The Need to Belong (NTB): Belongingness and Human Performance

“Much of what human beings do is done in the service of belongingness.” (Baumeister & Leary, 1995) Unconsciously, humanity works everyday to find happiness. The pursuit of happiness started when life formed millions of years ago. Happiness is largely found when a subject is with other beings. All complex creatures existing on this planet have a sense of belongingness in one way or another. However, only human beings are able to understand and take control of emotions in belongingness. Belongingness also exists in non-living elements and matter. Physicists call it gravity between two objects. Chemists call it a bond between subatomic particles. In humanity we call it attraction. Every creature from human to animal to the smallest single cell is attracted to another individual. These attractions exist because of many dynamic components working together in production of a functioning being. This paper explains the relationships and effects between emotion, motivation, and belongingness in human performance.

The need of belonging in human beings is the intrinsic desire to develop and maintain a positive, durable, and noteworthy interpersonal relationship with another human being. In order to fulfill this intrinsic desire, a subject needs periodic and constant pleasant interactions with a particular individual or groups of people. These interactions are frequent, stable, and continuously care for each other’s welfare.

One of the earliest discussions was by Sigmund Freud. He argued that the need of belongingness derives from the need of sex and filial bonds (Freud, 1930). Whereas, Alfred Adler regards the need of belongingness as a subject seeking a sense of superiority to counter a personal sense of inferiority. (Adler, 2007) Carl Jung, a former Freudian, also holds the same view with Adler. He explains humanity belongingness as seeking superiority from divine
interventions as an example of reaching out to a richer and more fulfilling purpose in life. (Seligman, & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000) In another study by Abraham Maslow (1968), he ranked belongingness needs in the middle of his motivational hierarchy. (APPENDIX A) John Bowlby, on the other hand, posited the NTB in the attachment theory. He regarded attachment existing in an individual is due to relationships a subject developed in childhood, but later his life he regarded attachment as innate based rather than a subject based on retrieving filial connections. Others also maintain similar views on the need of belongingness.

Most people who experience changes in the NTB, experience both pleasant and unpleasant emotions. This causes a subject to respond and react directly or indirectly to the situation and environment consciously. On the other hand, one’s motivation may be affected or deteriorated and yet that individual may be unaware of the causes. Later in the discussion, I will explain how one’s emotions, motivation and performance are affected by sense of belonging issues.

Bases to Belong

Humanity has many reasons for the NTB. There are a few bases that humanity reasoned the NTB. They are sense of identity, sense of security, and sense for orderliness.

Sense of Identity

Everyone wants to be identified to one thing or the other. It is the sense of identity. An identity allows a subject to distinguish oneself from the rest. A marketing research on celebrity endorsement shows that a consumer associates his learning of an identity to a celebrity through classical conditioning. (Till, Stanley, & Priluck, 2008) Classical conditioning is a process by
which unconditioned stimulus (a celebrity) is paired with conditioned stimulus (a brand product) eliciting a conditioned response. When a pleasant and attractive celebrity is used in an advertisement and endorsing a brand or product it increases sales. Repeated same stimulus creates a class of brand-belonging customers. This stems the belief formation that improves a consumers’ perception of a brand by pairing a brand with a well-regarded celebrity. The expertise, trustworthy, likeability, and familiarity in the mind of consumers allow endorsers to convey vivid messages to consumers. The repetitive contact and sense of pleasantness a person has with another object creates a lasting effect of the NTB. The NTB to a brand in marketing research shows that consumers want to be identified with a great and pleasant celebrity. This in turn causes increased affect transfer from a desired identity into a person. When a person is subjected to repetitive experiences it creates a powerful meaning of association and he/she will desire more association and a NTB to an identity. (McCracken, 1989)

Sense of Security

Colloquially said, when a person is dumped by a partner, he will experience a loss of security. This security is referred to as sense of powerlessness. Criminology studies show that gangsterism exists for the same reason as they replace the lack of a sense of security and powerlessness held by the individual. In a New York City Youth Board manual (1952) a principal wrote on the detached gang worker approach revealing the following point of view:

Participation in a street gang or club, like participation in any natural group, is a part of the growing-up process of adolescence. Such primary group associations possess potentialities for positive growth and development. Through such a group, the individual can gain security and
develop positive ways of living with other individuals. Within the structure of his group the individual can develop such characteristics as loyalty, leadership, and community responsibility (3, p. 107).

