slate, when entering the process of enquiry has received significant attention by theorists spanning decades (Clarke, 2005). Mills et al. (2006) argue that Glaser was "not so naïve as to think this was possible" and suggested the emphasis should rather be on the anticipated emergence of data regarding theoretical sensitivity (p. 28).

Grounded theory methodology necessitates maintaining a delicate balance between open-mindedness and the ability to discern theoretically relevant ideas (Birks & Mills, 2015). In alignment with the description of sensitising concepts set forth by Blumer (1969), researchers adopting grounded theory methodology initiate their study with awareness of particular interests and concepts (Charmaz, 2006). These sensitising concepts may then evolve into

broader research questions and subsequently into specific interview questions (Charmaz, 1990). In their methodological overview, Corbin and Strauss (2015) describe four types of questions useful for grounded theory. Sensitive questions consider the actors involved; guiding questions provide direction for the interview and may shift throughout; theoretical questions aid the over-arching process and create connections between concepts in the literature; and structural questions serve to progress the framework of the theory (Corbin & Strauss, 2015).

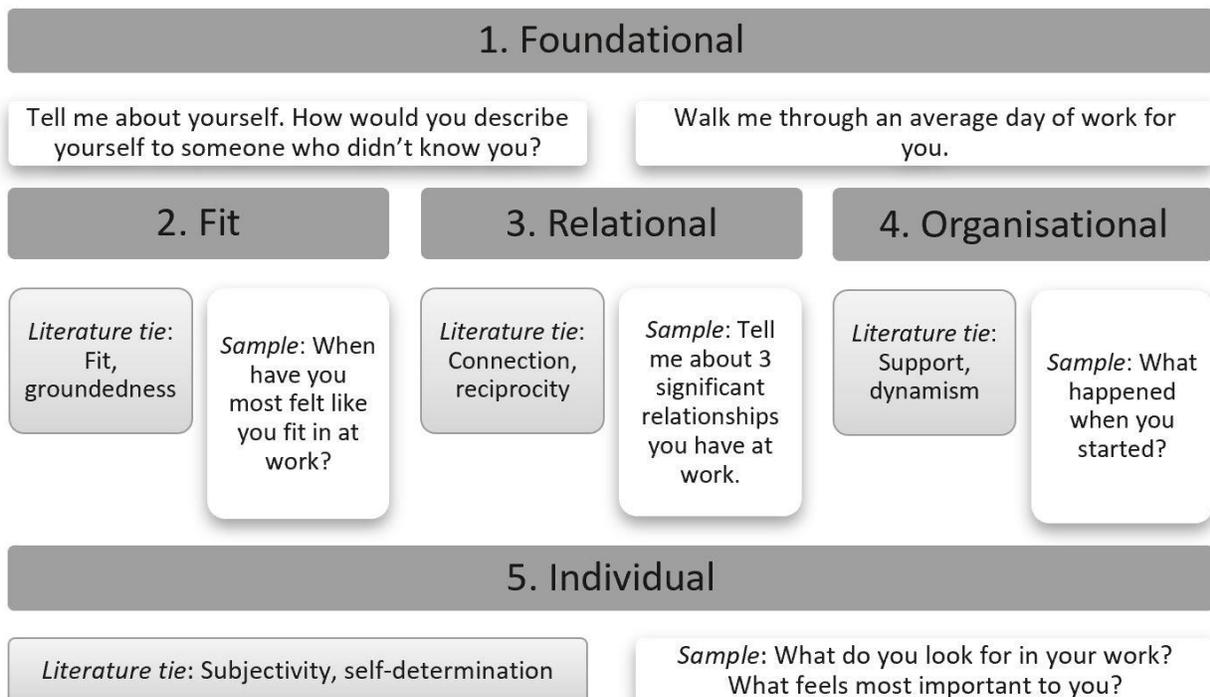
In considering my own theoretical sensitivity, the literature review I had conducted gave me a broad lens through which to view the general construct of belongingness. This eliminated the possibility of entering the research as a true *tabula rosa*, although this was never my aim. However, the dearth of studies on belongingness in a workplace context limited the formation of any preconceived theoretical ideas.

While constructing the interview guide, I also maintained an awareness of my bent toward humanistic practises and my professional experiences that bolstered those views. In addition, there remained the possibility of socially desirable responding, whereby interviewees may have been driven to provide the 'right' answers based on existing relationships or the general inclination to align with the aims of the research. Bearing this in mind, I utilised questions that were open-ended and broad in scope to allow the interviewees to establish the initial direction of the discussion. Further, I sought to use probing questions that struck opposing chords to avoid uni-dimensionality or leading lines of enquiry. Dey (2007) reminds us that a researcher's background informs their response to the data, and the construction of these expansive questions and the flexibility within the interview guide were designed to prevent any inadvertent steering toward particular themes.

As discussed in Chapter 2, the definitions of belongingness in the extant literature align to three primary categories: connection, support, and fit. Mahar et al. (2012) also synthesised belongingness definitions across domains and identified five key characteristics woven throughout, including subjectivity, groundedness, reciprocity, dynamism, and self-determination. Thus, the interview questions were constructed based on these themes across the belongingness literature, bookended by broad opening questions and a concluding exploration of individual factors. Table 5 further illustrates how the interview guide was mapped to these thematic definitions of belongingness, with specific examples of questions from each section.

Table 5

Interview Guide: Mapping to the Belongingness Literature



The two foundational questions allowed the participant to take the conversation where they chose while also giving me as the researcher an opportunity to see which aspects of their work life featured most prominently in their own account. From this point, I largely followed the direction of the discussion, pursuing meaningful threads of ideas. While I generally did not take a strictly linear approach to asking other questions from the interview guide, I asked at least one question from each of the fundamental categories, which were derived from the major themes surfaced in the literature review. This process was designed to capture various facets of belongingness and its common correlates.

Additional probing questions were used to elicit greater depth and clarity where needed, and a comprehensive list of these questions can be found in Appendix J. Finally, at the end of each interview, I posed the question, *Is there anything else you think it's important for me to know?* This allowed the participants to provide any further anecdotes or pieces of information they had not previously disclosed, share their thoughts about the interview process, or voice anything else that felt relevant to them based on our discussion.

The Interview Process

The interviews were conducted in a variety of settings, both virtual and in person. The in-person interviews were held primarily at coffee shops or restaurants, and three occurred at the participants' homes. They were recorded with a hand-held digital device for subsequent transcription. The virtual interviews took place over Skype or Zoom with the record function on. All interviewees were asked for explicit permission to record, with a brief explanation that the recording would be confidential and used only for transcription purposes. Refer to Appendices H and I for the information sheet and consent form provided to participants. The participants

consented to being recorded and were assured that their names and identities of their respective organisations would not be revealed in the final report. Once the interview began, participants seemed to forget the presence of the recorder and spoke freely throughout the interviews.

One of the most critical aspects of the interview process was building rapport with each participant. This stage can be likened to a courtship in which the researcher is seeking access to the interviewee's private world, working to build trust in the relationship and the interview experience (Karnieli-Miller et al., 2009). Beyond simply engaging in preliminary small talk, rapport is about "convincing people that you are listening, that you understand and are interested in what they are talking about, and that they should continue talking" (Leech, 2002, p. 665). Techniques for establishing rapport are bandied about freely in the qualitative research literature, with suggestions such as appearing "slightly dim and agreeable" (McCracken, 1988, p. 38) in order to minimise any perceived threat to the participant. Leech (2002) encourages mindfulness around language, explaining the basic premise of the study, and appearing benignly inquisitive. While I eschewed any particular technique in favour of authentic curiosity about each individual, I aimed to stay attuned to the nuances of the participants' verbal and non-verbal cues throughout the interviews and adjusted my tone, cadence, or line of questioning accordingly. Below is a sample memo that exemplifies my reflections of this process, and the supporting comments from a participant who likened the interview to a "reflective exercise."

Transcription	Researcher Memo
<p><i>Phil:</i> I think what I have found through going through this process with you is that it has been quite a reflective exercise for me, bringing some of these things up. Because I don't really have a chance to talk about it with people and share aspects of it. I found it really valuable. Obviously, you have your way of facilitating, which is really top drawer, so it has allowed me to really get into the feelings of it, which is good. So there is nothing else to say apart from me just probably venting with you. It's a very unique environment. It has been fascinating.</p>	<p><u><i>Space for reflection</i></u> When asked if he had anything else to share at the end of the interview, Phil expressed gratitude that the tone, pace, and general openness of the conversation allowed him to process some of the experiences he shared as he was disclosing them. He seemed to find benefit in the discussion itself, and it makes me wonder if there is inherent value in employees having this space to reflect on their own experiences and do some "sense-making" when they are removed from the emotionality of it. This opportunity likely doesn't happen often.</p> <p>It is particularly gratifying to hear this feedback since I did not know Phil previously. Affirming for my interview approach!</p>

Anyan (2013) advocates for awareness of the power dynamics in the qualitative interview, from the preparation to the data collection and analysis phases. It is the researcher who sets the stage for the interview, crafts the questions, and initiates the discussion in alignment with the study topic (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2005). With these factors in mind, I left the final choice of setting to the participants and dedicated intentional time at the beginning of each interview to establishing trust and a sense of ease. Although several of the interviewees were previous acquaintances, this brief warm-up prior to beginning the interview questions appeared to serve as an effective conversational lubricant for all participants, and this is reflected in the richness of the data.

The interviews were semi-structured, with a basic interview guide designed to encompass key topics relative to the study. Following the ideology that "the agenda for a semi-structured interview is never carved in stone" (Adams, 2015, p. 498), I established a general framework organised by topic that could easily be adjusted in accordance with the direction of

the conversation. While I ultimately obtained information encompassing all categories of the guide from each participant by the conclusion of the interview, the pathways to reach this common destination were many and varied. Based on factors such as scheduling restraints, forthcomingness of participants, and the nature of the conversation itself, interviews varied in length from around one hour to well over two hours.

When conducting the second round of interviews, I included time at the beginning of the conversation for member checking, a qualitative process that ensures accurate representation of participant voice by providing an opportunity for review of the way their perspectives have been portrayed (Cresswell, 2005; Stake, 2010). This segment of the conversation was structured in three primary phases: a) a verbal synopsis of the key ideas and themes that had arisen from the initial interview, b) solicitation of their feedback (confirmation or denial) about this summary, and c) an update on the over-arching research process to date. There were no instances where participants identified an incorrect interpretation of the data, and they often expressed intrigue about the ongoing direction of the research and the findings. This can likely be attributed to the nature of the relationships in which a foundation of trust had been built, as well as a precise transcription process.

Researcher Reflection

With four interviews under my belt, I am increasingly optimistic about the richness of the data coming forth. I feel honoured by the magnitude of the information my participants have been willing to disclose; the depth and honesty they have revealed is humbling. At times I have doubted my approach, wondering: Am I being formal enough? Should this process be more rigid in order to be truly 'scientific?' I continue to circle back to Strauss and Corbin's writings about qualitative research and the extent to which bringing ourselves (in all our messy humanity) is part and parcel of creating meaningful grounded theory. It's a reminder of why this approach makes sense for the nature of this research and for me as an individual.

Transcription

All interviews were transcribed and coded manually in Microsoft Word. I performed the transcriptions from the first round of interviews myself in order to review the content and begin to identify relevant phenomena, such as cadence, inflection, word repetition, and so forth, that could hold meaning for the coding interpretation and may have been missed in the active process of conducting the interviews. Woods (1986) takes note of the value of maintaining sensitivity to “repetition of incidents or words, irregularities, unusual occurrences and how people say things” (pp. 133-134).

The second round of interviews was partially transcribed by a research assistant experienced with qualitative methodology, and I again coded the remainder of the interviews myself. The transcriptionist subsequently provided her own memos from the transcription process, and the resulting discussion confirmed several data points surrounding my emerging codes and elucidated further viewpoints I had not considered. For both studies, the transcription and the coding were performed in as condensed of a timeframe as possible to allow for themes to more readily emerge and to begin drawing ties between data from each participant. The timeline in Figure 3 below serves to temporally locate each stage of the research process.

Data Security

The finalised transcripts removed participants’ names and replaced them with pseudonyms. Any identifying information that could potentially be traceable to participants or their peers was removed or changed, such as locations referenced, organisation names, and any specific peers, supervisors, or other individuals mentioned in the interviews. It was

Memos

Memo writing is typically described as the intermediate stage that occurs between the process of collecting the data and beginning to write about the results (Charmaz, 2006, 2008; Glaser, 1978, 1998). However, the breadth and utility of memos extends far beyond this basic definition. Memos capture ideas “in process and in progress,” and the very act of authoring and reviewing them can provide a framework through which to consider and validate ideas (Charmaz, 2008, p. 166).

There are several purposes for writing memos in grounded theory methodology. First, the ideas recorded in memos at various stages of the research process elevate the data to a conceptual level. Further, memoing promotes the sifting and revision of ideas and provides a simplified process for organising the researcher’s thinking. Finally, memos create an archive of conceptualisations as a central source for cultivating theory (Engward, 2013; Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

Glaser (1998) advocates for free and liberal use of memoing as a grounded theory technique, suggesting that researchers should create memos “whenever and however” an idea comes into being. Indeed, the informal nature of memos within the grounded theory methodology is non-prescriptive by design. Memos are allowed to be uncertain, incomplete, and exploratory (Charmaz, 2000, 2006, 2008), in service of subsequent thinking and theory generation that is unfettered and expansive. Memos provide fodder for grounded theorists to think, shift, and explore as they construct theory in the later phases of the research (Charmaz, 2008).

I frequently wrote memos directly following an interview to record my initial impressions and capture the fresh enthusiasm of collecting illuminating data. I found this preserved the sharpness of my thinking by not allowing too much space between the creation of the data and its subsequent analysis. Perhaps equally importantly, reading these memos refreshed my waning enthusiasm during the less heartening phases of the research. I was also mindful of the “infrangible privilege” of interpreting what the participants were trying to convey with their words as well as their unspoken communication (Kvale, 2006), and several of my memos reflected my observations on the potential significance of the tone or nonverbal behaviour I witnessed in the interview.

Transcription	Researcher Memo
<p><i>Stephen</i>: Socially, I suppose - I guess I fit in enough to be like, I am a comfortable human that can, like, be in the situation and conduct myself in a normal, appropriate way. I don't know. Yeah. So, it has always been - I have always been aware of it. And I can kind of tell that I don't fit in. Like on my previous team, I was the extrovert on a team of introverts and they always kind of joked, “Oh, there is Stephen again, with his funny shirts” and whatever. But I kind of think that situation was me choosing to stick out and bring a level of energy and pizzazz to that team. But then with this one, I am on a team of extroverted women. I am the only male and it is not a gender thing. I don't have any trouble hanging out with or interacting with women, but it's just the fact that they are all very stereotypically Kiwi-cultured, extroverted women that have a very specific way of interacting with each other. It became pretty obvious, pretty quickly that I was the odd one out.</p>	<p>This was the third time in the interview that Stephen mentioned the jokes his colleagues make about his different-ness.</p> <p>He was establishing a clear delineation between his <i>chosen</i> differences (wearing loud clothing, being gregarious and friendly) and that which set him apart in ways he perceived less control over, such as comments about his lifestyle, being included in organisational cultural norms, and reciprocating friendship.</p>

I also recorded memos throughout the coding process and found this to be a particularly useful tactic to note the intuitive insights that arose when moving quickly through the data. In

this way, memos were my method for shielding initial impressions from the mutation of overanalysing. As Gladwell (2007) cautions, “Insight is not a lightbulb that goes off inside our heads. It is a flickering candle that can easily be snuffed out” (p. 57). Examples of my memos and reflections are embedded throughout this chapter and elsewhere in the thesis as a means of guiding the reader through the thinking, feeling, and experiential nature of grappling with belongingness.

Coding

Coding catalyses the process of emergent data analysis in grounded theory (Charmaz, 2008). Coding can be defined as “simply the process of categorizing and sorting data,” with the resulting codes serving as a means to synthesize the numerous observations arising from the data (Charmaz, 1983, pp. 111-112). Said another way, coding is the bridge between data and theory (Bryman & Burgess, 1994). In constructivist grounded theory, coding is generally comprised of two primary phases: initial coding and focused coding (Charmaz, 2008). Some contemporary constructivist writings also identify a final phase of advanced categorisation referred to as theoretical coding wherein the storyline begins to develop, as reflected in Table 6 below (Chun Tie et al., 2019).

Table 6

Comparison of Coding Methodology

Table 1. Comparison of coding terminology in traditional, evolved and constructivist grounded theory.

Grounded theory genre	Coding terminology		
	Initial	Intermediate	Advanced
Traditional	Open coding	Selective coding	Theoretical coding
Evolved	Open coding	Axial coding	Selective coding
Constructivist	Initial coding	Focused coding	Theoretical coding

Note: From “Grounded Theory Research: A Design Framework for Novice Researchers,” by Y. Chun Tie, M. Birks, and K. Francis, 2019, *SAGE Open Medicine*, 7, p. 5. CC BY-NC.

After reading through each transcript in full to create a high-level mental summation of the ideas being conveyed by interviewees, I coded the transcripts (without the use of software) in accordance with constructivist grounded theory methodology by searching for cogent themes in sections of data (Charmaz, 1996, 2000, 2006, 2008, 2017; Kenny & Fourie, 2015; Mills et al., 2006). Most themes arose spontaneously and were validated by a closer line-by-line review of the transcripts. This frequent back-and-forth between the transcripts and the developing stems of theory reflected the process that Bryman and Burgess (1994) describe in which the analyst is writing memos that connect to the codes or other developing concepts and expand on the data as an initial step in the emergence of theory.

Charmaz (2008) distinguishes particular coding techniques such as utilising *gerunds*, verbs which function as nouns, to describe what is occurring in a data segment. This provides a means for the researcher to more clearly see implicit processes and connections among codes, as well as to maintain the emergent nature of the analysis (Charmaz, 2008). I frequently used gerunds in my own coding process, as reflected in the samples included in this chapter and elsewhere in the thesis.

In vivo coding is another type of data analysis in qualitative research that emphasises the language used by participants (Charmaz, 2006; Manning, 2017; Thornberg & Charmaz, 2014). This type of coding generally occurs early in the analytical process, allowing for more nuanced categories to develop in subsequent coding and refinement (Charmaz, 2006; Manning, 2017). Because *in vivo* coding consists of direct statements made by participants (Charmaz,

2008), it is particularly useful in research where cultural or micro-cultural context is imperative to acknowledge the voices of participants respectfully and accurately (Saldaña, 2016). It is also more broadly useful for capturing subtleties and complexities that may be overlooked by other types of coding (Manning, 2017). I occasionally used this technique in my initial phases of coding by bolding or highlighting particular phrasing in the transcripts that was distinct or uniquely descriptive. In many cases, it was indicative of categorical undercurrents that manifested in various ways throughout the interviews.

Initial Coding

Initial coding begins to shift the researcher's attention from the field to the analysis of the data and requires interrogation and deep interaction with the data (Charmaz, 2008). These initial codes are known as provisory codes, keeping the theorist open to further analytical possibilities that arise in the data (Corbin & Strauss, 2015; Santos et al., 2018). During the initial coding process, the data is segmented and analysed with the aim of constructing codes, or categories, from the ideas expressed in the interviews. This procedure can be undertaken at the level of detail called for the data and the research question, from a granular word-by-word basis to the broader scale of incident-by-incident (Corbin & Strauss, 2015; Kenny & Fourie, 2015; Santos et al., 2018).

