

A grounded theory of a sense of not belonging in the workplace and implications for self-concept

PhD Psychology

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Declaration

I confirm that this is my own work and the use of all material from other sources has been properly and fully acknowledged.

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Abstract

Abstract

Research suggests that a need to belong is a fundamental human need, motivating a wealth of behaviour, and that thwarting of this need has powerful consequences for emotion and self-esteem. As a place where we spend a lot of time, the workplace is increasingly central to a sense of belonging, and as such, a sense of *not* belonging (SoNB) in the workplace might have important implications for our psychological well-being.

The aim of this Grounded Theory study was to develop an understanding of the emotional, cognitive and behavioural processes involved in a SoNB in the workplace. In-depth interviews with 12 participants exploring their experiences of a SoNB revealed a theoretical framework. This framework constituted the key attributes and moderators of the phenomenon, participant's emotional experiences, and the cognitive and behavioural strategies employed to resolve the experience. It also identified a potential process through which the experience occurs. Core to this phenomenon was self-concept, the meaning participants attributed of having the experience to their sense of self. SoNB was found to undermine self-efficacy and self-esteem, as well as undermine a consistent and coherent self-concept through the conflict that emerged between who individuals thought they were, versus who they became during the experience.

The study makes a unique contribution to knowledge by providing an understanding of the subjective, lived experience of a sense of *not belonging* in the workplace that reveals the centrality of the self-concept. It offers a holistic, comprehensive synthesis of findings from previous research which has explored individual aspects of the experience, and presents a substantive theory of a sense of not belonging in the workplace.

Recommendations for future research, particularly in terms of exploring the proposed relationships are made, as well as recommendations for application of the findings in practice.

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Chapter 1 Introduction, background and rationale for the research

1.1 Introduction and background

The focus of this thesis is the experience in the workplace whereby individuals feel like an outsider, like they don't belong, and the emotional, cognitive and behavioural processes involved in that experience. My initial interest in not belonging in the workplace arose during my role as faculty facilitating a leadership development programme at the Business School where I work. During this programme I observed students who appeared to be very much out of their comfort zone, and looked like they felt that they didn't belong there. They did not appear to be engaged at all in the learning process, seemed remote and distracted, and contributed little. Reflecting on these observed behaviours reminded me of a similar learning experience of my own when I felt very out of place, as well as quite powerful occasions throughout my working life when I felt like an outsider, like I somehow did not fit in. Through discussion with friends and colleagues I discovered that this was a phenomenon which found resonance with others, that others had also gone through this experience at occasional times in their lives, and that the experience had had a detrimental impact on their wellbeing, performance, or career progression.

Given the negative impact of the experience, and the prevalence of not belonging that emerged from my anecdotal discussions, the study aim became to understand the experience of 'not belonging', specifically the situations, emotions, cognitions and behaviours that engendered it. The ultimate purpose of developing this understanding was to help those enduring it to resolve it, help prevent others from experiencing it, and help leaders and organisations to understand how better to support those going through it.

1.2 Thesis structure and terminology

At this point I will outline the structure of this thesis, and define key terminology.

This aim of *Chapter One* is to present the rationale for the methodological approach to the study – the employment of Grounded Theory. It will achieve this through presenting a brief summary of two potentially relevant theories that emerged through a high-level literature review which was conducted in order to determine what might be involved in the experience of not belonging in the workplace. The lack of fit which emerged from this initial review led me to the decision to conduct a grounded theory exploration of the phenomenon, a decision which was further supported by the dearth of studies in the extant literature that explored the experience in real-life settings or from the subjective perspective of the individual. As such, this Chapter will also

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discuss the methodologies most frequently employed in the literature and present a rationale for my choice of an interpretative approach.

Chapter Two will clarify my theoretical position and how this informs my choice of method, the application of that method, and the positioning of my substantive theory. Chapter Two will also provide full details of my chosen methodology and a discussion of the methodological steps taken. *Chapter Three* will present a discussion of the extant literature in terms of the general construct of belonging in order to situate the study prior to presentation of the findings, clarify the phenomenon being explored, and provide a further rationale for the study in terms of the fundamental nature of the need to belong. In *Chapter Four* I will present the findings from my interviews and detail the theoretical framework that has been developed, and the literature relevant to the various categories will be presented and discussed in the light of these findings in *Chapter Five*. As the various categories of the substantive theory being presented are, as will become clear, very tightly interwoven, it is necessary throughout *Chapter Five* to reference research in some sections which will be fully discussed in later, more relevant sections. The thesis will conclude in *Chapter Six* by presenting a revised theoretical framework that integrates, where appropriate, the theories from the extant literature along with a discussion of the theoretical and practical implications of the study and the contribution that it makes to theory.

1.2.1 Defining terms

The majority of the literature that pertains to the phenomenon of the experience of not belonging in the workplace explores the experience of ‘rejection’ or ‘social exclusion’ on the basis that being rejected or excluded has implications for one’s need to belong (Pond, Brey & DeWall, 2011). *Need to belong* is defined as an innate need for interpersonal attachments (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). *Rejection* is defined as a situation in which an individual attempts to form a relationship or social connection with another individual, and is either implicitly or explicitly refused (Blackhart, Nelson, Knowles & Baumeister, 2009). *Social exclusion* is a broader term and refers to any situation in which an individual feels alone or excluded (Blackhart, et al., 2009). The critical difference between the two is the extent to which the excluded individual has sought out the connection.

Williams (2001), defines *ostracism* as the ‘act’ of social exclusion: “any act or acts of ignoring or excluding of an individual or groups by an individual or groups” (Williams, 2001, p.ix.). Similarly, Hitlan, Clifton and DeSoto (2006) define *workplace ostracism* as:

“the exclusion, rejection, or ignoring of an individual (or group) by another individual (or group) that hinders one’s ability to establish or maintain positive interpersonal

relationships, work-related success, or favourable reputation within one's place of work." (Hitlan, Clifton, & DeSoto, 2006, p.216).

Drawing on these definitions, much of the research exploring workplace exclusion focuses on *actual*, rather than *perceived* exclusion. The impact that rejection, social exclusion or the act of ostracism has on one's need to belong is argued to result from the *discrepancy* that these acts create between one's need to belong and their sense of belonging (Pond, Brey & DeWall, 2011), which is reflected in Stillman, Baumeister, Lambert, Crescioni, DeWall and Fincham's (2009) definition of social exclusion as '*perceived* deficit in belongingness' (Stillman et al., 2009, p.2). As such, whilst social exclusion, ostracism and rejection are described as 'acts', their impact on one's sense of belonging is determined by the individual's *subjective* need to belong, presenting challenges to the ability to predict the outcomes of social exclusion.

1.3 Initial literature review

To begin my investigations into the experience of not belonging in the workplace I conducted an initial high-level review of the literature, the aim of which was to determine whether the phenomenon was accounted for by previous research and to find studies which would offer insight into what was involved in the experience. I began with a search for two constructs which had emerged from my informal conversations about my research with friends and colleagues: 'outsider' which led me to the literature around social exclusion, as defined above; and imposter phenomenon. As both these theories are explored in some depth in *Chapter Five* they will not be discussed here. However, what is relevant at this point is that neither theory appeared to adequately account for the phenomenon of not belonging in the workplace. Specifically, the social exclusion literature offered inconsistent findings in terms of the impact of social exclusion on emotion and behaviour, with some studies finding social exclusion to be associated with low self-esteem (Van Beest & Williams, 2006) and depression (Cockshaw & Sochet, 2010) whilst others found no change in emotion following exclusion (e.g., Twenge, Catanese & Baumeister, 2003). As well as demonstrating a lack of understanding and clarity in the literature around the experience of being socially excluded, many of the findings from the extant research were also in conflict with the anecdotal evidence I was gathering in terms of the negative emotional impact of feeling like an outsider. The potential reasons for these inconsistent and conflicting findings will be touched upon below and explored in detail in *Chapter Five*, however these inconsistencies led me to conclude that theories of social exclusion did not adequately account for the phenomenon of not belonging in the workplace.

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Similarly, Imposter Phenomenon (IP), defined as “an internal experience of intellectual phoniness in high achievers who are unable to internalise their successful experiences” (Bernard, Dollinger & Raminiah, 2002, p.321) also did not appear to account for the experience of not belonging. Whilst characterised in part by self-doubt and low self-esteem (Kets de Vries, 2009; Chrisman et al., 1994) which could explain some of these constructs in the experiences described, IP also has a strong correlation with neuroticism and depression (Bernard, Dollinger & Raminiah, 2002; Chae, Piedmont, Estadt & Wicks, 1995), which positions the phenomenon as a clinical disorder, a stable, psychological trait which is likely to surface in most situations. This however, did not resonate with the individual storytellers I encountered in the early stages of my research. Furthermore, another characteristic of IP is ‘perceived fraudulence’, which assumes that others believe you to be more capable than you consider yourself (Kolligian, 1990), which again did not resonate with the phenomenon under study, as many of those with whom I spoke talked of a fear of being evaluated *poorly* by others, not favourably. This experience is supported by other research which will be discussed in *Chapter Five*, which has found for example, that individuals with the highest imposter scores were those who rated themselves negatively but also assumed others rated them poorly as well (Leary, Patton, Orland & Funk, 2000). Whilst this better aligns IP with the phenomenon under study, the findings are inconsistent. Moreover, as an experience of ‘*intellectual phoniness*’ (Bernard, Dollinger & Raminiah, 2002, p.321) the focus of IP is primarily on concerns about competence and self-efficacy rather than *self-worth*, which as will be explored in *Chapters Four and Five*, emerged as central to the experience of not belonging in the workplace.

Given the inconsistencies in the research which emerged from my initial review, and the absence of a theory which adequately accounted for the phenomenon under study, I concluded that my research required the use of Grounded Theory (GT) which, as an inductive, qualitative approach, would allow a substantive theory to develop based on the themes and constructs which emerge from my data collection.

1.3.1 Methodological approaches to belonging and exclusion

This decision was further supported by the other significant absence that was highlighted by my initial review of the literature that presented a challenge to my understanding of what was involved in the experience of not belonging in the workplace – that of the methodological approaches to the study of social exclusion and belonging, which were predominantly positivist and quantitative, developed with the aim of understanding the potential correlates of social exclusion and predicting the cause and consequences of social exclusion, and as such offered little insight into the *subjective* experience of the individual. Whilst a full exploration of the

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studies and methodologies referenced below will be provided in *Chapter Five*, it is appropriate, in order to develop the rationale for the current study, to discuss them briefly here.

The extant research frequently involves the experimental manipulation of social exclusion. For example, the *Cyberball paradigm*, developed by Williams, Cheung and Choi (2000) employed in a great deal of social exclusion research (e.g., Twenge et al., 2001; Van Beest & Williams, 2006; Hess & Pickett, 2010; Begen & Turner-Cobb, 2015) involves participants playing a virtual game of ball toss with two or more other individuals. In the inclusion condition participants regularly receive the ball from the other players whilst in the exclusion condition, the participant initially receives the ball a couple of times and then stops receiving the ball, leading them to believe they have been excluded. In this paradigm exclusion is not signalled but inferred through the 'actions' of the other players.

Group-work rejection on the other hand involves clearly signalled and demarcated rejection, whereby the participant is involved in interacting with others and then told that no one wants to work with them (Nezlek, Kowalski, Leary, Blevins, & Holgate, 1997). In the exclusion condition this is ostensibly because they *chose* not to work with them, and in the control condition often utilised, the other participants were not *able* to work with them due to a logistical issue (e.g., Blackheart et al., 2009; Buckley, Winkel & Leary, 2004).

In the *Future Alone paradigm* participants complete a personality inventory and then, ostensibly based on their profile, receive feedback that they either will have a future filled with many social connections or one devoid of meaningful relationships (e.g., Twenge, Baumeister, Tice & Stucke, 2001). In these experiments rejection is not actually experienced but imagined in the future. Finally, *Reliving Rejection* experiments ask participants to think about past rejection experiences and either involve priming through subliminal interjection of words related to rejection (Sommer & Baumeister, 2002) or through asking participants to write a story about a time they felt rejected (Gardner, Pickett & Brewer, 2000). Again rejection is not experienced in the moment, but in these instances *relived* through the past.

These various paradigms however, as well as offering little insight into the *subjective* experience of the individual, present a challenge to interpretation as they essentially induce different experiences. For example, exclusion induced in the cyberball paradigm is *inferred* whereas in group work rejection it is clearly *intended*; future alone experiments induce *potential* rather than *actual* exclusion; and reliving rejection experiments involve participant's subjective perception of *past* rejection. Blackhart, et al., (2009) argue that different methodologies also differ in the *extent* of the rejection, including: Explicit rejection (I don't like you); implied

rejection (you've not been chosen); complete exclusion/ostracism (no attention paid to the participant); eventual ostracism (ignored over time); and unspecified rejection (relived, imagined or primed rejection).

As such, these different experiences and different levels of experience could involve different intrapersonal or interpersonal variables and result in very different outcomes. For example, an act that is perceived or interpreted as exclusion (such as in the cyberball paradigm) rather than clearly involving exclusion (such as in group work rejection) may also result in the individual questioning the *cause* or *reality* of the situation. As such, *perceived* ostracism may be a more pervasive experience than actual ostracism because of its ambiguous nature, and might be dependent upon and influenced by individual differences in terms of sensitivity to potentially negative actions as explored in 5.6, 'moderators' of *Chapter Five*. This presents a further challenge to developing an understanding of the attributes of SoNB and the associated outcomes.

This argument is supported by a study by Chernyak and Zayas (2010) which, rather than exploring actual, unambiguous exclusion explored *partial, ambiguous* exclusion whereby the participant was, after 12 out of 60 ball tosses, either excluded completely by both conspirators, included by both conspirators, or excluded by one (to the same extent as in the excluded condition) but included by the other conspirator (passing the ball to them 50% of the time). Chernyak and Zayas (2010) found that partial, ambiguous exclusion resulted in lower feelings of belonging, greater perceptions of not being liked by the excluder as well as lesser feelings of liking towards the excluder in comparison to the complete exclusion condition. As such, findings from experiments which involve actual exclusion may do little to inform us about the experience of a *sense* of not belonging.

Similarly, many experiments which involve *actual* exclusion as induced through the cyberball paradigm do not offer the opportunity for individuals to take action which might redress their inclusionary status, as potentially offered through the future alone paradigm, which, as was found by Gerber and Wheeler (2009a) may influence the choice of pro-social or anti-social behavioural responses to exclusion. Through removing the opportunity to influence one's inclusionary status these types of experiment may also impact one's need for control as well as one's need to belong and as such may again involve different intrapersonal processes and yield very different behavioural or emotional outcomes.

Finally, social exclusion experiments tend to involve exclusion by an unknown other, whereas real-life rejection typically involves exclusion, or perceived exclusion from known others rather

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than strangers, which may have a significantly greater impact on one's sense of belonging and perceived inclusionary status and therefore a greater impact on one's emotional experience (Murray, Holmes & Collins, 2006) (this is again explored in *Chapter Five*). Indeed, research has found that knowing and being close to the rejecter intensifies the negative outcomes of exclusion (Tesser, Millar & Moore, 1988).

Whilst the implications of these differences in method will be explored in the relevant sections of *Chapter Five*, it is important to note here that they do present a challenge to the assimilation and generalisation of the results found in much of the extant literature to the experience of not belonging in the workplace. However, not all of the relevant research involves laboratory experiments, and some do indeed take a more qualitative, phenomenological approach to exploring workplace belonging. For example, McClure and Brown (2008) explored the experience of belonging in the workplace using interview techniques, Belle, Burley and Long's (2015) research used interviews to explore the construct of organisational belonging, and Levett-Jones and Lathlean (2009) explored the experience of belonging with student nurses using a mixed-methods design.

Whilst these studies, as will be explored in *Chapter Five*, do provide insight into the subjective experience of belonging in the workplace, there remains a dearth of research which explores belonging in a real life setting, and indeed Levett-Jones and Lathlean (2009) and McClure and Brown (2008) and Belle, et al. (2015) are the only studies to this author's knowledge that include the theme of *not* belonging in the workplace. Moreover, a lot of the research in real-life settings still incorporates the use of various psychometric tools such as Hagerty and Patuský's (1995) Sense of Belonging Instrument-Psychological Experience (SOBI-P), the Need to Belong Scale (NTBS; Leary, Kelly, Cottrell, & Schreindorfer, 2001), and the Sense of Belonging Scale (SOBS; Hoffman, Richmond, Morrow & Salomone, 2003), and as such still attempt to quantitatively test and predict the impact of belonging, and reduce the variables involved in the experience down to clearly specified antecedents and consequences.

However, and as emerged from the current research, the constructs and concepts involved in the experience are enormously complex and determined by the subjective interpretation of the individual, and influenced by their experiences, their social and organisational context, and the *processes of attribution* that they make in regards to the causes of their experience (which are in turn influenced by their experiences and context). As these attribution processes are considered vital to the approach utilised in the study the theory will be discussed here, and will be drawn upon throughout *Chapter Five*.

1.3.1.1 Attribution theory

Attribution Theory began with the assertions of Hieder (1958) who believed that people have an innate need to understand the causes of their successes and failures and are driven by a desire to make sense of their world, and their own and other's behaviour. He argued that one's reality is determined not just by one's experience, but by the meaning one attaches to that experience and the manner in which they interpret that experience, and that those attributions then influence individual's responses to that behaviour.

Weiner (1986) proposed that our attributions vary along three primary dimensions: Locus of causality; stability; and controllability. Locus of causality refers to whether an individual attributes the cause of an outcome to internal or external causes. An internal attribution refers to causes perceived to be due to a characteristic of the individual, such as their intelligence or their likeability, whereas an external attribution refers to causes perceived to be due to factors other than the individual such as other individuals or environmental factors, such as the weather or the difficulty of a task. The stability dimension refers to the "perceived variability or permanence of a causal factor" (Harvey, Madison, Martinko, Crook, & Crook, 2014, p.131), with stable attributions considering causes of outcomes to be stable across time such as intelligence, whereas unstable attributes vary across time, such as effort. The stability dimension is related also to expectancy of future outcomes in that stable causes will predict future similar outcomes whereas unstable causes will predict different future outcomes (Weiner, 1985). The controllability dimension refers to the extent to which individuals believe that the causes of outcomes are within their control (Weiner, 1985).

Weiner (1985) argues that all causes will involve attributions across all three of these dimensions, and in a review of the literature exploring the causal attributions of success and failure he found support for the causal structure. Eleven of the 12 studies identified locus of causality as a dimension in the causal attributions of success or failure, ten identified the stability dimension, and ten identified the controllability dimension, offering support for the three dimensions of perceived causality. Further empirical evidence that supports the predictions of attribution theory will be explored in the relevant sections of *Chapter Five*.

Crittenden (1983) however, argues that attribution theories focus too greatly on the intrapersonal and disregard the social context and the social interaction in which attributions are made and suggests that attribution is a "process that begins with social perception, progresses through causal judgement and social inference, and ends with behavioural

consequences” (p.426) and as such researchers ought to pay attention to the influence of contextual factors that may influence our attributions (Weary & Arkin, 1981).

Crittenden argues for a symbolic interactionist approach to attribution theories. Symbolic interactionism proposes that “society, reality and self are constructed through interaction” (Charmaz, 2006, p.7). The theory argues that individual’s behaviour towards things and others is based on the meaning they place on them, and that meaning is determined through interaction and interpretation (Blumer, 1969). Both symbolic interactionism and attribution theories are concerned with how individuals make sense of their worlds, their desire to be able to understand and predict their environments and control their own and other’s behaviour. Both argue that individual behaviour is informed by the subjective construction of reality and their subjective interpretations rather than objective fact (Stryker & Gottlieb, 1981).

However, whereas attribution theories regard attribution as an intrapersonal, cognitive process, symbolic interactionism regards attribution as a social activity in which events are given meaning through the course of interaction, and that an individual’s interpretation of them and the causal attributions they make will be constrained by the social context. Similarly, whilst attribution theories are positivist and deterministic, assuming that individuals and their choice of action is governed by universal laws and based on objective properties, symbolic interactionism assumes multiple realities and that the interpretations of events that individuals make which are based on their unique perspectives are all valid interpretations rather than ‘biased’. As such, any discrepancy between another’s intentions and the intentions attributed to them does not constitute bias, but merely two different versions of reality (Crittenden, 1983).

This perspective therefore, positions experience, the meaning of that experience, the attributions inferred about that experience, and responses to that experience as being intimately dependent upon individual interpretation, which are all influenced by previous experience and social context. Some of the processes implicated in SoNB might include the cause of the experience (which may be implicated in the extent to which exclusion is ambiguous), the individual’s perception of situational control (which may be implicated by the extent to which they can redress their inclusionary status), as well as the extent to which the experience is attributed as having self-importance (which may be implicated by the extent to which the exclusion is from a group or by an individual that is known or valued by the individual). All of these integral attribution processes and the social context in which they are made, are likely to have an influence on the impact of SoNB; all are likely to be manipulated extraneously

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by experimental designs; and none of which are measured or accounted for in quantitative, positivistic studies of social exclusion and belonging.

As such, in order to fully explore and understand the experience of not belonging in the workplace from the subjective experience of the individual requires a qualitative approach that takes account of and explores the individual's subjective experience of not belonging in order to develop a nuanced substantive theory. The details of this methodological approach and the rationale for the specific method chosen will be discussed in the following Chapter.

Chapter 2 Methodology

2.1 Research aims

As described, the objective of the research was to understand what is involved in the workplace experience of feeling like an outsider or feeling that one does not belong. The study aimed to develop a substantive theory to understand what situations and factors might contribute to the experience, what cognitions, emotions and behaviours are involved, how the experience is managed by individuals, and what impact the experience might be having on psychological wellbeing.

Specifically, the research posed the following research questions:

1. What are the concerns which engender a sense of not belonging (SoNB)?
2. What emotions, cognitions and behaviours are involved in the experience?
3. What is the impact of this experience on psychological wellbeing?
4. How do individuals attempt to cope with the experience?

2.2 Research philosophy

In determining the design of a research study consideration needs to be paid to the theoretical and philosophical foundations and assumptions which inform the design and execution of the research. Specifically, the researcher's ontological position, their set of beliefs about the nature of being, reality and truth, and their epistemological position about the nature of knowing and the relationship between the knower and the known, need to be compatible with the researcher's approach to research – their methodology (Lincoln, Lynham & Guba, 2011; Newman, 2008).

Ontology is a philosophy of the nature of reality and is concerned with understanding the nature of existence and truth (Hudson & Ozanne, 1988). It considers whether there is a single, *objective* reality, whereby phenomena exist independently of the observer, determined through sensory input, and is thus universal, or whether there are multiple realities which are *subjective*, and determined by the contexts, interactions, thoughts, and interpretations of individuals (Mills, Bonner & Francis, 2006). Reality as such, from a subjectivist perspective, is inseparable from the observer.

Epistemology is the philosophy of knowledge and is concerned with what can be known and how we come to know (Girod-Seville & Perret, 2001). It addresses the choice of methodological

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approaches to discovering reality. A *positivist* epistemological perspective considers that knowledge should be created through the use of systematic, objective observation and experimentation in order to establish universal, deterministic laws about the real world, laws which operate through cause and effect, to predict behaviour (Charmaz, 2006). An *interpretive* epistemological position in contrast seeks to understand, rather than explain the social world through exploring, describing and *interpreting* participant experience (Smith, 2008), exploring the subjective meaning of a given phenomenon based on a participant's experience and interaction with objects and others (Howitt, 2010).

2.2.1 My epistemological and ontological position

As detailed above, the objective of the current study was to develop an understanding of the emotional, cognitive and behavioural processes involved in a sense of not belonging in the workplace from the subjective perspective of the individual. As explored in *Chapter One*, central to these perspectives are argued to be the individual's interpretation of their experience, particularly the processes of attribution, meaning and sense-making that inform this interpretation.

A subjectivist ontology asserts that knowledge is inseparable from individuals as all knowledge depends on our perspective, it is based on our interpretation of the world, and is therefore subjective and contextual (Cunliffe, 2011). Interpretivist researchers argue that humans are conscious beings, free to choose alternative interpretations and meanings of that which they experience. Individuals therefore are agentic constructors of their own realities through their thoughts and interpretations rather than just perceivers of reality (Ashworth, 2008). Whilst some of these constructions and interpretations are argued to be idiosyncratic, unique to the individual's experience and interpretation (Allport, 1962), subjectivists argue that we incorporate into our experience and system of interpretation the knowledge and perspective of others through interaction and sharing of common meanings and constructs (Kelly, 1955). A subjectivist position therefore asserts that our subjective realities are in part socially constructed, a mix of our internal representations, meaning, experience, thinking and emotion, and the external world that we encounter, which is both socially (as well as physically) constructed (Ashworth, 2008).

For subjectivist researchers, therefore, reality is personal and experiential, created through experience (Cunliffe, 2011) and as such, the subjectivist researcher seeks to understand an *individual's* experience of phenomena, their life world (Ashworth, 2008) and explores subjective experiences and individual understanding, meaning and sense making (Hudson & Ozanne,

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1988). This perspective aligns with the focus of my research which was to understand how individuals made sense of and found meaning in their experience, and how they subjectively constructed their realities.

Whilst the subjective researcher acknowledges that knowledge and sense-making is both individually and socially constructed, others argue that subjectivity focuses too much on the experience of the individual rather than the social nature of experience (Chamberlain-Salaun, Mills & Usher, 2013). They emphasise that meaning-making also happens in relation to others (Cunliffe, 2011). Intersubjectivity considers the way in which we jointly construct meaning, shaping reality and shared understanding between us through interaction (Ricoeur, 1992). The intersubjective perspective asserts that experience, meaning, and understanding is shared and evolving, created and understood in the space between I and thou (Cunliffe, 2011). Individual and other are interwoven, responsive to each other, making sense of experience through relational, embodied and embedded interactions, specific to time, place, context and relation to others.

Intersubjective researchers therefore are concerned with the process of making sense, exploring how we continually make sense, interpret and relate with others and experience (Cunliffe, 2011). The current research does indeed affiliate with an intersubjective perspective in many ways: My own subjectivist position as well as that of symbolic interactionism that informs the study, does assume that meaning is constructed in a social context and in part, through interaction with others; in this study, central to the experience is the individual's consideration of the self in relation to others, and consideration of the other's perspective of the self. However, the primary focus of the current research was to explore subjective, individual experience, the meaning individuals attributed to their experience, and the implications of this meaning on their psychological responses to that experience, rather than the social processes involved in constructing that meaning. As such, whilst this current research and the positioning of the substantive theory takes account of the social context and interactions in which meaning and knowing is created, a subjectivist perspective offers the greatest insight to the specific research questions posed by the current research.

2.2.2 Symbolic interactionism

As discussed in Chapter One, this study is also informed by symbolic interactionism, a theoretical perspective that asserts that individuals do not passively respond to their experience, but that responses are determined by the meaning that is placed on events and actions (Benzies, 2001). Individuals as such, act towards things based on the meanings they have

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for them. These meanings are constructed through interaction with others and made sense of through a process of interpretation (Blumer, 1969).

Interpretation of the meaning of actions and interactions is also influenced by *past* interactions which inform what symbols the individual selects to attend to, thus shaping their perspective, understanding and ultimately, their action (Blumer, 1969; Charon, 1992; Meltzer, 1972). Each participant therefore, has a unique understanding, history, and experience that makes different acts, actions and symbols salient (Chamberlain-Salaun, Mills & Usher, 2013). To understand behaviour from a symbolic interactionist perspective therefore, requires an interpretive approach, one that allows the researcher to get inside the individual's lifeworld and see the world as they see it – understand their subjective interpretation and the meaning that informs their behaviour (Carter & Fuller, 2015; Corbin & Strauss, 2008). The approach should therefore afford the researcher the opportunity of developing an emic, insider's perspective, developing an insight and understanding of the significance of that meaning to the individual, what is of concern to them, what they pay attention to, and to understand their idiographic internal representation of the experience (Ashworth, 2008).

2.3 Grounded Theory vs. other qualitative approaches

2.3.1 Grounded theory

Grounded Theory (GT) is a method of data collection and analysis which, rather than simply attempting to describe a given phenomenon, aims to develop a substantive theory about the phenomenon which is based, and grounded in the data gathered. A substantive theory is one which addresses a particular issue in a specific area, such as not belonging in the workplace (Charmaz, 2006). GT is an inductive methodology, and as such, grounded theorists, rather than *looking* for something in the data, wait for something to *emerge* from the data and develop, through that emergence, a substantive grounded theory.

In *Doing Grounded Theory: Issues and Discussions*, Glaser positions GT as a methodology which seeks to understand an experience in a substantive area from the perspective of the participants. The focus of the method is to uncover “the main concern of the participants whose behaviour continually resolves their concern” and influences the behaviours observed (Glaser, 1998, p.115).

There have emerged different variations of grounded theory since its initial development in 1967 (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). However, the primary concept of GT is described similarly in many methodological texts as a systematic, iterative approach to generating theory from data (e.g., Bryman, 2008; Dey, 1999). In all GT, data collection and analysis are conducted

concurrently, with successive sources selected to explore and refine themes as they emerge from the data. Data are coded, and codes synthesised into categories that make analytical sense of the phenomenon under study. Central to the development of the theory is the emergence of a core concern or category which integrates the analysis and provides a theoretical framework which explains the phenomenon being explored (Dey, 2007).

Whilst there are a variety of alternative qualitative methods, GT was considered the most appropriate approach for the current study for a number of reasons: Firstly, the study aimed to identify recurring themes and constructs across the sample group. Methods which focus on the specific experience of one or a small number of individuals, such as interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) were therefore considered too idiographic and not appropriate to the study (Smith & Osborn, 2004). Secondly, the intention was to develop a substantive theory about the phenomenon, rather than a simple description of the process, and as such, thematic or content analysis, which is a descriptive method rather than a theory building approach, was also considered to be inappropriate (Howitt, 2010). Grounded theory on the other hand is designed to identify theoretical relationships between the substantive codes that, as well as describing the data, allow for an explanation of what is going on in the given phenomenon and how the different categories relate to the core concern (Glaser, 1978).

Thirdly, as I have myself experienced the phenomenon under study, this presented a very real possibility that the review of the literature, collection of data, and analysis, could be biased by personal experience. Avoidance of an in-depth literature review prior to conducting the research, as well as an inductive rather than deductive approach to coding, ensures that the analysis is not biased by a priori theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), and reduces the impact of the personal experience of the researcher. Whilst, as will be discussed in 2.7 *Reflexivity*, the sense-making and subjectivity of the researcher is inherent in subjective and interpretive research (Chamberlain, et al. 2013), taking this approach to engaging with the literature and analysing the data helps to minimise the influence of my preconceptions on the review of the literature and ensure that the constructs and themes that emerge arise from the *data*.

2.3.1.1 Variations in Approach

Since its origination by Glaser and Strauss in 1967 (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) there have emerged three main, differing versions of the approach: Glaser's "classic" Glaserian grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Glaser, 1978; Glaser, 1998); Strauss and Corbin's evolved model (Corbin & Strauss, 2008); and Charmaz's constructivist grounded theory (Charmaz, 2008). Whilst some of these variations are more methodological in nature, it is argued that the different approaches

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reflect inherently different ontological and epistemological perspectives that inform the means by which the researcher analyses and interprets the data, and thus should be addressed before a particular method is decided upon (Morse, 1991).

I will begin by considering the methodological differences and how they informed my choice of Glaser's method, before going on to discuss the deeper theoretical differences and again, my rationale for remaining true to Glaser's methodology.

2.3.1.1.1 Methodological differences

The first key methodological difference between the three variations is their emphasis on induction versus deduction, played out particularly in the use and timing of the literature review and the techniques employed during analysis. As discussed, Glaser (1998) and Charmaz (2006) both contend that the literature review should be delayed until after data analysis to avoid imposing prior theory and preconceived ideas on the formulation of theory (Charmaz, 2006). Corbin and Strauss (2008) however, argue that the literature can serve to increase sensitivity to nuances in the data, and help the researcher formulate questions to ask in interviews, and as such propose that the literature be consulted prior to data collection and analysis. Strauss and Corbin also employ specific technical procedures, detailing questions to ask of the data during analysis, explicitly looking for process, conditions and context (Corbin and Strauss, 2008), thus forcing the data into specific pre-formulated categories (Glaser, 1978). As discussed above, a critical concern of mine was that my prior experience would likely bias the reading of the literature, directing me to literature that reflected my experience, my sense-making, and what was significant to me. This in turn would influence what I looked for in the data, and my subsequent analysis of the data. As such, in order to ensure that the theory developed reflected, as much as possible, the subjective experience of my participants, it was critical to conduct a literature review after my data collection and analysis, and to facilitate the inductive emergence of constructs from the data. Strauss and Corbin's model was therefore not appropriate for the current study.

Another important differentiator between the variations is the significance and centrality of the core category. The original intention of classic grounded theory is the systematic generation of theory from data which is represented as a core category, and is abstracted from the descriptions of participants (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). This core category conceptually explains the core concern of individuals and how they attempt to resolve this concern (Holton, 2018). Whilst both Glaser's and Corbin and Strauss' models adhere to this central tenet of the methodology, Charmaz argues that looking for and focusing on a core category interrupts the

theorising process (Charmaz, 2008). This departure from the substance of the original intention of the method was too fundamental for me, and encouraged me away from Charmaz and towards Glaser. Identification of the core concern is a vital component of the original methodology: It facilitates the synthesis of the theory through articulation of how the component parts are related to the core (Glaser, 1998); it helps in delimiting and refining the theory as only categories and concepts which are related to the core remain part of the theory (Holton, 2010); and it is this core concern that Glaser considers to be the generalisable element of a substantive grounded theory and can be applied to an understanding of the phenomenon in different substantive areas (Glaser, 1978).

2.3.1.1.2 Ontological and epistemological differences

In addition to the methodological differences, it has been widely argued in the literature that a critical difference between Glaserian GT and Corbin and Strauss' and Charmaz's approach to the method is what has been argued to be the positivist and objectivist nature of Glaserian GT, compared to the subjectivist and interpretive nature of Corbin and Strauss and Charmaz (Newman, 2007). Charmaz (2006) describes Glaserian GT as objectivist GT rooted in positivism, whereby data are considered to be facts that will reveal a reality that already exists and which the researcher, as unbiased observer, is tasked to uncover (Charmaz, 2006; Charmaz, 2008). Glaser himself has been described by some as a post-positivist researcher (Bryant & Charmaz, 2007), whilst GT has been positioned in a range of ways including positivist (Annells, 1996) and neo-positivist (Annells, 1986; Crotty, 1998), the latter emphasising a shift from absolute objectivity to a *level* of objectivity, and from certainty to probability of truth (Crotty, 1998).

Indeed, original GT developed with quantitative roots out of Lazarfeld's inductive quantitative analysis (Glaser, 1998). Glaser's training was inherently positivist, focusing on codifying qualitative methods (Charmaz, 2008), and understanding the relationship between variables which leads to the development of a set of integrated hypotheses (Glaser, 1998). Reading of both the early and later texts offers numerous examples of positivist and objectivist language and terminology which supports the claims above. For example, Glaser states that a grounded theory should be able to explain and predict behaviour (Glaser, 1978), and Glaser and Strauss (1967) talk of replicating 'facts' with comparative evidence. And whilst they present GT as a *departure* from positivist adherence to verification studies, they also state that theory should offer clear enough categories and hypotheses to be able to be verified in future work and be usable in quantitative studies (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). As such, their language reflects positivist epistemological assumptions.

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Their language is also suggestive of an objectivist ontology. For example, in discussing what an analyst can offer through their theories Glaser (1978) talks of revealing ““that’s the way it is””, ““that’s right”” (p.13). In *Doing Grounded Theory* (Glaser, 1998) a clear indication of objectivity emerges through his discussion of ‘explication de text’, in which he talks of focusing on line by line constant comparison to ensure that the researcher understands what the author is saying, not the researcher’s interpretation of it. He claims in this text that other researchers present what they *think* the participant meant rather than what they *did* mean, and argues that researchers should not impute what they think is going on. Glaser also states that GT is not “concern[ed] to understand the world of the research participants as they construct it” (Glaser, 1998). Glaser and Strauss (1967) also propose that through comparing incidents and sources and concepts and categories, inaccuracies in accounts can be corrected and eroded, implying that an objective truth can be established (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Glaser (1978) also argues that “generating good ideas requires the analyst to be a non-citizen for the moment so he can come closer to objectivity and to letting the data speak for itself.” (Glaser, 1978, p.8). All these statements are strongly suggestive of a belief in an objective reality that can be revealed by a passive observer.

An objectivist and positivist perspective is also suggested in some of Glaser’s descriptions and definitions of theory. Glaser defines theory as an integrated set of hypotheses, a modestly dense, integrative and explanatory theory, which fits the real world, and includes predictions and explanations (Glaser, 1978). Glaser (1978) states that in developing theory the researcher is looking for diverse ‘facts’ from many different situations and sources in a substantive area which result in a theory with a sufficient number of general concepts that will be relevant to most situations in the substantive area, and relationships and hypotheses that explain much of the behaviour (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), implying a level of objective understanding. In particular, Glaser and Strauss (1967) also state that grounded theories have generalisable properties, and that the diverse properties of a conceptual category offer explanatory power in many structural conditions. Glaser (1978) argues that the purpose of GT is to develop conceptual hypotheses that can be applied to any time and place; “The GT power gives control by its sensitizing, enduring grab, its generalizability and its being abstract from time, place and people!” (Glaser, 1998, p.26). As such, this suggests that grounded theories for Glaser are not contextualised, but are generalisable to broader populations and contexts.

In consideration of the role of the researcher in the process of research Glaser also takes an objectivist perspective, arguing against Charmaz’ perspective that “a constructivist grounded theory recognises that the viewer creates the data and ensuing analysis through interaction

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with the viewed” (Charmaz, 2000, p.523). Glaser (2002) argues that in co-constructing the data the participant’s voice gets lost in the interaction between researcher and interviewee, and the data become distorted by the researcher’s biased interpretation. Whilst he accepts that there will always be an element of bias inherent in the research process, Glaser argues that the influence and interpretation of the researcher should be considered and analysed as an influential variable (Glaser, 2002).

However, both Glaser and Glaser and Strauss also use language that implies both a subjectivist ontology and interpretive epistemology. For example, in reiteration of his statement that all is data, Glaser (1978) talks about interviews, observations or “biases of self and others” (p.8), and states that data does not need to be “sanctified, objective or valid” (p.8). He also describes four sets of data including baseline: The description offered by the participant; properline: what the participant *thinks* he/she should tell the researcher, irrespective of what ‘reality’ is, and describes the participant’s motivation for “correct distortion” (p.9); interpreted data: the interpretation of the professional irrespective of whether this changes the way others might see the data; and vaguing out where the participant just offers ‘vagueries’. He states that the researcher’s job is to let these forms of data emerge and induce their meaning. He also argues that within the researcher is the biographical and conceptual build up that develops as they immerse themselves in the data and the method, and which guides them to “interpret and explain” the data (Glaser, 1978, p.2), implying both that reality is subjective and that knowledge is achieved through interpretation (Glaser, 1998). Similarly, Glaser (1978) discusses GT as ideational, about generating *ideas* about the data and emerging theory, and that “good ideas contribute most to the science of sociology. Findings are soon forgotten but not ideas.” (p.8). In his distinction between scholar and analyst he again talks about taking chances with, not always *correct* ideas. Glaser (1978) also states that being aware of many theoretical codes, sensitises the researcher to the “myriad of implicit integrative possibilities in the data” (p.73), and that grounded theories are not proven – they are only suggested (Glaser, 1978).

In reference to theory, Glaser states that “the theory is an integrated set of hypotheses, not of findings. Proofs are not the point” (Glaser, 1978, p.134). And whilst he talks of hypotheses, and generalised relationships amongst categories, he states that these hypotheses are generated with enough evidence to “establish a suggestion” not to establish proof. These statements all imply that GT is designed not to reveal objective facts, but to develop one version of the truth that is subjective to the researcher’s interpretation.

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Furthermore, Glaser (1998) also talks of the importance of understanding *meaning* from the perspective of the participant. He claims that by working with Strauss who was informed by symbolic interactionism, he learned of the social construction of realities through symbolic interactionism, and understood that individuals construct meanings from their experience and of their experience. He states therefore that in engaging with a participant the analyst “need[s] to listen to his genuine meanings, to grasp his perspectives, to study his concerns and to study his motivational drivers” (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p.32). Glaser and Strauss (1967) also argue that a researcher’s conviction in the credibility of his or her theory is not that theirs is the only plausible explanation, but that they are confident that they understand the “perspectives and meanings of the people whom they have studied” (p.224). They add that “researchers will readily agree that their own theoretical formulations represent credible interpretations of their data, which could, however, be interpreted differently by others” (p.225). These statements are suggestive of a subjective and interpretive theoretical position, one informed by symbolic interactionism, and also imply an acceptance of the influence of the researcher and the subjectivity and interpretive nature of the emerging theory.

Moreover, Glaser also intimates in his texts an acceptance of the lack of neutrality of the researcher, again implying an interpretive epistemology. For example, Glaser (1978) states that data collection, analysis and theory generation is conducted by a researcher who is “plagued by other conditions in his life” (p.2). Glaser also states that the possibilities of conceptualisation and categorisation are limited only by the psychological capacity and resources of the analyst, thus acknowledging their history, experience, and expertise in influencing the emerging theory (Glaser, 1978).

Similarly, in discussing good theory Glaser (1978) talks about the value of insight, the first of which comes from the personal experience of the researcher themselves. Glaser and Strauss (1967) encourage researchers to deliberately “cultivate such reflections on personal experience” (p.252) and not suppress them, thus accepting the influence of this perspective and the therefore subjective nature of the developing theory.

2.3.1.1.3 Theoretical agnosticism?

As such, the language used throughout Glaser’s and Glaser and Strauss’ work is mixed, ambiguous and somewhat contradictory, presenting a conundrum to the researcher considering whether Glaserian GT is consistent with and appropriate for their research objectives and theoretical perspective. Glaser however, derides the “rhetorical wrestle” as to what philosophy underpins GT (Glaser, 1998, p.5), paying little attention in his earlier works to

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ontological or epistemological debates. He instead claims that GT is theory free and can be applied to whatever data and using whatever theoretical perspective suits the data (Glaser, 2005). He argues GT should not be constrained to a particular epistemology or ontological perspective, including positivism, but can “facilitate any philosophical perspective as embraced by the researcher” (Holton, 2018, p.235). Glaser describes GT’s inherent flexibility as a general methodology that can be applied to a variety of studies and underpinned by a range of epistemological perspectives and paradigms (Glaser, 2005; Holton, 2008).

Given the contradictory language used throughout Glaser and Glaser and Strauss’ texts, the absence of an articulated theoretical position in their earlier works, and Glaser’s strong argument for the neutrality of the method, I would argue that Glaserian GT is theoretically agnostic, and is as appropriately applied to a subjectivist and interpretive research study as one with positivist and objectivist foundations.

2.3.1.1.4 GT and symbolic interactionism

There is also a wealth of discussion in the literature about the extent to which GT is informed by symbolic interactionism (SI), with many GT researchers claiming SI as the intellectual tradition which informs their methodology (Aldiabat & Navenec, 2011; Crooks, 2001; Lomborg & Kirkevold, 2003) and a myriad of references to GT being *underpinned* by SI. A selection of the many examples include Milliken and Schreiber’s (2012) claim that GT is intrinsically tied to SI, and that the “ontology, epistemology, method, and techniques of grounded theory are all steeped in symbolic interactionism, such that the two cannot be divorced” (p.685). Alvesson and Skoldberg (2000) “regard SI as the most important inspiration for GT” (p.11). Handberg, Thorne, Midtgaard, Nielsen and Lomberg (2015) state that “GT has become so tightly bound within the qualitative health research literature, SI is assumed as an underpinning of any GT study” (p.1024); and Crotteau, Bunting and Draucker (2001) claim “GT is rooted in SI, which focuses on the meaning of events to people in natural settings” (p.175).

Indeed, Strauss’ academic grounding was developed at the Chicago School of pragmatism, and as a graduate student of Blumer, who was a student of Mead, the forefather of SI (Charmaz, 2001; Milliken & Schreiber, 2012). Strauss brought a symbolic interactionist approach to GT, and a focus on the study of social action in natural settings (Charmaz, 2001). And Glaser himself, alongside Strauss, was a member of the Social Interactionist Society, a group engaged in the work of Blumer (Bunch, 2004). Irrespective of these intellectual roots and bold claims however, Glaser argues fiercely against what he describes as the *possession* of GT by symbolic interactionism, and argues that “GT is just a relatively simple inductive model that can be used

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on any data type and with any theoretical perspective...no one theoretical perspective can possess it.” (Glaser, 2005). He claims that “there is nothing wrong with the SI perspective and its use in [qualitative data analysis] QDA...they are just not characteristics of GT as a general, inductive method” (Glaser, 2005. p.11).

He goes further, arguing that by constraining GT application to SI restricts the theoretical codes that can be used to integrate the theory, as these will focus only on those that are relevant to SI, focusing the researcher on just meaning and interaction, which he argues is only one type of data that may emerge. He expresses a concern that focusing only on SI, conceptualisation is lost in meaning making patterns rather than looking for latent behavioural patterns (Glaser, 2005). As such, Glaser does not argue that GT cannot be used on SI data or by SI theorists, but rather that SI can blind researchers to other theoretical perspective’s theoretical codes, and that being more open and sensitive to all types of data, not just meaning, can enrich the emerging theory (Glaser, 2005).

2.3.1.1.5 Methodological freedom

As such, Glaser argues quite clearly, that GT is a neutral methodology that can be applied to any type of data, and with any theoretical perspective as is appropriate for the data and the study, an argument which is supported by other scholars. Charmaz (2008) for example, claims that it is not necessary to make “rigid prescriptions about data collection, analysis, theoretical leanings and epistemological positions” (Charmaz, 2008, p.178), and that GT does not need to be tied to a single epistemology (Charmaz, 2008). Holton (2018) agrees too that the researcher’s position should play out in the topic of exploration, and what they consider to be data, rather than in their choice of GT (Holton, 2018). Similarly, Locke (2001) states that whilst she considers GT to be historically objectivist, it can also be employed by subjectivist researchers.

More broadly, others argue for methodological “promiscuity” (Efran, McNamee, Warren & Raskin, 2013, p.5). In dialogue at a panel discussion Professor McNamee argues that researchers should be fluid and flexible with the way they apply and are constrained by their theoretical positions and employ methods which make sense of that consideration. Corbin too states that methods are tools not rules, and that no one methodology or philosophy will be a perfect fit for any researcher, and as such there is a need for flexibility, whilst ensuring that the researcher is aware of and reflects upon their theoretical assumptions (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Similarly, Cunliffe (2010) states that different perspectives can span methodological boundaries, and subjectivist researchers may use the same methods as objectivist researchers, but will do so in different ways. What is important to consider however, in this methodological freedom, is how

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one's ontological and epistemological position will play out through the design, analysis and writing of our research (Charmaz, 2008; Cunliffe, 2011).

As such, I considered Glaserian GT to be compatible with the objective and theoretical perspective of my research as it a) is better matched to my methodological requirements in terms of delaying the literature review and emphasising induction over deduction; b) remains true to the original intention of the method in uncovering a core concern, as well as retaining the spirit and substance of the original work set forth in *Discovery* (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) (Locke, 2001); and c) is a flexible and adaptable approach that allowed me to remain true to my ontological and epistemological position through the questions that I asked of my participants, what I considered to be data, how I analysed that data, and how I presented and wrote up my substantive theory. As such, I followed the key elements of Glaserian GT in the use of the constant comparative method, the identification of the core concern, use of theoretical codes to develop potential relationships between the categories, memoing to reflect on and develop my emerging theory, as well as the late integration of the literature. However, I applied my theoretical position to what I considered to be data, and to the development of my substantive theory. I adjusted my language to better reflect my perspective, and applied my theoretical assumptions to the positioning of my substantive theory as one potential, integrative, theoretical framework contextualised to the experience of this particular population for whom SoNB is a significant experience, and to the sense-making of this researcher, to be explored in future research.

In consideration of Glaser's position on SI, whilst he is concerned that SI can restrict what the researcher considers to be data, focussing only on meaning and blinding the researcher to other concepts and constructs (Newman, 2008), the importance of meaning and the value of symbolic interactionist theory in the current study emerged only once I had started to examine my data. Meaning emerged as vital to experience and central to my research in terms of the meaning for the self-concept that my participants placed on their experience. It was latent in the relationships between the categories and the intensity of the experience – meaning was why SoNB was so impactful and significant.

The SI lens that emerged from this realisation allowed me to then be open to meaning and interpretation and interaction emerging from the data, whilst not precluding other concepts and constructs emerging. As such, SI did not limit the range of theoretical coding that I used or impose pre-determined codes and constructs. As Chamberlain, Mills and Usher (2013) argue, SI instead sensitised me to different ways of conceptualising my data. SI allows us to understand

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the contextualised processes through which individuals make sense of their worlds and sensitises us to data which may indicate mental processes, interpretations, meaning and sense making (Chamberlain, Mills & Usher, 2013), thus enriching rather than restricting, the emerging substantive theory.

Having articulated both my theoretical perspective and my rationale for the choice of Glaserian GT, I will now go on to describe the methodological steps in my study, starting with description of the participants involved.

2.4 Participants in the current study

2.4.1 Sampling

In order to explore the phenomenon of not belonging from the perspective of those who have insight into it, the sampling procedure was purposive. Purposive sampling involves selecting participants who will provide the greatest insight into the research question, and its use is advocated when the researcher does not intend to generalise the findings to a wider population (Bryman, 2008). Accordingly, participants were recruited for the study via email, from Ashridge Business School alumni, through which they were invited to discuss a particular situation or point in their career where they felt that they did not belong, or felt like an outsider in the workplace [see *Appendix I* for full details of the invitation to interview]. The email invitation was sent to all members of the Ashridge Alumni, and resulted in an initial five responses. Apart from experience with the phenomenon of not belonging, the only other inclusion criterion was that they needed to have been in work for at least one year. All those who responded met the criteria for inclusion and all were considered to provide a valuable insight into the research questions, and as such, all were selected for interview.

Whilst the invitation to interview was crafted so as to avoid the imposition of my own bias and personal experience on respondents, it is likely that my perspective of the experience as a negative one may have been latent in the language I used. As such, it is important to be mindful that those who responded to my invitation may be individuals for whom the experience of not belonging was negative and significant, which could influence the data gathered and the theory generated, and should be born in mind in the positioning and interpretation of my substantive theory.

When analysis was complete for my initial sample of five participants my second call for participation, this time through posting the same invitation to interview on LinkedIn, remained broad and unfocused and resulted in an additional three participants. However, this second group resulted in a gender bias towards males (5:3) and as such I determined that I needed a

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better understanding of the perspectives of women. Therefore, after completion of the data analysis of my second sample set I issued a final invitation to interview, again via LinkedIn, which resulted in another three applicants: Two women and one man.

2.4.1.1 Demographic and employment profile of final sample

By the close of the data collection stage of the study I had a final sample of 12 participants (6 men and 6 women). 11 participants from my sampling procedures plus my pilot participant. My sample ranged in age from 28-61; mean age of 46. Participants were asked where they currently reside and to specify their nationality. All participants resided in the United Kingdom, but nine participants were White-British, one was Indian-American, one India-British, and one White-Russian.

Seven participants worked in the private sector, three worked in the public sector, one worked in both (consultant) and one worked for a not-for-profit organisation. The mean number of years worked in current role was 5.79, ranging from 5 months to 15 years, and the mean number of years in employment was 22.9 ranging from 5-45. With the exception of three participants who were self-employed, all participants, based on job title, held middle to senior level roles, including four 'Heads of', two 'Directors', two 'Managers' and one 'Senior' professional.

2.4.2 Ethics

Appendices II and III detail the Information Sheet and Consent Forms used in the current study. These were sent to participants prior to interview, and at the start of the interview participants were asked if they had read the Information Sheet and were invited to ask questions. After this their agreement to participate was checked again. It was reiterated that the interview would be audio-recorded, but that no one else would hear the recording apart from myself and my transcriber.

I also clarified the process by which I would protect their data: The transcripts would be anonymised and given a unique identifier (i.e. P1M1 referred to participant 1, male 1), and that the only document associating the identifier with their name was a single, password-protected document that only I could access. At the close of the interview, participants either handed me or emailed a signed copy of the Consent Form for my records.

2.5 Procedure

2.5.1 Data collection

2.5.1.1 Interviews

When qualitative interviews are proposed, it is important to consider how qualitative interviewing methodologies vary in terms of their philosophical underpinnings and the extent to which the interviewer and the context of the interview is perceived to shape the data (King, 2004). Madill, Jordan and Shirley (2000) propose that qualitative methodologies can be placed along a dimension from a realist epistemological position to a radical constructionist position. Realist interviews consider the interview data to provide an accurate account of the interviewee's real life experience and place little bearing on the context of the interview situation (King, 2004). On the other hand, radical constructionists consider the data generated to be a construction of the interview interaction, and specific to the interview situation, bearing no relevance to the participant's wider experience (Madill, et al., 2000). My perspective, which will be explored in more detail in section 2.7 on reflexivity, is that whilst I consider the interview to be shaped by the context and dynamic of the interview situation and my preconceptions regarding the phenomenon, I also believe that the data generated *does* reflect the participant's wider experience. However, I do remain aware that the interview data is the participant's *representation* of their reality outside of the interview, rather than necessarily an accurate reflection of that reality, a discussion that I return to in section 2.7 on reflexivity.

2.5.1.1.1 Nature of the interviews

The method of data collection chosen was semi-structured qualitative interviews. Unlike structured interviews which typically involve a series of closed questions to be quantitatively analysed (Howitt, 2010), qualitative interviews tend to be semi-structured or unstructured, and are designed to generate an understanding of the participant's perspective and experience of the research topic (King, 2004), and elicit rich and extensive data regarding the phenomenon under study (Howitt, 2010). They are considered appropriate for research which intends to explore the thoughts, feelings and experiences of individuals, and can be valuable as a means of exploring an area around which there appears to be little knowledge in the extant literature (Howitt, 2010). Other qualitative methods, such as surveys employing open-ended questions, or focus groups in which a small number of participants are engaged in an informal discussion on a particular topic (Wilkinson, 2008) can also elicit data of this nature. However, given the sensitive nature of the topic, it was considered important to ensure the development of trust and rapport with the interviewees, which could not be established through survey, and to promise confidentiality and anonymity which would not have been possible with the use of

focus groups. In semi-structured interviews the researcher typically develops an interview guide with questions they may ask and topics that he/she wishes to explore. Rather than dictating the course of the interview, the guide provides some direction to how the interview may flow whilst allowing the interviewer to follow the interviewee's concerns and interests (Smith & Osborn, 2008).

In semi-structured interviews, the interviewee does most of the talking, guided by the interviewer with prompts and further questioning. Unstructured interviews by comparison, have no pre-planned structure, and no pre-defined set of questions. The interview is guided only by the overall goal of the interview and questions arise in response to the interviewee's dialogue (King, 2004). Given that my research had clear objectives and aimed to understand more about the specific research questions, it was considered appropriate to have structure in my interviews in order to ensure that all the areas I wished to explore were covered. The use of predetermined questions would also allow me to concentrate on my interviewee's responses, rather than the direction of questioning (Charmaz, 2006).

2.5.1.1.2 Interview guide

Although Glaser (1998) warns against the use of interview guides from a concern that they may be used to force the data, others argue that interview guides allow the researcher to think through clearly and plan their approach to the interview, and avoid potential use of loaded or leading questions (Charmaz, 2006). Howitt (2010) argues that qualitative interviews require active listening: Paying close attention to and absorbing all that is being said, whilst using probes to explore gaps, delve deeper and ensure clarity of understanding. Howitt (2010) argues therefore that an interview guide provides the structure with which to do this, and enhances the richness of the data gathered. The use of an interview guide also allows questions to be added or omitted during interviews in response to the interviewee's answers which can help to ensure that the data is not forced to fit the preconceptions of the researcher (Bryman, 2008). As such, an interview guide was created and utilised for the current research to help to ensure that the necessary topics were explored, and provide logical flow and structure to the interview [see *Appendix IV* for full details of the original and developed interview guides]. King (2004) recommends that the interview guide should be developed based on the research literature, the researcher's knowledge and understanding of the phenomenon, and informal preliminary discussions. With the exception of the literature review, these criteria informed the development of the interview guide, along with the research questions.

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The initial interview guide was piloted with a member of Ashridge faculty who it emerged through discussion, had experience with the phenomenon of not belonging in the workplace and who met the inclusion criteria. Following that interview the interview guide was modified: some of the questions were clarified to ensure understanding, and some additional questions were included to generate richer data, e.g.: *“What do you think makes the difference between situations when you have felt like you don’t belong and situations when you haven’t?”* as this emerged as a helpful way for the pilot participant to reflect on his experience. The interview guide was further modified through subsequent interviews to include themes that emerged from previous interviews which were relevant to the phenomenon under study, e.g. including the question: *“What was going on in your life then?”* as external factors had emerged as potentially moderating themes from earlier interviews (to be discussed further in 2.6.2, theoretical sampling).

2.5.1.1.3 Conducting the interviews

Seven interviews were conducted face to face, and five over the telephone in circumstances when it was impractical for them to be conducted in person. The mean length of interview was 69 minutes ranging from 35 minutes to 99. This excludes the pilot interview which lasted 145 minutes and was purposefully long in order to explore issues around clarity and discuss the process as well as the content.

It has been argued that telephone interviews are inferior to face to face interviews because they do not allow for the recording of visual cues, and as such non-verbal and contextual data can be missed, and responses misinterpreted (Creswell, 1998). Similarly, telephone interviews do not provide the opportunity to develop rapport, which may impact the quality of the responses (Sweet, 2002). However, it is also argued that the anonymity afforded by the telephone may facilitate participants feeling better able to disclose sensitive and personal information (Kavanaugh & Ayres, 1998). In the case of the current research, little difference was detected in the insights revealed or the richness of the data generated between face to face and telephone interviews. Participants in both types offered open, frank and honest accounts of their experiences and both revealed personal and sensitive information. Similarly, there was little variance in the length of the conversations (mean length of face to face interviews was 73 minutes and mean length of phone interviews was 65). As such, telephone interviews did not appear to impact the quality of the data generated.

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2.5.1.1.4 Recording

Glaser (1998) argues that researchers should avoid recording interviews and rely instead on notes taken in the field. For Glaser, recording interviews slows down data collection and results in a preponderance of unnecessary data which presents a barrier to the process of delimiting and ignores theoretical saturation. He argues that observation is lost as it is not recorded in notes, and the act of taping means anonymity cannot be ensured and therefore may compromise the honesty of the responses. For Glaser (1998), note taking is sufficient, and anything that is missed will be recalled during the process of analysis.

Whilst I would agree that recording may raise concerns about anonymity, I would dispute Glaser's position. Firstly, recording interviews allows the researcher to focus entirely on the interviewee without being distracted by continual note taking. This helps to ensure that the researcher can listen attentively, and can follow the course of the dialogue without missing valuable data, being aware of when topics have been covered, and picking up on relevant avenues for further probing (Charmaz, 2006). Recording also ensures that no relevant data is forgotten or ignored, thus enhancing the reliability of the data collected (LeComte & Goetz, 1982). I would argue that this facilitates the natural flow of the interview, helps to develop rapport with the interviewee, and helps the interviewee to feel that they are being paid attention to which will likely develop trust and result in more open, honest and insightful revelations. Recording is also not at the expense of note taking, and notes can be made of relevant visual cues, and as such, in face to face interviews, observation is not lost.

I would also argue that it is too easy to miss valuable data in note taking, and disagree that all relevant data will be recalled through subsequent comparison and analysis. Research around the development of memory has demonstrated that the more meaningful information is to us the more likely we are to remember it (Eysenck & Eysenck, 1980; Bransford & Johnson, 1972). As such, it is likely that the researcher may recall data that has meaning to them in terms of previous or personal experience. Relying on memory therefore, to recall relevant data may lead to biased recollection. Therefore, all interviews were recorded.

The first two interviews were transcribed by me; subsequent interviews were transcribed by a colleague from Ashridge Business School who had extensive experience in research interview transcribing. Transcripts included all spoken words, as well as indications of pausing and laughing. I checked for quality by reading excerpts from transcripts in conjunction with listening to the recordings to ensure the transcriber was accurately capturing all of the verbal data.

2.6 Theory development

As discussed above, GT is a method of data collection and analysis which aims to develop a substantive theory about the phenomenon which is being explored, which is grounded in the data gathered. Theory can be distinguished as either substantive or formal. Substantive theory develops from a single empirical area, drawing on data to develop a theory for the substantive area researched, focused on understanding the experience or phenomena relevant to a substantive empirical situation, and is therefore relevant to a particular population (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Whilst, as stated above, Glaser states that grounded theories are abstract from time and place (Glaser, 1998), he also states that it is the *core concern* that emerges through the process of generating theory that has generalisability and general implications, and can be applied to other substantive areas, whereas in different substantive areas it will have different related categories, different relationships, and different dimensions and properties (Glaser, 1978). To develop a substantive theory therefore, requires immersion in a given substantive area with a particular population. Broader generalisability comes through the development of formal theory, which has broader implications and concepts that can span contextual boundaries, and is developed through the comparing of data in different substantive areas and with different populations (Glaser, 1978).

Glaser and Strauss (1967) describe theories that are developed through GT as middle-range, incorporating more than a simple set of working hypotheses, but less than “all-inclusive” grand theories (p.33). They state that GT can be presented as either “a well-codified set of propositions or in a running theoretical discussion, using conceptual categories and their properties” (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p.31). Their choice is for the latter, to consider theory as a process which emphasises the continuing developmental, rather than static, nature of theory, and pays consideration to the “reality of the social interaction and its structural context” (p.32), positioning the theory as relevant to the time and context in which it was developed.

However, Charmaz (2008) claims that Glaser sees theory through a positivist lens, creating theoretical categories as variables, drawing theoretical statements that are context free, and seeking explanatory power. Whilst Glaser and Strauss (1967) do indeed state that a theory is a theory “because it explains or predicts something” (p.31), their focus on theory as process accounts to some degree, for the context in which theory is developed, and they state only that substantive theories have relevance and applicability to the substantive area and population explored (Glaser, 1978).

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As discussed above, what I have done in the development of my substantive theory is follow Glaser's (1978) and Glaser and Strauss's (1967) elements of theory development, as will be detailed below. However, I have employed these methods to develop a substantive theory – one that seeks to understand rather than explain what is going on in a phenomenon, based on participants' subjective interpretation of their experience and my interpretation of their accounts. I have applied my theoretical lens to what I consider to be data and how I have analysed that data, and in particular I have applied my theoretical perspective and assumptions to my positioning of my substantive theory as one that is contextualised to the particular conditions of my participant group, to the context in which it was developed and my theoretical rendering of the data. The thorough and rigorous integration of the literature in developing insight and understanding of the relationships proposed in my substantive theory takes the theoretical framework beyond Corbin and Strauss' (2009) definition of theory as a 'logical interpretation' of the data, and results instead, in a substantive theory that helps to develop understanding of the experience of not belonging in the workplace for individuals for whom the experience is significant.

The process that I followed in developing this substantive theory is detailed below.

2.6.1 Data Analysis

2.6.1.1 Substantive Coding

The core process of grounded theory is coding – the process of assigning conceptual labels to components of the data, which Glaser terms 'incidents' (Glaser, 1998). These incidents then become 'indicators' of that particular code. Fundamental to this process is the researcher's 'theoretical sensitivity', their ability to abstract conceptual ideas from data (Glaser, 1978; Holton, 2010). There are two stages to coding in Glaserian GT: Substantive coding and theoretical coding. Holton (2010) describes substantive coding as:

The process of conceptualizing the empirical substance of the area under study: the data in which the theory is grounded. Incidents are the empirical data (the indicators of a category or concept) from which a grounded theory is generated. The process proceeds from the initial open coding of data to the emergence of a core category, followed by delimiting of data collection and analysis for selective coding to theoretically saturate the core category and related categories (Holton, 2010, p.24)

Through open coding the researcher codes all incidents within the data which are relevant to the phenomenon under study. Through the Constant Comparative Method, each incident is analysed and compared to previous incidents, and similarities and differences between the data

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explored (Holton, 2018). Incidents are compared with other incidents to explore uniformity, variance and fit: Uniformity and fit is sought *within* categories; variance sought *between*. A category is a cluster of codes which forms a conceptual element of the theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The uniformity and fit of data within categories results in the development of concepts abstracted from, whilst closely tied to, the data (Holton, 2018; Dey, 2007). Initial conceptual codes may become elevated to conceptual categories or may become properties or sub-properties within a conceptual category. Properties are elements of the category which indicate the nature of the category, and capture the scope and variation in a category (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). These conceptual categories and their properties are then compared with other categories resulting in the integration of conceptual categories and the development of the theory (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). The theory develops therefore through the analysis and arrangement of coded data, using constant comparison, into conceptual categories, sub-categories, properties and sub-properties, and the emergence of proposed relationships between those conceptual categories.

In the current research transcripts were read line by line, and each sentence, line or paragraph coded to capture the essence of the incident. For example, the following incident was coded as ‘managing exterior presentation’:

“Um, and I think the more confident you feel in role the more prepared you are to expose some of those vulnerabilities. But if you’re not feeling confident then you’re kind of, you know you’re having to project a confidence that you perhaps don’t have.”

As coding progressed and all incidents were coded they were compared to previously created codes. Where no fit was identified, new codes were created, and where incidents fit with other incidents they were assigned the same code. In the example above 12 incidents across all transcripts, were assigned the code of ‘managing exterior presentation’. Once a transcript had been coded the initial codes were compared to all other codes to identify uniformity and fit, and where this was found, they were clustered together under a conceptual theme. In the example above, the code of ‘managing exterior presentation’ was clustered together with seven other codes into a conceptual theme of ‘seeking acceptance’.

Themes were then compared to other themes to again explore potential fit, and where identified, themes were clustered together to form a ‘conceptual category’. In the above example the theme of ‘seeking acceptance’ became one of two themes that clustered under the conceptual category of ‘finding a way to fit in’. These conceptual categories were again

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compared with other conceptual categories and where applicable, clustered together under an over-arching category. In the case above, the over-arching category was 'resolution' which constituted four sub-categories. This process continued throughout the data collection and analysis stage, with new incidents being compared to previously coded incidents, new emerging themes and categories compared to previous themes and categories. Each theme and category was then carefully analysed to ensure uniformity and fit within it, and each theme and category compared to other themes and categories to ensure variance between them.

Appendix V provides an example of the coding and categorisation process, with initial codes being clustered into themes, sub-categories and categories, which when conceptualised using GT become conceptual categories, sub-categories and the properties and sub-properties of those categories.

This coding process continues until a core category emerges – the category which appears central to the emerging theory, is related meaningfully to the other categories, and accounts for most of the variation found in behaviour (Holton, 2010). Glaser (1998) describes this core category as the core concern of the participants, and the process through which the core concern is resolved. In the current research the core category to emerge was '*self-concept*', which as will be explored in *Chapter Four: Findings*, emerged as the central concern of all participants and was related to all other categories in the emerging substantive theory, being influenced *by* and *influencing* the attributes of a SoNB, the resolution strategies employed, the emotion that was felt, and the factors that moderated the experience.

This category emerged through my attempts to understand and determine a process, how the various categories were related to each other and how in particular, the category of self-concept which had already emerged as a significant category, was related to the over-all experience. This is captured in a memo titled '*Sept 2014 – main category*':

'What I'm still really unclear of it how it all relates to, particularly, negative self-concept - it is not belonging that these people are talking to me about, and that seems to be wrapped up in their negative self-concept - I guess I'm trying to determine whether there is a process here - whether negative self-concept leads to them feeling like this, or whether not belonging leads to negative self-concept, or whether feeling like you don't belong is part of the negative self-concept.'

Through this continual process of reflection, and through comparing category to category, individual case to individual case, the process emerged, central to which was the self-concept,

as captured later in the same memo, as below (capitals indicate the importance in the moment, of this articulation to the developing theory):

'I THINK...THE VARIOUS ANTECEDENTS MAKE THEM FEEL LIKE THEY DON'T BELONG - IT'S EXPRESSED AS NOT BELONGING BECAUSE OF THE NATURE OF THE ANTECEDENTS - NOVELTY, DIFFERENCE, TRYING TO JOIN A NEW GROUP, FEELING OUT OF STEP WITH THE CULTURE, NOT HAVING CONNECTIONS, NOT CONTRIBUTING TO THE GROUP (PURPOSE) - THESE WILL IMPACT FEELING OF BELONGING (WILL PROBABLY UNDERSTAND THIS BETTER WHEN GO TO THE LITERATURE, AS THERE ARE BOUND TO BE CLEAR CONNECTIONS IDENTIFIED THAT LEAD PEOPLE TO FEEL LIKE THEY DON'T BELONG). I THEN THINK THAT BECAUSE THEY FEEL THEY DON'T BELONG, THEY ARE AN OUTSIDER, THEY FEEL CRAP ABOUT THEMSELVES - WHAT'S WRONG WITH ME? WHY DON'T THEY LIKE ME? WHY DO I FEEL LIKE THIS AND NO ONE ELSE DOES? OR, THEY ASSUME THE OUTGROUP ARE JUDGING THEM. THEY ALSO DON'T FEEL ABLE TO BE THEMSELVES BECAUSE WHO THEY ARE DOESN'T BELONG (COMPOUNDED BY COPING STRATEGIES) AND BECAUSE OF IMPACT ON SELF CONCEPT - FEEL THEY'RE CRAP AND BEING JUDGED SO THEY HIDE OR CHANGE.'

Further details of how this core concern emerged will be described in more detail below under section 2.6.3 on *Memoing*.

2.6.1.2 NVivo

NVivo software (QSR International) was used to facilitate the analysis. It enabled similarly coded text to be retrieved and considered together, greatly facilitating the constant comparison of incident to incident. As codes were generated and compared with other codes, uniformity was identified and codes integrated into categories, or properties of categories. The use of the software also enabled the generation of spider graphs which helped to illustrate hypothesised connections and relationships between the emerging categories. The software also ensured that associated incidents could easily be retrieved to illustrate the concepts and categories, and that thoughts and ideas around the concepts could be captured instantly in theoretical memos which could be linked to the associated codes and text.