Although this is a misconception of gangsterism, individuals who join a gang gain a sense of security. This security leads a subject to increase his self-esteem. However, the gang member is most likely to develop negative ways of living instead of positive ones. Nonetheless, it is reasonable to assume that when people live under such conditions of insecurity and the struggle for survival is intensified, it leads a subject to be attracted to belong to a group to create this NTB. Baumeister’s discussed how a child seeks to belong to parent due to the inability to provide one’s own need and security. (1999) Under the condition of insecurity, a subject feels extreme helplessness and powerlessness. This kind of condition is often accompanied by a multiple of disturbing psychological expressions, ranging from a deep sense of hopelessness to anger, anxiety, and isolation leading a subject to seek belongingness to reach emotional equilibrium.

**Sense for Orderliness**

One of the most important elements that distinguish organized religious groups from congregational groups is instilling orderliness in their members. (Iannaccone, 1994) Most people say that cleanliness is next to Godliness but orderliness is Godliness. Furthermore, structure allows people to live a simpler life and predictability is most desired by humanity. (Sickles, 1997) According to the need of structure scale, the need for structure study shows that people tend to want to use simple structure in decision making. Complexity causes a person to be indecisive. (Neuberg, Judice, & West, 1997) Therefore, rituals serve as activities that people
identify, recognize, and attach to an organization. In general, rituals are crucial in human social interactions when living together. Rituals fulfill the need for orderliness and security. Rituals are a means of simplification and decrease complexity of world view. Each organization implements specific rituals coined by a group. These rituals are respectively conceivable meanings. Many of them are culturally constructed over a period of time. (Wallace, 1966) When rituals are practiced frequently, one’s belongingness is owned.

Today, both religious and secular organizations use rituals as a means to maintain member turnover. They are used in both large and small organizations such as multilevel marketing companies (Amway, Shaklee, Agel, etc.), religions (Abrahamic religions, Hinduism, Buddhism, Wicca, etc.), Fraternity and Sonority (Freemason, Illuminate, Daughter of Nile, etc.), sports (FSU war chant, game open ceremony, etc.), and in the political world (National Anthems, Flag Raising, etc.). Understanding the connection of simple rituals and creating the need of belongingness in organization members will decrease organization maintenance and increase member retention in the recruiting processes.

There are many more reasons and bases people sense the NTB, however this is not the place to discuss all, such as on the basis of achievement, social connectedness, assurances, and simple social rationalization.

**Belongingness theories**

Different words and terms have been used in replacement of the NTB. Different scientists call it with a touch of their own perspectives. Some of the perspectives are based on specific motive origins, like the Freudian’s view that belongingness is caused by sex and aggression. However, Baumeister list out the criteria to satisfy the NTB.
Baumeister and Leary concluded the NTB from the motivational origin metatheory (1995). The origins are that it 1) produces effects readily under all but adverse conditions, 2) has affective outcomes, 3) directs cognitive processing, 4) leads to ill effects when upset in physical health and behavior readjustment, 5) elicits goal-oriented behaviors intended to satisfy it in subjection to motivational patterns, 6) universally applies to all people, 7) is not derived from other motives, 8) affects a broad variety of behaviors, and 9) has implications to go beyond immediate psychological functioning, such as economical and sociological pattern studies. This metatheory does not apply to those who live happily and are healthy despite living in isolation or those who do not response cognitively or emotionally during changes of belongingness situation.

The above three topics on belongingness bases about senses of identity, security, orderliness are triggers and causes of the NTB. They are not theories but common reasons people want to belong to something. The following conditions that were formulated by Baumeister and Leary set a standard conditioning for the NTB theory. This list will distinguish Baumieter and Leary’s NTB theory from others.