Using the highlighting, bolding, and comments features in Microsoft Word, I conducted initial coding to loosely describe the emerging phenomena and begin the analytical process. These classifications were explored and constructed in further detail with the creation of tables that delineated each theme and bolstered them with supporting commentary from the interviews. This process allowed for more expansive definition and refinement of the initially

identified categories to create the emergent themes discussed in Chapter 5. The following example illustrates my initial coding utilising gerunds to label categories, with particular phrases in bold to denote where specific attention was paid to use of language.

Transcription	Researcher Coding
<p><i>Daphne</i>: There is another friendship I have with one of the two young women I just talked about. So, I did the same thing, I went and chatted to her in her office and made her feel welcome. I talked about things not related to work because I found out it's always a good way to connect. I really adore her, she's wonderful. She's younger as well; she's in her 30s. But it was really interesting; she got engaged and then she got pregnant, and I went out of my way to do nice things for her. I wanted her to feel appreciated and cared for. Then she had an engagement party and she was talking to me about this engagement party, but she hadn't invited me. It was a really interesting learning experience. It was also slightly painful when I realised that the friendship meant more to me or was different than it was for her. For her really, it was a wonderful work friendship. We got along, we talked about personal things, but it didn't go beyond the workplace. It did really kind of hurt when I realized that it meant more to me than to her but then I came to terms; it took me about a week to not feel like my feelings were hurt anymore for not being invited to that party, because different people in the workplace just have different kinds of relationships with others, and it's fine and I certainly didn't want to force a bigger friendship on her. It was an interesting learning experience to let go of wanting something different than she did and being okay with that.</p>	<p>Repeating friendship-forming tactics Welcoming new group member Engaging in personal topics Encouraging vulnerability Expressing open affection Noticing age difference</p> <p>Going above and beyond to connect Influencing emotion</p> <p>Sharing stories Discovering exclusion</p> <p>Acknowledging hurt feelings Becoming aware of differences in perception</p> <p>Acknowledging hurt feelings Becoming aware of differences Coming to terms</p> <p>Noticing different relationships (Still) coming to terms Desiring reciprocal friendship</p> <p>Releasing expectations</p>

Focused Coding

Once initial coding has identified categories that appear to be frequent and/or notable, the researcher may move on to focused coding, also referred to as selective coding (Charmaz, 2008). In the constructivist perspective, this second step allows for the classification and synthesis of large blocks of data to expedite the analytical process, and the codes become progressively more focused and conceptual (Charmaz, 2008; Corbin & Strauss, 2015; Santos et al., 2018). The focused codes can be examined to identify those that most accurately explain the emerging phenomena (Charmaz, 2008), and they begin to evolve into tentative theoretical subcategories and categories to reveal central themes (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). In essence, the grounded theorist is searching for the codes that possess theoretical momentum (Charmaz, 2006) and have the potential to hold the weight of the analysis – what Clarke (2005) refers to as “carrying capacity.”

Theoretical Coding

The culminating stage of coding within the constructivist approach is theoretical coding (Chun Tie et al., 2019; Saldaña, 2016) in which the emerging theory becomes identified and integrated (Glaser, 2005). Whereas the initial phase of coding segments the data, theoretical codes “weave the fractured story back together again into an organized whole theory” (Glaser, 1978, p. 72). This particular step in my own process will be further explored in the forthcoming chapter on research findings, where the organisation and reintegration of codes will be illustrated in greater depth.

Theoretical Validation

An important element of grounded theory is the continuous analysis that is consistently and methodically shaping the researcher's empirical questions, a process known as theoretical sampling. Glaser (1978) described theoretical sampling as the data collection process in which the researcher "jointly collects, codes, and analyses his data and decides what data to collect next and where to find them in order to develop his theory as it emerges" (p. 36). Once theorists reach the point at which further data collection or additional sampling is yielding no further dimensions of the identified themes, this signals theoretical saturation (Charmaz, 2006; Thornberg & Charmaz, 2014; Ylona et al., 2019).

In my own research, the second round of qualitative interviews served as a vehicle for reaching theoretical saturation. After coding the initial interviews and beginning to identify tentative categories, I conducted follow-up interviews of the same participants to explore and validate emergent phenomena. I also expanded the sample to include additional interviewees from smaller organisations. While nuanced variations of the focused codes emerged, the three larger themes remained consistent, further supporting theoretical saturation.

The fundamental task of the grounded theorist is to define the properties of their codes, or categories, by pursuing comparative data to illuminate the more nuanced, hidden properties of the developing theory (Charmaz, 2008). In this way, researchers form initial interpretations that are further refined by theoretical sampling and returning to the field for additional data collection; as such, grounded theory shifts from inductive logic to abductive reasoning (Charmaz, 2008; Deely, 1990; Rosenthal, 2004). Abduction allows for an intuitive explication of the empirical phenomena and invokes creativity in exploring theory-yielding ideas that may

explain them (Dey, 2007; Haig, 2005). The nature of this abductive reasoning can lead the researcher into “unanticipated theoretical realms” by accounting for surprises and aberrations in the data (Charmaz, 2006, 2008; Rosenthal, 2004).

These aberrations appeared in my own data in a few ways. First, I was surprised by the variability in the degree to which employees wanted or expected to find a sense of belonging at work, and as a by-product, the extent to which they looked to organisations to foster that belongingness, as opposed to viewing it as a personal responsibility. I anticipated that the desire to experience belongingness at work would be nearly universal, but instead, it appeared to be influenced by the network of relationships they had outside of work. For example, one employee who was new to the city when he began working at his organisation did not feel like he fit in on his team until he began receiving invitations to participate in events outside of work and expressed that the company should have done more to build team cohesion during the onboarding process. Others with seemingly well-established social networks looked to their workplaces much less for personal connection. I also expected teleworking to potentially be a factor here, but there was variability in this area as well. Some work-from-home employees had an expectation that the organisation – and their managers, in particular – should exert a more concentrated effort to communicate frequently and make them feel included. Others appreciated the sense of autonomy and saw this as a hallmark of deeper trust and connection.

Further, most interviewees referenced the mode and style of communication used in their organisation as a factor in their sense of belonging, albeit a minor one. There was significant variability in the preferences employees had for interacting. One individual referenced several times how her manager sent memes, used emojis, and utilised instant

messaging for quick check-ins, and these casual modes of communication made her feel a sense of camaraderie and connection. Conversely, another employee expressed disdain for such types of surface-level interaction and indicated that he felt a greater respect and kinship with colleagues who communicated more formally and directly. An aptly worded excerpt from one of my interviewees summarises this phenomenon eloquently:

If I didn't have [connections outside of work] then I would be seeking it out in the workplace. I would be dependent on my job. But I don't know if you want those kind of people working on your goals. You would want, I would think, people who have an infinite reservoir of belonging. (Patrick, Data Analyst)

Thus, just as the unique lens of the researcher lends colour to the process, in the same way, the perspectives of the participants lend richness to the data.

Chapter Summary

This chapter has explored the data collection and analysis procedures utilized to begin the theory development that will be further expanded in the forthcoming chapter. The careful attention given to selecting appropriate participants, crafting the interview guide, carrying out the interviews, and transcribing the data provides a sense of the intentionality of the research design and its alignment with grounded theory. Further, a tour of the memoing, coding, and validation processes serves to demonstrate alignment with constructivist grounded theory and lay the foundation for a rich discussion of the study findings. Charmaz (2008) lauds the flexible nature of grounded theory techniques in spite of the ongoing efforts to make them more prescriptive. This tolerance – perhaps even celebration – of ambiguity is what yields creativity in the theory-building process while still maintaining its rigour.

CHAPTER 5

FINDINGS

Introduction

Through the preceding review of belongingness literature, the various settings in which it has been studied, and an exploration of what it means in the context of work, the groundwork has been laid for a theory of belongingness at work. In the two qualitative studies conducted for this research, several emerging themes were identified that will be further explored in this chapter.

In undertaking the development of grounded theory of workplace belongingness, it is wise to consider the advice of Heath and Cowley (2004), who remind us that the aim is “not to discover *the* theory, but *a* theory that aids understanding and action in the area under investigation” (p. 149). Thus, the following exploration weaves together the words of the participants with my insights as a theoretically informed researcher, all of which is framed by individual and collective experiences.

It is the task of the grounded theorist to capture the voice of the research participants by maintaining visibility of their accounts in the writing, while also relaying the analytical process in a way that allows the reader to trace the theoretical origins of the findings (Fossey et al., 2002). This approach emphasises the value placed on the contributions of the participants in the construction of the grounded theory (Mills et al., 2006) and simultaneously satisfies the ethical obligation of the researcher to “describe the experiences of others in the most faithful way possible” (Munhall, 2001, p. 540). Charmaz and Mitchell (2001) further echo that constructivist grounded theorists in particular should write in a way that evokes the lived experiences of the participants.

In keeping with this guidance, I have relied on direct quotes from my participants throughout this chapter to illuminate the broader story arc of the findings, supplementing their words with discussion of the phenomena they reveal. This displays both the integrity and the richness of the data. In theory and in practice, I have let them do the talking.

Foundation

Belongingness is often construed as a 'we' issue, one which is collective in nature. While this affiliative aspect is integral to the conceptual and relational understanding of belongingness, of equal importance is the domain of the self. This will be explored further through the lens of the extant literature in Chapter 6, but it is useful to provide a framework for the discussion here, given that the findings are informed largely by views of the self. Social psychologists view the self as a product of social interactions within the broader context of the sociocultural environment (Markus & Cross, 1990). Particularly in Westernised cultures, the self is construed as an integrated whole made up of capabilities, characteristics, values, preferences, and affective states (Kanagawa et al., 2001; Markus & Kitayama, 1991) with a goal to "continually identify these attributes and then to insure that they are persistently expressed and affirmed" (Markus et al., 1997, p. 3). In this way, the self is both collective and individual; social interactions, relationships, and frameworks are a vehicle for the development of self-construal, and the interplay between the relational and the individual is inherent in the experiential nature of belonging. This exploration centres on the *sense* of belonging, that is, the lived experience of self as belonging within a wider social system. Thus, it makes sense to explore belongingness through the experiential lens of the self.

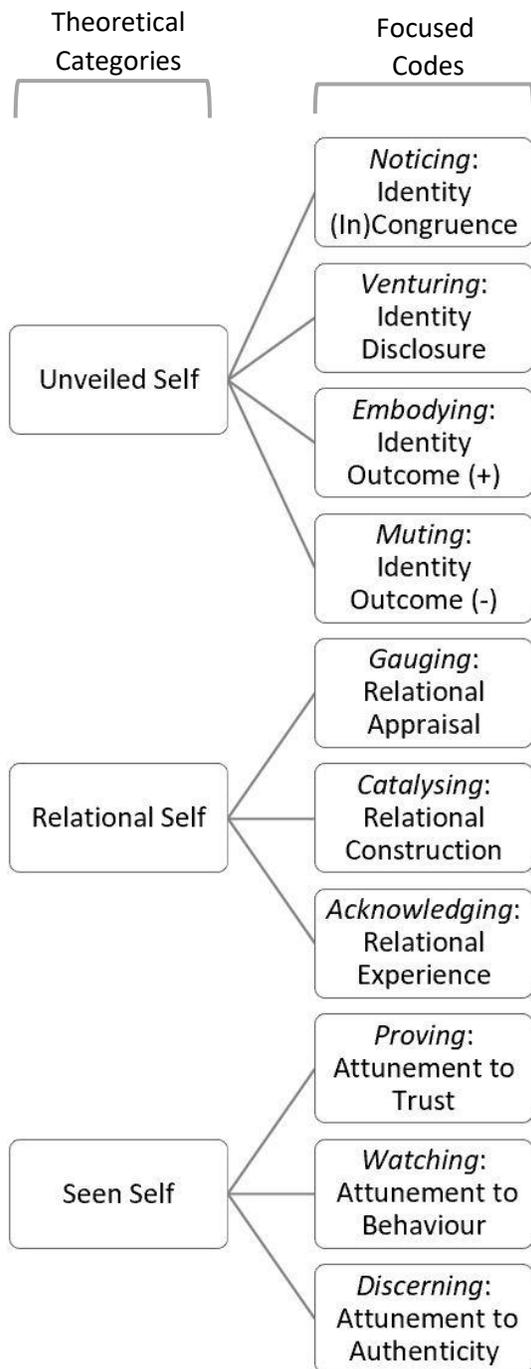
Three theoretical categories arose from the qualitative data, identified here as the unveiled self, the seen self, and the relational self. The following discussion explores the features of each, supported by the interview data from Studies 1 and 2, along with corresponding illustrations of the coding processes utilised to develop theory. Before embarking on this investigation, however, it is useful to consider the interplay between these dimensions of self as a backdrop to the discussion. The unveiled self category reflects the process and outcomes of surveying the environment through the lens of individual identity and self-concept, posing the evaluative question, *Can I be who I really am at work?* The relational self has a peer-oriented domain of influence and seeks to answer, *Can I connect with others as I really am at work?* Finally, the seen self enquires, *Am I recognised for my unique contributions at work?* To frame the discussion, Figure 4 below illustrates the three dimensions of self and the focused codes underlying each one.

The theory constructed from this research considers factors of perceived individual and relational authenticity as central to the achievement of belongingness at work. Employees' ability to be who they are, connect as they are, and be seen as they are emerge as critical facets of belongingness across several domains. The measuring stick against which employees evaluate their achieved or potential belongingness is the simple query: *'Can I be **me**?'*

The call for authenticity is an undercurrent running throughout all three themes and the multi-dimensionality of each one. It suggests that culture development on a behavioural level may be insufficient; organisations must consider not just whether they speak the language of belonging, but whether they embody it. As reflected in the words of the interviewees, it is clear they know the difference.

Figure 4

Dimensions of Self: Theoretical and Focused Coding

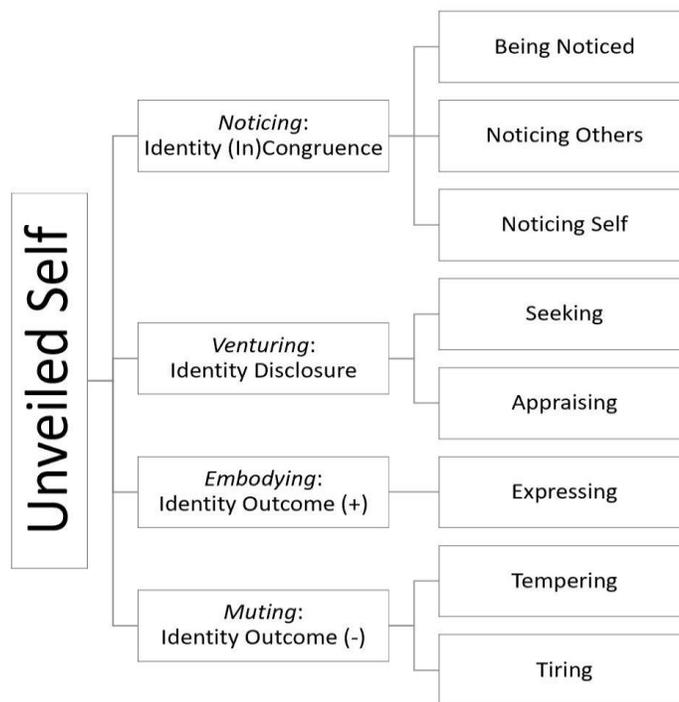


Unveiled Self

The *unveiled self* captures a sense of openness and transparency of being; it says, “I can be who I really am at work.” Figure 5 provides an overview of the initial (first order) and focused (second order) codes from which the theoretical category of the unveiled self was derived. The proceeding discussion will elucidate the data supporting the focused codes as a pathway to better understanding the unveiled self.

Figure 5

Unveiled Self Coding Tree



It became clear in the interviews that employees felt an obligation to veil certain elements of their personality and identity, creating what was aptly identified by one interviewee as a “tension” between the more relaxed, genuine self and the perceived mask of the work self:

*There's sometimes a **tension** between the way I want to **act as a human** and the way I feel like I can act in a professional corporate situation. There's always kind of a **layer of performance**. (Amelia, Collaborative Services Manager)*

This introduces the potential for limiting the degree to which a human-centred relationship can be formed in the context of work and presents a potential barrier to belongingness. One employee noted that the typical banter in his team meetings was not aligned with his own preferences for interacting, and as a result, he was less likely to fully integrate or feel a sense of belonging, evidenced in his comment that, "I don't see myself reflected in the ways that they like to be together." This is not always overt, but in many cases manifests as a subtle sense of apartness. One interviewee said, "I stick out on the team a bit. I get along with everyone but I don't really participate." Another employee indicated that his organisation "gets a watered-down version" of him because the culture is not a reflection of his own sense of identity:

*You kind of feel like you **need to act in a certain** way that **mirrors the culture** that we live in, and that doesn't necessarily reflect **the way I would act on my own**. My work just gets a **watered-down version** of me. (Zayn, Business Analyst)*

In addition to reflecting on their own feelings and behaviours, several participants also noted how it influenced the behaviour of their colleagues. One interviewee shared this perspective when discussing his preference for emails as a more efficient form of communication because "...a lot of face-to-face interactions I find with most people, it's spent keeping up appearances." While not every organisation reflected this relational phenomenon, a few employees described the perceived bureaucracy and rigidity of their workplace culture as a barrier to acting in ways that would otherwise come naturally to them, as illustrated in the following anecdote:

I have a co-worker and I think I was having a bad day and she went out and bought me a chocolate. She is super quiet and timid and I walked over to her and I said, "Hey, are we friends? Because when a friend does something nice for me, I usually give them a hug. Would be okay if I give you a hug?" After all this awkward preamble with this lady, she kind of did this look around and she said in a really quiet voice - she was like, "Oh, are we allowed?" and I said, "Well, I mean I am comfortable with it and if you are comfortable with it, then I think it's okay." And she said, "Okay" and stood up and gave me the timidest, most uncomfortable hug ever. So, yes, I have not attempted that again with her. [laughs] That's an extreme example, but that kind of fits the narrative that I have in my head about how you conduct yourself in that sort of an organisation. (Stephen, Event Coordinator)

Indeed, most participants appeared to view maintaining a sense of separateness as a mandate for professional employment. They described an invisible boundary that creates a barrier to belongingness, as reflected in one interviewee's comment that, "...you can't be totally who you are. You have to maintain a little bit of that professional distance." Some employees also viewed being themselves as a threat to job security and in some cases, an inhibitor to their interactions with clients: "I don't want to say something that, you know, during a call audit that would happen that could be misconstrued...so I tend to keep everybody at an arm's length with my job."

Some participants also demonstrated a keen awareness of the emotional toll that "fitting in" had taken over the course of their careers in a variety of roles and organisations. One interviewee shared that she grew weary of the need to mould to a specific culture and noted, "I just finally started saying, 'this is who I am, take it or leave it.' And that has really helped, really helped in the last year here."

Three focused codes uncovered the theoretical category of the unveiled self. First, there was an element of *noticing*, in which participants were scanning their environment to assess their own feelings and behaviour (noticing self), the feelings and behaviour of close others

(noticing others), and observing how these variables were responded to (being noticed) in a relational context. Table 7 reveals the data elements and corresponding initial codes that yielded the focused code of *noticing*.