2.6.1.3 *Delimiting the theory through identification of the core concern*

In GT, once the core concern has been identified the researcher begins to code selectively. Only data which are related to the core category are coded, thus delimiting the data. At this stage the researcher also begins theoretical sampling in search of data which will elaborate upon the core category and fill in gaps which emerge in the theory (Holton, 2010). Through the constant

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comparative method the researcher discovers uniformity in the conceptual categories which leads to the generation of new, overarching categories, delimiting the number of categories against which future data are coded. The researcher is then left with those higher level concepts which relate to the core concern and as such are relevant to the emerging theory (Glaser, 1998). In practice, no category that emerged from the analysis did *not* relate to the core category, and as such all initial categories and properties remained. However, in the final presentation of the analysis two categories were omitted: '*mitigator*' and '*positive self-concept*'. This decision was made because both categories reflected positive versions of other categories – '*positive self-concept*' reflected the opposite of much that appeared in '*self-concept*', and '*mitigators*' reflected the opposite of '*attributes*'. Given the scope of the emerging theory it was not considered necessary to present these as part of the substantive theory as they offered little additional insight. They are however, drawn upon in the discussion of the practical implications of the theory.

2.6.1.4 Theoretical coding

Theoretical coding is the process of applying a theoretical model to the data. This theoretical model relates all the substantive codes and categories to the core category (Hernandez, 2009). Whilst substantive codes fracture the data, theoretical codes weave it back together as a theoretical whole, which allows the theory to explain rather than just describe the phenomenon (Glaser, 1978). "Substantive codes conceptualize the empirical substance of the area of research. Theoretical codes conceptualize how the substantive codes may relate to each other as hypotheses to be integrated into the theory" (Glaser, 1978, p.55). Theoretical coding involves the researcher making explicit the implicit theoretical relationships and connections between the core category and the emerging categories which demonstrate how the theoretical process works (Glaser, 1978). Theoretical coding occurs concurrently with substantive coding as the researcher detects relationships between two or more codes, concepts or categories, but becomes the main preoccupation of the analysis during sorting of memos and categories and integrating the literature review (Hernandez, 2009).

In the current study the core concern for my participants was that the experience of not belonging was undermining their 'self-concept' which was further impacted by how they felt and behaved. My theoretical codes, as detailed in *Chapter Four*, articulate how this might come about and lead to the development of corresponding propositional relationships. For example, 'absence of quality relationships' is theorised to be a potential *cause* of negative self-concept, emotional experience is proposed as a potential *consequence* of the negative self-concept, and trying to fit in is a proposed *strategy* employed to resolve a SoNB. These theoretical

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relationships emerge throughout the process of data collection and analysis, but the application of specific theoretical codes helps to clarify and articulate these theorised relationships and provides the basis for the propositions that are developed about the relationships and processes involved. Using the example above, a proposition developed about the relationship between *self-concept* and the strategy of *trying to fit in*; the latter strategy may result in a sense of inauthenticity that may further undermine the self-concept and a sense of an integrated self. *Appendix VI* details the substantive categories, theoretical codes and associated proposed relationships.

2.6.2 Theoretical sampling

As detailed above, the data collection and analysis processes in grounded theory are conducted in parallel. As initial interviews are coded, propositions are generated as to the potential relationships between categories, possible explanations and interpretations which help to elaborate the theory that is being constructed, which Glaser terms “conceptual elaboration” (Glaser, 1978, p.40). The emerging theory helps the researcher to determine where to go next – what categories and properties of categories require further exploration or what groups require further comparison in order to develop the theory (Glaser, 1978). The criteria for theoretical sampling is relevance and purpose – samples are chosen that are *relevant* to the emerging theory and serve the *purpose* of conceptual elaboration (Glaser, 1978). Theoretical sampling therefore, allows you to gather additional empirical data to further explore and evidence your emerging ideas and propositions (Charmaz, 2008). It is not however, about verifying your emerging theory, but about developing and checking on your emerging theory (Glaser, 1978).

As detailed above, in the current study additional female participants were sought in order to ensure I had an in-depth understanding of the experience from this gender group. Throughout the study theoretical sampling was also employed through both the development of my interview guide and through returning to previously analysed interviews to further explore or support my emerging theory and proposed relationships. For example, I identified that there was a potential bi-directional relationship between how individuals attempted to resolve the experience and the core concern of self-concept. Specifically, I was developing an understanding that when individuals attempted to fit in, the behaviours in which they engaged may have left them feeling inauthentic and this may in turn have negatively impacted their self-concept. Similarly, protective behaviours, such as withdrawing may have served to exacerbate their sense of not belonging. In subsequent interviews I therefore explored whether participants had done anything to try to escape the experience and whether that had made it

better or worse. I asked these questions of all additional participants and returned to my transcripts from previous interviews to find support for this emerging proposed relationship.

Many of these gaps in understanding and need for additional data were captured in memos. For example, in my memo on '*conflicting with self-concept*' I noted:

'The experience is not congruent with his image of himself. He considers himself to be 'self-sufficient' and that he doesn't need others to survive. And yet he experiences this powerful feeling of not belonging, and wanting to belong, and that doesn't fit with what he knows about himself. Again, this seems to be an internal battle – the juxtaposition between his self-sufficiency and his need to be a part of something.' I later noted in the same memo: 'I need to re-code/look for this as I don't think I've captured and understood all the juxtapositions as I've been going through.'

2.6.3 Memoing

Glaser states that writing of memos is "the bedrock of theory generation" (Glaser, 1978, p.83). Through capturing thoughts and ideas in memo writing the analyst is able to raise the data to a conceptual level, abstract from the individual participant (Glaser, 1978). Memos allow the researcher to explore potential relationships, to integrate categories through these connections and raise the analysis from description to conceptual analysis and then to theory (Glaser, 1978).

Glaser (1998) describes memos as follows:

Memos are the theorizing write up of ideas about substantive codes and their theoretically coded relationships as they emerge during coding, collecting and analysing data and during memoing. Memos provide through this process the leads to theoretical sampling. Memos capture and keep track of the emerging theory. As they accumulate and mature they increase to the point of saturation and need to be sorted for writing up. (Glaser, 1998, p.177)

Through capturing ideas and reflecting on those ideas, memos sensitise the researcher to emerging concepts and potential relationships, and prompt the researcher to explore assumptions that they are making (Charmaz, 2008). By capturing the researcher's analytic thought, their internal dialogue about their emerging theory, memos make thinking explicit helping to clarify how this dialogue has led to their understanding and interpretation (Chamberlain et al., 2013) facilitating reflexivity. As a continual ongoing process, memos also help to preserve the original ideas so that the decisions that are made that influence the resulting theory can be captured and articulated (Birks, Chapman & Francis, 2008).

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In the current study the act of memoing was vital to the development of my emerging theory. Through writing memos I was able to capture my developing thinking throughout the two-year long process of data collection and analysis. Through my memos I captured and reflected upon my ideas about what was emerging from my data, what was significant to my participants. I captured the internal dialogue that led me to explore what meaning the experience had for my participants and the significance of this to their experience. For example, in my memo titled '*thoughts on core category*' I stated in January 2015:

'Where things get warped, when they become about not belonging, is in the link between the attributes and the negative self-concept. All the attributes are real. They are facts about difference, about being on the outside. They turn into not belonging as a 'problem' through interpretation and perception – the individual interprets them to mean they are crap – not competent, not intelligent, not liked, seen as stupid.'

As such, memoing facilitated the emergence of meaning, and ultimately the importance to the emerging theory of symbolic interactionism.

Through the process of memoing my theory developed from reflections and deliberations about the experience of individual participants, to broader conceptualisation abstract from the individual – moving from 'he', 'she' and 'they' to 'it' and 'this'. It was through the process of memoing too, that I was also able to reflect on and track, the emergence and development of the core category. As Glaser (1978) states, every new category appears core at first, but through writing and exploring in memos, the significance of other categories becomes apparent. In the current study the core category emerged first as '*internal struggle*' and I captured in a memo on that category:

'Off piste thought – is there something core here about struggling, battling, not being in control? Having to fight the experience, because in their hearts these people know it's not true – they're not outsiders, and they do fit in, they just FEEL like don't fit in??? Is the battle what results in the impact on psychological well-being? Perhaps this is about identity. That they don't want to accept this about themselves? It doesn't fit with the strength of person that they know they are?'

The articulation of this internal struggle as a conflict with identity has already been made above, and becomes clearer and further developed in September 2014 with consideration of and reflection on additional participants, where I state:

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‘Added to this weakness, this irrationality, is a struggle between what they think they know about themselves and who they are/become during this experience – so there’s a very real cognitive dissonance going on, a strong conflict with identity. Again, this will undermine their self-concept – are they really who they think they are, are they really resilient, are they really intelligent, do they really deserve to be here, if they feel vulnerable, weak, stupid?’

In the final theoretical framework, ‘*conflict with self-concept*’, which began as ‘*internal struggle*’ became a sub-category of the core concern of self-concept, which is captured in the memo quoted above from January 2015, and captures their negative and conflicting self-perception. Identification of this core category helped make the relationships that were emerging all the more salient. The core allowed me to synthesise across my categories, facilitating my insight into and understanding of the process, of the intensity, and the derogatory nature of the experience. It helped me to understand why the experience was often self-perpetuating as a sense of not belonging undermined the self-concept, the emotional impact undermined the self-concept, and the resolution behaviours undermined the self-concept.

Memos also greatly facilitate reflexivity. Birks and Mills (2011) argue that writing memos from the start of the research process can help to identify the researcher’s worldview and biases and guide methodological decisions. They also offer an opportunity of capturing the researcher’s emotions, feelings and actions which can highlight those perspectives which challenge your own, making the researcher mindful of the potential influence of those biases (Hoare, Buetow, Mills & Francis, 2012). And through capturing the researcher’s internal dialogue as discussed above, the researcher can explore the potential influence of this self-interaction and process of analytic thought on their interpretation of the data (Birks et al., 2008).

In the current research, my memos were almost entirely an articulation of my internal dialogue, my expression of the analytic process, questioning my thoughts and interpretations, and many include a challenge to myself to check the assumptions I was making. For example, in a memo entitled ‘*need to be the best*’, I noted:

‘He seems to need perfection, to be the "best". Suggests he can't handle anyone else being better than him? Is this about him being the best he can be, or better than anyone else. Perhaps it's the former, and my assumption that it could be about being better than anyone else maybe more about myself...need to watch for this.’

Similarly, in a memo entitled ‘*lonely at the top*’ I noted:

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‘Again for me, there seems to be an element of trying to justify or explain the feeling, trying to suggest that it's a good thing, and that it's a subconscious way of preparing him for the ultimate leadership. Or is this me being judgemental? Is he right? Is this a good thing. Is it preparing him for leadership? My gut says no, that he's struggling again to reconcile the feeling, but this could be because of my negative perception of the experience?’

These memos facilitated the process of reflexivity throughout the current study, allowing me to articulate and capture my internal dialogue and assumptions, maintaining my mindful reflection on their potential influence, and helping to ensure that the emerging theory was grounded in the data and reflective of the participant's experience rather less so than my own.

2.6.4 Theoretical saturation

Memos were also used to both determine and record theoretical saturation, the stage at which new properties of the categories and concepts no longer emerged from the data. As categories become saturated, the researcher moves on to other categories, until they too are saturated, at which point “theoretical completeness is achieved”. (Glaser, 2001 p.192). In the current study I routinely re-read my memos noting in a separate memo entitled ‘*theoretical sat or need more clarity*’ where I needed to learn and explore more through theoretical sampling, or where I felt I had reached theoretical saturation. For example, in February 2014 I noted: “‘Strength of feeling’ - need to explore more around whether this happens outside of work, try to understand whether there's a link with a 'trait', is there a connection between the depth and power of the experience and their coping strategy?” In February 2015 I then noted:

‘Have explored this a little more, and it doesn't seem to be the case that if you feel like this outside of work, and therefore possibly have a 'trait', that it impacts the strength of the feeling. In fact it appears to be the opposite, and it could be that this links to the internal conflict - the feeling is more intense if it is in conflict with how you usually are - it's the tension, the cognitive dissonance, that's painful. If you're like this outside of work, there seems to be more of an acceptance, a resignation to the fact, that this is just who you are. Think I'm there with this.’

2.6.5 Sorting

The penultimate process in grounded theory involves considering all of the memos that illustrate the various conceptual categories and determining how they relate to one another (Glaser, 1992). Whilst Glaser discusses physical sorting of memos at the close of the data analysis process, in the current study sorting occurred in an ongoing manner as categories were

related to one another through memo writing, and spider graphs were developed to help to illustrate and visualise the emerging relationships. The process was iterative and continuous, with properties of categories being moved to different categories if they did not fit with the developing category, or categories being combined if upon reflection they were integrated constructs. *Figure 2.1* illustrates an early spider graph detailing the substantive codes, themes and sub-categories of ‘coping’ which was articulated as ‘resolution’ in the final theoretical framework.

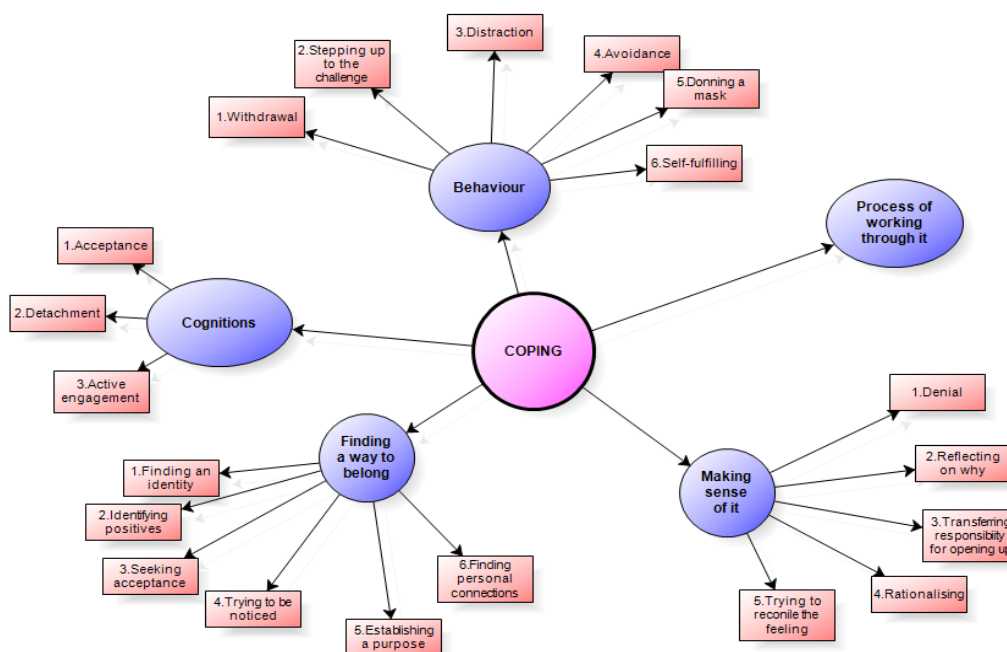


Figure 2.1: Early mind-map of the category of ‘coping’ illustrating the process of sorting

2.6.6 Integrating the literature review

In Glaserian GT, the final stage of the methodological process is integrating the literature review. As discussed above, Glaser advocates that a full review of the literature is only conducted once the data analysis is complete and theoretical saturation has been achieved. At this point the researcher turns to the literature to explore the constructs that have emerged from their data (Glaser, 1978). The extant research is then compared to the data and the researcher considers where the current research is both supported by or supports previous studies, and how their theory extends or offers a variation to extant theories. Using the process of constant comparison the GT researcher explores and articulates in memos and write-up, similarities between their research and the extant literature, and where literature has particular relevance and conceptual fit, the GT researcher integrates the literature into the developing theory (Glaser, 1992). Where literature offers a discrepancy to the findings of the current

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research, the GT researcher again compares their categories, their constructs and sample to that of the extant literature to elucidate and explain the difference in findings (Glaser, 1992).

In the current study I drew on literature that related to belonging or to being an outsider primarily from the psychology and sociology literatures, as well as literature from other disciplines such as neuroscience and management that related to specific constructs which emerged, such as theories of emotion, typologies of coping strategy, and theories of self. As advocated by Glaser (1998) I analysed the extant literature through in-depth critique and constant comparison with my findings and with other literature. Through this process the literature helped to both support the current study, highlight areas which required further exploration in future research, and allowed me to situate my substantive theory in the extant body of literature, demonstrating my contribution to theory. In particular, through comparing the literature with the findings from my research I was able to better understand and elaborate on the theoretical relationships that I developed. For example, comparing research on *self-affirmation theory* (Steele, 1999) and *self-consistency theory* (Aronson, 1968, 1999) to the current findings was helpful in explaining and clarifying the proposed impact of behaving in inauthentic ways on one's sense of an integrated self. Similarly, comparing literature that offered a contradiction to the current findings, such as that which found no relationships between exclusion and emotion (e.g. Begeen & Turner-Cobb, 2015) and that which found not belonging to have a less significant impact (Clegg, 2006) helped in clarifying the influence of both the real-life methodology employed in the current study, and the influence of the characteristics of the sample in the current study, being working adults for whom SoNB was a significant experience.

As such, this review of the literature and the incorporation of previous theories into my emerging theoretical framework was an integral step in developing my theory from an integrated set of plausible concepts to a substantive theory of a sense of not belonging in the workplace. Details of how the literature informed and developed the emerging theory are provided in *Chapter Five: Review and Discussion of the Literature*.

This theory however, is bounded by the choice of literature reviewed. As a psychology study, the focus of my search was on the psychology literature. Whilst the late engagement with the literature helps to mitigate the impact of the literature on the initial theory that developed from the data, the limitations of the literature searched does impact the refinements made to and the development of the theory, and as such the resulting substantive theory is contextualised to both the nature of the sample and the nature of the literature reviewed.

2.7 Reflexivity

As discussed above, prior experience and a researcher's subjective interpretation and biases can all influence the research process, impacting how research is designed, literature is searched, data is prioritised and analysed, and findings presented (Ritchie, 2014). Charmaz (2008) states that the researcher's assumptions "grind the lens for viewing the world" (p.132) and filter and change their perception of it. The account of the research presented in a subjective, interpretative research study is subjectively situated, reflecting the sense-making and subjectivity of the researcher. What is salient and meaningful to the researcher reflects their own sense making, meaning and interpretation drawing on this internal dialogue to make analytical decisions (Chamberlain, et al. 2013).

A reflexive researcher therefore, must consider and reflect on how their knowledge and understanding of the topics, the themes and the concepts they are applying to individual accounts are informed by their own understanding of those concepts, which is in turn informed by individual cases they encounter (Tomkins & Eatough, 2010). Rather than attempt to mitigate against these biases and influences, a reflexive researcher must mitigate against *a lack of awareness* of the influence of their interpretation and the distinction between that which is the participant's intention and that which is the researcher's assumption (Gadamer, 1989). They must question their thinking and ways of doing (Hibbert, et al., 2010) and 'bend-back' their thoughts upon themselves, monitoring, and responding to their thoughts, feelings and actions throughout the research process (Corlett & Marvin, 2018).

An intersubjective perspective also considers the influence of the researcher in the creation of meaning in the moment, proposing that meaning is created through interaction and dialogue, and that our interactions with our participants, the questions that we ask, the way that we ask them, the prompts and responses we offer, can all shape the participant's sense-making, their meaning and knowledge, and therefore the accounts they articulate and the data they collect (Cunliffe, 2008). As such, researcher and participant construct meaning and knowledge in the moment through sense-making (Cunliffe, 2011), through the insights and understandings that are triggered by the questions asked (Grandy, 2018). In the development of knowledge, Gadamer (1989) talks of a fusion of horizons in how we bridge the gap between the perspective we encounter and our own. The fused understanding that emerges through our interpretation becomes shared, constructed between the author (participant) and reader (researcher). Understanding and knowledge for Gadamer (1989) therefore, are intersubjective and social as we are embedded in shared traditions that inform future understanding. The implications for theory are therefore that we create meaning and generate theory that could be different from

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that which is created by another interpreter. From this intersubjective perspective therefore, a reflexive researcher must acknowledge the situated, temporal, contextual and biased nature of the account that is constructed through the process of research (Cunliffe, 2011; Gadamer, 1989).

As discussed above, my interest in the current study arose from personal experiences in the workplace where I felt different, either because I was young, or because of a different educational or professional background. I felt inferior to the rest of the group and felt as though I didn't deserve to be amongst them. These experiences had a significant impact on my self-esteem, and their recurring nature resulted in me internalising the problem, assuming responsibility, and believing the experience was unique to me.

This narrative encapsulates many different and significant constructs: Self-esteem; competence; credibility; difference; self-blame; distorted perceptions. As such, this powerful experience, the salience of the constructs, the meaning-making and self-analysis that I, as a psychologist, applied to my experience, presents a very real potential for bias. The significance of these constructs to my personal experience will have influenced the language used in my invitation to interview, the questions that I asked of my participants, how I responded to their answers, and my interpretation of their answers, placing greater focus and significance on those constructs that were meaningful to me and reflected my own experience.

What I learned through the process of the research was that as much as I attempted to mitigate against the influence of these biases through for example, the avoidance of the literature until I had analysed my data, they are inherent in the manner in which I worded my invitation to interview which emphasises my negative perception of the experience and would likely result in a participant group who perceived the phenomenon similarly and considered it to be a significant experience. They are inherent in my interpretation of my participants' accounts, my interpretation of the data that was generated, the significance of the concepts that emerged, and they are inextricably linked to my own meaning and sense-making, significance, assumptions and prejudices. What is meaningful and salient to me, may not have been meaningful and salient to a different analyst. Their interpretative rendering may have been different to my own, and the account and theory that they developed therefore, have been different to the one which I developed.

In consideration of these assumptions, what was critical to me was to be reflexive about their influence, for example by ensuring I paid equal attention and explored in equal depth, reported experiences that *did not* resonate with my own, such as the concern of some participants that

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others in the organisation evaluated them more favourably than they valued themselves. It was also important to articulate and capture the influence of my assumptions in memos, as discussed above in 2.6.3, as well as to offer a transparent presentation of the methodology, data collection and analysis in order to demonstrate what was done, why and how it was done, and upon what data interpretations and analytic decisions were made and conclusions were drawn (Yardley, 2008). Finally, in writing up and presenting my substantive theory it was also critical that I position that theory as a subjective interpretation of my participants' accounts grounded in the data, but contextualised to both myself, the specific conditions of my participant group, and to the social and temporal context in which the theory was developed.

Chapter 3 The construct of belonging

3.1 Introduction

Before presenting and discussing the categories that emerged from the research it is helpful to first situate the focal construct of this research in order to clarify what the study is exploring and what my interviewees are discussing. Through my interviews it emerged that what my participants were experiencing in the workplace was a sense of not belonging (SoNB), which appeared to be a deep and fundamentally rooted construct, and one which, as *Chapter Four* will illuminate, was rooted in a sense of self. For my participants this SoNB was associated with different contexts, including SoNB to teams, groups, cultures, and professions as well as not belonging to the broader organisation.

This articulation led me, in my full review of the psychology, sociology, and management literatures, to explore the construct of *belonging* as well as social exclusion, and revealed a wealth of research that positions belonging as a fundamental human need, and a vital component of many theories of human need and motivation, theories which explore the factors believed to be critical drivers of much of human thinking and activity (Borkowski, 2005; Baumeister and Leary, 1995).

What follows is a review of the literature relevant to this overall construct of belonging, and it is written to demonstrate the centrality, indeed the adaptive nature of the construct of belonging to human experience with the objective of both positioning the research within the literature and further developing the rationale for the conduct of the study. It will begin with an overview of the major need theories, all of which incorporate belonging as a fundamental component, before considering theories specific to the need to belong.

3.2 Belonging as a fundamental human need

One of the most familiar need theories is Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of needs which he introduced in his seminal work, *A Theory of Human Motivation* (Maslow, 1943). This theory proposes that human behaviour is motivated by a desire to satisfy one of five basic human needs: Physiological needs; safety needs; belongingness or love needs; self-esteem needs; and self-actualisation needs. Maslow proposes that these needs are related to each other in a hierarchy of pre-potent needs, in that the higher needs will not be attended to until the lower needs are at least partially satisfied, and until satisfied the individual's capacities will be put to the task of satisfying this need. Moreover, Maslow suggests a particular need can dominate an individual, so that they become defined in terms of that need, their behaviour becomes

organised by the drive to satisfy that need, and they focus only upon achieving a future where that need is satiated. *Figure 3.1* below, details the needs at the various levels of the hierarchy.

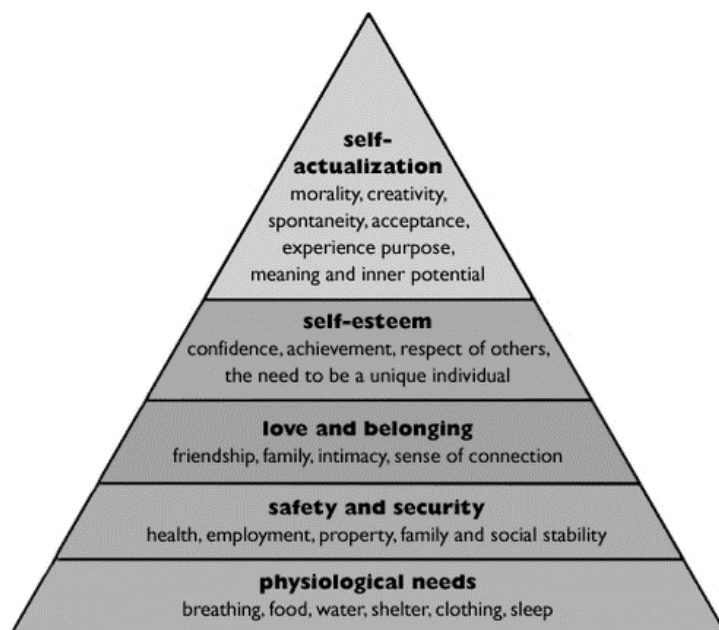


Figure 3.1: Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (1943)

Despite the wide spread acceptance and application of his theory, there is in fact little evidence to support the predictions it makes. In a thorough review of research studies testing Maslow's theory, Wahba and Bridwell (1976) concluded only partial support for many aspects of the theory. Specifically, Wahba and Bridwell (1976) did not find support for the proposition that the most deficient need should be the most dominant need. For example, out of a series of studies utilising Porter's Need Satisfaction Questionnaire (NSQ; Porter, 1962), a tool which measures need deficiency and need importance, only two out of seven studies found a correspondence between deficiency rank and importance rank for belonging, esteem or self-actualisation (e.g., Clark & McCabe's (1972) study of 1339 Australian managers; Porter's (1962) study of 139 lower and middle managers). If the most deficient need should be the most dominant need, the need ranked as most *deficient* should also be ranked as most *important*.

Wahba and Bridwell (1976) also found limited support for the proposition that the higher the satisfaction with a need the lower the importance of that need, which results in the activation of the next need in the hierarchy – the gratification/activation hypothesis. Whilst some studies (e.g. Porter & Mitchell, 1970) did find a correlation between importance of higher level needs and organisational level which suggested that the higher up an organisation one moves the more important the higher level needs become, these studies didn't actually assess satisfaction of lower level needs but inferred that those higher up the organisation would have satisfied

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these lower level needs. Other studies which did directly measure need satisfaction and strength of the next level need however, also found little support for the gratification/activation hypothesis. Hall and Nougaim, (1966) for example, in their longitudinal study of 49 managers over a five-year period found no correlation between satisfaction of a given need and the strength of the next need. Similarly, Lawler and Suttle (1972) utilising the NSQ (Porter, 1962) did not find a negative correlation between need satisfaction and importance or a positive correlation between need satisfaction and the importance of the next level need, again challenging the gratification/activation hypothesis. As such, there is little evidence to support the various predictions that the hierarchical nature of the theory asserts.

In addition, Wahba and Bridwell's, (1976) review found little support for Maslow's five stage model, but rather concluded that perhaps a two stage model exists, of *deficiency* needs and *growth* needs. *Deficiency* needs are defined as needs considered vital to survival and capture Maslow's physiological and security needs; whereas *growth* needs capture Maslow's needs for belongingness, esteem, and self-actualisation, and are not considered critical to survival.

Alderfer (1969), in contrast, developed an alternative model which, whilst capturing all of Maslow's concepts suggested a three stage model of *existence*, *relatedness*, and *growth* needs (ERG), as illustrated in *Table 3.1*. *Existence* refers to the individual's concern with material needs such as food, water, money, working conditions, etc. *Relatedness* refers to the need to develop and maintain interpersonal relationships with friends, family, peers and other working groups. *Growth* refers to the individual's need for personal development, to make a contribution, and to be creative (Borkowski, 2005).

Hierarchy of Needs (Maslow, 1948)	ERG Theory (Alderfer, 1972)
Physiological	Existence
Safety	
Belongingness	Relatedness
Esteem	Growth
Self-actualisation	

Table 3.1: Comparison of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs and Alderfer's (1972) ERG Theory

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The existence of a three rather than five stage model was supported by an empirical study of both ERG and Maslow's theory with 110 bank employees comparing satisfaction of need with importance of need (Alderfer, 1969). The study found greater support for the three-stage model than for Maslow's five stage conceptualisation – satisfaction of the three stage needs better predicted strength of need than did satisfaction of the five stage needs. In support of Wahba and Bridwell's (1976) review, Alderfer (1972) also found that, contrary to Maslow's theory, ERG theory does not require a strict order and indeed found that if an individual is prevented from achieving a higher level need, they may regress to attempting to obtain a lower level need – a concept referred to as the *frustration-regression principle*. Neither did they find that one need must be satisfied before another emerges as the primary driver of behaviour (Alderfer, 1972).

Focusing only on growth needs rather than basic human needs, McClelland's *3-Needs Theory* (McClelland, 1985) also identified three motivational needs: *Achievement*; *power*; and *affiliation*. *Achievement* refers to the need to excel and succeed; *power* refers to the need to influence others; and *affiliation* refers to the individual's need to be liked and approved of (McClelland, 1985). Through a series of empirical studies (e.g., Lansing & Heyns, 1959) using thematic apperception tests to measure motivation (whereby participants are asked to make up narratives about ambiguous pictures), rather than self-report tests which were considered to reflect cultural values and social norms, McClelland concluded that individuals have a combination of these needs, and may have a tendency towards one need over the others. Those with high affiliation needs, defined as "a concern for establishing and maintaining positive relationships with another person or group" (Lavigne, Vallerand & Crevier-Braud, 2011, p.1185), for example, are driven to please others, and behave in affiliative ways, are more sensitive to affiliative cues, and are concerned with establishing and maintaining positive relationships above all else. McClelland suggests that the affiliation need is likely universal, but its strength influenced by upbringing, a proposition which will be explored in section 5.6.1 of *Chapter Five*.

Finally, Deci and Ryan's (2000) *Self-Determination Theory* also focused on growth needs, exploring our inherent growth tendencies and innate needs and their relationship with motivation and personality (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Deci and Ryan (2000) suggest that human motivation is determined by the pursuit of three innate psychological needs: *Autonomy*; *competence*; and *relatedness*. The authors contend that these are universal, psychological needs that must be satisfied for optimal functioning in terms of well-being, growth, integrity, motivation, and psychological adjustment. The need for competence is said to be fulfilled by the ability to bring about desired outcomes; the need for autonomy fulfilled by the belief that one's activities are congruent with the self; and the need for relatedness fulfilled by feeling close

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and connected to significant others (Reis, Sheldon, Gable, Roscoe & Ryan, 2000). The innate and universal nature of the theory is underpinned by the assertion that nurturing or thwarting of these needs will have positive or deleterious psychological consequences.

This assertion finds support from a wealth of research that explores the relationship between the three needs and various measures of psychological well-being. In a thorough meta-analysis of 99 correlational studies Van den Broeck, Ferris, Chang and Rosen (2016) found that each of the three needs accounted for a unique variance in positive affect, general well-being, life satisfaction, negative affect, and strain and burnout. Reis et al. (2000) support these correlational findings with a daily diary study of 67 students which explored the relationship between daily fluctuations in emotional well-being, specifically: Positive affect; negative affect; psychological vitality; and health symptoms, and the extent to which needs for autonomy, competence and relatedness were met. As predicted in their hypotheses, all three needs were related to emotional well-being, with autonomy and competence related to all four measures of well-being, but relatedness only associated with positive affect and vitality, not negative affect and health symptoms.

Whilst there appears therefore, to be a lack of agreement in terms of the number and types of need that drive human behaviour, particularly in terms of the inclusion of the basic needs of physiology and safety, the inclusion of the need to belong in all the models discussed, described variously as *belongingness*, *relatedness*, or *affiliation*, suggests that human beings are driven to establish and maintain a sense of belonging and affiliation with individuals and groups. Whilst the primarily correlational methodologies employed in these studies make claims about causal direction difficult, all of the major need theories do contend that thwarting of this need will have deleterious consequences for psychological adjustment, suggesting that *not belonging* may have a detrimental impact on one's psychological well-being.

3.3 Specific theories of the need to belong

3.3.1 Belonging as an innate human motivation

Arguably the most commonly cited and influential theory of the need to belong is that of Baumeister and Leary (1995) who developed the *Belonging Hypothesis* – the proposition that belonging is an innate human motivation. They hypothesised that human beings have an innate need to form interpersonal relationships which are frequent, positive interactions, and involve an interpersonal affective concern that is stable and perceived to be enduring. They suggest that the need to belong can be satisfied by any individual, and that the loss of one relationship can be satisfied by the formation of another. They argue that an understanding of the need to

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belong as a fundamental human motivation can offer a wealth of understanding of much of human behaviour.

In their influential work, *The Need to Belong: Desire for Interpersonal Attachments as a Fundamental Human Motivation* (Baumeister and Leary, 1995), the authors examined their hypothesis against nine criteria of meta-theoretical requirements:

‘A fundamental motivation should (a) produce effects readily under all but adverse conditions, (b) have affective consequences, (c) direct cognitive processing, (d) lead to ill effects (such as on health or adjustment) when thwarted, (e) elicit goal-oriented behaviour designed to satisfy it (subject to motivational patterns such as object substitutability and satiation), (f) be universal in the sense of applying to all people, (g) not be derivative of other motives, (h) affect a broad variety of behaviours, and (i) have implications that go beyond immediate psychological functioning.’ (p.498.)

As the Belonging Hypothesis is referenced by a wealth of research studies positioning belonging as an innate human motivation, the central arguments of Baumeister and Leary’s (1995) warrant examination.

3.3.1.1 An innate desire to form social bonds

A wealth of research studies support the general proposition that all human beings do indeed desire to form social bonds and do so spontaneously. As described above, all of the major need theories agree that human beings are driven to establish and maintain a sense of belonging and affiliation with individuals and groups. Anthropological studies also find consistent evidence that individuals in all societies will naturally form into social groups (Mann, 1980). Similarly, numerous experimental studies, particularly those exploring in-group behaviour have found examples of spontaneous group formation and development of social bonds, such as the spontaneous development of group favouritism through random assignment to groups, even when allocation is entirely arbitrary.

In the classic Robbers Cave experiments for example, Sherif, Harvey, White, Hood and Sherif (1961; 1988) randomly allocated 12 year-old boys into two groups in order to explore the development of social bonds and the concept of ethnocentrism – that we are driven to preferably evaluate aspects of our own group (Brewer & Campbell, 1976). Keeping the two groups apart for the first week whilst they worked to achieve common goals (such as completing a treasure hunt or building apparatus), the authors first found that the two groups rapidly formed intra-group bonds. They developed a group structure as observed through the

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establishment of a hierarchy of status positions, established group norms and attitudes, such as naming their groups, referring to objects as 'ours' and created group characteristics, such as being 'tough' (Sherif et al., 1988). They also found that when competition was introduced between the two groups, fierce opposition developed, expressed through actions such as burning the other group's flag or eating their food, and characterising them in unfavourable terms. Whilst the participants in these experiments were children and not adults, the rapid development of in-group bonding and out-group opposition supports the argument that human beings do naturally develop social bonds.

In-group studies also find that we have a drive to form social bonds which even over shadows the competitiveness developed through the forming of two groups when those two groups are then combined. Wilder and Thompson (1980) for example explored in-group bias with two groups of female students divided on the basis of their college affiliation. They found that in-group bias (as measured by the allocation of rewards to either group and by trait evaluations of the individuals from both groups) reduced following repeated contact (more than twice) with members of the out-group. Similarly, in the final stage of Sherif et al.'s (1988) experiments the researchers found that when the two groups were required to work together in order to achieve certain superordinate goals that required combined effort, in-group bias and out-group opposition reduced. Despite the strong competition and derogatory attitudes expressed towards the outgroup in the second stage, tension between the two groups was observed by the researchers to be reduced and cooperation increased (assessed through the observation of choices of working together, sharing entertainment and wanting to travel home together). These observations were further supported by the rating of outgroup members in terms of more favourable stereotypes, and by a statistically significant increase in the number of friendship choices made in favour of outgroup members between the second and third stages of the study and a significant decrease in rejection choices of outgroup members. As such, these studies do offer support to Baumeister and Leary's (1995) proposition that humans have a natural tendency to form social bonds.

However, it could be argued that the development of social bonds in Sherif et al.'s (1961; 1988) Robber's Cave experiments could also have been motivated by causal agents other than a need to belong, and may more likely have been a function of the participant's need to achieve common goals. However, many experiments using the minimal group paradigm, which utilises random assignment to groups to explore social categorisation, have found that simple group assignment results in in-group preference and out-group competition, minimising the potential causal factors. Tajfel, Billig, Bundy and Flament (1971) for example randomly assigned children

to one of two groups, but ostensibly on the basis of preference for one of two artists. Despite not having met those in the other group, their study found that when asked to distribute money between pairs of recipients participants adopted strategies that maximised in-group profit and maximised the difference in favour of their group. Whilst this study did not assess the development of social bonds, this can be inferred through the use of strategies which would benefit the in-group.

In contrast, uncertainty-identity theory (Hogg, 2007; 2012) argues that rather than a need to form interpersonal attachments, individuals are driven to develop social bonds and form groups in order to establish a *validated sense of self* and reduce uncertainty about the self, rather than just to develop interpersonal relationships. This argument is supported again by research using the minimal group paradigm, as operationalised by Tajfel et al. (1971) and others which has consistently found that individuals identify more strongly with groups when they are experiencing uncertainty (Grieve & Hogg, 1999; Hogg, 2007; 2012), and that extreme uncertainty has been related to identification with highly entitative groups (those with clearly defined and unique characteristics) (Castano & Borgignon, 2003; Hogg, Sherman, Dierselhuis, Maitner & Moffit, 2007; Hogg, Meehan & Farquharson, 2010), suggesting an *identity motive* over the need to develop relationships.

Hogg, Sherman, Dierselhuis, Maitner and Moffit (2007) for example, explored the role of self-uncertainty and in-group entitativity on group identification. In their first study participants were asked to indicate which of the two major political parties in Australia they supported, how much of a 'group' they felt the party was (as a measure of in-group entitativity), and then either primed to feel self-uncertain or self-certain. This was achieved by asking them to describe aspects of their lives that made them feel certain or uncertain about themselves and their future. Following this manipulation, participants were asked to indicate how much they identified with their political party including items exploring goodness of fit to the party, liking/familiarity, self-importance, belonging and ties to the party. Results of this study found that when self-uncertainty was *high* participants identified more strongly with high than low entitativity groups, although uncertainty alone did not predict identification.

In their second study however, the authors employed a minimal-group paradigm in which participants were led to believe they were to engage in a discussion via computer with other members of a group. Following completion of standard questionnaires used only to ostensibly provide the experimenter with information about their group, they were provided with statistics which either indicated that their group were highly entitative (individuals had

responded very similarly to one another and the group was very different to other groups) or low in entitativity (the individuals had responded very differently to each other and the group was very similar to other groups). They were then primed for self-certainty in the same way as in study one. Manipulation checks confirmed that those in the high entitativity group felt the group had higher entitativity than the low entitativity group, and that those in the self-uncertain group felt less self-certain than those in the self-certain group. Results of their study found that participants identified more strongly under high rather than low uncertainty and with high rather than low entitativity. They also found a strong interaction between conditions with those in the high entitativity and high uncertainty conditions identifying significantly more strongly than low entitativity and low uncertainty participants. As such, their study supports the argument that the development of social bonds as observed in the minimal group experiments may be a function of the need to reduce uncertainty and develop a validated sense of self, rather than a need to develop interpersonal affiliations. Uncertainty-identity theory (Hogg, 2007; 2012) therefore extends the Belonging Hypothesis by demonstrating that our need to belong to a group is interwoven with our sense of self rather than simply involving interpersonal connections. As will be explored in *Chapter Four*, this relationship emerged as a core element in the SoNB in the current research, and as such will be explored in some depth in section 5.3 in *Chapter Five*.

Whilst research does therefore suggest that given the opportunity human beings will develop social bonds with others, the motivation for the development of these bonds is less clear, and they could be a function of an innate and spontaneous need to form interpersonal relationships or by a pragmatic need to cooperate in order to achieve common goals, or to develop a more certain and valued sense of self. Whilst we may have an innate need to belong therefore, it may not be a function of our need to develop affective, interpersonal attachments as proposed by Baumeister and Leary (1995). Whichever are the causal agents however, the combined research does suggest that human beings have an innate need to develop interpersonal relationships, supporting Baumeister and Leary's (1995) hypothesis.

3.3.1.2 Impact of a need to belong on cognition, emotional and mental health, and behaviour

Another argument proposed by Baumeister and Leary is that in order for belonging to be considered a fundamental human need it ought to be able to direct cognitive processing. The argument they present in this regard is based on evidence that demonstrates that we apply similar cognitive processes to our thinking about close others as we do to ourselves. For example, we have difficulty in distinguishing between our own and spouse's traits (Aaron, Aaron, Rudor & Nelson, 1991), and we apply the same favourable biases to close others as we

do to ourselves (Fincham, Beach & Baucom, 1987). These studies however, all involve spouses and close others rather than less intimate relationships, and as such alternative explanations may account for these findings. For example, attempting to perceive a spouse in a positive light may be driven by a desire to be perceived similarly, through association, or through what one's choice of said spouse suggests about one's own traits. So what may be at play in these circumstances could be a desire to convey positive information about oneself rather than by a need to belong.

However, Baumeister and Leary (1995) argue that social categorisation studies offer support to their argument, claiming that the tendency for us to rate in-group members more favourably than out-group members is indicative of the need to belong's influence on our cognitive processing. Indeed, research from the Social Identity Theory literature (Tajfel & Turner, 1984) has consistently found that we are prone to biased intragroup evaluations in an effort to promote the positive distinctiveness of the group to which we belong (Brown, 2000). For example, over a series of studies, Howard and Rothbart (1980) found that cognitive processes were biased in favour of in-group members. In the first of a series of studies participants were formed into groups through ostensibly being scored as either over or under estimators (determined by the number of dots they estimated to be on a card). When asked to assign favourable and unfavourable statements to members of their in-group (those who shared their estimating capability) participants assigned significantly more favourable statements to members of the in-group than unfavourable statements, and rated in-group members with more favourable adjectives than the out-group. In a second experiment, participants were presented with a variety of statements describing favourable or unfavourable behaviour which had been disclosed by either members of their in-group or the out-group. Following a distraction task participants were asked to recall whether each statement had been presented as an in-group or out-group behaviour. Results of this study found a significant interaction between group and favourableness, with participants more accurately recognising unfavourable behaviours associated with the out-group than those associated with the in-group, suggesting the need to belong directs cognitive processing. However, the tendency to recall the in-group in a more favourable light may be driven by a need for a positive sense of self by regarding those with whom one identifies more positively, rather than a need to develop and maintain social bonds. This proposition finds support from self-enhancement theory (Dipboye, 1977; Sedikides, Gaertner & Tosuchi, 2003) which proposes that individuals have a basic human need to enhance self-esteem and are motivated to find ways to enhance their self-views, and will be explored in section 5.4.1.2 of *Chapter Five*.

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Baumeister and Leary (1995) also propose that the need to belong should be considered an innate motivation because of its impact on emotion and mental health. As the purpose of this Chapter is to position the current research in the context of the general construct of belonging rather than to examine the potential correlates or consequences of belonging, a thorough examination of those correlates will be provided in *Chapter Five* when the extant literature is discussed in the light of the findings from the current study. However, as Baumeister and Leary (1995) argue that the consequences of thwarted belonging are evidence for its positioning as a fundamental human need, it is not possible to adequately critique the Belonging Hypothesis and explore the validity or utility of this theory without considering the research that supports or counters their hypothesis. As such, reference and some exploration of the more recent research around the emotional and behavioural correlates of belonging will be discussed here, but a full and thorough critique provided in *Chapter Five*.

In terms of impact on emotion, a variety of emotions have been found to be related to the need to belong such as anxiety, which has been found to be a consequence of exclusion from social groups and to be reduced following inclusion (Barden, Garber, Leiman, Ford & Masters, 1985), and related in more recent work by Levett-Jones and Lathlean (2009) to diminished sense of belonging in student nurses. A recent study by Shakespeare-Finch and Daley (2017) also supports the relationship between belonging and both anxiety and depression. Their study with 2,500 ambulance workers which will be explored in more detail in 5.5.3 of *Chapter Five*, found that workplace belongingness was the strongest significant negative predictor of psychological distress (including assessment of both anxiety and depression) explaining 19.8% of unique variance. Tambor and Leary (1993) also found that depression was negatively related to the extent to which individuals felt included and accepted. Studies have also found a relationship between exclusion and more general mental health, such as a study by Armstrong and Roth (1989) which found that women with eating disorders had more frequent and more intense separation anxieties than a control group, and studies have found rejected children to have a higher incidence of psychopathology than other children (Bhatti, Derezotes, Kim, & Specht, 1989). Similarly, social support and companionship have been found to be positively related to psychological well-being (Rook, 1987b).

Baumeister and Leary (1995) also present evidence regarding the incidence of suicide, although this research implies that belonging is implicated in the variables examined. For example, the authors argue that higher rates of suicide for single and divorced individuals than for married individuals, higher suicide rates for unemployed versus employed individuals, and for those whose occupations are shrinking (e.g., Rotherberg & Jones, 1987) are evidence of the impact of

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belonging on mental health. However, the impact found could be attributed to diminished lifestyle, lack of finances and concerns about the security of one's future rather than the thwarting of the need to belong. This said, more recent research, as explored in section 5.5.3 in *Chapter Five*, has indeed found deficits in belonging to be related to suicidal ideation (e.g., Fisher, Overholser, Ridley, Braden & Rosoff, 2015).

Whilst these studies do suggest a relationship between factors associated with belonging (rejection, social support and separation), they, and much of the recent research is correlational, and it could be that those with suicidal tendencies might be more likely to be rejected by others and as such their suicidal ideation may be responsible for their lack of belonging (if so inferred by their marital status in Rotherberg & Jones' 1987 study) rather than caused by their marital status. Similarly, it could be that the psychopathologies observed above may have caused individuals to be rejected, and that the symptoms often associated with depression, such as submissive behaviour, self-deprecation and withdrawal may *result* in rejection, rather than rejection and not belonging resulting in depression.

Furthermore, and as will be explored in section 5.5.4 of *Chapter Five*, the evidence for the emotional impact of belonging is not equivocal. Some research, including a substantial meta-analysis of 88 studies using a variety of different manipulations including Cyberball, Future Alone, and Reliving methodologies, supports Baumeister and Leary (1995) finding rejection to increase negative mood and decrease positive mood (Gerber and Wheeler, 2009a). Other research however, including a later study authored by Baumeister himself, found a neutral rather than negative emotional state following exclusion (Twenger, Canter & Baumeister, 2003). For example, a meta-analysis of 192 studies by Blackhart, et al. (2009) found that overall, whilst rejected participants felt worse than neutral controls and accepted participants they did not actually experience emotional distress. The potential explanations for these conflicting findings are examined in detail in 5.5.4 of *Chapter Five*, and as explored and referenced in *Chapter One*, suggest that the inconsistency in findings may be due to the methodologies employed and the lack of opportunity they present for appraisal of the cause of thwarted belonging. One conclusion that can be drawn however, is that in real-life settings rejection and exclusion is likely to impact emotion and mental health, supporting Baumeister and Leary's (1995) hypothesis.

As such, the evidence that thwarting of the need to belong impacts our cognitive, emotional and mental well-being is limited by the inferences made about the role of belonging in the studies referenced, by the often correlational nature that challenges Baumeister and Leary's

(1995) claim that the impact is *caused* by thwarted belonging, and the conflicting findings from more recent research. However, sections 5.5 of *Chapter Five* will explore the constructs which emerged from the current research in terms of the emotional experience of the participant group, and through that exploration will discuss studies that indicate that thwarted belonging does indeed have a significant impact on one's emotional and psychological well-being.

3.3.1.3 A universal need that drives behaviour

Baumeister and Leary's (1995) hypothesis also proposes that the need to belong is an innate, adaptive need and as such should consistently motivate behaviour designed to enhance one's sense of belonging rather than diminish it (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). As will be explored in depth in section 5.4.3 of *Chapter Five*, this proposition is supported by a wealth of research that has found that individuals with a thwarted need to belong will engage in behaviours designed to enhance their belonging status such as seeking out relationships, offering to help, and working extra hard (e.g., Maner, et al., 2007; Levett-Jones & Lathlean, 2009). Maner et al. (2007) for example found that socially excluded individuals showed more desire to engage in group work, to seek out social connections, and were more positive about services that offered the chance of making friends, than accepted individuals (Maner, et al., 2007). As will become evident in 5.4.4 of *Chapter Five* however, the findings are not conclusive, with research also finding that rather than engaging in behaviours that would enhance their belonging, excluded individuals sometimes engage in behaviours likely to *diminish* their belonging status such as counterproductive work behaviours (Hitlan & Noel, 2009), being anti-social and refusing to help others (e.g., Gerber and Wheeler's (2009a) meta-analysis of the rejection literature). However, as will be explored in detail in 5.4.4.2 in *Chapter Five*, these behaviours may only be engaged in when the individual is not actually able to influence their inclusionary status, whereas when given the opportunity individuals are more consistently driven to engage in behaviours that enhance their sense of belonging (Maner et al., 2007).

It has been also argued that the individualistic behaviour observed in some well researched psychological phenomena such as social loafing and the bystander effect counter the proposition that individuals are universally driven to behave in ways which will enhance their likelihood of belonging. These phenomena involve individualistic behaviours that do not serve the good of the group and as such would *inhibit* rather than *enhance* one's inclusionary status. In the case of social loafing, whereby individuals are observed to reduce their contributions when submerged in a group (Darley & Latane, 1968), the individual is not working towards the good of the group and as such does not appear motivated to enhance social bonds. However, this argument infers that the behaviours driven by a need to belong are altruistic and engaged

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in in service of the good of the group. However, behaviours driven by the need to belong are essentially self-interested – they are engaged in in order to enhance one's belonging status (Baumeister and Leary, 1995). In order for one's behaviour to enhance one's belonging status it needs to be observed by members of the group and recognised for its contribution to the group. Social loafing however, occurs in situations where individual effort is hard to distinguish and as such good performance is unlikely to be recognised and rewarded (Karau & Williams, 1993).

This argument finds support from a meta-analysis by Karau and Williams (1993) which explored the conditions under which social loafing is most and least likely to occur. This analysis of 78 social loafing studies found that, amongst other factors, social loafing was weakest in situations when individuals perceived that their contributions were unique. These findings support Karau and Williams' (1993) collective-effort-model which argues that social loafing occurs because the relationship between an individual's effort and the performance of the group, and the group's performance and their own rewards are weak, and as such contribution to the group is unlikely to be recognised and rewarded and therefore unlikely to enhance one's ability to belong.

Similarly, it could be argued that the bystander effect, a well evidenced phenomenon whereby the larger the group the less likely it is for an individual to come to the aid of someone in need (Darley & Latane, 1968), is another example of individuals not being driven to enhance social inclusion. This effect was first explored following the murder of Kitty Genovese – a murder that occurred over a time span of half an hour and was overheard by 38 neighbours, none of whom came to help or called the police (Darley & Latane, 1968). The attack sparked a surge of interest in the reasons why no one offered assistance and has been drawn upon as an example of individualistic behaviours usurping the need to belong (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). Whilst, in the particular incidence of the Genovese murder, safety needs may well have out-weighed belonging needs, the effect has been observed in many other instances that did not threaten the safety of the individual. For example, research has explored the helping behaviour of participants when a confederate appeared to be having a seizure (Darley & Latane, 1968) and when a confederate was struggling to open a filing cabinet (Latane & Rodin, 1969). Attending to safety needs in these cases could not account for an absence of helping behaviour and as such could be argued to counter the hypothesis that belonging needs will always motivate behaviour designed to enhance one's belonging as the cost of failing to help may result in exclusion.

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However, in a similar way to one's *contribution* not being recognised and rewarded for social loafing, in the case of bystander apathy, one's *failure to help* is also not likely to be recognised and punished, and as such these situations would not impact one's belonging status. This argument is supported by research that has found that the bystander effect is reduced in situations where the possibility of future interaction and therefore evaluation by others is introduced, which could impact one's belonging status. For example, Gottlieb and Carver (1980) investigated the helping behaviour of students during an experiment where they were led to believe that another 'participant' with whom they were having a discussion by microphone and headset, was choking. Half the group were told that following the experiment the participants would all come together to discuss the experiment and the other half told that they would remain anonymous, would not meet other participants and that the experimenter would not listen to the discussion. These two groups were also split in terms of number of bystanders, with half believing one other bystander was present and the other half believing five others were present. On exploring the difference between the conditions in the time it took for the participants to leave the cubicle to seek help, the authors found that the delay in responding was significantly reduced when participants believed there was only one rather than five bystanders, and significantly reduced when participants anticipated future interaction. The authors conclude therefore that one of the potential causes of this attenuation effect may be the costs associated with not helping and being poorly evaluated by others, which, one could argue, may in turn have implications for one's ability to belong.

Furthermore, to the extent that the other participants in this study could be considered to be a 'group' not helping might actually *enhance* one's sense of belonging because the passivity of the rest of the group would likely signal social norms, and as such not helping would be behaviour that would help individuals to 'fit in'. Similarly, individuals may be concerned about committing a social blunder through helping for which they may be punished through exclusion. This argument finds support from research by Latane and Darley (1976) which explored the helping behaviour of participants who believed they had observed an experimenter receiving an electric shock. The experiment involved five conditions: 'Alone' condition whereby the participant observed the event alone; 'diffusion of responsibility' where the participant knew another bystander was also watching but could not see them or be seen; 'diffusion plus social influence' where the participant could see the response of the other participant; 'diffusion plus audience inhibition' where the participant could be seen by the bystander but not vice versa; and 'diffusion plus social influence plus audience inhibition' where the participant could see the bystander's response and could be seen by the bystander. The research found that the greater

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the level of communication the more helping decreased, with the alone condition resulting in the greatest helping and the diffusion plus social influence plus audience inhibition resulting in the least helping. The authors conclude that these results suggest that the passivity of the bystander when the participant could see them indicated social norms and therefore helped to guide behaviour. They also concluded that concern about committing a social blunder was also involved for the participants whose response could be seen by the bystander. As such, the behaviour observed in the bystander effect may be driven in part by a need to belong, and concerns with replicating social norms and not engaging in behaviour which may lead to punishment through exclusion, and as such may in fact support the hypothesis of an innate human need rather than counter it.

3.3.1.4 Summary

A critical assessment of Baumeister and Leary's Belonging Hypothesis (1995) finds that much of the evidence quoted to support their argument at the time was drawn from research exploring different variables where the need to belong was inferred rather than directly tested, or from populations that were considered to represent those with thwarted need to belong such as divorcees and widowers, single individuals, prisoners and prostitutes, which cannot be considered to be representative populations and whose status may be the *result* of their reported psychopathologies and emotional distresses rather than being the cause. However, whilst the evidence upon which Baumeister and Leary (1995) proposed their hypothesis was somewhat indirect, inconclusive and inconsistent, later research does support their arguments that belonging is a universal, innate human motivation responsible for emotional, cognitive and behavioural outcomes. As will be explored next, there is also a wealth of evidence from different disciplines that suggests that the need to belong serves an adaptive function, and as such may be fundamental to our survival and existence.

3.3.2 Belonging as an adaptive mechanism

3.3.2.1 *The protective benefits of the group*

The theory that belonging may be an *adaptive mechanism* is one which is asserted by Leary and Cox (2008). They emphasise an evolutionary perspective to the need to belong and assert that the human species has survived primarily as a consequence of social inclusion and living in social groups which offered protection, nurture and support. They suggest that there are five distinct social groups to which individuals desire to belong, which differ in the benefits they afford and their criteria for inclusion: 1) macro level groups, such as communities or tribes, which offer benefits such as resources and protection against other groups; 2) instrumental coalitions,

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groups of people who come together to achieve shared goals, such as working groups; 3) mating relationships; 4) kin relationships, maintained on the basis of genetic relatedness, in which individuals have a biological driver to protect their kin; and 5) supportive friendships which provide support and companionship over time.

Leary and Cox (2008) also postulate that the process of natural selection would have favoured those who established and maintained interpersonal connections with social groups. An early paper by Coon (1946) supports this proposition, arguing that those who failed to cooperate with group members would likely be excluded and less likely to survive in life. Several anthropologists, evolutionary theorists and social psychologists similarly postulate that successful cooperation and harmonious group relations would have resulted in group inclusion (de Waal, 1989), whereas those who were less successful would more likely be excluded and in turn less likely to be able to survive (Caporael, 1997, 2001a, 2001b; Lewin, 1993). Belonging therefore may result in more effective functioning than acting alone and be integral to one's survival.

Social Capital Theory, defined by Putnam (1995, p.67) as: "features of social organisation such as networks, norms, and social trust that facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit" also supports the adaptive nature of belonging by proposing that lives and communities are made more productive by belonging and social connection (Prusak, 2001). The theory draws attention to the collective benefits that result from social networks, suggesting that belonging may have real value for society as well as individuals. This proposition is supported by research exploring the impact of social capital on the physical and psychological health of communities which has found that an absence of social ties consistently predicts mortality from almost every cause of death (Cohen, 1988; House, Landis & Umberson, 1988). For example, after controlling for smoking, blood pressure and cholesterol, healthy individuals with high social interaction scores had lower mortality risk than isolated individuals (House, et al., 1982). Similarly, more isolated unhealthy individuals, such as those who had heart disease, were found to have more total deaths and sudden cardiac arrest than those who were less isolated one to three years later (Ruberman, Weinblatt, Goldberg & Chaudhary, 1984). Lower levels of social trust have also been found to be associated with higher levels of most causes of death, whereas higher levels of social trust are associated with positive assessments of health and well-being (Kawachi, Kennedy & Prothrow-Stith, 1997), and are positively associated with income and income inequality (Knack & Keefer, 1997) and household income and welfare (Grootaert & Narayan, 2004).

3.3.2.2 The neurophysiological correlates of belonging

There is also evidence from the field of neuroscience which supports the notion that the drive to belong may indeed be an adaptive response to the threat to our survival posed by social exclusion (MacDonald & Leary, 2005). Specifically, research suggests that the neurophysiological mechanisms that underpin social affiliation and bonding may also support the adaptive nature of belonging. For example, research has found that bonding and social interaction stimulates the dopamine system which is involved in reward and reinforcement. The release of these neurochemicals make bonding a rewarding and inherently pleasurable experience, thus encouraging a preference for social interaction and driving the belongingness motivation (Carter, 1998).

Similarly, the hormone oxytocin has been found to play a role not only in the adaptive behaviour of mother-child bonding, but also in other forms of social bond (Gangestad & Grebe, 2016). For example, the administration of oxytocin has been found to be related to increased gaze following in monkeys, a building block of social behaviour, intimating its role in increasing interaction with others (Putnam, Romman, Zimmerman & Gothard, 2016). Oxytocin has also been found to promote empathy, generosity, trust and helping behaviour (e.g. McQuaid, McInnis, Abizaid & Anisman, 2014) between women, and cooperative behaviour towards in-group members whilst aggressive, defensive behaviours towards out-group members amongst men (De Dreu, 2012). The latter finding suggests oxytocin may be involved in the protection of in-group social bonds.

Oxytocin has also been found to be related to increased sensitivity to threats to social inclusion (Matheson, Robyn, McQuaid & Anisman, 2016), which may explain why some studies have found increased levels of oxytocin to be related to higher, rather than lower levels of marital distress (Taylor, Saphire-Bernstein, & Seeman, 2010) – the threat to the social bond triggering the release of oxytocin which is then put to the task of allocating resources to diminish that threat and protect the social bond (Hurlemann & Scheele, 2015).

Whilst some studies as referenced above, indicate a difference in the effect of oxytocin in males and females (e.g. in the accurate social perception of kinship behaviours for women and competitive behaviours for men (Fischer-Shofty, Levkovitz, & Shamay-Tsoory, 2011)), researchers interpret these findings to be reflective of gender-typical roles in that women focus on maintaining social bonds to protect their offspring, and males focus on inter-group conflict to enhance their opportunities to mate (Fischer-Shofty, Levkovitz & Shamay-Tsoory, 2011). These propositions find support from many social psychology studies which consistently find

sex differences in intergroup behaviour. For example, intergroup biases and racism are more strongly held by men than women (Gerard & Hoyt, 1974; Sidanius, Cling, & Pratto, 1991; Watts, 1996), and men are more likely to engage in intergroup aggression than women (Van Vugt, De Cremer and Janssen, 2007). Van Vugt, et al. (2007) for example, found in a series of experiments that male cooperation in a group task was significantly higher for those who believed the performance of their group was being compared to other groups than those who did not believe their group was competing. There was no effect of competition however, for women. As such, despite the gender differences, oxytocin appears to be significantly implicated in the social behaviour of humans.

Another indication that supports the adaptive nature of the need to belong is the proposition that social pain, defined as the pain experienced through interpersonal rejection or loss (Sturgeon & Zautra, 2016), may share the same neurobiological systems for monitoring and responding to rejection as physical pain. The anterior cingulate cortex (ACC) is a structure in the brain known to be activated by physical pain, specifically the affective rather than sensory component (Rainville, Duncan, Price, Carrier, & Bushnell, 1997), and when removed for the treatment of chronic pain results in a continuation of the intensity of the pain but amelioration of the distress caused (Foltz & White, 1968). Research has found that this same system is involved in social experience. Early research involving the lesioning of the ACC for the treatment of chronic pain found unexpected social consequences in that patients became less socially inhibited and less socially sensitive (Tow & Whitty, 1953). More recent neuroimaging research has also demonstrated that the ACC is involved in social pain. For example, research by Eisenberger, Lieberman and Williams (2003) using the cyberball technique and fMRI scans, found the ACC to be activated by social rejection. In their studies the ACC was more active for those in an exclusion group (where participants were prevented from joining in the ball toss by other players) than for those in the inclusion group (participants played with the other players). In addition, the researchers found that as well as correlating positively with ACC activation, self-reported distress during the exclusion condition was negatively correlated with the activation of the right ventral prefrontal cortex (RVPPFC) relative to the inclusion condition. This structure in the brain is believed to be involved in the regulation and inhibition of pain distress and negative affect and its stimulation associated with reduction of physical pain symptoms (Petrovic, Kalso, Peterson & Ingvar, 2002). As such, Eisenberger's findings suggest that the RVPPFC may also play a regulatory role in diminishing the distress of social exclusion (Eisenberger, et al. 2003).

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In addition, the Periaqueductal Gray (PAG) brain structure has also been found to be activated by social isolation in animals (MacDonald & Leary, 2005). This structure of the brain is part of the threat-defence mechanism and is associated with pain detection and reduction, inhibiting pain transmission signals (Fields, 2000). The activation of this structure in rat pups separated from their litter has been found to result in similar analgesic effects as from physical pain (Kehoe & Blass, 1986b; Spear et al., 1985).

3.3.2.3 Summary

Taken together these findings suggest that a sense of belonging is vital to existence, to the point that as humans became more dependent on each other for survival, the social attachment system may have evolved to adopt the same neural pathways involved in physical pain in order to alert us to a threat to our social inclusion by stimulating the same neural pathways as physical pain (Eisenberger, Lieberman & Williams, 2013). This activation would in turn motivate approach / avoidance behaviours to regulate our inclusion-status and ensure we maintained our social bonds (MacDonald & Leary, 2005). Given that not belonging appears to be as threatening to our survival and as distressing to us as pain, it is likely that a SoNB will result in detrimental consequences to our psychological well-being and motivate behaviour to redress the experience, which whilst touched on briefly above, will be discussed in detail in 5.4 and 5.5 of *Chapter Five*.

3.4 The context of the workplace

Given the potential importance of the need to belong to our survival as a species, the magnitude of the impact of thwarted belonging on the way that we think, feel and behave is likely to be great and felt in a variety of contexts. Some researchers however believe that these contexts may represent distinct belonging factors. Somers (1999) for example, hypothesised a four factor structure for belonging of family; friends; work/school; and neighbourhood. Employing the Belongingness Scale (BES; Somers, 1999) with a sample of 330 participants, her exploratory factor analysis offered significant, but moderate support for her hypothesis, suggesting that a four factor-model of belongingness might be more appropriate than a unidimensional model, and that belonging may be context-specific.

One such context is the workplace, and Cockshaw, Shochet and Obst (2013) specifically distinguish between general and workplace belonging, considering them to be separate factors. In a quantitative study of 369 participants Cockshaw et al. (2013) examined the relationship between the Sense of Belonging Instrument-Psychological (SOBI-P; Hagerty & Patusky, 1995) which conceptualises sense of belonging as both value and fit, with Psychological Sense of

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Organisational Membership (PSOM) an adaptation of the Psychological Sense of School Membership scale (Goodenow, 1993) which assesses belongingness in the workplace, and the depression Anxiety Stress scale – short form (DASS-21; Lovibond & Lovibond, 1995) which assesses both depressive and anxious symptoms. An exploratory factor analysis of the combined SOBI-P and PSOM found items in each of the scales loaded strongly onto their corresponding factor and low cross loadings between the factors supported their two factor model. In addition, general belongingness and workplace belongingness was found to distinctly and uniquely contribute to depressive symptoms in their sample.

Being the place where we spend the majority of our time, work has become increasingly important in modern life (Belle, Burley & Long, 2015), and now provides much of the social support that used to be gained from extended families and community (Gill, 1999). As such this is a context that is likely to be increasingly central to one's sense of belonging and critical to one's psychological well-being. It could be therefore that, as a distinct context, the causes and consequences of a sense of not belonging in the workplace may differ from those of not belonging in general or in other contexts, and, as intimated by the need theories discussed above, and to be explored in more detail in 5.1 of *Chapter Five*, may constitute more than just a need for affiliation.

Indeed, one of the limitations of much of the research explored thus far is the focus on the need for affiliation and the proposition that belonging is primarily about the need to develop social relationships. However, and as introduced above, SoNB might be a broader construct and involve more than just relationships, and may in fact incorporate the needs for growth, achievement, or competence as defined by Alderfer's ERG theory (1972), McClelland's 3-Need Theory (McClelland, 1985), and Deci and Ryan's (2000) Self-Determination Theory. Similarly, Uncertainty-Identity Theory (Hogg, 2007b; 2012) as well as Self-Enhancement (Dipboye, 1977; Sedikides, Gaertner & Tosuchi, 2003) and Self-Affirmation theories (Steele, 1999) present the possibility that some of the observed correlates of belonging may involve more existential constructs such as a need to develop a consistent, certain, stable, and positive sense of self.

This paper will now move on to present the findings of the current study followed by a discussion of the related literature which focuses on what might contribute to the experience of not belonging at work, the consequences of not belonging at work, and what may be core to the detrimental impact of the experience, in the workplace, of a sense of not belonging.

Chapter 4 Findings

4.1 Introduction to the theoretical model

Through the constant comparative method, as described in *Chapter Two*, analysis of the transcripts of the twelve interviews revealed a variety of concepts that clustered into themes, sub-categories, and overarching categories. These categories capture the experience of the participants and allow us to make sense of the data. Exploration of the relationships between the constructs and categories revealed a theoretical framework, a potential process through which the phenomenon of not belonging in the workplace may be experienced. In accordance with the guidance offered by Glaser (1978), the following sections will first present an outline of this theoretical framework and how the various categories and constructs relate to one another, and how the core category which emerged from the analysis is related to all other aspects of the substantive theory.

This initial outline will be followed by a detailed exploration the various categories, beginning with the attributes of SoNB before moving on to define each of the related categories and their component properties and sub-properties, illustrated throughout with incidents from the transcripts. The names used throughout this chapter are fictional to protect the anonymity of the participants.

4.1.1 Outline of theoretical framework

Through the process of the constant comparative method a theoretical framework has emerged that helps to elucidate the experience in the workplace of feeling like one does not belong. The relationships proposed in this model explore the *associations* and *potential* direction, between the various dimensions of the model, as reported by the participants. This provides an insight into the potential process through which the experience occurs and leads to the development of proposed relationships which can be explored through further research. This theoretical framework is illustrated in *Figure 4.1*, and described below, and captured in tables at the end of each section which detail the categories along with their theoretical codes (those codes which specify the theoretical relationships between the categories), and their proposed relationships.

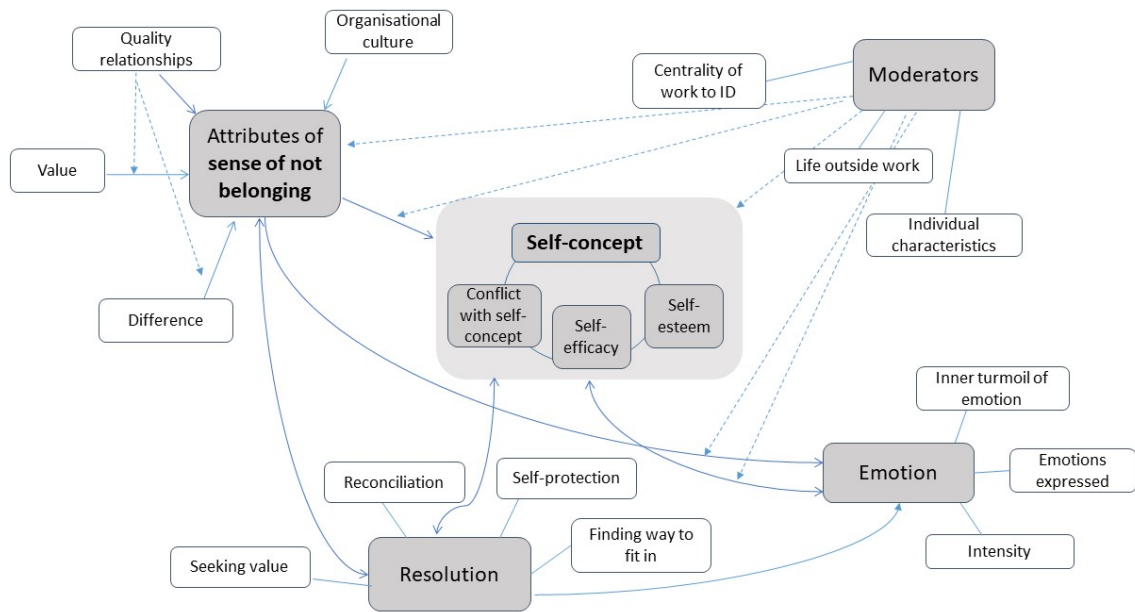


Figure 4.1: Theoretical framework of a sense of not belonging

The experience of not belonging is initiated by one or more of a collection of **'attributes'**, including, and as will be detailed below; **'absence of shared characteristics'**, **'absence of quality relationships'**, **'organisational culture'**, and **'not adding value'**. One or more of these attributes, at times *'moderated'* by other contextual or individual factors, appears to result in a *'sense of not belonging'* because by their nature, these factors lead to the individual feeling outside the group. This SoNB impacts the core concern – their **'self-concept'** in terms of both their self-knowledge and perception of **'self-efficacy'**, and critically, their **'self-esteem'** – their evaluation of their self-knowledge, the thoughts, perceptions and beliefs individuals hold about themselves, as well as their beliefs about others' perceptions about themselves.