Condition 1: The innate quality of survival and reproductive benefits. Survival and reproduction are two reasons for the continual existence of a species. This innate quality can be explained with a cognitive perspective in human beings. The need for survival is caused by fear of pain and non-existence. Human beings know and understand that antidote to life is death. Death is an end to existence. Therefore, non-existence creates emotion of fear and cognitively the need for reproduction as means of one’s continual existence. However, this innateness cannot be explained in other animals. Their cognitive processes are less complex than us, such as ants. Yet, they seek survival and reproduction naturally without complex cognitive involvement. These innate processes for survival and reproduction are unexplainable at this stage of research.
Condition 2: Competition for power under resource scarcity presence. Scarcity of resources lead people working in teams either big or small to form group advantage. Although Baumeister regard competition as a means of a NTB, this theory is originated from the need to survive motive. However, it stands alone from the NTB perspective as competition stimulates interpersonal connections. In group setting bonds are built between members. These bonds create teamwork and prevent an outsider from intruding or sharing resources. Furthermore, individuals know that a team is more likely to survive than working individually.

Condition 3: Internal affective mechanism. Positive or thrilling affects allow a person to function cognitively and physically well. These affects are sensational and recreational. Therefore, these sensations of pleasure and pleasant affects lead a subject to want to re-experience the similar state of affairs. These internal mechanisms stimulate relatedness to others and the reinforcement of positive/negative social interactions. On the opposite side, loneliness avoidance is explained that a subject cannot easily recreate these internal affective mechanisms with another being.

Condition 4: Unlike the Freudian, Baumeister and Leary explained that people substitute relationships with new ones when losing old ones. Belongingness is not generated from filial relationships only but also by any prior connections. People generate and replace relationships through substitution process. This explains the need of affiliation which leads a subject to making new friends to replace the old and remarriages. This happens because a subject needs to replace the loss of another.

Condition 5: Time is the key to develop relationships. Single interactions establish the ground for lasting relationship. However, relationships are established over a period of time with many activities and interactions. The NTB develops over a period of time. The more time spent
between individuals will create a greater NTB for one another, creating satisfaction for the NTB iteratively. The satisfaction through frequent social contact with another person created long-term intimate relationships.

Condition 6: positive vs. negative interactions. When a person interacts positively with another person, he increases the NTB with other person. However, when a person interacts negatively with another person, it decreases the NTB to another person. Positive input will produce positive output, whereas negative input produces negative inputs. Whenever, a positive input enters into a line of negative input, the low level of the NTB increases. This is from a mathematical point of view, but it shows the possibility of increases or decreases in the level of the NTB though positive and negative interactions between people.

Here, I concluded that human being’s level of the NTB can be calculated from changes in any of the 3 elements (Time, Frequency, and Positivity of Interactions). They determine the strength of a relationship. The strength of the relationship determines the level of the NTB.

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\text{Time} \times \text{Frequency} \times \text{Positivity of Interactions} = \text{strength of the relationship} = \text{level of the NTB.}
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Condition 7: Sharing Commonality. When two strangers leave each other after a short meeting, the only matter that will bring these two people together again is their common interest. Sharing common interests set a mode to positive interactions and a path for long-term relationships. Unlike, the attachment theory by Bowlby and Ainsworth, which emphasizes that elaborating differences between two people builds attachment to one another, (Bretherton, 1992) Baumeister and Leary focus on commonality as coverage to build lasting relationships.
Condition 8: The essential properties for the NTB are non-emotional matters, such as ideology, place, toys, and people. The essential properties are the main objects that an individual wants to belong to. Baumeister and Leary found that emotions are merely mediating mechanisms and are not essential properties in belongingness. In four studies of self-regulation and social rejection, they showed that emotions and moods did not play an immediate role during the tests. (Baumeister et al., 2005) They serve as transitional factors and by-products of changes in a subject’s NTB. The study also showed that one’s motivations are not essentials properties too, but they are highly affected during changes in belongingness.

Condition 9: Stimulate by goal directedness. The NTB can be satisfied through minimum level social interactivity. Like many motivation studies, the NTB ends when a subject reaches the minimum interactivity with a property. The lifespan of the NTB starts from a trigger for the need to the point of minimum interactivity required to reach feeling of satisfaction. When contact and interaction with the property starts, the NTB reaches the maximum point and starts to maintain at a level over a period of time. Finally, the need diminishes gradually after the need is met. Below is a chart to show the increase and decrease of the need.

