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The Need to Belong: Desire for Interpersonal Attachments as a Fundamental Human Motivation

Roy F. Baumeister
Case Western Reserve University

Mark R. Leary
Wake Forest University

A hypothesized need to form and maintain strong, stable interpersonal relationships is evaluated in light of the empirical literature. The need is for frequent, nonaversive interactions within an ongoing relational bond. Consistent with the belongingness hypothesis, people form social attachments readily under most conditions and resist the dissolution of existing bonds. Belongingness appears to have multiple and strong effects on emotional patterns and on cognitive processes. Lack of attachments is linked to a variety of ill effects on health, adjustment, and well-being. Other evidence, such as that concerning satiation, substitution, and behavioral consequences, is likewise consistent with the hypothesized motivation. Several seeming counterexamples turned out not to disconfirm the hypothesis. Existing evidence supports the hypothesis that the need to belong is a powerful, fundamental, and extremely pervasive motivation.

The purpose of this review is to develop and evaluate the hypothesis that a need to belong is a fundamental human motivation and to propose that the need to belong can provide a point of departure for understanding and integrating a great deal of the existing literature regarding human interpersonal behavior. More precisely, the belongingness hypothesis is that human beings have a pervasive drive to form and maintain at least a minimum quantity of lasting, positive, and significant interpersonal relationships. Satisfying this drive involves two criteria: First, there is a need for frequent, affectively pleasant interactions with a few other people, and, second, these interactions must take place in the context of a temporally stable and enduring framework of affective concern for each other's welfare. Interactions with a constantly changing sequence of partners will be less satisfactory than repeated interactions with the same person(s), and relatedness without frequent contact will also be unsatisfactory. A lack of belongingness should constitute severe deprivation and cause a variety of ill effects. Furthermore, a great deal of human behavior, emotion, and thought is caused by this fundamental interpersonal motive.

The hypothesis that people are motivated to form and maintain interpersonal bonds is not new, of course. John Donne (1975) has been widely quoted for the line "No [person] is an island." In psychology, the need for interpersonal contact was asserted in several ways by Freud (e.g., 1930), although he tended to see the motive as derived from the sex drive and from the filial bond. Maslow (1968) ranked "love and belongingness needs" in the middle of his motivational hierarchy; that is, belongingness needs do not emerge until food, hunger, safety, and other basic needs are satisfied, but they take precedence over esteem and self-actualization. Bowlby's (e.g., 1969, 1973) attachment theory also posited the need to form and maintain relationships. His early thinking followed the Freudian pattern of deriving attachment needs from the relationship to one's mother; he regarded the adult's need for attachment as an effort to recapture the intimate contact that the individual had, as an infant, with his or her mother.[1] Horney (1945), Sullivan (1953), Fromm (1955, 1956), de Rivera (1984), Hogan (1983), Epstein (1992), Ryan (1991), Guisinger and Blatt (1994), and others have made similar suggestions. The existence of a need to belong is thus a familiar point of theory and speculation, although not all theorists have anticipated our particular formulation of this need as the combination of frequent interaction plus persistent caring. Moreover, most theorists have neglected to provide systematic empirical evaluation of this hypothesis. For example, Maslow's (1968) influential assertion of a belongingness need was accompanied by neither original data nor review of previous findings. Thus, despite frequent, speculative assertions that people need to belong, the belongingness hypothesis needs to be critically evaluated in light of empirical evidence. A main goal of the present article is to assemble a large body of empirical findings pertinent to the belongingness hypothesis to evaluate how well the hypothesis fits the data.

Another goal of this article is to demonstrate the broad applicability of the need to belong for understanding human motivation and behavior. Even though many psychological theorists have noted human affiliative tendencies in one form or another, the field as a whole has neglected the broad applicability of this

Roy F. Baumeister, Department of Psychology, Case Western Reserve University; Mark R. Leary, Department of Psychology, Wake Forest University.

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Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Roy F. Baumeister, Department of Psychology, Case Western Reserve University, 10900 Euclid Avenue, Cleveland, Ohio 44106-7123. Electronic mail may be sent via Internet to rfb2@po.cwru.edu.

[1] His later thinking may, however, have moved beyond this view to regard attachment needs as having a separate, even innate basis rather than being derived from the contact with one's mother; in this later view, he treated the relationship to one's mother as simply an influential prototype of attachment.

need to a wide range of behaviors. Thus, for example, the motive literature has been dominated by research on the respective needs for power, achievement, intimacy, approval, and, to a lesser extent, affiliation. But the need for power may well be driven by the need to belong, as we suggest later. Likewise, people prefer achievements that are validated, recognized, and valued by other people over solitary achievements, so there may be a substantial interpersonal component behind the need for achievement. And the needs for approval and intimacy are undoubtedly linked to the fact that approval is a prerequisite for forming and maintaining social bonds, and intimacy is a defining characteristic of close relationships. The need to belong could thus be linked to all of them.

Furthermore, even a quick glance at research on social behavior from the perspective of the belongingness hypothesis raises the possibility that much of what human beings do is done in the service of belongingness. Thus, the belongingness hypothesis might have considerable value for personality and social psychology and even for psychology as a whole. As a broad integrative hypothesis, it might help rectify what some observers have criticized as fragmentation and atomization in the conceptual underpinnings of the field (see Vallacher & Nowak, 1994; West, Newsom, & Fenaughty, 1992).

At the interdisciplinary level, the belongingness hypothesis might help psychology recover from the challenge posed by cultural materialism. Cultural materialism (e.g., Harris, 1974, 1978, 1979) is based on the assumption that human culture is shaped primarily by economic needs and opportunities, and so historical, anthropological, sociological, and other cultural patterns should mainly be analyzed with reference to economic causes. In that framework, psychology is reduced to a vastly subordinate role; psychological phenomena are regarded merely as symptoms or coping mechanisms that follow from economic realities. In contrast, the belongingness hypothesis would suggest that human culture is at least partly adapted to enable people to satisfy the psychological need to live together (along with economic needs, to be sure), thereby assigning some fundamental causal power to psychological forces. We suggest that belongingness can be almost as compelling a need as food and that human culture is significantly conditioned by the pressure to provide belongingness.