Self-concept is central to the substantive theory because it is impacted both by one's SoNB as well as by how one feels about and attempts to deal with not belonging. Not having quality relationships, being different from the group, not adding value, or working in a culture that leaves you feeling disrespected and excluded may cause people to feel that there must be something *'wrong'* with them either in terms of their competence or their personality, leading them to have both a poor perception of themselves, and also to assume that the *'in-group'* (that they perceive themselves to be outside of) are judging them and perceiving them negatively. This often results in individuals feeling like they can't be themselves, because they believe that

who they are doesn't fit and they assume they are being judged negatively, and so feel the need to mask their identities or change how they present themselves.

At the same time the resolution strategies that individuals undertake in order to resolve the experience may also negatively impact their self-concept. These strategies are driven by either a need to fit in, to add value, or to protect themselves from the experience. Whilst some strategies have positive outcomes and are associated with a positive self-concept, most appear to have negative outcomes, further compounding a negative self-concept, particularly if individuals feel ashamed of the way they have behaved in terms of attempting to conform, limiting their potential, or becoming disruptive. They may also impact SoNB as they withdraw, become disinterested in others, or are inauthentic. These resolution strategies often also lead to an **'conflict with self-concept'**, a conflict between who they know themselves to be, and who they become through attempting to fit in, add value, or protect themselves. The emotional impact of the experience, felt as depression, anxiety and at times, anger, also further compounds their negative self-concept because of what having the experience and their emotional response to the experience says about who they are – they must be weak, and lack resilience. As such, the process of not belonging is often cyclical and self-perpetuating.

What now follows is a detailed exploration, illustrated throughout with incidents from the texts, of the categories, properties and sub-properties which constitute the substantive theory.

4.2 Attributes to sense of not belonging in the workplace

Analysis of the transcripts revealed that the experience within the workplace of feeling like one does not belong appeared to be attributed to a variety of factors. These factors clustered into four sub-categories: **'absence of quality relationships'**; **'not adding value'**; **'difference'**; and **'organisational culture'**. Without exception, all of the interviewees discussed attributes which fell within more than one of these categories, and as such, and as will be explored below, the experience of not belonging is likely the result of a graded-effect, in that the greater the number of contributory factors experienced, the higher the risk to one's sense of belonging and self-concept. What emerges as universal to all the attributory factors is that they all appear to put individuals on the 'outside' of the group or organisation to which they aspire to belong, and it is that perception that either, when compounded by the presence of more than one factor, or when moderated by other external factors, results in SoNB.

An overview of the conceptual sub-categories and their properties and sub-properties is given below:

- **Absence of quality relationships**
 - Not part of a team
 - No genuine relationships
 - Not trusting or being trusted
 - Not being able to be open
 - No understanding or empathy
 - Not mattering to someone
- **Not adding value**
 - Not making a contribution
 - Needing a sense of purpose
 - Lacking capability
- **Difference**
 - Professional background
 - Qualifications
 - Social background
 - Individual characteristics
 - Extraverted
 - Age
 - Sexuality
 - High achiever
- **Organisational culture**
 - Psychologically unsafe
 - Hierarchical and political culture
 - Commercial values

4.2.1 Absence of quality relationships

An absence of quality relationships emerged as the first major attribute. What was missing for many and in part triggered the experience of not belonging, was a lack of relationships with individuals in the workplace, relationships that had developed over time, and through which individuals were able to learn about and understand each other. This is a complex category and there are connections here with other attributory categories in that an absence of quality relationships leaves one vulnerable to concerns about difference or capability because of an inability to discuss any of those concerns. The properties that emerged within this sub-category were **'not being part of a team'**, **'no genuine relationships'**, **'not trusting or being trusted'**, **'not being able to be open'**, **'no understanding or empathy'**, and **'not mattering to someone'**.

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Being in a work environment in which there were no opportunities to develop quality relationships emerged as an attribute of SoNB. **'Not being part of a team'** left people feeling isolated, on the periphery and *"left out"* (DELIA). It prevented them from feeling part of an 'in group' and developing a sense of being part of a collective with a shared understanding and purpose, as articulated by ELAINE.

"I mean they have an [department] Ireland, but they meet maybe twice a year. It's very weak. So you don't even have that. I would go to England, try and get over to England every two months, just to meet up, and then I feel - you feel more of a bond. And it is good fun and it is nice you have got people in a similar situation, which is really where you feel included. Because you feel, 'yes we are part of this'."

What was particularly important however, was the ability to develop connections on a personal level – **'genuine'**, supportive relationships with those with whom they worked: *"[I] just didn't feel connected at all to any of my colleagues, you know, just no, um, no friendships in the workplace. No personal, personal connection with colleagues."* (JOANNE). This absence of genuine relationships left individuals feeling disconnected and unsupported and experiencing a **'lack of understanding and empathy'**:

"When you're at work for eight hours a day and you feel that ... not only that no one cares about you but that there's no one to talk to about it. There was no one else...there was no one to bond with." (LYDIA).

Individuals also talked about having no sense of being cared for of **'mattering to other people'** which for some, impacted their feeling of not belonging: *"Belonging is about feeling as if you have a place, as if you matter as if you have a set of relationships that really matter with people."* (NEIL).

One of the issues that arose from this absence of quality relationships was that individuals were not known well, were not understood, which meant their colleagues weren't able to see past any potential difference: *"And I think sometimes people see difference and they don't know what the difference is. They see something different and that unnerves people and makes them feel a bit uncomfortable"* (NEIL), or may misinterpret their behaviour and discourage the formation of relationships, as explained by STUART:

"...somebody for years said I almost look arrogant if I'm going from A to B I have this sort of military bearing that sort of [laughs]. And years later after they've known me for

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twenty years they've turned round and said it's just clicked...he said 'you go from A to B with a purpose'. So some people could see that as arrogance cos you're not speaking to anybody and you're tunnel visioned ... whereas now a good friend sees it as you know a sense of purpose."

A lack of quality relationships also sometimes meant there was '**no trust**' – individuals didn't feel trusted by others and they didn't trust them: "*Um, and people aren't always overt. So sometimes it's not so clear, what, how people are relating to, and you're having to... sort that out. I think in the senior management team less so because we know each other, personally very well.*" (NEIL)

The above quote illustrates an important relationship with 'perceptions of other people', a property of the core concern of 'self-concept', in that without knowing people well, without being able to trust others and be trusted by them, individuals can misinterpret other's behaviour and may erroneously conclude that they are being excluded or they are being judged negatively, when in fact that may not be the case, as the quote above illustrates.

Individuals also talked about '**not being able to be open**' with their colleagues about who they were or how they were feeling, particularly about feeling like an outsider. This further compounded the experience, leaving them feeling like they were the only ones, and as such, they didn't belong: "*And then I think the final thing was not having anyone close to me, and not being able to um, confide and not having someone just to say it you know, what you're feeling, validate what I was feeling. It's normal, ok. I kept thinking it's me, it's me.*" (SARAH). As such there is a connection here to two important properties of the core concern of self-concept: One's 'ability to be oneself' which emerged as a sub-property of 'conflict with self-concept', as well as 'self-blaming' which emerged as a property of self-esteem. As such, this absence of quality relationships and ability to be open with colleagues may well compound the experience exacerbating a conflict with self-concept as well as negative perceptions of oneself, thereby further compounding one's SoNB.

Taken together the data suggests a direct relationship between an absence of quality relationships and the experience of not belonging, as individuals felt isolated, unsupported, misunderstood and unable to talk about how they were feeling, likely compounding their negative self-concept in the interpretation that they must be the only one – there must be something about them that resulted in them feeling like an outsider. However, there is also a potential mediating role at play in that an absence of quality relationships may mediate the

relationship between the experience and other determinant factors. Without quality relationships individuals may not have been able to discuss concerns about feeling different, or feeling less competent, or feeling excluded, which had they done so, may have negated their SoNB or have obviated the impact on their self-concept, in both cases ultimately avoiding the experience of not belonging in the workplace.

4.2.2 Not adding value

Not adding value in the workplace or not being valued for what they do at work emerged as another contributor to the experience of not belonging. Within this sub-category, individuals talked about **‘not making a contribution’**, **‘needing a sense of purpose’** and **‘lacking the necessary capability’**. What’s important to distinguish here is that this sub-category is about *factually* not adding value or being capable rather than *perceiving* that one isn’t valued or capable. The former, as will be explored below, was described as instigating the experience for some, whereas the latter can be considered, and as will be explored under ‘self-concept’, an element of negative self-concept, of perceived lack of self-worth likely resulting from distorted perceptions – and as such is part of the impact of feeling like one does not belong rather than a potential contributory factor. What does appear to be involved in the experience of not belonging was *actually* not being valued by or adding value to the organisation: *“But again it comes back to the key of all of this. I think it’s feeling, it’s feeling valued, but at the same time feeling you’ve got a place in the organisation, whether it’s a purpose or, it’s an acceptance isn’t it I suppose.”* (STUART).

For some individuals believing that they were **‘not making a contribution’** in the workplace left them feeling like they did not belong because they didn’t consider themselves to be a valuable part of the organisation. Working in a company where they had no influence, where what they did was not having an impact and that no one valued their work left them feeling isolated and with no connection to the organisation: *“...so the business was not interested in you and the effect of that is, that you lose interest in the business. So you become disengaged, because you don’t believe that anything you do has any impact or purpose.”* (CLIVE).

ELAINE illustrates the concept through her articulation of the impact of being valuable: *“I got a call from one of the MDs who said, ‘could you just give me a help on this?’ You know, that to me, above all, I remember that. He said, ‘I’ve got an audit, what do you think I should do, ...? How should I speak to them?’ And I thought that’s super. That’s what, that’s what feeling an insider is.”*

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Not adding value was also expressed as a lack of a **'sense of purpose'**. For some this sense of purpose came from having a clearly defined role, for others it came from having a role that fulfilled a particular personal value, such as needing to nurture: *"And because I didn't have a managerial role there, I didn't have anybody to sort of drag along with me, and, try and inspire and, and challenge and change."* (STUART).

What seems to be important was that individuals were able to feel like what they were doing was worthwhile and valuable. If they didn't, they felt disconnected from the organisation which resulted both in the feeling of not belonging, as well as impacting their self-concept and their personal sense of value: *"So he was just prepared to leave you sitting there, twiddling your thumbs on forty grand a year or whatever it was at the time, [laughing] producing nothing of any value. Which just made you feel pretty useless"* (CLIVE). So, whilst not adding value is distinct from the perception that one is not valuable, there is a clear relationship here with the core concern of self-concept in that not being able to add value may likely lead to feelings of worthlessness.

Again, distinct from the perception that one didn't feel capable of doing a role that emerged from a negative self-concept, individuals also discussed *actually* **'lacking necessary capability'** to do a role, of lacking the appropriate skills, experience and competence for the role in which they found themselves, which left them with SoNB, as SARAH articulates: *"So, because it was a very traditional personnel function and I had come from HR in the states and saw it as a partnership and had you know, an idea of what HR looks like versus personnel. But God that doesn't mean that I knew what to do. So, huge feeling of outsider."*

Quite often this occurred when new in a position, when everything was unfamiliar or what was required took them out of their comfort zone. JOANNE captured the breadth of this experience: *"I think this is particularly when you're new in role, and trying to get to grips with something, and like... everybody knows [laughs] stuff that you don't know. So you're in a kind of different context and people have contacts that...you don't um...that you don't have and um, knowledge and understanding, and skills, etc."*

Again there is a relationship between an absence of the appropriate skills and required level of competence and the individual's perception that they are not good enough, which emerges as part of one's negative self-concept because having no expertise or experience for example, may result in the conclusion for individuals that it is they who are not good enough as JOANNE illustrates: *"I basically felt that I was failing as a teacher. Um, failing um, just not, not competent."*

Had the, completely the wrong skill set". This quote exemplifies what will become evident through the discussion of the moderators of the experience, in that what may make an important difference to whether such experiences result in SoNB is individual's ability to attribute these experiences to the situation, to a lack of role and person fit, rather than internalising and blaming themselves for not being good enough to be effective in the role.

4.2.3 Difference

In exploring the experience of not belonging, feeling different from the group of individuals with whom they worked emerged, differences which clustered into four properties: **'professional background'**; **'qualifications'**; **'social background'**; and **'individual characteristics'**. These properties will be explored in the sections below, but what emerges as universal to all the properties is that being different in these ways resulted in the perception that the individual was 'outside' the group, and as such, they felt that they didn't belong, a perception captured by one interviewee: *"So maybe that's it. Maybe it's being pushed out of the broader picture is the time when I sort of, have this complete sort of ... almost desolate sense of not belonging to something. That I'm being pushed out in my difference somehow."* (NEIL)

Difference in **'professional background'** emerged as one sub-property which separated individuals from the group. Having charted a different career path, arrived at a role through a different professional route and with a different set of experiences set the individual apart from their colleagues in part by strengthening the 'otherness' of the rest of the group:

"My boss and some of the other people had moved into that team from the same place, so there was a sort of a confidence attached to that, and a language attached to that, that felt like they knew what they were doing and were going whereas I'd come from a different... type of role and a different place." (SANDRA).

Different professional background also served to undermine a sense of value and credibility: *"I never really earned my spurs in a way that a lot of these people had done. I just kind of did a few different [specifies jobs], got invited to join the [organisation], and bump, here I am, so it just felt it was all luck rather than any kind of great career plan."* (JASON). This quote again illustrates the potential role of the individual's ability to attribute their success to themselves rather than to luck in determining the impact of this sense of difference on their SoNB.

Being either more or less academic, or having more or fewer **'qualifications'** than those with whom they worked also served to make individuals feel different, again setting them outside

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the group of colleagues with whom they worked: *“...so I’m probably more like a lot of the science people, but I’m not a science person, I’m an admin person as far as they’re concerned. Um, so there’s that sort of extra aspect to it as well. But all I can do with that is keep...doing my job properly and persuading people that I am actually like them.”* (SANDRA).

When feeling less well qualified the difference was again related to a perception that the individual didn’t deserve to be in the group: *“...ten of the others had been to Oxford or Cambridge, and a couple had been to Oxford and Cambridge, and there was only one other person and me that hadn’t been to Oxbridge. And I suddenly realised, that I was out of my depth. Or I certainly felt that I was out of my depth.”* (JASON). This is suggestive of a relationship between feeling different and feeling valued – an indication of the impact of difference on one’s sense of self-worth and self-concept.

Coming from a different **‘social background’** than those with whom they worked emerged as another factor that made individuals feel different, and outside of the group. In some instances, this was about social class, because they considered themselves to be of a higher or of a lower class: *“So again, whenever ... I was in meetings at that sort of level um, I did feel that, I wouldn’t like to call it a class thing, cos that’s ... too broad brush, but I felt that there was a, almost like a clique of people who spoke this sort of language, who understood.”* (JASON). In other instances, it was about being very different types of people, with very different interests or ways of approaching life: *“But they... eat really badly, don’t exercise, whereas I eat quite healthily, and I exercise, so there’d be things like you know, we went out for a pub lunch to celebrate the fact one of them being there for fifteen years... there’s that kind of, I’ve never been in an organisation for more than six. They all had burgers and I had fish ... it’s just, there’s just so many things that um, they’re just completely different people to me.”* (JOANNE).

And at yet other times, the difference in social background was about the national culture, surfacing through language barriers, different policies, and cultural expectations: *“...I was so different culturally. I mean you know, everything from how I dressed to how open I was and how direct I was. And...after being here for how many ever years...I think the cultural difference really made me feel like an outsider.”* (SARAH). Whatever the nuance of the social difference, these differences served to leave the individual disconnected from and outside of the group with which they wanted to have a sense of belonging.

Finally, different **‘individual characteristics’** emerged as specific factors which resulted in a perception of difference, of being outside of the group. Having an **‘extraverted personality’** –

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described as being someone who stands out, is talkative and outspoken, left some feeling like they didn't belong and were not accepted: *"I quickly move to the point of being maybe very extrovert and very um, to the point where people find it really quite challenging or difficult sometimes."* (NEIL); *"I would have been quite a lively person. Um, and I was told that that was not, you know, that that didn't conform as such. That wasn't what accountants should be like... so really basically I just didn't fit in, again"*. (ELAINE).

In another instance the defining characteristic that put one outside the group was **'sexuality'**, specifically being homosexual: *"I think actually I don't belong here, because you know, I'm not gonna change people's [laughs] perceptions of what it is to be gay, or, or that kind of thing in, you know in that kind of setting."* (NEIL); and in another it was **'age'**, being significantly younger than their counterparts: *"So I was 22...and the next youngest member of staff after me was about 38."* (JOANNE). Finally, being a **'high achiever'**, someone who had a positive and driven attitude also resulted in a feeling of difference and exclusion: *"Perhaps the reason people don't engage with you or totally embrace you as a person is that you know, perhaps they don't like the fact that your glass is always half full, they don't like the fact that you're always trying to achieve things, they don't like the fact that you want 75-80% pass as opposed to 55. And they steer clear of you."* (STUART).

Universally, these various differences created a distance from others, positioning the individual as outside of the group, feeding their SoNB. Some also served to undermine their sense of value and credibility which fuelled the negative self-concept. Different social or academic backgrounds for example connect to the competence and credibility themes which emerged as part of self-concept. What is important here is that a factual difference appears to impact the experience of not belonging or fuel a negative self-concept because of the *perception* of what being different says about the individual – they are not credible, not good enough. What moderates this perception, creates the link between fact and potentially fiction, will be explored in the 'moderators' section below.

4.2.4 Organisational culture

The final sub-category that emerged as an attribute to one's SoNB in the workplace was organisational culture. These cultures and climates reflect pervasive, stable elements of the organisation that often inhibited individual's ability to speak up and be themselves, or with which they struggled to find a fit:

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“I think to a large extent it was the organisation the context, the culture...If you’re not happy with the role you’re doing, there’s potential of changing it or, modifying it. But it’s issues with culture which I think have been the dominant ones.” (NATHAN).

The cultures of their organisations often didn’t reflect who they were and didn’t allow them to be who they were, to speak up and assert themselves. Trying to fit in to a negatively charged culture undermined their sense of self and self-worth. The constructs discussed in this sub-category clustered into three properties: Psychologically unsafe; hierarchical and political culture; and commercial values.

‘Psychologically unsafe’ environments were characterised by banter, bullying behaviour, and misogyny. DELIA describes the pervasiveness of these environments and the impact on sense of belonging:

“But that progressed over a period of time to be banter, so banter was the currency of that company. And it became an excuse for just behaving badly eventually. It started off quite funny and quite enjoyable and, you have to give back as good as you get, otherwise you don’t, a) you don’t fit in the gang, b) you don’t get respected, c) you don’t get liked.”

Some of the environments described operated on a basis of distrust, leading to second guessing other’s perceptions of oneself and impacting individual’s sense of value: *“But it was the type of culture that if your face isn’t there it gets questioned. Why aren’t you there, why aren’t you at your desk? That type of thing, and I remember thinking for fucks sake, why do I have to explain over and over again why I’m not in the office, which just seemed a little bit inhumane. That’s probably too strong a word. So this, this not being valued as an adult I guess.” (LYDIA).*

Some were ruthless environments as described by SARAH, *“... she ruled it with fear. There was always a sense of fear, of if you don’t do this, might you be the next to go?”* For many the culture was created or maintained by uncompassionate leadership, a feeling that emotions and vulnerability were not tolerated, and there was no care or concern for individuals: *“...I realised how unsuited I was to the environment. And how my, my internal struggles I suppose you could call it, were affected by the lack of management and the lack of care and lack of support and the lack of empathy. Oh I could go on [laughs]. Lack of consideration for you as a human being.” (LYDIA).* There was as such, no sense of support in these environments, a feeling that there was no-one to whom one could turn, and a sense for some of not being valued as an individual, impacting their sense of self.

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Because of the banter, the bullying, misogynistic behaviour it was hard to make their voices heard. Individuals didn't feel safe to challenge, to speak up, to ask for help, or to assert themselves: *"It was you just shut up and put up"* (LYDIA). *"I felt like I couldn't really say what is going on here, what is this dynamic, it's just so crass in a way, um because that was the culture, you know, I'd just joined I wasn't going to rock the boat at that point."* (DELIA). For some this inability to speak out also impacted their self-concept, leaving them feeling weak and lacking conviction: *"... a weakness where you're suppressed and haven't got that [pause] not bravery, bravery's the wrong word. You haven't got the moral courage to actually speak out when perhaps you should do."* (STUART).

For some their working environments were '**hierarchical and political**'. Closely linked to the lack of psychological safety, the political and individualistic elements of the organisational context often left individuals feeling unsafe and unable to be themselves because everyone was self-interested and competitive: *"... it had created a culture of individualism. No one wanted to share anything with anyone else because um, if I know something then that means I'm safe and I'm protected."* (SARAH). As well as being intrinsically isolating and putting individuals on the 'outside', these types of environments often also resulted in a feeling of not belonging because there was just no fit with the individual: *"you are put in a position where you were in conflict with the ethos of the business"* (CLIVE).

The hierarchical, and sometimes exclusive nature of these environments also pushed people to feel excluded, not feeling a part of the senior, influential group: *"...in an organisation where you get a lot of senior managers together. I would feel very much outsider, in fact I do, certainly here."* (ELAINE). It left them in a position where there was no one to go to for help with their situation, because everyone with influence was part of the clique.

There is again an impact on value which results from the implication that comes from not being part of the senior group – of inferiority, of a lack of value – compounded by a lack of influence as described by DELIA:

"...when I made suggestions about how to change it, they weren't taken on board. When I made suggestions about how, what I perceived that I was good at wasn't being incorporated. This is the job, this is what you do. And it was a bit of a shock because, before pretty much everywhere I've been, there was some consideration taken, but it was very much, very rigid, no this is the parameters, this is the job, this is what you do."

Again impacting the experience of not belonging was for some, a lack of fit with the values of the organisation, creating a dissonance between their personal values and the **'commercial values'** of the company. For some they found themselves in organisations which disregarded employees, or treated people unfairly: *"I do think it's the organisation and the way they're not willing to bend or they don't consider things like I say emotional intelligence, they don't consider the impact their organisational decisions are having on people."* (STUART). For some this resulted in a feeling of not belonging to either the organisation or the profession:

"There's a central discourse that business, that human resource managers should think like business managers. And that's precisely the discourse I was part of. But I also realised that if everyone starts to think like business managers then who will think like HR? And I realised that I was getting away from, or we were getting away from what we ought to be doing, and that somehow created the feeling of, you know not belonging, not only to the organisation, but to the profession." (NATHAN).

Others found themselves in profit-focused organisations at odds with their public sector, philanthropic values, such as JOANNE *"At that point there was a bit of a cultural mismatch for me...I'd come from um, a sort of charitable infrastructure organisation in the professional institute and it was quite um, staid and um, kind of quite commercially focused... but it didn't really have the... voluntary sector values that I was, I kind of would expect from the sector."* As well as contributing to SoNB there is likely an impact on one's sense of value, purpose and therefore sense of self, as described by CLIVE:

"Isolated, and in a state of despair really because ... I took a deliberate decision to go into public housing because one my grandfathers had had houses that he let at peppercorn rent down in south London, years ago when he was sort of, a philanthropic sort of guy and we've wasted all that resource and ethos ... I'd always had an interest, because of that, in social housing... I could see the purpose of it and why it was needed ... I chose that line of work because, and if you like some belief in its purpose."

For many therefore, a lack of fit with the organisational culture left them feeling 'outside' of and disconnected from the organisation, leading to SoNB which was compounded by uncompassionate leadership. As the cultures described were largely negative in nature accepting and sitting with the situation also had an impact on the individual's self-concept – their sense of value, purpose and resilience.

ATTRIBUTES OF A SENSE OF NOT BELONGING		
CATEGORY	THEORETICAL CODE	PROPOSED RELATIONSHIPS
Absence of quality relationships	Cause Cause Moderator	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – An absence of quality relationships may contribute to SoNB – An absence of quality relationships may negatively impact one’s self-concept – An absence of quality relationships may moderate the impact of difference on SoNB – An absence of quality relationships may moderate the impact of not adding value on SoNB
Not adding value	Cause Cause	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Not adding value may contribute to SoNB – Not adding value may negatively impact one’s self-concept
Difference	Cause Cause	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Being different may contribute to SoNB – Being different may negatively impact one’s self-concept
Organisational culture	Cause Condition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Organisational culture may contribute to SoNB – Organisational culture may provide the context in which SoNB can manifest

Table 4.1: Substantive categories, theoretical codes and proposed relationships for the category of Attributes of a Sense of Not Belonging

4.3 Core concern of self-concept

The core concern of SoNB within the workplace emerged as an individual’s **‘self-concept’**. This core concern constitutes the individual’s identity – the self-knowledge and perceptions they hold about themselves, and is composed of three distinct sub-categories: **‘Conflict with self-concept’**, the incongruence between what they know about themselves and who they perceive that they become through dealing with the experience; the individual’s sense of **‘self-efficacy’**, their belief about their abilities and their competence; and the individual’s **‘self-esteem’**, in terms of their evaluation of this self-knowledge, the judgmental perceptions, and beliefs about who they are and their beliefs about others’ perceptions of them.

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As described above, the construct of self-concept is related to all other constructs and categories within the substantive theory: It impacts and is impacted by the very fact that the individual has SoNB (I don't feel I add value, that I matter, I am different, therefore there must be something wrong with me); it impacts and is impacted by how they feel about that experience (I feel depressed and anxious, I must be weak and irrational); it impacts and is impacted by how they attempt to resolve the experience (I tried to fit in therefore I am inauthentic); and it impacts and is impacted by factors that moderate the experience (I must do well at work, but I feel I don't belong, so I'm a failure). What emerges as critical to these processes and to the experience of feeling like one doesn't belong, and will be explored in *Chapter Five*, is the individual's interpretation of their SoNB, the subjective meaning that they attribute to their experience, to their feelings, thoughts and actions. It is these attributions, these often erroneous interpretations and perceptions that are at the heart of the cyclical and perpetuating nature of the experience.

An overview of the conceptual sub-categories and their properties and sub-properties is given below:

- **Self-efficacy**
 - Lack of confidence
 - Less competent
- **Self-esteem**
 - Self-blame
 - Having a deficiency
 - Lacking courage
 - Keeping it hidden
 - Its only me
 - Perceptions of others
 - Competence
 - Weakness
 - Unlikable
- **Conflict with self-concept**
 - Inability to be oneself
 - Self-concept paradox

4.3.1 Self-efficacy

The concept of self-efficacy sits within the core concern of self-concept and was conceptualised as a '**lack of confidence**' and perceiving oneself to be '**less competent**' than others. The constructs which emerge in these categories are essentially the individual's salient cognitions about their abilities, their self-perceptions in terms of their abilities and their competence. Their relationship with not belonging is complexly interwoven, with a lack of self-efficacy at times

appearing to result *in* the perception of not belonging, and at other times resulting *from* the experience of not belonging, as will be explored.

A '**lack of confidence**', which was articulated as a lack of confidence in one's ability to competently do the role, or lack of conviction in one's decisions and judgement, which for LYDIA emerged from an earlier experience of SoNB undermining their confidence and shaping their perceptions: *"I don't know, lack of confidence I guess. So whereas before I'd been able to do my job absolutely fine, I remember getting to this law firm and then thinking, oh my god I can't even do my job now...But I questioned, I remember questioning myself a lot about what I was doing, and whether I was good enough."* (LYDIA).

At other times a lack of confidence in one's ability appeared to result in one feeling like an outsider and a perception that *"I shouldn't be doing these top jobs. I'm not cut out for these top jobs."* (JASON). As such a lack of confidence in one's abilities left individuals feeling like they didn't belong because they essentially weren't good enough, which weaves the construct of self-efficacy closely to that of self-esteem, as explored below.

There also emerged a comparative perception that individuals were '**less competent**' than others, and that others had more experience, more expertise. *"...people are actually wrestling with it on the ground and really doing the fast learning and they are having to deal with the issues, come up with solutions. I am just sitting there, there in the middle, looking at 'how do we address this piece of regulation'"* (CLIVE). Through grouping 'others' together this conceptualisation separates the individual, placing them on the outside of the group, and as such the relationship here appears to be SoNB being fuelled by a perceived comparative lack of competence: *"Feeling like everyone else seemed to be very competent"* (LYDIA); *"Other people in the organisation knew bits of it much better than I did."* (JASON).

4.3.2 Self-esteem

The concept of self-esteem is closely interwoven with that of self-efficacy, and constitutes the sub-properties of '**self-blame**'; and '**perception of others**'. The constructs which emerge in these categories were more reflective of how the individual *felt* about who they were, either in terms of their abilities or in terms of their personalities, and as will be explored in subsequent sections, it is the evaluation of their self-concept that appears to be responsible for much of the consequential behaviours and emotional responses to the experience. These properties and sub-properties will be explored below.

4.3.2.1 Self-blame

The construct of **'self-blame'** was expressed through the distinct, but overlapping constructs of **'having a deficiency'**, **'lacking courage'**, **'keeping it hidden'** and **'it's only me'**. **'Self-blame'** has, again, a complex relationship with the experience of not belonging, both influencing and being influenced by the experience. Individuals blamed themselves for their inability to fit in, believing that it was something that they had done, something *"they could have done better"* (SARAH), something they were responsible for which had resulted in them being excluded. *"I blame myself, in that, you know that's the other aspect of it for not belonging, it's because of something I've said or something I've done, or the way I've behaved or something. And you know, you end up having a real downer on yourself."* (NEIL).

At the same time individuals appeared to blame themselves for how they *felt* about not belonging, interpreting their emotional response to it as a weakness, as SARAH articulates: *"...initially it felt like they can all deal with this and I can't, so that makes... me a bit of a doofuss really, why can't I handle this, I'm a grown up, I should be able to, you know I understand about dynamics and emotions and stuff, why can't I deal with this?";* as well as a perceived lack of resilience, in that *"everybody else was far more resilient than I"* (DELIA).

Similarly, there was self-blame for the way in which they behaved, the actions they undertook, or didn't undertake, in response to not belonging: *"I should have recognised more clearly what was going on and been more determined to put myself in a position where I felt I was doing something of worth rather than just back-peddalling in a sort of, in a holding tank, waiting for somebody else to decide whether there was something for me to do."* (CLIVE).

Closely entwined with self-blame was the construct of **'having a deficiency'**. Individuals interpreted the experience of not belonging as resulting from something that was deficient with them, something they were not able to do that resulted in them not belonging such as *"It is ability to adapt to the environment that's part of the issue actually."* (SANDRA). Having the experience itself was interpreted as meaning that there was something about them, or something better about everyone else that made others *"more whole human beings"* (DELIA) because they were able to fit in and to belong.

"I was trying to question what's happening...my initial reaction was that there is something that is wrong with me. And that needs to be corrected. Um, but why is it happening? Everything is OK. Everything is fine. And yet I'm having this feeling. So there must be something that needs to be fixed." (NATHAN);

“I feel like I should be able to do it. I feel like there’s something missing. Like there’s a linking thing that’s missing. Um, that other people can do this, and I can’t. Does that, that’s a sort of a deficiency in a way isn’t it?” (SANDRA).

A **‘lack of courage’** also emerged primarily in terms of how individuals dealt with the experience. For some they *“didn’t have the courage and bravery”* (CLIVE) to move on and get out of the situation that was making them feel like they didn’t belong; whilst for others there was the perception that they lacked the courage to speak up through a desire to fit in and belong *“...generally I would hold back on saying things that were going to be too unpalatable to people rather than be sort of ostracised in a meeting.”* (JASON). Both types of cognitive process negatively impacted how the individuals felt about themselves.

The perception that not belonging was somehow a deficiency or a weakness was further illuminated by an expressed need to **‘keep it hidden’**. Individuals didn’t share how they felt and tried to cover it up. *“I don’t think I felt like that in any real dynamic way, it’s just that I just know I have felt like that. And that’s not, that’s between you and me. It wouldn’t be seen by anybody else.”* (STUART). They hid how they felt it seems through a concern about *“expos[ing] any vulnerability”* (JOANNE), or giving *“the sense that I’m not coping”* (NEIL). This both reflected a personal judgment about how they felt as well as a concern about how others would perceive them.

Across all the participant group, there emerged a strong sense of the perception that they, the individual going through the experience, must be the only one – **‘it’s only me’** as articulated by SARAH: *“I started to worry that it was me ... why was I not fitting in?”* (SARAH). There appeared to be an assumption that everyone else was *“chatting away and fitting in”* (SANDRA), that everyone else was more resilient, were feeling accepted. This seemed to fuel the interpretation of the experience as being a deficiency, something wrong with them, which both impacted their negative self-concept and their SoNB, because it again put them ‘outside’ of, and different to everyone else.

4.3.2.2 Perceptions of others

Whilst another person’s perception of an individual would not necessarily be conceptualised as constituting someone’s self-concept, because the text reveals no evidence to suggest that these supposed perceptions of others were based in fact (and the question was posed to the participants), they appear to be incorrect perceptions on the part of the individual, assumptions that are likely to reflect how the individual feels about themselves – their self-concept. What was evident however, was that through the experience of not belonging individuals *“assume,*

rightly or wrongly, that people are making judgments about me.” (NEIL). This finds support in the overlapping nature of the constructs: Self-perceptions of lacking self-belief and weakness were reflected in the assumption that other’s perceived them to lack competence or be weak. Where incidents were recalled which evidenced the actual perception of others, these have been coded amongst the attributory factors, as they can be conceptualised as events, factors which contribute to putting the individual on the outside of the group.

The property of **‘perceptions of others’** constitutes sub-properties of **‘lacking competence’**, **‘weakness’**, and **‘unlikable’**, and as with the cognitions that constitute self-belief, assumptions about negative **‘perceptions of others’** both influence and are influenced by the experience of not belonging. This occurs through the interpretation on the one hand, that if individuals are perceived negatively they will not be accepted, as may be the case with **‘lacking competence’**, or on the other hand, that they will be perceived negatively because of how they respond to not belonging, as may be the case with **‘weakness’**.

As suggested above, a concern that one is being perceived as **‘lacking competence’** both fuels one’s SoNB and is fuelled by it, as will be illustrated below. For example, in some instances there was a concern that those within the ‘outgroup’ didn’t consider the individual as being credible because they did not belong to that group, as described by JASON: *“So I’d be in meetings...and just sort of feel that these people didn’t actually rate me in any shape or form because I wasn’t, wasn’t one of them, and I didn’t know enough really to buy my place at the table.”*

However, as also illustrated by (JASON), the concern that one is not perceived as credible by others resulted in SoNB: *“So I felt it made me even more of an outsider, cos they could then just circle around with me on the outside and sort of say, ‘what an idiot, he doesn’t know what he’s talking about’.”* As is evident in the latter quote, this lack of credibility was also referred to as a concern that one was considered to be stupid, was a fool, or an idiot: *“Um, probably that they’ll think that I’m stupid. And that um I’m sort of in charge but I don’t know what I’m doing.”* (SANDRA).

There also emerged a concern about a lack of respect from others or a feeling that one was not important, not taken seriously which built on the assumption that the individual did not belong: *“Because you are trying to fit in with their conversation ...and you’re really weak because they really don’t listen or you don’t say anything, or they know more anyway and they are just trying to humour you anyway.”* (ELAINE).

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For the most part, concern that other's perceived them as weak resulted from feeling like they don't belong, and the concern that if they were to voice how they felt they would be seen as **'weak'** and not coping: *"Whereas at work, somehow if I said it, I'd feel a bit exposed maybe, in a different way. And you know, whether there'd be a sense of whether I'm not coping OK."* (NEIL). There are clear parallels here with the sub-property of **'keeping it hidden'** which emerged under the property of **'self-blame'** both of which are suggestive of a level of shame.

The final theme to emerge within the property of **'perception of others'** was **'unlikeable'**. This emerged in two forms; either as a concern that individuals were considered by others to be superior and bossy or that they were generally not liked. The former was referred to as both a consequence and potential cause of SoNB, and illustrated by SARAH: *"And then they'd see me as aloof and snobby. And I wasn't at all that. I think my quiet shyness comes from [being] afraid of rejection. So I over read, I think, I over examine, and then assume, usually the worst."* This incident again reflects the self-perpetuating nature of the experience in that protecting oneself from the experience of not belonging by being distant may result in one being excluded. At other times perceived superiority appeared to result in SoNB: *"I think, sometimes if you talk about you know, if I like opera or whatever... or those sorts of things, that people will think you're stuck up."* (SANDRA). Here there's a perception that others see them as different, as **'superior'** and this may result in them feeling like they don't belong.

Similarly, the concern that one is not liked occurred at times through the interpretation that if individuals are not liked they will not be accepted, as illustrated by SANDRA: *"...other people wouldn't want that interaction with me. So that even if I might want to be there and talk they'd think oh well, who does she think she is, there's, there's better people."*, or they will be perceived negatively because of how they respond to not belonging, as illustrated by ELAINE: *"...someone will notice I'm sitting by myself and is going to think, you know, I'm hopeless or I don't get on with anyone in the company, because I'm sitting by myself."* Again, the self-perpetuating nature of the experience is illustrated in the final quote.

4.3.3 Conflict with self-concept

Critical to the fundamental and pervasive nature of self-concept as the core concern was a **'conflict with self-concept'** – a conflict between what individuals believed they knew about themselves and who they became during the experience, or as a result of trying to resolve the experience. There was a sense of inauthenticity, of *"having to behave in a way that is so alien to you at work"* (LYDIA), to become someone else or hide your true self.

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For many of the individuals the experience of not belonging was associated with an **'inability to be oneself'**. There was a need to pretend, to play along in order to fit in as described by DELIA: *"It sets you off badly because they either get this ridiculously high pitched laugh where, you know they say it's like 'oh ha, ha, ha.' It's like, 'oh my god, [name] just shut up!' Or you try and put something into the conversation that really makes you feel stupid"* (ELAINE)."

As will be explored below under **'resolution'** there was a drive to find a person to be, an identity that fits: *"I wonder whether maybe that is again quite key that having these intense experiences of not belonging, what I have to do is find new ways of, of, of being within them."* (NEIL). Individuals discussed feeling like they needed to censor what they said, be mindful of what they gave away about themselves: *"...it's like a venn-diagram almost isn't it. Um, so, it's how much of yourself you can be that, in any environment, that, that, um, dictates how well you can fit in."* (SANDRA).

Intertwined with this was the perception for some of *"feeling like a fraud"* (JOANNE), a fear that one was *"gonna get found out"* (SARAH), not be able to meet the expectations of others, and a perception that one doesn't deserve to be doing the role: *"I went through quite a lot of my life thinking it was all a fluke."* (SANDRA). This perceived fraudulence at times undermined the self-concept, through a feeling of being *"inauthentic"* (DELIA) and not feeling *"like you can be entirely yourself"* (JOANNE), and again creating a cognitive dissonance, a disconnect between identity and who they became during the experience. There is a potentially self-perpetuating process here in that having SoNB may well result in people not being themselves because they feel that who they are doesn't fit in, and therefore feel they have to hide who they are, stimulating the resolution strategies of 'finding an identity' or 'conforming' which may themselves compound one's negative self-concept – they feel weak for not being resolute or inauthentic for trying to be someone else. These behaviours may be observed by others and lead to perceptions of inauthenticity or disinterest on the part of the individual, which may result in disengagement and actual exclusion by others.

For many there was also a clear **'self-concept paradox'** between the person they considered themselves to be and the person they became during the experience, including: the 'true extravert vs. the introvert' –

"So, another coping mechanism was that I just withdrew. I withdrew, and you know me very well, I, I'm the opposite of that, I am absolutely the opposite of that, but I became somebody else I absolutely wasn't in order to cope." (DELIA);

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‘true resilience vs. vulnerability’ –

“I’m incredibly resilient I think, I’m not thrown by many things, or you know, I’ve never been off sick in my life, it’s the kind of [laughs]. But yet there’s still a feeling of vulnerability sometimes when that happens.” (NEIL);

‘true vulnerability vs. insensitive’ –

“I was so tired and I wanted to go home and I just burst into tears, and she turned around to me and said ‘oh my god, I’ve never seen you cry before. I thought you were hard as nails’. And I thought wow, I really have put on a facade haven’t I. For nine months she thought I was hard as nails and actually I felt the whole time, I just felt oh my god.” (LYDIA);

as well as evidence of a conflict between knowing oneself to be ‘credible vs. incompetent’ –

“I do genuinely believe I work hard, that I have skill, and that I can do things well. And there’s this funny other side of me that totally doesn’t believe it. And it’s a funny little juxtaposition of...I felt, in some situations totally able, and then in other situations totally inept. Totally incompetent. And it was so polar, those views of yep, I can do that really well, and then Oh my god, I you know, why are they listening to me, I’ve no clue what I’m saying.” (SARAH).

These various paradoxes present a powerful cognitive dissonance, an internal battle, undermining and leaving individuals questioning their self-concept, their sense of who they believe themselves to be. The possible impact of this internal struggle finds some support from consideration of the relationship between depth of feeling and frequency of feeling, in that those individuals who experienced feeling like they did not belong outside of work as well as inside work actually reported less intensity in the experience – the feeling may be less intense because it is not in conflict with who they usually are, and as such there may be a sense of resignation and acceptance of the experience, as intimated by SANDRA: *“...it’s not really only in a work environment, but I think I’ve felt like I don’t fit in to um, a number of the work environments that I’ve been in in my working life. Um, and I don’t know whether that’s, I suppose I don’t know whether that’s me, or the working environment. I suspect it’s me, but there you are.”* It is perhaps, as suggested above, the cognitive dissonance, the conflict between who you know yourself to be and who you become during the experience that is so damaging and so painful.

CORE CONCERN		
CATEGORY	THEORETICAL CODE	PROPOSED RELATIONSHIPS
Self-efficacy	Self-concept / Consequence Cause	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – SoNB may negatively impact one's sense of self-efficacy – Self-efficacy may negatively impact one's self-esteem
Self-esteem	Self-concept / Consequence Cause Cause Consequence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – SoNB may negatively impact one's self-esteem – Self-esteem may motivate behaviour to resolve SoNB – Self-esteem may impact one's emotional experience – Self-esteem may be negatively impacted by one's emotional experience
Conflict with self-concept	Self-concept / Consequence Consequence Consequence Consequence Cause	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – SoNB may negatively impact one's sense of a consistent self-concept – Finding a way to belong resolution behaviours may negatively impact one's sense of a consistent self-concept – Self-protection resolution behaviours may negatively impact one's sense of a consistent self-concept – One's emotional experience may negatively impact one's sense of a consistent self-concept – Conflict with self-concept may negatively impact one's emotional experience

Table 4.2: Substantive categories, theoretical codes and associated hypotheses for the category of the Core Concern

4.4 Resolution

A critical category to emerge from the data was the attempts that individuals made to resolve the experience – the strategies they employed to deal with or extricate themselves from the experience of feeling like they did not belong. These strategies were both cognitive and behavioural, and whilst sometimes fruitful, helping individuals to move on from the experience

and re-establish a positive self-concept, more frequently their attempts at resolution served to perpetuate either their **'self-concept'** by impacting their perceived value, e.g. through becoming disruptive or introverted; their perceived acceptance and belonging, e.g. through removing themselves physically; or impacting their psychological well-being through the developing internal struggle – the conflict between who participants know themselves to be, and who they become through attempting to fit in or add value.

An overview of the conceptual sub-categories and their properties and sub-properties is given below:

- **Seeking value**
 - Active engagement
 - Establishing a purpose
- **Trying to fit in**
 - Finding an identity
 - Seeking acceptance
- **Self-protection**
 - Avoidance
 - Detachment
- **Reconciling the experience**
 - Reflection
 - Acceptance

4.4.1 Seeking value

This strategy for resolving and coping with the experience was generally positive and constructive and likely to result in a more positive self-concept. There was a sense of an attempt to push back against the experience – a determination to add value, make a contribution and take some control of their experience as articulated by JOANNE: *“The issue has been more about OK, you know how do I resolve this, how do I find the next thing either will make this work for me, or find the er, an alternative that fits me better, rather than me feeling that I’m just not competent?”*

In an attempt to resolve the experience a strategy employed by some was to **'actively engage'** in the workplace, to throw one’s energies into the job, engaging others in their ideas, or through focusing on finding a solution to what they identified as being the cause of their experience, as described by ELAINE: *“I’ve decided now what I’m going to do is really focus on the team and make us into a team. Because I remember being part of an audit team. And I think sometimes when you get into all this, ‘oh this isn’t great’ ‘oh I’m an outsider’, you forget that actually, hang on, I’m a manager. I need to focus on my team. I’m here to cope with that feeling. They have to feel part of a team.”* Others ensured they were fully prepared when going into situations that

they knew may result in a feeling of not belonging. SANDRA for example struggled to feel comfortable in conversations because of her experience of feeling like an outsider, *“Makes me be very clear about what it is that I want to know before I ask things, you know to, probably find out things before hand more aswell, so that I can have the conversations in the right way.”*

A final active engagement strategy involved focusing on and recognising strength through drawing on positive feedback, focusing on successes, and rebuilding one’s self-belief:

“...trying not to focus so much on the down and feeling like I am confident in myself, I can do this. If you like me you do, or if you don’t. But I am not going to force anything anymore, you know, I’m not going to make these – and I’m just going to be very good at what I do.” (ELAINE);

“So yes, out of my comfort zone, but the way you talk yourself round by saying, I’m the expert here, the one with the knowledge, I’d been there before in the early nineties. These guys had never been there before.” (STUART).

Another strategy to emerge in terms of seeking value was individual’s attempts to **‘establish a purpose’**, to find a way to feel like they were contributing, were having an impact. Individuals sought ways, through crafting their roles or identifying projects through which they could improve ways of working, such as CLIVE *“But, ah, I had learnt the lesson, I wasn’t going to get tied down to that so I’ve tended to try and work more like an internal consultant, just picking up problems and working with people to try and define how we can make the system work better for the people on the ground.”*; or feel they were making an impact, making a difference, *“But something you draw from an inner strength to be able to you know, either try and make a difference.”* (STUART).

Through seeking value individuals were better able to lift themselves out of the experience, by overcoming the factor that was associated with their respective experience, such as not feeling they were adding value or lacking quality relationships, by demonstrating to themselves that they did in fact, belong, and thus improving their self-concept, as illustrated by CLIVE:

“You move from being a complete outcast, totally ignored, to being, not the lynch pin, but quite key to the way that...this part of the service, this combined organisation is going to run...so that was a huge sea-change. From being completely ignored to being asked to prepare plans for how the business would run. Um, that was great. I really felt that I was doing something really useful.”

4.4.2 Trying to fit in

An alternative approach to resolving the experience – **‘trying to fit in’** – was less constructive and often, as will be explored below, resulted in perpetuating and further compounding the experience. Individuals attempted to belong, to fit in either through **‘finding an identity’**, a way to be, a role to play that fitted with the situation, or through **‘seeking acceptance’** by behaving in ways that were deemed acceptable and facilitated their acceptance into the group.

In attempting to belong, to fit in, some individuals would **‘seek out an identity’**, a role to play that would fit with the interaction or present them as the person that they thought was expected: *“I became who I think, I thought people wanted or need, you know, to fit in.”* (SARAH). Some individuals chose to become subservient, to play the lower-status: *“I was a child with a parent, so low status level”* (JASON), whilst others became the parent: *“So I think I made the effort as I say through perhaps parenting skills, to be inclusive myself, but by doing that I think it assisted me in being accepted.”* (STUART). Other individuals found ways to stand out, being more authoritarian or becoming the centre of attention, ensuring that they were at least noticed and heard, as described by NEIL:

“I suppose my default position if I’m really, really, pushed is always move to being the centre of attention. To be really big, and um, I, I think over the years with experience I’ve learned not to do that. But it’s really hard to find another way of belonging. Um, because of course people respond to you when you’re like that and react whatever in whatever way it doesn’t really matter.”

The second approach to trying to fit in was to **‘seek acceptance’** – intentional behaviours that they believed fitted with the accepted way of behaving, or particular strategies that would help them to become accepted. In the case of the former, individuals talked about conforming – changing the way they behaved to fit with the behaviour of others: *“So I’ll try and conform or try and not be, you know, try and just be there with everyone and not be noticed.”* (NEIL); *“I figured that one way to counter that kind of banter, behaviour, was to, was to attempt to do it myself.”* (DELIA). Some individuals would acquiesce, not speaking up in order to gain acceptance: *“... probably made me reign back a lot on what I was saying so it didn’t upset or offend people, or make myself too unlikeable to them”* (JASON), whilst others found they needed to be more assertive in order to fit in: *“Um, yes it was the type of place where you had to have a certain tone in your emails. And you had to have a presence, you had to be noticed in meetings, um, you had to um, be quite, not forceful, you had to state your opinion very clearly otherwise you’d get shouted down.”* (DELIA).

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Individuals also explored different strategies for fitting in, working out what they could do, “*all sorts of adjustments*” (NATHAN), to help with becoming accepted. Individuals would consciously attempt to manage their exterior presentation, paying attention to what they said or how they said it: “*And I became a contained, even I think my movements, my physical body movements became stilted and...if I said too much I’d then worry I said too much*” (SARAH), or hiding their feelings and their vulnerabilities “*You’re kind of managing your exterior presentation of yourself, but it’s not the entire, it’s perhaps not as much as you’d want to give or want to say*” (JOANNE). Some individuals actively sought a common ground, to find a connection with other people, or “*try to fit in with their conversation.*” (ELAINE), whilst others would actively seek out friendships: “*I definitely um, sought allies, um, that I could, um confide in*” (JOANNE).

Many of these strategies and behaviours fuelled the self-perpetuating nature of the experience and would likely result in an ‘internal struggle’, a construct that is part of ‘conflict with self-concept’ as explored above. Trying to fit in, finding a different identity and changing who they are creates a dissonance, a conflict with the person they know themselves to be, as articulated by DELIA: “*Yes, so I figured one way of, of gaining acceptance, gaining some visibility – because I was losing visibility, I was just shrinking away – was to, you know meet them with that sort of bantery type of thing. But I don’t do it very well, and it sort of fell flat on its face. And, because I’d tried to do it and its not part of me, that’s what felt inauthentic.*”

In a similar way, an association emerges between trying to fit in and an ‘**ability to be yourself**’, also part of ‘**conflict with self-concept**’, which in turn fuels the experience of not belonging: “*...it just can be viral, and can seed each other, so you don’t feel like you can be yourself cos if you’re just yourself then you don’t fit in. So then, it sort of, it multiplies.*” (SANDRA). There may also be a direct relationship with ‘**self-esteem**’, as individuals may feel weak or lacking in courage because they conformed or acquiesced, as suggested by (JASON) “*Probably made me reign back a lot on what I was saying so it didn’t upset or offend people, or make myself too unlikeable to them.*” This particular resolution strategy therefore often resulted in further compounding the experience through the impact on their negative self-concept, their ability to be themselves, or the conflict with their self-concept which in turn, as will be explored later, impacts their sense of belonging.

4.4.3 Self-protection

The third sub-category to emerge from the data in terms of individual’s attempts to resolve the experience was ‘self-protection’ – cognitions and behaviours that individuals engaged in in order to protect themselves from the experience. Similar to ‘trying to fit in’, for the most part

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these strategies were maladaptive, further compounding the individual's negative self-concept, as will be explored below.

One self-protective strategy for resolving the experience of not belonging, and one practiced in some shape or form by many participants, was that of '**avoidance**' – avoidance of people, situations, or responsibility that they felt would exacerbate or maintain the experience. In particular individuals found themselves withdrawing – "*go into a shell*" (NATHAN), becoming more introverted than they would typically be, as articulated by DELIA "*I withdrew which was easier for me...and I lost prominence ... but the choice was, that was the choice, so I decided that was preferable to being there in the mix and getting kicked around.*" STUART describes the physical manifestation of his withdrawal: "*Yeah I think you almost revert to an introvert state don't you...yeah, I think it's a mixture of speech but I think it's also body presence and everything else.*"

Others would physically withdraw from a situation, asking to move offices or departments, or making the decision to leave the organisation entirely, in order to escape the situation: "*I decided to leave before I had another job...it was so awful it forced me to take action.*" (JOANNE).

Another method of avoidance that emerged was that of not fulfilling potential, avoiding responsibilities, promotions, projects that might take them out of their comfort zone and play to their insecurities, as described by JASON: "*I suppose I had a tendency to avoid making difficult decisions or putting myself into difficult places.*" DELIA describes the impact that this could have for the organisations involved: "*So I just put my head down, got on with my job, didn't really you know, do anything else. Um, and actually, the result of that for the company was that they missed out on a whole load of things that I'm really good at, that I just didn't have the confidence to um, to show.*"

In a similar manner, some individuals would pass responsibility, delegating authority as they didn't have conviction in their decisions: "*That's me just not wanting to take responsibility anymore, me not wanting to stand up for myself and say I think this is the way it should be.*" (JASON). There's a connection here to the core concern of these individuals – that having SoNB has on one's negative self-concept, one's self-belief, which results in a lack of ambition, assertiveness and engagement in the organisation, confirming for some what they already believe about themselves.

An alternative strategy for self-protection to emerge was that of '**detachment**' – becoming disengaged from the organisation, role or the experience itself, either through their behaviours

or their cognitions, in order to switch off and escape. One form of this detachment was distancing – purposefully distancing oneself from others, as articulated by ELAINE: *“I’d better learn to zip it up and don’t say a word and sit with my coffee, which is what I’ve decided to do. Because they can’t read anything into that, apart from the fact that she just doesn’t want to talk to anyone, or she is unfriendly. But not to try, because once you try, I think you put yourself on a weak foot.”* Others just stopped trying, withdrawing their efforts as a result of feeling invisible: *“So you, you become disengaged, because you don’t believe that anything you do has any impact or purpose. And, you know, you can’t see where the business is going, you can’t see how you can influence it and it all just becomes so negative.”* (CLIVE).

For some this detachment took the form of destructive behaviours both in the workplace and at home, with some finding their experience at work spilling over into their home lives: *“And I took that stress home and I think I drank a lot as well actually”* (LYDIA).

Some individuals also detached cognitively – detaching themselves from their emotions: *“I probably tried to detach myself from the emotional mess of the situation”* (JOANNE) or detaching from concern about other’s opinions as articulated by STUART: *“...you’re just changing your mind set to say well it doesn’t matter and people aren’t looking at me.”* Others became disinterested in their work or disinterested in those around them: *“You don’t get particularly involved in conversation, you don’t get as much traction with that person socially, you’re not particularly interested in that individual as well. I mean, I don’t see the point of spending time with people that actually don’t interest me or engage me in a sincere way.”* (NICHOLAS).

As with **‘trying to fit in’** attempting to resolve the experience through self-protection may serve to perpetuate the experience. Those who detach themselves may end up excluding themselves from the group, compounding the experience of not belonging: *“I think my general focus and the way I am doesn’t, I don’t think ostracises me from the work force, it doesn’t. Erm, but I think if they don’t necessarily engage with me then I won’t engage or show any interest for them”* (STUART). Through avoidance, not fulfilling potential or disengaging from the organisation, whilst possibly being the result of a negative self-concept such as a lack of self-belief, is also likely to further impact one’s self-concept because individuals don’t assert themselves or achieve what they could have achieved, compounding their negative self-perception: *“I could limit the scope of my ambitions, or limit the scope of what I felt I should be doing...and that kind of just fed into a sort of growing negative feeling about my abilities anyway.”* (JASON)

4.4.4 Reconciling the experience

The last approach to resolving the experience to emerge was **'reconciling the experience'** – an active, conscious effort to understand and process their SoNB, **'reflecting'** on why and when it occurred, and **'accepting'** how it felt. This was about a rational, distanced, objectification of what they went through and often continued to go through.

In attempting to reconcile the experience many spent time **'reflecting'** on what they had been through and how it had felt, in an attempt to make sense of the experience: *"And I suppose what will be very interesting is almost, to play back a scenario when it happens to, to really very slowly be able to pinpoint what it is that leads to it, and how, how you get through it. And that's actually really hard to do."* (NEIL). Others talked to close friends, asking questions about what was happening, what they wanted, and why they felt how they did: *"I...started to question myself, is this what I want to do, is this where I belong? Those sort of questions, and you know, my focus turned inward rather than addressing some of the problems that were lying there."* (NATHAN).

Often this reflection involved a close examination of the potential causes of the experience and consideration of the role they the individual played, the organisation played, or the circumstances played, as articulated by STUART:

"I think a lot of this is self-induced as opposed to necessarily the organisation. But in total contradiction to that I do think it's the organisation and the way they're not willing to bend or they don't consider things like I say emotional intelligence, they don't consider the impact their organisational decisions are having on people, and everything else."

Often as a result of this process of reflection an **'acceptance'** of the experience developed. Individuals were able to attribute the cause the situation, understanding that it was the situation that didn't work, rather than something inherently wrong with them: *"Somebody even said actually 'you're an outsider and you shouldn't be doing the job you do'. But once you see that and you say, 'well actually this is why and this is why I do this' and they actually – it is not that I am the outsider, they're just differently wired'. And that doesn't make any of it wrong."* (ELAINE). There was also an acceptance that it's okay to not belong to every group and feel part of every group of people, as articulated by SANDRA: *"Although it is better, it doesn't mean that I feel that I fit in necessarily, probably just means that I kind of accepted things more, and accepted that OK, I might not be part of that group, or be invited to be part of that group, but,*

Chapter Four – Findings

although that sometimes is a bit difficult, um, I am actually alright, alright as I am. I have enough people.”

There also emerged an acceptance of the need to take control of your reactions – how you react to your situation, how you react to feeling like an outsider as articulated by ELAINE: *“I think it is nearly a self-education. I honestly do. I think you can feel like an outsider and you can, for all intents and purposes, be it. But you don’t have to react, because at the end of the day, the outside circumstances are what they are, it is how you react to it is what you can control.”* illustrating an understanding that controlling how one reacts to the experience can serve to break the cycle.

For some this acceptance grew as they aged and they developed a serenity through maturity particularly in terms of developing an awareness of self: *“I’ve got the maturity now to understand who I am as a person, and all that sort of thing.”* (LYDIA); *“And need to recognise actually that I can’t do everything ... and that’s something that comes...over years.”* (JOANNE).

This approach to resolving the experience therefore helped some individuals to lift themselves out of the experience – to break the self-perpetuating nature of the cycle, helping to reduce the psychological impact in terms of the emotional response or internal conflict, and help individuals to develop a more positive self-concept: *“Feeling the outsider is how you react to it and, I think once you realise that, and you stop yourself and think, no I’m not going to go there. It gradually, apparently, it self-propels itself and you don’t.”* (ELAINE)

RESOLUTION		
CATEGORY	THEORETICAL CODE	PROPOSED RELATIONSHIPS
Seeking value	Strategy / Consequence Cause Cause	– SoNB may motivate behaviours/strategies designed to add value – Self-concept may motivate behaviours designed to add value – Adding value behaviours may positively impact one’s self-concept
Trying to fit in	Strategy Consequence Consequence Cause	– SoNB may motivate behaviours/strategies designed to help one fit in – Self-concept may motivate behaviours designed to help one fit in – Trying to fit in behaviours may negatively impact one’s self-esteem

	<p>Cause</p> <p>Reciprocal</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – <i>Trying to fit in behaviours may negatively impact one's sense of a consistent self-concept</i> – <i>Trying to fit in behaviours may negatively impact one's ability to fit in and enhance one's SoNB</i>
Self-protection	<p>Strategy / Consequence</p> <p>Consequence</p> <p>Cause</p> <p>Reciprocal</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – <i>SoNB may motivate behaviours/strategies designed to protect from the pain of or threat of not belonging</i> – <i>Self-concept may motivate behaviours/strategies designed to protect from the pain of or threat of not belonging</i> – <i>Self-protection behaviours may negatively impact one's self-concept</i> – <i>Self-protection behaviours may negatively impact one's ability to belong and enhance one's SoNB</i>
Reconciling the experience	<p>Strategy / Consequence</p> <p>Consequence</p> <p>Cause</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – <i>SoNB may motivate cognitions/strategies designed to help one make sense of the experience</i> – <i>Self-concept may motivate cognitions/strategies designed to help one make sense of the experience</i> – <i>Reconciling cognitions may positively impact one's self-concept</i>

Table 4.3: Substantive categories, theoretical codes and proposed relationships for the category of Resolution

4.5 Emotional experience

Individuals described a variety of emotions that they felt during the experience, all of which can be considered powerful and negative and illustrate the strength of the experience for all of these individuals.

An overview of the conceptual sub-categories and their properties and sub-properties is given below:

- **Emotions expressed**
 - Depressive
 - Anxious
 - Angry
- **Intensity of emotion**
 - Frequency
 - Over time
 - Depth
- **Inner turmoil of emotion**
 - Irrational
 - Distorted perceptions
 - Feeling emotional
 - Out of control
 - Being lost

4.5.1 Emotions expressed

The emotions they discussed clustered into: **'depressive'**; **'anxious'**; and **'angry'**. Many specifically discussed feeling **'depressed'** as described by JOANNE: *"...that was a significant emotional stress, bordering on kind of depressive illness I would say."* Others articulated feelings that are closely associated with depression such as feeling exhausted all the time, feeling desolate, or feeling desperate: *"I was feeling quite desperate about the impact that that was having, but not feeling that I had a way out of it or the strength to escape from it."* (CLIVE).

The experience also made some individuals feel **'anxious'**, feeling scared and fearful about the experience they were having, the vulnerable state they were in, or the situation they'd found themselves in, such as LYDIA:

"Fear. No not so much fear, anxiety. Um, and worry, that I wasn't doing what I should be doing. That people didn't understand me ...Um, and feeling like everyone else seemed to be very competent. I was competent, I could do my job, but I sort of had this underlying feeling of, um, anxiety."

Some also described feeling vulnerable: *“I remember feeling very vulnerable and very scared coz I didn't ... I think I just didn't feel valued”* (LYDIA).

For some the experience left them feeling *‘angry’* – angry and resentful towards the organisation that they felt hadn't protected them from this experience: *“...actually I'm doing all this fucking work and I don't feel that I belong here. And that feels completely strange. Um, you know, so I'll, I'll be, quite belligerent perhaps, um. And become quite a bit, resentful.”* (NEIL).

4.5.2 Intensity of feeling

Another property that emerged in terms of their emotional experience was the **‘intensity of emotion’**. This property helps to illustrate both the depth and power of the experience, as well as it's often enduring and pervasive nature.

The **‘frequency’** of the experience varied across individuals with some only encountering the experience on one or two occasions, or in particular types of situation: *“I would say it, it tends to be situation specific. So it's not that I feel like that every day all day for my last 20 years of working but I have had that experience in particular roles or particular organisations. Or at particular points in time within a role.”* (JOANNE). Others described the experience as more pervasive, recognising, with occasional reluctance, that it was an experience that had occurred off and on frequently throughout their lives, as articulated by NATHAN:

“I think this has been if I really look at all the professional engagements I've had, at some point in time this feeling has always been there. And if I were to look at the three major job assignments that I did, and so. I can't say it is just episodic it happens only once, but I think this happened, you know, a number of occasions.”

and ELAINE: *“I'm fine, so really basically I just didn't fit in, again. When did I ever fit in? [laughing].”* One individual also discussed experiencing not belonging outside of work, as described by SANDRA: *“I think that I have always found it difficult to fit in. Um, I've never you know in social situations and things outside of work, I don't necessarily feel like I fit in.”*

In terms of the impact of **‘time’** on the occurrence of the experience throughout their lives, there was again some variation. Some were improving – occurring less frequently, often through the development of self-awareness and serenity, as explored in **‘resolution’**: *“I think I've changed over the years, I think I, I have understood ... that actually I'm alright as I am. But I think it took me a very long time to understand that I'm, I'm not a bad person, and the people who like me and love me, love me as I am, not because of what I perhaps should be.”* (SANDRA). For others however, the experience was enduring or indeed life-long: *“Oh, I think probably every*

month I swing backwards and forwards with it...I think I remember it happening all of my career.” (NEIL); “Well, it’s kind of been the theme for my life.” (NICHOLAS).

Finally, most individuals expressed a **‘depth’** of feeling. The emotional and psychological impact was not fleeting or insignificant, but powerful and encompassing, as articulated by NEIL: *“It’s a very, a very powerful experience I have”*; and LYDIA:

“I remember being off sick a lot. ... I remember being ill I think probably psychologically, you know my immune system was pretty awful. I remember drinking a lot in the evenings. Um, I remember waking up in the mornings and being on the tube and wanting to cry because I didn't want to go to work. So I guess it was almost, I was probably on the verge of a break down. But I realised and I left. It would have been. If I hadn't met my husband I wonder what I would have done.”

This depth is evidenced by the emotional descriptions the individuals gave in terms of depressive illness, desolation, and despair, as well as the overflow, as intimated in the quote above, into their non-working lives.

4.5.3 Inner turmoil of emotion

As referred to above – the emotions that were felt and associated with the experience were not critical to the psychological impact – these were simply the expression of how the experience felt. What appears to be fundamental to the depth, strength, pervasiveness and cyclical nature of the experience is an internal struggle – a battle with the **‘irrationality’** of the experience and with the conflict which they felt with their self-concept, as explored in ‘self-concept’. This internal battle, this continual cognitive dissonance, is likely to be cognitively challenging, and psychologically impacting.

For many individuals there was a sense that how they were feeling was **‘irrational’** – they were not in control, didn’t seem to be able to deal with how they were feeling, and were aware for the most part that their feelings were distorted. There appeared to be an internal struggle with how they felt about how they were feeling, as articulated by LYDIA *“Whereas actually it just felt messy. Messy and depressing and what the hell is going on? I don't like this and I don't understand it. And, why does no one else feel like this, why is it just me?”*

For some there was a real awareness that they had **‘distorted perceptions’** – distorted perceptions about not belonging, about what others think and feel about them, as articulated by SARAH: *“Everything I did, everything I said I would examine, in stupidity of detail, and sometimes awake at night ... how could I have said that better, how, when she was standing two*

feet away from me, did that mean she didn't want to talk to me?" There was an awareness for many that much of the experience was the result of a lack of confidence and not based on reality: *"And it all just [pause] it all just helped to reaffirm or confirm my own view that I wasn't good enough in the job. And that probably wasn't true because in each case the feedback was pretty good."* (JASON).

Some described **'feeling emotional'** – experiencing emotional difficulty, or *"emotional damage"* (JOANNE); *"...whether I would have lasted longer in that environment if I had the right support is another question, but I think certainly um, I might have, I might have come to that conclusion with um, less emotional damage."* (JOANNE). Others described feeling out of control – not only out of control of the situation they were in, but critically, out of control of how they were feeling. *"So it had all become ... you know, I'm getting close to the plughole. I was really getting sucked into, ah, this negative position."* (CLIVE); *"Generally feeling, you know...there's that not feeling um, emotionally in control."* (JOANNE).

For some there was a sense of **'being lost'** – lost in terms of what they should be doing to resolve the experience, *"a little bit at sea"* (NEIL), and lost in the complexity of the emotions associated with the experience: *"I feel, looking back, over that period particularly, that, that crisis period, that – it was just a complete waste of my time and my life. I was just completely lost."* (CLIVE).

There is a real sense here of an **"inner turmoil"** (STUART), an internal battle with how they are feeling – they feel irrational, out of control, and like they can't cope, which compounds their negative self-concept, fuelling their sense of weakness, and their perception that there is something somehow wrong with them, as articulated by LYDIA: *"I suppose I almost felt like there was something wrong [pause]. And when I say something wrong I mean, that there was something wrong with me. Why was I struggling with this so much? Why was I feeling so miserable and down? And, why was everyone, what, why me, why, what's wrong with me?"*

EMOTIONAL EXPERIENCE		
CATEGORY	THEORETICAL CODE	PROPOSED RELATIONSHIPS
Emotion expressed	Consequence Consequence Reciprocal	– SoNB may result in expressed emotions – Self-concept may result in felt emotions – Felt emotions may impact one's self-concept
Intensity of emotion	Intensity	– An intense SoNB may be associated with an intense emotional experience

	Consequence	– <i>Intensity of emotional experience may negatively impact one’s self-concept</i>
Inner turmoil of emotion	Consequence	– <i>SoNB may lead to an inner turmoil of emotion</i>
	Consequence	– <i>Resolution strategies may lead to an inner turmoil of emotion</i>
	Cause	– <i>Inner turmoil of emotion may negatively impact one’s self-concept</i>

Table 4.4: Substantive categories, theoretical codes and proposed relationships for the category of Emotional Experience

4.6 Moderators

The final category to emerge through the analysis, whilst not actually initiating the experience, may moderate the experience for some, and may help to explain why feeling like one does not belong at work results in a negative self-concept, as well as help explain some of the theoretical relationships proposed in terms of the impact on emotion and resolution strategies. The sub-categories cluster into: **‘centrality of work to identity and value’**; **‘life outside work’**; and **‘individual characteristics’**. It would appear that for some, either because work is so important to who they are, because of the impact of what is going on for them outside of work, or because of an enduring personality characteristic, not belonging in the workplace results in a negative impact on their self-concept.

An overview of the conceptual sub-categories, properties and sub-properties is provided below.

