

The Sense of Belonging Scale

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1 The Sense of Belonging Scale

1.1 Introduction

The Sense of Belonging Scale (SBS) integrates theory and items from the social psychological, counseling, psychiatry, and education literatures. The scale was examined for internal consistency and initial evidence of validity across three studies. These will be reported in forthcoming manuscript.

For most purposes, the eight-item SBS, referred to as the SBS-8, should suffice. The scale was originally developed to capture four facets of belonging derived from prior work: acceptance, fit, value (Haggerty et al., 1992), and connectedness (Lee & Robbins, 1995). If the population of interest might vary on these facets, then the 16 item scale is recommended. Note, however, that in the initial validation studies with American participants, no conclusive evidence emerged that the factors were differentiable.

The scale was developed to be adaptable for measuring the sense of belongingness in specific contexts and identities, as well as in general. We refer to forms of the scale as either *global* or *specific*. In addition, the scale can be adapted to measure *state* sense of belonging or *trait* sense of belonging. State belonging is the sense of inclusion that people feel in a recent timeframe, such as the previous week or the last few minutes. Trait belonging refers to the sense of belonging that participants feel in general across their lifetime. The combination of these two dimensions yields four potential forms of the scale: *specific-state*, *specific-trait*, *global-state*, and *global-trait*. Information and examples of each form of the scale are presented in subsequent chapters.

2 Global-Trait Form

This page contains the 16 items of the SBS in their global-trait form, as well as some descriptive information for them. The SBS-8 is comprised of the first 8 items listed in the Table 1. Because the scale was validated under a 1-factor model, we recommend administering the scale on a 5 or 7 point Likert-type scale and averaging item responses to derive a total score. In the validation studies, we used this scale for all forms:

- Strongly disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree

- Somewhat agree
- Strongly agree

The scale items were preceded by the following instructions:

When you think **about your life**, to what extent do you feel a **general sense of belonging and fitting in?**

Please answer the questions below to help us understand how you feel.

Table 1 below contains all items in their global form.

Table 1: SBS-8 & SBS-16 items in the global-trait form.

Item Number	Item	Wording Direction	Belongingness Facet
1	In general, I feel a sense of belonging.	positive	accepted
2	I don't really feel accepted.	negative	accepted
3	Overall, I feel valued by others.	positive	valued
4	I feel disregarded.	negative	valued
5	I feel like I fit in.	positive	fit
6	I feel like I don't really fit in with others.	negative	fit
7	I feel connected with others.	positive	connected/included
8	I feel so distant from others.	negative	connected/included
9	Overall, I feel accepted by others.	positive	accepted
10	I don't really feel like I belong anywhere.	negative	accepted
11	I feel appreciated.	positive	valued
12	I don't really feel valued for who I am.	negative	valued
13	I feel at home in the world.	positive	fit
14	I feel like a piece of a jig-saw puzzle that doesn't fit into the puzzle.	negative	fit
15	In general, I feel welcome.	positive	connected/included
16	I feel disconnected from the world around me.	negative	connected/included

Items 1-8, shown in the top half of the table, comprise the 8-item version. The "full" scale is comprised of all 16 items.

In Qualtrics, the survey appeared as in Figure 1. **Note** that each set of 8 items was presented in a random order.

3 Global-State Form

The items for the global state form of the scale are modified to include the timeframe for the desired measurement. In our validation studies, we asked participants about the past two weeks, as shown in Table 2. They were preceded by these instructions:

When you **think about your life**, to what extent do you feel **a general sense of belonging and fitting in?**

Please answer the questions below to help us understand how you feel.

	Strongly disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree
Overall, I feel accepted by others.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I don't really feel like I belong anywhere.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I feel appreciated.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I don't really feel valued for who I am.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Figure 1: Preview of the first four items as they appeared in Qualtrics for the global trait form. On the real survey, items were presented in a random order.

When you **think about your life at this moment**, to what extent do you feel **a general sense of belonging and fitting in?**

Think back over the past two weeks and answer the questions below based **just on your feelings over the past two weeks**.

This timeframe is, in theory, flexible. For example, one could phrase the scale to ask about the past 30 minutes. This feature might be useful for assessing belonging after an experimental manipulation or a program session.

The response scale was the same as for the global trait items in Section 2.

Table 2: SBS-8 & SBS-16 items in the global-state form.

Item Number	Item
1	In the past two weeks, I felt a sense of belonging.
2	In the past two weeks, I didn't really feel accepted.
3	In the past two weeks, I felt valued by others.
4	In the past two weeks, I felt disregarded.
5	In the past two weeks, I felt like I fit in.
6	In the past two weeks, I felt like I don't really fit in with others.
7	In the past two weeks, I felt connected with others.
8	In the past two weeks, I felt so distant from others.
9	In the past two weeks, I felt accepted by others.