Modern personality and social psychologists have shown a pervasive reluctance to entertain sweeping generalizations and broad hypotheses. This reluctance may well be a response to speculative excesses of earlier generations of theorists, who supposedly rushed to formulate broad theories from intuition and impression. Today there may be a sense that it is more appropriate to await the passing of a substantial interval, until considerable empirical work has been done. We propose that such an interval has passed, however, making it possible to begin considering broad hypotheses in light of the evidence accumulated through the last three decades. That is what we undertake here.

Review of Empirical Findings

We searched the empirical literature of social and personality psychology for findings relevant to the belongingness hypothesis. The following sections summarize the evidence we found pertaining to the series of predictions about belongingness.

Forming Social Bonds

A first prediction of the belongingness hypothesis is that social bonds should form relatively easily, without requiring specially conducive circumstances. Such evidence not only would attest to the presence and power of the need to belong but would suggest that the need is not a derivative of other needs (insofar as it is not limited to circumstances that meet other requirements or follow from other events).

There is abundant evidence that social bonds form easily. Indeed, people in every society on earth belong to small primary groups that involve face-to-face, personal interactions (Mann, 1980). The anthropologist Coon (1946) asserted that natural groups are characteristic of all human beings. Societies differ in the type, number, and permanence of the groups that people join, but people of all cultures quite naturally form groups.

The classic Robbers Cave study conducted by Sherif, Harvey, White, Hood, and Sherif (1961/1988) showed that when previously unacquainted boys were randomly assigned to newly created groups, strong loyalty and group identification ties ensued rapidly. In fact, later in that study, the two strongly opposed groups were recombined into a single group with cooperative goals, and emotional and behavioral patterns quickly accommodated to the new group (although the prior antagonistic identifications did hamper the process).

The tendency for laboratory or experimentally created groups to quickly become cohesive has also been noted in the *minimal intergroup* situation (Brewer, 1979). Tajfel and his colleagues (Billig & Tajfel, 1973; Tajfel, 1970; Tajfel & Billig, 1974; Tajfel, Flament, Billig, & Bundy, 1971) showed that assigning participants to categories on a seemingly arbitrary basis was sufficient to cause them to allocate greater rewards to in-group members than to out-group members. Indeed, the original goal of Tajfel et al. (1971) was not to study group formation but to understand the causes of in-group favoritism. To do this, they sought to set up an experimental group that would be so trivial that no favoritism would be found, intending then to add other variables progressively so as to determine at what point favoritism would start. To their surprise, however, in-group favoritism appeared at once, even in the minimal and supposedly trivial situation (see also Turner, 1985).

This preferential treatment of in-group members does not appear to be due to inferred self-interest or to issues of novelty and uncertainty about the task (Brewer & Silver, 1978; Tajfel, 1970; Tajfel & Billig, 1974). Inferred similarity of self to in-group members was a viable explanation for many of the early findings, but Locksley, Ortiz, and Hepburn (1980) ruled this out by showing that people show in-group favoritism even when they have been assigned to groups by a random lottery. Thus, patterns of in-group favoritism, such as sharing rewards and categorizing others relative to the group, appeared quite readily, even in the absence of experiences designed to bond people to the group emotionally or materially.

Several other studies suggest how little it takes (other than frequent contact) to create social attachments. Bowlby (1969) noted that infants form attachments to caregivers very early in life, long before babies are able to calculate benefits or even speak. Festinger, Schachter, and Back (1950) found that mere proximity was a potent factor in relationship formation; people seemed to develop social bonds with each other simply because they lived near each other. Nahemow and Lawton (1975) replicated those findings and also showed that pairs of best friends who differed by age or race were particularly likely to have lived very close together, suggesting that extreme proximity may overcome tendencies to bond with similar others. Wilder and Thompson (1980) showed that people seem to form favorable views toward whomever they spend time with, even if these others are members of a previously disliked or stereotyped outgroup. In their study, intergroup biases decreased as contact with members of the out-groups increased (and as in-group contact decreased).

We noted that the formation of social attachments under adverse circumstances would be especially compelling evidence because it avoids the alternative explanations based on classical conditioning (i.e., that positive associations breed attraction). Latane, Eckman, and Joy (1966) found that participants who experienced electric shock together tended to like each other more than control participants who did not experience shock, although the effect was significant only among firstborns. Kenrick and Johnson (1979) found that participants rated each other more positively in the presence of aversive than nonaversive noise. Elder and Clipp (1988) compared the persistence of attachments among military veterans and found that the greatest persistence occurred among groups that had undergone heavy combat resulting in the deaths of some friends and com-

rades. Although it would be rash to suggest that all shared negative experiences increase attraction, it does appear that positive bonding will occur even under adverse circumstances.

The development of interpersonal attraction under fearful circumstances has been explained in terms of both misattribution (i.e., people may misinterpret their anxious arousal as attraction to another person) and reinforcement theory (i.e., when the presence of some other person reduces one's distress, a positive emotional response becomes associated with that person; Kenrick & Cialdini, 1977). The misattribution explanation is largely irrelevant to the belongingness hypothesis, but the reinforcement explanation is germane. Specifically, although others may reduce one's distress through various routes (such as distraction, humor, or reassurance), evidence suggests strongly that the mere presence of other people can be comforting (Schachter, 1959). Such effects may well be conditioned through years of experience with supportive others, but they also may indicate that threatening events stimulate the need to belong.

The fact that people sometimes form attachments with former rivals or opponents is itself a meaningful indicator of a general inclination to form bonds. Cognitive consistency pressures and affective memories would militate against forming positive social bonds with people who have been rivals or opponents. Yet, as we have already noted, the Robbers Cave study (Sherif et al., 1961/1988) showed that people could join and work together with others who had been bitterly opposed very recently, and Wilder and Thompson (1980) showed that social contact could overcome established intergroup prejudices and stereotypes. Orbell, van de Kragt, and Dawes (1988) likewise showed that impulses toward forming positive attachments could overcome oppositional patterns. In their study using the prisoner's dilemma game, having a discussion period led to decreased competition and increased cooperation, as a result of either the formation of a group identity that joined the potential rivals together or explicit agreements to cooperate. Thus, belongingness motivations appear to be able to overcome some antagonistic, competitive, or divisive tendencies.

