

BELONGINGNESS AND MENTAL HEALTH: SOME RESEARCH FINDINGS

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More than a decade ago, Maslow presented the hierarchical theory of motivation. He considered 'Love and Belongingness Needs' important enough to give them the third place in his hierarchy, following only physiological needs and safety needs. According to him, 'If both the physiological and the safety needs are fairly well gratified, there will emerge the love and affection and belongingness needs . . . Now the person will feel keenly, as never before, the absence of friends, or a sweetheart, or a wife or children. He will hunger for affectionate relations with people in general, namely, *for a place in his group*, and he will strive with great intensity to achieve this goal. He will want to attain such a place more than anything else in the world' (MASLOW, 1954). Maslow's theory of a hierarchical structure of motivation has been widely accepted and has been included as a theory of motivation in almost every introductory text. But, no attempt has been made to describe and elaborate on the individual needs included in his theory. For example, 'a need to belong', though widely recognized as an important human need, has seldom been the subject of an empirical study. On the other hand, a great deal of experimental work has been reported on some related concepts; e.g., affiliation and identification (SCHACHTER, 1959; BRONFENBRENNER, 1960).

1. INTRODUCTION

Recently, ANANT (1966) redefined the 'need to belong', emphasizing its importance in child development, school, social relationships and mental health. Belongingness was defined as 'personal involvement (in a social system) to the extent that the person feels himself to be an indispensable and integral part of the system' (pp. 22-23). Another author (MEERLOO, 1966) has described six categories of human sympathy and discussed their psychodynamic aspects. Two of his six categories come very close to Anant's description of the concept of belongingness. These two categories are:

1. *Unipathy, being one with the others*, described as an identity of feelings, and rooted in the symbiosis of mother and child, and the later sexual feelings.

2. *Sympathetic togetherness*, representing the feeling of being one and together, of feeling cozy at home in an acceptant group.

In the paper, referred to above, Anant hypothesized a positive relationship between the sense of belongingness and mental health. The role of love, one of the important components of 'belongingness', in the determination of emotional adjustment of the child and adult alike is generally accepted. According to Dr. Adrian Van der Veer, maternal rejection may be seen as the 'causative factor in almost every type and every individual case of neurosis or behavior problem in children' (as quoted by Dr. Montagu, 1962). Dr. Montagu goes still further in recognizing the place of love (and, for that matter, of belongingness) in the life of the individual. He says:

'Show me a hardened criminal, a juvenile delinquent, a psychopath or a 'cold fish' and in almost every case I will show you a person resorting to desperate means in order to attract the emotional warmth and attention he failed to get but which he so much desires and needs.'

2. BELONGINGNESS, ANXIETY AND SELF-SUFFICIENCY

It is now well known that anxiety is caused by the lack of clarity of the situation. If a person, placed in a strange situation, does not know what to do, he is likely to become anxious. As a member of a group, the individual is less likely to become anxious, as there are other people around to help him. A person who is an integral part of a social system, i.e. the person who belongs will feel more secure and at ease in any situation than a person who 'does not belong' or feels alienated. Thus, a person can be relatively free from anxiety in two ways; either he is a self-sufficient person, knowledgeable and capable of taking care of himself. This type of person is independent, usually initiates action, is capable of making his own decisions and accepts responsibility. The other type of person is the one who has strong social ties and feels quite secure even in those situations which he thinks he cannot cope with. Because of social support from the group to which he belongs, he is likely to be less anxious in the face of crises or frustrations. The effect of the 'lack of belongingness' is clearly illustrated by the

'marginal man', as described by LEWIN (1939). The 'marginal man' is the person, who has lost contact with his former group and has not yet established himself in the new group, his 'reference group'. One example of a marginal man is the more privileged member of a less privileged group, a Negro, who through education and personal effort has made good. He does not want to belong to his former group; i.e., the Negroes living in the slum area. Instead, he aspires for a membership in the White middle-class society. If the middle-class Whites do not accept him as one of them, he is on the outside of both his former group and his reference group. Another such example is the adolescent, who has dissociated himself from his former group, the children's group, and aspires for membership in the adult group. As the adults do not consider him old enough to participate in adult activities, he is standing alone. This may explain the anxieties, stresses and conflicts associated with this stage of development. In terms of the developmental theory of belongingness, I call adolescence as the period of 'crisis in group belongingness'.