- Centrality of work to identity and value
 - Drive to achieve
- Life outside work
- Individual characteristics
 - Enduring low self-esteem
 - Need for external validation
 - Need to be included
 - From childhood

4.6.1 Centrality of work to identity and value

For some individuals the fact that their work was so important, so fundamental to their identity and their sense of value, acted as a moderator of the experience. For them, work was critical to who they were, to how they defined themselves: *“I never talk about work without talking about myself. And I think a lot of people do. And I can’t understand that, so I can’t talk about work without talking about me.”* (NEIL). Work provided an opportunity for fulfilment, to be

competent, to contribute positively to something: “...a sense of fulfilment, identity. Um, a little bit of an escape and, er, a place to do what I do best.” (LYDIA). As such, feeling like they didn’t belong at work threatened their self-concept, as articulated by CLIVE: “I really did go through a period where, I think the values that I thought were driving me, and the purpose of being engaged at work, it was all sort of – it all became sort of dissolved to a point where I seemed to have no purpose.”

Alongside the importance of work to identity for some there also emerged a strong, and often perpetual ‘**drive to achieve**’: “And yet, as you step into the next position there’s always then, it always becomes the next place to get to... I don’t particularly feel personally ambitious, but I do feel driven to actually achieve and to get to the place I’m meant to be.” (NEIL). Being driven to achieve meant that the SoNB that resulted from, in particular, not feeling they are adding value or were engaged with the organisation impacted their self-concept, because they were in essence, failing to achieve.

For some this was articulated as a fear of regret, a concern that they would not fulfil their potential or about the quality of “the legacy I will leave behind” (JASON). For others this was articulated as a fear that they wouldn’t meet expectations of others, of their parents or colleagues: “The organisation itself was in a very unhealthy position, um, I couldn’t achieve the things that I, had been brought in to achieve.” (JOANNE). Others described having high standards, standards they set for themselves, a self-imposed pressure that they were driven to satisfy: “I think there’s quite a close link between worrying and being conscientious. And I tend to look at myself as being conscientious about everything I do. But I know the downside of that is I do tend to worry about things more that I should do.” (STUART).

There is a clear association here between the drive to achieve and the attribute of ‘not adding value’, and it’s likely that for those with a strong drive to achieve, not adding value within an organisation will result in a more negative impact on their self-concept than for those who are less driven in this respect.

4.6.2 Life outside work

Another moderating factor for some, was their ‘**life outside work**’. In some instances, a lack of support, a lack of understanding from friends or family increased the negative impact of the experience, as described by LYDIA: “I’m the sort of person who will need emotional support. But when you’re not getting that from anywhere and not only that, you’re having to behave in a way that is so alien to you at work, it’s going to affect you more probably psychologically.” Similarly, having difficulties outside of work exacerbated the experience, but may also, as reflected on by

LYDIA have exacerbated the non-work life difficulties: *“And that probably played out in other things going on at home. Well and vice versa. So personally over those ten years, personally I was having a difficult time. And I wonder how much of that now is because I felt so depressed a lot of the time, at work. Because it impacts on your relationships with your husband and your parents and everything doesn't it.”*

4.6.3 Individual characteristics

The final moderating factor that emerged from the analysis was that of **‘individual characteristics’** – enduring characteristics which moderated the experience, either influencing the impact of the attribute factor on sense of belonging, or influencing the impact of sense of belonging on self-concept. Some individuals had an enduring sense of **‘low self-esteem’** which could mediate the impact of not belonging on their self-concept: *“It kind of well, it all helps I think to support my, the sort of low self-image I can have of myself.”* (JASON), or moderate the impact of the attribute of not adding value, or being different, on one’s sense of belonging: *“But there’s something in me that said, ‘why would anybody want to be, to have me? Why would anybody want to interact with me?’ I’m not interesting, I’m not like them, you know, I’m not of interest.”* (DELIA). Some articulated how this emanated from indoctrination from their families that they weren’t good enough as described by STUART: *“I think it’s you know, not having a father there, erm, if he was there he was normally nasty, drunk or whatever so therefore, you’re almost thrown in a corner aren’t you and what you have to say isn’t important, um. Or if you do something it’s not good enough.”*

For others there was a **‘need for external validation’**, which could moderate the impact of not belonging on self-concept because of the assumed lack of acceptance that is associated with the experience: *“If you’re given that validation by someone, suddenly you’ve become – which is pathetic. You become a person that other people are looking to be with - people with validation - will talk to.”* (ELAINE). Others exhibited a strong **‘need to be included’** which exacerbated the impact of not belonging: *“I have a high need to be included, so to know that I had to be like that to be included in that team made me feel very uncomfortable.”* (DELIA).

Finally, for some their SoNB was more salient due to their **‘childhood’**, from feeling from a young age that they didn’t belong: *“I had so much change in my early childhood, and I just wonder whether the seeds were sewn then of you know being eight and being different, and clearly being an outsider in the states, so much the outsider.”* (SARAH).

MODERATORS		
CATEGORY	THEORETICAL CODE	PROPOSED RELATIONSHIPS
Centrality of work to identity and value	Moderator Moderator	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Centrality of work to identity may enhance one's sensitivity to the attributes of SoNB – Centrality of work to identity may moderate the impact of SoNB on self-concept and emotional experience
Life outside work	Moderator Moderator Moderator	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Life outside work may enhance one's sensitivity to the attributes of SoNB – Life outside work may moderate the impact of SoNB on self-concept and emotional experience – Life outside work may moderate the impact of self-concept on emotional experience
Individual characteristics	Moderator Moderator Moderator	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Individual characteristics may enhance one's sensitivity to the attributes of SoNB – Individual characteristics may moderate the impact of SoNB on self-concept and emotional experience – Individual characteristics may moderate the impact of self-concept on emotional experience

Table 4.5: Substantive categories, theoretical codes and proposed relationships for the category of Moderators

4.7 Overview of the categories and proposed relationships

For the purposes of clarity, *Appendix VI* details the substantive categories for the entire theoretical framework, along with their theoretical codes (those codes which specify the theoretical relationships between the categories), and the proposed relationships which have been discussed above.

Chapter 5 Review and discussion of the literature

5.1 Introduction

As a Glaserian grounded theory study, a full review of the literature was undertaken after the data had been collected and analysed in order for the data collection and analysis to not be biased by apriori theory. As such, what follows is a discussion of the primarily psychology literature that was reviewed based on the themes and constructs that *emerged* from the current study. The purpose of this chapter is to discuss this literature and extant research in the light of the findings, considering where the current research is both supported by or supports previous studies and how the current theory extends or offers a variation to extant theories. In particular, the extant literature helps to elucidate the theoretical relationships that were developed and explored in the previous chapter, helping to refine and develop the proposed theoretical framework, substantiating the propositions through support from prior studies. Each section closes with a clear description of the relationship between the extant literature and the current theory, where and how the extant literature with good conceptual fit has developed the current theory, and the impact of those developments on the proposed theoretical relationships, which are illustrated in a revised model at the end of each section.

5.2 Attributes of sense of not belonging

From the current study four themes emerged as being key attributes of the experience of not belonging in the workplace: Quality relationships; not adding value; difference; and organisational culture.

5.2.1 Quality relationships

The current study found an absence of quality relationships to be a key attribute of SoNB in the workplace. What individuals lacked were genuine relationships characterised by trust, empathy, knowledge and understanding, feeling like one mattered, and an ability to be open. These themes find parallels in the definitions of quality relationships found in the literature.

5.2.1.1 Conceptualisations of quality relationships

Dutton and Heaphy (2003) define high quality relationships as constituting two critical attributes: Capacities and subjective experience. *Capacities* include the emotional carrying capacity of a relationship, the tensility of a relationship, and the degree of connectivity in a relationship. *Emotional carrying capacity* refers to the extent to which individuals are able to display a range of emotions and the probability that those emotions will be understood. *Tensility* refers to the extent to which relationships are able to withstand conflict and setbacks.

Connectivity refers to the extent to which a relationship is open to new information, approaches and challenges. *Subjective experience* includes both positive regard and mutuality. *Positive regard* refers to the extent to which individuals feel understood and respected by the other, and *mutuality* refers to the extent to which all individuals in the relationship are actively engaged and participating (Dutton & Heaphy, 2003).

In a study of 212 undergraduate and graduate students Carmelli, Brueller and Dutton (2009) explored the relationship between Dutton and Heaphy's (2003) conceptualisation of high quality relationships, psychological safety, and learning behaviour. Psychological safety is defined by Edmondson (1999) as an individual's perception that the team environment is safe for interpersonal risk taking, and in this study was operationalised using Edmondson's (1999) psychological safety scale. High quality relationships were measured using 20 items which captured the five dimensions of high quality relationships. Results of Carmelli et al.'s (2009) confirmatory factor analysis supported the five factor structure of the high quality relationship construct. Results of their structural equation model found that both the *capacity* of high quality relationships and the *experiences* of high quality relationships were *uniquely* positively related to psychological safety, as well as positively related to psychological safety as a combined construct, further supporting their conceptualisation.

Reis's (1990) definition of intimacy in relationships also parallels the characteristics of quality relationships described in the present study. Reis (1990, p.16) defines intimate interactions as ones in which "the discloser must feel understood, validated, and cared for by the listener." This conceptualisation of intimacy in relationship interactions reflects that of others such as Erikson (1950) who emphasises the importance of caring for one another, and Sullivan (1953), who emphasises the role of the validation of one's attributes and world views in intimate relationships.

Reis, Sheldon, Gable, Roscoe, and Ryan's (2000) diary study of 76 students further supports the present study's conceptualisation of quality of relationships. Using Deci and Ryan's (2000) definition of 'relatedness' – that of feeling close and connected to significant others, Reis et al.'s research explored the significance to relatedness of seven types of social activity: Talking about something meaningful; participating in shared activities; hanging out with others; feeling understood and appreciated; participating in pleasant social activities; avoiding conflict; and avoiding self-conscious or insecure feelings. Their study revealed that talking about meaningful matters and feeling understood and appreciated were most strongly related to daily relatedness, suggesting that it is the quality of the interactions with others and one's ability to

feel appreciated as a person that is most important to one's sense of relatedness. As such, the conceptualisations of quality relationships in the extant literature support the findings of the current study in terms of the importance of being understood, mattering to someone, and trust to the quality of those relationships.

5.2.1.2 Quality relationships and ability to be open

The present study also found that an absence of quality relationships was associated with individuals not feeling able to be open and talk about how they were feeling, an outcome which is reflected in the literature on psychological safety. As psychological safety emerged as a key theme within the attribute category of 'organisational culture', its potential direct and moderating role in the experience of not belonging will be explored in more detail below. However, two studies from the psychological safety literature are particularly pertinent to the role of quality relationships in individual's sense of belonging as they are directly related to one's ability to be open and to speak up. The first is that of Carmelli, et al. (2009) which was referred to above, which proposes that high quality relationships, relationships which have high levels of all three capacities and foster positive subjective experience, are strongly related to psychological safety. They argue that greater emotional carrying capacity means individuals are more likely to feel able to speak up about how they're feeling, greater tensility results in individuals being less cautious with their interactions, and connectivity results in individuals feeling able to offer different and novel information. Similarly, they argue that as positive regard helps individuals to feel worthy and valued, they are less likely to question their own competence, and that higher levels of mutuality will also encourage all individuals in a relationship to speak up and contribute. As detailed above their 2009 study did indeed find that both the capacity of high quality relationships and the experiences of high quality relationships were related to psychological safety.

The role that psychological safety plays in one's ability to be open is also explored by Liange, Farh and Farh's 2012 study investigating the impact of psychological safety on 'voice'. The authors distinguish between two types of voice: Promotive voice through which individuals express ways to *improve* practices and behaviours; and prohibitive voice through which individuals express *concern* about practices and behaviours. In a study involving 239 Chinese retail employees (Liange et al. 2012) the authors explored the relationship between psychological safety, felt obligation for change, and organisation-based self-esteem as predictors of prohibitive and promotive voice at two time points, six weeks apart. Organisation-based self-esteem (OBSE; Pierce & Gardner, 2004) is defined as "the degree to which an individual believes him/herself to be capable, significant and worthy as an organisational

member.” (p.593) and is considered to be a situation-specific dimension of general self-esteem (as such, it will be explored in detail under 5.3.4 on ‘self-esteem’). Liange et al.’s (2012) study found that of the dependent variables examined, psychological safety was most strongly positively related to subsequent prohibitive voice. As the study only involved Chinese participants who are from a collective society the findings may not be entirely generalisable to Western organisations. However, the results do offer further support for the role of psychological safety in our ability to speak up and voice concerns about our experience which the literature suggests is an important function of quality relationships and the current study suggests is important to one’s sense of belonging.

5.2.1.3 Quality relationships and belonging

As explored in *Chapter Three* all of the theories of human motivation incorporate the need for interpersonal relationships. Maslow (1943) discusses the need for belongingness or love, Alderfer (1969) refers to our need for relatedness with friends, family, peers and other groups, and McClelland (1985) and Deci and Ryan (2000) both refer to the need for affiliation and maintaining positive relationships with others. Similarly, in the literature regarding belonging, the central constructs to emerge were the need for affiliation with individuals and to develop and maintain interpersonal attachments which involve both frequent contact as well as interpersonal affective concern (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Somers, 1999; Van Orden, Cukrowicz, Witte & Joiner, 2012), and relationships with broader systems such as family, friends, and work (Adler, 1991; Thau, Aquino & Poortvliet, 2007; Leary & Cox, 2008). As has been demonstrated in *Chapter Three*, our need for social relationships is so fundamental to our survival as a species that over time we have developed the capability to physically alert ourselves to the threat of social exclusion (e.g. MacDonald & Leary, 2005; Eisenberger, Lieberman & Williams, 2003). As such, these theories and related empirical research support the relationship between quality relationships and a sense of belonging found in the current research, and we can infer that an *absence* of quality relationships in the workplace might be a significant determinant of the experience of *not* belonging.

The literature which specifically explores belonging also supports this relationship. Anant (1966) for example, emphasises the importance of relationships and interactions for one’s sense of ‘belongingness’ which he distinguishes from ‘belonging’, seeing the latter as a relationship between the individual and the social world and the former as a state or experience of fitting in. According to Anant (1966), an individual might belong to a club by virtue of membership, but will not experience the state of belongingness without social interaction with other members. This assertion finds empirical support from Belle et al.’s (2015) phenomenological exploration

of the experience of organisational belonging with high-intensity teleworkers which will be explored below under 5.2.4 on 'organisational culture'. They found that those individuals who reported belonging *more* had regular opportunities for interpersonal interaction and developing relationships. Of particular pertinence to the present study are the formulated meanings of 'not belonging' that emerged from Belle et al.'s, (2015) research. These themes emerged through discussion of moments when individuals felt they belonged *less*, not as mirror opposites of times of belonging, but, Belle et al. (2015) proposed, as a means of fully articulating the holistic experience of organisational belonging. For their participants, the experience of *not belonging* involved an absence of interest from others and meaningful association with others, as well as a lack of stability in maintaining relationships. Critically, this is one of the very few studies which elucidates a sense of *not belonging*, and as such offers direct support for the relationship found between an *absence* of quality relationships and SoNB in the workplace in the current study, rather than inferring this relationship through the presence of quality relationships and a sense *of* belonging.

A study by Clegg (2006), the only study in the extant literature to specifically explore the experience of *not* belonging, also supports the importance of the quality of relationships to one's sense of not belonging. Their phenomenological study explored the experience of eight individuals reflecting on their feelings of not belonging through adolescence and early adulthood as they negotiated social relationships throughout high school and college. Their study found that central to the experience of not belonging was a sense of differentiation from the rest of the group (which will be discussed in more detail below). However, what also emerged from their study was a notion of 'isolated belonging' – having a number of social interactions which were characterised by distant, disconnected relationships. These relationships were described as superficial, not involving true friendship and not relationships in which individuals felt they could talk about things that were truly important to them.

Drawing on Baumeister and Leary's (1995) Belonging Hypothesis, Somers (1999) also emphasises the importance of the quality of relationships in her conceptualisation of belonging, defining belonging as:

“...the need to be and perception of being involved with others at different interpersonal levels...which contributes to ones' sense of connectedness (being part of, feeling accepted, fitting in), and esteem (being cared about, valued and respected by others), while providing reciprocal acceptance, care and valuing to others.” (p.16)

Research by Levett-Jones, Lathlean, McMillan, and Higgins (2009) also supports the importance of the quality of relationships as well as the frequency of social interactions. In their 2009 mixed-methods, cross-national, multi-site qualitative study of 18 clinical nursing students, Levett-Jones et al., (2009) explored the causes and consequences of a sense of belonging. Data were collected through semi-structured interview and analysed using a form of grounded theory in which constant comparison of transcripts led to the emergence of themes and categories. The analysis of their data resulted in five key themes related to staff-student relationships and the impact on their experience of belonging and subsequent learning: Receptiveness of nursing staff; inclusion/exclusion; legitimisation of the student role; recognition and appreciation; and challenge and support.

Building on this research Levett-Jones and Lathlean (2009) developed a conceptual framework exploring nursing students' progression towards attaining a sense of competence, which perceives belonging as a process. Their 'Ascent to Competence' conceptual framework suggests that individuals begin at the stage of safety and security, and progress through the stages of belongingness, self-concept, learning and finally competence. Levett-Jones and Lathlean (2009) found that sense of belonging and ability to move up through this framework, was greatly impacted by individual's *interpersonal relationships* with nursing colleagues, and the extent to which they were accepting, supportive and interested in them. These relationships legitimised their role and place in the nursing environment and further impacted their level of motivation and participation at work, facilitating their ascent towards competence.

In a study of 292 workers from a single, Spanish organisation Davila and Jimenez (2012) also found a relationship between supportive relationships and belonging. Their study explored the relationship between the constructs of organisational identification (OI), defined as an individual's perception of belonging to an organisation to the extent that they define themselves in terms of their membership of that organisation (Mael & Ashforth, 1992), and organisational commitment (OC), defined as an individual's strong belief and acceptance of an organisation's goals and values and a desire to remain as a member of the organisation (Davila & Jimenez, 2012).

The authors explored three dimensions of OI: *Cognitive centrality* in terms of the frequency and speed with which membership to the organisation comes to mind; *contribution to self-esteem* in terms of the valence of affect felt towards the group and the impact this has on self-esteem; and *sense of belonging* to the organisation based on interpersonal ties and the extent to which they felt they were a part of the group based on common bonds. The OC construct is considered

to have three dimensions: *Affective commitment* – the wish to remain in the organisation; *continuance commitment* – the recognition of the negative consequences of leaving the organisation; and *normative commitment* – a sense of obligation towards the organisation (Allen & Meyer, 1996). OC was assessed using the Organizational Commitment Questionnaire (OCQ) created by Mowday, Steers and Porter (1979).

Part of Davila and Jimenez's (2012) analysis explored the impact of two antecedent factors on the different dimensions of OI and OC: *Value congruence*, which was assessed by asking participants to evaluate a list of values described by McDonald and Gandz (1992) in terms of the importance to themselves, their supervisor and their organisation; and *perceived support* from colleagues, supervisor and the organisation, assessed using a five item scale exploring the extent to which individuals felt supported, cared for and had good relationships at work. Using a regression analysis, Davila and Jimenez (2012) found that whilst a significant correlation was found between both value congruence and perceived support and both OI and OC dimensions, perceived support from colleagues was the only significant predictor of sense of belonging, whereas the most important significant predictor of affective commitment was value congruence. Whilst these findings support the current study in terms of the relationship between interpersonal relationships and a sense of belonging, the current study also found that value congruence emerged as a theme under the attribute of 'organisational culture', and as such, was found to be related to SoNB, which contradicts Davila and Jimenez (2012) finding. As will be explored below however, value congruence and misalignment between an individual's values and that of the organisation did emerge as crucial to one's sense of belonging as conceptualised by Belle et al. (2015).

Easterbrook and Vignoles' (2013) study explores the importance of both relationship *frequency* and *quality* in terms of impact on one's sense of belonging. The authors make the distinction between social category groups and social network groups, and hypothesise that sense of belonging to the two groups have different antecedents. Drawing on social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1985) they define social categories as homogeneous groups based on shared characteristics and similarities amongst members (Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, & Wetherell, 1987), and as such argue that sense of belonging is likely to come from perceptions of intragroup similarity. Social networks on the other hand are groups construed as sets of relationships based on interdependency and interactions, and members occupy specific roles emphasising their individuality (Easterbrook & Vignoles, 2013). Sense of belonging for these groups is less likely to be derived from intragroup similarity and more likely to arise from the frequency and quality of interpersonal relations (Easterbrook & Vignoles, 2013).

Given these assumptions, Easterbrook and Vignoles' (2013) longitudinal study of 111 undergraduate psychology students explored the relationship between intragroup similarity (including measures of stereotypicality, typicality, homogeneity, and prototypicality) and interpersonal bonds (including an assessment of intimacy, interdependence, knowledge of members and sociability between members) and belonging, which was measured using a single-item which asked 'how much does being a member of each group or category give you a feeling of 'belonging''. Results of their structural equation model found that perceptions of intragroup similarity predicted sense of belonging to social category groups but not social networks, but that frequent interactions and intimate interpersonal bonds with group members predicted sense of belonging for social network groups *and* sense of belonging for social categories (although not as strongly). This study suggests shared characteristics are only important to a sense of belonging to homogenous groups but interpersonal relationships are important for a sense of belonging to *all* types of group. However, interpretation of Easterbrook and Vignoles' (2013) findings as offering support to the current study in terms of the importance of quality relationships to one's sense of belonging should be caveated by the fact that their use of a single item measure which did not offer a definition of belonging means that belonging could be interpreted to mean a variety of different things to their participants.

5.2.1.4 Summary

The findings of the current research along with the extant literature allow us to conclude that quality relationships – relationships which offer opportunities for quality interaction, which are characterised by empathy, trust, understanding, feeling valued and validated, and an ability to be open – are a key attribute of a sense of belonging. Furthermore, an absence of these relationships might also leave individuals feeling like they can't speak up, they can't be open about how they are feeling and as such they have no opportunity to determine if others feel the same, perpetuating the perception that they do not fit in and do not belong. Given that only two studies explored thus far to elucidate the experience of *not* belonging are Belle et al.'s (2015) and Clegg's (2006) phenomenological studies, it is only possible to infer rather than conclude, that an *absence* of these relationships is likely to be related to a sense of *not* belonging, as was found in the current study.

The research and theories discussed so far have focused on the affiliative aspect of belonging. However, a wealth of research also suggests that belonging may be a multi-dimensional construct involving more than just affiliation, and extends the construct to incorporate the need to feel valued, competent, and respected, as well as the importance of shared characteristics

with those with whom we want to fit in. This literature and more will be explored below and discussed in light of the findings of the current study.

5.2.2 Value

The present study found that the experience of not feeling like one was adding value to one's role or organisation was another key attribute of SoNB in the workplace. Specifically, individuals discussed experiences in which they felt they were not contributing, they lacked a sense of purpose, or they lacked capability. These themes are reflected in both the general psychology literature and the belonging literature.

5.2.2.1 Antecedents and consequences of feeling valued in the broader literature

In White and MacKenzie-Davey's (2003) exploration of the construct of value they conceptualise what it feels like to feel valued as: "A positive, affective response arising from confirmation, within a congruent set of criteria, of an individual's possession of the qualities on which worth or desirability depends" (White & MacKenzie-Davey, 2003, p.228). In their qualitative study of training consultants and associate training consultants at an educational charitable trust the authors explored 'what' makes an individual feel valued. The outcomes from their focus groups found a variety of themes that impacted perception of being valued which clustered into three themes: Fairness; environment; and inclusion. *Fairness* refers to employee's perceptions that organisational processes are just and equal, and decision making processes and organisational practices are transparent and consistent. *Environment* refers to the organisational context and the individual's perceptions regarding how they are treated by the organisation, such as pay and recognition, opportunities for personal development, trust and support, as well as leadership and organisational reputation in terms of the value this places on the individual through association. Finally, *inclusion* refers to the extent to which an organisation strives to make the individual feel a valued part of the institution and the extent to which an individual considers themselves to be seen as an equal with something valuable to contribute. Inclusion is based on reciprocity in terms of shared values, two-way communication, ability to be heard and participation in decision making.

As their sample came from a charitable trust which might influence their participant's perspectives, their findings should be generalised to other organisations with some caution. However, the study does provide a comprehensive and in-depth conceptualisation of what contributes to being valued at work and supports the conceptualisation of this theme in the current research as constituting making a contribution and having a sense of purpose. Interestingly, White and MacKenzie-Davey (2003) also posit a *contributory* role of 'inclusion' to

one’s sense of feeling valued. Whilst this could be interpreted as contradicting the findings from the current research which proposes that not feeling valued may contribute to SoNB, it is important to emphasise the distinction between ‘inclusion’ and a sense of belonging. Inclusion, defined by Pelled, Ledford and Mohrman (1999) as the degree to which individuals are treated as insiders in an organisation, is an *act* or behaviour. Sense of belonging however, is a cognition, an individual’s *perception* of belonging, which may, or may not, be impacted by an act of inclusion.

White and MacKenzie-Davey’s (2003) conceptualisation of feeling valued in the workplace has close parallels with the findings from Rhoades and Eisenberger’s (2002) meta-analysis of 70 studies around perceived organisational support (POS). POS is defined as an individual’s belief that the organisation values their contributions and is concerned about their well-being. Their meta-analysis identified the key antecedent and consequence factors related to POS, the former of which closely reflect the factors found to contribute to feeling valued in White and MacKenzie-Davey’s (2003) study, being: Fairness, including procedural justice, voice and politics; supervisor support; and organisational rewards and job conditions. As such, the broader psychology and social psychology literature suggests that feeling valued in the workplace may be determined by being included, contributing, being heard, supported and treated fairly.

5.2.2.2 *Feeling valued and a sense of belonging*

The belonging literature in turn offers support to the relationship between not feeling valued and SoNB found in the current research. For example, Masterson and Stamper's (2003) theoretical model of perceived organisational membership incorporates perception of being valued by the organisation as a key motivating factor in the desire for organisational membership.

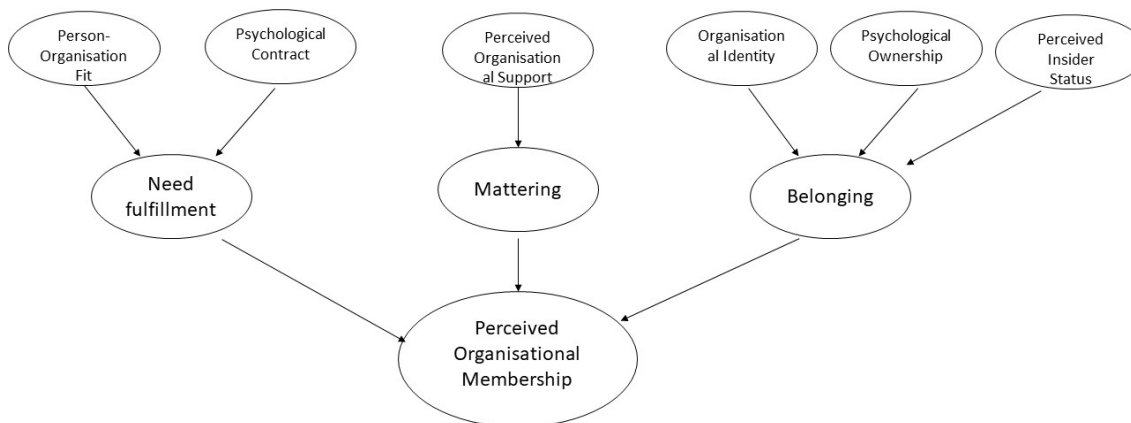


Figure 5.1: Perceived organisational membership (Masterson and Stamper, 2003)

Their framework [see *Figure 5.1*] considers *perceived organisational membership* to be constituted of three dimensions which motivate the individual to seek organisational membership: Need fulfilment; mattering; and belonging. *Need fulfilment* concerns the perception that the organisation provides benefits demonstrated through fit between the individual's needs and the organisation's contribution to those needs, as well as fulfilment of the psychological contract; *mattering* concerns the perception that the individual is valued by the organisation as demonstrated by organisational support such as fair performance practices, and consideration for employee's well-being; and *belonging* concerns the perception of intimate association demonstrated through *insider status*, *organisational identification* and *psychological ownership*.

In their conceptualisation of belonging, perceived *insider status* concerns the extent to which individuals feel included within the organisation, and emerges as various organisational practices, such as the hours worked per week, length of tenure, or multiple responsibilities, signal to the individual that they have earned acceptance inside their organisation (Knapp, Smith & Sprinkle, 2014). The experience of perceived insider status is hypothesised to result in the feeling of one being a central and important part of the organisation.

Psychological ownership concerns a feeling of ownership of an object, and emerges when individuals develop a sense of ownership over things they control, are invested in, or know intimately (Pierce, Kostova & Dirks, 2001). *Organisational identification* concerns the extent to which individuals define themselves in terms of their organisation and emerges when the individual considers an organisation to have shared values and a shared history, and the individual perceives themselves to be part of an in-group distinctive from the out-group. Such individuals perceive a similarity between their own and the organisation's identities, satisfying the need for self-worth and personal understanding (Abrams & Hogg, 1988). Considered together, the three concepts of insider status, psychological ownership and organisational identification are argued to represent a sense of belonging, and all are associated with positive attitudes, intentions and behaviours towards organisations (Masterson & Stamper, 2003).

In their conceptualisation of organisational membership, being valued – 'mattering' – is positioned as an independent contributor to organisational membership rather than a contributor to belonging, as proposed by the current study. However, the authors postulate that the three dimensions of need fulfillment, mattering and belonging are positively related and as such, a sense of mattering and being valued is likely to be related to belonging.

In a study of 347 students Knapp, Smith and Sprinkle (2014) empirically examined some of the propositions of Masterson and Stamper's (2003) theoretical framework. Specifically, they explored the similarities and distinctions between the constructs within the belonging dimension, hypothesising that they could be both significantly correlated and hold discriminant validity. They explored these hypotheses by investigating the relationships between each construct and job related attitudes, intentions and behaviours. In their study, insider status was measured using Stamper and Masterson's (2003) 6-item measure; psychological ownership was measured using Van Dyne and Pierce's (2004) 10-item scale; and organisational identification was measured using Mael and Ashforth's (1992) 6-item scale; job satisfaction was measured using Bacharach et al.'s (1991) 5-item measure; and turnover intentions were measured using a 4-item scale reflecting individual's intention to leave their employer.

The results of their confirmatory factor analyses supported the discriminant validity of the three belonging dimensions of organisational identification, insider status, and psychological ownership. In addition, regression analyses indicated that all three constructs were unique predictors of job satisfaction, although only insider status and psychological ownership were found to be significant predictors of turnover intentions. Their results offer support for Masterson and Stamper's (2003) conceptualisation of the belonging dimension of organisational membership as constituting three distinct, but related sub-dimensions of insider status, psychological ownership, and organisational identification. Whilst the constituent dimensions differ from the conceptualisation of SoNB in the current study, they do reflect the multi-faceted conceptualisation of belonging the current study proposes. Importantly, they also support the significance to belonging of one's sense of *self* in terms of the extent to which an individual *identifies* with their organisation, which emerged as core to SoNB in the current study and will be explored in 5.3 on 'self-concept'.

Hagerty, et al. (1992) also emphasise the concept of value in their definition of sense of belonging which they describe as "the experience of personal involvement in a system or environment so that persons feel themselves to be an integral part of that system or environment" (p.173). For these authors, there are two key characteristics of belonging: The individual feels valued, needed or important in respect to other people, groups or organisations; and they experience a congruence with them through shared characteristics (to be explored below). Hagerty, et al. (1992) identify potential antecedents of sense of belonging to be energy for involvement, desire and potential for meaningful involvement, and potential for shared or complementary characteristics. On the basis of this theoretical framework the authors developed the Sense of Belonging Instrument (SOBI) which assesses both the value and fit

elements of belonging as well as the proposed antecedents. Following a content validity index whereby a panel of seven experts rated the extent to which the items were relevant to the definition of belonging, a 49-item scale was developed with an overall content validity of .83 (Hagerty & Patusky, 1995). In order to test the construct validity of the SOBI the questionnaire was administered to a group of 379 students. A series of oblique rotations identified two distinct factors: Items which reflected the authors' conceptualisation of sense of belonging – value and fit (SOBI-P); and items which reflected the proposed antecedents of sense of belonging – desire and ability to develop a sense of belonging (SOBI-A). As the items that captured value and fit consistently loaded onto one factor in all the oblique rotations, their analyses provided clear empirical evidence for their conceptualisation of sense of belonging as constituting the attributes of both valued involvement with others and sense of fit.

In addition to the exploratory factor analysis (EFA), construct validity was also examined through the comparison of contrasted groups, one of which was anticipated to score highly (37 Roman Catholic nuns), and one expected to score low (31 outpatients suffering with severe depression) on the SOBI-A. As hypothesised, an ANOVA revealed a significant difference between the three groups ($f=5.69$, $p=0.001$) with post-hoc comparisons revealing that the nuns scored significantly higher than the student group (nuns' mean score of 29.32, $SD=2.57$ compared to students' mean score of 28.04, $SD=3.42$), and the patients scored significantly lower than the student group (patient mean score of 26.58, $SD=3.12$). These results confirmed that the instrument was able to differentiate between high and low levels of sense of belonging and its antecedents, providing further evidence to support the validity of the construct (Hagerty & Patusky, 1995) and the proposition that both value and fit in terms of meaningful involvement and complementary characteristics are integral dimensions of a sense of belonging, again supporting the findings of the current study.

Further support comes from Belle et al.'s (2015) study with high-intensity teleworkers (to be explored further below under 5.4.2 on 'organisational culture'). Their phenomenological study resulted in a conceptualisation of organisational belonging as "experiencing an acknowledgement of one's talents, interests, and experiences, and finding whole acceptance of one's self expression of these" (Belle et al., 2015, p90). Organisational belonging was expressed by their participants as concern of self and other awareness, participation, personal and professional fulfilment, and being *appreciated* and *equally honoured*. McClure and Brown's (2008) phenomenological study of belonging at work also supports the role of being valued to one's sense of belonging. They conceptualised belonging at work as a process, a journey from arriving in a new role to a level of self-actualisation, of positive self-concept, and acceptance.

Interview transcripts from 12 1:1 interviews were analysed for both content and meaning, resulting in clusters of meaning that identified the essence of what constitutes the phenomenon of belonging. These themes became the constituent steps in a journey of belonging at work and included: a) being invited and learning to be part of the workplace; b) connecting with colleagues and wanting to be included; c) doing work and being recognised; d) competing and being excluded; e) being needed and deeply involved in one's profession; f) reflecting on time, work and people passing. Fundamental to their research was the sense of a journey in both learning how to belong and how to relate to others as well as a developing understanding of self at work. McClure and Brown's (2008) conceptualisation proposes that organisational belonging is not just about developing relationships, but is also about "what it is like to be valued at work" (p.14) which emerged as part of the learning process at the very beginning of their proposed journey and was evident throughout the various stages, with participants describing the need to feel they were making a difference, were adding value, and recognised for their work. As such, this model again supports the importance of a sense of being valued to one's sense of belonging, and also emphasises a role for one's sense of self to that sense of belonging, which emerged as core to the experience in the current study.

Levett-Jones et al.'s (2009) study, described above, also found belonging to emerge as:

"...a deeply personal and contextually mediated experience that evolves in response to the degree to which an individual feels: a) secure, accepted, included, and respected by a defined group; b) connected to or integral to the group; and c) that their professional and/or personal values are in harmony with those of the group" (p.2872).

Throughout their analysis sense of belonging emerged as a *sense of being valued and appreciated for their contribution*, and being recognised as capable and credible, which had an impact on individual's confidence, well-being and learning motivation. Levett-Jones and Lathlean (2009) also found that opportunities to take on more responsibility and to be more independent resulted in their participants feeling validated, appreciated and of value, and led to an enhanced sense of belonging. Conversely, not being trusted or appreciated led to them feeling like they were in the way, and impacted their self-concept, leaving them feeling inadequate and inferior with diminished self-worth. As such this study offers direct support to the findings from the current study in that *not* being valued is related to the experience of *not* belonging. Critically, in their conceptual framework, *Level Three: Self-Concept*, is achieved through being appreciated, recognised and respected, and the sense that one is making a valuable contribution. As such, self-concept is intimately bound up in a sense of being valued.

For Levett-Jones and Lathlean (2009) however, the self-concept level is reached through *achieving* a sense of belonging, a sense of connectedness, acceptance and fit, and therefore suggests that a sense of self as valued and respected is a *consequence* of achieving a sense of belonging, rather than an attribute of SoNB as found in the current study. However, through this relationship their model does again illustrate the importance of belonging to the development of a positive sense of self, which emerged as the core concern of the current study and will be explored below.

5.2.2.3 Summary

The extant research from both the general psychological and belonging literatures support the finding that not feeling valued in the workplace is related to a sense of belonging, and as such one can again infer that an *absence* of a sense of feeling valued is likely related to a sense of *not* belonging, supporting the current research. Much of the literature suggests that belonging is a function of feeling valued, and this feeling of value is related to one's sense of contributing to the organisation, to having a sense of purpose and that one's work is contributing to one's values, as well as one's capability to do the role (e.g. Hagerty et al., 1992; Masterson & Stamper, 2003). Levett-Jones and Lathlean (2009) however, suggest that feeling valued and having a positive self-concept is a function of belonging and emerges through achieving a sense of acceptance and fit. The potentially two-directional nature of these relationships illustrates the complexity of the phenomenon and the often non-linear and sometimes cyclical nature of the experience, as emerged in the current study. Furthermore, Levett-Jones and Lathlean (2009), through defining self-concept in their model as involving a sense of being valued, also illustrate how this aspect of belonging might be intimately bound up in one's sense of self, which emerged as core to the experience in the current study, and will be explored further below.

As well as the importance of feeling valued and having quality relationships to one's sense of belonging, another important factor emerged from both the current study and the extant literature as being critical to this experience – and that was having shared characteristics, which will be explored next.

5.2.3 Difference

The third key attribute of SoNB in the workplace to emerge from the current research was that of being or feeling different. These differences included different social, professional or educational backgrounds, or different individual characteristics, including being an extravert, a high achiever, or of a different sexual orientation or age. These differences impacted the individual's SoNB by putting them outside of the group, impacting their sense of self, and at

times also contributing to their sense of self-worth through the impact on their perception of credibility, value and being liked. Research from both the belonging literature, as well as the general psychological and social psychology literatures help to illuminate the relationship and the impact on self-perception, behaviour, well-being, and ultimately SoNB.

5.2.3.1 Status characteristics, expectations and behaviour

Some of the differences to emerge in the current study can be classified as *status characteristics*, defined as “any characteristic of actors around which evaluations of and beliefs about them come to be organised” (Berger, Rosenholtz & Zelditch, 1980, p.479). Status characteristics theory suggests that status characteristics such as age, education, ethnicity, gender, professional, social background etc., can impact self and other perceptions about performance abilities and provide signals to the individual of their superiority or inferiority and their relative status within a social hierarchy (Berger, et al., 1980; Benoit-Smullyan, 1944). The theory argues that status characteristics give rise to expectation states – expectations about how an individual will perform and behave in a given situation (Berger, et al., 1980). Individual awareness of the perception of one’s status in turn is argued to create feelings of superiority and inferiority and can negatively impact an individual’s self-efficacy in terms of their beliefs and confidence in their capabilities (Tajfel & Turner, 1986; Berger, et al., 1980). Perceptions of self-efficacy and competence then encourage lower status individuals to defer decisions to higher status others and to limit their contributions, thus perpetuating the social hierarchy and their sense of self-efficacy and self-worth (as they are not contributing) (Driskell & Salas, 1991). In this manner expectations determine the behaviour of the individual, therefore maintaining, and ‘proving’ the expectation.

This impact of different status characteristics on performance evaluations was found in various empirical studies in the 1960s and 1970s at a time when gender and race were demonstrated to be considered status characteristics (e.g. Zimet & Zimet, 1978; Ward & Balswick, 1978). For example, a study by Goldberg (1968) found that when performance was controlled for, evaluations by women of male performance were more positive than evaluations by women of female performance. Similarly, Coates (1972) found white adult’s evaluations of black children’s performance to be determined by ethnicity irrespective of actual performance. Whilst these examples demonstrate the impact of status on *other people’s* perceptions, the status characteristic of gender was found in these early studies to impact *self-perceptions* in terms of the confidence of women in their future performance even on tasks they knew they were able to do as well, or better on than men (Maccoby & Jacklin, 1974).

A more recent study by Driskell and Salas (1991) of 78 male US Navy students explored the impact of hierarchical status on decision making processes. Participants were assigned either a high-status position, whereby they were introduced to a 'seaman' as the partner in their task, or a low-status position whereby they were introduced to a 'lieutenant' as the partner in their task. Participants were then asked to determine which side of a checkerboard contained the most white squares. Following their initial decision, they were able to evaluate the decision of their partner and then offer their final decision. As predicted, those in the low status group were significantly more likely to defer to the decision inputs of higher status partners and those in the higher status group were significantly less likely to defer to the decisions of low status partners (Driskel & Salas, 1991). These findings are supported by earlier studies which found that those with lower status educational backgrounds were more likely to be influenced in their decision making than those with higher educational status (Moore, 1968).

Whilst it is not clear from the research above whether the status characteristics studied were minority statuses and as such would make individuals feel *different* from the rest of the group, the research does provide evidence that status characteristics can impact self-perceptions of self-efficacy and equality, and whilst not impacting belonging, does help us to understand the relationship between these characteristics and self-concept. The research also demonstrates a relationship between these cognitions and *actual* behaviour in terms of deferring decision making – a relationship which will be discussed under 5.4 on 'resolution' below which explores individual's cognitive and behavioural coping strategies for resolving SoNB.

5.2.3.2 *Difference and belonging*

The specific belonging literature offers further insight into the relationship between difference and belonging. Hagerty et al. (1992) for example, as discussed above, considered belonging to involve an experience of congruence through a sense of shared characteristics, and identified potential antecedents of sense of belonging as the potential for shared or complementary characteristics. Similarly, Clegg's (2006) study of not belonging through adolescence and early adulthood in high-school and college years, found that not belonging was initiated by a sense of differentiation. This difference emerged through various ways including having a different perspective on life, different abilities, and having nothing in common. Importantly, for those participants in their study for whom the experience was prolonged, their experience of not belonging transformed how they viewed themselves, in particular reflecting a sense of self-blame and inadequacy, impacting their self-concept.

However, there is a body of research that suggests that similarity is not always related to positive individual outcomes, and indeed a wealth of studies have found that conforming to the group at the expense of one's individuality and uniqueness has deleterious consequences for mental well-being, and is associated with perceived weakness (Baumeister, 1991, Wallach & Wallach, 1983). A sense of uniqueness is defined by Simsek and Yalincetin, (2010) as "one's personal perceptions of self that are unique to the individual and different from others" (Simsek & Yalincetin, 2010, p.376). In a series of studies with graduate and undergraduate students, Simsek and Yalincetin (2010) developed and validated a Personal Sense of Uniqueness Scale, and through conducting factor analysis, cross-validation, re-test reliability and convergent and discriminant validity tests, the authors confirmed a one-dimensional structure of sense of uniqueness construct. They also found that high levels of a sense of uniqueness were positively related to hope ($r=0.43, p=0.01$), resilience ($r=0.49, p=0.01$) and self-esteem ($r=0.65, p=0.01$), and negatively related to mental health indicators including depression ($r=-0.24, p=0.01$), anxiety ($r=-0.29, p=0.01$) and neuroticism ($r=-0.28, p=0.01$). As such, these findings contradict those of the current research as they suggest that being different *enhances* self-esteem and psychological well-being.

However, whilst early social identity theorists suggest that uniqueness must be at the *expense* of belonging and vice versa by viewing personal and social identities as the opposite ends of a continuum (Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher & Wetherall, 1987), Optimal Distinctiveness Theory (ODT; Brewer, 1991) proposes that the need for similarity and in-group inclusion (assimilation) as well as uniqueness and individuation (differentiation) should be *balanced*. Differentiation can be experienced both in terms of the individual's differentiation from others in the group and as differentiation between one's in-group versus out-group. As such, belonging should not be conceptualised as the *opposite* of differentiation. Brewer argues that an optimal level of inclusion involves a *balance* between these two needs. Drawing on this theory, Shore, Randel, Chung, Dean, Ehrhart and Singh (2011) developed a framework of inclusion using two dimensions of belongingness and uniqueness. Their framework defines a sense of inclusion as being the extent to which individuals perceive themselves to be treated as an insider but also as a person whose unique knowledge and contributions are recognised, valued and encouraged. A sense of exclusion refers to the extent to which individuals are *not* treated as an insider and their unique contributions are *not* valued. *Assimilation*, in their framework reflects situations in which individuals are treated as insiders but only if they conform or downplay their individuality, and *differentiation* reflects situations in which individuals are not treated as an insider but are

valued for their unique characteristics. Inclusion therefore, whereby individuals are treated as insiders yet valued for their uniqueness is proposed as the *optimal* situation.

Research by Pickett, Bonner and Coleman (2002) supports the conceptual validity of ODT but argues that different situations will stimulate one of the two needs, and this arousal will in turn motivate individual behaviour in order to satisfy that need. In a series of studies with undergraduate students, Pickett et al. (2002) explored the relationship between assimilation needs and differentiation needs and self-stereotyping behaviour – the tendency to make salient, stereotypical characteristics and traits in order to enhance intragroup similarity and inter-group differentiation (Turner & Onerato, 1999). In their study, those in the need for assimilation condition were told that their scores on a test were below the average for their group (arousal of assimilation need). Those in the differential condition were told that their group's average score was similar to most other group's average scores (arousal of differentiation need). Self-stereotyping was measured by a 74-word trait measure. Their research found, as predicted, that arousal of both assimilation and differentiation needs resulted in increased self-stereotyping behaviours compared to the no-need control group. In both conditions individuals changed their self-perceptions in order to be more like the group both to enhance their assimilation with the group and enhance the group's differentiation from other groups. As such, this research supports the importance to individuals of both assimilation and differentiation and the impact it has on motivating behavior.

Whilst ODT research could be regarded as contradictory to the current study in that feeling included involves a sense of both assimilation (similarity) and differentiation, it could be argued that this need for differentiation reflects one's need to feel *valued* in that recognition of one's unique contribution is likely to result in a sense of being valued for one's individuality. This proposition finds support from Hornsey and Jetten (2004) who suggest that one can achieve a balance between distinctiveness and uniqueness through the clarification of specific role identities which provide a sense that one is *contributing* to the group. Vignoles, Chrysoschoou and Breakwell (2002) examined this proposition with a sample of 19 Anglican priests. The authors distinguished between three types of distinctiveness: *Difference* reflecting personal characteristics; *separateness* reflecting psychological distance separation; and *position* reflecting one's distinction from others based on role differentiation. The authors argued that as individuals whose self-construct would likely be determined in large part by their belonging to the church, satisfying their need for distinctiveness would likely be more feasible through position rather than separateness or difference. The results of their study supported their hypothesis and their conceptualisation of distinctiveness. A regression analysis comparing a

model incorporating all three constructs with alternate models omitting each predictor showed a substantial improvement in fit to models with any two of the three constructs. This analysis therefore demonstrated that all three constructs made a significant and substantial unique contribution to overall distinctiveness, supporting the classification of the different types of distinctiveness.

Moreover, Vignoles et al. (2002) found that these different types of distinctiveness had differential impacts on affect. Distinctiveness through position was found to be associated with positive affect, whereas distinctiveness through separateness or difference was found to be associated with negative affect. As such, their research suggests that difference can be both a positive and negative experience. When it sets one apart from the group in terms of difference in individual characteristics or feeling psychologically distant, this might be related to SoNB, as was found in the current study. However, distinctiveness achieved through one's unique contribution might enhance one's sense of belonging through a sense of adding value, as was also found in the current study. ODT therefore offers support to the multi-faceted nature of the SoNB proposed by the current research in that SoNB constitutes both shared characteristics *and* a sense of being valued.

5.2.3.3 Summary

Taken together the extant literature offers support for the findings of the current research that perceiving oneself to be different from those in the group to which one wants to belong contributes to SoNB in the workplace. Different status characteristics have been found, whilst not to impact a sense of belonging, to impact one's self-perceptions in terms of competence and confidence, which supports the findings of the current study in terms of the impact that different status characteristics are proposed to have on the individual's sense of value and credibility.

ODT research however, suggests that a sense of inclusion actually constitutes a *balance* between a sense of similarity and a sense of distinctiveness. The type of distinctiveness involved in this balance however, is one that supports an individual's sense of valued contribution rather than one that separates the individual from the group (Vignoles et al., 2002). As such, ODT's conceptualisation of a sense of inclusion offers support to the multi-dimensional nature of SoNB offered in the current research.

The final theme that emerged from the current study in terms of an attribute of SoNB was organisational culture. However, the literature discussed in particular in terms of psychological safety, and to be explored below, suggests that rather than an attribute to SoNB, organisational

culture might *moderate* the impact of the three other attributes of quality relationships, value and difference on one's SoNB in the workplace. As it was categorised as an attribute in the findings from the current study, the relevant literature will be discussed below, in light of this potentially different role in the theory, and the implications for its position in the theoretical framework explored at the close of this section.

5.2.4 Organisational culture

The organisational cultures which emerged as critical to one's SoNB in the current research were characterised by a lack of psychological safety, hierarchical and competitive cultures, and commercial values, which resulted in either a misalignment with the individual's sense of self or functioned to inhibit the individual's ability to make themselves heard.

In his widely applied conceptual model, Schein (1985) identifies three layers of organisational culture: *Artefacts*; *beliefs and values*; and *assumptions*. *Artefacts* are the visible manifestations of a culture such as rituals and rewards, structures, practices and processes. They are tangible illustrations of what individuals within organisations are doing (Barrios, 2013) and represent in a visible way the underlying values and assumptions of an organisation (Beyer & Trice, 1987). At a deeper level, *beliefs and values* are the espoused beliefs which are used to validate patterns of behaviour and guide choices in ways of working, such as preferences for creativity or collaboration. They are the core values which determine how individuals act, speak and interpret their organisation (McDermott & O'Dell, 2001) and by which employees understand what behaviours are considered to be right and wrong (Dose, 1997). At the deepest level are underlying *assumptions* – the unconscious, implicit beliefs, and expectations shared by members of the organisation, such as perceptions, thoughts and feelings (Al Saifi, 2015).

In one of the few empirical studies of Schein's model, Hogan and Coote (2014) explored the relationship between three layers of organisational culture and innovative behaviours in law firms. Whilst the model they tested did not precisely map that of Schein's model in that their layers consisted of values, norms and artefacts (rather than assumptions, values and artefacts) their study does provide evidence of the distinct *moderating* role of three layers of organisational culture on their specific measures of innovative behaviour and performance. The authors devised a scale for the three levels of culture associated with innovative behaviours and explored the relationship between these scales (values, norms and artefacts) and innovative behaviours and firm performance through the responses of 658 law firm principles. Their findings suggest that the three layers are indeed distinct and can have a moderating effect on behaviour. For example, they found that values *alone* did not result in increased performance

but rather moderated the impact of innovative behaviours on performance. As such, the authors suggest that whilst values provide a foundation for how to behave, norms are required to guide specific behaviours, which are in turn supported by their manifestation in artefacts such as rewards, language and rituals (Hogan & Coote, 2014).

5.2.4.1 Misalignment between organisational and personal values

If organisational culture serves to guide behaviour in organisations, organisational socialisation is the process through which individuals are able to adjust to this culture and to the people within an organisation. Organisational socialisation is defined by Louis (1980, p.229-30) as: “[...] the process by which an individual comes to appreciate the values, abilities, expected behaviours, and social knowledge essential for assuming an organisational role and for participating as an organisational member.” As such, organisational processes can be perceived as being vital to an individual’s ability to adjust to and fit in with the organisation in which they work, and can determine the level of congruence between the individual and the culture of the organisation (McMillan-Capehart, (2005). Given that the core values and underlying assumptions of an organisation are perceived to be both deeply rooted and ingrained and key indicators of what is right and wrong, misalignment with these core values is likely to result in a cognitive dissonance and a perception of not belonging, as found in the current study between some individuals’ charitable or people-focused values and the organisation’s commercial values. This proposition is supported by Levett-Jones and Lathlean (2009) who found that the degree of harmony between student nurses’ values and those of the clinical setting in which they found themselves was related to their sense of belonging, and when they experienced a dissonance between these values they often felt alienated, disillusioned, and psychologically disengaged.

Similarly, in their study of high-intensity teleworkers, Belle, et al. (2015) also found that organisational belonging and identification at an organisational level was predicated on an alignment between personal values and the ideals and principles of the organisation. As a primary conclusion of Belle et al.’s (2015) study was the importance to belonging of an ability to be oneself, this study will be explored in detail under 5.3 on ‘self-concept’ as it offers support to that element of the self-concept that emerged strongly in the current study. However, what is important to note here is that their analysis of qualitative data gathered about teleworker’s experience of belonging identified degrees of belonging that began with superficial identification and concluded with a feeling of identity fulfilment. As such they conclude that deep organisational belonging develops from *close alignment and fit* between organisational and personal values, blending organisational identification with personal identity. Again this

suggests that a lack of fit between one's personal identity and that of the organisation may have consequences for one's SoNB in the workplace.

5.2.4.2 Moderating role of organisational culture

Also to emerge under the category of organisational culture were the themes of psychological safety and hierarchical culture. Psychological safety is defined by Edmondson (1999) as an individual's perception that the team environment is safe for interpersonal risk taking. The construct has attracted a great deal of research much of which has empirically supported its direct or moderating role in a variety of individual and organisational outcomes, such as organisational learning (Carmeli, Brueller & Dutton, 2009), creativity (Choo, Lindermann & Schroeder, 2009) and performance (Baer & Frese, 2003), as explored in a systematic review of the literature by Edmondson and Lei (2014). A key stream of this research which is of particular significance to the current study is the reported impact of psychological safety on individual voice. As this was explored above under 5.2.1 it will not be repeated here, except to conclude that through reducing one's ability to speak out, the role of psychological safety might not be one of *determining* SoNB, but one of moderating SoNB as individuals feel unable to speak up about their experience. This in turn could limit their ability to get support and to determine whether they are alone in this experience. Therefore, a lack of psychological safety might *exacerbate* one's SoNB rather than determine it.

Support for the potentially moderating role of the organisational climate is also found from studies on Self-Categorisation Theory (Turner, 1987) that propose that self-categorisation is facilitated by clear communication from the organisation regarding an individual's roles, the organisation's expectations and their contribution to the organisation (Turner, 1987). In tandem, such communication will encourage a sense of belonging and involvement with the organisation (Lawler, 1989), which is facilitated by a positive communication climate, defined as the shared psychological climate pertaining to communication factors such as openness, trust, participation in decision making, voice, and support (Smidts, Pruyn & Van Riel, 2001). Such a climate, through involvement in decision making, voice, and trust is argued to encourage individuals to feel they are included and are a valuable member of the organisation, whilst support and openness is argued to enhance self-worth as individuals feel they are being taken seriously and are able to be heard.

These propositions were explored by Smidts et al. (2001) in a study in three organisations resulting in a sample of 1,127 employees. Organisational Identification (OI), defined as an individual's perception of belonging to an organisation to the extent that they define

themselves in terms of their membership of that organisation (Mael & Ashforth, 1992), was assessed using a five item scale based on Social Identity Theory. Communication content regarding roles was assessed using four statements regarding expectations and information about roles, and communication assessed using fifteen statements across three dimensions: Trust and openness; participation in decision making; and supportiveness. The resulting structural equation model showed that a positive communication climate *mediated* the relationship between communication content in terms of expectation and information about roles and the organisation, and OI, supporting the potentially moderating role of the organisational climate in SoNB in the workplace.

Scott, Zagenczyk, Schippers, Purvis and Cruz (2014) further support the moderating role of culture through their exploration of the moderating effects of perceived organisational support (POS) on employee outcomes of social exclusion. They define POS as the ‘perception that the organisation values one’s contributions and is concerned about his or her wellbeing’ (p.1237). The authors hypothesise that POS would positively moderate the impact of social exclusion on organisation-based self-esteem (OBSE) as well as job induced tension and supervisor-rated performance. OBSE was operationalised as the employee’s perception of his or her self-worth and competence as a member of the organisation. The results of their hierarchical regressions largely supported their hypotheses, finding that POS did indeed *mitigate* the negative relationship between social exclusion in the workplace and OBSE. POS however did not have a mediating effect on job related tension suggesting that the support afforded by the organisation is not adequate to mitigate all potential consequences of co-worker exclusion. The authors argue that a supportive work environment is important for the development of organisation-based self-esteem through moderating the impact of social exclusion on OBSE. As such, this research suggests that an unsupportive work environment such as that described by participants in the current study, might moderate the relationship between feeling excluded and not belonging and the impact on one’s self-concept in terms of their self-esteem.

The final theme that emerged from the current study in relation to organisational culture was hierarchical culture which was again reported to impact one’s sense of psychological safety and ability to speak out. This theme is supported by Reis, Trullen and Story’s (2016) study which investigated the role of culture type in influencing employee’s authenticity, defined as consistency between one’s external expressions and internal experiences (Roberts, Cha, Hewlin, & Settles, 2009), and the subsequent impact on engagement. Organisational culture was operationalised using Cameron and Quinn’s (2005) classification of culture as four types of culture: Clan; market; hierarchy; and adhocracy. *Clan cultures* are based on a common purpose

and values, cohesion, participation, and community; *market cultures* emphasise efficiency, profit and control; *hierarchy cultures* are highly formalised and structured; and *adhocracy cultures* are dynamic, enterprising and creative (Pilch & Turska, 2015).

Reis et al.'s (2016) study explored these relationships with 208 current or former attendees of a Brazilian business school, investigating the relationship between Cameron and Quinn's four culture types and authenticity (measured using a 24-item organisational culture diagnosis instrument (Cameron & Quinn, 2006)), and any resultant impact on work engagement. Authenticity was operationalised through the employment of Wood, Linley, Maltby, Baliousis and Joseph's (2008) Authentic Living Scale which assesses the extent to which people behave and express themselves in ways consistent with their values and beliefs. The results of their study found that the two control-oriented cultures (hierarchy and market) were significantly and negatively related to authenticity at work, whereas no relationship was found between clan and adhocracy cultures. As such, their study provides evidence for the role of different organisational cultures in determining the extent to which individuals can be authentic in the workplace. As their study did not explore *belonging* it is difficult to infer what these findings contribute to the current study. However, as authenticity and ability to be oneself emerged as an element of self-concept impacted by SoNB found in the present study, it could be that organisational culture might *exacerbate* the impact of SoNB on one's self-concept consistency, specifically one's ability to be authentic, a proposition that requires further support.

5.2.4.3 Summary

Taken together these studies suggest that organisational culture, including psychological safety, hierarchy and perceived organisational support, rather than attributing to SoNB, might have a moderating role, either moderating the relationship between the attributes and SoNB or between SoNB and one's self-concept. The research suggests that a culture lacking in psychological safety and organisational support might exacerbate the impact on one's sense of self and SoNB triggered by the proposed attributes of either difference, as determined by demography or status, one's sense of adding value, or an absence of quality relationships.

5.2.5 Category summary

The current study found four key factors to attribute to SoNB in the workplace: An absence of quality relationships; not being valued; perceived difference; and organisational culture. A review of the relevant literature offers support for three of these factors, supporting the conceptualisation of SoNB as a multi-dimensional construct, being predicated on one or more of an absence of quality relationships, a sense of not being valued, and an absence of shared

characteristics. Whilst some research suggests that being different and distinct is *beneficial* to a sense of belonging (e.g. ODT; Brewer, 1991), Vignoles et al. (2002) found that this was only the case when distinctiveness was achieved through unique contribution to the group, which adds further support to the aspect of adding value in the current study's conceptualisation of SoNB.

Much of the research which explores the relationship between organisational culture and belonging however, indicates a moderating rather than attributory role and suggests that cultures which are hierarchical and political or are absent of psychological safety, might provide the context in which SoNB can manifest, and as such organisational culture has been moved to the category of 'moderators' in the proposed theoretical framework, as detailed below.

Whilst supporting the current study, none of the studies discussed above bring together all three factors of quality relationships, value and difference: Davila and Jiminez (2012) conceptualise sense of belonging as being based on personal ties and common bonds; Clegg (2006) found not belonging to involve primarily a sense of differentiation from the group, as well as a sense of isolated belonging; Levett-Jones and Lathlean (2009), as well as Belle et al. (2015) both propose that a sense of belonging involves quality relationships and a sense of adding value; Hagerty et al. (1992) propose that a sense of belonging involves shared characteristics and a sense of adding value; and Masterson and Stamper (2003) conceptualise belonging as constituting inclusion, psychological ownership and organisational identification, which is associated with a sense of being valued. As such, the current research extends the extant theories by conceptualising SoNB as constituting three distinct attributory factors.

A further, critical area of alignment between the current and previous research is in respect of the importance of self-concept. McClure and Brown (2008), Belle et al. (2015) and Levett-Jones and Lathlean (2009) all propose that a sense of belonging is related to an individual's positive sense of self, and Clegg (2006) proposes that a sense of not belonging is related to a negative sense of self, but only those individuals who reported a sense of generalised and consistent not belonging experienced the "profound transformation of how [they] experienced themselves" (p.72). Of these studies only McClure and Brown (2008) position self-concept as *integral* to their theory, conceptualising belonging as a process through which understanding of the self and a positive self-concept is developed. This reflects the conceptualisation of SoNB in the current study which demonstrates the centrality of this construct to SoNB in the workplace, which will be discussed below.

5.2.5.1 Theory development

Extant theories with good conceptual fit, which account for much of the variation found in the proposed relationships, have been integrated into the current theoretical model, resulting in some adaptations and elaborations, which are illustrated in *Figure 5.II* below, and summarised in *Table 5.1*. Findings from Liange et al.'s (2012) study of voice in organisations suggest that psychological safety, an element of organisational culture in the current study, may have a direct impact on quality relationships by reducing the individual's ability to be open with others and thus limit their ability to develop quality relationships. The impact of psychological safety on the development of quality relationships was also found by Carmelli et al. (2009). Liange et al.'s (2012) study also suggests that psychological safety may moderate the relationship between absence of quality relationships and SoNB as individuals do not feel able to speak up about how they are feeling, exacerbating their sense of not belonging (Liange et al., 2012).

Other studies also indicate a moderating role for organisational culture, with Scott et al. (2014) finding that a supportive work environment mediated the relationship between exclusion and organisation-based self-esteem, and Reis et al. (2016) finding that hierarchical cultures impacted the extent to which individuals could be authentic in the workplace. Both studies suggest therefore that organisational culture may moderate the impact of SoNB on self-concept, in terms of self-esteem and conflict with self-concept respectively. Organisational culture as a category appears therefore, to have a moderating role in the relationships in the theoretical framework, rather than a direct influence on one's SoNB.

Research by Levett-Jones and Lathlean (2009) has also been integrated into the developing theory. Their research found that a sense of belonging contributed to a sense of being valued, suggesting that the relationship between sense of value and SoNB may be bi-directional and that a SoNB may impact one's sense of adding value as well as being impacted by one's sense of adding value. Finally, research by Driskell and Salas (1991) whose status characteristics research found that those with a minority status are more likely to defer decisions to others, suggests that the attribute of difference may directly impact resolution behaviours, particularly in terms of 'finding a way to fit it' (Driskell & Salas, 1991).

This research has been integrated into the theoretical framework and added to the proposed relationships in *Table 5.1* (orange text). Where these additions have resulted in a new relationship, or new direction of relationship, this is illustrated in orange in *Figure 5.II* below. Where the additions have strengthened relationships already proposed by the current model, these are illustrated by thicker arrows.

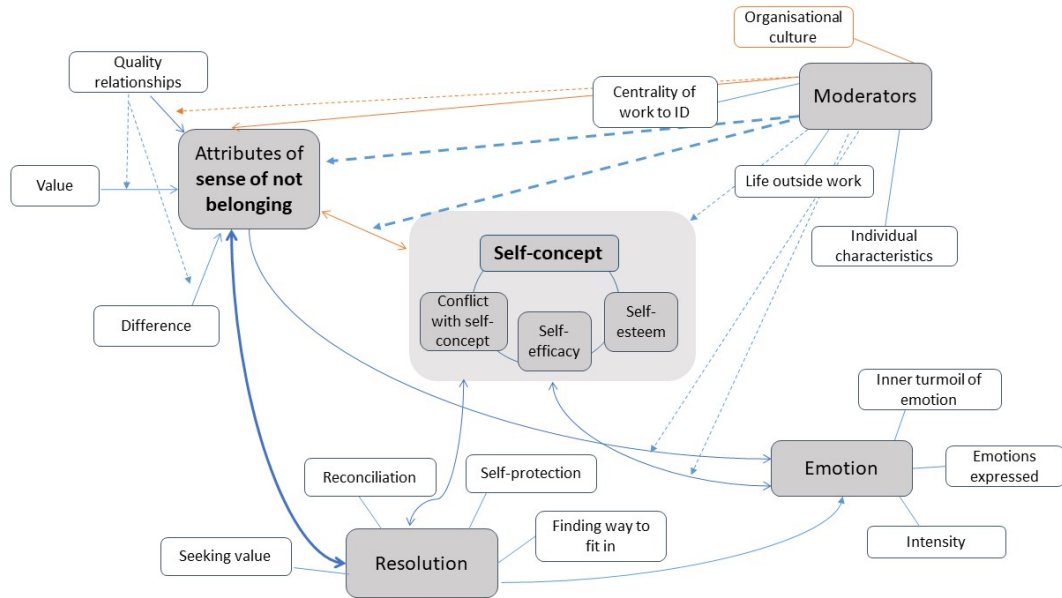


Figure 5.II: Developed theoretical framework integrating the pertinent extant literature

CATEGORY	PROPOSED RELATIONSHIPS
Absence of quality relationships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – An absence of quality relationships may contribute to SoNB – An absence of quality relationships may negatively impact one’s self-concept – An absence of quality relationships may moderate the impact of difference on SoNB – An absence of quality relationships may moderate the impact of not adding value on SoNB
Not adding value	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Not adding value may contribute to SoNB – Not adding value may negatively impact one’s self-concept – One’s self-concept may negatively impact SoNB in terms of one’s sense of adding value (Levett-Jones & Lathlean, 2009)
Difference	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Being different may contribute to SoNB – Being different may negatively impact one’s self-concept – Being different may lead to trying to fit in resolution behaviours (Driskell & Salas, 1991)
Organisational culture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Organisational culture may contribute to SoNB – Organisational culture may provide the context in which SoNB can manifest – Organisational culture, particularly psychological safety, may impact quality relationships (Liange et al., 2012) – Organisational culture may moderate the relationship between absence of quality relationships and SoNB (Liange et al., 2012) – Organisational culture may exacerbate one’s SoNB (Liange et al., 2012) – Organisational culture may moderate the relationship between SoNB and self-concept (Reis et al., 2016) – Organisational culture may moderate the impact of SoNB on self-concept

Table 5.1: Development of the theoretical framework incorporating extant literature

5.3 Core category of self-concept

In the current study, *self-concept* emerged as the core concern in SoNB – the meaning participants attributed to the experience in terms of who they were as a person. Feeling like they did not belong left them questioning their self-knowledge, questioning their abilities and their worth. How they *felt* about the experience left them questioning their resilience and their strength, and how they attempted to *resolve* the experience left them questioning their authenticity and their courage. This poor self-concept was further compounded by their concerns that others held negative perceptions of them too. Their SoNB left them feeling unable to be themselves at work, and undermined their self-concepts, creating a paradox between who they thought they were and who they became during the experience, resulting in a conflict in self-concept which intensified the psychological impact of SoNB in the workplace.

As the core concern is so intimately connected to other elements of the theoretical framework this discussion will consider literature that is relevant to both the categories that emerged as part of self-concept (self-efficacy, self-esteem and conflict with self-concept) as well as aspects relevant to the theoretical relationships *between* the core construct and the attributes, resolution strategies and emotional experience. It will begin with a discussion of the literature regarding the structure and development of self-concept.

5.3.1 Structure and development of self-concept

The general psychology and social psychology literatures offer various conceptualisations of self-concept, but common across all theories of the self is the perception of self-concept as being one's *view* of oneself – the knowledge that an individual holds about themselves, incorporating traits, values, memories, and self-relevant information (Greenwald & Pratkanis, 1984; Kihlstrom & Cantor, 1984; Markus, 1977). Whilst there is some divergence in terms of the structure and development of the self, all conceptualisations perceive the self as developed in relation to 'others'.

Baumeister (2011) for example, conceptualises self as constituting three concepts: *Knowledge* structure in terms of the information one knows about oneself, and reflexive consciousness, in terms of awareness of self and ability to reflect upon oneself; *interpersonal being* in that the concept of the self is determined through interaction with others, in comparison to others and as distinct from others; and *agent with executive function* in that the self is capable of making choices and regulating their own responses. Baumeister argues that one's identity is defined by the specific tasks and role that one has in a society or group and that the purpose of the self is to secure, maintain and improve one's place in a social group. Integral to acceptance is that

others consider the individual to be good, in terms of behaving in acceptable ways, and as such this motivates individual behaviour to *be good*, resulting in acceptance, respect and ultimately survival and reproduction.

'Other' is therefore integral to Baumeister's (2011) conceptualisation, and he argues that *others* offer a point of reference against which to compare one's sense of self, and provide the distinction between you, they, and I, as well as a means of placing oneself in a social system. He argues therefore, that self and identity only become meaningful through interaction with others, and as such believes that understanding of oneself is inextricably linked to understanding of others.

Brewer and Gardner (1996) propose a tripartite model of the self and conceptualise the self as constituting three elements: The *personal self* in terms of characteristics which separate one from others, such as personality characteristics; *relational self* in terms of aspects of self that connect one to significant others, such as daughter, father, friend; and *collective self* in terms of aspects of the self that are prototypical of a particular group, such as gender, ethnicity, or social status (Brewer & Gardner, 1996).

In her conceptual paper, May (2011) proposes that the self is a construct of both interactions with individuals and with society. She argues that the self and society are interdependent and in order to understand them both one needs to consider the relationship *between* them. Drawing on the work of Simmel (1950) and Elias (2001) May argues that society is a social construction determined by the interactions between individuals rather than by fixed social structures. Social structures she argues, rather than 'reified entities' (2011, p.366) represent practices and norms that underpin and are acted out through the everyday lives of the individuals in that society. She argues that sense of self is determined through one's interactions with others in relation to these social norms, and sense of belonging, which she defines as a 'sense of ease with oneself and one's surroundings' (May, 2011, p.368) and acceptance, is determined by consideration of how the other, the rest of society, would evaluate one's actions in relation to those social norms (Fortier, 2000).