Table 7

Unveiled Self: Noticing

<i>Focused Code</i>	<i>Initial Codes</i>	<i>Data</i>
Noticing: Identity (In)Congruence	Being Noticed	o Choosing to stick out
		o Being noticed neutrally for different-ness
		o Being noticed for unique fashion
		- Being ridiculed for quirks
		- Getting negative attention for quirks
		+ Feeling noticed and responded to
		+ Expressing individuality with fashion
		+ Feeling in control with unique fashion
	+ Having uniqueness appreciated	
	Noticing Others	o Having awareness of other-ness
		o Noticing unique fashion in others
		o Dismissing gender differences
		- Noticing blank stares in response to 'me'
		+ Valuing others' acceptance of quirks
	Noticing Self	o Comparing work self/personal self
		- Not seeing myself (in others' ways of being)
		- Feeling tension between my identity + company
		- Feeling 'extreme'
+ Feeling unique		
+ Feeling like I can be 'me'		

Coding Key
 + Experienced positively
 - Experienced negatively
 o Experienced neutrally

Within the *noticing* code, employees were determining whether their distinct sense of self - the values and characteristics that make them who they are - were in congruence with organisational norms and expectations.

*In the interview process, I remember asking her, "How do people express themselves at work? What do people wear and how do people interact and express themselves?" I don't remember the exact words I use, but I asked the question and she said, "Well, just stand up and look around the office. I can see two people barefoot, another couple of people walking around in socks. Matt is wearing a bowler's hat and a polka dot bow tie or something like that. In his spare time, he does performance theatre." She kind of said, like, "You know, **we want you to be yourself.**" (Ben, Business Analyst)*

Second, there were *venturing* and *embodying* aspects, reflected as dimensions of identity assessment in which employees began to experiment with how it would be received if they brought their 'entire self' to work. Table 8 reflects the underlying data and initial codes.

Table 8

Unveiled Self: Venturing and Embodying

<i>Focused Codes</i>	<i>Initial Codes</i>	<i>Data</i>
Venturing: Identity Disclosure	Seeking	o Looking for acceptance
		o Asking about personal expression
		o Asking about relational dynamics
		+ Finding 'my people'
	Appraising	+ Hearing 'we want you to be yourself'
		+ Welcoming all dimensions of personality
		+ Having personal freedom
		+ Showing up in costume
		+ Feeling like I fit in
		+ Being accepted for who I am
Embodying: Identity Outcome	Expressing	+ Being invited to be myself
		+ Feeling empowered to share feelings
		+ Talking about personal life
		+ Having emotions accepted
		+ Having flexibility during personal challenges

	+ Casting a lofty vision when accepted
	+ Not worrying about practicality
	+ Using personality to do good work
	+ Being allowed to do work differently

This phase demonstrates a shift from assessment and attunement – a general appraisal of the environment – to actively engaging in ways that are reflective of their identity. Such a shift is reflected particularly clearly with Ben, the business analyst quoted previously who enquired about the organisational culture around individual expression during the interview for his position. He shared in our conversation that he progressively ‘tested the waters’ after joining the organisation by first going barefoot, then wearing dungarees and a hat, and ultimately, showing up in full costume:

*So, one day I turn up in my pink fox onesie with my velvet, purple waistcoat and a top hat on. Like, **I'm dressing up**. But actually **in my real life**, in my life outside of work, I wear a pink fox onesie all the time. And so, it was just like **people kind of notice it**, but it's just like, **they don't care**. (Ben, Business Analyst)*

Other interviewees also noted their use of fashion as a distinguishing characteristic of their identity and their corresponding attunement to how their peers responded to this different-ness.

***They always kind of joked**, “Oh, there’s Stephen again, with his funny shirts” and whatever. But I kind of think that situation was me **choosing to stick out** and bring a level of energy and pizzazz to that team. (Stephen, Event Coordinator)*

*I feel like so much of my life is **outside of my control**, but what I wear isn't, **and how I present myself to the world** isn't, so I was thinking that might be the reason why I like wearing kind of unique clothes sometimes – just, like, colourful things different from what other people are wearing. And **I feel like that is acceptable** to [the organisation]. (Daphne, Programme Manager)*

The ability to be emotionally expressive also featured prominently in employees' assessments of the degree to which they could be 'unveiled.' In some cases, they compared their positive experiences at their current organisations to cultures they had previously been part of as a means of highlighting their recognition of and appreciation for feeling a level of comfort with displaying their humanness show.

*I think after having that experience in a new place, which can be uncomfortable at the beginning for anybody - but seeing how **I was not able to fit in there** over an extended period of time and then kind of **coming home** back to where I am now, I feel very blessed to be in a company where **I feel like I do very much fit in and can be myself.** (Julie, Director of Compliance)*

Further, this element of identity acceptance led participants to feel they could embrace their own multi-dimensionality and allow broadly varying aspects of their personality to be present at work.

*So **I can be who I want to be** because I know it's **accepted and it's appreciated**, and they know me a little bit better. We have a little bit of banter, and we'll take the piss¹ with each other. (Anne, Recruiter)*

Finally, there is a *muting* code within the theoretical category of the unveiled self, wherein employees veil, or temper elements of their personality to more closely align with perceived organisational norms. Table 9 illuminates the data and initial codes leading to the formation of the *muting* focused code.

Table 9

Unveiled Self: Muting

¹ A Commonwealth colloquialism meaning 'to joke around'

<i>Focused Code</i>	<i>Initial Codes</i>	<i>Data</i>
Muting: Identity Outcome	Tempering	- Giving up on being 'me'
		- Lowering expectations of fitting in
		- Tempering expectations of acceptance
		- Missing small talk
		- Longing for ways to showcase personality
	Tiring	- Putting on a performance
		- Needing to act a certain way
		- Watering down who I am
		- Censoring conversations
		- Holding myself apart
		- Mirroring culture that's not 'me'
		- Feeling tired of trying so hard

Muting can be viewed as the negative counterpoint to the *being* state previously described; employees have scanned their organisational environment and determined that it is hostile to their authenticity based on both individual perceptions and observable behaviours. In essence, they assess the safety of showcasing who they really are, take tentative steps of unveiling to determine how it is received, and temper their future behaviour accordingly. [Refer to the diagram in Figure 8 for a broader illustration of how this cycle may manifest.]

This entails stepping out of their identity and into their workplace 'character,' or it may simply result in dulling or toning down certain aspects of who they are.

*There is always kind of a **layer of performance** that goes into your job, whether it is kind of driven by your peers, or - like in the firefighting role, it was very macho and you know, bro-ey and kind of masculine, kind of stereotypical masculinity, and **you feel like you need to perform** in that sort of way. (Stephen, Event Coordinator)*

Thus, the theoretical category of the unveiled self becomes evident through the *noticing, venturing, embodying, and muting* focused codes of identity perception in which

employees scan their organisational environment and determine how (and how much) they can be who they really are at work.

Beyond the codes just discussed, the unveiled self was also evident in participants' reflections on how their ability to be themselves and lead with their personality allowed them to work more effectively, creatively, and boldly. In referencing the degree to which he felt understood and accepted by his leader, one interviewee spoke of how it allowed him to "not worry about practicality" and cast a "super and ambitious lofty vision" about what he could achieve for the organisation. Beyond the grander ambition elicited by the unveiled self, it arguably brought more joy and ingenuity to work outcomes as well.

*When I started the compliance training programme back in 2009, my training was full of **sarcasm...little anecdotes and jokes...**I took a topic that, for lack of a better word, sucks, and I tried to make it entertaining and **I was never told, 'you can't do that.'** It was **completely appreciated** and completely like, "**Go ahead and do what you want to do.**" (Julie, Director of Compliance)*

Finally, there is a feature of the *unveiled self* that I found both interesting and endearing: everyone seems to think they are weirder than everyone else. Many interviewees referenced their "quirks" and compared their personalities or lifestyles to their peers, noting how much they stood apart from the perceived norm. This impacted their expectations from peers and the organisation as a whole, and they often found it a pleasant surprise when their individuality was embraced rather than merely tolerated.

*I mean, I have an **extreme kind of personality** or culture compared to the norm. So, I **don't really expect the organisation to break the mould** to fit me. And there might be a day where I go off and work for a smaller company or start my own where I can achieve that but I don't feel like it's that important for this big beast – this behemoth to allow me to be **as ridiculous as I am** on my own. (Patrick, Business Analyst)*

*The particular way that I do things is **very different** and **very unique compared to other people's way**. (Zayn, Business Analyst)*

*My **lifestyle is so different** from my colleagues. They all live in mansions or something and have the latest Range Rover. I live in a little cottage, drive a beat-up Jeep, and have a bit of land on the West Coast with a house truck on it, and that's enough for me. (George, Physician)*

This exploration of the unveiled self as a theoretical category has explored the ways in which employees take notice of individual, organisational, and relational factors that inform their perspectives of identity and influence their decision-making about how to engage at work. It further demonstrates the potential impact of these facets on behavioural outcomes and the extent to which employees may express or mute elements of themselves in an organisational context.

Table 10

Unveiled Self Proof Quotes

Unveiled Self	
Noticing	<i>So, I don't know if I can actually point a finger at any particular thing. I just feel like my experience has been that, you know, that of being noticed, like, "Oh, that's weird. Why would you do that?" kind of rhetoric. And me just kind of like, I guess giving up a little bit and being like, "Yeah, okay." (Nicole, Account Specialist)</i>
	<i>I receive light ridicule, but then just ongoing, like every time I pull a piece of food out of my bag, it's like, "Oh, is that from the dumpster?" And like, yes, funny. I mean, sure, whatever. In the same way I kind of push back on them. I'll kind of poke or ask prodding questions that reflect my values to some of my co-workers, like, "Oh, did you need to buy that thing?" or whatever. And it's just kind of met with blank faces. (Stephen, Event Coordinator)</i>
	<i>I started working around the same time as this other lady and our work overlapped a bit I suppose, but she's just a bit more open and accepting of my shenanigans and able to receive a lot of my quirky qualities. I used to go by and say hello a lot to the larger team and I just got more response out of this one person. (Samuel, Business Analyst)</i>

Venturing and Embodying	<p><i>I think if I was in a law firm or something like that, you wouldn't have that ability to really express yourself more. So I think for the most part, I'm accepted for who I am, and of course you will always present the professional side of yourself, but also like if I've been crying, actually, which has happened, that's okay too.</i> (Daphne, Programme Manager)</p>
	<p><i>She's just a really genuine, loving person who shows their humanity and strong integrity and invites you to be yourself, to bring yourself to work - and challenges people when they're not, really encourages them to take sick leave or mental health days. There's this tremendous flexibility when somebody's in the shit.</i> (Ben, Business Analyst)</p>
	<p><i>So I'm kind of like that person who's really professional when you need her to be but she's also kind of a pain in the ass and extremely sarcastic. So I'm allowed to be both of those things, like both of those personas or both of those, like - all of that is accepted and at times appreciated and I've always felt, for the most part, that they have been. Like I never went through a period of time where I felt like I had to be anybody different than me.</i> (Julie, Director of Compliance)</p>
Muting	<p><i>A lot of me just, like - discussing things that are important to me and things I do in my free time is censored because I just - I don't feel like the conversation that would spring from that would be productive or well-received.</i> (Tom, Solutions Architect Manager)</p>
	<p><i>It's been challenging to really show a lot of my personality as it is more - I'm trying to think of the word here to use. Maybe because I'm [a remote worker]. I'm not too sure how much that plays into factor here but whenever I am in a meeting, it's very cut and dry.</i> (Samuel, Business Analyst)</p>
	<p><i>I have struggled immensely to be myself at work within the last year more than I ever had in my life. The 'me' that I know, even in the professional setting - whether or not it serves me well is beside the point - but I am goofy, I am sarcastic, I am silly, but I get the work done. I know that I am good at what I do but I'm really not a serious person and it has been very hard to keep that at bay over the last year because I feel like I have had to.</i> (Julie, Director of Compliance)</p>

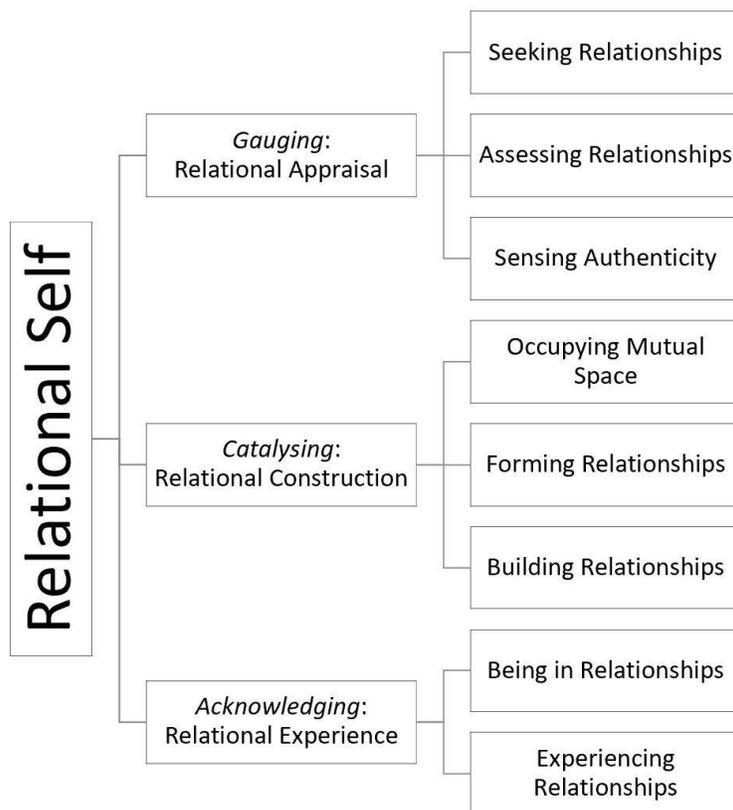
Relational Self

The theoretical category of the *relational self* captures the idea that employees experience a sense of belongingness in the workplace through relationships in which their

personhood is affirmed with the acknowledgement of the *personal*: the things that make us who we are as humans, not just as employees. The relational self says, “I want to connect with others as I really am at work.” Figure 6 illuminates the initial and focused codes that comprise the relational self to lay the groundwork for the forthcoming discussion.

Figure 6

Relational Self Coding Tree



Several interviewees spoke to the value of simply having their name recognised and known by both leadership and colleagues, or having aspects of their personality known by their supervisor.

[The COO] knew who I was...even the higher up leadership, they called me by name. And I was like, what? You know who I am? I think that's what really kept me loyal, why I

*was in [the department] for the longest time, because I had that **personal connection** with them. (Amelia, Collaborative Services Manager)*

*When [my team leader] found out that I was going from like an assistant to the case manager role and I completed training, it's so silly, but she had a list of something that she wanted me to put together, like **what I like to do, favourite foods, favourite candies**. She actually showed up with, like, a bag of Dove chocolates because **she knew I liked it**. Like, it was something very, very simple, but it was just – she **went out of her way**. It was **personalised**. She **knew something about me**. (Nicole, Account Specialist)*

Many interviewees described workplace relationships in with familial language and acknowledged the sense of being cared for in a way that transcended their professional affiliation.

*So we just kind of ended up forming a bit of our relationship around **being there to talk to each other and catch up**, and it **developed into a sounding board** kind of arrangement where when we had issues with the work, we were **able to come to each other** and work through it and that kind of **developed further into a more personal**, kind of, "What's going on in your life? Let's talk about it. Are you having a bad day? That sucks, here's some chocolate," kind of, a friendship. And I have since been over to her house and she's been over here on birthdays and stuff like that. It doesn't feel contrived or anything, it **feels very natural**. I jokingly call her my **work wife** in a completely platonic way. I don't know if we have permission from [the organisation] to use that kind of terminology. (Stephen, Event Coordinator)*

Several participants provided examples of circumstances in which a work colleague ventured far outside the scope of their professional duties to help them. This included situations such as helping with a tax issue, reviewing a CV and providing recommendations for other roles that would support professional growth, investing several hours of personal time to assist with a visa application, and providing advice on a personal conflict. One interviewee described the camaraderie that was established when her new manager scheduled a meeting for the sole purpose of getting to know her:

*The fact that she actually **took the time to talk with me**, and then she **related with me** because she knew that I had kids, and she told me that she was pregnant. And so it just turned into, like – all of a sudden, **we were just moms**. We weren't service line manager and employee, you know? There was that **mutual connection**, that mutual ground.*
(Nicole, Account Specialist)

This attentiveness to the personal also manifested in the opposite dimension; when no attempt was made to build a meaningful relationship, employees felt overlooked and monetised. One interviewee expressed her frustration at being migrated to a new team with minimal communication: "I don't even know exactly who's on my new team because since I've been on the new team, I haven't even had a team meeting yet with this new leader and I've had her now for, like, two months." Overlaying the desire to be seen and treated with respect and humanity, employees expressed a keen awareness of their importance – or lack thereof – within the larger framework of the organisation.

*There's **no softness** in how her answers land and I don't know, maybe that's just my perception, because I'm always like, "Good morning!" with a little smiley face. She's just like, "Hi, please do this." When [my husband got COVID-19], for the first time, I actually **saw some elements of human in her, and caring and compassion**. When we got back from Christmas, then **she just turned back into a robot**. (Nicole, Account Specialist)*

There are three key focused codes within the relational self that further expand the understanding of its dimensions: gauging (relational appraisal), catalysing (relational construction), and acknowledging (relational experience). The theoretical coding that serves as the foundation of this construct is broadened in the proceeding discussion.

First, the practice of *gauging* occurs when individuals begin to assess their opportunities for belongingness and the extent to which they can be themselves in potential workplace relationships. Table 11 outlines the data and initial codes that form the backdrop for *gauging*.

Table 11

Relational Self: Gauging

<i>Focused Code</i>	<i>Initial Codes</i>	<i>Data</i>
Gauging: Relational Appraisal	Seeking Relationships	Seeking connection at work
		Looking for connection
		Seeing work friends as work friends
		Wanting to feel cared for
	Assessing Relationships	Noticing age difference
		Becoming aware of differences
		Noticing different relationships
		Respecting intellect
		Respecting job aptitude
		Using familial language
		Dehumanising tone
		Relying on process over people
		Seeing people as 'cogs'
		Appreciating humanity in leaders
		Appreciating humanity in others
		Noticing lack of compassion
		Noticing lack of eye contact
	Learning to tailor approach to personalities	
	Sensing Authenticity	Intuiting disconnection
		Recognising authenticity
		Trusting intuition about other people
		Being asked genuine questions
		Noticing genuine care for others
Intuiting connection		

Gauging resembles the *noticing* facet of the unveiled self in the sense that it involves scanning the environment to identify factors that may influence personal organisational behaviour. However, gauging differs in its purpose; whereas noticing considers whether the employee can be themselves in a broader organisational aspect, gauging looks at the more narrowed context of relationship. The underlying question as the interviewees relayed their stories seemed to be: *Can I establish relationships in this workplace that allow me to be 'me?'*

*I was **looking for [connection]**, yeah. I don't think I got it in this workplace. The previous jobs were different. I mean, as a firefighter on a team of 20 in a small town in the middle of nowhere you kind of develop those friendships differently. But in a city where people are around their families and have had their entire lives developed, yeah, **I was looking for it, but I didn't really find it at work.** (Stephen, Event Coordinator)*

Next, *catalysing* centres on relational construction, or the concerted act of building relationships in which employees felt like they could be who they really are and relax self-monitoring behaviours to move toward belongingness. The formation of these connections occurred through several consistent frameworks: sharing space, engaging in small talk, spending time outside of work, and demonstrating vulnerability and support, as demonstrated in the data and initial codes outlined in Table 12 below.