Similar shifts have been suggested by M. S. Clark (1984, 1986; Clark, Mills, & Powell, 1986; Clark, Ouellette, Powell, & Milberg, 1987), who showed that people move toward a communal orientation when there is a chance to form a relationship. When participants were confronted with a person who seemingly would not be amenable to relationship formation (i.e., because she was already married), they interacted with her on the basis of norms of equitable exchange and individuality; when they believed she would be a possible relationship partner, however, they interacted with her on a communal basis (i.e., mutuality and sharing, without respect to individual equity concerns).

Critical assessment. The remarkable ease with which social bonds form has been shown with experimental methods and confirmed by other methods. The main limitation would be that people do not always form relationships with all available or proximal others, which could mean that satiation processes limit the number of relationships people seek and which also indicates that other factors and processes affect the formation of relationships. Some patterns (e.g., in-group favoritism in minimal groups) have been well replicated with careful efforts to rule out alternative explanations.

Conclusion. In brief, people seem widely and strongly inclined to form social relationships quite easily in the absence of any special set of eliciting circumstances or ulterior motives. Friendships and group allegiance seem to arise spontaneously and readily, without needing evidence of material advantage or inferred similarity. Not only do relationships emerge quite naturally, but people invest a great deal of time and effort in fostering supportive relationships with others. External threat seems to increase the tendency to form strong bonds.

Not Breaking Bonds

The belongingness hypothesis predicts that people should generally be at least as reluctant to break social bonds as they are eager to form them in the first place. A variety of patterns supports the view that people try to preserve relationships and avoid ending them. In fact, Hazan and Shaver (1994a, p. 14) recently concluded that the tendency for human beings to respond with distress and protest to the end of a relationship is nearly universal, even across different cultures and across the age span.

Some relationships are limited in time by external factors, and so these are logically the first place to look for evidence that people show distress and resistance to breaking bonds. Encounter groups and training groups, for example, are often convened with the explicit understanding that the meetings will stop at a certain point in the future. Even so, it is a familiar observation in the empirical literature (e.g., Egan, 1970; Lacoursiere, 1980; Lieberman, Yalom, & Miles, 1973) that the members of such groups resist the notion that the group will dissolve. Even though the group's purpose may have been fulfilled, the participants want to hold on to the social bonds and relationships they have formed with each other. They promise individually and sometimes collectively to stay in touch with each other, they plan for reunions, and they take other steps to ensure a continuity of future contacts. In actuality, only a small minority of these envisioned reunions or contacts take place, and so the widespread exercise of making them can be regarded as a symptom of resistance to the threatened dissolution (Lacoursiere, 1980, p. 216).

Other relationships are limited in time by external transitions such as graduating from college, moving to a different city, or getting a new job. As such transitions approach, people commonly get together formally and informally and promise to remain in contact, to share meals or other social occasions together, to write and call each other, and to continue the relationship in other ways. They also cry or show other signs of distress over the impending separation (Bridges, 1980). These patterns seem to occur even if the dissolving relationship (e.g., with neighbors) had no important practical or instrumental function and there is no realistic likelihood of further contact.

More generally, many social institutions and behavior patterns seem to serve a need to preserve at least the appearance of social attachment in the absence of actual, continued interaction. Reunions constitute an occasion for people to see former acquaintances. The massive exchange of greeting cards during the Christmas holiday season includes many cases in which the

card is the sole contact that two people have had during the entire year, but people still resist dropping each other's name from the mailing list because to do so signifies a final dissolution of the social bond. In fact, most people will send Christmas cards to perfect strangers from whom they receive cards (Kunz & Woolcott, 1976). People seem not to want to risk damaging a relationship even if they do not know the identity of the other person!

Likewise, social rituals involving greetings and farewells serve to assure others of the continuation of one's relationships with them. Many greetings, particularly those directed at family members and close friends, seem designed to indicate that one's relationship has remained intact since the last contact, and farewells often include some hint that the relationship will be maintained until the people see one another again (Goffman, 1971). The importance of such rituals in the maintenance of belongingness is reflected in the distress people sometimes experience when they feel that another's greeting is inadequately warm or that the other's farewell expresses insufficient concern about the impending separation.

In many cases, people seem reluctant to dissolve even bad or destructive relationships. The apparent unwillingness of many women to leave abusive, battering spouses or boyfriends (Roy, 1977; Strube, 1988) has prompted several generations of speculative explanations, ranging from masochistic or self-destructive liking for abuse to calculations of economic self-interest that supposedly override considerations of physical harm. The belongingness hypothesis offers yet one more potential perspective: The unwillingness to leave an abusive intimate partner is another manifestation of the strength of the need to belong and of the resulting reluctance to break social bonds. The fact that people resist breaking off an attachment that causes pain attests to how deeply rooted and powerful the need to belong is.

Moreover, when people do decide to break off an intimate relationship, they typically experience considerable distress over the dissolution (which we cover in more detail in the later section on emotion). This is ironic: Although goal attainment is usually marked by positive affect such as satisfaction and joy, attaining the goal of getting a divorce is generally accompanied by negative affect. To be sure, in some cases the distress over divorce is accompanied by an admixture of positive affect, but the negative affect nonetheless indicates the resistance to breaking the bond.

It is also relevant and noteworthy that the social bond often continues despite the divorce. In her study on divorce, Vaughan (1986) concluded that "in most cases [marital] relationships don't end. They change, but they don't end" (p. 282). Weiss (1979) also found that some form of (often ambivalent) attachment persists after divorce. The persistence of intimate relationships past the occasion of mutually agreed and formally institutionalized dissolution may be yet another indication of people's reluctance to break social bonds.

Critical assessment. Because ethical and practical constraints prevent laboratory experimentation on the ending of significant relationships, the evidence in this section was drawn from observational studies and other methods, and so the hypothesis of resistance to relationship dissolution is not as conclusively supported as might be desired. Alternative explanations exist for some of the findings. For example, the persistence of relatedness after divorce is partly due to ongoing practical concerns, such as joint responsibility for child care; although Vaughan (1986) was emphatic in asserting that such pragmatic concerns fall far short of explaining the extent of continuing attachments, she was vague about the evidence to back up her assertion. Also, as we noted, the tendency for battered women to return to their abusive partners has been explained in many ways, and the hypothesized reluctance to break off a relationship is only one of them.