Markus and Nurius (1986) also argue that the self is both relationally and socially determined, conceptualising the self-concept as constituting various 'possible selves' which they define as "the ideal selves that we would very much like to become. They are also the selves we could become, and the selves we are afraid of becoming." (Markus & Nurius, 1986, p.954). One's pool of possible selves is deeply personal, and yet socially and contextually determined through comparison with others and through the availability of contextually relevant and salient role

models. In this model the self-concept constitutes a system of schemas that give meaning and relevance to experience, are informed by past experiences and inform expectations.

Shrauger and Schoeneman (1999) also consider one's sense of self to be developed through interaction with others. They draw on the symbolic interactionist view of the 'looking glass self' which argues that an individual's self-concept is a "reflection of one's perceptions about how one appears to others" (Shrauger & Schoeneman, 1999, p.25), and as such is developed through seeing ourselves as we believe others see us (Mead, 1934). The looking-glass self is believed to comprise of three elements: Our perception of how we appear to others; our perception of other's judgment of that appearance; and an element of affect such as pride or shame (Cooley, 1902, p.152). Our sense of self is believed to derive from our interactions with others in our social group and the meanings that we place upon those interactions. SoNB therefore might imply negative evaluation from others which would be reflected in one's self-perception, negatively impacting one's sense of self.

Shrauger and Schoeneman's (1999) review of the research at the time found consistent support for the positive relationship between one's self-perceptions and the *perceived* perceptions of others. The review also found however, no significant correlations between self-perceptions and *actual* perceptions of others and similarly found that *perceived* reactions of others were more closely related to the self-concept than were *actual* reactions of others (e.g., Walhoad & Klopfer, 1971). These findings suggest that not only are our self-concepts closely linked to what we *think* others think of us, supporting the current research that found perceptions of others emerged as a key property of self-concept, but also that those perceptions may be erroneous and distorted which may further undermine the clarity of the self-concept.

However, these studies did not demonstrate the direction of the relationship and whether our self-perceptions are *informed* by what we think others think of us, or whether what we think other's think of us is informed by our own self-perceptions. To explore this relationship Shrauger and Schoeneman (1999) also reviewed research which explored whether individuals *change* their self-perceptions in the direction of other's actual perceptions, which would indicate that our self-perceptions are indeed influenced by what others think of us. For example, an early study by Manis (1955) assessed participants' self-ratings on arrival on a university campus, self-ratings at six weeks and other's ratings of them at the same time points. Their results found that student's self-ratings at six weeks were closer to their friend's initial ratings than to their own initial ratings, but that their friend's second ratings were no more similar to the student's second ratings than their first, suggesting that the students *changed* their self-

perceptions in response to other's perceptions of them but not vice versa. However, this relationship was only found when the friend rated them more positively than they initially rated themselves.

Laboratory controlled studies found more consistent results for both positive and negative ratings but also found that the extent to which self-perceptions changed was contingent on a variety of factors including the *discrepancy* between the self and other ratings, whereby smaller discrepancies were more influential than larger discrepancies (Johnson, 1966). Change in self-perceptions was also contingent on the *competence* of the evaluator (Webster & Sobieszek, 1974). These moderating variables suggest that in order for one's self-concept to be influenced by the perceptions of others the evaluator needs to be credible and the evaluation plausible. Susceptibility to other's perceptions was also moderated by *self-esteem* in that compared to those with high self-esteem, those lower in self-esteem were more greatly influenced by negative feedback from others and less influenced by positive feedback (Eagly, 1967). However, as Shrauger and Schoeneman (1999) highlight, one of the methodological issues with controlled studies is that participants may be influenced by demand characteristics in terms of wanting to be seen to agree with the other rater, particularly if that individual has a higher status in terms of competence or credibility. As such, the perceived credibility of the *experimenter* may encourage the participant to change their self-perceptions in response to feedback from others, which should be born in mind when drawing conclusions from their study.

Shrauger and Schoeneman's (1999) studies do help to elucidate the influence of perceptions of others on the development of the self-concept, by demonstrating that a discrepancy between one's self-concept and other's perceptions might be resolved by *changing* the self-concept. As such, Schraugher and Schoeneman's (1999) conceptualisation of self offers support to that proposed by the current research in that one's self-concept is proposed to be influenced by both self-perception and the perceived perception of others and suggests that, to the extent that SoNB indicates to the individual that they are perceived negatively by others, this negative evaluation will likely be internalised resulting in a detrimental impact on one's own self-perception.

5.3.1.1 Summary

There is agreement across many scholars that the self-concept constitutes both personal knowledge of the self in terms of one's characteristics, traits and beliefs, and also a relational, or collective sense of self in terms of who one is in relation to other people or groups. The research suggests that this self-concept is developed through interaction with others,

membership of groups, and comparison with others, thus supporting the proposition of the current study which suggests that one's self-concept is likely to be influenced by an individual's perception of their place in relation to others as well as what they believe others think of them. This would suggest that SoNB might have important consequences for the development and positivity of one's self-concept.

5.3.2 Conflict with self-concept and impact on psychological well-being

5.3.2.1 *Relationship between interpretation of SoNB, interpretation of emotional experience, and self-concept consistency*

What also emerged from the current research was that the experience of not belonging was associated with a *conflict* in self-concept which emerged in two key ways: Firstly, an internal conflict between what participants thought they knew about themselves compared to how they felt during the experience, such as feeling weak, feeling incompetent, feeling vulnerable or emotional. As explored under 4.5.3 'emotional experience' in *Chapter Four*, these feelings were expressed as an inner turmoil of distorted perception, irrationality, and loss of control. The experience therefore, left them questioning who they were, and resulted in a cognitive dissonance further undermining the clarity of their self-concept. Secondly, and as will be explored in subsequent sections, a conflict emerged in terms of a participant's *ability to be themselves*, to be authentic in the workplace, which often resulted from their resolution strategies of either attempting to fit in or self-protection.

These findings are supported by the literature and indeed by the conceptualisations of the self as explored above, the multifaceted conceptualisations of which imply that the differing contexts, influences and interests of these different elements of the self may at times be in conflict. In considering the impact of identity conflict on psychological well-being, Horton, Bayerl and Jacobs (2014) make the distinction between intra and inter unit conflict, with *inter* unit conflict being conflict between different individual or collective identities in an organisation, and *intra* unit conflict being between the values, beliefs and expectations of the different identities and level of identity within the individual. They also distinguish between deep-structured and situated identities, the former referring to *deep rooted* identities that are fundamental to one's self definition, the latter referring to transient, *situation specific* identities that may operate within one domain. Whilst Horton et al. (2014) offer no empirical evidence for the differential impacts on well-being of these different levels of conflict, they propose that conflicts which threaten this deep-structured identity are likely to have deep-seated impacts (Horton et al., 2014). As such, their theory provides some theoretical insight into the

relationship proposed by the current study between self-concept conflict and psychological well-being.

Horton et al.'s (2014) proposition is also consistent with theories of cognitive dissonance, self-discrepancy and self-concept clarity which are supported by empirical evidence. *Cognitive dissonance theory* (to be discussed in more detail further below in this section) for example proposes that inconsistent cognitions lead to an aversive affective state (dissonance) which leads to a drive to resolve the inconsistency and maintain consonance (Festinger, 1957). Cognitive dissonance, according to Festinger, involves three core principles: Inconsistent cognitions need to occur *simultaneously*; they need to be directed at the same object; and they need to be *propositional beliefs* – that is they need to be considered by the individual to be true. This theory indicates that although inconsistent propositional beliefs about oneself are targeted at one object and may be considered to be true, inconsistency between *situated* identities would not necessarily result in cognitive dissonance as they do not occur simultaneously – one can be a professional in the workplace and a mother in the home. Inconsistent cognitions about deep-structured self-constructs however, such as 'I am resilient', 'I am rational' would likely result in cognitive dissonance as they are propositional beliefs, targeting the same object simultaneously as they apply in all contexts.

Theories of *self-concept unity* further support this proposition by arguing that individuals high in self-concept unity have integrated and coherent self-concepts which allow for continuity and integrity across different circumstances and roles (Block, 1961). Donahue, Robins, Roberts and John (1993) investigated the relationship between self-concept differentiation (SCD) and psychological adjustment. Whereas some theorists argue that individuals high in SCD have numerous specialised identities which enable them to effectively adapt and flex to the different demands and requirements of different roles (Goffman, 1971, Gergen 1972), Donahue et al. (1993) argue that SCD is reflective of a *fragmentation* or lack of an integrated core identity. They conceptualise SCD as the extent to which an individual considers themselves to have different personality characteristics in different situations. Their measure of SCD calculates the variance between the different personality traits that individuals identify across five different roles (friend, romantic partner, son/daughter, student and worker). Their measure therefore represents inconsistency not just in terms of attitudes and behaviours that may be demanded of different social roles, but in terms of actual *personality characteristics and traits*, which could represent a deeper felt conflict. Their research explored the relationship between SCD and psychological adjustment (assessed using the NEO-FFI (Costa & McCrae, 1989)) across two studies including undergraduates in study one and middle-aged women (who have greater life

experience and role diversity) in study two. They found across both studies that SCD was positively correlated with depression, anxiety and neuroticism and negatively correlated with self-esteem, supporting the theoretical relationship between conflict in self-concept and emotion and self-esteem proposed by the current study. As a correlational study however, it could be that high levels of depression, anxiety or neuroticism *promote* self-concept differentiation.

Campbell, Trapnell, Heine, Katz, Lavallo, and Lehman (1996) propose that *self-concept clarity* is related to psychological adjustment. They distinguish between content components and structural components of self-concept. *Content components* refer to the knowledge about oneself (who am I?) as well as the evaluation of oneself (how do I feel about who I am?). *Structural components* are concerned with how the content components are organised, such as whether they are complex (a number of dimensions), integrated, or compartmentalised (perceiving different content components to be related to different dimensions, such as work and home), and with Self-Concept Clarity (SCC) which they define as a subjective belief regarding the extent to which an individual's self-concept is clearly defined, internally consistent and temporally stable (Campbell et al., 1996). As such, in addition to the consideration of the multiple personality characteristics that may be evident in different situations made by SCD, SCC emphasises the importance of how these are structured, integrated, and consistent over time.

Campbell et al., (1996) argue that self-concept clarity has important implications for self-esteem, over and above the evaluation of one's self-concept as positive or negative. Their early research (Campbell, 1990) supported this proposition demonstrating a relationship between SCC and global self-esteem: Whilst those with positive evaluative components and high self-concept clarity also exhibited high self-esteem, those with low self-esteem did not necessarily have negative views of themselves but did have *low self-concept clarity* (Campbell, 1990; Campbell & Fehr, 1990). These findings were replicated in a later study with 471 undergraduates which measured SCC with a 20 item scale, as well as measuring self-esteem using Rosenberg's (1965) self-esteem scale and the Texas Social Behaviour Inventory (Helmich, Stapp & Ervin, 1974). Results of this study again found that SCC was strongly correlated with self-esteem with those high in SCC also being high in self-esteem. These studies therefore suggest that low self-esteem might not just be related to negative self-beliefs but rather to an *inconsistency* and *uncertainty* in those beliefs, further supporting the current findings.

The findings from Campbell et al.'s (1996) research found further support from later research which explored the relationship between various conceptualisations of self-concept structure and their impact on psychological adjustment and well-being (Campbell, Assanand, & Paula, 2003). Their research with two separate groups of undergraduates took measures of *pluralism* (defined as the extent to which an individual's self-concept is organised into different, diverse facets), as well as measures of *unity* (defined as the extent to which the self-concept is coherent and integrated (Zajonc, 1960)), and included a measure of *self-complexity* devised by Linville (1987) which assesses the extent to which the self consists of multiple self-aspects. This is determined by asking participants to identify different traits and group them into different aspects of their lives. The greater the number of independent traits across the groupings the higher an individual's level of self-complexity. *Self-concept clarity* was assessed using Campbell et al.'s tool (1996); Donahue et al.'s (1993) SCD measure; and a measure of self-discrepancy based on Higgins, Klein and Straumann (1985) self-discrepancy theory. Self-discrepancy theory explores the discrepancies individuals experience between who they believe they *actually* are and who they (or others) *ideally* want them to be, and who they (or others) think they *ought* to be. The measure Campbell et al. (2003) took explored the discrepancies between participant's actual traits and the traits they thought others believed them to possess, thus providing a measure of the *difference* between their self and other perceptions. These instruments therefore, provided various indicators of the clarity of the self-concept and were correlated with measures of self-esteem using the Revised Janis-Field Feelings of Inadequacy Scale (Eagly, 1967) and neuroticism measured by the Neuroticism scales of the NEO-FFI (Costa & McCrae, 1989) to explore the impact of self-concept clarity on psychological well-being.

Results of their study found that the measures of self-concept unity and clarity were related to psychological adjustment. Specifically, *all* measures of unity were positively related to self-esteem, with self-concept clarity having the strongest correlation, and negatively related to neuroticism. The findings of Campbell et al.'s (1990, 1996, 2003) series of studies therefore, support the theorised relationship in the current study between the identity conflict and lack of self-concept clarity and psychological well-being. However, as all these studies were correlational, it could be that low self-esteem *promotes* a lack of self-concept clarity, or that psychological adjustment *promotes* self-concept clarity and unity.

A longitudinal study by Schwartz, Klimstra, Luyckx, Hale, Frijns, Oosterwegel, Van Lier, Koot and Meeus (2011) however, helps to clarify the direction. They explored the relationship between personal self-concept clarity and personal identity, as well as the relationship between these constructs and anxiety and depression. They draw on the distinction identified by James (1890)

and Cote and Levine (2002) between self and identity, defining identity as the process by which individuals search for and commit to personal standards and roles, and self as the subjective view of oneself developed through these commitments. Self-concept clarity is defined as above, and personal identity is defined as the extent to which an individual has a clear and consistent set of internally held beliefs, values and goals (Erikson, 1950, 1968).

Schwartz et al.'s (2011) Longitudinal research with 611 young adolescents (mean age 13.32) explored fluctuations in self-concept clarity over a period of 12 months, as identified by individual's commitment to and reconsideration of, identity elements which provide a sense of meaning and direction to one's life path and choices (Bosma & Kunnen, 2001). The authors found that fluctuations in uncertainty as identified through reconsideration of identity elements predicted both anxiety and depression at 12 months, although anxiety and depression were not predictive of reconsideration. Whilst this research was conducted with adolescents for whom self-concept clarity may have very different implications for one's psychological well-being, it does provide evidence of the *impact* of uncertainty and inconsistency of the self-concept on psychological well-being in a sample for whom self-concept clarity may be an anticipated and therefore potentially less detrimental aspect of life.

Finally, Campbell's studies (1990; 1996) and Donohue et al.'s (1993) studies also offer support for the proposed relationship between SoNB and the 'inner turmoil of emotion' that emerged as an integral part of the emotional experience, in terms of feeling irrational, lost and out of control. The NEO-FFI (Costa & McCrae, 1989) measure used in these studies assesses levels of anxiety, depression, self-consciousness, impulsiveness, and vulnerability to stress and is conceptualised as an indicator of emotional instability. As such, the relationship found between self-concept clarity and neuroticism in these studies supports the current study's proposition that through undermining self-concept, SoNB results in an inner turmoil of emotion. Moreover, the current study also proposes that the emotional experience and inner turmoil of emotion itself could undermine one's self-concept, through the conflict presented by this emotional vulnerability, thus supporting the potentially bi-directional nature of the relationship indicated by the correlational studies.

5.3.2.2 Relationship between resolution behaviours and self-concept: How thoughts and behaviour impact the self-concept

The second way in which a self-concept conflict manifested in the current study was through a lack of ability individuals experienced to be themselves and to be authentic in the workplace. For the most part this was driven by their attempts to resolve the experience of not belonging,

either by trying to find an ‘identity’ that would fit, or through withdrawing or conforming in order to be accepted. Whilst at times this behaviour impacted their self-concept through what it *said* about who they were (in terms of their weakness, or lack of courage, as will be explored below in 5.3.4) at other times it presented a clear *paradox* between who they thought they were and how they behaved, e.g. between being the extravert and withdrawing or between being compassionate and behaving insensitively.

5.3.2.2.1 Authenticity and ability to be oneself

This ability to be oneself is theorised by some to be a critical element in one’s sense of belonging. Miller (2003) for example, describes belonging as “something...fundamental to who and what we are...it might be stated that belonging is in some way part of what constitutes our identity” (2003, p.217). Weeks (1990) also argues that identity is about belonging, and perceived to be determined by one’s ability to be fully oneself, to express one’s identity, and not belonging the inability to be oneself.

This proposition finds empirical support from Belle, et al.’s (2015) study, as referenced in previous sections, which explored the experience of organisational belonging for high-intensity teleworkers. Their approach used semi-structured interviews with employees which were analysed using Colaizzi’s (1978) formulated meaning and exhaustive approach emphasising the importance of relevance and clarity of the phenomenon to the individual experiencing it. As a complex and contextualised phenomenon, this approach helped to elucidate the *participant’s perspective* of organisational belonging, and captured the essence of their lived experience. What emerged from their study was a picture of the holistic totality of their experience of belonging at work. Whilst this was an investigation of a specific population which undertook a great deal of work from home and as such may have different needs and experiences of belonging, the rich data from the study does provide a robust and illuminating insight into the experience of organisational belonging, which emerged in three overall themes: The *context* (nature of the work); the *construct* of the work (how it is performed); and employee’s *confidence* in the work. They also found that individuals developed a sense of organisational belonging through three processes: *Choice*, in terms of the choice to undertake telework; *negotiation*, in terms of their ability to influence and decide how they conducted their work; and *knowing*, in terms of knowing the organisation, the norms, and personal understanding of others, and an understanding of self. Knowing emerged as an important and encompassing theme, associated with developing competence and confidence. It involved a deeper knowing of the self, and a recognition of the *balance* between personal and organisational identity. The consolidation of their research resulted in a definition of belonging as “experiencing an

acknowledgement of one's talents, interests, and experiences, and finding whole acceptance of one's self expression of these" (p.90), supporting the relationship between ability to be oneself and SoNB.

Clegg (2006) also found not belonging to be related to a sense of inauthenticity. Whilst their study of not belonging focused on the experiences of individuals in adolescence and early adulthood, a particular feature of the experience for those participants for whom not belonging was consistent and generalised beyond high school was a sense of insincerity and inauthenticity, a need to be fake in order to fit in.

Further support is found in the literature exploring the construct of authenticity, which is defined by Rogers (1961) as a sense of empowerment and an ability to behave in ways which are consistent with one's beliefs and values rather than the result of external pressures. An authentic individual is one who feels "consistency between their inner and outer senses of self and correspondingly experience coherence between their thoughts, feelings, and behaviour." (Robinson, Lopez, Ramos, Nartova-Bochaver, 2013, p.720). As such, authenticity represents an ability to be oneself and a coherence between one's true identity and self-expression.

Kernis and Goldman (2006) conceptualise authenticity as an individual's tendency to behave in ways which reflect their values, beliefs and true selves irrespective of context. Kernis and Goldman conceive of authenticity as being comprised of both cognitive and behavioural elements – cognitive being an awareness of one's self, attributes, and capacities and an unbiased and accurate self-perception; and behavioural being a tendency for honest self-expression and openness within relationships. The cognitive aspects reflect one's understanding and appraisal of oneself – their self-concept clarity, whereas the behavioural aspects reflect one's ability to act in concordance with that understanding of self through one's interactions (Goldman & Kernis, 2002).

A study by Menard and Brunet (2010) of 360 French Canadian managers from public sector organisations explored the relationship between authenticity and well-being, making the distinction between subjective well-being and psychological well-being. They define subjective well-being as evaluations of life satisfaction and affect, including anxiety, depression, and distress (Diener, 1984), and psychological well-being as one's perception that one is realising one's true potential and pursuing meaningful goals, and as such incorporates a sense of autonomy, mastery and meaning (Ryan & Deci, 2001; Keyes, Schmotkin, & Ryff, 2002). Psychological well-being was measured using the presence scale from the Meaning in Life Questionnaire contextualised to the workplace (Steger, Frazier, Oishi & Kaler, 2006);

authenticity was measured using the Authenticity Inventory (Goldman & Kernis, 2004); and subjective well-being measured using the Satisfaction with Life Scale and Affect Scale (Diener, Emmons, Larsen & Griffin, 1985; Diener, Smith & Fujita, 1995). The results of their study found that both the cognitive and behavioural dimensions of authenticity were related to subjective well-being, in that managers who were more authentic in the workplace were more satisfied with life and experienced more positive affect. Authenticity was also found to be related to psychological well-being, in that those reporting high authenticity also reported having a more meaningful job. Whilst the definition of the psychological well-being the authors make is based on a factor analysis by Keyes, et al. (2002) which distinguished between subjective and psychological well-being, the latter essentially reflects perceptions of meaning in life, and as such claiming that authenticity is related to *psychological well-being* is somewhat misleading. Furthermore, whilst their research supports the potential relationships proposed in the current study between authenticity in the workplace and subjective well-being, the support offered to the relationships proposed should be considered with some caution as the cross-sectional nature of their study precludes claims of causality. Moreover, their results may be biased by the public-sector nature of their sample, for whom meaning at work may be particularly important to life satisfaction and happiness as they may be less likely to be motivated by money.

5.3.2.2.2 Imposter phenomenon

Also related to a conflict with self-concept was the construct that emerged, for some, of ‘feeling like a fraud’, feeling like one wasn’t able to meet the expectations of others or of their role, and this was associated with a feeling of inauthenticity and an inability to be oneself. This experience of perceived fraudulence is reflected in the literature on Imposter Phenomenon, and was introduced in *Chapter One*.

Imposter Phenomenon (IP) is commonly defined as “an internal experience of intellectual phoniness in high achievers who are unable to internalise their successful experiences” (Bernard, Dollinger & Raminiah, 2002, p.321). It is characterised in part, by feelings of self-doubt, low self-esteem, and social anxiety (Kets de Vries, 2009; Chrisman, Pieper, Clance, Holland, & Glickauf-Hughes, 1995), as such supporting the proposed relationship between this form of inauthenticity and self-esteem found in the current research. IP also has been found to be correlated with specific personality traits as well as with psychological disorders. For example, Bernard, Dollinger and Raminiah (2002) explored the relationship between the Five Factor model of personality, which includes measures of openness, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness, and neuroticism, as measured by the NEO-Personality Inventory-Revised (NEO-PI-R; Costa & McCrae, 1992) and imposter phenomenon as measured using both

the Clance Imposter Phenomenon Scale (CIPS; Clance, 1985) and the Perceived Fraudulence Scale (Kolligan & Sternberg, 1991). Results of their correlational and regression analyses found significant positive correlations between IP and neuroticism and negative correlations with conscientiousness.

Ross and Krukowski (2003) also explored the relationship between IP measured using the Harvey Imposter Phenomenon Scale (HIP; Harvey, 1981) and personality disorders assessed using the Schedule for Nonadaptive and Adaptive Personality (SNAP). Results of their multiple regressions found IP to be predicted by avoidant, dependent and obsessive-compulsive characteristics, as well as by detachment and dependency traits, from which they conclude that IP is “a pervasive and maladaptive style of relating to the world” (Ross & Krukowski, 2003, p. 482). These findings position IP as a stable, psychological trait or disorder, which is likely to surface in most situations. However, SoNB and the related inauthenticity did not for most participants in the current study, occur across all roles and organisations, but occurred at different times and situations throughout their careers. However, Chae et al. (1995), in investigating the validity of IP in a Korean context, found a much lower prevalence rate for IP in their Korean sample than has been found in other samples (24-39% of their sample, compared to an average of 60-70% in American samples). They argued that these differences could in part be due to the inability to identify consistent cut-off scores across studies, at which one is categorised as having IP. This, coupled with the negative correlation they found between IP and age, led them to propose a *dimensional* rather than clinical view, suggesting that one could experience different *levels* of IP in different *situations* or different life stages. In terms of the current research therefore, as a state rather than trait construct this supports the current research’s findings of the inauthenticity related to SoNB arising in certain situations rather than across all situations and work roles.

However, another important characteristic of IP is ‘perceived fraudulence’, which is defined by Kolligan (1990) as the belief that others consider you to be more capable than you consider yourself, and reflects the concern that one is not as competent as they appear to others. For example, in her work with high-achieving women, Clance and Imes (1978) found these women believed that others regarded them as more successful and competent than they believed themselves to be, which does not support the current research which found individuals to be concerned that others perceived them *negatively* not favourably. Indeed, Kolligan (1990) conceptualises IP *as* perceived fraudulence which he assesses with the Perceived Fraudulence Scale (Kolligan, 1990). This scale assesses perceptions of inauthenticity as well as self-deprecation, which includes items such as ‘I often feel I receive praise or grades I don’t deserve’.

In a series of studies Leary, Patton, Orlando and Funk (2000) however, found that the highest IP scores were found in individuals who rated themselves negatively, and also believed others rated them poorly as well. Their first study assessed IP using the Clance Imposter Phenomenon Scale (CIPS; Clance, 1985), the Imposter Test (Clance, 1985) and the Perceived Fraudulence Scale (Kolligan & Sternberg, 1991). Participants also completed self-appraisals and reflected appraisals – what they perceived to be other’s appraisals of them – in terms of overall self-rating, physical appearance, ability and intelligence on intellectual tasks, skill in social situations, and ability to exercise, which are proposed by Fleming and Courtney (1984) to reflect the primary facets of self-regard. They found that all three IP scales were negatively correlated with self-ratings and with reflected appraisals, and that those with high IP scores also had a higher discrepancy between self and other appraisals, which would appear to support the idea that IP involves a concern that others consider you to be more competent than you think of yourself. However, the difference score was confounded by the magnitude of the self-ratings in that those with lower self-ratings had greater potential for difference. When this was accounted for they found no correlations between IP and the difference between self and other evaluations. They also found no interaction effect between self and reflected appraisals and IP, and that additive effects of self and reflected appraisals resulted in the highest IP scores for those who rated themselves negatively and assumed others did too.

In terms of the current research, this finding that IP is related to low self and other perceptions rather than the discrepancy *between* these perceptions better supports the current findings in terms of the conceptualisation of self-esteem as constituting both self-perceptions and concerns about perceptions of others. As such, IP may be implicated in the inauthenticity that emerged from SoNB and the related low self-esteem found in the current study.

5.3.2.3 Summary

The literature suggests that a lack of clarity in one’s self-concept and the conflict that arises between different structured and deep-rooted aspects of one’s self-concept might have important psychological implications. Whilst the correlational nature of many of the studies reported makes it difficult to conclude that a conflict in self-concept presented by SoNB (in terms of what individuals thought they knew about themselves compared to who they became) impacts psychological well-being, they do support the theoretical relationships proposed between SoNB and self-concept and psychological well-being, both in terms of self-esteem and the emotional experience, particularly the inner turmoil of emotion that emerged in terms of feelings of irrationality, distortion and lack of control. Given the correlational nature however, they also indirectly support the proposition that emotional experience may further undermine

one's self-concept. Whilst some research suggests that multiple identities might not always be detrimental to one's psychological well-being (e.g. Goffman, 1971; Gergen, 1972), it is important to clarify that much of the research around conflict in self focuses on conflict *between* identities, particularly in terms of different role identities rather than conflict *with* the self-concept, as in cognitions, emotions and behaviours that conflict with how an individual views themselves.

What appears to be important is whether the elements of self in conflict are deep-structured reflecting ubiquitous values and beliefs, or situational, reflecting competing demands and requiring different attitudes and behaviours. In terms of the current study a deep structured conflict may arise between one's beliefs about who they are, e.g. in terms of believing oneself to be resilient, strong and competent, versus how they feel they appear to others, e.g. weak and incompetent. As has been seen from the research that explores the relationship between self-concept clarity and psychological well-being, this may have important implications for one's emotional experience, as will be explored below in the 5.5 on 'emotional experience'.

The research also suggests that the inauthenticity expressed by many, as well as a sense of imposter phenomenon expressed by some in the current research, may be particularly detrimental to one's psychological well-being, with previous research finding a relationship between authenticity and self-esteem, negative affect, and well-being. As such, the extant literature supports the theoretical relationships proposed between ability to be oneself and psychological well-being in terms of both the impact on self-esteem and on emotion.

5.3.3 Self-efficacy

The second category to emerge from the current research as integral to one's self concept was self-efficacy – the individual's beliefs and confidence in their capabilities and their competence, which appeared to be undermined by the experience of not belonging, and which left them questioning themselves and lacking self-belief.

Self-efficacy is defined as one's belief that one can be successful in future tasks, and is generally regarded as a specific, state-based belief which refers to a particular task or activity (Bandura, 1997). Self-efficacy is believed to be a defining element of identity but conceptually distinct from self-esteem (Tafarodi & Swan, 2001). Whilst self-efficacy refers to one's perception of competence, self-esteem, which will be explored below, refers to the *evaluation* of that competence (Campbell, et al., 1996). For example, an individual may feel incompetent in a domain but assign no negative evaluation to that incompetence as it is not something they feel they ought to be competent in.

Self-efficacy therefore, reflects one's cognitions about oneself, whilst self-esteem reflects how one *evaluates* these self-relevant cognitions. Evidence does suggest that the constructs of self-esteem and self-efficacy are closely related, most likely in a bi-directional fashion, in that an individual with high self-esteem is likely to consider that they are able to complete a task and the successful completion of a task is likely to lead to higher self-esteem (e.g., Sherer, Maddux, Mercadante, Prentice-Dunn, Jacobs & Rogers (1982) found generalised self-efficacy correlated with global self-esteem).

The importance of self-efficacy to SoNB finds support from two of the key studies discussed in the literature: Levett-Jones and Lathlean's (2009) investigation of a sense of belonging for student nurses; and Belle et al.'s (2015) investigation of belonging for high-intensity teleworkers. Levett-Jones and Lathlean (2009) argue that the process and stages of belonging for student nurses culminates in achievement of competence, whereby students consider themselves to be an "efficacious and capable professional" (p.2873). Similarly, Belle et al. (2015) define belonging in part as "experiencing an acknowledgement of one's talents" (p.90), and argue that belonging is predicated on 'knowing', part of which involves developing confidence and competence in their work. As such, these studies support the current study in finding a sense of competence, confidence and self-efficacy to be an important aspect of one's self-concept related to one's sense of belonging.

Another theory which offers support to the relationship between SoNB in the workplace and self-efficacy is Pierce and Gardner's (2004) theory of Organisation-Based Self-Esteem (OBSE). Whilst they argue that OBSE is a situation-specific dimension of general *self-esteem*, examination of their model finds limited support for this proposition, but does find support for its validity as a self-efficacy construct relevant to the workplace. OBSE is defined as "the degree to which an individual believes him/herself to be capable, significant and worthy as an organisational member." (p.593). OBSE is typically measured using Pierce, Gardner, Cummings, and Dunham's (1989) ten-item instrument which captures individual's beliefs about their current organisation in terms of, for example, the extent to which they believe they count, are taken seriously or are trusted. A number of studies have explored the reliability and validity of the instrument and found internal consistency reliability estimates ranging from 0.82 to 0.85 (Pierce & Gardner, 2004), demonstrating the stability of the construct and convergent validity for the scale (Pierce et al., 1989), as well as supported the single-factor construct (e.g. ,Van Dyne, VandeWalle, Kostova & Cummings, 2000).

Pierce et al. (1989) argue that OBSE has three key determinants: Implicit signals from the organisational environment; signals from significant others; and individual's feelings of self-efficacy and competence that come from experience. In respect to environmental signals, OBSE theorists suggest that organisational structures which are rigid and controlling signal to the employee that they are not competent enough to regulate their own behaviour, whereas organisations which are more collaborative and less structured signal that individuals are trusted and are capable of independent self-regulation as well as providing opportunities for them to express themselves. The former would result in lower OBSE and the latter higher OBSE.

A review of the extant literature finds broad support for this hypothesised relationship (Pierce & Gardner, 2004). For example, negative relationships have been found between mechanistically designed organisations (those which emphasise control, formality and hierarchy) and OBSE (Pierce et al, 1989) and positive relationships found between organic structures (those which are more personal and democratic) and OBSE (Tan & Peng, 1997). Similarly, job complexity which it is argued allows for greater self-direction and control (Pierce & Gardner, 2004), has been found to be related to OBSE with more complex jobs which involve feedback and task identity significantly positively related to higher OBSE, with associations ranging from .39 ($p < .01$) and .44 ($p < .01$) (Pierce et al., 1989).

The second determinant refers to the extent to which significant others, such as role models, mentors and managers, consider the person to be competent and capable and demonstrate this positive regard to the individual. This communicated perception then becomes integrated into the individual's self-concept, as argued by many of the theories of self-concept explored above (e.g., Shrauger & Shoeneman, 1999). Again, the review of the literature offered by Pierce and Gardner (2004) provides a wealth of support for this second determinant. For example, Pierce et al. (1989) found a moderate positive relationship between perceived managerial respect and OBSE ($r=0.52$) and Chattopadhyay and George (2001) found a moderate positive relationship ($r=0.52$) between trust and OBSE. Similarly, Lee (2003b) found a moderate positive relationship between supervisor support and OBSE ($r=0.38$) and co-worker support and OBSE ($r=0.37$), and a large positive relationship ($r=0.70$) between perceived organisational support and OBSE (Lee, 2003b).

The final determinant refers to OBSE which is developed through one's successes and failures in the organisational context. Pierce and Gardner (2004) argue that individuals who experience successes which they attribute to themselves (high self-efficacy) will experience higher levels of OBSE whilst those who experience failures which they attribute to themselves (low self-efficacy)

will experience lower levels of OBSE. The authors argue that practices which encourage high performance would therefore be related to higher OBSE.

These propositions have been investigated by a number of studies (e.g. Riodan, Weatherly, Vandenberg & Self, 2001; Pierce, Gardner, Dunham, & Cummings, 1993; Pierce, et al., 1993; and Lee, 2003b). However, none of these studies actually measured performance or perceptions of success and failure, or indeed self-efficacy, rather inferring that these would be the outcomes of such practices to which the observed OBSE could be attributed.

One study by Gardner and Pierce (1998) has directly explored the relationship between self-efficacy and OBSE. Their study of 148 employees measured OBSE, generalised self-efficacy, job related affect, which included assessments of job satisfaction and job commitment, and then eight months later took three measures of performance (manager's ratings on 10 dimensions of performance, overall performance, and manager's ratings of the degree to which their employees engaged in extra-role behaviours). The results of their study found relationships between generalised self-efficacy and OBSE ($r=0.47$), OBSE and performance ($r=0.23$), generalised self-efficacy and job-related affect ($r=0.69$), and a mediating role for OBSE on the relationship between generalised self-efficacy and employee performance and affect [see *figure 5.III*].

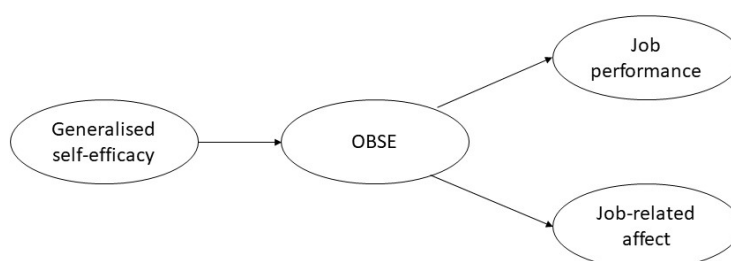


Figure 5.III: Model of supported hypotheses (Gardner & Pierce, 1998)

These proposed determinants of OBSE were also largely supported by Bowling et al.'s (2010) meta-analysis referred to above, which found corrected positive correlations between OBSE and self-efficacy, job complexity, autonomy, leader consideration, perceived organisational support, supervisor and co-worker support, and negative correlations between OBSE and role ambiguity, role conflict, and job insecurity.

As such, research supports the construct of OBSE in terms of both the proposed determinants and outcomes of the construct, however, it does not support the definition of the construct as a situation-specific dimension of general self-esteem, as the determinants of OBSE are more

closely related to competence than to self-esteem. Signals from the environment communicate competence, signals from success and failures signal competence, and signals from others also only signal competence and capability, rather than *evaluations* of that competence. Furthermore, no evidence is presented about any relationship between OBSE and affect (job related affect in their model includes satisfaction and commitment), and indeed there appears to be an absence of the critical affective component that scholars agree is fundamental to self-esteem – how one feels about their self-knowledge – not just their cognitive evaluation of that self-knowledge (Brown, 1993). As a self-efficacy construct however, OBSE does offer support to the theoretical relationships found in the current research particularly in terms of the impact of the attributes of SoNB of ‘not adding value’ and ‘organisational culture’ on self-efficacy.

5.3.4 Self-esteem

Self-esteem is the evaluative component of the self in terms of how one evaluates dimensions of the self-concept (Campbell, et al., 1996) and has been conceptualised as an attitude towards oneself (Coppersmith, 1967; Rosenberg, 1965), which has both cognitive and affective components. Whilst based on self-relevant cognitions (thoughts and knowledge about the self), what distinguishes self-esteem from pure cognitions and self-efficacy is the affective component in terms of how one ‘feels’ about those self-relevant cognitions, e.g. how one feels about being clever, kind, or likable (Brown, 1993).

Most conceptualisations of self-esteem make distinctions between three different types of self-esteem: State versus trait; personal versus social; and Global versus specific (Rubin & Hewstone, 1998). Trait self-esteem refers to one’s average level of self-esteem over time and domains, whereas state self-esteem refers to self-esteem which is contingent upon specific situations and events (Rosenberg, 1965; Leary, Tambor, Terdal & Downs, 1995b). Personal self-esteem refers to the esteem one holds in regards to themselves, whereas social self-esteem refers to the esteem one holds for the collective self-image that they share with a group of which they are a member (Rubin & Hewstone, 1998). Global self-esteem refers to the esteem in which an individual holds one’s overall self-image, whereas specific self-esteem refers to the esteem in which one holds a particular self-image, such as their intelligence or their role as a mother (Rosenberg, Schooler, Schoenbach, & Rosenberg, 1995).

5.3.4.1 *The function of self-esteem and relationship with belonging*

Whilst most psychological theories agree that individuals are universally motivated to maintain and enhance their self-esteem, a motivation which drives a wealth of human behaviour (e.g., Crocker & Wolfe, 2001; Fein & Spencer, 1997; James, 1890; Leary, 2005) there is some

discrepancy in terms of the function of self-esteem. Some theories suggest that self-esteem serves simply to promote positive affect and well-being. This view is supported by the wealth of research that finds a positive relationship between low self-esteem and negative emotion (e.g., Cutrona, 1982; Goswick & Jones, 1981; Taylor & Brown, 1988; White, 1981) and a negative relationship between high self-esteem and anxiety (e.g., Baumeister, 1993; Greenberg et al., 1992; Taylor & Brown, 1988). However, these theories do not explain *why* self-esteem is associated with these effects, which is relevant to the current research as it illuminates the contexts in which self-esteem is likely to manifest.

One theory that seeks to explain the purpose and function of self-esteem is Terror Management Theory (TMT; Greenberg, Pyszczynski & Solomon, 1986). TMT asserts that self-esteem operates as a buffer against the otherwise perpetual anxiety created by one's awareness of mortality and the inevitability of death (Pyszczynski, Greenberg, Solomon & Arndt, 2004). The theory contends that in order to avoid paralysing terror our species evolved to create shared, cultural worldviews that provide a set of standards as to what is valuable and meaningful. These cultural worldviews are argued to offer symbolic immortality by helping individuals to feel a part of something more significant than their own life, and to the extent that they feel they are meeting these standards, *buffer* the individual from the anxiety of imminent death (Pyszczynski, et al., 2004). Self-esteem, TMT theorists argue, is obtained through believing in and having confidence that one's cultural worldview is correct and valid, that one is living up to those values, making one's existence valued and meaningful (Becker, 1973). Strong self-esteem built on confidence in their worldview and a sense of value buffers the individual from the anxiety of death, but when weak this anxiety is able to surface leading to behaviours designed to reaffirm the worldview and / or enhance one's self-worth (Pyszczynski, et al., 2004).

This theory would suggest that the low self-esteem experienced in the current research was the result of anxiety about death, which emerged due to the threat posed to one's worldview and associated sense of value and self-worth from feeling like they do not belong. Whilst a lack of shared characteristics, quality relationships and value that are attributed to the experience of not belonging could reflect a dissonance between the individual's worldview and that of the group / organisation, the nuances of the themes that emerged in terms of how the individuals felt about themselves, in terms of competence, weakness, resilience, etc., would appear to account for more than just a concern that others do not share their worldview.

In a thorough review of the literature on self-esteem and TMT, Pyszczynski, et al. (2004) discuss research which they claim supports TMT's assertions. One line of evidence from investigations

of TMT explores the impact of self-esteem on people's reactions to reminders of their mortality (mortality salience, (MS)), and proposes that if self-esteem buffers against anxiety about death those with high self-esteem should display less defensive reactions to reminders of their mortality than low self-esteem individuals. The authors reference research, e.g. Harmon-Jones, Simon, Greenberg, Pyszczynski, Solomon, and McGregor (1997) which involved participants writing about their own death, following which the researchers evaluated the defensiveness of participants' reactions to an essay that contradicted their previously stated political worldview. For example, the extent to which they derogated the essay writer. They found that a boost to self-esteem in the form of bogus positive feedback on a personality test did result in less defensive reactions to reminders of 'death'.

The authors also refer to research which finds that MS leads to individuals striving to meet valued cultural standards, such as those who value tolerance responding favourably to someone who challenges their worldview following MS (Greenberg, Simon, Pyszczynski, Solomon & Chatel, 1992), or increasing the appeal of high-status items following MS for those for whom material and financial possessions are an indication of self-worth (Mandel & Heine, 1999). However, the research they reference infers that the resultant behaviour is driven by a need to boost self-esteem (thus demonstrating the relationship between death anxiety and self-esteem) but self-esteem is not operationalised in these experiments and alternative explanations for the observed behaviour could be equally plausible (e.g. determining that in the grand scheme of life tolerance of other's views is a virtue, or that given the transient nature of life one ought to live for the moment in fast cars). Similarly, the authors reference research which finds that MS leads to greater intentions to exercise (Arndt, Schimel & Goldenberg, 2003) or to demonstrate personal strength (Peters, Greenberg, Williams & Schneider, 2003) only for those for whom health and fitness is an important personal value, again inferring rather than assessing that the observed behaviour is an indication of striving to boost self-esteem by enhancing an aspect of their self-concept they value. As such, it is not clear from these studies that self-esteem acts as a buffer against the anxiety of imminent death or indeed that death anxiety induces self-esteem enhancing behaviour.

The authors also argue that the effects of MS on self-esteem striving (which are questionable) is specific to the *threat of death* rather than a reaction to an aversive state. They evidence this by research which has found that priming individuals to believe that there is scientific evidence of life after death mitigated the impact of MS on ratings of the validity of positive feedback (an indication of self-serving bias) (Dechesne, Greenberg, Arndt, & Schimel, 2000). Whilst the authors conclude this provides evidence that it is anxiety about death specifically, that results

in the observed behaviour, the authors again infer that the self-serving bias indicates self-esteem striving and therefore demonstrates that self-esteem provides a buffer against death anxiety, whereas the observed behaviour could be motivated by concerns other than a need to enhance self-esteem. As such, the case has not been empirically made that self-esteem functions as an adaptive buffer against the anxiety of death which surfaces through a threat to one's worldview. Indeed, from an evolutionary perspective it could be argued that an individual who worries about death is more likely to survive and reproduce (Leary, Tambor, Terdal & Downs, 1995b).

An alternative theory of the function of self-esteem is offered by Leary (1990). His *Sociometer Hypothesis* argues that self-esteem is an internal gauge that alerts us to a threat to acceptance or inclusion, and motivates us to behave in ways that maintain our self-esteem not for the sake of self-esteem per se, but in order to increase our chances of being accepted and included (Leary, 1990). Leary argues that as human beings need to be included in order to survive (as explored in *Chapter Three*), self-esteem as a monitor of possible social exclusion evolved as an adaptive mechanism. This triggered loss in self-esteem then stimulates negative affect as well as conscious exploration of the causes, both situational and personal, in order to address and respond to the threat (Leary, 2005). The relationship with the current research is apparent and implies that the concern about being excluded and not belonging is what triggers the experience of low self-esteem as a mechanism to drive behaviour designed to address the threat, thus offering support for the proposed impact of SoNB on self-esteem and the proposed impact of self-esteem on resolution behaviours in the current research.

The assumptions of the Sociometer Hypothesis find support from a wealth of research (see Leary 2005 for a review). For example, a series of experiments by Leary et al., (1995b) demonstrated both a correlational and causal link between inclusion/exclusion and self-esteem. One study asked 160 undergraduate students to write about a recent occasion during which they felt either lonely, depressed, jealous or socially anxious, following which they were asked to rate themselves in terms of how included or excluded they felt in the situation, as well as how they felt about themselves during the situation. Results of this study found a strong negative correlation between the extent to which they felt excluded and how they felt about themselves during the situation. Self-feelings included descriptions such as good, bad, ashamed, superior, proud, and negative self-feelings were reverse-scored so that high scores reflected more positive self-feelings. Another study by Leary et al. (1995b) explored the relationship between general feelings of exclusion / inclusion and trait self-esteem by asking 220 undergraduate students to indicate the extent to which they generally feel included / excluded.

This was measured using a nine-item scale designed for the study which included items such as “I often feel like an outsider in social gatherings”. Participants also completed two trait measures of self-esteem: Rosenberg’s Self-Esteem Scale (1965) and McFarland and Ross’s self-feelings scale (1982). As predicted they found moderate negative correlations between the degree to which individuals felt excluded and both measures of self-esteem. Whilst the authors argue that this study demonstrates that a general, pervasive feeling of exclusion is related to trait self-esteem, asking individuals to rate their general level of inclusion/exclusion however, may have presented a priming effect resulting in participants feeling excluded or included in that moment. As such their results may only indicate the relationship between situational feelings of exclusion and self-esteem, rather than general feelings of exclusion and trait self-esteem. Furthermore, these studies did not clarify the direction of the relationship between the two constructs and it could be that those with generally lower self-esteem are more likely to *perceive* that they are being rejected and excluded than those with higher self-esteem and as such it may not be that general perceptions of rejection *lead* to generally low self-esteem.

In order to determine the causal effects, Leary et al. (1995b) manipulated exclusion / inclusion by informing participants that they had either been included in a laboratory group or assigned to work alone, and that this was based either on other’s preferences or through random allocation, following which they were asked to rate how they felt about themselves on adjectives drawn from McFarland and Ross’ (1985) self-esteem factors. Tests of simple main effects found that inclusion-exclusion affected participants’ self-esteem, but only when attributable to the preference of the group ($F(1,104) = 18.55, p < 0.05$) rather than random allocation. Results also showed that self-esteem was only impacted by exclusion and not inclusion, whereby participants who thought they’d been included on the basis of group preference felt no better about themselves than those who thought they were included through random assignment ($F(1,104) = 1.42, p < 0.20$). These results suggest that self-esteem is related only to exclusion and not inclusion, and further that it is the fear of *exclusion* rather than of being *alone* that triggers low self-esteem.

A series of studies in 1998 further clarified the relationship, finding that rather than a linear relationship between exclusion/inclusion and self-esteem, the relationship levels out at either extreme (Leary, Haupt, Strausser, & Chokel, 1998). These studies involved four different approaches, one of which asked students to imagine they had been negatively or positively evaluated by another, two involved asking students to imagine they had been excluded or included by another, and one which manipulated students to believe they had *actually* been excluded or included by another. The degree of negative/positive evaluations in the first study

included 9 levels. Participants were asked to imagine that they had been rated by a professor on 30 adjectives. Very negative evaluations included ratings of 1-2 on the favourable adjectives and 8-9 on the unfavourable adjectives, and very positive evaluations included ratings of 1-2 on the unfavourable adjectives and 8-9 on the favourable adjectives. Degrees of inclusion and exclusion used in the second, third and fourth studies were 13, 18 and 13 respectively, ranging from absolute exclusion to absolute inclusion. In study two, participants were asked to imagine a 'date' had rated them against six questions that reflected the extent to which they wanted to spend time with them (e.g., sit next to them in class). Absolute rejection corresponded with 'absolutely not' ratings on all six questions, and absolute inclusion corresponded with 'absolutely yes' ratings on all six questions. Studies three and four involved similar imagined scenarios resulting in degrees of exclusion from absolute exclusion to absolute acceptance. Students then completed a range of measures including rating themselves on self-relevant emotions, the State Self-Esteem Scale (Heatherton & Polivy, 1991), Rosenberg's Self-Esteem Scale (Rosenberg, 1965), as well as rating how good or bad they felt about themselves following the imagined or actual exclusion/inclusion.

Across all four experiments the results consistently indicated that self-esteem was most affected by either moderately negative or positive evaluations or moderate levels of exclusion/inclusion. Put differently, participants were consistently most sensitive to moderate levels of exclusion and inclusion and proportionally less sensitive to extreme exclusion/inclusion or negative/positive evaluations. Ruling out methodological floor or ceiling effects because of the variety of independent and dependent measures employed, the authors suggest that these results indicate either that extreme evaluations lose credibility and are therefore discounted (as found in studies exploring the influence of other's perceptions on self-concept discussed above (Johnson, 1966; Webster & Sobieszek, 1974)), or that there is little utility in these extreme evaluations – one is either excluded or included and the consequences of being very included or very excluded are not likely to differ greatly from being moderately included or excluded.

Pyszczynski, et al. (2004) however, dispute the validity of the Sociometer Hypothesis, arguing that the evidence that Leary and colleagues present does not demonstrate that it uniquely supports their theory over TMT. For example, they argue that as most theories of self-esteem hold true a central tenet of the Sociometer Hypothesis – that self-esteem is contingent upon being liked and included – that the theory holds no utility as it is not distinct from other theories.

Pyszczynski, et al. (2004) also argue that given that random exclusion has been found to not impact self-esteem as detailed above (Leary et al., 1995b) this indicates that it is the *meaning* of exclusion (in terms of what it says about an individual's ability to live up to the standards of their worldview) that has impact rather than exclusion per se. They also argue that the fact that individuals are driven to excel and be the best even when their inclusion needs are met suggests that self-esteem isn't just about inclusion, and the fact that some people try to disassociate with groups that undermine their value, such as gender or age (Hummert, Garstka, O'Brien, Greenwald and Mellott (2002) also indicates that inclusionary status is not integral to self-esteem.

These arguments against the validity and utility of the Sociometer Hypothesis however, are predicated on the earlier version of the theory that proposed that self-esteem was simply an indicator of potential *exclusion*. In more recent years, Leary's (2005) theory was developed to construe self-esteem as a gauge of one's *relational value* to others rather than simply their inclusionary status. Leary (2005) defines relational value as the extent to which an individual regards their relationship with another as valuable or important, and defines self-esteem as "the valenced feelings that people have about themselves which rise and fall with changes in perceived relational value" (Leary, 2005 p.85). Whilst one's relational value will likely impact the degree to which one is accepted and included by others, not all events which are associated with self-esteem necessarily involve exclusion or inclusion. As such, Leary argues that the key determinant of one's self-esteem is an individual's concern about their relational value rather than their concern about being excluded. This very much supports the conceptualisation of SoNB and the related impact on self-esteem proposed by the current research in that SoNB was found to involve perceptions of not being valued, as well as not feeling that they mattered.

Leary and colleagues tested this assumption in various studies. In one experiment, individuals were told that others either wanted to interact or disassociate from them, and some were also told that this was based on the other individual incorrectly believing they had a stigma. They found that self-esteem was only related to disassociation for those who could not attribute the rejection to the stigma thus believing that their relational value was low (Leary, Rice & Schreindorfer, 2005). Whilst this could be explained by their indifference towards those who would reject them based on a stigma, a further study found that only those who believed they'd been excluded from a laboratory group because they were the worst group member rather than the best group member reported lower state self-esteem, suggesting again that it is one's perceived relational value rather than exclusion which triggers loss of self-esteem.

In further support of the connection between self-esteem and relational value, Leary draws on research that suggests that people's self-concept is related to their perceptions of what others think of them (e.g., Shrauger & Schoeneman, 1979; Harter, 1993). If how we feel about ourselves is so strongly predicated on how we believe others perceive us, then our self-evaluation is likely to be related to our perceived value to others. Thus, as discussed above, Leary et al., (1995b) found that individuals who had been assigned to work alone rather than as part of a group reported lower self-esteem but only when the exclusion was based on other's preferences rather than through random allocation. Furthermore, research has found that self-evaluations of certain characteristics are related to self-esteem when they are based not just on one's own ratings of certain characteristics but on the degree to which those dimensions are likely to result in disapproval or approval from others. MacDonald, Saltzmann and Leary (2003) for example found that the relationship between individual's self-evaluations on traits such as competence, attractiveness and sociability and self-esteem were moderated by the degree to which they thought those traits would lead to approval or disapproval by others.

In terms of the current research the Sociometer Hypothesis accounts for the range of attributory factors which are associated with SoNB. In the current research, SoNB did not emerge in response to just a fear of being excluded, but rather emerged from a concern that one did not add value, had no shared characteristics, or had no quality relationships, all of which are indicative of one's relational value rather than just exclusionary status. As such, the Sociometer Hypothesis offers support for the conceptualisation of SoNB and the related impact on self-esteem as was found in the current study.

The evidence presented above however, does not rule out the importance of worldview validation as proposed by Pyszczynski, et al. (2004). For example, the finding that self-evaluations are influenced by the extent to which individuals are approved or disapproved of by others (MacDonald, Saltzmann & Leary, 2003) is as likely to be the result of a concern about the validation of one's worldview as about concerns about one's relational value. Similarly, the factors that emerged around self-esteem (such as lacking self-belief) from the current study, as well as the attributes of the experience (adding value, shared characteristics, and quality relationships) could be accounted for by concerns around worldview validation as well as relational value. And indeed, the evidence is mixed in terms of whether individuals will prioritise belonging over worldview or vice versa. For example, some evidence suggests that individuals may forgo their need to belong in order to validate their worldviews, such as distancing oneself from groups who did not live up to their standards and values (Brewer, 1991), whereas other research has found individuals to sacrifice their values or present attitudes

contrary to their worldview in order to belong (Cialdini, Levy, Herman & Evenbeck, 1973; Lerner & Tetlock, 1999).

Gaillot and Baumeister (2007) however, offer some clarity as to the validity of both theories exploring the relationships between self-esteem, belonging and worldview validation through a series of studies. The first study investigated the relationship between trait self-esteem using Rosenberg's (1965) self-esteem scale, and belongingness (assessed using nine items from a scale developed by Leary, et al. (1995b) to assess social inclusionary status) and worldview validation (assessed through a nine item scale that assessed the extent to which others shared their values and beliefs as well as the extent to which they believed they were living up to those values and beliefs). This first study found a strong negative relationship between both measures and self-esteem, and demonstrated that the relationships with self-esteem remained significant after controlling for the other measure, suggesting both independently contribute to self-esteem. However, whilst the relationship between belongingness and self-esteem remained highly significant when controlling for worldview, the relationship between worldview and self-esteem was significantly weaker when controlling for belongingness, suggesting that belongingness may account for some of the relationship between worldview validation and self-esteem.

Their second study manipulated perceptions of worldview and belonging by asking participants to read a passage supporting the American cultural value of independence and how being alone or rejected met this value (Gaillot & Baumeister, 2007). Participants were then asked to write about a time when they either felt socially accepted or excluded. They hypothesised that those who were triggered to feel accepted would have lower self-esteem if worldview validation was more important than belonging, because being accepted would not live up to the value of independence. They found that those writing about acceptance had higher levels of self-esteem *despite* believing they were not living up to their worldview, suggesting that belonging influences self-esteem regardless of one's perception of worldview validation. It should be noted however, that whilst they did ensure only those participants who agreed with the value of independence (and as such held that as a worldview) were included in the study, it could be that they disagreed that being socially accepted conflicts with this value and as such being accepted may not have been seen as in conflict to their worldview.

The third study asked participants to write two essays about an important person in their life, one essay being about whether this person agreed with or disagreed with their worldview and the other about whether they felt socially accepted or rejected by them (Gaillot & Baumeister,

2007). This study found that those who wrote about being rejected socially by someone who agreed with their worldviews had significantly lower self-esteem than the other conditions, including writing about someone who disagreed with their worldviews but accepted them. Thus, worldview validation did not influence self-esteem over and above social rejection. This study suggests therefore that belonging has a stronger relationship with self-esteem than with worldview validation and indeed that perhaps rejection is most painful when rejected by someone who validates your worldview – perhaps because that individual's perception of you is important.

5.3.4.2 Threat to belonging and self-esteem

The relationship between not belonging and self-esteem is further supported by research that has found that *threats* to belonging are related to reductions in self-esteem and negative self-concept (Baumeister & Tice, 1990; Baumeister & Leary, 1995). For example, Levett-Jones and Lathlean (2009), in their qualitative study of student nurses found that not being trusted or appreciated by ward nurses was reported by their participants as leading to them feeling like they were in the way, were inadequate and inferior and with diminished self-worth. Clegg (2006) found that not belonging was related to perceptions of self-blame and inadequacy. Gailliot and Baumeister (2007) also found that perceived belongingness was related to self-esteem, as those who wrote about a social acceptance experience in their study had higher subsequent self-esteem scores than those who wrote about a social exclusion experience.

Similarly, a field study by Hitlan, Clifton, and DeSoto (2006) found high levels of perceived exclusion to be related to higher levels of threat to self-esteem. Their study explored gender differences in the impact of social exclusion on self-esteem and well-being at work and was based on findings that men tend to define themselves more in terms of their work performance than women (Nelson & Burke, 2002). As such, they predicted that workplace exclusion would have a greater impact on the self-esteem of men than women. They assessed exclusion using the Workplace Exclusion Scale (WES; Hitlan & Kelly, 2005) which assesses the extent to which participants perceive themselves to be excluded from activities and discussions by their peers or supervisor, such as being shut out of conversations or not being replied to in a reasonable time. Psychological impact was assessed using the Mental Health Index (Veit & Ware, 1983), and self-esteem assessed with two questions, one regarding the extent to which participants felt good about themselves, and the other asking how much they wanted to increase the perception that they were a good person. Their study found that higher levels of perceived exclusion for men were associated with lower levels of supervisor satisfaction, co-worker satisfaction and psychological well-being than women, as well as higher levels of self-esteem

threat. However, as their measure of self-esteem included only two items rather than an established and validated measure of self-esteem, this undermines the support their study offers to the relationship found between SoNB and self-esteem in the current research.

Not all research has demonstrated that a threat to belonging is associated with lower self-esteem. Twenge, Catanese and Baumeister (2002) for example, found no significant differences in reported self-esteem in participants who were told that no one wanted to work with them, or for participants told they were likely to end up alone. They propose that this is because individuals enter a defensive state of cognitive deconstruction to avoid distress, resulting in emotional numbness. Cognitive deconstruction is characterised by a lack of emotion, an altered sense of time, focus on the present rather than the future, an absence of meaningful thought, and lethargy (Baumeister, 1990; 1991). Twenge et al. (2002) argue that all of these characteristics serve to protect the individual from the experience of rejection and result in the observed emotional numbness. The details of their research and the implications for psychological impact of not belonging are explored in full in section 5.5 on 'emotional experience', and so will not be discussed here, except to propose that cognitive deconstruction may be one explanation for why some research finds no reduction in self-esteem in response to the experience of not belonging.

Another explanation for the lack of impact of belonging on self-esteem found in some studies can also be accounted for by the paradigm used in the research, as explored above in *Chapter 1*. For example, Blackhart, et al.'s (2009) meta-analysis of the impact of exclusion on affect and self-esteem found a significant difference in self-esteem between rejected and accepted participants, however, when compared to neutral controls the effect size was near to zero ($zr = 0.03$). They conclude that experimentally manipulated rejection may have no impact on self-esteem since relived past rejection (which whilst manipulated, does involve *real perceived* rejection) had a significantly larger effect in terms of difference between rejected and accepted participants, than any of the other paradigms. Similarly, the real-world studies explored in their meta-analysis found a significant impact of social rejection on self-esteem, although no control groups were involved. Blackhart, et al. (2009) suggest that the lack of impact from laboratory manipulations of rejection on self-esteem may be the result of individuals using defensive strategies, such as discrediting the rejecter, to maintain their self-esteem. Assessment of future strategies such as presenting the opportunity of derogating the rejecter may have helped to determine whether this strategy was in fact operationalised in the studies explored. It could also be that exclusion in a laboratory setting does not actually raise concerns about one's relational value and therefore, in accordance with the Sociometer Hypothesis (Leary, 2005)

would not result in a reduction in self-esteem. Again, the significant results in terms of self-esteem from non-laboratory studies lend weight to this argument, suggesting that real-life rejection, presumably from known others rather than strangers, may have a significantly greater impact on one's sense of belonging and perceived inclusionary status and relational value and therefore greater impact on one's self-esteem, as was found in the current study.

5.3.4.3 Summary

Taken together the extant literature regarding self-esteem offers strong support to the findings from the current study which found that the experience of not belonging in the workplace was strongly related to the individual's sense of self-esteem and self-worth. Indeed, this impact on self-concept emerged as the core concern of participants. Drawing on both TMT and the Sociometer Hypothesis, what appears to be critical to one's self-esteem is an individual's sense of *relational value* which is greatly impacted by SoNB.

5.3.5 Category summary

Self-concept emerged as the core concern of participants in the current study, in terms of the impact that SoNB had on self-efficacy, self-esteem, and a sense of a consistent and coherent self-concept. The importance of this construct to SoNB is supported by the literature that suggests that the self-concept develops through interaction with others and is informed by the perceptions, or perceived perceptions of others.

A critical element of the self-concept in the current study was the conflict in self-concept which arose from both the meaning that participants placed on having SoNB and their emotional response to it, as well as the conflict that arose from the way they behaved in an attempt to resolve the experience. The former finds support from cognitive dissonance theory (Festinger, 1957), and the impact this conflict was theorised to have on psychological well-being is supported by Self-Concept Clarity theory (Campbell, 1996) and Self-Concept Differentiation theory (Donahue et al. (1993) which demonstrate a relationship between deep-rooted identity conflict (Horton et al. 2014) and psychological well-being, particularly self-esteem and neuroticism. The literature around authenticity (Menard & Brunet, 2010) and imposter phenomenon (Leary et al., 2000) as well as the belonging literature (Belle et al., 2015) also supports the theoretical relationship proposed between the resolution behaviours undertaken and self-concept, particularly in terms of feeling able to be oneself and the proposed impact that this conflict has on psychological well-being.

There is also some support from the literature in terms of the impact of SoNB and self-efficacy, with Levett-Jones et al. (2009), Belle et al. (2015) and Pierce and Gardner (2004) finding

relationships between belonging and a sense of competence, and self-efficacy. Moreover, a wealth of research supports the relationship proposed by the current research between SoNB and self-esteem as well as the centrality of self-esteem to SoNB, positioning self-esteem as an alert mechanism to the threat to one's relational value (Leary 2005). Whilst some research has failed to find a relationship between perceived rejection and self-esteem (e.g. Twenge et al., 2002), these findings could be indicative of the differential impact of real perceived rejection in real-life settings which is more likely to threaten one's relational value than perceived rejection in a laboratory from unknown others.

The current research therefore, extends previous research by exploring SoNB and its consequences in a real-life setting, by positioning the self-concept as central to the experience, as well as by bringing together different aspects of this multi-faceted and complex phenomenon.

5.3.5.1 Theory development

Those extant theories with good conceptual fit to the proposed relationships have been integrated into the current theoretical model, resulting in some adaptations and elaborations, which are summarised in *Table 5.2*. In particular, the literature has elucidated the mechanisms by which some of those relationships may operate.

Research exploring Cognitive Dissonance Theory (Festinger, 1957) finds that inconsistent cognitions result in an aversive state and drive behaviour to resolve the consistency. As such, the inconsistent cognitions about the self that arise through a SoNB may create a cognitive dissonance which in turn stimulates the emotional and behavioural response.

Research exploring Self-Concept Clarity Theory (Campbell, et al. (1996) proposes that there may be a direct relationship between conflict in self-concept and self-esteem as their research found that those with low self-concept clarity also had low self-esteem, and Schwartz et al.'s (2011) longitudinal research suggests that self-concept clarity may impact self-esteem. This relationship between these two components of the self-concept in the current study is also proposed by Self-Concept Differentiation Theory (Donahue et al., 1993) which finds that a fragmented core identity is related to low self-esteem.

The Sociometer Hypothesis (Leary, 1990) also elucidates the mechanism and function of self-esteem arguing that low self-esteem alerts us to the threat to our relational value and motivates us to behave in ways that increase that value and our potential for acceptance. As such, this suggests that the proposed impact of SoNB on self-esteem may serve the purpose of alerting us

to a threat to our relational value to motivate behaviours to increase likelihood of acceptance (Sociometer Hypothesis, Leary, 1990).

This research has been integrated into the theoretical framework and added to the proposed relationships in *Table 5.2* (orange text). These additions have not resulted in new relationships, or new direction of relationships between the categories, however they have strengthened relationships proposed by the current model, which are reflected in changes in *Figure 5.IV* below.

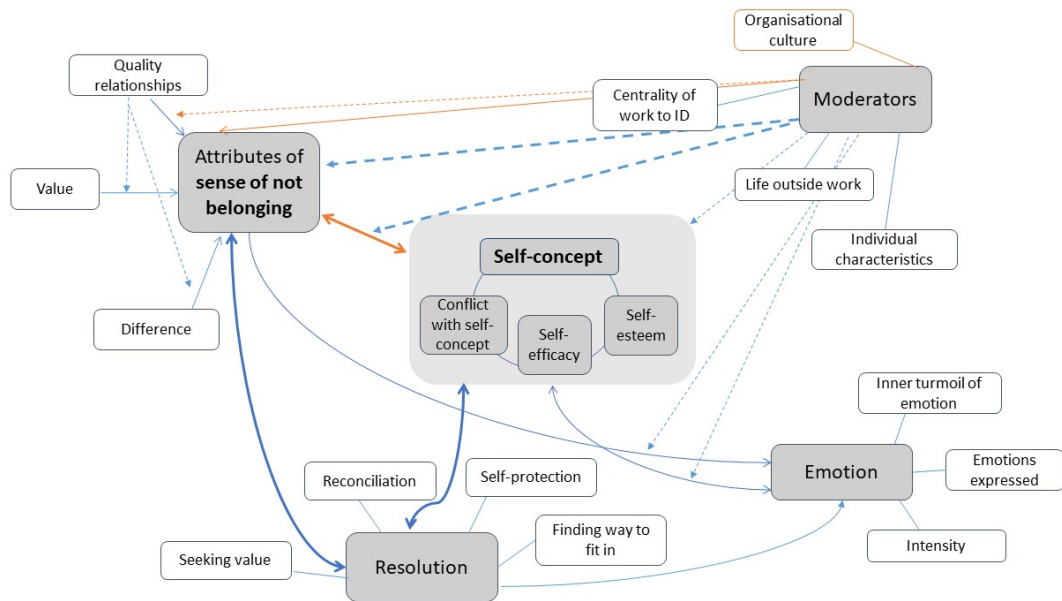


Figure 5.IV: Developed theoretical framework integrating the pertinent extant literature

CATEGORY	PROPOSED RELATIONSHIPS
Self-efficacy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – SoNB may negatively impact one’s sense of self-efficacy – Self-efficacy may negatively impact one’s self-esteem
Self-esteem	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – SoNB may negatively impact one’s self-esteem – SoNB may trigger low self-esteem to alert us to a threat to our relational value. This low self-esteem may in turn motivate behaviour to resolve SoNB (Leary, 1996) – Self-esteem may motivate behaviour to resolve SoNB – Self-esteem may impact one’s emotional experience – Self-esteem may be negatively impacted by one’s emotional experience
Conflict with self-concept	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – SoNB may negatively impact one’s sense of a consistent self-concept – SoNB may result in a cognitive dissonance in terms of inconsistent self-cognitions (Festinger,1957) – Finding a way to belong resolution behaviours may negatively impact one’s sense of a consistent self-concept

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – <i>Self-protection resolution behaviours may negatively impact one’s sense of a consistent self-concept</i> – <i>One’s emotional experience may negatively impact one’s sense of a consistent self-concept</i> – <i>Conflict with self-concept may negatively impact one’s emotional experience</i> – <i>Conflict with self-concept may negatively impact one’s self-esteem (Campbell et al., 1996; Donahue et al., 1993)</i>
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Table 5.2: Development of the theoretical framework incorporating extant literature

5.4 Resolution

As discussed in *Chapter Four*, a key category in SoNB emerged as the resolution strategies that individuals employed in order to resolve the experience. These strategies included active engagement strategies, designed to enhance the individual’s sense of value and purpose; acceptance and identity strategies, designed to help them to fit in and belong; avoidance and detachment strategies designed to protect the individual from the pain or threat of the experience; and reflection and acceptance strategies designed to help individuals to reconcile themselves with the experience and move on. It also emerged from the research that these cognitive and behavioural responses, as well as being motivated by a desire to belong, also occurred in response to the impact on self-concept both in terms of undermining their self-efficacy, self-esteem and sense of an integrated and unified sense of self, as well as in response to their emotional experience.

Critically, whilst some of these strategies were constructive and served to resolve the experience, many were not and served to perpetuate or exacerbate the experience, both in terms of enhancing SoNB and undermining self-concept. As such, the relationship between the core concern of self-concept and resolution is theorised to be bi-directional, with self-concept both motivating cognitions and behaviours and those cognitions and behaviours also impacting the self-concept. The latter relationship was explored above under 5.3.2.2.1 ‘authenticity and ability to be oneself’, whereas the literature that illuminates the theoretical relationships proposed between self-concept and possible resolution strategies will be explored below: specifically, what processes may be involved that motivate certain cognitive and behavioural responses when the self-concept is undermined?

5.4.1 Theoretical relationship between self-concept and resolution strategies: How the search for consistency and self-worth drives thoughts and behaviour

In considering the cognitive, emotional and behavioural responses to a conflict in self-concept presented by, in the case of the current research, SoNB, there is some divergence in the extant

theories in terms of whether these responses are driven by a need to address the conflict presented and are therefore motivated by consistency, or by a need to enhance self-worth, and are therefore motivated by self-esteem.