Table 12

Relational Self: Catalysing

<i>Focused Code</i>	<i>Initial Codes</i>	<i>Data</i>
Catalysing: Relational Construction	Occupying Mutual Space	Physical proximity impacting connections
		Noticing role of physical proximity
		Noticing role of physical proximity
		Sharing space as friendship building
	Forming Relationships	Spending time outside of work
		Spending time outside of work
		Feeling included in and out of work
		Being invited to personal events
		Spending time outside of work
		Showing up for life events
		Being invited to non-work social events
		Spending time outside of work
		Sharing vulnerabilities
		Being a sounding board
		Asking personal questions
		Engaging in personal topics
		Encouraging vulnerability
		Expressing open affection

	Building Relationships	Going above and beyond to connect
		Repeating friendship-forming tactics
		Sharing stories
		Starting informal traditions amid uncertainty
		Finding creative ways to connect
		Taking time for each other
		Asking about needs
		Being checked on
		Being listened to
		Expressing love at work
		Valuing spontaneous connection
		Valuing small talk
		Missing rapport building
		Having a designated person to go to

Several interviewees noted that their workplace relationships were not cultivated intentionally, but rather they formed organically as a result of being in close proximity to others over an extended period of time. Particularly when their values aligned, this led to the natural development of relationships. In some cases, those connections ebbed along with the loss of the physical proximity.

*So thank God we liked each other because if that had not worked out well, God forbid, what could have happened? So basically, just **time and presence** and being in such **close quarters** with somebody that you **really don't have a choice** unless you're not going to like each other. I guess you could be less personal and just more formal with somebody but that tends to - especially in my life and my experience, it doesn't really happen. I tend to **bond with people if I'm around them often**. (Julie, Director of Compliance)*

Another code that arose in the catalysing framework was the importance of office small talk as a relational accelerator and a potential pre-cursor to building workplace friendship. This facet arose more prominently in Phase 2 after most employees had been working remotely for a year or longer due to the COVID-19 pandemic, or they had shifted to a different organisation

with a less collegial culture. In its absence, they recognised the important role that office chatter played in their sense of belonging and relational ease at work.

*My boss, when he and I meet, **he wants to talk** before we jump into whatever is going on at work. He wants to know how [my son] is; he wants to know how I am coping, how I'm doing, how I'm feeling. And it does seem genuine to me. It does seem like **he actually cares about the things that are going on in my life other than just as an employee.***
(Julie, Director of Compliance)

A key feature of the catalysing facet of the relational self is time spent outside of work. Among the study participants, it tended to occur gradually after the foundation had been laid for a relationship that transcended the traditional office banter and work-centric interactions. In many cases, interviewees identified the time spent outside of the workplace as a turning point in the relationship in which they could begin to share more personal information and reveal traits they did not necessarily showcase at work.

*Like originally when I first moved back here, I **had no friends** because all my friends from high school either moved or – all my friends in college were still in college. So it was very **scary for me**, and I remember [my colleagues] invited me to just do like Dungeons and Dragons or **stuff outside of work**. And that's when I first **started to feel included**, because not only did I see them at work and we formed that connection - if I had questions, I knew I **could go to them about work stuff**, but I also have, like, these **lifelong friendships** now with people. And we still play video games or talk on a regular basis now. That was like the first – I would say like the **first moment I really felt connected**. (Samuel, Business Analyst)*

Demonstrating vulnerability and support is a final code relevant to relational construction. Going through a challenging situation with a colleague or experiencing shared moments of vulnerability served to further cement existing relationships and contribute to belongingness and a sense of 'we're in this together.' This was evident in a story shared by Tom (Solutions Architect Manager) about the unexpected death of a colleague on his team. He

noted that the response from most of the organisational leadership was in the vein of, “Well, that’s definitely sad; my condolences to the family. Now what’s happening with the project?” As a result, the degree of mutual support and togetherness within the team was enhanced as they provided each other with the comfort they were not receiving from their leaders and the organisation, as Tom noted that, “I think that we’ve been pretty open as a team, talking through it and providing the opportunity to kind of grieve together and to plan together and just make sure that we maintain the bond within our group.”

Other interviewees reflected on how their workplace interactions were often hallmarked by a particular moment or bid for connection that served as a pivot to deepening the relationship.

*And she **reached out**, and she’s like, I need to talk to you. And I was just like, oh – this is not just, I have an account question, this is – it **transcended work**. But we had also started dabbling in just **personal conversations** at work too, but it wasn’t until you get that text message on your phone and it’s not just an IM. You’re like, **oh, we’re friends**. (Nicole, Account Specialist)*

While the *gauging* code of the relational self considers the surveyance of the relational landscape and *catalysing* speaks to the formation of meaningful workplace relationships that underlie belongingness, the *acknowledging* code centres on the lived experience of connecting at work. Table 13 highlights the data and first order initial codes that drive this aspect of the relational self.

Table 13

Relational Self: Acknowledging

<i>Focused Code</i>	<i>Initial Codes</i>	<i>Data</i>
Acknowledging: Relational Experience	Being in Relationships	Being open to work friendship
		Putting up with quirks
		Feeling protected
		Feeling safe
		Feeling trusted
		Being appreciated for who I am
		Being understood
		Feeling comfortable initiating connection
		Being singled out for connection
		Being seen as a friend, not colleague
		Feeling special
		Feeling needed
		Having friendship appreciated
	Experiencing Relationships	Acknowledging hurt feelings
		Discovering exclusion
		Becoming aware of differences in perception
		Acknowledging hurt feelings
		Coming to terms
		Desiring reciprocal friendship
		Releasing expectations
Feeling excluded from existing cliques		

This surfaces a unique attribute of belongingness, particularly its relational dimension: most people seek inclusion and acceptance, whether in the context of a relationship, a group, or even an entity such as an organisation. At the same time, they want to be recognised for their uniqueness and the aspects of their own humanity that distinguish them from the very crowd they long to be a part of. While similar to the seen self in this focus on unique distinction, the relational self is more concerned with how one is engaged with versus how one is praised or recognised. This phenomenon was reflected in many employees’ reflections around the

acknowledging code of the relational self. In sharing their experiences of belongingness, they identified a feeling of being particularly special to others in a way that set them apart.

*He **took the time** for me. He would come with me on the road. He would impart his wisdom to me. He was **always there**, and he would **protect me**. Anyone else who tried to give me any sort of grief or if I made mistakes, **he was right there** - "Now OK, Phil, just reflect on it. It will be fine." He **protected me** from the powers that be, and I always **felt safe**. (Phil, Innovation Manager)*

Another consideration in the discussion of the relational self is the critical role of workplace relationships both in fostering belongingness, as demonstrated in the preceding exploration, and in contributing to workplace outcomes. Time and again, relationships trump roles; employees will stay or leave an organisation (and be delighted or miserable in so doing) based on the quality of their workplace relationships. The forthcoming chapter will elucidate this further by tying the findings of this research to evidence from the extant literature. For the present discussion, it is useful to see this phenomenon reflected in the words of the participants.

*It comes to that **sense of connection**; it comes to the **relationships** I think for me, **not the work itself**. So, I feel the work that I do predominately supports others, giving grant funding for other people to do the work they want to do, and that makes me feel good to be able to support them to do great things. It's fulfilling but it **doesn't necessarily make me feel connected like the relationships do**. (Daphne, Programme Manager)*

Finally, within the theoretical category of the relational self, there was a deeper recognition of humanity that arose, and a knowingness suggesting that, in a sense, we recognise when we are recognised. One employee, who noted that he is accustomed to being misunderstood in some circles in his life, referenced the recognition and acceptance of his identity in the workplace as a hallmark of the sense of belonging that is felt: "...People know

who I am. They know the person I am. I don't really have problems with people misunderstanding that I'm a quiet introvert who kind of thinks a little bit differently." Perhaps the most apt way of summarising what employees look for to achieve belongingness is reflected in one interviewee's statement reflection: "I think a lot of people don't want their hand to be held, necessarily, but want to feel cared for and guided."

Table 14

Relational Self Proof Quotes

Relational Self	
Use of relational language	...And she's like, if I was your mom , this is what I'd be telling you with my experience and my knowledge. So her just saying that right out of the gate made me feel a lot more comfortable because I'm like, ok, she's not a manager that's going to be out to get me . (Anne, Recruiter)
	She's a mother and she's bad-ass professionally, obviously - really onto it, really encouraging, and really human . She is significantly invested in her own joy and purpose, just as she is at work about creating awesome products or doing awesome work for clients and growing people. She genuinely cares about people . So, she hires people who are really human and can speak the language of vulnerability and humanity . (Ben, Business Analyst)
	They're like my work moms , if you will. For a while it didn't look like [organisation] was going to extend an offer to me, and that was a very scary time because I'm like, I'm graduating, I need to know what's going on. They looked at me as a friend and a person rather than a colleague first, and they wanted to put me and my life first . (Samuel, Business Analyst)
	She's even gone out of her way at one point where she was also having a hard time because she just had surgery and just feeling really down herself, so we shared gratitude with each other every day for quite a few months, and it was her idea to do that. I appreciate how she makes that effort to connect , it helps as well. To be more than just a team leader, but also being a friend . (Daphne, Programme Manager)
	That tone of questioning, it's not like - I don't know if I want to say dehumanising . It doesn't have that type of respect that you want to get on, I don't know - some sort of human level . But I don't - I don't let it get to me. Like I know that there's always going to be people like that. So any, you know, reaction from me that's negative is only going to hurt me because I need to learn how to deal with those people. So I take it in stride , but it's not my preferred way of operating. (Patrick, Business Analyst)

	<p>I realize that it's corporate America and I am replaceable. Like, however much they may like you as a person, at the end of the day, what I do can be replaced by somebody else. (Amelia, Collaborate Services Manager)</p> <p>I still remember a story. I think it was my first or second summer and my start time was 8 a.m. and I showed up at probably 8:01 or 8:02, and there was a piece of paper on my chair that said "eight o'clock." And that is still burned into my brain to this day about the feelings that came from that, and they weren't good feelings. (Julie, Director of Compliance)</p>
Gauging	<p>I guess early on my experience was, as a newcomer to the city and the organisation, everyone's already paired off with a partner. They have their friend groups that they've established and they're all content to kind of live their own lives and I didn't feel like there was much space for me to come into that. (Margot, Project Specialist)</p> <p>On the surface, we're very, very different but, like, just through exposure and similar experiences at work, we actually get along really well and I really, really respect and value his perspectives and his intellect and his approach to the job. And I think that largely drives me putting up with a lot of his kind of, weird qualities. That's how much I respect him as a caring person...he really cares about the work that he does and puts a lot of effort and a lot of his intellectual energy into it. I can't help but respect him for that. (Stephen, Event Coordinator)</p>
Catalysing	<p>Like we would do bike rides to different people's houses and have different meals at each other's houses and stuff like that. And that felt like a strong community and it was interesting. We then moved out of that satellite office back into the main building. That connection, physically - the two teams sat a little bit removed from each other - and that connection was just completely severed. And I tried to maintain that connection by going and saying hi to the other team constantly, and I think it was appreciated. But it just kind of faded over time to the point where now I work in a completely different building and I don't do that at all. It was just a little pocket of time when things were really strong. (Stephen, Event Coordinator)</p> <p>So, not having that in-person interaction is definitely different to the point I just can't stop by someone's office or stop by a cube and say hi, see how the other person's day is going. It's only, like, interactions when we have a meeting or when we're in a weekly stand-up or something like that. (Tom, Solutions Architect Manager)</p> <p>There's no talking before, like, hey, how is your day going or what are you doing this weekend? Kind of the office small talk but on a different level if you will. (Samuel, Business Analyst)</p> <p>We get to the meeting; it's like, okay, here's what we're working on today or here's what we're discussing today and as soon as we're done discussing the topic, it's like - great, see you guys, talk to you next time or whatever. So, it's been different. We</p>

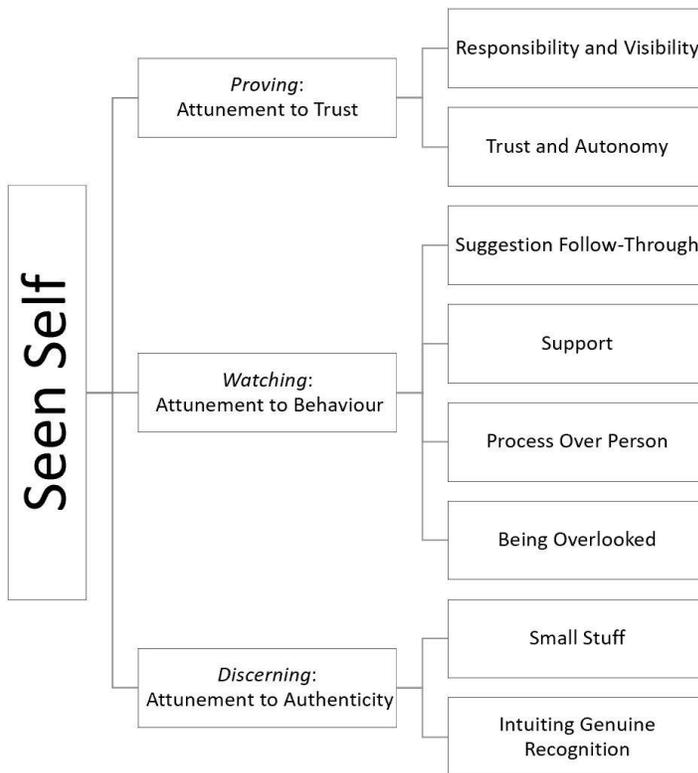
	<p>haven't been actually having time to build up that rapport and relationship. (Amelia, Collaborative Services Manager)</p>
	<p>Some of those friendships started in that way where it was just really quite friendly and then it became spending more time together at work, then it moved into spending time outside of work. (Daphne, Programme Manager)</p>
	<p>I went to his wedding. He invited the entire team and I was the only person to show up. And this is pretty early on so I didn't have like other things happening in my life really. But I don't know. I think he really respected and appreciated that. (Stephen, Event Coordinator)</p>
	<p>But she's just a friend too. And then when she herself was going through a really hard time, she had no problem reaching out to me so I could be a source of comfort, so there was that reciprocity right there. But I also knew that she wasn't going to let me down because she showed that in her work, so I think that would carry over into her personal life as well. (Anne, Recruiter)</p>
	<p>I typed, "I'm going to work from home tomorrow. Send somebody you love a message telling them that you love them." Because that's the kind of stuff I can do at work. I try and encourage people to love each other. And she responded back pretty quickly because she was online, and it was like 10 p.m. or something like that on a Sunday or Monday. She said, "Love you, Ben" with a heart emoji. She cares. (Ben, Business Analyst)</p>
Acknowledging	<p>We have a lot of people on our team who have birthdays in January and I don't think she got them a gift; that made me feel really quite special. It's that appreciation, a very personal - personalised appreciation. (Daphne, Programme Manager)</p>
	<p>He sees me as a trusted individual, more so than probably about anybody because he can fully appreciate who I am and what I do. Other people don't even understand that freedom that we talked about before, but he fully understands it, so it's quite significant. (Patrick, Business Analyst)</p>
	<p>I think I started to feel like this wasn't a good fit for me personally was when a lot of people that I trusted in the organisation, or like, I got a really solid rapport with, started to leave and started looking elsewhere. I was like, maybe I am missing something because I haven't been here long enough. So, I actually reached out to a couple of them, I was like, here's what I am starting to see; what happened there? Is this what you saw, why you decided to leave? (Samuel, Business Analyst)</p>
	<p>So I think that the quality of relationships in your work life is paramount. I mean, your marriage is only as good as your relationship with your partner. You could argue that the work that you're doing every day is only as good as the people you're doing it with. For me, personally, it's extremely significant. (Zayn, Business Analyst)</p>
	<p>She's certainly a main reason why I am still there and why I enjoy turning up and why I have as much fun as I do at work. (Ben, Business Analyst)</p>

Seen Self

The *seen self* asks, “Do you recognise my unique contribution at work?” This theoretical category emerged from consistent commentary on the significant value employees place on the nature of the skills and expertise that the organisation and its members recognise. In other words, if an employee has a skillset they are particularly proud of, or that is an elemental component of their identity, the recognition of that skill by the organisation, manager, or colleague is held in particularly high esteem by the individual. As reflected in Figure 7, there are three primary focused codes within the seen self: *proving* (attunement to trust), *watching* (attunement to behaviour), and *discerning* (attunement to authenticity).

Figure 7

Seen Self Coding Tree



When employees are attuned to trust, they assess the degree to which they are *proving* themselves and their ability to meet the expectations and fulfil the trust of their leadership through being given autonomy and responsibility or being invited to take on special projects that may supersede their job description. The data underlying the focused code of *proving* are outlined in Table 15 below.

Table 15

Seen Self: Proving

<i>Focused Code</i>	<i>Initial Codes</i>	<i>Data</i>
Proving: Attunement to Trust	Responsibility + Visibility	Being given visibility
		Being given responsibility
		Feeling empowered to make decisions
		Being given responsibility
		Feeling deeply involved
		Getting extra projects
		Being asked to do 'special' work
	Trust + Autonomy	Having autonomy
		Feeling trusted

This code was illuminated by an employee who shared how he was recognised for his soft skills and presentation abilities and given responsibilities outside the typical scope of his role as a result:

*I started to become **a bit of a pony boy** trotted out to talk to delegates and going to conferences and being the **face of the programme**, and I think that was kind of their **unspoken way of valuing me**...just the fact that they were allowing me that space to do that kind of work I think is subtly them saying, you know, **you're important to this team**. (Stephen, Event Coordinator)*

Conversely, when those skills or qualities are overlooked, it can be perceived by the employee as threat to their sense of value and subsequently detract from cultivating

belongingness. If leaders or peers fail to trust, delegate, and involve the employee, this results in a disincentive to engage in proving behaviour. For example, one tele-working employee cited an experience when she was mistaken for a new employee during a visit to the office after she had worked at the organisation for over a decade, and others spoke of having their ideas and storytelling efforts dismissed or ignored.

*When I started to present ideas at the team forums or being like, hey, I've had a really good experience and results with this in the past, let's try implementing that here; it was **repeatedly shut down** over and over again. Not just from the HR side, but from my manager's perspective as well. It was **very discouraging** to see a lot of those things. Like, **what's my role here?** Maybe I'm misunderstanding even after several repeated conversations trying to understand - **am I doing the right things?** What should I actually be doing? A lot of conversations like that **just didn't go anywhere** and flourish. (Samuel, Business Analyst)*

Interviewees also seemed to hold a deep awareness of the contributions they made to their team or the organisation, and they used this to infer others' perceptions of their value as employees. This showed up in both negative and positive ways. For example, one employee said she often felt that she was treated "like the red-headed stepchild" because she was in a support function and not earning direct revenue for the organisation. In the positive sense, another participant explained this phenomenon in the following way:

*I'm more **integral to the day-to-day operation**, whereas before I was **on the periphery**. I was not really **impacting things at the root of the operation**. So in terms of fitting in, I'm way **more integral to the machinery** of things [now]. (Patrick, Business Analyst)*

Just as apartness manifested as a potential detractor to belongingness in the dimension of the unveiled self, it served as a bolster for cohesion within the seen self when that distinction was for recognition, even (or especially) when it involved additional responsibility:

*I started getting **put on those projects** or being **asked more questions** or being **given more accountabilities**. Yeah, it was scary at times because **they're expecting more** but you're also **being empowered to make those decisions** and you know that **they trust you** and they **have your back as well**. So that's when it really started to all click for me and I'm like, **I feel appreciated**, I know my work's good, and I know my manager appreciates my work. (Samuel, Business Analyst)*

This sense of separateness was also impacted by the nature of the relationship the employee had with their manager. One interviewee shared her struggles with a new manager who did not have a “hands-on” approach and reached out to her infrequently, particularly in comparison to her prior manager with whom she had a well-established relationship. As a result, the organisation’s recognition platform became her way of looking for acknowledgement and being *seen* by her new manager.