On the positive side, however, the persistence of such bonds has been observed by a variety of researchers. The fact that these researchers are from different disciplines suggests that these conclusions do not stem from a single methodological or theoretical bias. More systematic research on possible boundary and limiting conditions of the resistance to dissolve bonds would be desirable.

Conclusion. Despite some methodological weaknesses and ambiguities, the weight of the evidence does favor the conclusion that people strongly and generally resist the dissolution of relationships and social bonds. Moreover, this resistance appears to go well beyond rational considerations of practical or material advantage.

Cognition

Intelligent thought is generally recognized as the most important adaptive trait among human beings, and so it seems reasonable to assume that issues of fundamental concern and importance are likely to be the focus of cognitive activity. The belongingness hypothesis therefore would predict that people will devote considerable cognitive processing to interpersonal interactions and relationships.

Basic patterns of thought appear to reflect a fundamental concern with social relationships. Sedikides, Olsen, and Reis (1993) showed that relationships are natural categories; that is, people spontaneously classify incoming information in terms of social relationships. Participants stored information about relationship partners together, and they did this more for strong, close relationships (marriage) than for weak or distant ones (e.g., acquaintanceship). Pryor and Ostrom (1981) showed that people use the individual person as a cognitive unit of analysis for familiar people more than for unfamiliar people. These researchers began by questioning the basic assumption that the person is the fundamental unit of social perception. That is, information is not necessarily or inherently processed and stored in memory on a person-by-person basis, but it is, in fact, processed and stored on such a basis when it pertains to significant others. Ostrom, Carpenter, Sedikides, and Li (1993) provided evidence that information about out-group members tends to be stored and organized on the basis of attribute categories (such as traits, preferences, and duties), whereas in-group information is processed on the basis of person categories. Thus, social bonds create a pattern in cognitive processing that gives priority to organizing information on the basis of the person with whom one has some sort of connection.

Several studies have pursued the notion that people process information about close relationship partners differently from the way they process information about strangers or distant acquaintances. For example, research has shown that,

when a group of people take turns reading words aloud, they each have high recall for the words they personally speak but have poor recall for the words preceding and following their performance. Brenner (1976) found that this next-in-line effect occurs not only for one's own performance but also for words spoken by one's dating partner (and the words immediately preceding and following).

In a series of studies, Aron, Aron, Tudor, and Nelson (1991) showed that close relationship partners, unlike strangers, have cognitive effects similar to those of the self. Thus, when people form an image of themselves or their mothers interacting with some object, they have more difficulty recalling that object than if they imagined a famous but personally unacquainted person interacting with that same object. In another study, participants had more difficulty in making me–not me judgments about traits on which they differed from their spouse than in making judgments about traits on which they resembled the spouse. These results suggest that cognitive processes tend to blur the boundaries between relationship partners and the self, in the form of "including [the] other in the self" (p. 241). In short, these studies confirm that information about relationship partners is singled out for special processing, and they raise the possibility that the need to belong leads to a cognitive merging of self with particular other people. Such patterns of subsuming the individual in the interpersonal unit indicate the importance of these relationships.

Many of the special biases that people exhibit for processing information in ways that favor and flatter themselves are extended to partners in close relationships. Fincham, Beach, and Baucom (1987) showed that self-serving biases that take credit for success and refuse blame for failure operate just as strongly—or even more strongly—when people interpret their spouses' outcomes as when they interpret their own outcomes. That is, events are interpreted in a way that is maximally flattering to the spouse, just as they are interpreted in ways that enhance and protect the self. (These patterns are extended only to partners in good, strong, happy relationships, however; high marital distress is correlated with a breakdown in these partner-serving attributions.)

Likewise, the "illusion of unique invulnerability" (Perloff & Fetzer, 1986) turns out not to be as unique as first thought. Although people are more extremely and unrealistically optimistic about themselves than about some vague target such as the average person, they are equally optimistic about their closest friends and family members. That is, they think that bad things are not as likely to happen either to themselves or to their close friends as to strangers or to a hypothetical average person.[3] Along the same lines, Brown (1986) showed that people (particularly those with high self-esteem) tend to extend self-serving biases to their friends. Specifically, people rate both self and a same-sex friend more favorably than they rate people in general.

Group memberships also appear to exert important influences on cognitive patterns. People expect more favorable and fewer objectionable actions by their in-group than by out-group members, and these expectations bias information processing and memory, leading people to forget the bad things (relative to good things) that their fellow in-group members do (Howard & Rothbart, 1980). People also make group-serving or "sociocentric" attributions for the performance of the groups to which they belong. Members of a successful group may make group-serving attributions that put the entire group in a good light, whereas, after failure, group members may join together in absolving one another of responsibility (Forsyth & Schlenker, 1977; Leary & Forsyth, 1987; Zander, 1971).

Linville and Jones (1980) showed that people tend to process information about out-group members in extreme, black-and-white, simplistic, polarized ways, whereas similar information about members of their own group is processed in a more complex fashion. Thus, the mere existence of a social bond leads to more complex (and sometimes more biased) information processing.

Of broader interest is evidence that belongingness can affect how people process information about nearly all categories of stimuli in the social world. Wegner (1986) noted the irony that traditional theories of the "group mind" tended to assume that all members would essentially think the same thing, because much more far-reaching advantages could be realized through a group mind if each member was responsible for different information, thereby enabling the group to process considerably more information than any one person could. Wegner went on to propose that *transactive memory* processes operate in close relationships and groups by assigning each person a significant category of expertise, with the result that each person becomes expert in one or a few areas and simply consults others when alternative areas come up. An empirical study conducted by Wegner, Erber, and Raymond (1991) supported the transactive memory hypothesis by showing that partners in close relationships apparently have established procedures for determining which person should remember which information. Participants were people in dating couples who were paired either with their partner or with a stranger. The preexisting couples showed better memory for experimental stimuli than the impromptu assigned couples, except when the researchers assigned people at random to be the expert responsible for various categories of stimuli. In this latter condition, apparently, the assignment disrupted the couples' preexisting system and hence impaired the processing of information.