5.4.1.1 Consistency motivation

Cognitive dissonance theory proposes that inconsistent cognitions lead to an aversive reaction which in turn motivates individuals to resolve the inconsistency to maintain consonance (Festinger, 1957). Festinger argues that cognitive consistency is a ubiquitous and fundamental motive that drives cognition and behaviour. Many of the early studies which explored this theory involved the induced compliance paradigm (Festinger & Carlsmith, 1959) and argued that the change in attitude induced was an indication of cognitive dissonance. A common methodology was to offer an individual either a low or high incentive to change their evaluation of a given target, such as reporting to another student that a task they had previously rated as boring was in fact interesting. Studies of this nature found that under high incentive conditions (\$50 incentive to display counter-attitudinal behaviour such as rating the task as interesting) participants were less likely to change their attitudes than under low incentive conditions. This is argued to be because the high incentive provides a *justification* for the behaviour so that there is no need to change their attitude to match that behaviour, whereas a low incentive is insufficient to justify the behaviour, creating an experience of dissonance between behaviour and attitude and therefore resulting in a change in attitude to resolve the inconsistency (Gawronski, 2012). Free choice experiments (Brehm, 1956) have also found that individuals rate a chosen object more favourably than a rejected object when participants realise the rejected object has more positive features or the chosen object has more negative features, even when participants have rated them both similarly beforehand. It is argued that individuals reframe the chosen object by emphasising positive characteristics in order to resolve the inconsistency between their current evaluation and their past behaviour.

Gawronski (2012) argues that the aversive reaction of dissonance that arises from such inconsistencies provides a cue to the individual that there are errors in their system of beliefs motivating changes in thinking, reasoning and behaviour in addition to attitude change, in order to resolve the inconsistency. He argues therefore that inconsistency which leads to cognitive dissonance may be resolved through attitude change, through behaviour change or through strategies such as situational attribution. However, if, irrespective of changes in behaviour or attributions, attitudes are still not changed then it is likely that the dissonance remains as the past behaviour would still be inconsistent with current attitudes.

Indeed, in terms of the current research, cognitive dissonance theory would predict that the threat to participants' self-consistency that was presented by the experience of not belonging or by the way they behaved in order to attempt to belong, could be resolved by changing their attitudes. Taking conformity as an example, in order to fit in and be accepted individuals may have changed their attitude towards a decision or a way of working. By changing their attitude and the consequential behaviour (not arguing their case) they would be able to maintain a consistent and positive sense of self because their attitudes would be consistent with the way they behaved. However, the theoretical relationship between self-concept and resolution arose primarily because participants reported that they felt *inauthentic* in the way they were behaving, or felt in conflict with who they knew themselves to be. As such, whilst cognitive dissonance may explain the cognitive mechanism that connects their resolution behaviours to the conflict in their self-concept in that the way in which they behave to resolve the experience creates a cognitive dissonance, the theory does not account for their (in)ability to resolve that conflict.

Self-consistency theory (Aronson, 1968, 1999), similar to cognitive dissonance theory (Festinger, 1957) argues that individuals are driven to maintain consistent self-concepts and as such, rather than inconsistent cognitions resulting in dissonance between attitudes and behaviour, what creates dissonance is how those cognitions reflect upon the self-concept (Aronson, 1968, 1999). The aversive experience of dissonance therefore is argued to be due to the inconsistency between the cognition or act and one's self-concept. This would explain the dissonance that was theorised to emerge in the current study from the inconsistency presented by the experience of not belonging with one's self-concept of being competent, credible, and of worth. Interestingly however, this theory also predicts that those with low self-esteem will experience *less* dissonance in response to events or cognitions which present a negative view of the self because that self-relevant information is *consistent* with their self-view (Swann, Griffin, Predmore & Gaines, 1987). As a critical experience of the participants in the current study was low self-esteem, this theory would predict that participants should not have experienced an inconsistency between not belonging and their self-concept. However, only two individuals in the current research suggested that they had low *trait* self-esteem; the low self-esteem reported by most participants in the current research was state self-esteem, associated with the experience of not belonging. For the two low trait self-esteem individuals however, the theory would predict that they would primarily engage in behaviours that *supported* their negative self-concept. This could therefore, account for the behaviours that emerged as part of the avoidance strategies, in terms of avoiding responsibilities, not fulfilling potential, or taking

stretching roles, as was found in the current research and articulated by JASON: “*I could limit the scope of my ambitions, or limit the scope of what I felt I should be doing...and that kind of just fed into a sort of growing negative feeling about my abilities anyway.*”

For the majority of participants however, the low self-esteem that emerged from the experience *would* present an inconsistency with their self-concept, and as such would motivate behaviours designed to address that inconsistency, which would account for the active engagement strategies. However, those participants who indicated low trait self-esteem did also report times when they engaged in strategies that would add value, and those who did not indicate low trait self-esteem also reported times when then engaged in self-protection strategies. Self-consistency theory therefore doesn't adequately account for all of the behaviours observed. It does however, offer some support to the moderating role of individual characteristics, in that the relationship between the self-concept and resolution strategies might be moderated by low trait self-esteem.

5.4.1.2 Self-integrity and self-worth motivation

In comparison to theories of cognitive dissonance, Steele's (1999) *Self-Affirmation Theory* argues that our response to dissonance, whether cognitive or behavioural, is not about addressing the inconsistency in espoused attitudes or cognitions, but is about addressing the *threat* that the inconsistency poses to one's sense of global self-integrity. Self-integrity is defined as the belief that the self is “*adaptively and morally adequate...competent, good, coherent, unitary, stable, capable of free choice, capable of controlling important outcomes...*” (Steele, 1988, p.262). Dissonance therefore occurs when one engages in behaviour or is presented with information about the self that threatens their self-integrity.

Steele supports his argument with a series of studies exploring different aspects of his theory. Firstly, Steele presents evidence that demonstrates that dissonance can be eliminated by affirming an aspect of the self unrelated to the dissonance causing act. This was demonstrated through a classic dissonance experiment in which individuals were manipulated to believe that by virtue of their particular community membership they were considered to be uncooperative with community projects (relevant name condition), or were considered to be bad drivers (irrelevant name condition). As predicted by dissonance theory, those in the relevant name condition were found to offer twice as much help to a food co-op project than controls, theoretically in order to reaffirm their self-perception that they were in fact cooperative people. However, those in the irrelevant name condition were also found to offer twice as much help to the food project as controls. As being cooperative should have no impact on one's self-

perception of being a good driver, the authors conclude that what is important is maintaining a *general sense of self* as a good person rather than addressing the specific threat to one's self concept (Steele, 1975). They argue that the threat to one's sense of self activates a self-affirmation system, an ego-protective system designed to maintain a sense of global integrity and self-worth.

They further support their argument using the free-choice paradigm discussed above. In one experiment, participants who had previously strongly opposed a tuition fee increase were asked to write an essay, ostensibly to balance the views presented, that supported an increase in fees, and were then again asked to express their attitudes towards tuition fees. As predicted by dissonance theory, those in a high choice condition (who had a choice of whether to write the essay) displayed greater attitude change than those in the low choice condition (who did not have a choice as to whether to write the essay) (Steele & Lui, 1983). However, the authors added an additional condition in which subjects were classified as either having a strong economic-political value orientation or no such orientation. They were then, in between the essay writing and subsequent attitude measure, given the opportunity of completing an Economic-Political subscale. As predicted they found that completing the scale significantly reduced the attitude change for those with an economic-political value orientation but not for those without. They concluded that completing the scale *affirmed individual's self-concept* and reduced the dissonance, supporting their proposition that what is important is the threat presented to one's overall sense of self, rather than addressing the specific inconsistency. Once a sense of self had been restored the inconsistency was tolerated, as evidenced by the reduction in compliance behaviours. Therefore, rather than a concern with the inconsistency, what this theory suggests is important in dissonance motivation is what the threat says about who an individual considers themselves to be, and the threat that it poses to one's sense of integrity and self-worth. Whilst not empirically evidenced, Steele does argue that what is also important is that whilst one can restore the integrity of the self through sustaining self-images unrelated to the specific threat, those self-images must be as important to the individual as the aspect of self being threatened. This may explain why it appears that the centrality of work to one's identity may be related to the intensity and duration of the experience – for some people it may be hard to find a self-image that reaffirms one's sense of self-worth that is as important as that provided by one's work.

This theory also supports the theoretical relationships proposed by the current research between the conflict in self-concept and resolution strategies, in terms of how individuals addressed the inconsistency presented by what having the experience said about them (I

thought I was competent, I'm not; I thought I was resilient, I'm not). This might be particularly true for strategies that involved attempts to add value or throw themselves into something that played to a strength, in that these behaviours do address the individual's overall sense of self-worth and integrity. This would not however, explain self-protection or fitting in strategies, such as conforming or withdrawing, as these don't serve to enhance self-worth.

The self-enhancement perspective, similar to self-affirmation theory, proposes that individuals have a basic human need to enhance self-esteem (Dipboye, 1977; Sedikides, Gaertner & Tosuchi, 2003) and that when the self-concept is threatened by negative self-relevant information individuals are motivated to find ways to enhance their self-views or protect themselves from negative information. In terms of the current research, this would suggest that resolution strategies are driven by the impact of SoNB on self-esteem, and would predict that rather than addressing the conflict presented by the undermined feelings of self-worth, the active engagement strategies were driven by an attempt to find ways to enhance a sense of worth and that the self-protective strategies that emerged were engaged in in order to avoid failure and further erosion of self-esteem (Campbell, 1990; Pierce & Garner, 2004).

Self-consistency and self-enhancement theories therefore, offer very different predictions in terms of what motivates the behaviour of those with negative self-views: Achieving a consistent sense of self or a positive sense of self (Swann et al. 1987). However, the *Stability Contingent Theory* (Dipboye, 1977), argues that whether behaviour is driven by a need to maintain consistency or self-worth is contingent upon the stability of one's self-esteem. The theory proposes that self-esteem stability will moderate reactions to self-relevant information and predicts that those with unstable self-views will be more prone to search for enhancement whereas those with stable self-views will be more driven by consistency. Self-esteem stability refers to the "magnitude of short-term fluctuations that people experience in their contextually based, immediate feelings of self-worth" (Kernis, 2005; p.1572). An unstable self-esteem reflects a vulnerable and fragile sense of self-worth that is influenced by self-relevant events, including external cues such as being rejected, or internal cues such as attributing failure to oneself (Kernis, 2005).

The stability-contingent theory suggests that those with stable positive self-views will not need to seek enhancement and therefore will be more concerned with consistent sense of self, and those with stable negative self-views will presumably have become accustomed to their negative self-views which would have been developed through extensive experience, and as such will likely not believe they *can* enhance their self-views and will therefore be more

concerned with maintaining consistency. Those with *unstable* self-views however, are likely to have an insecure sense of self and will therefore be more driven to find ways to enhance their self views.

Some support for the impact of stability of self-esteem and level of self-esteem on outcomes such as psychological adjustment and self-assessment has been found. For example, early studies found self-esteem instability to be positively correlated with psychological maladjustment (Brownfain, 1952), and with depression, anxiety and psychosomatic symptoms and these correlations held when level of self-esteem was controlled (Rosenberg, 1979). A further study by Kugle, et al. (1983) found *unstable* self-esteem (as determined by the level of agreement between assessments of self-esteem taken four months apart) to be positively related to self-assessment biases that enhanced self-worth, whereas *level* of self-esteem did not correlate with self-assessment bias.

Applied to the current study, the stability-contingent hypothesis would predict that the low self-esteem that was associated with the experience of not belonging would drive behaviours and cognitions designed to enhance a consistent sense of self for those with stable low self-esteem, but would drive behaviours designed to enhance a sense of self-worth for those with unstable self-esteem. Given that a critical phenomenon implicated in the current research is the lack of clarity that emerges in individual's self-concept and the conflict that emerges within individual's identity, it is likely that SoNB would result in an *unstable* self-view and therefore the most powerful driver of behaviour would be self-enhancement. This would better account for the range of behaviours reported in that active engagement strategies would enhance self-worth through adding value, and self-protection strategies would enhance self-worth through the avoidance of scenarios which might present opportunities for failure and further damage to one's self esteem.

However, a comprehensive study by Wells and Sweeney (1986) failed to support the stability-contingent hypothesis. In their study 1508 adolescents were assessed for self-esteem stability using both the Stability of Self-Esteem Scale (Rosenberg, 1965) and by calculating the agreement in scores of the Rosenberg's Self Esteem Scale (Rosenberg, 1965) over two time points. Bias in self-assessment was determined by subtracting participant's self-assessments of academic ability from objective measures (grades, reading, and general intelligence). Across all measures their multiple regression analyses were consistent in that those with high and unstable self-esteem rated themselves more favourably than those with low and unstable self-esteem, and that overall subjects with high self-esteem, irrespective of stability, rated

themselves more favourably than those with low self-esteem. As such, their findings support the self-consistency theory in that self-assessments were consistent with levels of self-esteem. However, no other study that directly explored the stability-contingent theory has been conducted and as such it is not possible to directly verify their findings. It could also be however, that irrespective of the stability of self-esteem, humans have a stronger drive to enhance their sense of self-worth than they have to enhance their sense of a consistent sense of self.

5.4.1.3 Summary

The research explored above provides some insight into the mechanisms and processes that might be involved in the theoretical relationships proposed, specifically between the self-concept and the resolution strategies. Some theories propose that when the sense of self is undermined by SoNB this drives behaviours designed to maintain a consistent sense of self, whether that sense of self is typically positive or negative, whereas others propose that behaviours are driven by a need to enhance a sense of self-worth and self-integrity. Other theories further propose that whether behaviours are driven by a need to enhance a consistent or positive sense of self is contingent upon the stability of the self-esteem. Findings from the current study however, could provide evidence of *both* types of theory in that the minority of individuals with low trait self-esteem did report engaging in more self-protection behaviours that would not enhance their self-worth but might be consistent with their sense of self. However, most of the resolution strategies employed could be considered attempts to enhance self-worth either through actively seeking ways to add value or to belong, or through protecting themselves from a threat to their sense of self-worth. As the current study did not directly explore either state and trait self-esteem or self-esteem stability it is hard to draw conclusions as to the precise nature of the relationships, and further research is needed to clarify those relationships. However, the extant research does support the current research which proposes that resolution behaviours are driven by the impact of SoNB on one's self-concept either in terms of diminishing a coherent or positive sense of self.

Both self-consistency theory and stability contingent theory also support the current research by implicating a moderating role for individual characteristics, in that the extent to which SoNB might present a conflict to a sense of self might be contingent on trait self-esteem, and that the resolution strategies chosen might be similarly contingent upon trait self-esteem or stability of self-esteem, which will be explored below in 5.6 'moderators'.

5.4.2 Coping – definitions and outcomes

The resolutions strategies that emerged from the current research and discussed thus far can be conceptualised as *coping* strategies, and as such a review of the literature around the definitions and outcomes of coping strategies is pertinent to the current study. Coping has been defined in many ways. Whilst some researchers have taken a trait approach, classifying individuals as to their coping preferences and styles (e.g., Haan, 1969; Vailant, 1977), others take a process approach, considering coping strategies to be contingent on both individual factors, such as personality characteristics and competence, as well as situational factors and the nature of the stressor, such as controllability, immediacy and intensity (Holoohan & Moos, 1987; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; Pearlin & Schooler, 1978). From a process perspective, coping has been defined as “constantly changing cognitive and behavioural efforts to manage specific external and / or internal demands that are appraised as taxing or exceeding the resources of the person” (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984, p.141.).

Lazarus and Folkman’s (1984) transactional model of coping suggests that coping behaviour is determined by the individual’s cognitive appraisal of the stressor as well as the situational characteristics, and the effectiveness of this strategy is contingent on the appropriate match between the characteristic and the strategy chosen – the matching hypothesis (Lazarus, 1993). As will be explored below, the strategies employed by individuals to manage these demands can serve to both diminish or exacerbate the impact of these stressors on both immediate emotional distress and cognitive functioning as well as long-term health and well-being (Skinner, Edge, Altman & Sherwood, 2003). As such, the coping strategies employed by individuals to manage SoNB can, as was seen, potentially either reduce or amplify the impact of the experience and therefore result in either its resolution, perpetuation or magnification.

The literature offers a plethora of categorisations, typologies and hierarchies which attempt to classify the different ways in which people cope with stressors, and the specific cognitions and behaviours in which they engage (Skinner et al., 2003). Whilst simplified distinctions have been made such as between problem versus emotion coping, engagement versus disengagement, and accommodative versus meaning-focused (see Carver & Connor-Smith, 2010), in a thorough and comprehensive review of the literature incorporating more than 100 coping assessments and over 400 ways of coping, Skinner et al. (2003) argue these distinctions are fraught with issues of functional homogeneity (with some lower order factors within these broad categories lacking clear and consistent associations with outcomes or antecedents) and functional distinctiveness (with lower order factors often being classifiable in different higher order categories). Rather, Skinner et al. (2003) identified 13 potential core families of hierarchical

Chapter Five – Review and discussion of the literature

systems of coping, detailed below in *Table 5.3*. Whilst a full empirical examination of the validity of these hierarchies is beyond the scope of this thesis, Skinner et al.'s (2003) proposed classification includes categories that have either been empirically tested, or based on comprehensive reviews and rational classification. These higher order categories and their constituent lower order ways of coping are detailed in *Table 5.3*.

Higher order family of coping	Lower order ways of coping
Problem solving	Instrumental action
	Direct action
	Decision making
	Planning
Support seeking	Comfort seeking
	Help seeking
	Spiritual support
Escape	Avoidance
	Disengagement
	Denial
Distraction	Acceptance
Cognitive restructuring	Positive thinking
	Self-encouragement
Rumination	Intrusive thoughts
	Negative thinking
	Self-blame
	Worry
Helplessness	Inaction
	Passivity
	Giving up
Social withdrawal	Self-isolation
Emotional regulation	Emotional expression
	Self-calming
Information seeking	Observation
	Monitoring
Negotiation	Offer exchange
	Compromise
	Prioritising
Opposition	Aggression
	Blame others

Table 5.3: Drawn from Comparison of multidimensional higher order coping categories from six hierarchical systems and reviews (Skinner, et al., 2003)

Chapter Five – Review and discussion of the literature

These ways of coping and categorisations reflect those strategies that emerged in the current research, as well as the distinctions that were drawn between the different types of coping. For example, 'seeking value' may constitute strategies employed in the problem-solving family, 'finding a way to fit in' may constitute strategies employed in the negotiation family, 'self-protection' may constitute strategies employed in the escape, social withdrawal or helplessness families, and 'reconciliation' may constitute strategies employed under the cognitive restructuring or emotional restructuring families of coping.

Welbourne, Eggerth, Hartley, Andrew and Sanchez (2007) explored whether choice of coping style employed in the workplace could be determined by attributional style. As explored in *Chapter One*, attributional style refers to the stable tendencies that individuals have to interpret and explain events as attributable to internal or external forces, stable or unstable causes, and are global or situation specific (Abramson, Seligman & Teasdale, 1978). A positive attributional style is one which attributes positive events to internal, stable and global causes and negative events to external, temporary and situation-specific causes. Conversely, a negative attributional style attributes positive events to external, unstable and situation-specific causes and negative events to internal, stable and global causes (Abramson et al., 1979; Peterson, Semmel, Von Baeyer, Abramson, Metalsky & Seligman, 1982).

Welbourne et al.'s, (2007) study of American nurses measured coping style using the Brief COPE (Carver, 1997), workplace attribution style using the Occupational Attributional Style Questionnaire (OASQ; Furnham, Sadka & Brewin, 1992) which assesses whether individuals have a positive or negative attributional style. The authors found that positive attributional style was related to problem-solving/cognitive restructuring strategies and negative attributional style related to avoidance strategies. As such, these studies support the role of attribution processes and the meaning that individuals place on experience in determining behaviour as proposed by the current research, and the importance of taking a symbolic interactionist approach to understanding drivers of behaviour.

In terms of the *outcomes* of the employment of these different coping strategies, past research largely supports that of the current research. For example, in a meta-analysis of 34 studies, Penley, Tomaka and Wiebe (2002) investigated the relationship between different coping strategies and physical health and psychological health outcomes, including depression, life appraisal, mood, and anxiety. Their analysis found that, broadly speaking, problem-focused strategies which involve strategies such as making changes, compromise, and decision making, were generally associated with positive health outcomes, particularly psychological health

outcomes, as such strategies would likely lead to tangible solutions to problems (Welbourne, et al. 2007). Avoidance strategies, such as taking drugs and keeping issues to oneself, and distancing strategies involving withdrawal or denial, were both associated with negative psychological outcomes, often resulting in exacerbated situational outcomes due to factors such as the avoidance of problem-solving, increased anxiety (Folkman & Lazarus, 1988a), or alienation (Folkman & Lazarus, 1988b). Similarly, confrontational coping involving aggression or blaming others was also associated with poor psychological outcomes through factors such as exacerbating interpersonal difficulties or straining interpersonal relationships (Folkman & Lazarus, 1986).

Research by Bowman and Stern (1995) suggests that the effectiveness of coping strategies in the workplace may be contingent on factors such as the controllability of the situation. Their study of Australian nurses asked participants to describe a work-related stressful situation that they had high control over and one which they had little control over. Coping strategies employed were measured using the Ways of Coping Checklist (WCC; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Occupational stress was measured using the Nursing Stress Scale (NSS; Gray-Toft & Anderson, 1981a). Outcome measures included the General Health Questionnaire (GHQ; Goldberg, 1978) assessing minor psychiatric disorders, the Positive and Negative Affect Scale (PANAS; Watson, Clarke & Tellegen, 1988), and perceived coping effectiveness. Their study found that problem-solving strategies were considered effective only in high-control situations, whereas problem-reappraisal strategies, involving efforts to reappraise the stressful event, were effective for both high and low control situations, and avoidance strategies, involving avoiding dealing with the problem were seen as ineffective for both low and high control situations. Bowman and Stern (1995) also found problem-solving and problem-reappraisal strategies to be positively related to positive affect whilst avoidance strategies were positively related to negative affect. Whilst this could suggest that the former strategies result in enhanced mood and the latter in more negative mood, it could also be the case that these moods determine the choice of coping strategy. As such, whilst problem-solving strategies may be useful in controllable situations, in situations that the individual is not able to change they may lead to frustration and result in perceived failure to resolve the situation. These findings support Lazarus and Folkman's (1984) matching hypothesis that proposes that effectiveness of coping is contingent on an interaction between the individual and the environment when cognitive appraisals of the situation result in a 'goodness of fit' between coping strategies and stressor characteristics (Park, Armeli & Tennen, 2004; Zakowski, Hall, Klein & Baum, 2001). They also support research which will be

discussed in the following section which implicates a role for the need for control in determining the choice of strategy employed to resolve the experience of not belonging.

5.4.2.1 Summary

In terms of the current research, the literature around copying strategies and outcomes, supports many of the theoretical relationships found between strategies employed and individual's ability to move on from the experience. For example, those who engaged in active strategies designed to add value or establish a purpose typically reported being able to resolve or mitigate the experience. For example JOANNE and ELAINE both engaged in seeking value strategies and both discussed an ability to resolve the experience. Similarly, those who were able to reconcile the experience, making sense of what was going on and accepting the impact that it had, such as ELAINE and SANDRA, also reported being able to resolve the experience. Others however, such as JASON and DELIA engaged at times in avoidance strategies such as withdrawal, which were designed to protect them from SoNB, and reported the experience to be unresolved in those instances, often perpetuating or exacerbating the experience compounding their SoNB or undermining their self-concept.

According to Bowman and Stern's (1995) research, the effectiveness of these strategies may have been impacted by the context of the situation, in that whilst both controllable and uncontrollable experiences of not belonging may be resolved by reconciliation strategies, active strategies may have only been successful in circumstance in which the individuals were able to control the situation, and the absence of control could have motivated more avoidance strategies. This was again found in the current research, and illustrated by NATHAN: *"So you, you become disengaged, because you don't believe that anything you do has any impact or purpose. And, you know, you can't see where the business is going, you can't see how you can influence it and it all just becomes so negative."*

5.4.3 Adaptive resolution strategies and belonging

The theoretical relationship proposed by the current research between the resolution strategies employed and the individual's ability to resolve the experience and establish a sense of belonging are also supported by the belonging literature which, as will be seen below also supports the findings that some of these strategies are adaptive and constructive (e.g. seeking value or cognitive acceptance) enhancing one's potential to belong, whilst others appear to be maladaptive (such as withdrawal, disengagement or detachment) further perpetuating or exacerbating the experience. The literature offers some interesting theories as to the processes

that may be involved and the potential reasons for the divergence in responses and outcomes across the literature.

As explored above in *Chapter Three*, Baumeister and Leary (1995) propose that belonging is an innate human need, and argue that the thwarting of this need should motivate behaviour to restore one's sense of belonging. Such behaviours include those designed to encourage development of relationships, pro-social and helpful behaviours, and increased engagement, as well as conformity behaviours and self-presentational tactics to convey a particular impression of oneself (Leary, 1995). Support for this adaptive response to not belonging is found in the literature. For example, Mohamed, Newton, and McKenna's (2014) study of belongingness amongst 437 Malaysian nurses found that in response to an open question regarding strategies employed in order to 'fit in', individuals reported undertaking a variety of strategies based on maintaining group harmony, such as practicing team work, always being willing to help, and always respecting team members. There is a possibility however, that their findings are influenced by the collectivist nature of the Malaysian culture of their sample, in that acceptance in Malaysian culture is gained through respect and obedience to those in authority.

In a similar study of American undergraduate students explored fully below, Maner, DeWall and Baumeister (2007) also found that socially excluded individuals showed more desire to engage in group work, to seek out social connections, were more positive about services that offered the chance of making friends, and perceived potential future friends as nicer and friendlier than accepted individuals (Maner, et al., 2007). Levett-Jones and Lathlean (2009) also found that one strategy reported by their student nurses with a diminished sense of belonging was working extra hard and trying to find ways to add value in order to enhance their chance of acceptance. Similarly, Elcock, Curtis and Sharples (2007) found that students worked to become an extra pair of hands in order to ingratiate themselves and to feel more included, even at the expense of their clinical learning experience. As such, the literature reflects the findings of the current research in that proactive and prosocial strategies designed to add value to the group emerged as a key theme.

5.4.3.1 Social monitoring as an adaptive strategy

Baumeister and Leary (1995) also propose that thwarting of the need to belong should lead individuals to direct attention towards socially relevant information in order to facilitate engagement in behaviours that would enhance one's inclusion status. Over a series of studies this proposition was explored by Gardner, Pickett and Brewer (2000). Specifically, they explored their theory of a Social Monitoring System (SMS) and whether the need to belong would

influence one's processing and recall of socially relevant events such that those high in the need to belong would recall more socially relevant events than those low in the need to belong. Their SMS theory builds on Leary's (1999) Sociometer Hypothesis, as explored above, and suggests that whilst self-esteem may function as an indicator of one's inclusionary status, the SMS provides the integrative mechanism that monitors the environment, identifies socially relevant information and guides behaviour towards obtaining inclusion and avoiding rejection (Pickett, Gardner and Knowles, 2004).

Pickett, et al. (2004) also propose that, much like the Sociometer Hypothesis, the SMS may be calibrated, in that some individuals, either because of a lack of social ties, or because of a trait-like, high need to belong, may have a chronically heightened sensitivity to social cues. Importantly, however, they make a clear distinction between social monitoring and rejection sensitivity (Horney (1937), (which will be explored below) in that they propose that the SMS is sensitive to both cues for rejection *and* acceptance, rather than being biased towards perceiving and responding only to perceptions of rejection. Whilst rejection sensitivity is defined as a characteristic response to threat of rejection involving attempts to affiliate with the rejecter interspersed with hostility, interpersonal sensitivity is defined as "the ability to sense, perceive accurately, and respond *appropriately* to one's personal, interpersonal, and social environment." (Bernieri, 2001, p.3). As such, Pickett et al. (2004) propose that the SMS is an *adaptive*, self-regulatory mechanism that serves to enhance one's likelihood of being included.

In addition, Gardner et al. (2000) also explored whether any evident effect on the recall of socially relevant events would be influenced by the type of exclusion event in terms of whether it was relevant to interpersonal or collective rejection. As explored above under 5.3 'self-concept', Brewer and Gardner (1996) distinguish between relational and collective aspects of the self, the former being representative of the self in relation to specific others and the latter representative of the self in relation to a group. As such, Gardner et al. (2000) argue that these two elements might represent different needs. Thwarting of the need for interpersonal relationships therefore, should result in increased sensitivity specifically towards interpersonally relevant social information whereas thwarting of the need for collective belonging should result in increased sensitivity specifically towards collectively relevant social information.

These hypotheses were explored through a series of studies over some years. The first of these involved participants interacting via a computer with four other individuals (Gardner et al., 2000). During their online discussions the responses of the others in the group were

manipulated so as to either induce interpersonal rejection (through the four others continuing conversations in dyads at the exclusion of the participant), or collective exclusion (through the rest of the group uncovering a shared common interest that the participant did not have), or social acceptance (where the participant was explicitly accepted and included in the group discussion). Following this discussion, participants were asked to read diary entries of other participants which had been coded as either individual positive events, individual negative events, collective positive events, collective negative events, relational positive events, relational negative events, or neutral events. They were then later asked to recall as many events as possible. The authors found that participants who had been either interpersonally or collectively rejected recalled significantly more socially relevant events (both interpersonal and collective) than did those who had been accepted. They also found a negative correlation between the extent to which participants rated that they felt included and recall for socially relevant events, both of which suggest that the need to belong *does* bias recall of socially relevant events. Similarly, they found no effect for the valence of the event in that rejected participants recalled more of both positive and negatively valenced events, suggesting that it was the social nature of the events that was important to recall rather than the valence. However, no distinction was found between the recall of interpersonal and collective events for those who had been interpersonally or collectively rejected.

To explore whether this was the result of their interpersonal/collective rejection manipulation Gardner et al. (2000) conducted a second experiment whereby dyadic rejection and dyadic acceptance involved participants being interviewed by another individual online. Towards the end of this interview participants were asked to express their opinions on a matter and received either *affirming* responses from the interviewer, in that they agreed with them, or *rejecting* responses in that the interviewer strongly disagreed with them. The discussions were then followed up with feedback sessions during which participants either received feedback that reaffirmed their rejection or acceptance by the individual or the group. The findings of this second study replicated those of the first, supporting the proposition that a high need to belong biases information processing in favour of attending to and recalling socially relevant events, but that the nature of the relationship from which they were rejected (dyadic or group) had no impact and resulted in enhanced attention to both interpersonal and collective social information.

In a later series of experiments Pickett, Gardner and Knowles (2004) replicated their findings using subtler, as well as more complex indicators of social cues. Specifically, they assessed the impact of exclusion and the need to belong (as measured using the Need to Belong Scale (NTBS;

Leary et al., 2001)) on an individual's ability to accurately identify vocal tone, emotional facial expressions, and empathy (through identifying feelings associated with another's description of a personal, emotional event). Through these later studies they also attempted to demonstrate the adaptive rather than maladaptive nature of their proposed social monitoring system in that rather than making individuals hypersensitive to negative social cues, as has been found with rejection sensitivity (Romero-Canyas, Downey, Reddy, Rodriguez, Cavanaugh, and Pelayo, 2010), they suggest that by increasing sensitivity to both cues for rejection *and* acceptance, the SMS serves to enhance one's potential for future inclusion.

Results of these later studies consistently supported their earlier studies with those high in the need to belong demonstrating more accuracy across all their measures, showing that heightened need to belong is associated with increased interpersonal sensitivity. They also found no effect for the valence of the social cues, such that excluded participants and those high in need to belong were more sensitive to both cues for belonging *and* cues for rejection. This, coupled with their findings that the perceptions made were *accurate* supports their proposition that the SMS is an adaptive mechanism, rather than one which biases individuals towards rejection sensitivity, and is designed to sensitise people to social cues and enhance their potential for inclusion.

Research by Hess and Pickett (2010) offers further support to the proposition that the experience of not belonging can encourage an adaptive response by enhancing our awareness of social cues. Their research built on Twenge et al.'s (2003) research (explored fully under the section 5.5 on '*emotional experience*') which suggested that rejected individuals avoid self-awareness in order to protect themselves from the pain of their social shortcomings. In their study Hess and Pickett (2010) explored the proposition that whilst rejection could lead one to avoid socially-relevant aspects of the self, it could at the same time, increase one's awareness of socially-relevant aspects of others which would serve to facilitate their social integration. As such, reducing self-awareness may be doubly adaptive in that it protects the self from the pain of rejection whilst at the same time increasing one's cognitive capacity by freeing up resources to pay more attention to socially-relevant aspects of others which may be important to one's ability to be included in the future.

To test this proposition Hess and Pickett (2010) employed the cyberball paradigm to explore the impact of rejection on ability to recall socially relevant information of either themselves or others. To do this they used a social memory paradigm developed by Gardner, Pickett and Brewer (2010) whereby participants were presented with a list of diary entries which included

either social, non-social or neutral events. To manipulate the target of awareness participants were asked to visualise that the author was either themselves, a friend or a stranger. Following a distraction task they were asked to then recall as many of the entries as possible. Results of their mixed ANOVA found that rejected participants exhibited significantly better memory for social events than accepted participants when the target was a stranger or friend but recalled significantly fewer social events when the target was themselves, supporting Twenge et al.'s (2003) finding that rejection diminishes self-awareness and supporting their hypothesis and the research above that suggests that exclusion enhances our sensitivity to social cues.

Whilst social monitoring did not emerge as a distinct construct in the current study it is reflected in the findings. In particular, the interpersonal sensitivity involved in social monitoring reflects heightened concern for social feedback, concern about the behaviour and comments of others, and fear of perceived or actual criticism of others (Boyce, Hickie, Parker, & Mitchell, 1993), and a key theme to emerge in the category of self-esteem was concerns about the perceptions of others. This concern emerged through many themes which illustrate a focus on interpersonal interactions and perceptions, such as concern about being respected, considered weak or incompetent, such as that expressed by LYDIA: *“And then they’d see me as aloof and snobby. And I wasn’t at all that. I think my quiet shyness comes from [being] afraid of rejection. So I over read, I think, I over examine, and then assume, usually the worst.”* As such, it is likely that an increase in interpersonal sensitivity was involved in the response processes to SoNB.

5.4.3.2 Conformity as an adaptive strategy

Another resolution strategy frequently found in the belonging literature in response to not belonging is conformity. Levett-Jones et al. (2007) for example, in their study of student nurses described above, found that their nursing students made the conscious decision to conform in order to be accepted, and that those with a diminished sense of belonging were more likely to conform and not to question nursing practices with which they were not comfortable (Levett-Jones and Lathlean (2009), suggesting their need to belong and be accepted was more important than the care that they delivered. Clegg (2006) found that their participants compromised themselves and moulded themselves in order to fit in and to belong. In a study of medical practitioners, Champion, et al. (1998) also found that in order to fit in, practitioners became ‘chameleons’, adapting and changing to suit their environment, and that the best way to fit in was to conform to established norms and practices. Similarly, Williams, Cheung and Choi’s (2000) study exploring the impact of social exclusion using the cyberball paradigm on conformity, which will be discussed below, found that ostracised participants conformed significantly more than included participants. This included measures of both the mean

percentage of times participants conformed to incorrect judgements made by others on a perception task, as well as the percentage of participants per group (included or excluded) who conformed at least once.

Leary and Cox (2008) propose that conforming behaviours are informed by normative influence in that the beliefs and actions of others provides information to the individual regarding socially acceptable ways to belong, encouraging conformity to these social norms through the individual's fear of being rejected. This concern for social acceptance can lead to both attitude acquisition and change, with individuals adopting attitudes that enhance their potential for acceptance, or *expressing* attitudes that differ from their own privately held beliefs and attitudes. Whilst conformity according to the belongingness perspective is natural and adaptive and allows individuals to assimilate with other groups and to be accepted (Leary & Cox, 2008), the dissonance between expressed and actual attitudes is likely to result in a conflict with identity and undermine one's sense of self and one's ability to be authentic, as was found in the current study and explored above under 5.3.2.2. As such, whilst the conformity behaviours found in the current and extant research in response to not belonging may be adaptive in that they enhance one's potential to be accepted, they also have implications for one's sense of a consistent and authentic self.

Adding weight to this interpretation is Hewlin's (2003) work on *Facades of Conformity* which she defines as "false representations created by employees to appear as if they embrace organisational values" (p.634). As such, her model challenges the implicit assumption made by cognitive dissonance theories that conformity will involve the *internalisation* of values and beliefs, with the individual *changing* their own values in the face of perceived pressure (Bass, 1961; Kiesler & Kiesler, 1969). Rather, in order to gain acceptance at work Hewlin argues that individuals *pretend* to embrace organisational values and *suppress* their own values to give the impression of conformity. Hewlin argues that conformity can be evident in all interactions in an organisation and can involve both emotional and behavioural facades. For example, conformity may be enacted through modelling others, expressing appropriate emotions or opinions, or wearing appropriate clothes (Ibarra, 1999; Hochschild, 1983; Rafaeli, Dutton, Harquail & Mackie-Lewis, 1997).

Hewlin (2009) explored whether organisational culture, perceived minority status, self-monitoring and collectivist vs individualist cultures would be significant antecedents of facades of conformity and whether facades would be related to emotional exhaustion – defined as the depletion of emotional energy in response to work demands (Maslach & Jackson, 1986) – and

intention to leave [see *Figure 5.V*]. Through a qualitative data collection phase in which participants were asked about times when they behaved in a manner inconsistent with their true feelings and suppressed their personal values, Hewlin (2009) developed a six item ‘facades of conformity’ measure which was administered to 238 MBA students, along with measures capturing intention to leave, collectivism vs individualism, perceived non-participatory environment and perceived minority status. Participative work environments are defined as those which encourage participation in decision making and diverse perspectives and values, and in which individuals feel safe expressing their personally held values (Evered & Selman, 1989). This is a culture which is resonant of the psychologically safe environment which was found in the present study to be implicated in SoNB. Minority status in Hewlin’s research involved ‘perceived’ minority status including age, ethnicity, gender, beliefs and values; characteristics which are likely to make the individual feel that they are different and stand out. As such, this research resonates with the perceived difference discussed in the present study in terms of different backgrounds, different levels of qualification, and different ages.

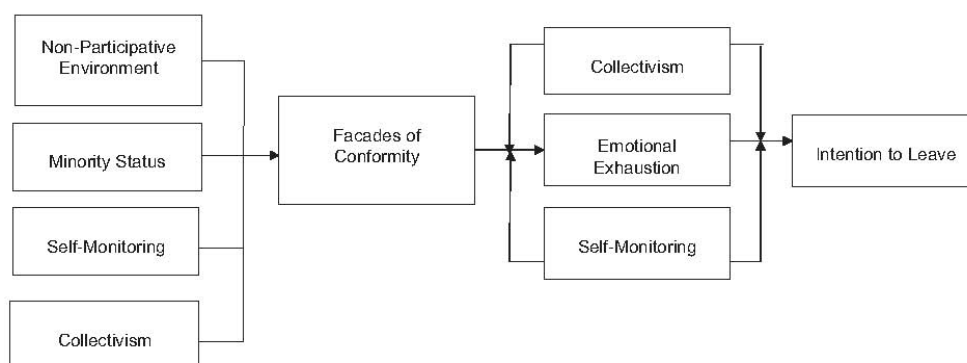


Figure 5.V: Hewlin’s model of Facades of Conformity (2009)

Hewlin’s (2009) research demonstrated that environments which were perceived to be unreceptive to diverse perspectives and values and discouraged participation in decision making were related to facades of conformity, as measured by Hewlin’s six item ‘facades of conformity’ scale. Similarly, perceived minority status was also related to facades of conformity as was self-monitoring, in that those who were more sensitive to external cues of how to behave engaged in more facades. Facades of conformity were also related to emotional exhaustion which in turn moderated one’s intention to leave. As such, whilst her research did not explore SoNB, it does provide evidence for the proposed relationship between conformity behaviours in which participants engaged in the current study, and three of the factors that emerged as either attributes to or moderators of SoNB: Perceived difference; psychologically unsafe

organisational cultures; and not adding value (through discouragement of participation in decision making). Her findings also speak to the potential cognitive dissonance presented by the facades that emerged in the current study. If, as Hewlin argues, conformity involves the creation of facades rather than actual change in attitudes, these will likely result in cognitive dissonance between those facades and actual attitudes. This offers further support to the theoretical relationship proposed in the current study between the resolution strategies employed and one's consistent sense of self explored under 5.3.2.2, in that conformity strategies may conflict with one's self-concept creating dissonance as well as impacting one's sense of self-worth in terms of being resolute and behaving with integrity.

5.4.3.3 Summary

The research above supports Baumeister and Leary's (1995) propositions as well as the current research, that thwarting the need to belong may motivate adaptive behaviours designed to enhance one's potential to be accepted and to belong, for instance by conforming to expected ways of thinking or behaving, or seeking ways to add value. As such, the belonging literature discussed thus far supports two of the resolution strategies found of 'seeking value' and 'finding a way to fit in'. Whilst social monitoring, which is proposed as a self-regulatory mechanism designed to enhance one's ability to be accepted and included (Pickett et al., 2004) did not emerge as a resolution strategy in the current research, there was clear evidence from the study that those with SoNB paid particular attention to the thoughts and perceptions of others. In addition, Hewlin's (2009) research supports the theoretical relationship proposed by the current study in terms of the impact of resolution strategies such as conformity on a consistent sense of self, and therefore whilst intentionally adaptive, may in fact result, as was proposed by the current research in a negative impact on self-concept as well as the inability to resolve the experience.

5.4.4 Maladaptive strategies employed to resolve SoNB

In contrast to attempts to seek value and fit in, many of the strategies employed, particularly those that involved withdrawal, avoidance or detachment, appeared to also be maladaptive in that they perpetuated or even exacerbated the experience of not belonging. This finding is supported by literature that finds associations between exclusion, rejection and not belonging and anti-social behaviours, described as self-defeating to the extent that they do nothing to enhance one's inclusionary status. The literature indicates that the reason behind this choice of strategy may be due to either a wilful lack of self-regulation or a perceived lack of control over the situation.

5.4.4.1 *Maladaptive strategies and self-regulation*

A study by Thau, Aquino and Poortvliet (2007) investigated whether individuals engage in self-defeating behaviours when there is a discrepancy between their desired and actual levels of belonging. They define self-defeating behaviours as behaviours that in the long run serve to *increase* rather than decrease the gap between actual and desired belonging. As such, these behaviours self-perpetuate the experience, increasing the sense of thwarted belonging. Actual and desired belonging was assessed using two versions of the Inclusion of Other in the Self Scale (IOS; Aron, Aron, & Smollen, 1992) which involved asking participants to indicate which of a series of pictures best represented the relations they *actually* have with their colleagues and which pictures indicate the relations they *desired* to have. Supervisor ratings of harmful behaviours were assessed using the Interpersonal Deviance Scale (Bennett & Robinson, 2000) and included behaviours such as cursing at someone at work. Helpful behaviours were assessed using the Helping Scale (Van Dyne & LePine, 1998) and included behaviours such as volunteering to do things for the team.

Results of their multilevel regression analysis found that those who perceived a discrepancy between their desired and actual belonging were reported by their co-workers as displaying more interpersonally harmful and less interpersonally helpful behaviours. The authors argue that their study demonstrates the sacrifice of long-term goals (of belonging) for the sake of short-term goals (although it is not made clear what these may be) and that the underlying mechanism may be a lack of self-regulation, which is explored further below. However, as their study was not longitudinal, they can only claim to find an *association* between these variables rather than make claims of causation. It could be the case that individuals who engage in interpersonally harmful behaviours report thwarted belonging because of the way that they behave. One strength of this study however, is that it does explore the experience of inclusion/rejection in the workplace and feeling unaccepted by people that are *known* to the participants rather than manipulated exclusion in a laboratory and by individuals that participants have no relationship with. As such, the methodology may better reflect the lived experience of not belonging in the workplace. Unfortunately, the measure of belonging employed was questionable as an overlap between individual and other identity which they capture with their IOS scale as an attribute of belonging has not been established in the literature, and as such the applicability of this research to the belonging literature requires further substantiation.

Other laboratory and field studies, as well as the current study however, have found many of the behaviours that emerge through the experience of not belonging and perceived exclusion

to be self-defeating. What is pertinent to the current study is *why* some individuals choose adaptive strategies whilst others chose maladaptive strategies. The Self-Regulation Perspective hypothesises that the choice to use maladaptive strategies is indicative of a *diminished* ability to self-regulate behaviour following rejection (Baumeister, 2005). Self-regulation is defined by Baumeister, DeWall, Ciarocco and Twenge (2005, p.590) as the “capacity to control or alter one’s responses”, and by Kanfer and Karoly (1972) as the overriding or inhibition of automatic behaviours, urges, impulses, emotions or desires that would otherwise interfere with goal-directed behaviour.

A series of studies investigating not belonging and self-control by Blackhart, Nelson, Winter and Rockney (2010) offered some support for the proposition that self-regulation is diminished following exclusion. In their first study belonging was assessed using the Perceived Acceptance Scale (PAS; Brock, Sarason, Shanhvi & Gurung, 1998) which assesses perceptions of acceptance through different relationships including mother, father, family in general, and friends. Self-control was assessed using the Self-Control Scale-Brief Version (SCS; Tangney, Baumeister & Boone, 2004) which assesses general, broad based control. Results of their correlational analysis found a significant relationship between acceptance by family and self-control and acceptance by friends and self-control, in that those higher in acceptance reported greater levels of self-control. Once again, it should be noted however, that no causality can be claimed and it could be that individuals are less accepted by friends and family *because* they exert less self-control.

Their second study manipulated belonging by asking participants to either create a list of names of their five closest friends (increased belonging condition) or to create a list of five names of people who were friends with their closest friend but not friends with them (decreased belonging condition). Self-control was measured by the number of cookies participants ate during a taste test. Results showed that those in the increased belonging group ate significantly fewer cookies than those in the decreased belonging condition. However, the authors did not include a manipulation check and as such it is not possible to confirm that SoNB was induced and that the results are therefore due to a decreased sense of belonging. Similarly, it is not possible to determine whether those in the decreased belonging group exhibited *less* self-control or that those in the increased belonging group exhibited *more* self-control, as a control group was not involved. Indeed, their third study which explored the impact of the same belonging manipulation on delayed gratification (operationalised through the choice of options that provided short term or long term gain) *did* include a control group and whilst finding that those in the increased belonging group exhibited significantly more control than those in the decreased belonging or control groups, there was not a significant difference between the

decreased belonging and control group. As such, rather than indicating that exclusion results in decreased self-control their study in fact indicates that *increased* belonging *increases* self-control and that *decreased* belonging has no impact. Moreover, as self-control and self-regulation are argued to be adaptive processes designed to enhance one's likelihood of social acceptance (Baumeister and Leary, 1995) then indicators of a *lack* of self-regulation should involve an inability to control behaviours that might exacerbate one's inclusionary status, which eating a biscuit and making safe choices cannot be argued to do.

Baumeister, Twenge and Nuss (2002) do however, offer some support for the self-regulation perspective through research which explored the impact of social exclusion using the future alone paradigm detailed in *Chapter One* which includes three conditions: Participants imagine a future involving being alone; a future involving belonging; or a future involving misfortune. Outcome measures included mood (as measured by PANAS (Watson, et al., 1988)) and cognitive performance. The latter was measured through IQ test performance in experiment one, through encoding and recall of complex and simple text passages in experiment two and through tests of reasoning ability and recall of nonsense syllables in experiment three. In terms of cognitive performance, the authors found that those in the future alone group made more mistakes and attempted fewer questions than those in the future belonging group or future misfortune groups in experiment one. In experiment two the future alone group performed worse than the other groups on recall of information but not encoding of information, and performed worse on analytical tasks but not nonsense recall tasks than the other conditions in experiment three. In terms of mood, experiment one found future alone participants and future misfortune participants reported neutral mood, in experiment two all three groups reported neutral mood, but in experiment three a significant difference with a moderate to large effect size ($d=0.71$) was found between future alone and future belonging groups for negative mood, with future alone participants reporting greater negative mood.

Baumeister et al. (2002) argue that their findings suggest that the impact on cognition of exclusion cannot be the result of rumination (otherwise both simple and complex tasks would be impeded) but must be the result of self-regulation. They argue that the minimal impact that they found of exclusion on emotion is evidence of individuals *suppressing* emotion following social exclusion. This suppression they argue, takes cognitive effort and therefore diminishes the executive function resource available for complex cognitive functioning, thus impeding cognitive performance. However, the authors fail to explain the moderate to large impact of exclusion on negative emotion found in experiment three, which suggests that participants were not in fact suppressing their emotions and were experiencing an emotional response to

exclusion. In that experiment at least, suppression of emotion cannot account for the reduction in cognitive performance found.

In a later series of experiments Baumeister, DeWall, Ciarocco and Twenge (2005) build on this research. They argue that self-regulatory processes are employed in order to suppress self-serving impulses and encourage engagement in socially desirable behaviours thereby enhancing one's likelihood of being included in society. As such, social exclusion they argue may be perceived as society breaking the promise of acceptance and therefore one may feel it no longer *necessary* to continue to self-regulate.

The authors explored this proposition with a series of experiments, the first, third, fourth and fifth of which manipulated exclusion using the future alone paradigm as described previously, and in which the future prediction was ostensibly based on personality profile. In experiment two exclusion was manipulated by individuals meeting a group of peers and then being informed that no one wanted to work with them. Self-regulation was operationalised using various measures: By the participant's willingness to consume an unpleasant but healthy drink in experiment one; by the number of biscuits consumed in experiment two; by persistence with an unsolvable puzzle in experiment three (persistence in which is argued to be indicative of self-regulation overriding the impulse to quit (Muraven, Tice, & Baumeister, 1998)); and by performance on a dichotic listening test in experiments four and five, whereby participants were instructed to ignore information heard in one ear and focus attention to the information in the other ear (requiring cognitive control which is argued to be indicative of self-regulation (Carver & Scheier, 1981)). Across all five studies Baumeister et al. (2005) found that social exclusion *diminished* self-regulation. Compared to included and control participants, excluded participants drank significantly less of the healthy drink, ate significantly more biscuits, gave up significantly earlier on the puzzle, and performed significantly worse on the dichotic listening test.

In order to explore the reason for the diminished self-regulation experiment five also included a cash incentive. The authors hypothesised that if the reduced self-regulation was *wilful* then a cash inducement should enhance self-regulation, whereas if it was *unconscious* and involved a lack of *ability* to self-regulate because resources were consumed in attempting to suppress emotion (as postulated by Baumeister et al., 2002) then a cash inducement should have no effect. This study found that future alone participants who received the cash incentive performed significantly better than those who did not, suggesting that self-regulation deficits are the result of *will* rather than an *inability* to self-regulate.

A final experiment replicated experiment five but involved participants sitting in front of a mirror which has been found to direct attention to themselves (Carver & Scheier, 1981) and was hypothesised to improve self-awareness. This has in turn been found to increase self-regulation (Carver & Scheier, 1981). Baumeister et al. (2005) hypothesised that rejection would lead to individuals wanting to avoid self-awareness because it focuses attention on the fault that caused the rejection. They suggest that if the reduction in self-regulation after rejection is wilful, enhancing self-awareness through placing someone in front of a mirror should counteract the effect of rejection on self-regulation. If the reduction is unconscious and the result of an inability to self-regulate then the mirror should further diminish self-regulation through drawing attention away from the task. They found that those in the mirror, future alone condition performed significantly better than those in the non-mirror, future alone condition.

The authors conclude therefore that exclusion results in a *wilful* reduction in self-regulation because the rewards of self-regulation in terms of being included are not received. The authors also conclude that social exclusion does not *facilitate* self-regulation which would be predicted if individuals attempt to enhance their inclusion through more socially acceptable behaviours. However, in order for one's behaviour to enhance the opportunity for social inclusion the behaviour ought to hold the potential for impacting one's inclusionary status. The behaviours and tasks involved in these experiments however were not at all relevant to inclusion and would not have any impact on one's likelihood of being included. Engaging in them would not enhance one's inclusionary status, and therefore this study should not be seen to be evidence that exclusion does not facilitate self-regulation, as it would only do so in terms of behaviours that might meet the need to belong. As will be explored below, providing participants with opportunities to actually *enhance* their inclusionary status may result in different behavioural responses.

DeWall, Baumeister and Vohs (2008) did redress this limitation in a series of experiments exploring both the effects of inclusion and acceptance on self-regulatory behaviour as indicated by performance on tasks ostensibly indicative of social skills. The credible link between the tasks and social skills was highly questionable for two of the tasks and as such may not have been believed by the participants (e.g., being told that performance on the game 'Operation' which involves removing body parts from a game without setting off the buzzer indicates social skills, or performance on a Stroop task (Stroop, 1935) in which one has to override the inclination to name the colour of ink in which a word is written and state the colour named in the word were associated with traits such as empathy and social sensitivity). However, the results of their experiments did consistently demonstrate that those in the exclusion conditions who were told

that performance was diagnostic of social skills performed significantly better than those in the exclusion condition who did not receive that diagnostic. As such, these studies offered the opportunity for participants to *ostensibly* enhance their inclusionary status through good performance on tests diagnostic of social skills, and indicate that individuals *are* able to self-regulate following exclusion when self-regulation will enhance their inclusion rather than demonstrating that exclusion diminishes self-regulation.

In addition, those in the acceptance conditions who received the social skills diagnosis performed significantly worse than accepted participants who did not receive this diagnosis. A cash incentive however, did override the motivational processes for accepted participants in that those who were offered cash for their performance improved despite the social skills diagnostic. This suggests again that the self-regulation processes are *wilfully* impeded rather than resulting from a lack of resource.

5.4.4.2 Maladaptive strategies and the need for control

It appears therefore that the self-defeating behaviours that emerge from experimental research may not be due to a *lack* of self-regulation but a lack of an opportunity to enhance one's inclusionary status which then results in wilful lack of self-regulation and anti-social behaviours. As such, the motivational driver may not just be about the need to belong but also about the need for control. If participants cannot control their inclusionary status they might attempt to take control of something else. Support for this proposition comes from a meta-analysis of the rejection literature by Gerber and Wheeler (2009a), described in more detail in the section 5.5 '*emotional experience*'. They argue that self-regulation researchers have assumed that rejection is only associated with a need to belong, and therefore acting in ways that will increase the likelihood of rejection *following* rejection are self-defeating and therefore indicate a lack of self-regulation and self-control (e.g., Leary 2005). However, Gerber and Wheeler's (2009a) meta-analysis found a large effect size for the association between rejection and need for control, in both self-report measures of need for control as well as actions associated with need for control (such as pain tolerance, or opportunities to punish others in a game – antisocial behaviour). Control is defined as "authority, power or influence over events, behaviours, situations or people" (Van den Bos, 2007, p.228). As such, Gerber and Wheeler argue that changes in pain tolerance and antisocial behaviour both of which were positively related to rejection in their analysis, do not provide evidence of a lack of self-regulation, but rather of rejection impacting on the need for control which individuals attempt to restore through being anti-social or aggressive towards their rejecter or increasing their tolerance for pain – actions over which they have control.

They also found that rejected individuals *prioritised* their need for control over their need for belonging, suggesting that need for control is more greatly impacted by rejection than belonging. This, they argue, is demonstrated through the choice to engage in antisocial or unhelpful behaviours which are likely to promote exclusion, rather than choosing to engage in helpful, prosocial behaviours such as helping to pick up pencils, which are likely to enhance inclusion. As in the moment, relived or future exclusion induced in experimental designs is unexpected and entirely out of one's control, the primary driver of behaviour may be to regain *control* rather than find ways to enhance belonging, which might be achieved *through* and account *for* the anti-social behaviours observed in these studies. In real life however, exclusion or not belonging is often sensed, perceived and anticipated through action. As such, in real life participants may often have a choice of addressing the perceived exclusion through engaging in behaviours likely to enhance inclusionary status or not engaging in behaviours likely to diminish it. As such, one's choice of resolution strategy may depend on the extent to which one perceives and anticipates exclusion and feels able to control the situation. This supports the coping research discussed earlier in this section which suggests that the choice of and effectiveness of different coping strategies is contingent upon *controllability* of the situation (Bowman & Stern, 1995).

This finds support from Knapton, Bäck and Bäck (2015) who suggest that the impact that ostracism has on individual needs including the need to belong, the need for self-esteem, for control, and for meaningful existence will moderate consequential behaviour. They predicted that when the needs to belong and for self-esteem (inclusionary needs) are threatened, behaviour will be pro-social, whereas if the need for control or for meaningful existence (power-provocation needs) are threatened the response will be antisocial (Williams, 2007). Their study manipulated rejection and acceptance by asking participants to write a statement about their beliefs about tuition fees which they were then told were either evaluated as being compatible with a student union group (acceptance) or non-compatible (rejection). Rejected participants were then informed that they were compatible with an *alternative* union group, and read an article about that group's aggressive activities towards the opposing group (from which the individual had been rejected). This served to inform them of the in-group's norms. Participants were then asked to complete a questionnaire rating to what extent they would participate in or recommend forms of action against the opposing group, ranging from writing letters to vandalism (the higher their overall score the more aggressive the acts). They also rated the extent to which their needs were thwarted using a nine-item questionnaire adapted from the needs-threat questionnaire used by Zadro, Williams and Richardson (2004).

Results indicated that rejected participants rated themselves higher on political activity against the opposing group, and found rejection to significantly affect inclusionary needs but not power-provocation needs. Similarly, mediation analyses revealed that inclusionary needs *mediated* the relationship between rejection and political activity. These findings support the proposition that thwarting inclusionary needs will result in pro-social behaviour as demonstrated by the participant's increased conformity to the in-group's norms through political activity. The lack of a significant correlation between political activity and power needs and the lack of mediation of power needs on political activity also supports the argument that when opportunities to address thwarted belonging are presented, the act of rejection does not impact the need for control (as those needs have presumably been met through the political activity). Had the authors assessed need threat both before and after the opportunity of political activity or included a rejected group who did not have the opportunity to aggress against the rejecting out-group this would have allowed us to draw more firm conclusions as to role of the need for control in rejection.

Support for the importance of control and the ability to actually enhance one's inclusionary status is also found in Maner, et al.'s (2007) research. Specifically, the authors explored the reconnection hypothesis which asserts that social exclusion motivates behaviours designed to increase affiliation and connection with others. In exploring this hypothesis Maner et al. (2007) test three possible boundary conditions all associated with the extent to which the target individual presents a realistic source of renewed affiliation. Firstly, they hypothesise that individuals will not attempt to behave favourably towards the perpetrator of the rejection and may avoid them or behave in a hostile manner. Secondly, they hypothesise that individuals are more likely to behave favourably with individuals with whom they will actually interact in the future. Finally, they hypothesise that those who anticipate negative evaluation from others are less likely to respond favourably to potential new affiliations and again, may avoid them or behave with hostility in an attempt to protect themselves from anticipated rejection.

A series of studies supported their hypotheses. The first found that participants who were asked to write about an experience of being rejected (rather than accepted) were significantly more interested in a university initiative designed to help students connect with each other than accepted or control participants. A second experiment found that participants in a future alone condition were significantly more likely than belonging or misfortune participants to choose to work in a group rather than alone. Their third study, in which participants were told after meeting in a group that others either chose to work with them or not, found that those in the

rejected condition were more likely than accepted participants to rate target individuals as more attractive and sociable but no more likely to rate them as hostile.

Another study found that rejection (operationalised by being told that a research assistant had either chosen not to interact with them or couldn't interact with them for logistical reasons) led to the allocation of more money to a new potential source of affiliation, whilst another, using the same manipulation found that rejected participants assigned marginally more money to a new partner than control participants, but only when participants were informed that they would be able to meet the potential partner. When no meeting was anticipated rejected participants actually assigned fewer awards than controls.

Their studies therefore offer a parsimonious reconciliation of the seemingly conflicting findings from the research which has found rejected individuals to respond with both prosocial and antisocial behaviours. In their studies participants consistently behaved in ways likely to enhance affiliation but only when those target individuals offered realistic opportunities for affiliation. As such, what appears critical to motivating behaviour and to one's choice of resolution strategy and ultimately the success of that strategy in addressing the SoNB, is the individual's perceived ability to enhance inclusion, supporting the proposition that social exclusion thwarts the need to belong and stimulates *adaptive* behaviours designed to enhance rather than diminish the potential for future affiliation.

In terms of the current research, the self-defeating behaviours that emerged fell primarily in the self-protection category, and involved withdrawal, distancing, disinterest and disengagement from work, which can be regarded as self-defeating to the extent that they remove opportunities to add value, develop relationships and become included, and ultimately enhance a sense of belonging. The extant belonging research suggests that these self-defeating strategies might have been employed because participants did not have a sense of control and did not feel able to enhance their sense of belonging. As such, they either chose to protect themselves from future exclusion by withdrawing from situations which may pose the threat of further exclusion or threaten their overall sense of self, or satisfied their need for control by taking control of what they could by being disruptive, disengaged, or leaving the organisation. Whilst a lack of control didn't emerge as a theme in the current research, there is some support for this proposition. For example, CLIVE described: *"So you, you become disengaged, because you don't believe that anything you do has any impact or purpose."*

5.4.4.3 Summary

Taken together the extant research supports the resolution strategies that emerged from the current research and offers insight into the choice of resolution strategy taken. The literature suggests that when individuals do not believe they are able to enhance their inclusionary status they are likely to choose *maladaptive* strategies such as withdrawing, disengaging or becoming disruptive, strategies engaged in, in an attempt to exert a form of control. If, however, individuals are able to enhance their inclusionary status they are more likely to choose seemingly *adaptive* strategies such as seeking value and attempting to fit in. Whilst these strategies may enhance inclusion and a sense of belonging however, they may also be at odds with an integrated sense of self and self-worth through the resulting conflict with self-concept and sense of inauthenticity.

5.4.5 Category Summary

The research discussed provides both support to the findings of the current research and offers some valuable insight into the theoretical relationships proposed between SoNB and the resolution behaviours in which individuals engage when their sense of self is undermined by SoNB. Whilst some research indicates that resolution strategies are designed to re-establish a consistent sense of self, whether that sense of self be negative or positive (Aronson, 1968, 1999; Steele, 1999), others indicate that the resolution strategies might be driven by a need to enhance a sense of self-worth (Campbell, 1990; Dipboye, 1977). Whilst the current research offers support to both potential processes, a drive to maintain a positive sense of self and self-worth would explain most of the resolution strategies reported which could either enhance self-worth through adding value, or protect self-worth through avoiding situations which might threaten a sense of self. Further research is required to clarify the nature of the relationships.

The coping literature further supports the current research particularly in terms of the outcomes of the coping strategies employed – whether they serve to mitigate or exacerbate SoNB (Penley et al., 2002). The belonging literature in turn supports the resolution strategies identified and offers further insight into the choice of coping strategy by indicating that adaptive and constructive resolution strategies may be chosen when individuals feel able to influence and control their inclusionary status whereas maladaptive strategies may be chosen when they do not (Gerber & Wheeler, 2009a; Knapton, Bäck and Bäck (2015); Maner et al., 2007). Support is also found for the proposed bi-directional relationship between these resolution strategies and sense of self, in that some strategies employed in order to enhance a sense of belonging may further undermine a consistent sense of self through the conflict in self-concept and sense

of inauthenticity they create, further compounding the experience (Hewlin, 2009; Menard and Brunet, 2010).

Finally, the extant research also supports the current research in terms of the moderating role proposed by individual characteristics, in that one's sensitivity to SoNB and one's choice of resolution strategy may also be contingent upon trait self-esteem, the causal attributions made about the experience of not belonging (Welbourne et al., 2007) and again, whether individuals feel able to influence their situation (Bowman & Stern, 1995).

5.4.5.1 Theory development

Those extant theories with good conceptual fit to the proposed relationships have been integrated into the current theoretical model, resulting in some adaptations and elaborations, which are illustrated in *Figure 5.VI* below, and summarised in *Table 5.4*. Once again, the literature is helpful in elucidating some of the mechanisms that might be involved in the relationships proposed between resolution behaviours and particularly, the self-concept. In terms of the potential impact of resolution behaviours on the self-concept cognitive dissonance theory (Festinger, 1957) indicates that as well as a cognitive dissonance being created by the conflicting self cognitions experience through *having* a SoNB, the behaviours in which individuals engage in order fit in may also create a cognitive dissonance in terms of a conflict between their self-concept and their behaviour (Festinger, 1957) – the way they are behaving is not consistent with who they are.

Self-enhancement theories offer insight into the reverse relationship – the impact of the self-concept on resolution behaviours. Self-Enhancement Theory (Dipboye, 1977) in particular, offers potential explanations for many of the resolution behaviours reported. The theory suggests that negative self-relevant information presents a threat to one's self-esteem which drives behaviour to enhance feelings of self-worth, and as such, the impact of SoNB on self-esteem may motivate adding value resolution behaviours designed to enhance one's self-esteem or self-protection behaviours designed to protect further erosion of self-esteem.

The coping literature also offers insight to some of the potential relationships, particularly in terms of the moderating role of individual characteristics. Welbourne et al. (2007) found that different attribution styles were related to different coping strategies. As such a positive attributional style may be related to seeking value and reconciling the experience resolution behaviours, and a negative attributional style may be related to self-protection resolution behaviours.

The literature also suggests that one’s sense of control over the experience of SoNB may have important implications for one’s choice of resolution strategy, with research finding that a sense of control in terms of enhancing one’s inclusionary status results in adaptive, prosocial behaviours (Knapton et al., 2015; Maner et al., 2007). As such, the ability to diminish SoNB may motivate adaptive, seeking value behaviours designed to address need to belong, whereas a lack of ability to diminish SoNB may motivate maladaptive, self-protection behaviours designed to address the need for control.

This research has been integrated into the theoretical framework and added to the proposed relationships in *Table 5.4* (orange text). Where these additions have resulted in a new relationship, or new direction of relationship, this is illustrated in orange in *Figure 5.VI* below. Where the additions have strengthened relationships already proposed by the current model, these are illustrated by thicker arrows (these particular relationships have all been adjusted at previous stages in the discussion, i.e. strengthening the relationship in both directions between self-concept and resolution behaviours).

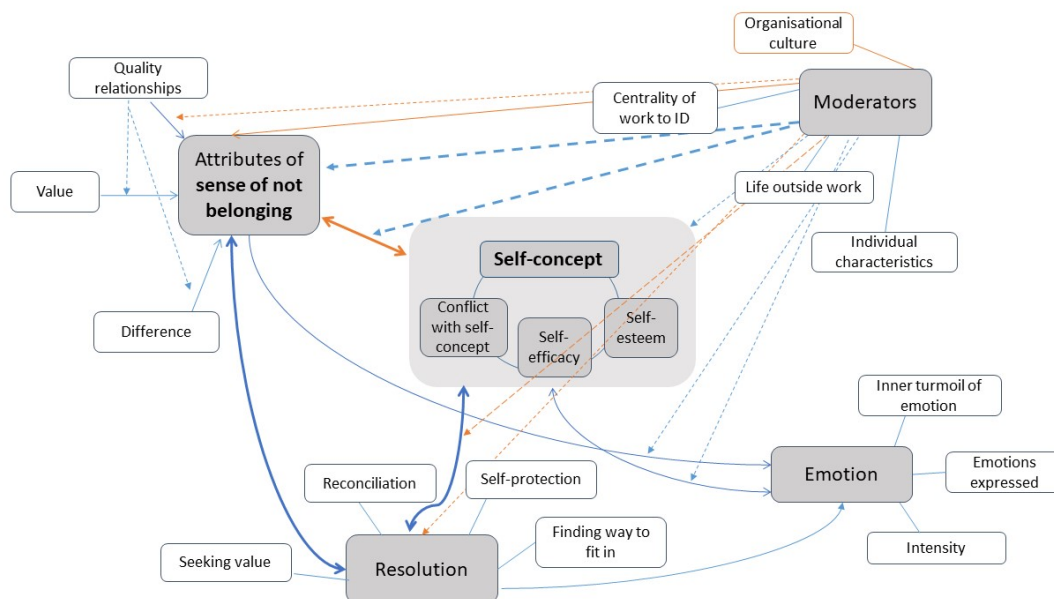


Figure 5.VI: Developed theoretical framework integrating the pertinent extant literature

CATEGORY	PROPOSED RELATIONSHIPS
Seeking value	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – SoNB may motivate behaviours/strategies designed to add value – Self-concept may motivate behaviours designed to add value – Adding value behaviours may positively impact one’s self-concept – <i>Impact of SoNB on self-esteem may motivate behaviours designed to enhance one’s self-worth in order to achieve a positive sense of self (Dipboye, 1977)</i> – <i>A positive attribution style may motivate seeking value behaviours (Welbourne et al., 2007)</i> – <i>The choice of fitting in behaviours may be motivated by a perceived sense of control and ability to enhance SoNB (Knapton et al., 2015; Maner et al., 2007)</i>
Trying to fit in	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – SoNB may motivate behaviours/strategies designed to help one fit in – Self-concept may motivate behaviours designed to help one fit in – Trying to fit in behaviours may negatively impact one’s self-esteem – Trying to fit in behaviours may negatively impact one’s sense of a consistent self-concept – <i>Trying to fit in behaviours may create a cognitive dissonance in terms of a conflict between their self-concept and their behaviour (Festinger, 1957)</i> – Trying to fit in behaviours may negatively impact one’s ability to fit in and enhance one’s SoNB
Self-protection	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – SoNB may motivate behaviours/strategies designed to protect from the pain of or threat of not belonging – Self-concept may motivate behaviours/strategies designed to protect from the pain of or threat of not belonging – Self-protection behaviours may negatively impact one’s self-concept – Self-protection behaviours may negatively impact one’s ability to belong and enhance one’s SoNB – <i>Impact of SoNB on self-esteem may motivate self-protection behaviours designed to protect further erosion of self-esteem (Dipboye, 1977)</i> – <i>A negative attribution style may motivate self-protection behaviours (Welbourne et al., 2007)</i> – <i>The choice of self-protection behaviours may be motivated by a perceived lack of control of ability to enhance SoNB (Knapton et al., 2015; Maner et al., 2007)</i>
Reconciling the experience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – SoNB may motivate cognitions/strategies designed to help one make sense of the experience – Self-concept may motivate cognitions/strategies designed to help one make sense of the experience

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – <i>Reconciling cognitions may positively impact one's self-concept</i> – <i>A positive attribution style may motivate reconciling the experience behaviours (Welbourne et al., 2007)</i>
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Table 5.4: Development of the theoretical framework incorporating extant literature

5.5 Emotional experience

Without exception, SoNB was emotionally felt. For some the experience was associated with anxiety, and for all the experience was associated with negative affect and feelings associated with depression. The emotions experienced appeared to be related to the individual's interpretation of the experience, what SoNB said about who they were – they felt depressed not just because they had SoNB, but because of the meaning that they placed on not belonging in terms of their self-worth, their competence or their likeability. This was further compounded by the meaning they placed on the *emotional experience* and their evaluation of that emotional experience – what feeling depressed or anxious meant for who they were in terms of their emotional vulnerability, their irrationality, their resilience.