*I used to really knock the [recognition programme] points. I used to think that it was stupid because you pay me to do my job, I do my job right, I keep my job. Like, I didn't need little [programme] points. With [previous manager], I was just like, OK, fine, I'm getting points, this is stupid. Oddly enough though with [new manager], to make the shift, I do like the shout out and the points because it lets me know that **she knows I'm there**. (Nicole, Account Specialist)*

This sentiment was echoed by other employees who shared the sense of inclusion they felt when they were given special projects that held them apart from their colleagues and demonstrated the trust and confidence of their managers.

*I think the most meaningful is when they **seek you out in subsequent projects**...so the fact that someone is asking me for a new thing, I kind of **take that as proof** that they were wowed by the thing that I gave them in the first place. (Samuel, Business Analyst)*

Bearing similarity to the *noticing* code of the unveiled self and the *gauging* code of the relational self, *watching* is centred on the context of recognition. The distinction can be understood by considering the evaluative question, or the lens through which the employee is

surveying the phenomena. Within the *watching* code of the seen self, participants were attuned to the behaviour of others, particularly their leaders, as it related to being provided with the right tools, witnessing follow-through on their ideas, and having their needs understood, illustrated in the data underlying the codes.

Table 16

Seen Self: Watching

<i>Focused Code</i>	<i>Initial Codes</i>	<i>Data</i>
Watching: Attunement to Behaviour	Suggestion Follow-Through	Seeing suggestions implemented
		Seeing action taken on feedback
		Having ideas shut down
		Feeling confusion about value
		Having value of work understood
	Support	Having my back
		Picking up the slack for me
		Having the right tools
	Process Over Person	Valuing process over person
		Hearing 'the party line'
		Not fitting in the boxes
		Feeling overlooked
	Being Overlooked	Not getting feedback
		Wanting to tell the story 'my way'
		Feeling tired of making effort

When engaged in *watching* behaviours, employees were assessing their organisational environment to consider whether their superiors were 'walking the talk.'

*I would say, the fact that they allow me to take like, three weeks of vacation. I think they were **genuinely happy for me** that I was going to visit these places. So they're willing to - like, they knew it **might cause a temporary burden**, three weeks without my work like that. That's going to fall on somebody. But the fact that they **didn't even, like, cause a fuss about it** - yeah. So that **sends a signal** to me like they are **willing to take on that extra burden** for me. (Patrick, Business Analyst)*

Finally, the focused code of *discerning* within the theoretical category of the seen self reflects employees' ability to easily distinguish genuine recognition from that which was given to tick a box. Many of them expressed that it would be preferable to receive *no* feedback rather than recognition that was perceived to be disingenuous or contrived.

Table 17

Seen Self: Discerning

<i>Focused Code</i>	<i>Initial Codes</i>	<i>Data</i>
Discerning: Attunement to Authenticity	Small Stuff	Getting favourite chocolate
		Cherishing small gestures
		Being impacted by personal gestures
		Receiving a spontaneous care package
		Being warmly surprised
	Intuiting Genuine Recognition	Perceiving genuine good will
		Getting a pat on the head
		Noticing rote recognition
		Intuiting genuine feedback
		Noticing rote recognition
		Intuiting disingenuous recognition
		Feeling 'obligated' recognition
		Getting forced recognition
		Assessing embodied appreciation
		Noticing impersonal recognition
		Piling on recognition

Underlying the experience of authenticity was an appreciation for having their values and the nature of their work understood.

*So, those types of messages stand out starkly from the whole, just like, mosaic of **mundane, repetitive comments**. Like, great job, exclamation mark. Those are almost, like – have no value. Because they're just **automatic**. You're just **checking that off your list** that says to be a good manager, you have to recognise people. **You're better off without** these ten emails saying good job, good job, good job. (Zayn, Business Analyst)*

*I think of a quote: if you've got something to say, **say it hot**, or else don't say anything at all. To me, you actually **have to be embodying the appreciation**, like, you **can't fake that** in my opinion, at least not with me. Like, in order to write something genuine, thoughtful, spontaneous, whatever, you actually **have to be experiencing that in your being**. If you aren't in that space, then **I'll be able to see through that**, personally.
(Patrick, Business Analyst)*

In addition to demonstrating a keen awareness of when recognition was genuine, participants also took notice when their attributes or circumstances were not given consideration beyond following “the party line.” This was particularly true when it was based on explicit or implicit organisational rules. For example, one interviewee voiced frustration at the dismissive nature of the feedback he received when he was rejected for a promotion for which he was denied based on a policy technicality, in spite of being well-qualified.

*I guess I just - I felt that, personally, when I went for a promotion and it was just kind of received with what I interpreted to be kind of **the party line**, the easy-to-recite policy - “Oh, you **didn't check these kinds of boxes**.” Well, maybe the boxes are incorrect. Do you value me as **what I can grow into** and **what I can offer this team** or are you just going to choose to **follow this process** that's been designed to work for all 3,000 employees in this organisation? (Stephen, Event Coordinator)*

At its core, the *seen self* is about being held apart for the positive qualities that we perceive to be unique and value in ourselves. It is, in the words of one participant, being “identified in a crowd.” When the attributes they value most in themselves are recognised by others, it bolsters their sense of identity and the belief in their ability to contribute meaningfully to the organisation.

Table 18

Seen Self Proof Quotes

Seen Self	
Proving	<i>I think I was in the office for a whole three weeks last June and nobody knew who I was until they would come up to me and be like, 'Hi, are you new?' It just would have been nice to have a team leader be like, hey, Nicole is in the office, stop by the cubicle if you want to meet her. (Nicole, Account Specialist)</i>
	<i>A perfect example is I'm responsible for delivering this report up the line about what I have been doing for the last year and I wanted to encapsulate all of those learnings and all of the little bits that I think are important to tell them the story. And the immediate response was, like, "This is too long. Give us two pages." And I'm like, okay, when you condense this down to two pages, it's hard to – you're not getting the full picture. (Stephen, Event Coordinator)</i>
	<i>During that time, I really, really enjoyed it because they recognised that I wanted to do more than just what the average stuff was and so they, like, gave me special projects and stuff, and I actually liked doing that. (Amelia, Collaborative Services Manager)</i>
	<i>They actually recognised that you were a leader or you were a top performer and they wanted to pull you aside to give you more skills. I don't want to be like, 'I got special recognition.' But it's true, that's exactly what it was. (Nicole, Account Specialist)</i>
Watching	<i>They have my back, and they support me. I have the right tools to be able to do my job in terms of technology that is reliable, and trust and autonomy to self-actualise what I need to do. It is really important to me. If I get micromanaged, I will pull out quite quickly. (Ben, Business Analyst)</i>
	<i>Whenever we are in workshops and people are, like, giving you feedback at the end – they go away and they actually take what you have done and run with it. You have inspired them to do things and then you get that feedback again. Yeah, it is often verifiable and backed up by action. (Phil, Innovation Manager)</i>
Discerning	<i>In a meeting, someone would be like, "Alright guys, we're doing focused recognition cards, does anyone have one?" We all sit there in silence for a minute and someone will be like, I have one. And they'll be like, I want to recognise Josh because he did this thing that I don't even remember - just like a random thing to fill the gap and meet the quota if you will. Sometimes you just receive one and you'll be like, I'm pretty sure this is for the practice of it, not really the general authenticity. (Samuel, Business Analyst)</i>

[My former bosses] really just did not understand anything I was doing and so they had no input. They had no advice. They had no real feedback for me. It was just kind of like a **pat on the head** - "You're doing a great job." Whereas, [my current boss] so **understands the work that I do** day in and day out that his feedback is so valuable. Like, he's really big on that and he will regularly tell me, like, "**I could not have done this without you.**" And he **involves me in things** rather than, kind of, you know, keeping me at arm's length or not letting me know too much. So I think that that's been really beneficial for me and has **made me feel more a part of the company** for sure. (Julie, Director of Compliance)

Undercurrents

Throughout the conversations about belongingness at work, there were two common threads woven into all of the discussed dimensions of self. First, there was an element of fatigue that arose when participants voiced the emotional toll of exerting so much effort in trying to be themselves and forge relationships in an environment that felt hostile to their authenticity. The word 'tired' surfaced several times in their descriptions, and behind their comments is a sort of weary acceptance signalling their lack of belief in belongingness as an achievable end.

*But, yes, it definitely goes in waves because **things get frustrating** after a while and I'm just trying to balance out those two forces in my mind. **I'm really tired** and I feel like the organisation does not support me sometimes, but also, **we are all doing our best.***
(Nicole, Account Specialist)

*After a while, **I just kind of get tired** of bringing that kind of conversation or that kind of perspective to some of my more traditional co-workers. (Margot, Project Specialist)*

It just gets tiring** and takes the extra mile or **extra bit of effort**, and it is **not always kind of recognised.** It should be in your job description, but it's not. I don't know. Maybe I don't know what I actually want. But I just - I know that it **takes a lot of energy** and it is **not necessarily ever acknowledged. (Stephen, Event Coordinator)

Further, as discussed at the beginning of this chapter, the role of intuition surfaced as a lens through which employees identified whether belongingness was possible or desirable. In assessing the culture and context of the organisation, as well as the perceived energetic exchange with their colleagues, they sought to determine whether they would be met where they were. The language about sensing, knowing, and intuiting colourfully illustrates how they navigated their own inner landscape.

*And like, hey, you know, I'm a pretty outgoing, engaging person and it just felt like **dead energy** and like **people weren't interested in me**. They tried, but the **connections were flat**. (Ben, Business Analyst)*

*It's like I'm trying to work with you on something and I can - in your actions directly in front of me, **I can acknowledge that you're feeling this thing**. We're just physically in the same general space and **we sense it**. (Tom, Solutions Architect Manager)*

*You know how you get that **gut feeling** when something is wrong or it **just doesn't seem authentic or genuine**? That's when it really clicked for me. **I can't really describe it** in a way other than that. (Samuel, Business Analyst)*

*It's just - I am **aware enough to know** someone's behaviour with a lack of eye contact and stuff. **I have a feeling. You know it**. (Phil, Innovation Manager)*

***You can tell. You can sense** when somebody is going through the motions versus when they actually care. You can tell in the inflection of the voice; you can tell if they are typing while they are talking; you can tell if they are distracted. I feel like **there's a way of sensing that**. (Julie, Director of Compliance)*

*But I think that's almost, like, why we're here on earth, is to align like that. So I think we all have a little bit of that spark inside of us. And it gets - it gets lit when **you actually are feeling something**, which is very rare. So I like the saying, you know, '**real recognise real**.' It's like, a light inside of me recognises the light inside of you, so that when that spark is there - whether it's like, for five seconds, or a day or a week or six months, or whatever - **there's something inside of us that can intuit that**. (Patrick, Business Analyst)*

The reliance of interviewees on their intuition and “gut feelings” to separate the proverbial wheat from the chaff and make sense of the recognition they received is compelling and warrants a deeper exploration that extends beyond the scope of this thesis. As such, a recommendation for further study will be included in the concluding discussion of Chapter 6.

Chapter Summary

This chapter built a theory of belongingness at work by examining three dimensions of self that emerged from the study findings. The **unveiled self** considers the role of identity and emphasises employees’ desire to be themselves at work as a tie to belongingness. Through the practise of *noticing*, they scan their environment for cues that inform whether they can take tentative steps toward *venturing* and *expressing*, the experience of unveiling their individuality. If there is a perceived acceptance of these idiosyncrasies, it provides a ripe environment for belongingness to flourish. When this does not occur, however, individuals may engage in *muting* aspects of themselves, tempering their behaviour to fit organisational norms and expectations and detracting from belongingness. The diagram in Figure 8 further demonstrates the phenomena discussed throughout this chapter and illuminates the interconnectedness of the three dimensions of the theory and their related facets.

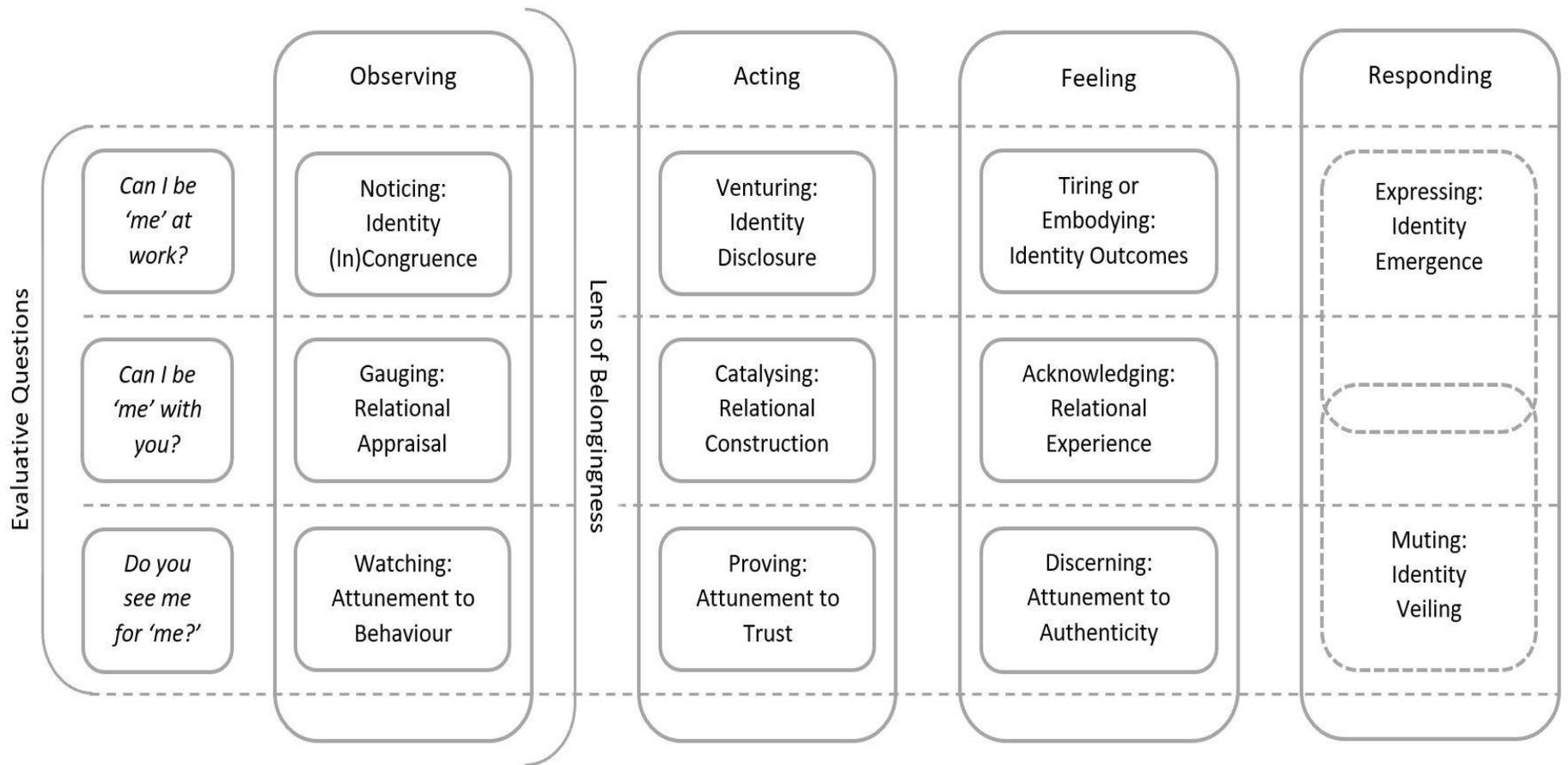
The dimension of the **relational self** describes employees’ experiences of belongingness at work as they are influenced by relationships. By first *gauging* the relational landscape, they make decisions about how – and how much – to invest in workplace relationships. *Catalysing* describes the construction of those relationships through various avenues, such as sharing space, engaging in small talk, and demonstrating vulnerability. The *acknowledging* code within

the relational self speaks to the lived experiences of those relationships, both positive and negative, and the ways in which they contribute to or detract from belongingness at work.

Finally, the **seen self** looks at the degree to which employees are recognised for traits or skills they personally value and whether that recognition is perceived to be genuine. In the *proving* code, employees assess the degree of responsibility and autonomy they are given as a reflection of the organisation's trust in their capability. They are likewise attuned to behaviour, primarily of their leaders, that signals support and willingness to take action as a hallmark of meaningful recognition. In the *discerning* code of the seen self, employees display a keen awareness of the genuineness (or disingenuousness) of the recognition they receive, and they utilise feeling, intuitive language to express this attunement to authenticity.

Figure 8

Patterns of Workplace Belongingness



In closing this discussion of research findings, I point back to the reminder at the beginning of the chapter that the aim of the grounded theorist is “not to discover *the* theory, but *a* theory that aids understanding and action in the area under investigation” (Heath & Cowley, 2004, p. 149). While other researchers may perhaps contrive differing storylines from this qualitative material, the theoretical arc described here is framed by the richness and integrity of the data and the colourful voices of the participants who gifted it. Thus, it is fitting to conclude this discussion with a description of belongingness from one of the participants, who eloquently reflected, “I think, whenever you feel like you belong, there’s a clarity of being. There’s no cloudiness. There’s no obstruction.”

CHAPTER 6

CONTRIBUTIONS

Introduction

In a world that is still adjusting to the realities of a global pandemic and its corresponding (and substantial) impact on the modern workplace, organisations are being forced to reckon with employee wellbeing as a moral imperative and not merely a nice-to-have organisational feature. This is highlighted by the emerging trend of “the great resignation,” with individuals choosing to leave the workplace at unprecedented rates (Cook, 2021). A recent McKinsey study revealed the top three reasons employees cited for choosing to leave: they did not feel valued by their organisations (54%), they did not feel valued by their managers (52%), and of particular relevance to this thesis – they did not feel a sense of belonging (51%) (De Smet et al., 2021).

By investigating the attitudinal and behavioural outcomes of belongingness in organisational settings, we have come to understand the critical role that it plays in the changing world of work. Factors such as generational shifts in the make-up of workplace populations (Bannon, Ford & Meltzer, 2011; Brack & Kelly, 2012; Carpenter & de Charon, 2014), considerations such as employees’ changing expectations of leadership (Burkus, 2010), the impact of technology and accessibility (Urciuoli, 2008), and the blurring lines between the work self and the personal self (Pluut, Ilies, Curseu & Liu, 2018) all serve to underscore the dynamic nature of the modern workplace and the increasingly urgent calls for belongingness.

This chapter will marry the extant literature with the emergent themes from the interviews outlined in Chapter 5 to identify areas of overlap and meaningful contributions to the theory. It will concurrently elucidate the organisational practices and structures that foster or undermine a sense of belongingness across the three facets identified – the unveiled self, the relational self, and the seen self – and highlight wellbeing, engagement, and other outcomes of

interest. It is worth noting that numerous other topics in the literature could be considered proximate constructs to belongingness, such as connectedness, affection, companionship, social bonds, social integration, and normativity. While some of these terms are addressed briefly in the larger arc of this thesis, each has its own distinct relational perspective, and this research is more centrally focused on the specific construct of belongingness.

Framing the Discussion

When considering the locus of belongingness, the question is raised: to what, or whom, do we belong? In the context of the workplace, belongingness is generally understood to mean belonging to the organisation or the entity. However, that belongingness is experienced in its felt sense through the relationships within the organisation. As noted in Chapter 2, a common theme through the literature around belongingness is about “fitting in.” There would be no fitting in - no belonging - without people. As reflected in the interview data discussed in the findings, we don’t fit in *to* or *because* of the organisation itself, we fit in with the people who comprise it. More simply, it is not the entity that inspires belongingness; it is the people.