Another broad and very basic issue is how often interpersonal belongingness is used as an interpretive category. C. A. Anderson (e.g., 1991) sought to establish the fundamental dimensions people use for making attributions about the causes of events. His study coded participants' attributional activity along 13 dimensions, including all of the ones featured in the major attri-

[3] Perloff and Fetzer (1986) favored an interpretation for their results in terms of the vagueness of the comparison target over the motivational explanation that people want to regard their closest relationship partners as equally invulnerable (equal to themselves). Their discrimination between the two hypotheses rested on the "one of your friends" condition in their second study: They found that the "closest friend" was seen as being highly invulnerable, whereas when participants chose one of their other friends, this person was seen as more vulnerable. Their findings suggested that participants in that condition selected a friend who seemed most likely to have the problem asked about, so it is difficult to evaluate the motivational hypothesis. Thus, the interpretation emphasized here is consistent with all of Perloff and Fetzer's findings, as they acknowledged, even though their own interpretations tended to favor explanation in terms of vague versus specific targets.

butional theories (e.g., locus, stability, globality, and controllability). To his surprise, however, the strongest single dimension was what he called *interpersonalness,* which was defined as the degree to which the causes of the focal event reflected on the relationship between the individual attributor and other people (e.g., doing something because one is married). Thus, although interpersonalness was not a central concern of his investigation (because the major attribution theories had largely ignored it), it emerged as a major dimension in the way people normally think about and interpret the causes of events. The unexpected emergence of interpersonalness as a powerful fundamental dimension of causal attribution is consistent with the view that belongingness is one of humanity's basic concerns.

Thus far we have provided evidence that interpersonal relationships are centrally important in the way people think. Additional predictions about cognitive activity can be derived from the belongingness hypothesis. Although the evidence is consistent with these predictions, it tends to be subject to alternative explanations based on short-term, pragmatic concerns, so it is less compelling for present purposes. We include brief coverage for the sake of thoroughness.

Clearly, one would predict, on the basis of a need to belong, that people should tend to think particularly about actual and potential relationship partners more than about other people. This would be reflected in increased cognitive processing caused by the expectation of future or further interactions, because these conditions hold the possibility of forming a relationship. Devine, Sedikides, and Fuhrman (1989) confronted participants with advance information about various stimulus persons and found that this information received more thorough and detailed processing when it pertained to a future interaction partner. Monson, Keel, Stephens, and Genung (1982) found that people made more extreme—and more valid—trait attributions from identical information when it pertained to a future interaction partner than when it pertained to someone with whom no interaction was anticipated. Erber and Fiske (1984) showed that interpersonal dependency (outcome dependency) overcame the usual tendency to ignore information that runs counter to expectations. When participants were outcome dependent on the confederate, they paid extra attention to inconsistent information about the confederate and seemed to think more in terms of dispositional attributions about the partner. Thus, belonging to another person changes the way one processes information about that person.

Some of these interaction effects could be interpreted as guided by short-term concerns. Still, the prospect of forming a relationship with a recently met person appears to be sufficient to alter the way people process the interaction. M. S. Clark (1984) showed that people keep track of information differently when the interaction partner is a potential relationship partner. Furthermore, recent work by Tice, Butler, Muraven, and Stillwell (1994) showed that when people were interacting with friends as opposed to strangers, they changed the way they presented information about themselves (i.e., they became more modest). Moreover, the way they encoded and recalled the interaction depended on the relationship: Memory was best if one had been modest with friends or self-enhancing with strangers, and otherwise it was impaired.

Critical assessment. The evidence that interpersonal concerns affect cognitive processing is methodologically strong and extensive. A broad variety of experimental procedures has been involved in demonstrating such effects. For present purposes, the main critique would be that some of the studies have not been directly concerned with close relationships. Some have shown that the expectation of interaction with a stranger or new acquaintance is sufficient to alter cognitive processing. Although it is reasonable to infer that people regard meeting new people as the first step in possible relationship formation (perhaps especially among the young adult populations who constitute most of the experimental samples), this inference requires further validation before one can have full confidence in interpreting those findings as evidence for the need to belong, because short-term concerns of practical or material advantage may also play a role in some such situations.

Nonetheless, many of the findings reviewed in this section do pertain to close relationship partners, and there is evidence that information pertaining to interaction partners is processed differently depending on its relevance to lasting relationships. It is thus quite clear that relatedness affects cognitive processing; only the extent of that influence and some of its processes are still open to debate.

Conclusion. Concern with belongingness appears to be a powerful factor shaping human thought. People interpret situations and events with regard to their implications for relationships, and they think more thoroughly about relationship (and interaction) partners than about other people. Moreover, the special patterns of processing information about the self are sometimes used for information about relationship partners as well. Thus, both actual and potential bonds exert substantial effects on how people think.

Emotion

The main emotional implication of the belongingness hypothesis is that real, potential, or imagined changes in one's belongingness status will produce emotional responses, with positive affect linked to increases in belongingness and negative affect linked to decreases in it. Also, stable or chronic conditions of high belongingness should produce a general abundance of positive affect, whereas chronic deprivation should produce a tendency toward abundant negative affect.

Positive affect. In general, the formation of social bonds is associated with positive emotions. Perhaps the prototype of relationship formation is the experience of falling in love, which is typically marked by periods of intense bliss and joy, at least if the love is mutual (e.g., Sternberg, 1986). When love arises without belongingness, as in unrequited love, the result is typically distress and disappointment (Baumeister & Wotman, 1992). Belongingness is thus crucial if love is to produce bliss.

Likewise, occasions such as new employment, childbirth, fraternity or sorority pledging, and religious conversion, all of which are based on the entry into new relationships and the formation of new social bonds, are typically marked by positive emotions and celebrated as joyous. Childbirth is especially significant in this regard because the data show that parenthood reduces happiness and increases stress, strain, and marital dissatisfaction (e.g., S. A. Anderson, Russell, & Schumm, 1983; Campbell, Converse, & Rodgers, 1976; Glenn & McLanahan,

1982; for reviews, see Baumeister, 1991; Bernard, 1982; Campbell, 1981; Spanier & Lewis, 1980), yet people nonetheless retain a positive image of it, celebrate it, and feel positive about it, both in advance and in retrospect. It is plausible that the formation of the new social bond is directly responsible for the joy and positive feelings, whereas the negative aspects and feelings associated with parenthood arise indirectly from the hassles, conflicts, and stresses that accompany the social bond.