This section will begin with an overview of the theories of emotion that help to clarify why the emotions that were felt were experienced, before moving on to consider the research from the belonging literature and how it relates to the findings from the current study, and the theories that may elucidate the theoretical relationships proposed.

5.5.1 Theories of emotion

Most theories of emotion agree that emotions are caused by a combination of factors, which means that different individuals may respond to the same event with different emotions, and indeed that the same individual may respond to the same event at different times with different emotions (e.g., Roseman, Antoniou, & Jose, 1996; Arnold, 1960; Lazarus, 1966; Siemer, Gross & Mauss, 2007). Whilst these theories differ in terms of the definition and number of various elements that constitute an emotional episode, most broadly agree that an emotional episode involves a variety of components, including: A cognitive component (mental processing involved in emotion); feeling component (the emotional experience); motivational component (tendencies to action); somatic component (neural or physiological response); and motor component (including facial or vocal expressions) (Moors, 2009). These components correspond with different functions and mechanisms involved in the processing of emotion, such that cognition is involved in the evaluation and appraisal of the stimulus, feeling is involved in monitoring and regulation of emotion, motivational and somatic components are involved in the preparation and support of action, and the motor component is involved in action and

behavioural response (Moors, 2009). In this way, theories of emotion are able to explain the individual differences found in the experience of emotion. *Figure 5.VII* below illustrates the order of components for *appraisal theories* of emotion, but captures the components incorporated in many theories of emotion.

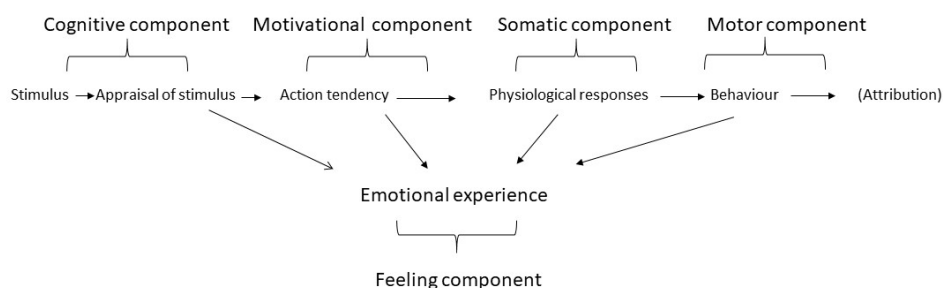


Figure 5.VII: Order of components in appraisal theories of emotion

Whilst a comprehensive review of the empirical merits of the various emotion theories is beyond the scope of this thesis, what is pertinent to the current study are perspectives on the various mechanisms and processes involved in the elicitation of emotion which may help to elucidate why SoNB may result in intense negative affect for some but not for others, as well as how these elicited emotions may lead to different behavioural responses.

The James Lange Theory of Emotion (James, 1884, 1890) proposed that emotions are the conscious experience of bodily responses, and as such that physical feelings such as trembling precede an emotional response, such as fear. Whilst James (1984) argues that the intensity and quality of the emotion (in terms of its valence) is determined by the intensity and quality of the bodily response, critics have argued that this does little to explain what stimulates the bodily response in the first place – what is the intentional object of the emotional response, what is it about? (Solomon, 1976). Cannon (1927) also argues that the theory fails to account for the mechanisms that determine the specificity of the resulting emotions – some physical responses may be caused for example, by both excitement or fear – or for the fact that manipulated physical arousal is not associated with real emotions.

Schachter’s theory (1964) however proposes a two-step process in which a stimulus leads to a physiological arousal in the first step. In the second step a cognitive process of attribution then interprets the *cause* of that arousal which results in the specific emotion. Like James, Schachter (1964) argues that the intensity of the emotion is determined by the intensity of the arousal, but the valence is determined by the process of attribution which can result in different emotional responses such as fear vs. excitement or shame vs. pride, resulting from the same stimulus. As such, Schachter argues that conscious cognition is necessary for emotion. However,

and as reflected in appraisal theories of emotion explored below, critics, such as Zajonc (1980) have argued that whilst cognition may be necessary for specific emotions (such as shame, joy, guilt) it is not a necessary process to determine the quality of affect (whether positive or negative). This is supported by research that has found that repeated subliminal exposure (and therefore below conscious identification) to stimuli results in increased liking of that stimuli and as such, demonstrates that conscious cognition is not necessary for affect (Kunst-Wilson & Zajonc, 1960).

Appraisal theories of emotion on the other hand, whilst proposing that cognition is a necessary antecedent to specific emotions, argue that much of this cognitive processing is automatic and unconscious (Arnold, 1960; Scherer, 2001, 2004). For appraisal theorists, unconscious cognitive processes determine which stimuli will lead to an initial affective response and determine the *intensity* and the *quality* (valence) of that response, whereas conscious causal attribution processes then determine the specific *nature* of the emotional response (Arnold, 1960; Lazarus, 1966). For appraisal theorists, the emotion that is elicited by a stimulus depends, not on the characteristics of the stimulus, but on the appraisal process, and the attributions made about that stimulus which depends on the context within which they are made. They argue that different stimuli can cause different emotions in different people, or different emotions in the same person depending on the context in which they happen and their relational meaning (Roseman & Smith, 2001). Crashing a car for example, may lead to anger if the cause of the crash is another person, or guilt if the cause of the crash was the individual not paying attention. There are therefore, a variety of appraisal variables at play in the elicitation of any given emotion at any given moment in time. These variables provide relational meaning to the stimulus, appraising the stimulus in terms of its significance in relation to personal goals, resources, abilities, etc., both in terms of their relevance to and congruence with those goals (Lazarus, 1966). For example, if one's goal is to fit in with a group, being ignored is likely to be seen as both relevant and incongruent with that goal and as such is likely to elicit a negative emotional response such as sadness.

There is some disagreement about the number of appraisal dimensions and the number of emotional states they differentiate. Roseman, Antoniou and Jose (1996) for example propose that seven different appraisals differentiate between 17 different emotions; Smith and Ellsworth (1985) identify six dimensions which elicit 15 different emotions; and Scherer (1997) found that eight dimensions differentiated between just seven major emotional states. However, there is a wealth of evidence which supports specific structural models of appraisal and the proposition that the experience of particular emotions is related to specific appraisals

(e.g., Frijda, Kuipers, & ter Schure, 1989; Kuppens, Van Mechelen, Smits, & De Boek, 2003; Roseman, 1991; Roseman, Spindel, & Jose, 1990; Scherer, 1997; Smith & Ellsworth, 1985; Smith & Lazarus, 1993; Tong et al., 2007).

There are clear parallels between appraisal theories of emotion and attribution theory, as discussed in *Chapter One*, particularly in terms of the causality dimensions such as self-other responsibility or situational control (Smith & Ellsworth, 1985) and external causation (Scherer, 1997). Specifically, attribution theory contends that different dimensions of causality are related to different affective reactions, but that affective reactions involve a temporal sequence which results in immediate ‘attribution independent’ emotions and then, following cognitive appraisal, ‘attribution-dependent’ emotions (Weiner, 1985). Weiner (1985) argues that this first, attribution independent primary appraisal will result in a general emotion such as happiness if the outcome is positive, or a general emotion of sadness or frustration if the outcome is negative. Following this primary appraisal however, the cause of the outcome will be sought, and the resulting emotions will be contingent upon the chosen attribution. The cognitive involvement gives rise therefore, to attribution-dependent emotions which, Weiner argues, are more differentiated and distinct.

Weiner’s (1985) theory finds support from Harvey, Madison, Martinko, Crook and Crook’s (2014) meta-analysis of research which explored the impact of attributional processes in the workplace. Their meta-analysis found that when negative outcomes are internally attributed they typically result in negative affect, such as shame and guilt, whereas when negative outcomes are externally attributed they often result in anger or frustration. As such, the locus of causality of one’s attributions may moderate the relationship between a sense of not belonging and the emotional response with internal attributions leading to feelings of shame and guilt and external attributions leading to anger or frustration. This interpretation is supported by the current data with for example SARAH’s internal attribution of the experience and associated negative affect: *“I suppose I almost felt like there was something wrong [pause]. And when I say something wrong I mean, that there was something wrong with me. Why was I struggling with this so much? Why was I feeling so miserable and down? ...what's wrong with me?”*; as well as NEIL’s external attribution and anger: *“...actually I’m doing all this fucking work and I don’t feel that I belong here. And that feels completely strange...so I’ll be quite belligerent perhaps, and become quite a bit, resentful.”*

5.5.1.1 Summary

As such, what appears to be significant from appraisal theories and attribution theory, and indeed all the theories of emotion explored (with the exception of James (1884, 1890)) is that one's cognitive appraisal of an experience is vital to one's emotional response, particularly in terms of how relevant it is to the self, how much control one feels one has over the experience, and how much responsibility one takes for the experience. These theories therefore reflect the perspective of symbolic interactionism discussed in *Chapter One*, emphasising the importance of the individual's interpretation of the experience, and the personally relevant meaning they assign to it in determining their emotional response. Given that one's sense of self was core to the SoNB, the experience is likely to be associated, as was seen, with often intense levels of negative affect, depression or anxiety.

5.5.2 Emotion and belonging

I will now consider what has been found in the specific belonging literature in relation to the emotions associated with the experience of not belonging. As will be explored below, findings are mixed, with some supporting the current study in finding the experience to be related to both anxiety and depression, whilst other research has found the experience to be related to neutral rather than negative affect. There is also some debate as to whether the experience of not belonging *causes* the associated depression, or whether depression causes the experience of not belonging, which arise primarily from the correlational nature of many of the studies.

5.5.3 Associations found between belonging and negative affect

5.5.3.1 Anxiety

One form of emotion that emerged from the current research was anxiety. Anxiety refers to a variety of emotional states that typically involve fear, panic, phobias, evaluation, and helplessness (Baumeister & Tice, 1990). However, what distinguishes anxiety from fear, according to Freud (1926) is that anxiety involves fear without a specific feared object. Similarly, Barlow (1988) emphasises the importance of the object of anxiety when distinguishing it from fear, in that anxiety is considered to be caused by uncertainty and unpredictability and involves a heightened state of self-awareness with a focus on the self, whereas panic can be focused on other objects. As such, experiences that are seen to be self-relevant are likely to be associated with anxiety.

Similar to theories of self-esteem, there have emerged some conflicting perspectives as to the *function* of anxiety. As discussed above, Terror Management Theory (TMT; Greenberg, Pyszczynski & Solomon, 1986) proposes that anxiety is the affective reaction to the perpetual

fear of death, against which we are protected through the development of self-esteem which allows us to regard ourselves and our existence as meaningful and worthy. Becker (1973) argued that fear of death is largely unconscious, and as such underpins anxiety at a sub-conscious level even if not explicitly identified. However, a study by Parkes and Weiss (1983) which explored reactions to bereavement of recent widows found that those whose loss was sudden had higher anxiety levels than those whose spouse's death was foreseen, and were also more likely to agree that they wouldn't care if they died tomorrow. This finding suggests that anxiety was related to the uncertainty and unpredictability of the event rather than the specific element of death.

In a precursor to the Sociometer Hypothesis put forward by Leary (1995) and others and explored above, Baumeister and Tice (1990) argued that social exclusion is one of the major causes of anxiety, and that indeed it is an adaptive response to the threat of social exclusion. They argue that anxiety occurs not only in *reaction* to exclusion, but importantly *prior* to exclusion, in response to any signal, such as unkind words or criticism, that may indicate the threat of social exclusion. Anxiety therefore occurs not in the absence of social bonds, but with the *threat* or act of broken bonds. This theory builds on the work of Simon (1967) who argued that anxiety functions as an 'interrupt mechanism' that forces the individual to reassess their behaviour and direct attention to the threat that triggered the anxiety. Evidence for this assertion can be found in research that suggests that anxious individuals do indeed experience increased cognitive activity involving evaluation of anxiety provoking experiences, particularly those which involve self-evaluation (Smith, Ingram & Brehem, 1983). Baumeister and Tice (1990) argue therefore that anxiety developed as an adaptive mechanism to interrupt thought and behaviour in response to the threat of social exclusion, in order to direct attention towards the threat.

However, as has been explored throughout this thesis, adaptive mechanisms generally evolve in order to enhance chances of survival or reproduction and therefore, in order to be effective in that regard they ought to be successful in *enhancing* survival and reproduction. However, anxiety is known to frequently have negative consequences for individuals, particularly when the anxiety serves to fulfil the very fear it is supposed to be avoiding. For example, socially anxious individuals often withdraw from social interactions and self-disclosures in order to protect themselves from rejection (Schlenker & Leary, 1985) (thus successfully alleviating the anxiety). However, such behaviours are self-defeating and do nothing to address the *cause* of the anxiety, rendering anxiety and the behavioural response driven by it, somewhat ineffective as an adaptive mechanism.

Whilst anxiety may not be an *adaptive* response to the threat of social exclusion, the current research did find that the experience of not belonging was related to anxiety for some individuals, and the literature offers some support for these findings. For example, Kendall's (1978) analysis of anxiety-inducing situations found that alongside physical danger, personal evaluation, which poses the possibility of rejection, was the main kind of threat reported to result in anxiety (although it could be the self-relevant and unknown nature of the threat that induced anxiety rather than the social nature). Similarly, Craighead, Kimball and Rehak (1979) showed that imagining scenes involving social rejection more reliably caused increases in anxiety than other scenes. Barden, Garber, Leiman, Ford and Masters (1985) also found anxiety to result from being excluded from social groups, and to be reduced following inclusion, Anant (1967) found a diminished sense of belonging to cause anxiety, stress and depression, and Levett-Jones and Lathlean (2009) found that those student nurses who had a diminished sense of belonging felt isolated, disempowered, lacking motivation, anxiety and distress. Similarly, Clegg (2006) found that those who experienced prolonged, rather than episodic not belonging felt strong emotions including anxiety, sadness and exhaustion.

A recent study by Shakespeare-Finch and Daley (2017) offers further support for this relationship. Their study explored the association between belongingness, distress and resilience in the workplace with 2,500 ambulance officers all of whom reported to have experienced a traumatic event in the workplace. Psychological distress was assessed using the Kessler 10 (K10; Kessler & Mroczek, 1994) which measures symptoms of depression and anxiety and resilience was measured using the Brief Resilience Scale (BRS; Smith, Dalen, Wiggins, Tooley, Christopher, & Bernardet, 2008). Results showed that workplace belongingness was the strongest significant negative predictor of psychological distress explaining 19.8% of unique variance, and the strongest significant predictor of resilience, explaining 10% of unique variance. However, as the results from the K10 are summed it is not possible to determine how much of the distress reported was accounted for by depression rather than anxiety. Cockshaw and Shochet (2010) however (in a study to be discussed below) did distinguish between the two and found whilst anxiety was negatively correlated with workplace belonging, this was significantly less than the correlation found between workplace belonging and depression.

There is therefore research that supports the findings from the current research demonstrating that the experience of not belonging can be related to anxiety for some individuals. What emerged as more strongly associated with SoNB across most of the sample however, were feelings of negative affect associated with depression, strong support for which is found in the extant research.

5.5.3.2 Depression

Depression is classified as a mood disorder which constitutes a wide range of emotional, cognitive and behavioural symptoms, including: “depressed mood, anhedonia, change in appetite, insomnia/hypersomnia, psychomotor agitation/retardation, low energy, extreme feelings of worthlessness or guilt, concentration difficulties or indecisiveness, and suicidal ideation” (Hames, Hagan & Joiner, 2013, p.356-57). As such, depression is likely to have a significant impact on the ways in which individuals interact with others, as well as on how they think and feel.

There is however, a dearth of studies in the literature which demonstrate the direction of the relationship between depression and belonging, and whether social exclusion, rejection and not belonging *lead* to depression or whether depressive symptoms lead to social exclusion, rejection and not belonging, which will be explored below. There is certainly however, a lot of support for a relationship between the two, with a wealth of cross-sectional studies demonstrating a relationship between belonging and depressive symptoms in a wide range of populations such as students (Malone, Pillow & Osman, 2012), adults (Turner & MacClaren, 2011), and working adults (Cockshaw, Shochet & Obst, 2013, 2014). For example, Shakespeare-Finch and Daley (2017) found that workplace belonging was the strongest significant *negative* predictor of psychological distress (including anxiety and depression) in their study of ambulance workers, and Tambor and Leary (1993) found that depression was negatively related to the extent to which individuals felt included and accepted.

Exploring the difference between general and workplace belonging, Cockshaw and Shochet (2010) found a moderate negative correlation between workplace belonging and depression which was similar to that found between depression and general belongingness. In a later study Cockshaw et al. (2013) again found moderate correlations between general belongingness scale and depression (-.54) and between the workplace belongingness scale (-.59) and depression as measured by the DASS-21. Workplace belongingness accounted for more variance for women, and general belongingness accounted for more variance for men. Their results suggest that the two constructs add uniquely to depressive symptoms, and one does not compensate for the other. They conclude however, that workplace belonging, and searching for harmonious relationships at work may be more important to women than men, and that for men, psychological well-being may be predicated more on a general SoNB across a variety of contexts. This interpretation supports the appraisal models of emotion discussed above in terms of the importance of the relational meaning of an experience to the emotional impact of that experience.

Fisher, Overholser, Ridley, Braden and Rosoff (2015) also explored the relationship between belong and depression (including suicidal thoughts), using the Sense of Belonging Instrument-Psychological (SOBI-P; Hagerty & Patusky, 1995) in a sample of 116 veteran outpatients with clinical depression or disorders which incorporated depressive symptoms. The authors assessed depression using the BDI-II (Beck, Steer & Brown, 1996), hopelessness using The Beck Hopelessness Scale (BHS; Beck, Weissman, Lester & Trexler, 1974), suicide ideation, using The Beck Scale for Suicide Ideation (BSSI; Beck & Steer, 1991), social support using The Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS; Zimet, Dahlem, Zimet & Farley, 1988), and lifetime stressors using The Modified Life Experience Scale adapted from The Life Experiences Survey (LES; Sarason, Johnson, & Seigel, 1978). Their study found deficits in belonging to be significantly related to greater depression, hopelessness, current suicidal thoughts and prior suicide attempts. Although this was a cross-sectional study, the authors infer causality, suggesting that an ongoing SoNB could *lead* to a sense of hopelessness, and potentially enhance depressive symptoms or the hopelessness associated with subsequent suicidal thoughts. However, it is equally plausible that a sense of hopelessness and depressive symptoms could lead one to be and therefore *feel* excluded (as explored below). However, whilst this study uses a clinical sample and therefore cannot be generalised to the population as a whole, it does lend support to the *association* found between SoNB and depression in the current research.

5.5.3.3 Do depressive symptoms cause a sense of not belonging?

The Interpersonal Process Model of Depression (Coyne, 1976) proposes that individuals with depressive symptoms interact in ways that *elicit* rejection and fuel further depressive symptoms. Coyne (1976) proposes that doubts about self-worth lead to an increased need for validation and an increase in behaviours such as seeking reassurance and self-deprecation which in turn lead to reciprocal behaviours such as criticism, rejection and non-genuine support. Building on this, Sacco and Vaughan (2006) developed a social-cognitive interpersonal process model which proposed that reduced belonging, in terms of a reduced perception of evaluation and support from others might lead directly to depressive symptoms, which in turn might impact on one's attention to and perception of potential signals of reduced relational value, as well as resulting in changes in the perception and response of others towards the individual.

Support for this proposition is found in research with clinically depressed samples which suggests that depressed people have more negative perceptions of ambiguous social interactions than non-depressed people (Beck, Rush, Shaw & Emery, 1979), and have dampened reactions to both negative punishment and positive reward cues (Henriques &

Davidson, 1990; Sloan, Strauss & Wisner, 2001). Research also finds that depressed individuals elicit more negative responses from others including rejection responses (Gotlib, 1992; Joiner & Coyne, 1999; Segrin & Abramson, 1994), and induce more negative affect from others resulting in rejection (Coyne, 1976a; Joiner & Katz, 1999). As such the model suggests that, rather than being a *symptom* of not belonging, depressive symptoms may *result* in not belonging, and there is a wealth of studies which support this hypothesis. For example, a variety of cross-sectional studies have found that compared to non-depressed people, depressed individuals make less eye contact (e.g., Kazdin, Sherick, Esveltd-Dawson, & Rancurello, 1985), speak more slowly, with less intonation and volume (e.g., Youngren & Lewinsohn, 1980), initiate less conversations (Libet & Lewinsohn, 1973), and self-disclose more negative feelings without solicitation (Segrin, 2000). All these behaviours are likely to lead to negative perceptions from others which may enhance the likelihood of rejection.

The proposed direction of the relationship between belonging and depression was also explored by Cockshaw, Schochet and Obst (2014) who employed structural equation modelling to determine the direction of the relationship between depressive symptoms and general and workplace belonging. Their study was built on transactional interpersonal theories of depression which suggest that the relationship between belonging and depression is in fact reciprocal (Kochel, Ladd & Rudolph, 2012). To explore this proposition, Cockshaw, et al. (2014) conducted a longitudinal study with 221 participants who completed measures at two time points (three months' later). General Belongingness was assessed using the SOBI, (Hagerty & Patusky, 1995); workplace belongingness was assessed using the Psychological Sense of Organisational Membership (PSOM; Cockshaw & Shochet, 2010); and depression assessed using both the short form of the Depression Anxiety Stress Scales (DASS21; Sunderland, Mahoney & Andrews, 2012) and the Kessler Psychological Distress Scale (K10; Kessler, et al., 2002). Results demonstrated a strong cross-sectional association between depression and SOBI with $r=0.73$. The longitudinal association between depression and SOBI at both time points was also strong with $r=0.8$. However, they also found that depression at time 1 *predicted* general belongingness at time 2 more strongly than did general belongingness at time 1, and that general belongingness at time 1 did *not* predict depressive symptoms at time 2. They also found no significant cross-lagged associations between depression and workplace belonging. This study therefore supports the social-cognitive interpersonal process model (Sacco & Vaughan, 2006) whereby depressive symptoms are found to *cause* a general SoNB rather than the reverse relationship by potentially sensitising people to cues of diminished relational value as well as impacting other's behaviour towards those individuals, making them *feel* like they don't belong.

Further support for this direction is also found through research which explores two interpersonal behaviours that have been consistently found to be exhibited by depressed individuals: Excessive reassurance seeking (ERS) and negative feedback seeking (NFS). ERS involves the excessive seeking of reassurances from others that one is worthy and lovable despite such assurances already being provided (Joiner, et al., 1992, 1999). NFS involves actively seeking criticism and other negative interpersonal feedback from others (Hames, Hagan & Joiner, 2013). Research has found that as well as correlating with depressive symptoms, ERS has been found to *predict* depressive symptoms, (e.g., Davila, 2001; Joiner & Metalsky, 2001).

In a meta-analysis of 38 studies Starr and Davila (2008) found a moderate relationship between ERS and depression, as well as a relationship between ERS and interpersonal rejection. These results were obtained with both clinical and community samples, although the correlation in the clinical samples was marginally weaker. They also found that the relationship between ERS and rejection was substantially weaker when rejection was assessed by the rejecter rather than self-report, which suggests that excessive reassurance seekers are more sensitive to potential rejection. This ‘rejection sensitivity’, described as the anxious anticipation, ready perception and over reaction to rejection (Downey & Feldman, 1996) suggests therefore that perhaps those who seek excessive reassurance are more likely to *perceive* rejection but only slightly more likely to *actually* be rejected (Starr & Davila, 2008).

These propositions build on self-verification theory (Swann, 1990) as described above in 5.3.2 ‘conflict with identity’, which posits that individuals seek out feedback that is consistent with their self-concept, even when that feedback is negative, as this provides them with a sense of internal consistency and helps them to predict and control their environment (Swann, et al., 1992a). In accordance with this theory, the interpersonal process model of depression posits that depressed individuals will engage in NFS – seeking out negative and critical feedback from others which is in line with their self-concept (Hames, et al., 2013). However, this suggests that depression is closely linked to low self-esteem, which as discussed above is *reliably* linked to not belonging. As such it could be that not belonging leads to low self-esteem, which *leads* to depression and maladaptive interpersonal behaviours, which then leads to actual rejection further fuelling low self-esteem and depression. However, a study by Borelli and Prinstein (2006) found that NFS *predicted* depression 11 months later, and a study by Joiner (1995) with 100 college students found that the whilst NFS or rejection *alone* did not predict depression, the interaction between NFS and roommate rejection (as assessed from the perspective of the rejecter using the Willingness to Interact scale (WILL; Coyne, 1976a)) in college students *did* predict depression three weeks later, which held when controlling for self-esteem. As such, this

suggests that self-esteem was not related to the impact of NFS and rejection on depressive symptoms. However, since only the *combination* of NFS and rejection led to depression this suggests that *actually* being rejected is still an important variable in the risk of depression, rather than just NFS alone.

5.5.3.3.1 Depressive symptoms as an adaptive mechanism

The social risk hypothesis of depression (Allen & Badcock, 2003), in a similar manner to the Sociometer Hypothesis (Leary & Downs, 1995) argues that depressive symptoms act as a signal to one's declining social value in, and risk of social exclusion. The theory proposes that social relationships are perceived as a ratio of social value to social burden – what they term the social investment potential (SIP). Social value refers to the benefits in terms of resource *value* that others accrue as a result of a relationship with the individual, and social burden refers to the *cost* others incur from a relationship with the individual (Dunn, Whelton & Sharpee, 2012). If social burden exceeds social value this increases the risk of exclusion (Allen, Gilbert, & Semedar, 2004). The theory proposes that in response to activation of the depressive mechanism, individuals will behave in ways designed to enhance their social value and reduce their social burden by engaging in less risk-taking behaviours, that minimise the risk of social loss, and behave in ways often associated with depression such as being submissive (Gilbert 1992, 2006), prone to tears, and downcast (Dunn, et al., 2012).

Steger and Kashdan (2009) propose that non-clinically depressed individuals will have a heightened sensitivity to both indicators of social burden *and* indicators of social value and will react more strongly to those factors, which supports the research explored above under 5.4.3 under 'resolution' that found rejection was associated with an adaptive increase in attention to social cues. To explore this proposition Steger and Kashdan (2009) conducted two studies with non-clinically, sub-threshold for depression participants, measured using the Centre for Epidemiologic Studies Depression Scale (CES-D; Randloff, 1977). In study one, participants were asked to rate the daily frequency of positive events (e.g. went out socialising) and negative events (e.g. was excluded by my group of friends) over a three-week period as well as record their daily cognitive well-being (CWB) scores which assessed meaning in life and life satisfaction, and their affective well-being (AWB), which rated negative and positive affect. Results of their first study found that those with more depressive symptoms reported statistically marginally *fewer* positive social interactions and significantly *more* negative social interactions and *lower* average daily CWB and AWB. Those with more depressive symptoms also reported statistically larger relations between positive social interactions and CWB and AWB and larger negative relations between negative social interactions and CWB.

In study two participants completed a belonging measure which asked them to rate how close and connected they felt to other people each day, list memorable interactions and rate how good they felt about them and how understood they felt. They also completed the CES-D, CWB and AWB. Results showed that those with higher levels of depression reported less satisfaction in their belonging (although this was measured through their indication of whether their interactions were considered good and left them feeling understood, rather than a valid assessment of belonging), and stronger relations between their sense of belonging and CWB (but not AWB). Whilst these findings suggest that those with more depressive symptoms may respond more strongly to SoNB, the questionable validity of their measure means their results require further substantiation.

Some research however, suggests that rather than a heightened sensitivity to threatening and negative events and increases in negative affect, depressed individuals may be more prone to *reduced* sensitivity to positive events and reductions in positive affect. For example, studies have found depressed participants to have blunted affective responses to positive but not negative cues (Sloan, Strauss & Wisner, 2001; Rottenberg, Kasch, Gross & Gotlib, 2002; Dichter, Tomarken, Shelton, & Sutton, 2004), have found reduced positive self-image but not increased negative self-image to be *predictive* of depressive symptoms (Dobson & Shaw, 1987; Johnson, Joormann & Gotlib, 2007), and have shown that depressed patients demonstrate reduced reward responsiveness (Knutson, Bhanji, Cooney, Atlas, & Gotlib, 2008). As such, rather than increased sensitivity and negative response to experiences such as exclusion, depression may be related to *reduced* sensitivity and positive response to inclusion.

Zhang, Li, Wang, Zhau, Dong, Zhang, Xie, et al. (2017) explored this hypothesis by comparing the responses to inclusion and exclusion (manipulated using the cyberball paradigm) of depressed patients with those of typical participants. In their study they measured affect using PANAS (Watson, et al., 1988), the Need-Threat Scale (NTS; Williams et al., 2000) which assesses belonging, self-esteem, control and meaningful existence needs, as well as using electroencephalography (EEG) to record event related brain potentials (ERPs) which recorded the shifting activity and attention of the brain (Singh & Telles, 2015) in response to the social interaction. Their study found a decrease in positive affect and an increase in negative affect as well as a decrease in need satisfaction following exclusion in both the depressed and healthy control groups, supporting previous studies. They also found however, that positive affect was lower after *both* inclusion and exclusion for the patients relative to the healthy controls, that self-esteem and control needs were lower for patients than HCs after social acceptance but not after exclusion, and that patients showed *decreased* P3 amplitudes (indicating lower expectancy

of social involvement (Niedeggen, Sarauli, Cacciola, & Weschke, 2014)) in response to social acceptance. As such, their study supports the argument that rather than depression resulting in increased sensitivity to exclusion, depressed individuals may be *less* sensitive to inclusion.

5.5.3.4 Summary

As the research explored above in terms of the direction of the relationship is not conclusive, it could be that the relationship between depression and SoNB found in the current research may be reciprocal, with the experience of not belonging both impacting and being impacted by depressive symptoms. As such, whilst SoNB might result in feelings of depression, those feelings of depression and the display of the behaviours associated with depression, such as being submissive, self-deprecating and withdrawn may serve to *enhance* one's likelihood of exclusion. Furthermore, depression might also heighten an individual's sensitivity to events that signal exclusion further exacerbating their SoNB and encouraging the cycle. Whilst the proposed theoretical relationship in the current research is in the direction of SoNB *inducing* symptoms of depression, the participants in the current study provided evidence of the behavioural symptoms of depression through their self-protective strategies as well as the cognitions associated with depression, such as worthlessness and hopelessness. As such, it could be that these cognitions and behaviours served to *fuel* and perpetuate the experience and may account for the continuation of the experience that was reported by some.

5.5.4 Lack of associations between belonging, mood and psychological distress

Despite the research discussed above which demonstrates a relationship, be it in *response* to not belonging or a *cause* of not belonging, there is a lot of research in the literature that has failed to find an association between exclusion and psychological distress, and some interesting theories have been proposed to explain these findings. For example, a study of 138 students conducted by Begen and Turner-Cobb (2015) found that whilst inclusion, manipulated through the cyberball paradigm, resulted in a decrease in negative affect, the impact of exclusion on negative affect, whilst increasing it, was not significant. Rather, a balanced affect was found between downward shifts in positive affect and upward shifts in negative affect, resulting in a *neutral* emotional state. Baumeister (2005) and DeWall and Baumeister (2006) argue that this finding is explained by the numbness hypothesis which proposes that rejection results in *flattened* emotions and arousal.

Twenge, Catanese and Baumeister (2003) propose that this emotional numbness results from individuals entering a defensive state of cognitive deconstruction in order to avoid distress. Cognitive deconstruction is proposed to arise in response to psychologically aversive states, and

is characterised by a lack of emotion, an altered sense of time, focus on the present rather than the future, an absence of meaningful thought, and lethargy (Baumeister, 1990; 1991). Twenge et al. (2003) argue that all of these characteristics serve to protect the individual from the experience of rejection and result in the observed emotional numbness. For example, evading meaningful thought and self-awareness avoids the need to focus on why one was rejected, a focus on the present avoids the need to think about a potential future alone, and shutting down one's emotional response avoids the acute distress associated with rejection. As such, Twenge et al. (2003) argue that rejected individuals enter a deconstructed state in order to protect themselves from processing and engaging in their experience which results in emotional numbness and the lack of emotion following the social exclusion and rejection often found in the research.

They explored their proposition in a series of studies incorporating each of the characteristics of the deconstructed state as an independent variable and manipulating rejection by either telling participants that no one wanted to work with them, or using the future alone paradigm. Multiple measures of mood were used including single-item and multiple item measures, PANAS (Watson et al., 1988) and ratings of or circling of positive and negative adjectives. Study one assessed ability to judge time intervals, and demonstrated that rejected participants overestimated time, were more present-orientated, and chose short-term gain at the expense of long-term gain. Study two asked participants to what extent they agreed with the statements "life is meaningless" and "I am in control of my life", and found that rejected participants did not disagree with the meaning statement as strongly as accepted participant (none of whom agreed with it), but did not report feeling a lack of control. Study three included a measure of State Self-Esteem Scale (SSES; Heatherton & Polivy, 1991), as well as a measure of lethargy (asking participants to explain ten common proverbs in their own words – writing less was argued to demonstrate lethargy), and found that future alone participants were more lethargic than future misfortune or future belonging participants but found no differences in self-esteem (although the reliability of their measure of lethargy is not evidenced). Study four assessed participant reaction times over 25 trials, and found that rejected participants showed slower reaction times in the first, novel trial but no significant differences for the remaining trials, suggesting that lethargy slows down controlled reactions as demonstrated in trial 1, but not automatic reactions to a familiar task, as demonstrated through the remaining trials.

Another of their studies explored the impact of social exclusion on self-awareness using a technique adapted from Greenberg and Musham (1981) whereby participants could choose to sit on a chair facing a mirror (increasing self-awareness) or facing away from a mirror (avoiding

self-awareness), as referred to above. This study found that those in the future alone condition were significantly more likely to avoid self-awareness than participants in the other conditions. Across all of their studies, Twenge et al. (2003) consistently found *no impact* of social exclusion on mood irrespective of the measure of mood or affect employed.

The findings from these experiments therefore support the proposition that rejection and social exclusion result in *cognitive deconstruction*, a state designed to avoid the emotional distress of rejection and avoid cognitive engagement with the meaning individuals attribute to the rejection. This is evidenced by the significant effects they found of rejection on all the measured characteristics of deconstruction. Rejected participants were more lethargic, more present orientated, had a distorted sense of time, regarded life as less meaningful, and avoided self-awareness more than accepted or future misfortune participants.

A meta-analysis of 192 studies by Blackhart, et al. (2009) adds further support to the numbness hypothesis. They explored the impact of social exclusion, rejection and ostracism as manipulated using Cyberball, Future Alone, Reliving, and Group-Work rejection on emotional distress and self-esteem. Whilst their results initially found a significant, moderate effect of rejection on emotion and affect when compared to an acceptance group, this effect was smaller ($zr = 0.26$ vs. 0.35) when compared to a neutral control group. This was explained by an *increase* in affect for the accepted participants following inclusion. As such, their results did find that rejected participants felt significantly worse than neutral controls or accepted participants. However, when the absolute scores for mood and affect were considered they found that rejected participant's affect was slightly *higher* than neutral but moderately positive, whereas accepted and neutral control participant's affect was moderately positive. As such, they concluded that whilst rejected participants felt worse than neutral controls and accepted participants, they did not actually experience emotional *distress*, suggesting that rejection leads to a move towards neutral feelings rather than emotional distress.

However, Blackhart et al. (2009) also found that the *paradigm* moderated the results such that future-alone participants reported more negative affect than those left out of a group (cyberball and group-work rejection), and stronger effects for those in imagined rather than actual exclusion paradigms. This is also supported by their findings in regards to self-esteem whereby, when compared to neutral controls the effect size of the difference between accepted and rejected participants was near to zero ($zr = 0.03$), however, relived past rejection yielded a significantly larger effect ($zr = 0.73$) in terms of difference between rejected and accepted participants, than any of the other paradigms (these studies did not include a control group).

They argue therefore, that rejection might produce a delayed response. This is supported by the findings from the non-laboratory studies in their meta-analysis which found a significant reduction in affect (although no assessment was made of the absolute valence of that affect), suggesting that the impact on affect occurs over time. They also argue that perhaps relived experiences might be appraised in more meaningful ways than momentary ones, and as such have a greater psychological impact (Baumeister, Brewer, Tice & Twenge, 2007). It could also be however, that relived experiences are exaggerated in memory, compared to reality, resulting in greater psychological impact.

Gerber and Wheeler (2009a) however, conducted a meta-analysis of 88 studies exploring the impact of rejection on mood, self-esteem, arousal, basic needs, and behaviour. Their analyses included all four of the paradigms explored elsewhere (Cyberball, Future Alone, Reliving, and Group-Work rejection), and captured different measures of mood, self-esteem, arousal, need for belonging, need for control, and need for meaningful existence. The results of their analysis found a moderate effect size of rejection on mood: Specifically, rejection appeared to *decrease* positive mood and *increase* negative mood for three of the four paradigms. In the future-Life paradigm there was no impact of exclusion on mood but there was an increase in positive mood for included participants. They also found ostracism (as experienced in the Cyberball paradigm) to have a marginal positive effect on arousal, defined as a state of alertness and readiness for action, cortical responsiveness and a state of excitement or energy linked to an emotion (VandenBos, 2007). They argue this finding contradicts the numbness hypothesis suggesting that although participants may demonstrate affective flattening following rejection, they may still be alert.

The potential causes for the lack of agreement between studies regarding the impact of social exclusion on emotion explored above are examined by Bernstein and Claypool (2012). In support of Blackhart et al. (2009) they argue that what might be significant is the *severity* of the exclusion induced by the different paradigms used. Bernstein and Claypool (2012) compared the impact of the cyberball paradigm and future life paradigm and found that those in the cyberball paradigm reported increased sensitivity to physical pain whereas those in the future-life paradigm reported a numbing of pain. As discussed in *Chapter Three*, social pain is known to share the same neural networks as physical pain (Eisenberger, Lieberman, and Williams, 2003), and therefore physical pain was used as a proxy measure of social pain.

Bernstein and Claypool (2012) therefore hypothesised that the two techniques involve different *severities* of social injury, with the future-life paradigm being the most severe. As such, they

argue that, in a similar manner to our physical response to extreme injury, severe social injury should result in numbness and therefore no increase in pain whereas less severe social injury as induced through cyberball should result in reported increases in pain. In a pilot study in 2012 utilising the two techniques, the authors found that participants rated the social pain from cyberball as less severe than that from future-life. Furthermore, when they manipulated the severity of the social pain in the future-life paradigm (life devoid of all possible relationships versus fewer social relationships) the extreme condition resulted in emotional numbness whereas the less severe version resulted in increased sensitivity.

To further explore their proposition Bernstein and Claypool (2012) conducted two studies, both of which included a cyberball manipulation and a future-life manipulation. In study one the dependent variables were the 20-item Basic Needs Questionnaire (including belonging, meaningful existence, self-control and self-esteem) and an 8-item mood measure (Wirth, Lynam & Williams, 2010). In their second study mood was measured using the PANAS (Watson, et al., 1988). Both studies demonstrated that exclusion in the future-life paradigm resulted in *no differences* in need or mood, whereas those excluded in the cyberball paradigm reported *greater negative affect* than both inclusion in the cyberball paradigm and exclusion in the future-life paradigm. They conclude that the greater social damage elicited by the future-life paradigm results in a numbing of emotion whereas the less severe damage caused by the cyberball paradigm results in increased emotional distress, providing a potential explanation for the conflicting results found in the research around the impact of exclusion on social pain. They provide a caveat to their results however, by emphasising that whilst social pain was inferred by measures of basic needs and mood, these are not direct measures of social pain, and as such should be applied with caution to findings regarding physical or social pain and exclusion.

The research therefore would suggest that severe and acute social exclusion may result in a numbing effect whereby the individual enters a state of cognitive deconstruction in order to protect themselves from the pain of social exclusion. Less extreme social exclusion would result in a negative emotional response. Given that the SoNB experienced in the current research was associated with negative emotions, this suggests that the perceived exclusion in the current research was not severe, which contradicts the power of the emotional experience as described by my participants. However, the perceived exclusion in the current study was not a one time, in one moment experience, but an *ongoing* perception that they did not belong which may result in a very different emotional experience than that induced through laboratory studies. This proposition finds support from Clegg's (2006) study of not belonging in adolescence and early adulthood which found that only those who experienced a prolonged rather than episodic

sense of not belonging experienced strong negative emotions. Furthermore, all of the field studies that have explored the impact on affect of belonging in the workplace have found that not belonging, exclusion and rejection in these real-life settings has been associated with increased anxiety, depression and psychological distress (e.g., Levett-Jones, 2009; Shakespeare-Finch & Davey, 2017; Cockshaw & Sochet, 2010).

The potential differential impact of real-life exclusion finds support from field studies which explore opportunities to *appraise* the cause of exclusion, which would likely be found in most real-life exclusion situations. For example, Kitchens and Gohm (2010) explored the impact of reappraisal of exclusion feedback on emotion with 252 psychology students. Exclusion was manipulated by having participants ostensibly rated by other participants as either being a potential good friend or poor friend, and emotion assessed using the PANAS-X (Watson & Clark, 1999). Reappraisal was manipulated by participants being told that the ratings were either accurate or inaccurate methods of determining potential for friendship and then by writing two or three sentences describing why the method was valid or invalid. In essence this provided the participants with an opportunity of derogating the credibility of the rating.

Results indicated that reappraising social exclusion *diminished* emotional distress; those in the invalid-reappraisal condition reported significantly less negative affect than those in the valid-reappraisal condition and control condition. No differences were found in terms of positive affect. Being able to discredit the excluder therefore, might limit the impact of the exclusion. Since rejection in laboratory studies is often unexplained, participants may not perceive the rejection to be credible and might therefore be protected from any emotional impact.

The potential role of time and appraisal was also explored in a series of studies by Buckley, Winkel and Leary (2003) who investigated the impact of the temporal nature of rejection. According to gain-loss theory (Aronson & Linder, 1995) we like people more when their evaluations of us are increasingly positive rather than constantly positive, and like people less when their evaluations are increasingly negative rather than constantly negative. This suggests that over time we *gain* their esteem, or *lose* their esteem, and as such their evaluations have more credibility. Hewitt (1972) on the other hand suggests that our feelings towards others are based on the *proportion* of negative or positive ratings they give us. As such, we should like those who *constantly* evaluate us positively more than those who *increasingly* evaluate us positively.

To determine which of these propositions applies to rejection and acceptance, Buckley et al. (2004) manipulated the temporal nature of rejection by asking participants to answer a series

of questions about themselves over a period of five minutes. During this time, they were rated every minute by an evaluator in terms of how much they wanted to get to know them. Depending on condition, these ratings were either constantly accepting (6 or 5 out of 7), constantly rejecting (2 or 3 out of 7) or increasingly accepting (ratings from 2 increasing to 6) or increasingly rejecting (ratings from 6 to 2). Measures included mood ratings including happy, angry, anxious, sad and hurt, ratings of the evaluator including friendly, likeable, kind, good or pleasant, and an indication of whether the participant would engage in negative or positive behaviours with them as per their first study. Buckley et al. (2003) found that participants who were increasingly rejected felt worse than those who were constantly rejected. However, those who were constantly rejected felt it less important that the evaluator liked them than those who were increasingly rejected. There was however, no difference between the two rejection conditions in terms of their inclination to behave antisocially.

In support of attribution theory discussed in previous section, what may be important therefore is the *credibility* of the source of rejection as well as the *attribution* made for the cause of the rejection. Those who are increasingly rejected may attribute the rejection more to themselves because it is ostensibly built on the evaluator's experience and developing knowledge of them, whereas those constantly rejected could be seen to be reacting to first impressions or be otherwise biased against the participant, making their evaluations less credible and the cause of their evaluation less relevant to the individual. As such, those increasingly rejected are more likely to feel worse because the rejection is self-relevant, suggesting that long-term rejection and exclusion is likely to have a greater emotional impact because of the credibility of the source and the attributional value of their rejection than one-off rejection.

5.5.5 Category Summary

The research discussed seemingly both supports and contradicts the current research, with some finding a relationship between belonging and emotion (Shakespeare-Finch & Daley, 2017; Cockshaw & Sochet, 2010; Dunn et al. 2012; Clegg, 2006) and others finding no relationship between belonging and emotion (Twenge et al., 2002; Blackhart et al., 2009). In terms of the relationship with depression there are also contradictory findings with some research supporting the proposed impact of SoNB on depression (Shakespeare-Finch & Daley, 2017) and others suggesting that the depressive symptoms may in fact *result* in SoNB (Davilla, 2001; Borelli & Prinstein, 2006; Cockshaw et al., 2014) or heighten sensitivity to SoNB (Steger and Kashdan, 2009), indicating that emotional response to SoNB may serve to perpetuate the experience, as discussed below.

The inconsistency between the current findings and some of the extant literature in respect of the emotional impact of exclusion may well be an artefact of the methodology used, in that laboratory studies do not allow opportunities for participants to reflect on the experience of exclusion and to *appraise* the exclusion in terms of the importance to their sense of self or their responsibility for the exclusion (Kitchens & Gohm, 2010). However, all of the theories of emotion argue that cognitive appraisal of an experience is vital to the *intensity* and the *valence* of the emotional response (Arnold, 1960; Scherer, 2001, 2004). As such, experiences that do not allow for appraisal are less likely to result in an emotional response. Indeed, when perceived exclusion occurs over time individuals are more likely to consider the perceived exclusion as their responsibility. This emerged clearly in the current research in the perception that there was something wrong with the individual which was why they felt they did not belong, as expressed for example by NATHAN: “...*there is something that is wrong with me. And that needs to be corrected...there must be something that needs to be fixed.*” And SANDRA: “*I feel like there’s something missing. Like there’s a linking thing that’s missing...that’s a sort of a deficiency in a way isn’t it?*” (SANDRA). Moreover, as self-concept emerged as the core concern of the participants, the importance of the perceived exclusion to their sense of self would be significant, all of which, as supported by appraisal theories of emotion, would result in intense and negatively valenced emotional experience, as was found.

As such, the outcomes of research regarding the emotional impact of not belonging, similarly to that regarding the behavioural impact of not belonging, would seem to be greatly influenced by the methodology used. As argued in *Chapter One*, in order to truly understand the experience of not belonging in the workplace it appears necessary to adopt real-world field studies such as the current research.

5.5.5.1 Theory development

Those extant theories with good conceptual fit to the proposed relationships have been integrated into the current theoretical model, resulting in some adaptations and elaborations, which are illustrated in *Figure 5.VIII* below, and summarised in *Table 5.5*.

Research into the Interpersonal Process Theory of Depression (Coyne, 1976) argues that the behaviours of depressed individuals, such as making less eye contact, initiating fewer conversations and unsolicited self-disclosure of negative feelings, may elicit rejection and as such the relationship between SoNB and depression may be bi-directional with depression fuelling a well as being fuelled by a SoNB. Similarly, research into the Transactional

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Interpersonal Theory of Depression (Krochel et al., 2012) has found that depression is predictive of general belongingness (Cockshaw, et al. (2014).

The Social Risk Hypothesis of Depression (Allen & Badcock, 2003) has found that depressed individuals have a heightened sensitivity to indicators of social burden and social value, and as such depression may heighten sensitivity to signals of exclusion exacerbating a SoNB.

Finally, research exploring appraisal theories of emotion (Arnold, 1960) and attribution theory (Weiner, 1985) has found that the experience of different emotions is related to different attributional processes, and as such the emotional response to SoNB may be moderated by individual attribution processes in terms of relevance of SoNB to an individual’s sense of self, their ability to control the experience and their sense of responsibility for the experience.

This research has been integrated into the theoretical framework and added to the proposed relationships in *Table 5.5* (orange text). Where these additions have resulted in a new relationship, or new direction of relationship, this is illustrated in orange in *Figure 5.VIII* below.

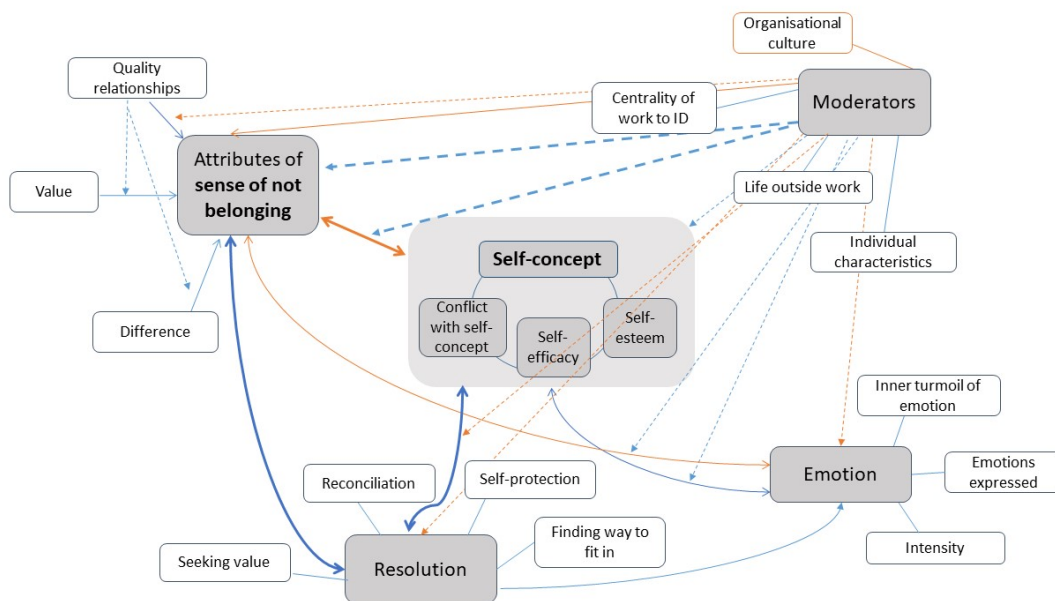


Figure 5.VIII: Developed theoretical framework integrating the pertinent extant literature

CATEGORY	PROPOSED RELATIONSHIPS
Emotion expressed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – <i>SoNB may result in expressed emotions</i> – <i>Self-concept may result in expressed emotions</i> – <i>Expressed emotions may impact one’s self-concept</i> – <i>The symptoms of depression may elicit rejection and fuel SoNB (Coyne, 1976; Krochel et al., 2012)</i> – <i>Depression may heighten sensitivity to SoNB (Allen & Badcock, 2003)</i>
Intensity of emotion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – <i>An intense SoNB may be associated with an intense emotional experience</i> – <i>Intensity of emotional experience may negatively impact one’s self-concept</i> – <i>Intensity and valence of emotional response may be moderated by individual attribution processes (Arnold, 1960; Weiner, 1985)</i>
Inner turmoil of emotion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – <i>SoNB may lead to an inner turmoil of emotion</i> – <i>Resolution strategies may lead to an inner turmoil of emotion</i> – <i>Inner turmoil of emotion may negatively impact one’s self-concept</i>

Table 5.5: Development of the theoretical framework incorporating extant literature

5.6 Moderators

The final category to emerge from the current research was that of ‘moderators’. Analyses suggested that a variety of factors were at play in the experience of not belonging, which whilst not *attributes* of the experience, appeared to moderate the experience for some. This had the potential to heighten an individual’s sensitivity to a perceived SoNB, either moderating the impact this might have on their self-concept, or moderating their emotional and behavioural responses. These factors themed into ‘individual characteristics’, ‘life outside of work’, and the ‘centrality of work to identity’.

5.6.1 Individual characteristics

The constructs which emerged as potentially moderating *individual characteristics* from the current research were ‘enduring low self-esteem’, ‘need for external validation’, ‘need to belong’ and ‘from childhood’. Enduring low self-esteem, which is supported by the literature, will be discussed towards the end of this section. The literature discussed above under ‘emotional experience’ around the role of excessive reassurance seeking provides support for the constructs of ‘need for external validation’ in terms of the potential impact of a heightened need for reassurance from others on both individual behaviour and potentially treatment by others (Starr & Davillia, 2008). This suggests a potential moderating role of ‘need for external validation’ in terms of an individual’s heightened sensitivity to threats to belonging.

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In addition to the research explored above, research regarding individual differences in the need to belong also illuminates the potential moderating role of a need for external validation in one's sensitivity to SoNB. Moreover, research which associates this need to belong with attachment styles that develop from childhood also offers support for the construct to emerge as an individual characteristic moderator of 'from childhood'.

5.6.1.1 *Individual differences in need to belong*

Research explored previously in *Chapter Three* provides evidence that the need to belong is a universal, human motivation that operates according to standard motivational laws (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). If sense of belonging does not meet an individual's need to belong this will likely motivate behaviours and cognitions designed to address the discrepancy between need and sense of belonging. However, Leary, Kelly, Cottrell and Schreindorger (2006) argue that the need to belong has a dispositional dimension in which individuals differ. It is therefore possible that individuals with a naturally higher need to belong might perpetually experience a discrepancy between desired and perceived belonging which motivates constant or excessive behaviours designed to enhance belonging, as well as to moderate the individual's emotional response to SoNB. Similarly, a high need to belong may render some individuals particularly sensitive to threats to their need to belong.

5.6.1.1.1 *High need to belong may moderate sensitivity to threats to belonging*

As discussed in *Chapter Three*, McClelland's *3-Needs Theory* (McClelland, 1985) identified three motivational needs: *Achievement*; *power*; and *affiliation*. McClelland argued that whilst individuals will have a combination of these needs, they may have a tendency to require more of one than another. Previous research has found that those high in affiliation needs behave in particularly affiliative ways, are driven to please people, and are particularly sensitive to affiliative cues (e.g., Atkinson & Walker, 1956; Boyatzis, 1972; Constantian, 1981; Lansing & Heynes, 1959; McClelland, 1985). These propositions are supported by the research explored above which finds that rejected individuals demonstrate higher levels of interpersonal sensitivity. For example, Pickett, Gardner and Knowles (2004) found that those high in the need to belong paid more attention to social cues such as accurately identifying vocal tone, emotional facial expressions, and empathy. Different levels of need to belong may thus moderate some individual's *sensitivity* to threats to belonging or *moderate* their emotional or behavioural responses.

However, research also suggests that a key determinant of these differences in need to belong are the security, or lack thereof, of past social and personal relationships. In particular,

attachment has been found in many research studies to be related to an individual's interest in social interactions and need to belong.

Bowlby's *Attachment Theory* (Bowlby, 1969, 1973, 1980) emerged from an interest in maternal deprivation and later personality development, and Ainsworth's work on security theory (Ainsworth, 1967). Attachment is defined as "the propensity of human beings to make strong affectional bonds to particular others" (Bowlby, 1977, p201). The attachment system is said to function in order for children to continuously maintain a sense of security which facilitates their exploration, and it is suggested that the quality of a child's early attachment relationships is founded upon the extent to which they rely on their attachment figure as a source of security (Ainsworth, Blebar, Waters & Wall, 1978). Research by Ainsworth identified three distinct patterns of infant attachment based on their behaviour following separation: *Secure*; *anxious-resistant*; and *avoidant*. *Securely* attached children welcome their caregiver's return and are able to be comforted if distressed; *anxious-resistant* children are ambivalent towards returning caregivers and are not able to be comforted when reunited; and *avoidant* children avoid interaction with the returning caregiver (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991). What is pertinent to the current study is that early attachment relationships might lay the foundations for later family or peer relationships (Bowlby, 1973), and influence perceptions of belonging and an ability to belong.

Bartholomew and Horowitz (1991) propose a model of adult attachment constituting four quadrants based on individual's negative or positive views of self and negative and positive views of other. They postulate that *secure* individuals, with a positive view of self and others, have a sense of worthiness and assume others are accepting and responsive; *preoccupied* individuals with a low sense of worthiness but a positive evaluation of others are preoccupied with relationships in an effort to get validation from others; *fearful-avoidant* individuals with low sense of worthiness and negative evaluation of others avoid intimacy in order to avoid rejection; and *dismissive-avoidant* individuals with high self-perception and poor evaluation of others are dismissive of intimacy and maintain their independence. This classification may predict level of dependency on others: Positive self-regard may result in low dependency, whereas negative self-regard may result in high dependency, as sense of self-worth for these individuals is dependent upon other's acceptance (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991). All of which may determine the strength of an individual's need to belong, their consequential behaviour, as well as explain individual differences in the impact of not belonging on self-concept and psychological well-being.

Bartholomew and Horowitz (1991) tested their model to determine whether the four classifications were indeed related to childhood attachment styles. Their results suggested that each adult attachment style was differentiated by perceptions of self and perceptions of others, and were associated with distinct interpersonal problems. Importantly, different categorisations were associated with different interactions with others. For example, whilst *preoccupied* and *fearful* individuals both had a negative sense of self, they differed in terms of their readiness to become intimate and their dependency on others; whereas *fearful* and *dismissing* individuals both had a negative view of others and avoided close relationship, but differed in terms of their sense of self-worth. Thus, their research supported their classification. Their model suggests that avoidance of close relationships may be due to *either* a fear of intimacy or the result of a disinterest in others due to a low dependency on others for self-worth. Both types of individuals however, are likely to perpetuate their negative view of others by virtue of the resulting inability to establish relationships.

Similarly, perceptions of self may be further perpetuated by those with low self-worth (*preoccupied*) blaming themselves for others' perceived rejection, and those with high self-worth (*dismissive*) blaming others for perceived rejection. This could explain how attachment styles are maintained from childhood; people behave in ways that evoke reactions from others that they then interpret in order to confirm their internal models of self and others (Caspi & Elder, 1988). Previous relationship experiences and their influence on attachment may therefore be a key determinant in differences in the extent to which individuals *need* to belong, which would moderate cognitive and emotional responses to thwarting of the need to belong, which would be contingent upon their attachment style.

Lavigne, Vallerand and Crevier-Braud (2011) however, propose that as well as a difference in the *strength* of the need to belong, there also exists a difference in the *quality* of the need which may determine different psychological outcomes. This is predicted to be determined by previous relationship experiences. They propose two distinct orientations which guide behaviour and evolve from the need for belongingness in their Belongingness Orientation Model (BOM): *Growth orientation*; and *deficit-reduction orientation*. *Growth orientated* individuals are genuinely interested in relationships and consider them to be enriching and valuable, and are motivated to connect with others. As these relationships are seen to be satisfying, they result in higher levels of well-being. *Deficit-reduction orientated* individuals gain social acceptance from relationships and use them to appease a need for security and fear of rejection. Their need for belongingness and resultant behaviour is driven by a constant desire for security and reassurance. These individuals are predicted to experience a constant social

deficit, therefore social relationships are less likely to result in psychological adjustment (Lavigne, Vallerand & Crevier-Braud, 2011).

This model assumes a trait perspective, and whilst the authors accept that either orientation may be triggered by specific situations, they contend that one orientation will predominate, primarily as a result of prior childhood and social experiences. They suggest that previous secure relationships from birth which satisfied belongingness needs, and were characterised by love, trust and mutual respect, will result in a positive representation of relationships promoting the development of a *growth orientation*, whereas previous relationships lacking in trust, love and mutual respect will result in a fear of rejection and the development of a *deficit-reduction orientation*, and an ongoing drive to satisfy belongingness needs.

The model also posits that the two orientations will result in differences in how people are perceived and treated by others. Those with a *growth-orientation*, who have a genuine interest in others, are more likely to make social connections easily and are more likely to be accepted and liked by others. Conversely, those with a *deficit-reduction orientation* are more likely to be disliked and rejected by others through their insecurity and constant search for signs of rejection, which fuels their assumptions and becomes self-fulfilling. According to this model the belonging orientation predicts both an individual's behaviour and psychological adjustment as well as how they are perceived and treated by others, which further impacts their experience of belonging. This finds support from the research discussed above under 5.4.3 under 'resolution' that demonstrated a relationship between rejection and interpersonal sensitivity, (e.g. Gardner et al., 2001), as well as that explored under 5.5.3 under 'emotional experience' which found that rejected individuals are more likely to engage in excessive reassurance seeking behaviours (Starr & Davilla, 2008).

In a series of four quantitative studies, Lavigne et al. (2011) tested their model. Their first study explored the construct validity of the two orientations, correlating their Belongingness Orientation Scale (BOS) with psychological constructs including measures of interpersonal relationship importance and commitment, importance of psychological needs for autonomy, competence and security, motivation for and tendency towards affiliation, resilience and extraversion. A confirmatory factor analysis validated the two-factor structure of the scale and demonstrated discriminant and convergent validity with the two constructs being differently associated with distinct psychological constructs. Their second study explored whether self-esteem (measured using Rosenberg's Self-Esteem Scale, 1965), social anxiety (measured Pelletier & Vallerand's, ERCS-22, 1990) and loneliness (measured with the UCLA Loneliness Scale

(Russell, 1996)) would be associated with a deficit reduction but not a growth orientation as measured by the BOS. Results of this study found that *growth orientation* was negatively correlated with social anxiety and loneliness (but not self-esteem), and *deficit reduction orientation* was positively correlated with social anxiety and loneliness, and negatively correlated with self-esteem.

Their third study explored the relationship between attachment style and BOM, the former of which was measured using the Relationship Questionnaire (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991) assessing secure, fearful-avoidant, preoccupied, and dismissing-avoidant attachment styles. Results demonstrated that secure attachment styles were positively related to growth orientation and negatively related to deficit reduction orientation; fearful-avoidant attachment style was negatively related to growth orientation; preoccupied attachment style was positively related to deficit reduction orientation; and dismissing-avoidant attachment style was negatively related to deficit reduction.

Their final study explored whether different belongingness styles might *lead* to different behaviours by assessing BOM at the beginning of a semester and colleague's evaluations of social acceptance and social involvement and social anxiety at the end of the semester. Social acceptance assessed whether colleagues would like to work with the individual again, and involvement assessed how actively involved individuals were in work teams. Results of this study found that *deficit-reduction orientation* negatively predicted colleague's evaluations of social involvement and social acceptance, but no significant relationship was found between a growth orientation and colleague's evaluations. The authors infer from this study that the high insecurity and social neediness of deficit reduction individuals may translate into negative behaviours that result in negative evaluations, which is again supported by the ERS research (e.g., Starr & Davillia, 2008).

Lavigne et al.'s (2011) two-factor structure of the BOM is supported by a study by Pillow, Malone and Hale (2014) who explored the relationship between the need to belong, avoidance and approach orientations, various psychological outcomes (detailed below), and satisfaction with relationships. Their study involved a sample of 869 undergraduate students who completed the Need to Belong Scale (NTBS; Leary, Kelly, Cottrell, & Schreindorfer, 2013), the SOBI-A, which assesses antecedents of a need to belong, and the SOBI-P, which assesses sense of belonging (Hagerty & Patusky, 1995), along with measures of psychological outcomes including the UCLA Loneliness Scale (ULS-8; Hayes & DiMatteo, 1978), the Satisfaction with Life scale (Diener, Emmons, Larsen & Griffin, 1985), Experiences in Close Relationships Short Form (ECR-S, Wei,

Russell, Mallinckrodt & Vogel, 2007) and Rosenberg's Self-Esteem Scale (Rosenberg, 1965). Results of their study found that the NTBS correlated positively with loneliness and the SOBI-A correlated negatively with loneliness. Similarly, the NTBS was positively correlated with anxious attachment, low self-esteem and neuroticism, whereas the SOBI-A was negatively correlated with avoidant attachment style, and positively correlated with self-esteem and extraversion. The authors argue that these findings suggest that high scores on the NTBS indicate a discrepancy between desired and met belongingness needs.

Results also demonstrated that high NTBS scores were associated with more partially fulfilling than fulfilling relationships, whereas high SOBI-A scores were associated with more whole relationships. The authors suggest that the relationship between the avoidance orientated NTBS and the number of partial relationships may be due to the tendency of avoidance-orientated individuals to interpret ambiguous behaviour negatively, have greater levels of negative affect which may make it harder to maintain relationships, or may be overly dependent in their behaviours in their search for meaningful relationships, which might result in difficulties in creating and maintaining satisfying relationships (Pillow et al., 2014). Conversely, it could be that those with an avoidance orientation struggle to create and maintain satisfying relationships because they are constantly striving for attention and reassurance. Whatever the direction of causality, it is likely that this involves a cycle in which individual's efforts to get close to people are thwarted. This is supported by the interpersonal sensitivity and depression research (e.g., Steger & Kashdan, 2009; Badcock & Allen, 2007; Dunn, Whelton & Sharpe, 2012), and offers a potential explanation for the perpetuation of the SoNB as found for some, in the current research.

5.6.1.1.2 Individual differences in need to belong as moderators of the *impact* of a sense of not belonging

Thus far, this section has focused on the heightened sensitivity of those with a high need to belong. However, if particular attachment styles (e.g. *preoccupied*) result in some individuals having a high need to belong, it follows that individuals with alternative styles might have a lower need to belong. For example, those with dismissive-avoidant attachment styles report that they attribute a lack of importance to interpersonal, emotional attachments, a passive avoidance of relationships, and a self-reliance and independence, all of which suggests they have a minimal need to belong (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991). If this is indeed the case it challenges Baumeister and Leary's (1995) belonging hypothesis, which contends that the need to belong is both fundamental and universal.

In order to explore the validity of this argument, Carvallo and Gabriel (2006) investigated the reactions of dismissive-avoidant individuals to social inclusion. As previous research has found a neutral and subdued response to social rejection (e.g., Twenge et al., 2003), a similar response from dismissive-avoidant individuals would do little to distinguish them from the general population. However, Carvallo and Gabriel (2006) argue that given their lack of opportunity to experience belonging and acceptance that results from avoidance of interpersonal relationships, dismissive-avoidant individuals should be more sensitive than others to social acceptance (Gardner, Pickett & Brewer, 2000). In addition, they also explored the universality of the Sociometer Hypothesis which proposes that self-esteem functions as an indicator of one's level of acceptance or rejection (Leary, et al., 1995). Previous research has suggested that self-esteem in dismissive-avoidant individuals is disconnected from their social acceptance and instead relates to their abilities and achievements (Brennan & Bossman, 1998; Brennan & Morris, 1997). This group might therefore provide evidence to disprove the universality of the Sociometer Hypothesis.

Over two studies Carvallo and Gabriel (2006) examined the impact of social acceptance on mood, as measured by PANAS (Watson, et al. 1988), self-esteem, as measured by Rosenberg's (1965) Self-Esteem Scale, and attachment style using Bartholomew and Horowitz's (1991) measure. In their first study, acceptance was manipulated by asking participants to rate themselves against 15 personality traits and answer a series of questions about themselves. They were then told that their self-reviews would be ranked by other participants and that those ranked highest would be able to select a partner to interact with first. Those in the acceptance condition were informed that they had been ranked highest and were therefore able to choose an interaction partner, whereas those in the control condition were told that the choice of interaction partner had been selected randomly. This study found that those high in dismissive-avoidance reported significantly *higher* levels of positive affect in the acceptance condition than those *low* in dismissive-avoidance, but no significant difference between this group was found in the control condition. They also found that those high in dismissive-avoidance reported significantly higher self-esteem in the acceptance condition than low dismissive-avoidance. These effects were specific to participants with a dismissive-avoidant style since they were not found when using scores for other attachment styles as predictors. This suggests that dismissive-avoidant oriented individuals are as motivated by a need to belong as others.

To rule out the possibility that these reported improvements in mood and self-esteem were due to the interpretation of feedback as a signal of competence, a second study manipulated acceptance by asking participants to read a passage that either told them that high scores on a

bogus personality test, a 'surgency' test, were related to *interpersonal* future success (acceptance condition) or related to *individual* future success (competence condition). Results of this second study also found that those high in dismissive-avoidance reported significantly more positive mood and significantly higher self-esteem in the interpersonal success condition than those low in dismissive-avoidance, while no significant effects were found on either measure in the individual success condition.

These experiments suggest therefore, that not only do those high in dismissive-avoidance *care* about acceptance, and that it does reflect on their perceptions of self-worth, but that they may have an even *stronger* need for belonging than those low in dismissive-avoidance. One possible explanation for this is that these individuals have a lower sense of belonging because of their minimal interpersonal relationships. As such, this study supports the universal nature of the belonging hypothesis (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). It also supports the claim of the Sociometer Hypothesis that our alert system is individually calibrated to reflect our need to belong and our current belonging status. Whilst for most people the sociometer is more sensitive to potential rejection than to acceptance (Leary & Downs, 1995), those who avoid interpersonal relationships and inhibit their response to cues of social rejection, may be the most sensitive to information that signals acceptance.

Carvallo and Gabriel's (2010) study also suggests that what is important to sensitivity and response to SoNB is not simply the strength of the need to belong, but the *discrepancy* between that need and perception of belonging. This proposition was explored in a study by Mellor, Stokes, Firth, Hayashi and Cummins (2008) who examined the relationship between need for belonging, loneliness and life satisfaction. They define loneliness as being characterised by the unpleasant feelings that come from a perceived discrepancy between desired and existing social relationships. As such, loneliness is conceptualised as a subjective, rather than objective experience, and is based on the individual's *perception* of this discrepancy. Therefore, the authors contend that need for belongingness does not directly relate to loneliness, but rather it is the discrepancy between need to belong and satisfaction with social relationships that results in loneliness. As such, an individual with a low need to belong and few social relationships may not experience loneliness because of the small discrepancy between needed and actual belonging. Similarly, an individual with a high need to belong and a similar number of social relationships will likely experience loneliness due to the greater discrepancy – the stronger experience of 'thwarted belonging'.

The authors explored this proposition with 436 adults from the Australian Unity Wellbeing project, using Kelly's (1999) modified version of the Need to Belong Scale, the UCLA Loneliness Scale (Russell, 1996), the personal Wellbeing Index (International Wellbeing Group, 2006) assessing satisfaction with personal relationships, and a single-item measure of life satisfaction. Results demonstrated that need to belong was positively, but weakly correlated ($r=-0.28$) with loneliness and negatively, but weakly correlated with satisfaction with personal relationships ($r=-0.17$). Satisfaction with personal relationships was negatively correlated with loneliness ($r=0.61$). By subtracting satisfaction with personal relationships from need to belong scores the authors calculated an 'unmet need to belong score' indicating a discrepancy in need to belong. This revealed a stronger relationship between the discrepancy score and loneliness ($r=0.62$), than between need to belong and loneliness, supporting their hypothesis that it is the *discrepancy* between need for belonging and satisfaction with personal relationships that is vital to the experience of loneliness, rather than one's satisfaction with personal relationships.

5.6.1.2 Summary

The research suggests that individual differences in need to belong and their resultant behaviours may be consequent on whether secure attachment relationships develop in early life (Bartholomew and Horowitz, 1991), or on the quality of past relationships (Levigne, et al., 2011) supporting the finding from the current study that for some, an experience of not belonging as a child carried over and may have moderated the individual's sensitivity and response to SoNB. The research also suggests that insecure attachments in turn may lead to an over-dependency on others and a stronger need to belong, in order to gain validation of self-worth from others (Bartholomew and Horowitz, 1991). As such, this research supports the findings from the current study in that the individual differences in the need to belong that emerged in terms of 'need for external validation' and 'from childhood' might moderate sensitivity to and consequential impact of the experience of belonging, as well as the perceptions of others and the subsequent treatment by others, which could in turn exacerbate SoNB and perpetuate a cycle.