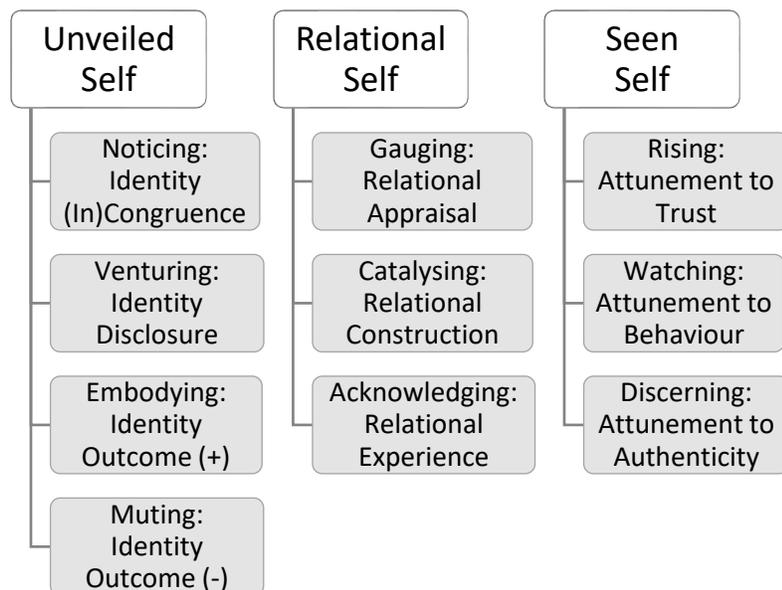
The extant literature has demonstrated that positive workplace relationships are a powerful force in organisational culture (Dutton & Heaphy, 2003; Spreitzer et al., 2005). Employees who cultivate high levels of connectivity with their colleagues develop a broader capacity for creativity and trying new things (Losada & Heaphy, 2004). The psychological safety provided by trusted connections help individuals feel comfortable taking risks and engaging with new ways of working (Edmondson, 1999), and these relational resources further facilitate their ability to experiment with new possible selves (Dutton et al., 2010;

Roberts et al., 2005). In alignment with this emphasis on the influential nature of workplace relationships, the interviews conducted for this research revealed very few instances where employees spoke about the organisation as a whole. Their experiences of belonging were deeply tethered to their relationships with colleagues and supervisors. When they did reference the larger organisation, it was generally through the lens of espoused values and alignment of purpose, but even that to a degree was based on relationships in the sense that it was dependent on how leadership conveyed and inspired those constructs.

The forthcoming discussion will explore each dimension of self in turn, illuminating its relevance to the extant literature and its theoretical contributions. The unveiled self takes an inward-facing approach, asking, *Can I be 'me' at work?* The relational self is other-facing, considering, *Can I be 'me' with you?* Finally, the seen self is organisation-facing, addressing the evaluative question, *Do you see me for 'me'?* To frame this chapter, it is helpful to begin with an illustration of these theoretical categories, reflected in Table 16 below.

Table 19

Theoretical Categories and Codes



Unveiled Self

The over-arching theme of the unveiled self is centred on the desire expressed by employees to be their authentic selves as a pathway to belongingness, and to be accepted not despite, but because of the uniqueness they bring to work. They wish, in the words of one interviewee, to be “invited to bring my whole self to work.” In this discussion, the broader premise of the unveiled self will be explored in the context of the extant literature to draw out notable contributions. First, how employees view themselves and develop self-concept will be examined through the lens of psychology of the self, organisation-based self-esteem, and authenticity at work. Then, the ways in which individuals assess their organisational environment and act in accordance with that assessment will be considered by tying it to the constructs of facades of conformity and emotive dissonance. Finally, the potential outcomes of acting in conformity with or contrary to one’s self will be discussed, as well as their implications for belongingness at work.

Psychology of the Self

The psychology of the self has particular relevance for the theme of the unveiled self not just in its support of the need for belongingness but also in the view of self as central to the way in which individuals express themselves and seek affirmation for that expression. In the *noticing* theoretical code, participants were attuned to their sense of self in three primary ways: noticing how others seemed to perceive them, noticing their response to those perceptions, and noticing their other-ness. Employees used reflective language to indicate this introspection, sharing their observations of how their teams or other groups interacted in ways that did not resonate with their own personalities or preferred ways of relating. One participant spoke of

being “acutely aware” of the differences between him and his colleagues when he first joined the organisation, and others expressed comparative views of themselves, noting how “unique” or “extreme” they were in contrast to their perceptions of their peers. In some cases, this preliminary *noticing* prevented them from shifting to the *venturing* phase of revealing perceived vulnerabilities and unique aspects of their identity.

The theory of self-psychology originates from the premise that the self is the centrepiece from which one organises and understands their experiences (Kohut, 1971). Kohut (1971, 1977) suggested that much of life is spent in the pursuit of self-concept through continuously building and maintaining a concept of who we are. He described needs of the self for grandiosity and idealisation, and later proposed a need for belongingness (Kohut, 1984; M. J. Patton et al., 1982). As a whole, these identified needs provide the motivational and structural backdrop for self-expression, and the drive for validation within any of the three aspects may occur in disparate contexts and at various stages of life (Kohut, 1984; Lee & Robbins, 1995).

The psychology literature has also positioned the self as a product of social interaction and sociocultural contexts (Kanagawa et al., 2001; Markus & Cross, 1991). In an exploration of the conceptual self through a cultural lens, Kanagawa et al. (2001) distinguish the view of the self in Western settings as an “integrated whole” encompassing ability, personality, values, and affective states. From this perspective, the goal of the individual is to “identify these attributes and then to insure they are persistently expressed and affirmed” (Markus et al., 1997, p. 3). This expression and affirmation is also reflected in the theme of the unveiled self, particularly in the theoretical code of *venturing* wherein employees ‘unveil’ their attributes and

assess how they are received by their colleagues. For example, they took note when others were visibly (and positively) open and accepting to their perceived idiosyncrasies. One interviewee shared that he “just got more response” out of a particular colleague with whom he went on to develop a workplace friendship. These affirmational experiences further encouraged self-expression and contributed to their sense of belongingness.

Organisation-Based Self Esteem

Following on the construct of self-concept, organisation-based self-esteem (OBSE) reflects the transient sense of worth and acceptance an employee feels at work (Ferris et al., 2009). It captures the self-evaluative sense of adequacy and value they perceive as an organisational member and is associated with a myriad of positive work outcomes, including job satisfaction, performance, and organisational commitment (Gardner & Pierce, 1998; McAllister & Bigley, 2002). The early literature on self-esteem at work (Korman, 1970) looked at self-concept as being “largely socially determined, grounded in social learning experience, and shaped by interactions with others” (McAllister & Bigley, 2002, p. 894).

This focus on the social aspect of OBSE helps explain the unveiled self in its emphasis on the importance of other-perception to the development of self-concept. Several interviewees demonstrated a keen awareness of the responses they received in their social interactions when *venturing*, or attempting to unveil aspects of their authentic selves. They noted the hopefulness they felt when their relational attempts were affirmed and welcomed by others. The nature of these interactions generally led to *embodying*, in which they felt safe taking larger steps toward behavioural authenticity at work. However, employees also shared negative stories about being upset by the ridicule they received from colleagues pertaining to

the more unique elements of their personalities, even when it was ‘in good fun.’ Equally disturbing was getting no response at all and being “met with blank faces.” In these cases, behavioural modification in the form of *muting* led them to temper their authenticity by behaving in ways they believed would be more aligned with the expectations of the organisation and their peers. Further, the evaluative nature of *noticing*, *gauging*, and *watching* codes cutting across the unveiled self, the relational self, and the seen self suggest that workplace experiences and relationships played a demonstrable role in shaping self-concept. Thus, these “social learning experiences” as described by the OBSE literature developed employees’ sense of self and their perceived value as a member of the organisation and ultimately drove future behaviour.

Authenticity at Work

Authenticity is defined and understood in a variety of ways across the literature. Within the humanistic domain of psychology, authenticity has been conceptualised as a central aspect of human functioning (Horney, 1951). Self-determination theory holds that individuals demonstrate authenticity when they act in accordance with their ‘true self’ in an autonomous and self-determinate fashion (Deci & Ryan, 1985b). Feeling supported to act autonomously elicits positive wellbeing outcomes and motivation to pursue work goals (Deci & Ryan, 1985a, 2014). More contemporary research looks at three fundamental aspects of authenticity: a) having a cogent sense of identity that is consistent with one’s emotions, innate tendencies, and objective reality, b) living in alignment with that formed identity, and c) eschewing external influences that oppose individual beliefs (A. Wood et al., 2008). Similarly, Kernis and Goldman

(2006) suggest a multidimensional view of authenticity consisting of awareness, unbiased processing, behaviour, and relational orientation.

The latter component, relational orientation, is of particular relevance to the unveiled self. Kernis and Goldman (2006) note that relational authenticity means “being genuine rather than fake in one’s relationships with close others” and values the ability to relate to others as the ‘real you’ (p. 300). This sentiment came through in numerous comments from the research participants as they disclosed their ability to be ‘real’ with their peers and leaders. For example, Patrick (Business Analyst) spoke of having his introversion and other unique elements of his personality known and understood, reflected in his comment that, “People know who I am. They know the person I am. I don’t really have problems with people misunderstanding that I’m a quiet introvert who kind of thinks a little bit differently.”

In her exploration of authenticity and personality consistency, A. Sutton (2018) found that individuals with a high sense of authenticity may consciously construct a ‘work personality’ in response to the perceived expectations of the workplace, while simultaneously recognising that it is not reflective of their ‘true self.’ This was apparent in my interviews as well, reflected in one participant’s slip-of-the-tongue comment in which he referenced “my *real* life – my life outside of work.” A further investigation of the motivations for this self-modification found that employees were influenced by a) their prior work experiences that created an awareness of the need to conduct themselves differently, and b) the nature of the workplace environment and its corresponding behavioural expectations (A. Sutton, 2018).

Similar phenomena emerged in my qualitative studies. Employees shared examples of circumstances in which they had been treated unfavourably for exhibiting their ‘true selves,’

either at a previous workplace or within their existing role. This was generally reflected in the actions or reactions of their colleagues and close peers, but in some cases, it was an inferred part of the organisational culture. They responded by adjusting their behaviour in future interactions to align with organisational and relational norms, reflected in the theoretical code of *muting* their 'true self.'

Beyond previous experience and the organisational environment, however, there was a more nuanced phenomenon at play. It was not always the nature of the workplace setting itself that catalysed a behavioural shift; in many cases, it was the perception or inference made by the employee that drove the muting behaviour. In other words, even when expectations were not explicitly stated by the organisation – in the form of policies, edicts from managers, or other directive communication – employees assessed what they *believed* to be the expectations for acceptable behaviour and acted accordingly. In rare cases, they solicited guidance about how much of 'themselves' they could bring to work, as in the previously shared example of Ben, the Business Analyst who asked his future employer, "How do people express themselves at work?" The vast majority of participants, however, exerted considerable effort covertly scanning for organisational and relational cues to form their own conclusions. This suggests that organisations may unwittingly detract from belongingness through a lack of clarity or with negative policy language that emphasises what is *not* allowed rather than what *is*. Otherwise, when left to their own devices, employees may err on the side of inauthenticity.

There is considerable evidence in the extant literature to suggest a positive association between authenticity and wellbeing (Kernis & Goldman, 2006). Authenticity has also been shown to enhance coping and socialisation skills, improve self-concept, and

contribute to goal achievement (Kernis & Goldman, 2006; Lenton et al., 2016; A. Wood et al., 2008). In the context of work, being authentic predicts greater satisfaction and reduced stress and may contribute to increased productivity, effectiveness and role confidence (A. Sutton, 2018). Of equal importance, employees express that being authentic at work allows them to “present a more light-hearted, happy, confident and productive self and to have better and more effective relationships at work” (A. Sutton, 2018, p. 126). Conversely, acting inauthentically at work can present emotional demands for employees and negatively impact wellbeing (Hewlin, 2009). Further, inauthenticity has been demonstrated to function as a precursor to job dissatisfaction, stress, and depression (Erickson & Wharton, 1997; Parkinson, 1991).

Facades of Conformity and Emotive Dissonance

Facades of conformity also hold relevance for the theme of the unveiled self. Facades of conformity describe false depictions constructed by employees that allow them to seem as if they support organisational values; much like the *muting* behaviour in the unveiled self, creating a facade of conformity is “a form of masking one’s true self” (Hewlin, 2003, p. 634). These facades may occur in the form of rote habits or language (Tetlock & Manstead, 1985) or intentionally performed behaviours (Rosenfeld et al., 1995). Hewlin (2003, 2009) notes that facades may arise from a variety of organisational, hierarchical, and individual variables, and employees are likely to experience negative tensions in workplace settings where they feel obligated to pretend. This is particularly true for individuals who seek cohesion between their work and personal identities, as the intensity of negative outcomes they experience may be magnified (Hewlin, 2003). These ideas were reflected by my interviewees, one of whom

identified “a tension between the way I want to act as a human and the way I feel like I *can* act in a professional situation.” They used language that indicated the need to engage in “a layer of performance” and “act in a certain way” that detracted from their felt sense of authenticity and belongingness.

There is also a strong relationship between facades of conformity and emotional exhaustion (Hewlin, 2009). Literature on emotional labour demonstrates that ‘emotive dissonance’ stemming from the friction between felt emotion and expressed emotion contributes to emotional exhaustion (Morris & Feldman, 1996; R. L. Sutton & Rafaeli, 1988). This coincides with research which suggests that inconsistency between self-perception and outward behaviour can lead to emotional distress (Hewlin, 2003; Tunnell, 1984). These findings are compatible with the data from several interviewees who frequently used the word “tired” to describe their psychological state in the wake of consistently engaging in the “extra bit of effort” required to reconcile the desired behaviour of their authentic self with that of the behaviour they perceived to be acceptable in their role. This creates a belongingness paradox in which employees create facades of conformity in an effort to belong, and subsequently feel a sense of depletion and alienation from the emotive dissonance that occurs as a result of maintaining the façade.

There are also positive implications for the unveiled self within the domain of emotions at work. For example, positive emotional experience, and belongingness as a corollary, have been found to influence creativity and performance (James et al., 2004). While the broader domain of the workplace emotions literature is outside the scope of this thesis, certain elements such as playfulness are of particular interest. In some of the earliest thinking

in this realm, Maccoby (1976) purported that the masking of felt emotions could disrupt job performance and subsequently called for a deeper focus on “qualities of the heart” over the traditionally emphasised “qualities of the head.” Ashforth and Humphrey (1995) further suggest that a clearer social identity and deeper sense of community can be derived from play and humour, noting that such experiences yield “a sense of ‘groupness,’ and facilitate a richer appreciation of one’s peers as whole persons” (p. 115). These in turn influences cooperation, affective commitment, and prosocial behaviour (Ashforth & Humphrey, 1995).

This concept is also tied to the findings on workplace authenticity, which suggest that interactions marked by pleasantness, playfulness, and trust promote employees’ willingness to reveal their true selves (A. Sutton, 2018). While ‘unveiled’ experiences of workplace belongingness were less frequent, some participants shared examples in which this sense of playfulness manifested in helpful ways, such as being encouraged to use humour and sarcasm to create training programmes or having permission to come to work in costume. They noted that this autonomy of expression and the coinciding authenticity it promoted contributed to greater creativity, quality of work, and job satisfaction, and they further suggested that it allowed them to positively influence their peers in similar ways.

Relational Self

The relational self poses the evaluative question, *Can I be ‘me’ with you?* The theoretical codes discussed in Chapter 5 illustrate a tripartite process to the construction and maintenance of workplace relationships that facilitate belongingness: *gauging*, *catalysing*, and *acknowledging*. While there are numerous domains of literature exploring the complexities of relationships at work, this discussion will centre on those with the deepest ties to

belongingness and the theoretical codes emerging from this research. The literature on psychological safety will illuminate the environmental cues employees use to *gauge* the feasibility and appeal of achieving belongingness within a relational context. Further, the *catalysing* and *acknowledging* aspects of the relational self will be investigated through the lens of positive work relationships and high-quality connections, with some brief discussion of companionate love, workplace friendships, and the role of small talk to deepen to the discussion.

Previous research has suggested that individuals mentally process and organise incoming stimuli based on its impact on their social relationships (Sedikides et al., 1993). In one study of mid-life meaning, every participant referenced relationships as a core element of meaning in life (O'Connor & Chamberlain, 1996). Further, belongingness has a positive association with the tendency to value social connections as a source of meaning (Zhang et al., 2018). Sociometer theory expands on this idea with the suggestion that human beings have an innate mechanism for scanning and identifying social signals to create an impression of whether we are being accepted or rejected (Leary & Baumeister, 2000). There is a universality to belonging that factors into the discussion as well; across multiple demographic groups and cultures, human beings respond with “distress and protest” when relationships are severed (Hazan & Shaver, 1994).

Amid this broader discussion of the relational self, its reliance on self-concept, and the critical nature of relationships in achieving belongingness, it is also helpful to acknowledge the emergent, co-constructive element of belongingness. For example, friendships at work reflect a mutuality and acceptance while also changing the individuals participating in the relationship;

belongingness grows as they grow. In this way, belongingness transcends a mere sense of acceptance and further describes a commitment to, and felt experience of, behaviours of co-creation, such as proximity and development of common language.

Psychological Safety

Psychological safety has been defined as the development of a common belief or a shared vision that signals safety for risk-taking in an interpersonal workplace context (Edmondson, 1999). In simple terms, it means people feel safe to voice their views or dissent without fear of negative repercussions.

The need for psychological safety emerged in my research through the theoretical code of *gauging* within the relational self. When gauging the potential of a workplace friendship, participants assessed the degree of psychological safety on both a behavioural and an affective level. From a behavioural perspective, they noted how others responded to their humour, the quality of their work, and their attempts to engage in personal conversations. Beyond these external cues, they were attuned to the way these interactions *felt* as a means of determining the degree of psychological safety and potential nature of the relationship. For example, one interviewee described the evolution of his relationship with one colleague in more cerebral terms, noting that he “respected and valued his intellect” but struggled to form a more personal friendship. Comparatively, the relationship he developed with a peer he termed his ‘work wife’ was one in which he perceived a level of emotional security shortly after their first meeting, sharing that, “It doesn’t feel contrived or anything, it feels very natural.”

Employees’ requirements for psychological safety were largely individual, in the sense that they differed in the amount of demonstrable evidence of trust and mutuality required

before shifting to the *catalysing* stage of building a trusted relationship. Some individuals “hung back” and tested the emotional waters in a variety of contexts and over longer stretches of time before deeming it safe enough to develop a relationship beyond a professional level. Others described personal relationships that formed rapidly at work, stemming from a sense of psychological safety derived from one or several of three key phenomena: a) a pivotal moment of expressed vulnerability, either as the recipient or the expresser; b) an experience of shared workplace challenge, such as a problematic boss, difficult change management process, dramatic cultural shift, or death of a colleague; and c) an intuitive sense of kinship in which they “just knew” there was the potential and mutual desire for a broader relationship.

Psychological safety is a critical factor in understanding organisational constructs around team and organisational learning, voice, and teamwork (Edmondson & Lei, 2014). In a workplace culture that is psychologically secure, employees benefit from an environment of mutual respect, interpersonal sensitivity, acceptance of authenticity, productive disagreement, risk-taking, and personal interest in each other (Sapra & Kumar, 2020). When individuals feel safe in this way, it creates an organisational climate conducive to experimentation with new behaviours, perceptions, and interactions (Kolb & Boyatzis, 1970) and fosters a sense of belongingness (Sapra & Kumar, 2020). Bowlby (1988) suggests that through the lens of attachment theory, “resonant relationships” are one means to providing this foundation or secure base for psychological safety. Further underscoring the importance of security in a relational context, A. Sutton (2018) notes the role of safety for inducing authentic behaviour and describes a “virtuous cycle” of trust, relationship, and communication when this is present.