If the formation of bonds is one occasion for joy, a second occasion comes when the bond is formalized into a more recognizably permanent status. A wedding, for example, does not create a new relationship, at least in modern Western cultures, because the bride and groom typically have known each other intimately for some time. The wedding does, however, signify an increase in commitment to maintaining the relationship permanently, and the joyful celebration of the wedding can be regarded as an affective consequence of solidifying the social bond. It is noteworthy that many traditional wedding vows include an actuarially implausible pledge that the marriage will never end ("till death do us part"). In essence, such vows are an institutionalized mechanism for committing people to meet their spouse's belongingness needs.

Although we have emphasized the view of affect as a result of attachment, positive affect may in turn help solidify social attachment. Probably the most influential view of this sort was developed by Shaver et al. (1988), who portrayed romantic love as a kind of glue designed by nature to solidify the attachment between two adults whose interaction is likely to lead to parenting. In their view, love elaborates on sexual attraction in a way that will hold the couple together when their sexual intercourse leads to reproduction. Along the same lines, various studies have found that positive affective experiences increase attraction and solidify social bonds (L. A. Clark & Watson, 1988; Gouaux, 1971; May & Hamilton, 1980; Veitch & Griffitt, 1976). Moreland (1987) concluded that the development of shared emotions is one of the principal causes of the formation of small groups.

More generally, happiness in life is strongly correlated with having some close personal relationships. Research suggests that it does not seem to make a great deal of difference what sort of relationship one has, but the absence of close social bonds is strongly linked to unhappiness, depression, and other woes (e.g., Argyle, 1987; Freedman, 1978; Myers, 1992). People with high levels of intimacy motivation tend to enjoy higher levels of happiness and subjective well-being (McAdams & Bryant, 1987), which is likely a result of their tendency to form and maintain a rich network of friendships and other social bonds (McAdams, 1985). Having some intimate bond appears to be important and perhaps even necessary for happiness. Social isolation is practically incompatible with high levels of happiness.

Negative affect. Threats to social attachments, especially the dissolution of social bonds, are a primary source of negative affect. People feel anxious at the prospect of losing important relationships, feel depressed or grief stricken when their connections with certain other people are severed, and feel lonely when they lack important relationships (Leary, 1990; Leary & Downs, in press; Tambor & Leary, 1993).

Anxiety is often regarded as the extreme or prototype of negative affect, and it is clearly linked to damaged, lost, or threatened social bonds. In fact, social exclusion may well be the most common and important cause of anxiety (Baumeister & Tice, 1990). Horney (1945) identified the source of "basic anxiety" as the feeling of "being isolated and helpless in a potentially hostile world" (p. 41); of course, that formula mixes two different sources, insofar as isolation is a function of the belongingness need, whereas helplessness is a frustration of control (which is probably another fundamental motivation). Anxiety and general distress seem to be a natural consequence of being separated from important others. Children as young as 1 year old show extreme distress—separation anxiety—on being separated from their mothers (Bowlby, 1973), and adults show similar reactions when they must leave loved ones for an extended period of time. Furthermore, people's memories of past rejections are tainted with anxiety (Tambor & Leary, 1993), and even just imagining social rejection increases physiological arousal (Craighead, Kimball, & Rehak, 1979).

Consistent with the social exclusion theory of anxiety, Barden, Garber, Leiman, Ford, and Masters (1985) found that anxiety ensues if people are excluded from social groups, but experiences of social inclusion appear to counteract the effects of exclusion and remove the anxiety. Mathes, Adams, and Davies (1985) predicted that a threat to self-esteem would mediate the link between jealousy and anxiety, but their results did not support their hypothesis. Instead, they found that the loss of relationship led directly to anxiety.

Like anxiety, depression may be precipitated by a variety of events, but failing to feel accepted or included is certainly one of them. Both general depression and social depression (i.e., dysphoria about the nature of one's social relationships) are inversely related to the degree to which one feels included and accepted by others (Tambor & Leary, 1993). Hoyle and Crawford (in press) found that both depression and anxiety were significantly correlated (negatively) with students' sense of belonging to their university.

Jealousy is another negative affective state that is a common response to threats to one's relationships. Pines and Aronson (1983) reported that, in a series of surveys, some experience of jealousy was essentially universal, in the sense that everyone experiences it sooner or later. Moreover, more than half of their respondents described themselves as being "a jealous person" and correctly estimated that slightly more than half of the other participants would respond in that same way; however, they also said that the true incidence of jealous people was even higher, because some jealous people deny their jealousy. Pines and Aronson emphasized that "feeling excluded" is a major cause of jealousy.

Regarding jealousy, perhaps the most relevant finding for our purposes was that of Reiss (1986), who concluded that jealousy is cross-culturally universal. Reiss carefully investigated the extravagant claims made by some observers and anthropologists that, in certain cultures, people are able to exchange sexual partners and intimate partners without any possessiveness or jealousy, and in every case the claim turned out to be unwarranted. Cultures may indeed vary as to which particular actions or signs of affection are regarded as justifying jealous reactions, and they may differ in how people express their jealousy, but sexual jealousy is found in all cultures.

Loneliness reflects "an individual's subjective perception of

deficiencies in his or her social relationships" (Russell, Cutrona, Rose, & Yurko, 1984, p. 1313). In other words, people feel lonely when their belongingness needs are being insufficiently met. Moreover, it appears that belongingness, rather than mere social contact, is the crucial factor. Mere social contact does not, by itself, buffer people against loneliness. Lonely and nonlonely people do not differ markedly in the amount of time they spend with other people. However, lonely people spend less time with friends and family—those who are most likely to fulfill their needs to belong—than nonlonely people (Jones, 1981). Furthermore, loneliness is much more strongly related to one's sense of social isolation than to objective indexes of one's social network, such as one's sheer number of friends (Williams & Solano, 1983). In one study, the correlation between self-reported loneliness and the degree to which people felt included and accepted by others was found to be −.71 (Spivey, 1990). Generally, loneliness seems to be a matter more of a lack of intimate connections than of a lack of social contact (Reis, 1990; Wheeler, Reis, & Nezlek, 1983).