Items 1-8, shown in the top half of the table, comprise the 8-item version. The "full" scale is comprised of all 16 items.

Table 2: SBS-8 & SBS-16 items in the global-state form.

Item Number	Item
10	In the past two weeks, I didn't really feel like I belonged anywhere.
11	In the past two weeks, I felt appreciated.
12	In the past two weeks, I didn't really feel valued for who I am.
13	In the past two weeks, I felt at home in the world.
14	In the past two weeks, I felt like a piece of a jig-saw puzzle that doesn't fit into the puzzle.
15	In the past two weeks, I felt welcome.
16	In the past two weeks, I felt disconnected from the world around me.

Items 1-8, shown in the top half of the table, comprise the 8-item version. The "full" scale is comprised of all 16 items.

4 Specific Trait Form

The items for any specific form of the scale will be tailored for the identity or context in question. We validated the scale for a university student identity. The instructions were:

Think about **your entire college career**. When you think about **your time as a student at the University of XXX**, to what extent do you feel **a sense of belonging and fitting in?**

Please answer the questions below to help us understand how you feel.

Note the reference to their *specific* identity and the unbounded *trait* timeframe.

The response scale was the same as for the global trait items in Section 2.

Table 3: SBS-8 & SBS-16 items in the specific-trait form.

Item Number	Item
1	In general, as a student at XXX, I feel a sense of belonging.
2	As a student at XXX, I don't really feel accepted.
3	Overall, I feel valued by other students at XXX
4	As a student at XXX, I feel disregarded.
5	As a student at XXX, I feel like I fit in.
6	I feel like I don't really fit in with other students at XXX
7	I feel connected with other students at XXX.

Items 1-8, shown in the top half of the table, comprise the 8-item version. The "full" scale is comprised of all 16 items.

Table 3: SBS-8 & SBS-16 items in the specific-trait form.

Item Number	Item
8	8I feel so distant from other students at XXX.
9	9Overall, as a student at XXX I feel accepted by others.
10	10As a student at XXX, I don't really feel like I belong anywhere.
11	11As a student at XXX, I feel appreciated.
12	12As a student at XXX, I don't really feel valued for who I am.
13	13I feel at home as a student at XXX.
14	14As a student at XXX, I feel like a piece of a jig-saw puzzle that doesn't fit into the puzzle.
15	15In general, as a student at XXX, I feel welcome.
16	16I feel disconnected from students at XXX.

Items 1-8, shown in the top half of the table, comprise the 8-item version. The "full" scale is comprised of all 16 items.

5 Specific State Form

This form of the scale requires a *specific* identity and a constrained timeframe for the *state* measurement. Both elements can be adapted as necessary.

When you think about being a **student at the University of XXX at this moment**, to what extent do you feel a sense of belonging and fitting in?

Think back over the past two weeks and answer the questions below based on your feelings about being a **student at XXX over just the past two weeks**.

Note the reference to their *specific* identity and the bounded *state* timeframe.

The response scale was the same as for the global trait items in Section 2.

Table 4: SBS-8 & SBS-16 items in the specific-trait form.

Item Number	Item
1	1In the past two weeks, as a student at XXX, I felt a sense of belonging.
2	2In the past two weeks, as a student at XXX, I didn't really feel accepted.
3	3In the past two weeks, I felt valued by other students at XXX
4	4In the past two weeks, as a student at XXX, I felt disregarded.

Items 1-8, shown in the top half of the table, comprise the 8-item version. The "full" scale is comprised of all 16 items.

Table 4: SBS-8 & SBS-16 items in the specific-trait form.

Item Number	Item
5	In the past two weeks, as a student at XXX, I felt like I fit in.
6	In the past two weeks, I felt like I didn't really fit in with other students at XXX
7	In the past two weeks, I felt connected with other students at XXX.
8	In the past two weeks, I felt so distant from other students at XXX.
9	In the past two weeks, as a student at XXX I felt accepted by others.
10	In the past two weeks, as a student at XXX, I didn't really feel like I belonged anywhere.
11	In the past two weeks, as a student at XXX, I felt appreciated.
12	In the past two weeks, as a student at XXX, I didn't really feel valued for who I am.
13	In the past two weeks, I felt at home as a student at XXX.
14	In the past two weeks, as a student at XXX, I felt like a piece of a jig-saw puzzle that doesn't fit into the puzzle.
15	In the past two weeks, as a student at XXX, I felt welcome.
16	In the past two weeks, I felt disconnected from students at XXX.

Items 1-8, shown in the top half of the table, comprise the 8-item version. The "full" scale is comprised of all 16 items.