Chart 1.0 Stimulus of The NTB.
The changes in the stimulus are controlled by the cognitive activities and the emotional reactions are products and outcomes in contingent to the process of meeting the NTB. At the same time, people who are socially fulfilled will have less NTB compared to those who are deprived of it.

Condition 10: As a fundamental need, the NTB has effects on a human’s physical body. When a person is deprived from the NTB in social interactions, he will not only experience behavioral and psychological illnesses, but also biological illness effects, such as signs of maladjustment stress, psychological pathology, and even a weakened immune system. However, when a person’s NTB is well established, NTB satisfaction will also contribute to improvements of the physical body system. (Seligman, & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000) When the NTB changes, it affects a person’s psychology positively or negatively, and corresponding it exhibits itself in the physical body.

Condition 11: Freeing from frequent negative interactions. The NTB only exists when frequent contacts and interactions are free from negative affects and conflicts. The more negative interaction will slowly deteriorate the NTB toward a property. This is different from Condition 6, which explains that the interaction happens in both positive and negative form. This condition specifies the need to avoid negative interactions. This does not apply to a subject who is consciously staying in brutal situation due to the subject’s beliefs.

Condition 12: NTB is marked by stability and foreseeable continuation in the future. Baumeister and Leary’s reasoned that under this condition it provides a subject a relational context to his interactions with another person and the perception becomes essential to satisfy his NTB now and in the near future. They also explain that this condition is relevantly applies to
ongoing interactions with another person as meaningful and rewarding, whereas, the NTB to someone who has no continuous connection or interactions, the NTB would be meaningless.

Condition 13: A subject must know and belief that the Condition 12 is real. If a subject has a sense of the NTB, yet recognizes that it is not real or it is a pretend, then these situations are superficial to a subject.

Condition 14: Mutuality and Reciprocal. This may seem nonessential to the NTB. A subject can continue to portray one directional NTB over a period of time. However, sometime later the NTB will diminish into nonexistence. Therefore, mutuality and reciprocal interactions will prolong, sustain, and validate the existence of the NTB between subjects.

These Baumeister and Leary’s fourteen NTB conditions set a path for NTB theorists from the need of affiliation, attachment, and other relational theories. There are many others who contribute greatly in this path of study, such as Abraham Harold Maslow, David McClelland, Alfred Adler, Carl Rogers, Frederick Herzberg, and Victor Vroom. They have led topics like transpersonal psychology, organismic theory, humanistic psychology, human bonding, affection, courtship, psychodynamics, interpersonal attraction, and intimate relationship. As much personal interest in these topics, this is not the place to discuss all of them.

**NTB Social Interactions**

There are two most commonly discussed topics in NTB social interactions. They are social exclusion and social inclusion. However, both interactions exist at different levels of volitions. There are different degrees of volition, but two are the most discussed and researched are voluntarily and non-voluntarily. Here we will not discuss partial exclusions, partial inclusions and partial voluntary situations.
The above matrix table shows the possible combinations of social settings and two extreme forms of volitions. Starting with the first quadrant, it is the most favorable situation and the least challenged by problems. Anyone at anytime working under this quadrant circumstance finds him or herself happy, confident, with a sense of acceptance, and satisfied in the NTB. In the second quadrant, the subject may find himself forced to participate in an organization or in a relationship which he has no interest. Yet due to certain reasons or obligations he is part of the organization or a relationship. This person is usually not happy and certainly has a zero NTB. The third quadrant is when a subject disassociates himself from a group or a relationship willingly. Similar to the second quadrant, the subject shows a zero NTB and most likely happy when excluded. These are people who isolated themselves from a groups or relationships and want to be left alone. The last quadrant is most studied by scholars and researchers, because people in this state face extreme cognitive, emotion, motivation, and performance challenges. Baumieter was particularly interested in motivation and performance of those who fall into this quadrant. Subjects are usually forced to leave a relationship or get cut off from a group or organization of people. Every day, these situations happen to many people from all ages or in
any relational settings. People in this quadrant face many emotional and motivational disturbances caused by exclusions, such as getting lay-off from work, discrimination due to sexual orientation, and dis-fellowship from organized religious organizations. This subject is most likely to have performance issues and even physical illnesses due to emotions and motivations disturbances which weaken their ability to perform well in tasks. They also face extreme challenges in their social life, especially when rejected by those considered close or loved ones.