Yet another highly aversive emotional state is guilt. Despite a long tradition of analyzing guilt in terms of self-evaluation according to abstract moral standards, recent work has increasingly emphasized the interpersonal structure of guilt (Baumeister, Stillwell, & Heatherton, 1994; Cunningham, Steinberg, & Grev, 1980; Jones & Kugler, in press; Jones, Kugler, & Adams, 1995; Miceli, 1992; Tangney, 1992). Empirical studies of how people induce guilt in others have found that such inductions are almost entirely confined to close interpersonal relationships and that a major reason for inducing guilt is to cause one's partner to exert himself or herself more to maintain the interpersonal relationship (e.g., by spending more time with or paying more attention to oneself; Baumeister, Stillwell, & Heatherton, in press; Vangelisti, Daly, & Rudnick, 1991). Many episodes of guilt can thus be understood as responses to disturbances or threats to interpersonal attachments.

Two specific events that thwart people's need to belong are divorce and death. Divorce is not generally recognized as an occasion for joyful celebration, even if the divorce was desired more fervently than the wedding had been. Divorce produces varied forms of distress, including anger, depression, desolation, and loneliness, in nearly everyone. Weiss (1979) concluded that some "emotional upset . . . appears to be a nearly inevitable accompaniment to marital separation" (p. 210) and is found "even though [the] marriage had become unhappy" (p. 202). In contrast, Spanier and Casto (1979) and Goode (1956) did find a minority of participants who reported relatively little distress in response to divorce. Spanier and Casto (1979) thought that one possible explanation for the discrepancy was that their single interview technique (in contrast to Weiss's multiple sessions) was less sensitive to some deep or occasional feelings. Consistent with this, they concluded that certain forms of distress, such as regret, yearning, and bitterness, "actually may increase over time" (p. 226). Price and McKenry (1988) suggested another reason that one-time measures may fail to find universal distress after divorce: Many couples may have passed through the most distressing phase before the researchers collect their data.

Spanier and Casto (1979) listed the emotional turmoil after divorce as mixed from among

> feelings about the (former) spouse, such as love, hate, bitterness, guilt, anger, envy, concern, and attachment; feelings about the marriage, such as regret, disappointment, bitterness, sadness, and failure; and more general feelings, such as failure, depression, euphoria, relief, guilt, lowered self-esteem, and lowered self-confidence. (p. 213)

Price and McKenry (1988) summarized the common emotional reactions to divorce as including "extreme stress, including feelings of rejection, depression, hostility, bitterness, loneliness, ambivalence, guilt, failure, confusion, disorganization, and sometimes relief" (p. 42). It is clear that plenty of negative affect accompanies divorce.

Perhaps the strongest emotional reactions human beings experience involve death, both the death of oneself and the death of other people. The death of a spouse, child, or close friend ranks among the most stressful events that people experience (T. H. Holmes & Rahe, 1967; Weiss, 1979). Grief often takes the form of an especially severe depression. Some conceptualizations of grief portray it not as a reaction to the loss of the person but as a reaction to the loss of a linkage with another person (Lofland, 1982). It is interesting that people even grieve deeply over the death of spouses with whom they had had troubled marriages. As Weiss (1979) observed, "Apart from minor variations, . . . nearly disabling grief was the rule, even among individuals who could say about the preceding marriage, as one widow did, 'Ours wasn't the best marriage in the world' " (p. 202).

Anxiety about death, whether of oneself or others, can be regarded as stemming (at least in part) from a threat to belongingness (Baumeister & Tice, 1990). As Lofland (1982) pointed out, when people die, relationships end. Along these lines, Conte, Weiner, and Plutchik (1982) linked death anxiety to fear of loneliness (see also Mijuskovic, 1980). In a study of death anxieties, Bednarski and Leary (1994) found that a primary basis of people's fears about death involved concerns with being separated from friends and family. These interpersonal concerns appeared to be a more important source of death anxiety than fears about no longer existing or uncertainty about what happens after death. This link between death anxiety and separation anxiety may explain why most positive depictions of life after death have emphasized togetherness with family and loved ones, with a broad community of like-minded believers, with a loving deity, or with all of the above (e.g., Baumeister, 1991). If death anxiety is rooted in threats to belongingness and social inclusion, then fears of death can best be soothed by emphasizing that death will involve a continuation or even an improvement in one's belongingness status.

Indirect effects. Although we have emphasized emotional consequences of changes in belongingness, there may also be indirect ways in which belongingness affects emotion. As shown earlier with cognitive processes, emotional processes may change when the situation involves a close friend or intimate partner. Tesser (1991) has reviewed a number of such effects. The main implication is that emotional responses to the relative outcomes of self and other depend heavily on whether the other person is a close relationship partner such as a good friend. When the performance involves a domain that is important to the self, it is upsetting to be outperformed by another person, and the emotional distress is magnified if the other person is a

close friend (see also Tesser, Millar, & Moore, 1988). In contrast, if the performance involves some ability that is not important to self-definition, then superior performances by friends (but not strangers) produce positive affect. One key difference is what Tesser (1991) called the reflection process: The positive achievements of one's relationship partners reflect favorably on the self (as long as they do not make the self look bad by comparison in some important way). Similar achievements by strangers do not reflect on the self, of course, and so they do not produce positive affect. Meanwhile, it appears that the positive accomplishments of close others in domains relevant to one's own identity have a special capacity to generate distress by threatening one's cherished views of one's own important abilities. Thus, the existence of a close relationship with another person changes the way one responds emotionally to that person's performance outcomes in complex but predictable ways.

Critical assessment. The evidence reviewed in this section was drawn from sociology, anthropology, and several subfields of psychology, and it is based on a variety of methods including surveys, observational studies, cross-cultural comparisons, autobiographical narratives, and experiments. Although several of these methods are generally regarded as less conclusive than experimentation, the consistency of the conclusion across multiple methodologies is itself a source of confidence. Thus, for example, one could dispute Pines and Aronson's (1983) determination about the pervasiveness of jealousy by noting that their sample was possibly skewed to include a high proportion of people who were interested in jealousy, but the very high (indeed, universal) incidence of jealousy across different cultures, as attested by Reiss's (1986) review, makes it seem unlikely that Pines and Aronson were wrong in concluding that jealousy is very common.

Probably the greatest ambiguity in this section's evidence attaches to the discussion of death. To be sure, it is implausible to dispute that emotional distress very typically attends the death of a loved one or relationship partner. Still, there are alternate explanations for this distress that could possibly dispense with the need to belong. A partner's death may have effects on material and pragmatic concerns (e.g., loss of income), may create distressing uncertainty about one's own future, may affect the self-concept, and may activate worries about one's own death.