In this way, psychological safety may have implications for belongingness at work by influencing individuals' assessments of the potential for developing trusted relationships, as well as the ways in which they take the first tentative steps toward constructing them.

Positive Work Relationships and High-Quality Connections

The benefits of building and engaging in healthy relationships at work are well-documented and far-reaching. High-quality connections yield positive outcomes for physiological and psychological wellbeing, with associations to stronger immune systems, longer lifespans, and a sense of purpose and meaning (Dutton & Heaphy, 2003). Relationships of this nature allow employees to be more engaged in their work, to experience positive emotions, and even to feel care and love for and from their colleagues (Dutton & Heaphy, 2003).

When considering the nature and impact of workplace relationships, it is useful to note that they are not always intentionally formed, nor are they exclusively positive (Gersick et al., 2000). Indeed, negative or harmful relationships can be of particular importance because negative experiences often have a disproportionate influence on behaviours and attitudes (Labianca et al., 1998). This became evident in the data as an undertone of "relationship over role" emerged. For example, two employees noted that they enjoyed their role and found meaningfulness in their work, but as a result of troublesome relationships with their managers, they were actively searching for other jobs. Others shared interactions with a consistently negative tone, with language ranging from "a flat connection" to the more extreme descriptor of "dehumanising." While it detracted from cultivating a sense of connection or belongingness with that specific individual, in some cases, it deepened their relationship with peers who

experienced the same treatment. Employees also differed in their responses to these relationships. As mentioned, it led some individuals to begin looking for roles elsewhere, while others attempted to “take it in stride” and “learn how to deal with those people.”

In their mixed methods exploration of workplace relationships, Gersick et al. (2000) include this compelling reflection about the ways we connect at work:

To join a profession is to plunge into a community of people. Much more than the meeting rooms and offices where we work, our relationships with individuals and groups constitute the environment in which we live our professional lives. Such environments can be nurturant sources of learning, inspiration, and enjoyment, or they can be destructive sources of frustration and injury. They send us powerful messages about who we are and how we are valued (p. 1026).

Emerging from these qualitative and quantitative data were distinct types of relationships, categorised as career help, joint work, harming, and emotional support (Gersick et al., 2000). The implications of the latter two will be further explored in the context of this thesis.

The type of relationship with the deepest ties to belongingness is that of emotional support. These connections are characterised by mutuality, ease, and the ability to be one’s ‘offstage self’ (Gersick et al., 2000). They often serve as a “safe harbour” at work (Kahn, 1998) and reflect the deep care that can develop between employees (Gersick et al., 2000). These were the relationships most commonly described by participants in my studies when sharing their experiences of belonging in a relational context, particularly within the experiential stage of *acknowledging*. In their own words, these relationships made employees feel connected, protected, safe, cared for, trusted, and special.

Finally, workplace relationships can be significantly impacted by pivotal moments that convert interactions to a test of belonging (Gersick et al., 2000). This was evident in the experience of one of my interviewees who shared the challenges she faced becoming part of a new project team. What was previously a safe and cohesive relationship with her manager became fraught with anxiety when he began to question her ability to “fit in” and match the relational dynamics of the group as they came under increasing pressure for project deliverables. It led her to question not only the trust and safety of the relationship, but her role in the organisation as a whole:

I struggle with wondering: How do you be yourself when yourself doesn't fit? Do you have to be a certain personality type to rise to a certain level - to be at a certain level within an organisation? Is this a moment of me really realising and recognising that I am not supposed to be at that level? (Julie, Director of Compliance)

Thus, workplace relationships are particularly potent in their ability to empower or quash, connect or exclude, inspire or deflate. They have a demonstrable impact on the machinations of workplace interactions and the way work gets done (or not). Employees come to develop deeply espoused perspectives of their perceived value and belongingness based on the nature of these relationships, and for many, it is the deciding factor in whether they stay or leave.

The Supporting Role of Small Talk

The banter and micro-interactions inherent in office life may often be disdained by employees and managers alike, but emerging research suggests that it plays an important role in organisational culture (Fayard & Weeks, 2007; Huang et al., 2017; Methot et al., 2020). The data collected in my interviews supports the view of small talk as a connective and meaningful element of workplace satisfaction and wellbeing. Employees described small talk as a gateway

to deeper conversations that had the potential to culminate in workplace friendship. Under the umbrella of the relational self, it was their way of *gauging* and *catalysing* relationships at work to develop them into a more meaningful mode of connection.

In most cases, participants did not proactively identify these micro-interactions as playing a critical role in their sense of belongingness. Rather, they noticed the importance of small talk in its *absence*. Two interviewees noticed the contrast when they migrated to different jobs and observed the differing culture around allowing and fostering small talk versus intentionally shutting it down. This was also a common by-product of COVID-19 as employees shifted to work-from-home models and quickly felt the emotional gap produced by the loss of informal gatherings and chit-chat in the workplace. One participant noted that the transition of meetings to Zoom brought this into his awareness, and he described any attempted small talk in online meetings as either missing entirely or stilted and “awkward” in its nature compared to the more natural flow of pre-meeting banter in person. The notable exception to this was an employee who had already been a teleworker for over a decade before COVID-19, and she described an enhanced sense of belonging because her peers “finally understood” and she had more people to engage with online.

Office chit-chat was not universally lauded, however. One employee discussed his loathing for this type of banter, dismissing it as unproductive in any form and noting that he could “see right through” the perceived disingenuous attempts at connection through the side door of small talk. Whether they loved it or hated it, the ways in which employees consistently surfaced small talk as a point of discussion in the context of their organisational life seems to suggest that the no workplace is the same without it.

The organisational behaviour literature suggests that small talk is a means for rapport-building, connection development, and presence acknowledgement; it acts as a social lubricant that facilitates transitions between routine activities (Molinsky, 2013). These types of interactions can also produce positive social emotions. Kitayama et al. (2000) note that a sense of belongingness and interpersonal engagement yield positive social emotions, and the practise of small talk demonstrates connection and assimilation that support this outcome in a relational context. Methot et al. (2020) further suggest that small talk can fulfil employees' belongingness needs and increase positive social emotions, translating to enhanced wellbeing and organisational commitment behaviour (OCB) as a result. However, small talk is not without its consequences and may in turn reduce cognitive engagement and detract from OCB (Ashforth, 2001; Methot et al., 2020). As a whole, it is important to recognise that "seemingly inconsequential conversations can have meaningful effects on individuals' daily work experiences" (Methot et al., 2020, p. 32).

In the context of belongingness, small talk can play an important role in facilitating cohesion through the micro-moments that employees engage in during everyday organisational life. Thus, it may behove leaders and organisations to consider how to construct an environment that supports and encourages these organic connections without over-engineering or prohibiting the achievement of strategic aims.

Seen Self

The seen self is concerned with being recognised in meaningful ways that are consistent with employees' self-valued skills and perceptions. This manifests in the theoretical codes of *rising*, a sense of mindfulness about trust and role autonomy; *watching*, monitoring leaders for

behaviour that reflects meaningful recognition; and *discerning*, the intuitive practise of evaluating the authenticity (or lack thereof) of distributed praise. The drive for recognition encapsulated by the seen self is primarily sought from one's superiors. As such, various types of leadership described in the contemporary organisational behaviour literature will be further explored as they relate to belongingness. The discussion will also turn to organisational citizenship behaviour and the paradoxical desire for unique recognition and acceptance within the whole.

Leadership: Inclusive and Transformational

While the research on leadership typology is far-reaching and ever-changing, inclusive leadership and transformational leadership hold particular relevance for issues of belongingness. Inclusive leadership encompasses a set of leadership behaviours such as support for group members, assurance of justice and equity, and opportunities for mutual decision-making, all actions that are likely to be belongingness-promoting (Randel et al., 2018). A critical element of this type of leadership is catalysing belongingness within work groups while also recognising the uniqueness of individual contributions (Randel et al., 2018). Similarly, transformational leaders enhance the intrinsic value of effort through an emphasis on membership within the collective. In so doing, they effectively transform effort into both a collective contribution and an identity-affirming statement (Ashforth & Humphrey, 1995). Thus, transformational leadership emphasises both the uniqueness of the individual and the value of the collective (Ashforth & Mael, 1989).

A dual emphasis on uniqueness and acceptance is at the heart of what the participants in the two qualitative studies sought in their efforts to be seen. They wanted to have their work

understood, to be able to tell the story of their achievements in a way that was both meaningful and representative of their capability, and to be lauded for those efforts. In this way, it was the sense of apart-ness that proved most meaningful. For example, one interviewee talked about how his manager “identified me in a crowd” and another referenced the “special recognition” she received when she was chosen to participate in an emerging leader programme. Beyond this recognition however, they also maintained a watchful eye on follow-through. As represented in the theoretical codes of *watching* and *discerning*, employees demonstrated an astute awareness of whether leaders took action by implementing suggestions, following through on promises, and engaging in forms of recognition that required personal effort. Further, they wanted their leaders to see not just who they were, but who they could be. One participant spoke of longing for his manager to “see me for what I can grow into” and others referenced the deep impact of leaders who saw their potential and exerted consistent effort into helping them achieve it.

It comes as no surprise that leadership would play a critical role in the facilitation of belongingness at work. The organisational behaviour literature is rife with studies of leadership and the far-reaching impact it holds on nearly every facet of workplace life. What rises to the fore in the context of belongingness is the opportunity leaders have to strike the delicate balance between recognising individual achievement and cultivating a broader sense of collective team membership. This push and pull between individuality and collectivity is at the heart of the way employees seek experiences of belongingness.

Organisational Citizenship Behaviour

Organisational citizenship behaviour has been defined as discretionary extra-role actions that demonstrated conscientiousness or support for the organisation (Borman & Penner, 2001). The OCB literature suggests that individuals who perform these extra-role tasks are imperative to the healthy functioning of the organisation but are often not explicitly recognised by the formal reward system (Organ, 1990). OCB has close ties to the *rising* theoretical code within the seen self, in which employees assess the degree of responsibility and autonomy they are given as a reflection of the organisation's trust in their capability, with the aim of rising to the level of trust.

In this instance, interviewees viewed requests to perform extra-role tasks as a means of recognition and proof that their work was valued. Employees talked about being put on special projects, getting asked to lead meetings, and given accountability for work outside the scope of their day-to-day roles. They referenced simultaneous feelings of uncertainty about their ability to fulfil expectations as well as pride in being entrusted with increased responsibility, viewing it as the organisation's "unspoken way" of valuing their work. It is also crucial to note that these extra-role tasks were well received primarily when they were coupled with a sense of support, as expressed by one participant: "You know they trust you and they've also got your back."

The findings of this research run counter to some prior studies which have focused on the dark side of organisational citizenship behaviour and extra-role behaviour in particular. For example, while OCBs are generally upheld as voluntary behaviours (Organ, 1990), recent empirical evidence has suggested that employees may in fact perceive them as compulsory expectations (Vigoda-Gadot, 2006). Further, when performed consistently over time, OCBs can

lead to what Bolino and Turnley (2005) refer to as escalating citizenship, in which 'going the extra mile' becomes normative. This progression may gradually reduce the perceived value of OCBs to the point that the energy and time exerted by the employee may in fact outweigh the benefits (Bergeron, 2007). Thus, while employees may welcome the option to perform extra-role behaviours as a signal of implicit belongingness, it falls to leaders to wield the responsibility of providing those opportunities with a gentle hand and a keen awareness of the potential outcomes.

(In)visibility at Work

Finally, the concept of visibility at work cuts across all three dimensions of self that have been illuminated in this research. The emerging literature on visibility is tied largely to minority issues but can have implications in other arenas of work as well. Visibility describes the degree to which an individual is "fully regarded and recognised by others" (Settles et al., 2018, p. 63). Employees may intentionally manage their visibility by determining which aspects of themselves will be revealed and to whom (Brighenti, 2007). In keeping with the features of the unveiled self discussed previously, Clair et al. (2005) further suggest that individuals "experience a feeling of authenticity when they can be fully 'themselves'" with others (p.79). Hence, employees may strategically manage their level of visibility by hiding parts of who they are, compromising their sense of authenticity and belongingness to the team or organisation (Settles et al., 2018). As a whole, visibility at work, and the ability to be seen wholly and accurately by important others is a crucial element of authenticity and self-determination, contributing to positive organisational outcomes such as commitment and belongingness (Buchanan & Settles, 2018).

Thus, the theoretical categories of the unveiled self, the relational self, and the seen self overlap with and contribute to the extant literature in important ways. The preceding discussion has illuminated how individuals develop self-concept through their social interactions within a broader socio-cultural framework and in the specific domain of the workplace, along with the implications this may have for building relationships that contribute to belongingness. Further, authenticity provides a critical backdrop for belongingness as an aspirational behavioural and affective state for employees and a filter through which they evaluate relationships and recognition. In essence, they seek to be who they are, connect as they are, and be seen as they are.

The findings of this work are notable not just in their achievement of the research aims, but in uncovering the self as a central tenet of belongingness at work. To date, the literature perceives belongingness primarily through a collective lens centred on group membership. This study, however, has revealed a more nuanced perspective of the construct by orienting belongingness to the lived experience and felt perception of the individual. The framework produced by the data broadens our understanding of the deeper machinations of belongingness and lays the groundwork for putting it into practice in meaningful ways.

Practical Implications

While the intention of this research was not inherently prescriptive, the richness of the data and the preceding analysis laid the foundation for a framework that can yield a demonstrable impact for organisations seeking to build healthy cultures of belonging. It is important to note that efforts to engineer a sense of belongingness are likely to backfire, as this research has made it clear that employees have a keen awareness of what is real and what is

contrived. A broad array of practical implications could be derived from the findings of these qualitative studies and the corresponding analysis. For the sake of brevity and pragmatism, however, three key recommendations that are of particular relevance to organisations will be discussed here.

First, a common thread throughout all three theoretical categories was the value of *small acts*. Interviewees valued personalised, meaningful gestures that made them feel appreciated, known, and cared for. This took the shape of receiving their favourite candy as a celebration or consolation, getting a spontaneous handwritten note, having someone check in on them when they encountered a challenging situation personally or professionally, and similar small gestures. The key to these acts was in their simplicity and authenticity; they were meaningful because they were personal. From an organisational perspective, promoting small acts could take the shape of learning employees' preferences during the onboarding process, allocating time for managers to conduct wellbeing checks, and finding ways to foster workplace friendships. However, the defining element of small acts is that it was often their spontaneity that signified meaning; they were not quota-driven, routine processes. Thus, organisations would likely need to undertake these efforts at a cultural level by educating leaders on the impact of fostering positive workplace relationships and empowering them to create 'micro-climates' of belongingness within their teams and individual relationships.

Next, *small freedoms* may promote authenticity and meaningful recognition as pathways to belongingness. A consistent thread throughout the emergent data was the desire that employees expressed to be themselves and bring their 'whole self' to work. Practically speaking, this often meant using fashion to display their uniqueness, demonstrating affection,

expressing their feelings and vulnerabilities, and sharing aspects of their lifestyle without concern of ridicule. *Small freedoms* also addresses the appreciation participants expressed for being given autonomy in their roles and feeling trusted to do their jobs well, or being given responsibility outside the scope of their day-to-day work. The primary recommendation for organisations in this regard is to provide clarity around expectations such as attire and expression and to frame this positively in policy and communication. In other words, provide examples of what employees *can* do rather than what they cannot. As previously discussed, the research suggests that when expectations are not clarified, employees covertly scan their environment for cues about how they should act in given situations and generally make conservative assumptions. Of course, the extent to which these small freedoms can be offered will vary by organisation and industry and potentially run the risk of overwhelming or rebuffing some staff.

Finally, *small talk* can be a useful tool for developing and maintaining relationships that contribute to belongingness. Employees noted the contrast they felt within workplaces or relationships where small talk was part of the cultural fabric versus those in which it was absent. Further, when managers took time to engage in personal conversation before addressing work topics, it bred loyalty and created a sense of feeling cared for at an individual level. Hence, it may behove organisations to embrace small talk by allotting time for it in meeting agendas and encouraging managers to build it into one-on-one sessions, however brief, although this may be a hard sell in bottom line-focused industries where efficiency takes precedence. Similar to the previous recommendations, over-engineering opportunities for small talk may inhibit its effectiveness as a means for cultivating belongingness.

Thus, these small practises may be useful in promoting organisational cultures and relationships hallmarked by belongingness. It is important to emphasise, however, that being overly prescriptive in any one of these strategies would strip them of their power. As noted here and throughout this research, employees are highly attuned to authenticity – both others’ and their own – and are quick to decipher the genuine from the contrived. As such, perhaps the most influential course of action is for an organisation to encourage authenticity. Allowing employees across the organisation to be who they are and to truly care for each other may yield great strides toward a culture of belongingness.

Table 20

Recommendations for Organisational Practise

Small Freedoms	Small Acts	Small (Personal) Talk
	Relationships	
Recognition		
Authenticity		

Limitations

There are a few notable limitations to this research. First, participants were recruited exclusively from New Zealand and the United States with a predominantly white sample, limiting its implications to WEIRD societies. As noted previously, this is a common bias in psychology research, and Henrich et al. (2010) found that 96% of sample populations came from countries with only 12% of the world’s population. Further, Nielsen et al. (2017) raise the concern that findings with culturally specific elements are often prescribed more broadly and misattributed as universal. Hence, it is critical for researchers to clearly note when their samples are limited in diversity, as this section of the thesis is revealing, so that

any recommendations tied to the outcomes are considered only for relevant populations. While this sample was balanced between individuals who identified as male and individuals who identified as female, there was limited minority representation as a whole. Particularly for the construct of belongingness, broadening the diversity of the sample would likely uncover complexities not addressed in this work.

An additional limitation is the broader context of the research and the fact that I was not embedded in the organisations themselves, but rather had an external perspective framed by the experiences of the interviewees. As a result, there may have been workplace cultural nuances and other structural-functional features of the organisations that were not revealed or that were construed in particular ways based on individual perceptions. Further, the interview process yielded retrospective data by requesting that participants reflect on their experiences, in contrast to in-context data collected in real time. Such retrospective data is notably prone to memory bias and retrospective rationality (Krinsley et al., 2003; Miller et al., 1997). While the rapport and trust built in the interviewer-interviewee relationships would suggest that the accounts provided were accurately and fairly represented, it is not possible to confirm this unequivocally. This limitation could be addressed by utilising diary-based methodology for data collection in future research to capture in-the-moment affective and experiential data.

Finally, like any qualitative researcher, I was limited by my own perspectives, experiences, and general unconscious bias as a human and a theorist. This was addressed at greater length in the earlier discussion of methodology in Chapter 3, but it bears reiteration as an acknowledged limitation of qualitative research, and constructivist grounded theory

in particular (Charmaz, 2000; Mills et al., 2006). Strauss and Corbin (1994) suggest that researchers are products of the eras and societies in which they are immersed, and further note that the fallibility of interpretive theory – and the theorist – does not deny its usefulness. This limitation was accounted for by upholding rigour in the data collection and analysis procedures while simultaneously acknowledging and embracing the “messiness” inherent in qualitative research and the data it yields (Bechhofer, 1974). Indeed, it is challenging for any scientist to fully account for their own pesky proclivities, and I am not exempt from this limitation.