Social Exclusion Impairs Self Regulation

Baumeister, DeWall, Ciarocco, and Twenge (2005) were taking an interest in the involuntary social exclusions’ effects on self-regulation. There were 6 experiments done in this research. In Experiment 1, participants were led to anticipate in future belonging with family and friends group, second as misfortune causes one to lose everything group, and last, a lonely future life group. Each feedback was bogus and randomly assigned. Each was given a bitter tasting yet healthy drink. Participants were encouraged to drink the healthy yet bitter drink. Those who were in the lonely future life group showed significantly lower in partaking the of drinks compared to those from other two groups. This activity required each participant to self-regulate forcing oneself to drink the unpleasant liquid. As self-regulation is being tested on the participants, those who were told that they will live in a lonely life partook 2/3 less than the other two groups. The significant difference shows that self-regulation in individuals are impaired by social exclusion. Experiment 2, on the other hand uses good tasting and unhealthy food. All participants were told that these snacks are fattening and unhealthy. This experiment, uses immediate social rejection after participants worked in a group work. Similar to experiment 1, participants were divided
equally into 3 groups and given random and bogus identical feedbacks. This time, the results showed that the lonely life group ate much more than future belonging group. (2:1) Further experiments continue using different methods to measure self-regulations similarly thought random assigned 3 bogus feedbacks groups. Experiment 3 measured persistency working on an unsolvable puzzles, Experiment 4-6 used Performance on Dichotic Listening Task. All experiments 3-6 showed similar results that socially rejected groups tend to perform lesser in all task-oriented work than other two groups. At the same time, moods and emotions in mediation analysis were measured in each of the 6 experiments. All the groups failed to show that the future lonely life groups were immediately influenced by mood or emotions during the experiment because emotions and moods are considered as mediators instead actual effects during social rejection process.

These experiments mark the conclusions that social exclusions cause behavioral effects in self-regulation, and no signs of emotional distress or any emotional mediating role. The experiments did not conclude the process of how social exclusion impairs self-regulation. The process remained unknown at the end of the study. However, this investigation shows new understanding of the inner process when one’s NTB is thwarted. In another experiment it showed that socially excluded participants were able to eliminate self-regulation decrement when rewarded with incentives and NTB. (DeWall, Baumeister, & Vohs, 2008) This shows that socially rejected people can do well in self-regulation again despite early exclusions.

There are many other studies which have been conducted showing that when people are deprived from the NTB, they tend to perform poorer than others. These Measurements and experiments of social excluded subjects showed like self-esteem reduction and social avoidance behaviors. (Gailliot, & Baumeister, 2007; Lee, & Robbin, 1998; Baumeister, Dori, & Hastings,
intelligent thoughts reduction, (Baumeister, Twenge, & Nuss, 2002) (Lee, & Robbin, 1995; Twenge, Ciarocco, Baumeister, DeWall, & Bartels, 2007). However, these experiments did not explain the processes of social exclusion. However, each of them is an internal element of NTB. These studies are paving a path for further research on NTB in human performance.

In all the work and effort in studying involuntary social exclusion on individuals, it has shown that those who are involuntarily socially excluded display increased violent behavior, poorer intellectual performance, a loss of pro-social behavior, and a susceptibility to self-defeating behavior patterns.

At the societal level view, people who were and felt socially excluded by the dominant cultured setting have shown similar patterns as a whole. They are reflected in high crime rates, students underperforming in schools, society executed low intellectual life, high rates of drug abuse, generally lack of positive contributions to society, increasing youth suicides, and other self-destructive patterns.

Current findings show that there are common underlying processes in NTB deprivation. When one is deprived from social inclusion, individuals lose their self-regulation, self-esteem, self-worth, and self-concept, which are elements that allow individuals to control and alter his behavior in order to resist temptations, suppress socially undesirable impulses, follow rules, pursue enlightened self-interest, and make positive contributions to society. (Baumeiter & Leary, 1995)

Social rejection causes people to be less willing to improve themselves from their shortcomings. Understanding the cause-effect for social interactions vs. individual volition, will help solve many societal problems through promotions of socially inclusive activities, ideology, and acceptance.
References


APPENDIX A: Abraham Maslow’s Motivational Hierarchy