Conclusion. Many of the strongest emotions people experience, both positive and negative, are linked to belongingness. Evidence suggests a general conclusion that being accepted, included, or welcomed leads to a variety of positive emotions (e.g., happiness, elation, contentment, and calm), whereas being rejected, excluded, or ignored leads to potent negative feelings (e.g., anxiety, depression, grief, jealousy, and loneliness). The near universality of distress associated with divorce and bereavement is consistent with the belongingness hypothesis; indeed, there is no firm evidence in those literatures that significant social bonds can ever be broken without suffering or distress, even though (as noted) not every recently divorced or bereaved person will necessarily be suffering acutely when the interviewer happens to call.

Although the evidence was not equally abundant or equally strong for all emotions, the consistency across multiple emotions was impressive. It seems quite safe to conclude that both positive and negative emotional reactions are pervasively linked to relationship status. The existence of an interpersonal bond changes the way one responds emotionally to the performances and actions of a relationship partner and indeed intensifies many emotional reactions. Moreover, actual or possible changes in belongingness status constitute an important cause of emotions. The evidence is sufficiently broad and consistent to suggest that one of the basic functions of emotion is to regulate behavior so as to form and maintain social bonds.

General Discussion

We have considered a broad assortment of evidence pertaining to the hypothesis that the desire for interpersonal attachments—the need to belong—is a fundamental human motivation. Most of the metatheoretical requirements we outlined for evaluating such a hypothesis appear to be satisfied, although some issues remain. We begin by reviewing the major conclusions.

Again and again, we found evidence of a basic desire to form social attachments. People form social bonds readily, even under seemingly adverse conditions. People who have anything in common, who share common (even unpleasant) experiences, or who simply are exposed to each other frequently tend to form friendships or other attachments. Moreover, people resist losing attachments and breaking social bonds, even if there is no material or pragmatic reason to maintain the bond and even if maintaining it would be difficult.

Abundant evidence also attests that the need to belong shapes emotion and cognition. Forming or solidifying social attachments generally produces positive emotion, whereas real, imagined, or even potential threats to social bonds generate a variety of unpleasant emotional states. In short, change in belongingness is a strong and pervasive cause of emotion in ways that support the hypothesis of a need to belong. It is also evident that people think a great deal about belongingness. They devote a disproportionate amount of cognitive processing to actual or possible relationship partners and interaction partners, and they reserve particular, more extensive, and more favorable patterns of information processing for people with whom they share social bonds.

Deficits in belongingness apparently lead to a variety of ill effects, consistent with the view that belongingness is a need (as opposed to merely a want). Both psychological and physical health problems are more common among people who lack social attachments. Behavioral pathologies, ranging from eating disorders to suicide, are more common among people who are unattached. Although most of these findings are correlational and many alternative explanations can be suggested, recent efforts have begun controlling for these other factors, and the pure, primary effects of belongingness appear to remain strong. It appears, then, that belongingness is not only pleasant but also apparently very beneficial to the individual in multiple ways.

We proposed two aspects of the need to belong, and both appear to be important. That is, people seem to need frequent, affectively pleasant or positive interactions with the same individuals, and they need these interactions to occur in a framework of long-term, stable caring and concern. People who can satisfy one component but not the other tend to be less satisfied and less well off then people who can satisfy both, but they do seem to derive some benefits from satisfying the one component (as opposed to satisfying neither). More and better evidence is needed on this point, however; most evidence pertains to people who have the bond and lack interactions, rather than the reverse. Also, it is unclear whether the interactions must be pleasant or can be satisfactory if they are merely neutral. The evidence suggests merely that aversive or conflictual interactions fail to satisfy the need. Some evidence suggests that a framework of mutual, reciprocal concern is best, but the effects and importance of mutuality need further investigation.

The need to belong also appears to conform to motivational patterns of satiation and substitution. People need a few close relationships, and forming additional bonds beyond those few has less and less impact. Having two as opposed to no close relationships may make a world of difference to the person's health and happiness; having eight as opposed to six may have very little consequence. When a social bond is broken, people appear to recover best if they form a new one, although each individual life tends to involve some particularly special relationships (such as filial or marital bonds) that are not easily replaced. People without intimate partners engage in a variety of activities to find partners, but people who have partners already are much less active at seeking additional relationships, consistent with the satiation hypothesis.

We reviewed evidence that the need to belong affects a broad variety of behaviors; indeed, the range is sufficiently broad as to render less plausible any notion that the need to belong is a

product of certain other factors or motives. We also noted that evidence about belongingness seems to implicate some brain mechanisms and to conform to patterns that evolutionary theory would suggest, both of which seem consistent with the argument that the need is innate in humans. Still, the nonderivative hypothesis is probably the least well supported aspect of our theory, not because of any clear evidence deriving the need to belong from other motives but simply perhaps because it is relatively difficult to collect compelling data to show that a motive is not derivative. The issue of which motives derive from which others appears to be an important challenge for future motivation research.

We also considered several counterexamples that at least superficially suggested tendencies to reject social attachment. On close inspection, these patterns did not stand up as counterexamples, and indeed there was generally strong evidence of a positive need to belong that increased the subjective difficulty of rejecting or avoiding attachment.

We conclude, then, that the present state of the empirical evidence is sufficient to confirm the belongingness hypothesis. The need to belong can be considered a fundamental human motivation.

Concluding Remarks

At present, it seems fair to conclude that human beings are fundamentally and pervasively motivated by a need to belong, that is, by a strong desire to form and maintain enduring interpersonal attachments. People seek frequent, affectively positive interactions within the context of long-term, caring relationships. As a speculative point of theory or impressionistic observation, the need to belong is not a new idea; indeed, we noted a variety of previous psychological theorists who have proposed it in one form or another. What is new, however, is the existence of a large body of empirical evidence with which to evaluate that hypothesis.

If psychology has erred with regard to the need to belong, in our view, the error has not been to deny the existence of such a motive so much as to underappreciate it. This review has shown multiple links between the need to belong and cognitive processes, emotional patterns, behavioral responses, and health and well-being. The desire for interpersonal attachment may well be one of the most far-reaching and integrative constructs currently available to understand human nature.