Recommendations for Future Research

At various points throughout this journey, I commented to my supervisors that the data gleaned from these studies could easily yield several more theses. While I would happily take them on myself for the somewhat arduous joy of uncovering even greater nuance, it would be gratifying to see other researchers pick up the belongingness baton and further the efforts reflected here. Numerous areas are ripe for further study, discussed in the context of the findings of this thesis and the extant literature.

First, there is ample room for methodological advancement of workplace belongingness. A multi-dimensional measure of belongingness at work would turn an important quantitative lens to this nebulous construct and broaden future exploration. The qualitative data from this thesis suggest that belongingness at work could yield positive organisational outcomes stemming from the development and maintenance of healthy workplace relationships, fostering authenticity, and recognising employees in personally meaningful ways. A validated measure would allow for a concise investigation of specific variables relative to workplace

belongingness, such as job performance, tenure, satisfaction, and other work outcomes. It could also serve as a means for further exploring and validating the link between authenticity and belongingness. Finally, a longitudinal study of belongingness over the trajectory of a career would likely yield nuanced and practical perspectives of belonging.

Following on the discussion of the changing world of work, variables such as the gig economy (Sargeant, 2017), the ongoing pandemic (Gómez et al., 2020), and continued technological advances (Potter, 2003; Wang & Siau, 2019) will force organisational behaviourists to rethink the context and demands of work, including the role of relationships and belonging. For example, each of these factors will likely contribute to employees working in increasingly isolated environment as teleworkers or independent contractors. Previous research has demonstrated that spatial proximity and design can play an influential role in the formation of workplace relationships (Khazanchi et al., 2018), and that the informal banter inherent in office culture may contribute to employee wellbeing by meeting belongingness needs and producing positive emotions (Huang et al., 2017; Methot et al., 2020). In the absence of physical environments that foster relationship-building – or in the absence of colleagues with whom relationships can be formed – the opportunities to cultivate belongingness at work could be significantly reduced. Clearly linking belongingness to employee wellbeing and various positive work outcomes could serve as an effective call to action for organisations in the face of such rapidly approaching shifts in the world of work.

This thesis focused primarily on key organisational factors relevant to the cultivation of belongingness at work. However, there are a host of potential individual and relational avenues to workplace belongingness, such as familial dynamics, the existence or lack of social networks

external to the organisation, and individual variables such as trauma and attachment. Marrying constructs from clinical psychology and organisational behaviour could illuminate individual developmental factors that contribute to or inhibit the development of belongingness at work, the extent to which individuals seek belongingness in this context, and how organisations may be able to effectively utilise such knowledge.

Conclusion

This thesis has taken the reader on a grand tour of belongingness, beginning with a brief background on the construct of belongingness and its nuance, in addition to a road map of the aims, study design, methodology, and broader story arc of the research. Then, an investigation of the existing literature and foundational basis for the theory of belongingness illuminated its importance in the context of this work. Exploring the craft of qualitative methodology by considering its philosophical underpinnings, operational definitions, and typology provided a backdrop for the contemporary grounded theory methods employed in these studies. The data analysis process was subsequently described, including the grounded theory methodology utilized to identify emergent themes. Finally, the findings of the two qualitative studies were explored in depth, revealing the three key dimensions of self that were borne from the data. The present chapter highlighted the theoretical contributions of these findings, identified limitations, and made recommendations for future research and practical application of the concepts elucidated here.

The beauty of belonging is in its ineffable universality. Even when we struggle to define it or wrap language around it, as this thesis has sought to do, we inherently understand what it

is and what it means to us. To draw this work to a thoughtful close, the poet David Whyte gives us these haunting and hopeful words:

*This is the temple of my adult aloneness
and I belong to that aloneness
as I belong to my life.
There is no house like the house of belonging.*

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Appendices

Appendix A: Sense of Belonging Instrument (SOBI-P)

SOBI-P

Instructions: Here are some statements with which you may or may not agree. Using the key listed below, circle the number that most closely reflects your feelings about each statement.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1. I often wonder if there is anyplace on earth where I really fit in.	1	2	3	4
2. I am just not sure if I fit in with my friends.	1	2	3	4
3. I would describe myself as a misfit in most social situations.	1	2	3	4
4. I generally feel that people accept me.	1	2	3	4
5. I feel like a piece of a jig-saw puzzle that doesn't fit into the puzzle.	1	2	3	4
6. I would like to make a difference to people or things around me, but I don't feel that what I have to offer is valued.	1	2	3	4
7. I feel like an outsider in most situations.	1	2	3	4
8. I am troubled by feeling like I have no place in this world.	1	2	3	4
9. I could disappear for days and it wouldn't matter to my family.	1	2	3	4
10. In general, I don't feel a part of the mainstream of society.	1	2	3	4
11. I feel like I observe life rather than participate in it.	1	2	3	4
12. If I died tomorrow, very few people would come to my funeral.	1	2	3	4
13. I feel like a square peg trying to fit into a round	1	2	3	4

hole.				
14. I don't feel that there is anyplace where I really fit in this world.	1	2	3	4
15. I am uncomfortable that my background and experiences are so different from those who are usually around me.	1	2	3	4
16. I could not see or call my friends for days and it wouldn't matter to them.	1	2	3	4
17. I feel left out of things.	1	2	3	4
18. I am not valued by or important to my friends.	1	2	3	4

From "Developing a Measure of a Sense of Belonging," by B.M. Hagerty and K. Patusky, 1995, *Nursing Research*, 44(1), 9-13.

Appendix B: Sense of Belonging Instrument (SOBI-A)

SOBI-A

Instructions: Here are some statements with which you may or may not agree. Using the key listed below, circle the number that most closely reflects your feelings about each statement.

KEY: SD = Strongly Disagree

D = Disagree

A = Agree

SA = Strongly Agree

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1. It is important to me that I am valued or accepted by others.	1	2	3	4
2. In the past, I have felt valued and important to others.	1	2	3	4
3. It is important to me that I fit somewhere in this world.	1	2	3	4
4. I have qualities that can be important to others.	1	2	3	4
5. I am working on fitting in better with those around me.	1	2	3	4
6. I want to be a part of things going on around me.	1	2	3	4
7. It is important to me that my thoughts and opinions are valued.	1	2	3	4
8. Generally, other people recognize my strengths and good points.	1	2	3	4
9. I can make myself fit in anywhere.	1	2	3	4

From "Developing a Measure of a Sense of Belonging," by B.M. Hagerty and K. Patusky, 1995, *Nursing Research*, 44(1), 9-13.

Appendix C: Need to Belong Scale

Need to Belong Scale

(Leary, Kelly, Cottrell, & Schreindorfer, 2005)

Instructions: For each of the statements below, indicate the degree to which you agree or disagree with the statement by writing a number in the space beside the question using the scale below:

- 1 = Strongly disagree
- 2 = Moderately disagree
- 3 = Neither agree nor disagree
- 4 = Moderately agree
- 5 = Strongly agree

- _____ 1. If other people don't seem to accept me, I don't let it bother me.
- _____ 2. I try hard not to do things that will make other people avoid or reject me.
- _____ 3. I seldom worry about whether other people care about me.
- _____ 4. I need to feel that there are people I can turn to in times of need.
- _____ 5. I want other people to accept me.
- _____ 6. I do not like being alone.
- _____ 7. Being apart from my friends for long periods of time does not bother me.
- _____ 8. I have a strong need to belong.
- _____ 9. It bothers me a great deal when I am not included in other people's plans.
- _____ 10. My feelings are easily hurt when I feel that others do not accept me.

From "Construct Validity of the Need to Belong Scale: Mapping the Nomological Network," by M.R. Leary, K. Kelly, C.A. Cottrell, and L.S. Schreindorfer, 2013, *Journal of Personality Assessment*, 95(6), 610-624.

Appendix D: General Belongingness Scale

The final General Belongingness Scale (GBS) and CFA factor loadings.

Item number	Item description	Loadings
<i>Acceptance/Inclusion</i>		
1	When I am with other people, I feel included	.70
2	I have close bonds with family and friends	.67
5	I feel accepted by others	.65
8	I have a sense of belonging	.67
10	I have a place at the table with others	.70
11	I feel connected with others	.78
<i>Rejection/Exclusion (items are reverse-scored)</i>		
3	I feel like an outsider	.78
4	I feel as if people do not care about me	.66
6	Because I do not belong, I feel distant during the holiday season	.77
7	I feel isolated from the rest of the world	.82
9	When I am with other people, I feel like a stranger	.79
12	Friends and family do not involve me in their plans	.66

Note. Loadings are standardized. The items for the scale reported above may be used for research purposes.

From "The General Belongingness Scale (GBS): Assessing Achieved Belongingness" by G.P.

Malone, D.R. Pillow, and A. Osman, 2012, *Personality and Individual Differences*, 52(3), 311-316.

Appendix E: Social Connectedness and Social Assurance Scales

Table 1
Results From Principal-Components Analysis

Item	Source	<i>r</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Factor 1 (Social Connectedness)				
1. I feel disconnected from the world around me.	con	.839	4.73	1.38
2. Even around people I know, I don't feel that I really belong.	com	.779	4.51	1.51
3. I feel so distant from people.	con	.764	4.70	1.40
4. I have no sense of togetherness with my peers.	aff	.759	4.92	1.14
5. I don't feel related to anyone.	con	.741	5.11	1.17
6. I catch myself losing all sense of connectedness with society.	con	.736	4.82	1.33
7. Even among my friends, there is no sense of brother/sisterhood.	aff	.691	4.98	1.31
8. I don't feel I participate with anyone or any group.	aff	.678	4.84	1.36
Factor 2 (Social Assurance)				
1. I feel more comfortable when someone is constantly with me.	com	.736	4.09	1.54
2. I'm more at ease doing things together with other people.	aff	.693	3.26	1.27
3. Working side by side with others is more comfortable than working alone.	aff	.680	3.32	1.40
4. My life is incomplete without a buddy beside me.	com	.647	4.24	1.57
5. It's hard for me to use my skills and talents without someone beside me.	aff	.594	4.77	1.30
6. I stick to my friends like glue.	com	.551	4.46	1.50
7. I join groups more for the friendship than the activity itself.	aff	.537	4.03	1.46
8. I wish to find someone who can be with me all the time.	com	.537	4.20	1.63

Note. Source refers to the operational definition from which the item originated. Scale items are copyrighted (1994) by Richard M. Lee and Steven B. Robbins. con = connectedness; com = companionship; aff = affiliation.

From "Measuring Belongingness: The Social Connectedness and the Social Assurance Scales" by R.M. Lee and S.B. Robbins, 1995, *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 42(2), 232-241.

Appendix F: Workplace Belongingness Scale

Sl. no	Statements	Factor loading values	Communality
1	I am able to work in this organisation without sacrificing my principles	0.55	0.21
2	I use to refer as “we/us” rather than “they/them” when I refer my organisation to outsiders	0.59	0.27
3	I feel that there is a semblance between my organisation and my own values and beliefs	0.63	0.35
4	I generally carry more positive emotions than the negative ones during my job	0.54	0.27
5	Being a part of this organisation inspires me to do more than what is expected	0.61	0.29
6	In my work unit I have many common themes with my co-workers	0.74	0.52
7	Fairness is maintained while executing rules and policies in my organisation	0.66	0.39
8	My personal needs are well met by my organisation	0.51	0.24
9	Whenever I have any personal or professional issues my organisation extends necessary help and support	0.70	0.33
10	My career goals are well considered by my organisation	0.61	0.32
11	My organisation tries to make my job as exciting and promising as possible	0.72	0.41
12	Accomplishments at work are adequately rewarded in my organisation	0.64	0.38

Note: $n = 824$

Source: Author's findings

From “Conceptualizing and Validating Workplace Belongingness Scale” by L.K. Jena and S. Pradhan, 2018, *Journal of Organizational Change Management*, 31(2), 451-462.

Appendix G: Workplace Loneliness Scale

Table 1. Item-Total Correlations and Factor Analysis Pattern Matrix for the Loneliness at Work Scale

Scale Items		Item-Total Correlations	Factor Loadings	
Item			Factor 1	Factor 2
<i>Items Relating to Emotional Deprivation</i>				
1.	I often feel abandoned by my co-workers when I am under pressure at work	.45	.74	.12
2.	I often feel alienated from my co-workers	.65	.80	.00
3.	I feel myself withdrawing from the people I work with	.65	.77	.06
4.	I often feel emotionally distant from the people I work with	.70	.79	.07
5.	I feel satisfied with the relationships I have at work*	.65	.64	.23
6.	There is a sense of camaraderie in my workplace*	.60	.72	.08
7.	I often feel isolated when I am with my co-workers	.74	.85	.01
8.	I often feel disconnected from others at work	.78	.89	.00
9.	I experience a general sense of emptiness when I am at work	.55	.75	.02
<i>Items Relating to Social Companionship</i>				
10.	I have social companionship/fellowship at work*	.69	.22	.68
11.	I feel included in the social aspects of work*	.60	.39	.47
12.	There is someone at work I can talk to about my day to day work problems if I need to*	.58	.03	.75
13.	There is no one at work I can share personal thoughts with if I want to	.57	.09	.81
14.	I have someone at work I can spend time with on my breaks if I want to*	.50	.09	.76
15.	I feel part of a group of friends at work*	.61	.27	.59
16.	There are people at work who take the trouble to listen to me*	.58	.10	.69
Eigenvalues			8.55	1.34
Percentage of Variance Explained			53.44	8.37
Cronbach's Alpha Reliability Coefficient			.93	.87

* Items that are asterisked have been reversed scored.

From "Loneliness in the Workplace: Construct Definition and Scale Development" by S. Wright, C. Burt, and K. Strongman, 2006, *New Zealand Journal of Psychology*, 35(2), 59-68.

Appendix H: Information Sheet



Department of Psychology
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Email: natasha.zimmerman@pg.canterbury.ac.nz

[Date]

What Matters Most: An Exploration of Belongingness Information Sheet for Interview Participants

This research is being conducted through the University of Canterbury and will explore belongingness at work through the lens of employees. It looks at elements that contribute to a culture of belongingness, such as leadership, individual factors, and the general features of an organisation or team. In turn, it will examine the perceived positive and negative outcomes of belongingness. The primary researcher for this project is Natasha Zimmerman, a Psychology PhD student.

If you choose to take part in this study, your involvement in this project will be sitting for a 60-minute interview with the researcher. You will be invited to meet with the researcher in person to complete the interview questions at a time and place agreed upon by the researcher, you as the participant, and your organisation if applicable. You will have oversight of other parties who are aware of the interview. The interview will last approximately 60 minutes.

Some of the questions may concern sensitive issues, such as your perceptions of work demands and your feelings about your employing organisation. While it is unlikely that you will experience significant distress from answering these questions, if you do feel uncomfortable you are advised to withdraw from the study by contacting the researcher or supervisors listed below to inform them of your decision. If you require further assistance, you may contact your local GP or a counsellor as necessary.

Participation is voluntary, and you have the right to withdraw at any stage without penalty. The

interview will be audio recorded with your consent for transcription and data analysis. You may ask for your interview data to be returned to you or destroyed at any point.

Access to your interview transcripts can be provided upon request. If you withdraw, I will remove information relating to you. However, once analysis of raw data starts on 1 October 2019, it will become increasingly difficult to remove the influence of your data on the results.

The results of the project may be published, but you may be assured of the complete confidentiality of data gathered in this investigation: your identity will not be made public. No specific or identifiable interview data will be reported back to your employing organisation. Participants' confidentiality will be maintained through storing data on a password-protected computer. Reports to organizations at the end of the research will only include a generalized summary of findings for their organization and will not include individual identities. Only the named researchers will have access to data (on a password locked computer). A thesis is a public document and will be available through the UCLibrary.

Please indicate to the researcher on the consent form if you would like to receive a copy of the summary of results of the project.

The project is being carried out as a requirement for the completion of a PhD in Psychology by Natasha Zimmerman (Natasha.zimmerman@pg.canterbury.ac.nz) under the supervision of Dr. Joana Kuntz and Dr. Sarah Wright, who can be contacted at joana.kuntz@canterbury.ac.nz and sarah.wright@canterbury.ac.nz. They will be pleased to discuss any concerns you may have about participation in the project.

This project has been reviewed and approved by the University of Canterbury Human Ethics Committee, and participants should address any complaints to The Chair, Human Ethics Committee, University of Canterbury, Private Bag 4800, Christchurch (human-ethics@canterbury.ac.nz).

If you agree to participate in the study, you are asked to complete the consent form and return to the researcher at the time of the interview.

Appendix I: Consent Form



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natasha.zimmerman@pg.canterbury.ac.nz

What Matters Most: Exploring Belongingness in the Workplace Consent Form for Survey Participants

- I have been given a full explanation of this project and have had the opportunity to ask questions.
- I understand what is required of me if I agree to take part in the research.
- I understand that participation is voluntary and I may withdraw at any time without penalty. Withdrawal is effected by closing my internet browser. Withdrawal of participation will also include the withdrawal of any information I have provided should this remain practically achievable.
- I understand that any information or opinions I provide will be kept confidential to the researcher and the research supervisor and that any published or reported results will not identify the participants or their place of employment. I understand that a thesis is a public document and will be available through the UC Library.
- I understand that all data collected for the study will be kept in locked and secure facilities and/or in password protected electronic form and will be destroyed after ten years.
- I understand the risks associated with taking part and how they will be managed.
- I understand that I can contact the researcher, Natasha Zimmerman, at Natasha.zimmerman@pg.canterbury.ac.nz or supervisor Dr. Joana Kuntz at joana.kuntz@canterbury.ac.nz for further information. If I have any complaints, I can contact the Chair of the University of Canterbury Human Ethics Committee, Private Bag 4800, Christchurch (human-ethics@canterbury.ac.nz)
- I would like a summary of the results of the project. This request is separate from the survey and may be obtained at [link].
- By signing below, I agree to participate in this research project.

Name: _____ Signed: _____ Date: _____

Email address (for report of findings, if applicable): _____

Please return this consent form to the researcher at the time of the interview.

Appendix J: Interview Guide

- General
 - Tell me about yourself. How would you describe yourself to someone who didn't know you?
 - Walk me through an average day of work for you.
- Satisfaction and Fit
 - What makes you feel accepted in your organisation? What about on your team?
 - When have you felt most valued for your role?
 - When have you most felt like you fit in at work? Can you provide some examples?
 - If we asked your manager how well you fit in at work, what might they say?
 - How would you describe your level of satisfaction at work?
 - What factors contribute? What factors detract?
- Individual
 - How would you describe your mood or mindset as you begin work each day?
 - How do you approach your work?
 - What do you look for in your work? What feels most important to you?
 - How do you think your perception of the organisation is the same or different compared to other employees?
 - How would you describe your performance?
 - When you think about yourself at the beginning of your career and now, how do you think you've changed?
- Organisational
 - How would you describe the culture of your organisation?
 - What is the structure of your organisation? What about your team?
 - For example, how many people are on your team? Who do you report to?
 - What initially drew you to the organisation?
 - What do you expect from your organisation? Which of those expectations are met or not met?
 - When you think about different places you've worked, have you fit in more at one versus the others? Why do you think that was?
 - What happened when you started? What did your onboarding process look like?
 - How long was it before you felt like you fit in?
 - What do you love most about your organisation? What's your biggest complaint?
 - What are 3 things you would change about your work life if you could?
- Relational
 - How would you describe the quality of the relationships you have at work?
 - Tell me about 3 significant relationships you have at work.

- Do you have any friendships at work?
 - How did those friendships develop?
 - Do you spend time with colleagues outside of work? What does that look like?
- Environmental/external factors
 - Tell me about your relationships outside of work. How do they contribute to your overall sense of wellbeing (or lack thereof)?