On the basis of above discussion, we can formulate the following hypotheses:

(1) There is an inverse relationship between the 'sense of belongingness' and anxiety; i.e., the higher the sense of belongingness, the lower the anxiety and vice versa.

It should be pointed out that I am not using the 'need to belong' but the 'sense of belongingness' as a variable. A person may have a high 'need to belong', but low 'sense of belongingness', because of the constant frustration of his need to belong.

(2) There is also an inverse relationship between self-sufficiency and anxiety; i.e., the more self-sufficient the person is, the less anxious he will be.

(3) There is a positive relationship between 'belongingness' and 'self-sufficiency'.

This hypothesis is based on the reasoning that true 'belongingness' (where a person feels an integral part of the social system) is a non-dependent relationship. Thus, the person who has a high sense of belongingness is also a self-sufficient and independent person.

3. SAMPLE AND METHODOLOGY

A group of 47 nursing students, 33 females and 14 males, of the freshman class in the Saskatchewan Hospital in Weyburn were used

as subjects in the pilot study. The mean age of the sample ranged between 18 and 24, with a mean of 18.9. (The range would have been 18 to 21, but for one student who was 24.) A large battery of tests, including DAT, MMPI, Welsh, etc. were administered to the students as a part of another study. The following three tests were added to the battery as measures of belongingness, selfsufficiency and anxiety:

- (1) Anant's Sense of Belongingness Questionnaire;
- (2) Bernreuter's Self-Sufficiency Scale;
- (3) Willoughby's Personality Schedule (as a measure of Anxiety).

The means, standard deviations and intercorrelations of the scores on the above three tests were calculated and the *t*-test of significance of correlation was applied. All scores were converted to a percentile scale in order to ensure uniformity.

4. RESULTS

The means and standard deviations of the scores on the three tests are given in table 1 below:

TABLE 1

	Belongingness	Self-sufficiency	Anxiety
Mean	76	38	30
SD	8.4	11.3	11.6

The results in table 1 show that the measure for the 'Sense of Belongingness' has the lowest variability, As this questionnaire was a new test, the author of the test was not certain about its effectiveness. As it turned out, this test has proved itself to be the best out of the three, in terms of at least variability.

The intercorrelations (Pearson's Product Moment *r*'s) of the scores on the three measures are given in table 2 below:

The results, as presented in table 2, tend to support our hypotheses (1) and (2), viz., the hypothesis of inverse relationship between belongingness and anxiety and self-sufficiency and anxiety. The third hypothesis, concerning the positive relationship between belongingness and self-sufficiency has not been supported. As the correlation of $-.15$

TABLE 2

	Belongingness	Self-sufficiency
Belongingness	X	X
Self-sufficiency	— .15	X
Anxiety	— .41*	— .28**

* Significant beyond .01 level

** Significant beyond .05 level

is not statistically significant, we can presume that there is no relationship between these two variables. As indicated above, self-sufficiency involves independence, knowledgeability and initiativeness. It is possible that 'belongingness' as measured in this study, contains a component of dependence. To the extent, the belongingness means involvement, love relationship and acceptance by others in the group, dependency may be an important component in belongingness. This may explain slight negative correlation between belongingness and self-sufficiency.

5. DISCUSSION

The results of the pilot study have supported the hypothesis of inverse relationship between belongingness and anxiety, one of the indices of mental illness. In other words, the study has also supported the earlier contention of the author that there is a positive relationship between the sense of belongingness and mental health. The hypothesized positive correlation between belongingness and self-sufficiency has not been supported, probably due to the presence of a component of dependency in belongingness.

In order to clarify this issue, a measure of dependency will be introduced as an additional test in future studies. It is also planned to study the relationship of belongingness with neuroticism and extraversion (using *Eysenck Personality Inventory*) among other factors.

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