5.6.2 Other moderating individual characteristics

5.6.2.1 Trait low self-esteem

The final moderating individual characteristic that emerged from the current research was, for some, an 'enduring low self-esteem' which has the potential to moderate sensitivity to threats to belonging and the impact of not belonging, on one's self-concept.

Drawing on their Sociometer Hypothesis, Leary et al. (1995) argue that those with low trait self-esteem are more likely to be more sensitive to the threat of rejection and to perceive that they are being rejected and excluded. Moreover, Kernis, Cornell, Sun, Berry and Harlow (1993) found that individual reactions to self-esteem threatening events were moderated by both *level* of self-esteem and the *stability* of self-esteem, such that those with lower and unstable self-esteem were more sensitive to self-esteem threats. Leary et al. (1995) argue that both low levels of self-esteem and fluctuating self-esteem predispose individuals to perceive and respond emotionally to inclusion threatening events.

This is supported by research which found that those with lower trait self-esteem were more sensitive to interpersonal rejection. For example, Haupt and Leary (1997) found that individuals with low self-esteem estimated their exclusion from a group to be higher when the exclusion was based on a vote by members of the group, but underestimated their potential for exclusion when they believed the rejection would be random. The opposite was true for high self-esteem participants however. This could be because random exclusion has no bearing on other people's evaluations and therefore those who think poorly of themselves may conclude that they are no more likely to be rejected than other people.

Leary et al. (1995) also offer evidence for this proposition through their 1995 study, which found a moderate negative relationship between individual's general perceptions that they are being included or excluded and their trait self-esteem. This study however, did not infer the direction of the relationship; whilst it is possible that those with lower trait self-esteem are more likely to *perceive* they are being rejected, it could also be that ongoing perceptions of rejection might fuel lower trait self-esteem. Leary et al. (1995) do argue however, that those with lower trait self-esteem have differently calibrated sociometers, and as such are more likely to perceive others as rejecting than those with high trait self-esteem.

Whilst the experience of not belonging found in the current study was associated with lowered state self-esteem for the majority of participants, a minority did indicate low *trait* low self-esteem. As such, this tendency to generally low self-esteem may predispose those individuals to more readily perceive that they do not belong and as such may moderate the experience. This might have developed for reasons unrelated to belonging, or through ongoing perceptions of not belonging. Either way, low trait self-esteem may make some individuals more sensitive to SoNB in the workplace.

5.6.3 Life outside work

One of the other moderating factors to emerge from the current study was ‘life outside work’, both in terms of potentially exacerbating the experience when support was absent, and diminishing the experience when support was present. Little research was found which directly explored this potential moderating role, and that which was found was inconclusive.

For example, a study of ostracism in a workplace setting by Scott, Zagenczyk, Schippers, Purvis and Cruz (2014) explored the moderating effects of perceived organisational support (POS) and family and social support (FSS) on employee outcomes of social exclusion. They define POS as the “perception that the organisation values one’s contributions and is concerned about personal wellbeing” (p.1237), and FSS as emotional support offering an outlet for individuals to express their concerns and emotions. The results of their hierarchical regressions found that POS *mitigated* the negative relationship between social exclusion in the workplace and OBSE, whereas the relationship between OBSE and social exclusion was *exacerbated* by FSS. This study suggests therefore that support from outside the work environment may not necessarily moderate the impact of social exclusion and not belonging on individual well-being, contradicting the findings of the current study.

Spillover theory proposes however, that experiences in one domain, such as work or home *can* transfer to the other domain (Frone, Russell, & Cooper, 1992). *Emotional* spillover occurs when an individual transfers an emotional reaction from one domain to the other, e.g. anger with a spouse may result in an angry reaction to a work conflict. *Behavioural* spillover occurs when skills and behaviours are applied from one domain to another, e.g. good interpersonal skills between husband and wife may enhance the ability to have effective interactions at work. These propositions have found some empirical support: In a study of 214 women in the United States exploring the relationship between attachment style, intimate relationships, workplace relations and well-being, Towler and Stuhlmacher (2013) found that intimate relationship satisfaction and cohesion at home was positively related to job satisfaction and negatively related to interpersonal work conflict. Whilst this study did not explore the impact of family life on the experience of not belonging, it does offer limited support to the potential for secure family life to moderate the impact of not belonging in the workplace, as was found in the current research.

5.6.4 Centrality of work to identity

The final theme that emerged as a potential moderating factor was the ‘centrality of work to identity’ which exerted its influence through the impact that not belonging at work had on the

individual's self-concept. The importance of work to identity could exacerbate the impact of SoNB at work on self-concept, because it threatens something integral to sense of self.

This finding is supported by much of the literature discussed which suggests that undermining an element of identity that is central and deep-structured is likely to have deep-seated impact (Horton et al., 2014). Steele (1999) for example, argued that whilst it may be possible to restore a sense of integrity through reaffirming a sense of self-worth through another domain (such as through being a good mother), the sense of self that one achieves through that domain must be as important to identity as the domain being threatened. As such, for those for whom work was central to their identity, the threat to their sense of self that arose from SoNB in the workplace might have been hard to restore through other aspects of identity, and therefore would have a stronger impact on their self-concept than for those for whom work was less central to their sense of self.

The moderating role of the centrality of work to identity is also supported by the research explored above around attribution theory and the impact of different attribution dimensions on emotional response to an experience. For example, Siemer et al. (2007) demonstrated that the emotional response of shame and guilt was positively associated with attributions of the self-importance of an emotional event, and negative emotions were also strongly related to attributions of self-importance. Therefore, if work is central to identity greater levels of self-importance are likely to be attributed to the experience of not belonging in the workplace which could then moderate the emotional response, resulting in greater levels of negative affect, including shame and guilt.

Hewlin (2003) adds further support to the importance of work to sense of self in terms of both resolution strategies employed and emotional responses to those resolution strategies. She argues that the extent to which individuals create facades of conformity is dependent upon the extent to which individuals perceive their organisational identity to be fundamental to who they are (Ashforth, 2001). Hewlin (2003) argues that whilst facades of conformity are likely to be associated with psychological and emotional distress through the suppression of one's true values, the extent of this distress will be contingent upon the extent to which individuals are able to segment their work selves from their personal selves. As such, the research supports the moderating role of the centrality of work to identity proposed by the current research in terms of exacerbating the impact of SoNB on self-concept, exacerbating the impact of resolution strategies on self-concept, and exacerbating and intensifying one's emotional response to the experience.

5.6.5 Category Summary

The extant research offers some support to the proposed moderating role of the various factors proposed by the current research. The literature indicates that one's sensitivity to SoNB may be moderated by certain individual characteristics, including low trait self-esteem (Leary et al., 1995) and need to belong, with those high in a need to belong being more sensitive to SoNB, and that this need to belong may be informed by early attachment styles (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991). The research also suggests that the behaviours associated with a high need to belong and insecure attachment styles may moderate the response to SoNB as well as influence the perception and reactions of others and thus enhance the potential of rejection, further perpetuating the experience (Romero-Canyas et al., 2010).

The few studies found which explored the impact of life outside work on work behaviours were inconsistent, with some indicating that life outside work would be unlikely to moderate impact of social exclusion (Scott et al., 2014) and others indicating that a secure family life may support effective relations (Towler & Schumacher). But no direct support for the moderating role of life outside work was found, and as such further research is required to substantiate this element of the current theory.

However, the literature does suggest that the centrality of work to identity may indeed moderate the psychological impact of SoNB as it may be more difficult for those for whom work is central to their identity to restore a positive sense of self through other domains when sense of self at work is undermined (Steel, 1999). Research also suggests that as SoNB is likely to be more important and more self-relevant to those for whom work is central to their identity, the experience of SoNB may have more negative emotional impact (Siemer et al., 2007) and that this centrality to identity may also moderate the impact on sense of self, of behaviours that suppress one's true identity (Hewlin, 2003).

Finally, whilst the research exploring organisational culture was considered in section 5.1.4 under 'attributes', consideration of the findings of the current research in light of the extant literature also suggests that different organisational cultures may operate as a moderating factor, providing the context in which SoNB can manifest. The implications of the extant literature in terms of the final proposed theoretical framework will be presented in the next chapter.

5.6.5.1 Theory development

Those extant theories with good conceptual fit to the proposed relationships have been integrated into the current theoretical model, resulting in some adaptations and elaborations, which are illustrated in *Figure 5.IX* below, and summarised in *Table 5.6*.

In terms of individual characteristics, research on attachment styles has found that different attachment styles are associated with different levels of dependency on others and different interaction behaviours (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991). As such attachment styles may influence individual need to belong and thus moderate sensitivity to SoNB, as well as moderate emotional and cognitive responses to SoNB. Similarly, research has also found that differences in belongingness orientation (Lavigne et al., 2011) are related to different interaction behaviours and different evaluations from others. As such, belongingness orientation may moderate responses to SoNB with those with a deficit-reduction orientation more likely to engage in reassurance seeking behaviour which in turn may impact how they are treated by others, and increase their likelihood of rejection, thus perpetuating the experience of SoNB.

As discussed above, attribution theory (Weiner, 1985) and appraisal theories of emotion (Arnold, 1960) have found that the experience of different emotions is related to different attribution process, and as such the emotional response to SoNB may be moderated by individual attribution processes in terms of relevance of SoNB to an individual's sense of self, their perception that they are able to control the experience and their sense of responsibility for the experience. Centrality of work to identity in particular, may moderate an individual's emotional response to SoNB due to an enhanced attribution of self-importance (Siemer et al., 2007).

As also discussed above, one's sense of control over the experience of SoNB may moderate one's choice of resolution strategy (Knapton et al., 2015; Maner et al., 2007). As such, the ability to diminish SoNB may motivate adaptive, seeking value behaviours designed to address need to belong, whereas a lack of ability to diminish SoNB may motivate maladaptive, self-protection behaviours designed to address the need for control.

The implications for the theory of the research around the potential moderating role of organisational culture has been discussed above under 5.2.5.1, and won't be repeated here, but is summarised in the table below.

This research has been integrated into the theoretical framework and added to the proposed relationships in *Table 5.6* (orange text). Where these additions have resulted in a new

relationship, or new direction of relationship, this is illustrated in orange in *Figure 5.IX* below (all of which have been added at previous stages of the discussion). *Figure 5.IX* however, has been amended by thickening the arrows, to illustrate where additions have strengthened relationships already proposed by the current model.

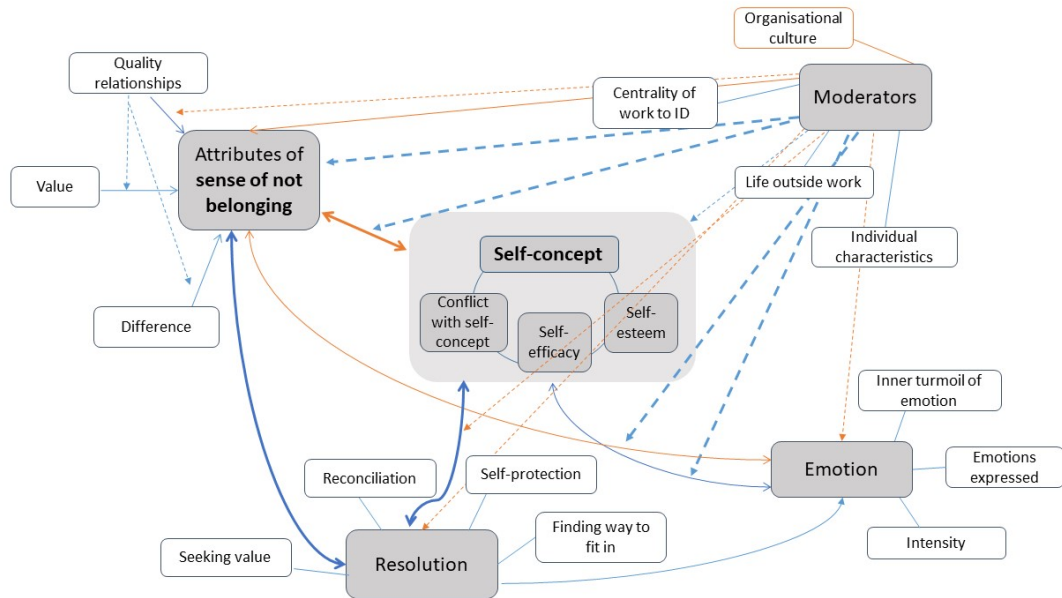


Figure 5.IX: Developed, and final, theoretical framework integrating the pertinent extant literature

CATEGORY	PROPOSED RELATIONSHIPS
Centrality of work to identity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Centrality of work to identity may moderate one’s sensitivity to the attributes of SoNB – Centrality of work to identity may moderate the impact of SoNB on self-concept and emotional experience
Life outside work	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Life outside may moderate one’s sensitivity to the attributes of SoNB – Life outside work may moderate the impact of SoNB on self-concept and emotional experience – Life outside work may moderate the impact of self-concept on emotional experience
Individual characteristics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Individual characteristics may moderate one’s sensitivity to the attributes of SoNB – Individual characteristics may moderate the impact of SoNB on self-concept and emotional experience – Individual characteristics may moderate the impact of self-concept on emotional experience

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – <i>Attachment styles may moderate sensitivity to SoNB and cognitive and emotional responses to SoNB (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991)</i> – <i>Belongingness Orientation may moderate cognitive responses to SoNB (Lavigne et al., 2011)</i> – <i>A sense of control in terms of perceived ability to diminish SoNB may moderate the choice of resolution strategies (Knapton et al., 2015; Maner et al., 2007)</i> – <i>Intensity and valence of emotional response may be moderated by individual attribution processes (Arnold, 1960; Weiner, 1985; Siemer et al., 2007)</i> – <i>Individual attribution style may moderate the choice of resolution behaviours (Welbourne et al., 2007)</i>
<p>Organisational culture</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – <i>Organisational culture may provide the context in which SoNB can manifest</i> – <i>Organisational culture, particularly psychological safety, may impact quality relationships (Liange et al., 2012)</i> – <i>Organisational culture may moderate the relationship between absence of quality relationships and SoNB (Liange et al., 2012)</i> – <i>Organisational culture may exacerbate one’s SoNB (Liange et al., 2012)</i> – <i>Organisational culture may moderate the relationship between SoNB and self-concept (Reis et al., 2016)</i> – <i>Organisational culture may moderate the impact of SoNB on self-concept</i> – <i>Organisational culture in terms of psychological safety, may moderate the choice of resolution behaviours (Hewlin, 2009)</i>

Table 5.6: Development of the theoretical framework incorporating extant literature

Chapter 6 Conclusion and implications for theory and practice

6.1 Introduction

The primary objective of the current research was to develop an understanding of the experience of a sense of not belonging (SoNB) in the workplace: What contributes to the experience; how individuals attempted to resolve the experience; and the impact that it has in terms of thoughts, feelings and behaviour. Ultimately, the purpose of the research was, through this exploration, to help individuals identify a SoNB in themselves, and understand how best to resolve the experience; to help organisations and leaders understand how to create cultures in which SoNB cannot manifest and thrive; and to help leaders to identify SoNB in their employees, and understand how to help them manage it. This final chapter therefore, will begin by presenting my final substantive theory of a SoNB in the workplace, which has been developed through consideration of my findings in the light of the extant research. It will then consider the contribution that my substantive theory offers to the body of knowledge in this area, before considering the practical implications of those findings, and concluding with a discussion of the limitations of my research and recommendations for further research.

6.2 A substantive theory of a sense of not belonging in the workplace

Exploration and critique of the literature from different disciplines and domains largely supports the findings of the current research. Drawing together studies that address specific elements of the substantive theory of the current research, has helped to support both the constructs that emerged as fundamental to the theory as well as elucidate the theoretical relationships proposed. Where the literature has developed my understanding of relationships, mechanisms and processes, these have been integrated into the theoretical framework as detailed above in *Chapter Five*, and resulted in a final proposed theoretical framework, contextualised to the experience of this particular population for whom SoNB is a significant experience. It is illustrated below in *Figure 6.1*. Details of the initial and developed theoretical framework including relationships between sub-categories is also included in *Appendix VII*.

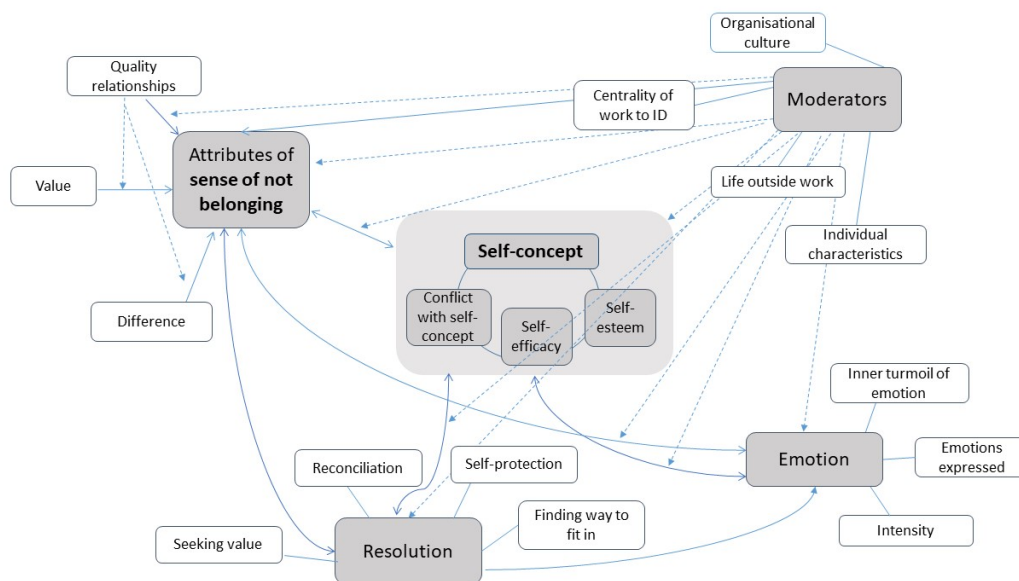


Figure 6.1: Final substantive theoretical framework of SoNB in the workplace

The proposed substantive theory derived from the current study and refined by integration of pertinent literature conceptualises SoNB in the workplace as a multi-dimensional phenomenon. It arises through one or a combination of factors which involve an absence of close, quality relationships built on trust, empathy and openness, an absence of shared characteristics, and a sense of not adding value. Critically, the psychological and detrimental impact of SoNB appears to arise through the construct undermining a sense of self, in terms of undermining a sense of self-efficacy and self-esteem, as well as undermining a consistent and coherent self-concept. This can have a significant impact on one’s emotional response, leaving the individual feeling low, anxious, and depressed. The intensity and negative nature of this emotional response may be informed by the attributions and appraisals made by the individual, particularly in terms of the extent to which the experience is appraised as important to the sense of self, and the extent to which an individual appraises the experience as being their responsibility rather than attributable to the situation. This emotional experience can also present a conflict in self-concept – a cognitive dissonance between one’s beliefs about who they are, who they become during the experience and the inner turmoil of emotion felt during the experience. The emotions expressed may also serve to perpetuate the experience as behaviours associated with depressive symptoms may elicit rejection and fuel SoNB.

In attempting to resolve the experience individuals engage in a variety of strategies designed to resolve SoNB or to enhance self-worth, some of which may be adaptive and serve to resolve the experience by enhancing a sense of belonging, whilst others may serve to compound or perpetuate the experience. The choice of strategy may be informed by the individual’s

perspective that they are able to influence the capacity to belong. A sense of control may be related to adaptive strategies which enhance a sense of belonging such as finding ways to add value, whereas lack of a sense of control may be related to maladaptive strategies, such as withdrawal or disengagement, as individuals attempt to protect themselves from further exclusion, or attempt to satisfy their need for control through controlling what they can – being disruptive, disengaged, or leaving. The substantive theory proposes however, that many of the strategies which individuals employ may also present a self-concept conflict, undermining a sense of a consistent and integrated self. Attempts to fit in may result in a sense of inauthenticity and an inability to be oneself, and behaviours that are inconsistent with the self-concept, such as withdrawing or becoming destructive, may create a paradox between who they know themselves to be and how they behave.

The theoretical relationships between SoNB and self-concept, between self-concept and emotional response, and between self-concept and resolution strategies may also be moderated by factors specific to the individual or their context. A high need to belong, low trait self-esteem, work being particularly central to one's identity, and individual attribution processes, might enhance an individual's sensitivity to SoNB, influence the attributions they make about the causes of the experience and the meaning of the experience to their sense of self, as well as influence their behavioural and emotional responses to it. Sensitivity to, experience of and response to, SoNB in the workplace may also be moderated by the support or lack therefore, from one's family and home life. Finally, rather than attributing to SoNB, the organisational cultures in which individuals operate, particularly in terms of psychologically safe cultures, may also moderate the experience, providing the context in which SoNB can manifest and be maintained.

Core to SoNB in the workplace therefore, is the meaning that individuals place on having the experience, the meaning they place on the emotions they feel during the experience, and the meaning they place on the behaviours in which they engage to resolve the experience, which have significant consequences for their fundamental concept of self.

6.3 Contribution

This thesis presents a rich exploration of SoNB in the workplace. Through the qualitative and subjective methodology employed, the study provides a deep understanding of the participant's lived experience of SoNB in the workplace, and illuminates the emotional, cognitive and behavioural consequences of that experience. The grounded theory methodology allowed for the participants' fundamental, core concern to be revealed – that of the

experience's effect in undermining self-concept, both in terms of self-efficacy, self-esteem and self-worth, and also in terms of undermining a consistent and coherent sense of self. Through the development of a substantive theory as opposed to a descriptive analysis, the study provides insight into the myriad theoretical relationships that relate the different categories to the core, in terms of how SoNB is theorised to undermine self-concept which in turn leads to emotional, cognitive and behavioural responses that might further undermine that self-concept. As such, the sometimes cyclical and self-perpetuated nature of the phenomenon is revealed, allowing for greater and more insightful understanding.

This research contributes to the literature in numerous ways. Firstly, it is the first study to *specifically* explore the experience of *not* belonging in the *workplace*. Whilst constructions of not belonging emerged spontaneously through Belle et al.'s (2015) study of high-intensity teleworkers and through McClure and Brown's (2008) study of belonging in the workplace, and the theme of 'exclusion' emerged in Levett-Jones et al.'s (2008) study of student nurses, without exception, all the workplace belonging research studies explored and discussed have set out to investigate the experience of *belonging*. Whilst Clegg's (2006) study directly explored the experience of not belonging, the experiences described were of not belonging to social groups and an absence of not belonging through high school and college years and into early adulthood, rather than of adults in a workplace setting.

As such, in order to understand the experience of *not* belonging in the workplace through the extant literature, inferences must be made based on the experience of *belonging*, and as discussed throughout this thesis, not belonging does not constitute simply the absence of factors present in the experience of belonging. It is only through exploring *not* belonging that the importance and integral nature of the self-concept emerges. In order to understand the true nature of not belonging therefore, you must *study* the experience of not belonging, not study the experience of belonging. In contrast to the extant literature, the current study offers direct empirical evidence of the factors specific to the experience and implications of a sense of *not belonging* in the workplace.

Moreover, whilst there exists a wealth of studies that explore the experience of social *exclusion*, these studies either explore experiences of *actual* exclusion (e.g., Twenge et al., 2002; Hess & Pickett, 2010) rather than *perceptions* of exclusion in the workplace, or they explore exclusion and perceptions of exclusion in the *laboratory*, rather than the workplace (e.g., Chernyak & Zayas, 2010). As discussed in both *Chapters One* and *Five*, actual exclusion in the workplace or actual or perceived exclusion in the laboratory has been found to involve different intrapersonal

factors, such as different motivational needs (e.g. Maner et al., 2007), and therefore these methodologies present a challenge to the application of these findings to an understanding of the lived experience of a perceived SoNB in the workplace which is overcome in the current study. The substantive theory developed in the current study however, through exploring perceived SoNB in real life settings, contributes to our understanding of the processes and mechanisms that motivate different cognitive and behavioural responses to SoNB, proposing that an absence of control in addressing SoNB may lead to maladaptive resolution strategies and the presence of control in addressing SoNB to adaptive strategies. It also emphasises the importance of the processes of attribution that are present in perceptions of real life SoNB, in particular the attributions of responsibility and centrality, and the implications of these to the intensity and valence of the resulting emotional experience. In so doing the current study also helps to explain the often conflicting results found in terms of behavioural and emotional responses to exclusion in previous studies.

The current study also contributes to the literature by conceptualising SoNB as a complex and multifaceted construct, involving an absence of quality relationships, perceived difference, and a sense of not adding value, intimately entwined with the self-concept and related through a system of proposed relationships. Previous studies in contrast, most of which explore belonging rather than not belonging, offer less comprehensive insight, focusing on either only one (Davila & Jiminez, 2012) or two (Clegg, 2006; Levett-Jones & Lathlean, 2009; Belle et al., 2015; Hagerty et al., 1992) of the attributory elements proposed by the current study; or offering only description rather than potential process and theory (Davila & Jiminez, 2012; Hagerty et al., 1992; Clegg, 2006). As such the current study extends the extant theories by presenting a multifaceted and complex theoretical model of SoNB in the workplace, bringing together the insights provided by many studies.

Most critically, the current research contributes to the literature by revealing that SoNB is intimately entwined with one's *sense of self*. Whilst some of the studies discussed revealed the importance of the self-concept to the experience of belonging (e.g., McClure & Brown, 2008; Levett-Jones et al., 2008), there is a dearth of studies that have identified this relationship and only McClure and Brown (2008) illuminated the *centrality* of this construct to the experience of belonging. And, as revealed in the current study, the impact of SoNB on the self-concept is fundamental to the intensity, significance and often cyclical nature of the experience. SoNB undermines self-esteem and self-efficacy through the attribution of the cause of the experience to the self. SoNB also undermines the sense of a coherent self-concept, conflicting with previously held concepts of self, and directly conflicting with the self-concept through the

inauthenticity created by resolution strategies and a lack of ability to be oneself. It is the impact on self-concept that instigates negative emotions and an inner turmoil of emotion, and it is the impact on self-concept that drives resolution behaviours and cognitions, strategies often designed to enhance a sense of self-worth as well as directly influence one's SoNB, but which often further perpetuate the experience. As such, identification of the centrality of the self-concept to SoNB in the workplace through the grounded theory methodology employed in this study, offers a significant contribution to our previous understanding.

As SoNB has been demonstrated to have implications for a coherent sense of self, the current research also makes important contributions to the identity literature. In particular, the current research helps clarify our understanding of the differential impact of a conflict in deep-rooted elements of the self compared to a conflict between situated identities proposed by Horton et al. (2014). The conflict in self that arises through a SoNB is representative of a conflict between ubiquitous values and personal beliefs, rather than competing demands of different situated identities. SoNB and the associated resolution behaviours, undermines what you know about *who* you are, not *what* you are. This form of conflict, as revealed by the current research, may have significant implications for one's psychological well-being and as such, the current research offers empirical evidence to support prior theoretical propositions as to the differential impact of these different forms of identity conflict (Horton et al., 2014).

The current research also offers some insight into the literature on liminality, defined as a temporary transition between identities through which identity is reconstructed (Beech, 2006). Liminality is argued to significantly disrupt a sense of self and motivates processes of reconstruction to create a renewed and meaningful identity (Beech, 2006). A SoNB as such, and the impact it has on a coherent sense of self, may involve the experience of liminality. However, liminality is a temporary, transitional experience, and the identity work involved results in a new identity, one that involves separation from a previous identity, transition (liminality) between identities, and then incorporation of a new identity into one's sense of self (Bamber, Allen-Collinson & McCormack, 2017). The current theory of SoNB however, suggests that the conflict in self that the experience of SoNB invokes, is resolvable only when the established sense of self is able to remerge and be galvanised through establishing a sense of belonging. SoNB therefore, may instead be an example of an experience of permanent liminality, an unresolved experience of neither feeling inside or outside the group (Bamber, et al., 2017). The current model as such offers insight into the potential psychological impact of this state of permanent, or sustained liminality.

Chapter Six – Conclusion and implications

The current research also contributes to the literature on Social Identity Theory (SIT; Tajfel & Turner, 1985). SIT considers the self to constitute both a *personal* self and a *collective* self. The theory suggests that people have a tendency to classify themselves into categories such as age, gender, social background, or organisational membership. These classifications are based on prototypical characteristics and serve to both define others and oneself. According to SIT therefore, the self is comprised of both unique, *personal identity* constituting personal characteristics, as well as *social identity* encompassing one's classification into groups and the salient characteristics of those groups. Through contrast with other groups and through identification with the group, individuals can determine both who they are (and who they are not) and how good they are, in terms of the extent to which they share attitudes and behaviours endorsed by the group (Adler & Adler, 1987). Similarly, Uncertainty-Identity Theory (Hogg, 2007; 2012) as explored in *Chapter Three*, argues that individuals seek to form social bonds with groups in order to reduce uncertainty about the self and develop a validated sense of self. These theories suggest therefore that a SoNB to a group may have important implications for both a coherent sense of self and for a sense of self-worth, and the current model illuminates the potential impact of that undermined collective identity on psychological well-being.

The current model of SoNB in the workplace also contributes to knowledge around the need for a balance between differentiation and assimilation with a group. As discussed above in *Chapter Five*, Optimal Distinctiveness Theory (ODT; Brewer, 1991) suggests that individuals have a need for both similarity and distinctiveness, but distinctiveness which is achieved through unique contribution to a group (Hornsey & Jetten, 2004; Vignoles et al., 2002). As such, SoNB may reflect an experience of imbalance, whereby one's need for assimilation is not being met. Conversely, establishment of a sense of belonging may be indicative of achievement of optimal distinctiveness – a balance between a sense of similarity with and a sense of adding unique value to the group, both of which are absent in the current model's conceptualisation of a SoNB.

Through explication of the resolution behaviours involved in a SoNB, the current research also has implications for the process of identity work – the strategies involved in achieving an optimal balance between differentiation and integration of personal and social identities (Kreiner, Hollensbe & Sheep, 2006), between distinctiveness and assimilation (Brewer, 1991) and strategies involved in transiting from one situational or occupational identity to another (Ladge, Claire & Greenberg, 2012). The current model suggests that success in achieving a meaningful and coherent sense of self will likely result from strategies which involve an assertion of uniqueness through adding value, making a contribution and establishing a sense of purpose, helping to reinforce one's sense of self. The model also illustrates the potential

negative impact of failure in achieving transition or balance on psychological well-being, and the potential for such failure to perpetuate an experience of imbalance or result in a state of permanent, or sustained liminality.

The final contribution to theory made by the current research is through the presentation of a comprehensive theory of a SoNB in the workplace. The constructs and relationships explored in the current study are broad and encompassing, exploring the experience of SoNB in the workplace from the theorised attributes, through the core concern of self-concept, the emotional, behavioural and cognitive consequences and psychological impact of the experience, and the theoretical relationships relating the constructs. The current study contributes parsimony and scope, ‘the two prime attributes of theory’ (Glaser, 1992, p.34), offering a parsimonious synthesis of findings from many different studies that have explored individual aspects of my model and results in a substantive theory which offers both a comprehensive and holistic as well as an in-depth insight into the experience of SoNB in the workplace, and paves the way for further research to both replicate the study and explore the proposed relationships that have emerged.

6.4 Practical implications

From the perspective of the individual, the impact on psychological well-being of a SoNB is clear. The current study found that SoNB in the workplace had a significant and intense impact on self-esteem, and on a sense of having a coherent, integrated and authentic sense of self. Furthermore, SoNB was found to have a detrimental impact on emotional state, which was associated with negative affect, anxiety, feelings of depression and an inner turmoil of emotion.

The current research also found that SoNB impacted both an individual’s performance at work and the decisions they made about their career. The substantive theory proposes that when SoNB is associated with a perceived lack of control, a perceived lack of ability to proactively enhance one’s sense of belonging, the associated behaviours can involve disengagement, withdrawal, or disruption, impacting performance and the value they add to the organisation. These behaviours may also result in individuals limiting their potential through attempting to protect themselves from further undermining their sense of self, and on occasion may result in them leaving an organisation or profession.

As such, the benefit of helping individuals to avoid the experience or to constructively and adaptively resolve it is apparent, both for the sake of the individual and for the sake of the organisation. This need is ever greater as we spend more and more time in the workplace (Belle et al., 2015), and as such individuals and organisations should be aware of the potential impact

of SoNB both in terms of their own or employees' psychological well-being and their performance. The integral question that arises therefore, is what might be done, by individuals or organisations to help to mitigate or alleviate the experience?

6.4.1 Attenuating the attributes of SoNB

The themes that emerged as attributes to SoNB highlight the importance to a sense of belonging, of establishing quality relationships, a sense of shared characteristics and values, and critically for the context of the workplace, a sense that one is of value. That is not to say that belonging is simply the polar opposite of not belonging. As has been discussed in this thesis, SoNB constitutes existentially more than the mere absence of factors which lead to a sense of belong. But in terms of how the experience can be prevented from occurring in the first place, a focus on encouraging a *presence* of the factors that are *absent* in SoNB is helpful.

Given the integrity of quality relationships to SoNB, establishing practices and processes within the workplace that encourage the development of these relationships, and the establishment of a positive social network may help to ensure that employees have access to supportive, empathetic and genuine relationships. These relationships can serve to provide a safe space for voicing concerns about belonging in the workplace, help the individual to feel understood, 'known' for all that they are, not just those characteristics which might set them apart, and be appreciated for their diversity and their contribution. SARAH articulated the value of these relationships: *"But what's really important to me in those relationships is the...vulnerability, exposure, openness that we have to share mutually."*

Offering training and development in relational skills, such as active listening, emotional intelligence, and communication skills, recruiting on the basis of these relational skills and rewarding employees for demonstrating these relational skills may help in promoting the development of quality relationships (Baker & Dutton, 2007). Similarly, making available opportunities for out of work gatherings and engagement in informal 'off-task' activities can also help to develop trust, camaraderie and meaningful relationships in the workplace (McClure & Brown, 2008).

In terms of ensuring that employees feel valued and valuable, organisations should first ensure that their employees have the necessary skills and knowledge to perform in their roles and make a valuable contribution to the organisation, which would also enhance their sense of self-efficacy. This is particularly true when employees are new in role or new to the organisation. Providing clarity on the expectations, requirements and boundaries of roles, along with training in the necessary skills, will serve to develop the employee's self-efficacy and sense of

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competence (Gardner & Pierce, 1998). As discussed in 5.2.4 of *Chapter Five*, organisational socialisation is the process through which employees learn about and come to appreciate the norms, values and expected behaviours of an organisation, and is argued to contribute to an individual's ability to adjust to and fit in with the organisation in which they work (Louis, 1980). As such, employees should have the opportunity to develop a true understanding of the institution, the culture and the role in order to ensure appropriate socialisation and set a secure foundation upon which they can develop their sense of competence and belonging (Levett-Jones & Lathlean, 2009).

Job design and organisational structure also has a role to play in enhancing an employee's sense of adding value. Less structured hierarchies and more autonomous job designs signal to the employee that they are perceived by the manager as a trusted, competent and valued employee (Gardner & Pierce, 1998). Providing employees with autonomy, positive feedback and involvement in decision making can facilitate a perception of being valued, (Boccio & Macari, 2015). Increasing task demands and job control may also promote a sense of achievement and positive self-esteem. The value of these practices is articulated by CLIVE: *"So that was a huge sea-change. From being completely ignored to being asked to prepare plans for how the business would run. I really felt that I was doing something really useful."*

Positive and constructive feedback, and recognition and reward for distinctive contributions will also help to develop a sense of unique, differentiated value (McClure & Brown's, 2008). Similarly, providing opportunities for employees to experience successes, and providing positive feedback on those successes, might also help to develop a sense of competence and value (Levett-Jones & Lathlean, 2009). This is expressed by ELAINE: *"You'd feel valued because you'd get recognition, not necessarily financial, but you'd get recognition just from comments – it's a feeling of belonging."*

Organisations can also influence the development of SoNB through the creation of an organisational culture that fosters psychological safety, allowing individuals to both contribute and feel included and valuable, and also feel comfortable to express their concerns and vulnerabilities, as well as their difference and uniqueness. DELIA articulated the feeling of acceptance that can be felt in such organisations: *"The sense of being myself came from being able to view my ideas and have them heard and very often acted on. Being able to be as extravert as I am... that idiosyncrasy was not, was not a negative, it was accepted as being quite quirky and interesting and fun."*

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One means of fostering psychological safety is through the establishment of high quality relationships, which research has found to be associated with psychological safety (Carmelli & Gittell, 2009). High quality relationships are relationships in which goals are shared, knowledge is shared, and there is mutual respect for the expertise, skills, and abilities of others (Gittell, 2002). Relational work practices which encourage knowledge sharing across functions, and employee involvement and participation across the workplace, have been found to enhance the development of shared goals and mutual respect and could therefore be effective in enhancing psychological safety and belonging (Gittell, 2008).

Research has also found that leadership style has a particular role to play in enhancing psychological safety (Nembhard & Edmondson, 2006), particularly the extent to which leaders are inclusive. Nembhard and Edmondson (2006) define leader inclusiveness as “words and deeds by a leader or leaders that indicate an invitation and appreciation for others’ contributions” (p.947). It involves behaviours which deliberately and proactively invite team members into discussions and decisions helping to ensure their voices and perspectives are heard, as well as appreciative behaviours, such as a positive response to contributions that demonstrates those perspectives are valued. It is distinguished from participative leadership, which involves consultation, shared decision-making and delegation of authority to subordinates (Bass, 1990; McGregor, 1960; Yukl, 1994) in that it focuses specifically on behaviours that invite and acknowledge others’ views. Research has found leader inclusiveness to be positively associated with psychological safety (Nembhard & Edmondson, 2006).

As such, leaders need to be aware of the impact that style of leadership might have on the ability and willingness of employees to speak up, contribute, challenge and raise concerns (Edmondson, 1996, 2003). Ensuring that managers are conveying a message of inclusivity to their employees will help to mitigate the personal risks associated with speaking up about a SoNB and encourage disclosure, potentially leading to an appreciation that they are not alone in their experience or to opportunities to enhance their sense of belonging. This can be supported through development programmes which focus on developing these inclusive leadership skills as well as enhance leader’s awareness of the role that they play in developing supportive environments and the influence they have, through role modelling, on the attitudes of others (Levett-Jones & Lathlean, 2009). As such, through the way that they behave, leaders can model the inclusive behaviours they expect of others and promote a climate that fosters psychological safety and promotes belonging (Pearson, Anderson & Porath, 2005).

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As mutual trust is a key characteristic of psychological safety (Edmondson, 2003), practices which enhance interpersonal trust between employees may also serve to enhance psychological safety. Research suggests that perceptions regarding the motives and intentions of another are key factors in determining trust. Indeed, Costa's research found that perceived trustworthiness accounted for the largest percentage of the construct (Costa, 2003). This suggests that development of trust may be facilitated by increased knowledge and understanding of others (Zeffane & Connell, 2003; Hardin, 1992). Therefore, practices which may facilitate learning about the other members within a team may increase trust levels, enhance psychological safety, and promote cultures that foster belonging.

Human resource departments may also have a role in terms of selecting, promoting, training and managing performance in a manner that fosters a culture of mutual respect, collaboration and the development of supportive relationships (Scott et al., 2013). Practices might include performance appraisals that incorporate expectations about collaboration, information sharing and cooperation, and rewarding employees for such behaviours. Providing development of skills such as emotional intelligence, open door policies, and inclusivity, may all support the development of a culture in which individuals feel valued, respected and able to speak out, and as such enhance their sense of belonging.

Organisational culture can be particularly important when considering diversity and the potential impact of a minority status on SoNB. Research by Philips, Dumas and Rothbard (2018) for example, found that racial minority employees were less likely to disclose personal information about themselves, feel able to be authentic in the workplace, and less able to develop connections and relationships across demographic boundaries. It may be particularly imperative therefore, that organisations find ways to help overcome these barriers to relationship development and acceptance of difference. Emphasising commonalities, such as work goals, whilst adopting a culture of openness and curiosity to different experiences and demographics may help to demonstrate the value of difference and diversity (Phillips et al., 2018).

6.4.2 Identifying adaptive and constructive resolution strategies

As the current research found that the resolution strategies that individual's employed in order to resolve the experience often made the difference between resolving and moving on from the experience or exacerbating and perpetuating it, awareness and interventions at this stage in the theoretical cycle might also be constructive in limiting the endurance or impact of SoNB in the workplace.

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Given the research that demonstrates the differentially positive or negative impact of different coping strategies on outcomes, helping employees to identify the strategies that they use, and understand for example, the extent to which avoidant coping strategies are compounding the experience of not belonging, should help employees to resolve the experience through the use of more constructive problem-solving and cognitive restructuring strategies (Welbourne et al., 2007). There is a role therefore, for work-place counselling or coaching practices in helping employees to identify and employ more constructive coping strategies. Similarly, such practices would also offer the opportunity for employees to discuss their experience, allowing them to both be supported and potentially discover that they are not unusual in their experience. LYDIA expressed the potential value of such interventions: *“I wish I'd known about coaching. I would have got coaching right from the start. But it would have been really interesting to see where my career path would have got to by now if I'd had some support. And, partly that support to be able to articulate what I was feeling.”*

There is a role again for job design and for leaders in terms of helping employees to develop a sense of control. As this need for control may be implicated in the maladaptive and destructive resolution behaviours found in the current research, enhancing a sense of control through offering the autonomy and the space in which employees feel able to develop relationships, add value and enhance their sense of belonging might encourage more proactive, constructive and adaptive resolution strategies. Through understanding these strategies, and adopting more constructive methods of developing a sense of belonging, individuals may be more likely to be able to overcome and move on from their experience (Shifron, 2010).

There is much therefore, that organisations and leaders can do to help ensure that the attributes of SoNB are absent in their organisations, and that rather, employees feel able to speak up and contribute, and are made to feel included and valuable. However, the core concern of SoNB is the self-concept; the meaning that individuals attribute to the fact that they are experiencing SoNB, or the meaning they attribute to their emotional or behavioural responses. There is a role here again for workplace counselling and coaching practices and the potential for the use of cognitive-behavioural models in these practices to help employees understand and identify the attributes and underlying beliefs that influence how they interpret events, which then influences how they respond to that event. Challenging these attributions, such as internal causal attributions for SoNB, and helping employees to make more accurate attributions, such as attributing the cause of the experience to the situation, might also help individuals to avoid the impact of SoNB on self-concept.

6.4.3 Enhancing awareness of the prevalence of SoNB

Finally, developing awareness of the potential prevalence of SoNB, and an understanding that this is an experience which, as I discovered through my initial conversations about the phenomenon, has been experienced by many across their careers, in and of itself might help to alleviate the impact and break the cycle. Helping individuals who are going through the experience to realise that they are not 'deficient', they are not different, and they are not weak, might help them to appropriately assign responsibility for the experience to the situation, and to maintain a more positive sense of self throughout the experience, helping them to find constructive ways to resolve it and avoid the spiral of the undermined self-concept. This might be achieved through communication of the findings of research such as this through induction programmes and development programmes in workplaces, and in career planning and workplace transition programmes in schools, colleges and universities. The value of understanding the prevalence of the experience was alluded to by many in the current study and articulated by DELIA: *"It really wasn't until we had those discussions that I understood that I was not alone in that viewpoint. That was a part of my coping mechanism, knowing I wasn't alone."*

Developing an understanding in managers too, of the impact of a lack of quality relationships, of a sense of not adding value, or feeling different and diverse might also help leaders to identify those at risk of SoNB. For example, employees who have not established quality relationships, who are in a minority demographic, or perhaps who have experienced a failure in the workplace which might impact their self-efficacy or sense of adding value, may all be at risk of SoNB. Being open to the potential presence of these attributes and mindful of their impact on SoNB may alert leaders to a need to intervene and support their employees in re-establishing a sense of belonging. Similarly, being aware of the behavioural ways in which SoNB may manifest, such as withdrawal or conformity behaviours, may also help managers to identify SoNB in their employees and provide the impetus for them to engage their employee in conversation and understand how they may support them in mitigating the experience. Including discussion of this phenomenon in business school practices, in coaching development programmes, in leadership development programmes, and as part of induction and socialisation practices therefore, holds the potential to limit the impact and duration of SoNB in the workplace.

6.5 Limitations

The current study is not without its limitations. Firstly, whilst my sample did cover a level of cultural and generational diversity, all of my participants were middle-class workers, working in Western-European organisations, which may limit the insight generated. Similarly, the invitation to participate would likely encourage only those for whom SoNB was a significant and negative experience to come forward, and as such the findings from this research may be applicable only to individuals for whom SoNB is a significant experience. Whilst the support that the study received from the extant research does endorse the credibility of the findings and the robustness of the applied method, the implications of the substantive theory are bounded by this particular participant group.

Secondly, the substantive theory offers many propositions regarding the possible directions of the relationships between the constructs, relationships which are not substantiated by the current study and need to be explored further in order to refine the theory.

Finally, as discussed in *Chapters One and Two*, as I myself have experienced SoNB in the workplace, it is possible that my findings may be biased by that personal experience. This experience is inherent in the way that I worded my invitation to interview, in my interpretation of my participants' accounts and of the data, the significance of the concepts that emerged, and my own meaning and sense-making, assumptions and prejudices. Whilst, as discussed in 2.7 *Reflexivity*, I attempted to attenuate this bias through engaging in an open-minded manner with the data, through capturing my assumptions in my memos, and presenting a transparent account of my methodology and analytical decisions, it is not possible to mitigate this bias entirely (Chamberlain, Mills & Usher, 2013). As such, it is important that this substantive theory is positioned as a subjective interpretation, one plausible interpretation of my participants' accounts contextualised to myself, the conditions of my participant group, and to the context in which the theory was developed.

6.6 Implications for future research

These limitations and the subjective and qualitative nature of the current study offer many potentially fruitful avenues for future research.

In the first instance, as the current study developed a substantive theory of SoNB based on the accounts presented by this specific participant group, future research could seek to build on and extend these findings by replicating this methodology to develop a substantive theory SoNB with different populations. Through comparison with data from other substantive areas and

different populations, such an approach may lead to the development of a formal theory of SoNB in the workplace (Glaser, 1978).

Furthermore, the current study proposed many theoretical associations that related the constructs and categories to the core concern of self-concept, as detailed in *Appendix VI*. These have been refined in light of the extant research, incorporated into the current model and are detailed in *Appendix VIII*. These proposed relationships include for example, associations between one's self-esteem and emotional experience, between emotional experience and self-concept conflict, and between resolution strategies and self-concept conflict. Future research could further investigate and explore the theoretical relationships proposed. Specifically, such research might explore the following :

1. The impact of SoNB on a sense of a consistent self-concept
2. Whether SoNB motivates behaviours designed to enhance a consistent sense of self or to enhance self-worth
3. The relationship between fitting in resolution strategies (such as conformity) and a sense of a consistent self-concept
4. The relationship between self-protection resolution strategies (such as withdrawal) and the self-concept
5. The relationship between the inner turmoil of emotion experienced through SoNB and the self-concept
6. The moderating role of the centrality of work to identity on the relationship between SoNB and self-concept

Qualitative research that focuses specifically on exploring the relationships between these constructs, or quantitative research that explores potential correlations between those constructs could be undertaken to support the proposed relationships, and longitudinal studies could help to determine the directions of these relationships.

Future research could also focus more specifically on better understanding the relationships between *specific* constructs. For example, research could explore whether the behaviours of those who experience a lack of a consistent sense of self are motivated by a drive to enhance consistency or by a drive to enhance self-worth. Furthermore, research could explore whether individuals whose SoNB is particularly predicated on not feeling valued also have a strong drive to achieve, or whether those whose SoNB is predicated on an absence of quality relationships have a strong need for external validation. This would help to further illuminate the relationships proposed.

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Another avenue for future research would be to develop a better understanding of the *prevalence* of SoNB. As discussed above, for most participants the sense that they were the only one experiencing SoNB compounded the experience, particularly in terms of feeling like there was something different and wrong with them. As such, survey methods asking participants to indicate the extent to which they have experienced different aspects of the phenomenon and agree with the constructs implicated, would help to demonstrate the prevalence of SoNB in the workplace and may also serve to minimise the impact of the experience on an individual's sense of self.

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Appendix I: Invitation to Interview

Have you ever felt in the workplace, that you don't belong?

Have you ever felt like an outsider at work?

Has there been a particular situation, environment, or point in your career where you have felt that everyone else fitted in better than you?

If this is your experience I would really like to talk to you.

I am undertaking a PhD at the University of Reading exploring the causes and consequences of the experience in the workplace of feeling like you don't belong. Initial work indicates that this experience is common, and I am keen to understand why people so often feel this way, what impact it has on them, and what could be done to avoid or relieve the experience.

My overriding objective is to help to avoid the negative consequences that the experience in the workplace of feeling like you don't belong may have. Ultimately, I hope that this will improve the well-being of individuals at work, and the performance of employees for organisations.

I am looking for individuals who have had at least one year's experience of work, and who are willing to speak openly and frankly with me about their experience of feeling like they don't belong at work.

Interviews should take approximately one hour, and will be scheduled over the course of the next 10 months. They will be entirely confidential. As the outputs from the research will contain verbatim quotes, you may be able to identify yourself, but no one else will be able to identify you.

If you would be interested in talking to me, or would like further details of the research, please contact me on _____, or at _____

I look forward to hearing from you.

Kind regards

Lee Waller

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Appendix II: Information Sheet

Title of Study: Investigating the causes and emotional, cognitive and behavioural consequences of the experience of feeling like an outsider in the workplace

Information Sheet

Supervisor: Email: Phone:
Dr Patricia Riddell

Experimenters:
Lee Waller

Thank you for agreeing to assist us by participating in our study exploring the experience of feeling like an outsider in the workplace. The study is specifically interested in the causes and emotional, cognitive and behavioural consequences of the experience, and hopes to understand what might be done to avoid or relieve the experience.

Your participation will take approximately 60 minutes, during which time I will be asking you questions exploring your experience.

Your data will be kept confidential and securely stored, with only an anonymous number identifying it. Information linking that number to your name will be stored securely and separately from the data you provide us. All data collected for the project will be destroyed after a period of 12 months from the completion of the project has elapsed. Consent forms will be kept for 5 years after which they will be destroyed. Taking part in this study is completely voluntary; you may withdraw at any time without having to give any reason. Please feel free to ask any questions that you may have about this study at any point.

This application has been reviewed by the University Research Ethics Committee and has been given a favourable ethical opinion for conduct

Thank you for your help.

Lee Waller

Appendix III: Consent Form

Title of Study: Investigating the causes and emotional, cognitive, and behavioural outcomes of the experience in the workplace, of feeling like you don't belong

CONSENT FORM

I, agree to participate in the study, investigating the causes and emotional, cognitive and behavioural outcomes of the experience in the workplace of feeling like you don't belong, being conducted by Lee Waller at The University of Reading. I have seen and read a copy of the Participants Information Sheet and have been given the opportunity to ask questions about the study and these have been answered to my satisfaction. I understand that all personal information will remain confidential to the Investigator and arrangements for the storage and eventual disposal of any identifiable material have been made clear to me. I understand that participation in this study is voluntary and that I can withdraw at any time without having to give an explanation.

I am happy to proceed with my participation.

Signature

Name (in capitals)

Date

Appendix IV: Interview Guides

ORIGINAL INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

1. Tell me about the situation in which you felt like you did not belong
2. What do you think it was about the situation that made you feel this way?
3. What was going through your head at the time?
4. What emotions did you experience?
5. How did you behave, and do you think this was affected by how you were feeling?
6. Is there anything that would have prevented you from feeling this way, or helped to alleviate how you felt?
7. What do think makes the difference between situations when you have felt like you don't belong and situations when you haven't?

EXPANDED INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

1. Tell me about the situation in which you felt like you did not belong
2. Is it a general feeling or specific situations? How long / how often?
3. What do you think it was about the situation that made you feel this way?
4. Why does the description of 'not belonging' or feeling like an outsider resonate with you. What is it about the experience that makes you feel outside?
5. What was going through your head at the time?
6. What emotions did you experience? How were you feeling?
7. How did you behave, and do you think this was affected by how you were feeling?
8. Do you do anything to try to escape the feeling?
9. Does that help or make it worse?
10. Is there anything that would have prevented you from feeling this way, or helped to alleviate how you felt?
11. How do you feel about yourself during these experiences?
12. What do think makes the difference between situations when you have felt like you don't belong and situations when you haven't?
13. What was going on in your life then? Did that influence it/protect or make worse?
14. How have you / what has changed?
15. What does fitting in feel like?
16. How important to your life is your work? How important to your identity?
17. Have you ever experienced this outside of the workplace?
18. Do they believe other's feel this way?

Appendix V: Example Coding and Categorisation Process

CATEGORY: RESOLUTION

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sub-category: Seeking value <i>Properties</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Active engagement <i>Sub-properties</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Energies into job ▪ Engaging others in ideas ▪ Focus on finding a solution ▪ Preparing ▪ Recognising strengths ○ Establishing a purpose <i>Sub-properties</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Crafting roles ▪ Making a difference • Sub-category: Trying to fit in <i>Properties</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Finding an identity <i>Sub-properties</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Becoming subservient ▪ Becoming the centre of attention ▪ Becoming the parent ▪ More authoritarian ○ Seeking acceptance <i>Sub-properties</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Attempt to join in ▪ Becoming assertive ▪ Acquiescing ▪ Conforming ▪ Managing exterior presentation ▪ Searching for common ground ▪ Seeking friendships ▪ Trying to understand how to change 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sub-category: Self-protection <i>Properties</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Avoidance <i>Sub-properties</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Removing oneself physically ▪ Not fulfilling potential ▪ Not wanting to be there ▪ Passing responsibility ▪ Withdrawing ○ Detachment <i>Sub-properties</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Destructive ▪ Distancing ▪ Disengaging ▪ Detach from concern about other's opinions ▪ Detach from the emotion ▪ Disinterest • Sub-category: Reconciling the experience <i>Properties</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Reflection <i>Sub-properties</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Identifying causes ▪ Sense making ○ Acceptance <i>Sub-properties</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Ability to attribute cause to the situation ▪ Accepting insecurities ▪ Serenity through maturity ▪ Taking responsibility for how you react
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Appendix VI: Substantive codes, theoretical codes and proposed relationships of initial theoretical framework

CATEGORY	THEORETICAL CODE	PROPOSED RELATIONSHIPS
ATTRIBUTES OF A SENSE OF NOT BELONGING		
Absence of quality relationships	Cause Cause Moderator	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – An absence of quality relationships may contribute to SoNB – An absence of quality relationships may negatively impact one’s self-concept – An absence of quality relationships may moderate the impact of difference on SoNB – An absence of quality relationships may moderate the impact of not adding value on SoNB
Not adding value	Cause Cause	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Not adding value may contribute to SoNB – Not adding value may negatively impact one’s self-concept
Difference	Cause Cause	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Being different may contribute to SoNB – Being different may negatively impact one’s self-concept
Organisational culture	Cause Condition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Organisational culture may contribute to SoNB – Organisational culture may provide the context in which SoNB can manifest
CORE CONCERN		
Self-efficacy	Self-concept / Consequence Cause	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – SoNB may negatively impact one’s sense of self-efficacy – Self-efficacy may negatively impact one’s self-esteem
Self-esteem	Self-concept / Consequence Cause	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – SoNB may negatively impact one’s self-esteem – Self-esteem may motivate behaviour to resolve SoNB

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	<p>Cause</p> <p>Consequence</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – <i>Self-esteem may impact one’s emotional experience</i> – <i>Self-esteem may be negatively impacted by one’s emotional experience</i>
Conflict with self-concept	<p>Self-concept / Consequence</p> <p>Consequence</p> <p>Consequence</p> <p>Consequence</p> <p>Cause</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – <i>SoNB may negatively impact one’s sense of a consistent self-concept</i> – <i>Finding a way to belong resolution behaviours may negatively impact one’s sense of a consistent self-concept</i> – <i>Self-protection resolution behaviours may negatively impact one’s sense of a consistent self-concept</i> – <i>One’s emotional experience may negatively impact one’s sense of a consistent self-concept</i> – <i>Conflict with self-concept may negatively impact one’s emotional experience</i>
RESOLUTION		
Seeking value	<p>Strategy / Consequence</p> <p>Cause</p> <p>Cause</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – <i>SoNB may motivate behaviours/strategies designed to add value</i> – <i>Self-concept may motivate behaviours designed to add value</i> – <i>Adding value behaviours may positively impact one’s self-concept</i>
Trying to fit in	<p>Strategy Consequence</p> <p>Consequence</p> <p>Cause</p> <p>Cause</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – <i>SoNB may motivate behaviours/strategies designed to help one fit in</i> – <i>Self-concept may motivate behaviours designed to help one fit in</i> – <i>Trying to fit in behaviours may negatively impact one’s self-esteem</i> – <i>Trying to fit in behaviours may negatively impact one’s sense of a consistent self-concept</i> – <i>Trying to fit in behaviours may negatively impact one’s</i>

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	Reciprocal	<i>ability to fit in and enhance one's SoNB</i>
Self-protection	Strategy / Consequence Consequence Cause Reciprocal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – <i>SoNB may motivate behaviours/strategies designed to protect from the pain of or threat of not belonging</i> – <i>Self-concept may motivate behaviours/strategies designed to protect from the pain of or threat of not belonging</i> – <i>Self-protection behaviours may negatively impact one's self-concept</i> – <i>Self-protection behaviours may negatively impact one's ability to belong and enhance one's SoNB</i>
Reconciling the experience	Strategy / Consequence Consequence Cause	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – <i>SoNB may motivate cognitions/strategies designed to help one make sense of the experience</i> – <i>Self-concept may motivate cognitions/strategies designed to help one make sense of the experience</i> – <i>Reconciling cognitions may positively impact one's self-concept</i>
EMOTIONAL EXPERIENCE		
Emotion expressed	Consequence Consequence Reciprocal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – <i>SoNB may result in expressed emotions</i> – <i>Self-concept may result in expressed emotions</i> – <i>Expressed emotions may impact one's self-concept</i>
Intensity of emotion	Intensity Consequence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – <i>An intense SoNB may be associated with an intense emotional experience</i> – <i>Intensity of emotional experience may negatively impact one's self-concept</i>
Inner turmoil of emotion	Consequence Consequence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – <i>SoNB may lead to an inner turmoil of emotion</i> – <i>Resolution strategies may lead to an inner turmoil of emotion</i>

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	Cause	– <i>Inner turmoil of emotion may negatively impact one’s self-concept</i>
MODERATORS		
Centrality of work to identity and value	Moderator Moderator	– <i>Centrality of work to identity may enhance one’s sensitivity to the attributes of SoNB</i> – <i>Centrality of work to identity may moderate the impact of SoNB on self-concept and emotional experience</i>
Life outside work	Moderator Moderator Moderator	– <i>Life outside work may enhance one’s sensitivity to the attributes of SoNB</i> – <i>Life outside work may moderate the impact of SoNB on self-concept and emotional experience</i> – <i>Life outside work may moderate the impact of self-concept on emotional experience</i>
Individual characteristics	Moderator Moderator Moderator	– <i>Individual characteristics may enhance one’s sensitivity to the attributes of SoNB</i> – <i>Individual characteristics may moderate the impact of SoNB on self-concept and emotional experience</i> – <i>Individual characteristics may moderate the impact of self-concept on emotional experience</i>

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Appendix VII: Illustrations of theoretical framework including sub-category relationships

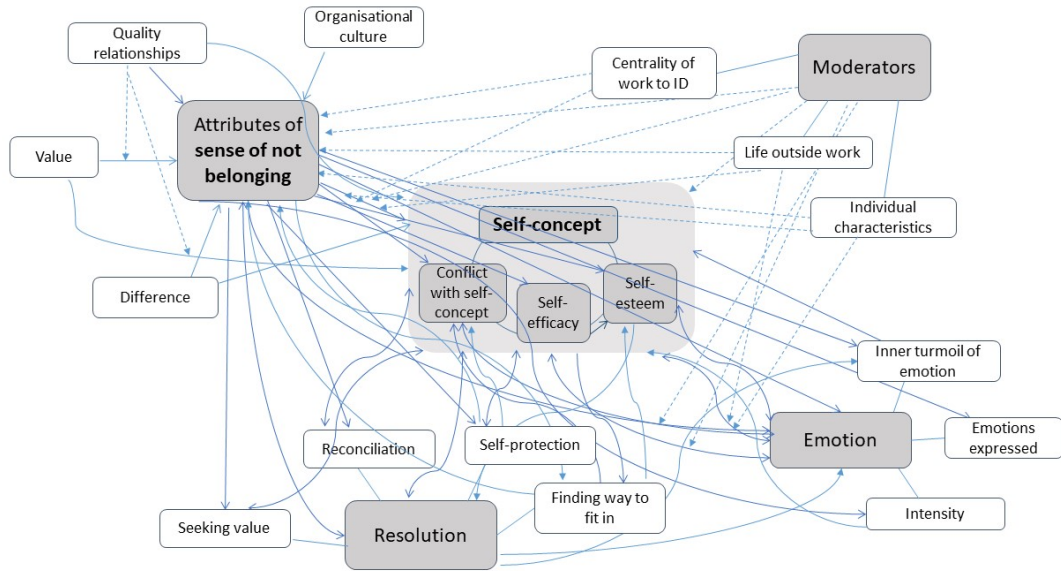


Figure A.I: Initial theoretical framework including relationships between sub-categories

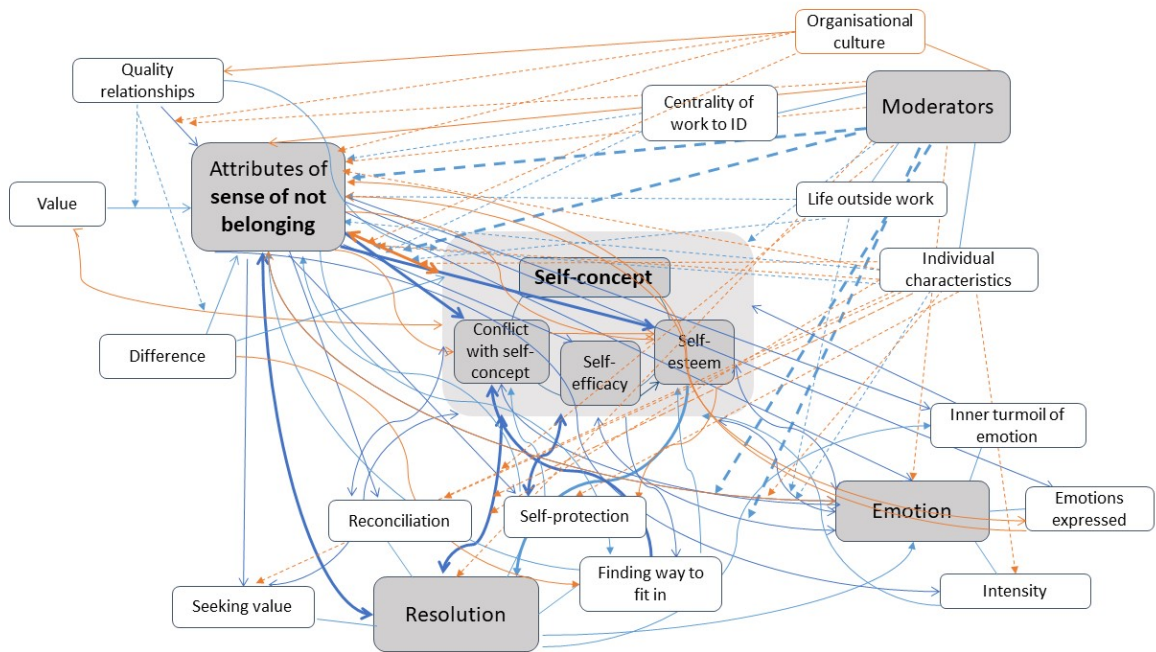


Figure A.II: Refined theoretical framework integrating the pertinent extant literature and including relationships between sub-categories

Appendix VIII: Categories and refined proposed relationships integrating the literature

ATTRIBUTES	
CATEGORY	PROPOSED RELATIONSHIPS
Absence of quality relationships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – <i>An absence of quality relationships may contribute to SoNB</i> – <i>An absence of quality relationships may negatively impact one’s self-concept</i> – <i>An absence of quality relationships may moderate the impact of difference on SoNB</i> – <i>An absence of quality relationships may moderate the impact of not adding value on SoNB</i>
Not adding value	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – <i>Not adding value may contribute to SoNB</i> – <i>Not adding value may negatively impact one’s self-concept</i> – <i>One’s self-concept may negatively impact SoNB in terms of one’s sense of adding value (Levett-Jones & Lathlean, 2009)</i>
Difference	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – <i>Being different may contribute to SoNB</i> – <i>Being different may negatively impact one’s self-concept</i> – <i>Being different may lead to trying to fit in resolution behaviours (Driskell & Salas, 1991)</i>

CORE CONCERN	
CATEGORY	PROPOSED RELATIONSHIPS
Self-efficacy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – <i>SoNB may negatively impact one’s sense of self-efficacy</i> – <i>Self-efficacy may negatively impact one’s self-esteem</i>
Self-esteem	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – <i>SoNB may negatively impact one’s self-esteem</i> – <i>SoNB may trigger low self-esteem to alert us to a threat to our relational value. This low self-esteem may in turn motivate behaviour to resolve SoNB (Leary, 1996)</i> – <i>Self-esteem may motivate behaviour to resolve SoNB</i> – <i>Self-esteem may impact one’s emotional experience</i> – <i>Self-esteem may be negatively impacted by one’s emotional experience</i>
Conflict with self-concept	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – <i>SoNB may negatively impact one’s sense of a consistent self-concept</i> – <i>SoNB may result in a cognitive dissonance in terms of inconsistent self-cognitions (Festinger,1957)</i> – <i>Finding a way to belong resolution behaviours may negatively impact one’s sense of a consistent self-concept</i> – <i>Self-protection resolution behaviours may negatively impact one’s sense of a consistent self-concept</i> – <i>One’s emotional experience may negatively impact one’s sense of a consistent self-concept</i> – <i>Conflict with self-concept may negatively impact one’s emotional experience</i>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – <i>Conflict with self-concept may negatively impact one’s self-esteem (Campbell et al., 1996; Donahue et al., 1993)</i>
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RESOLUTION	
CATEGORY	PROPOSED RELATIONSHIPS
Seeking value	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – <i>SoNB may motivate behaviours/strategies designed to add value</i> – <i>Self-concept may motivate behaviours designed to add value</i> – <i>Adding value behaviours may positively impact one’s self-concept</i> – <i>Impact of SoNB on self-esteem may motivate behaviours designed to enhance one’s self-worth in order to achieve a positive sense of self (Dipboye, 1977)</i> – <i>A positive attribution style may motivate seeking value behaviours (Welbourne et al., 2007)</i> – <i>The choice of fitting in behaviours may be motivated by a perceived sense of control and ability to enhance SoNB (Knapton et al., 2015; Maner et al., 2007)</i>
Trying to fit in	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – <i>SoNB may motivate behaviours/strategies designed to help one fit in</i> – <i>Self-concept may motivate behaviours designed to help one fit in</i> – <i>Trying to fit in behaviours may negatively impact one’s self-esteem</i> – <i>Trying to fit in behaviours may negatively impact one’s sense of a consistent self-concept</i> – <i>Trying to fit in behaviours may create a cognitive dissonance in terms of a conflict between their self-concept and their behaviour (Festinger, 1957)</i> – <i>Trying to fit in behaviours may negatively impact one’s ability to fit in and enhance one’s SoNB</i>
Self-protection	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – <i>SoNB may motivate behaviours/strategies designed to protect from the pain of or threat of not belonging</i> – <i>Self-concept may motivate behaviours/strategies designed to protect from the pain of or threat of not belonging</i> – <i>Self-protection behaviours may negatively impact one’s self-concept</i> – <i>Self-protection behaviours may negatively impact one’s ability to belong and enhance one’s SoNB</i> – <i>Impact of SoNB on self-esteem may motivate self-protection behaviours designed to protect further erosion of self-esteem (Dipboye, 1977)</i> – <i>A negative attribution style may motivate self-protection behaviours (Welbourne et al., 2007)</i> – <i>The choice of self-protection behaviours may be motivated by a perceived lack of control of ability to enhance SoNB (Knapton et al., 2015; Maner et al., 2007)</i>

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Reconciling the experience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – <i>SoNB may motivate cognitions/strategies designed to help one make sense of the experience</i> – <i>Self-concept may motivate cognitions/strategies designed to help one make sense of the experience</i> – <i>Reconciling cognitions may positively impact one’s self-concept</i> – <i>A positive attribution style may motivate reconciling the experience behaviours (Welbourne et al., 2007)</i>
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EMOTIONAL EXPERIENCE	
CATEGORY	PROPOSED RELATIONSHIPS
Emotion expressed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – <i>SoNB may result in expressed emotions</i> – <i>Self-concept may result in expressed emotions</i> – <i>Expressed emotions may impact one’s self-concept</i> – <i>The symptoms of depression may elicit rejection and fuel SoNB (Coyne, 1976; Krochel et al., 2012)</i> – <i>Depression may heighten sensitivity to SoNB (Allen & Badcock, 2003)</i>
Intensity of emotion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – <i>An intense SoNB may be associated with an intense emotional experience</i> – <i>Intensity of emotional experience may negatively impact one’s self-concept</i> – <i>Intensity and valence of emotional response may be moderated by individual attribution processes (Arnold, 1960; Weiner, 1985)</i>
Inner turmoil of emotion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – <i>SoNB may lead to an inner turmoil of emotion</i> – <i>Resolution strategies may lead to an inner turmoil of emotion</i> – <i>Inner turmoil of emotion may negatively impact one’s self-concept</i>

MODERATORS	
CATEGORY	PROPOSED RELATIONSHIPS
Centrality of work to identity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – <i>Centrality of work to identity may moderate one’s sensitivity to the attributes of SoNB</i> – <i>Centrality of work to identity may moderate the impact of SoNB on self-concept and emotional experience</i>
Life outside work	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – <i>Life outside may moderate one’s sensitivity to the attributes of SoNB</i> – <i>Life outside work may moderate the impact of SoNB on self-concept and emotional experience</i> – <i>Life outside work may moderate the impact of self-concept on emotional experience</i>
Individual characteristics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – <i>Individual characteristics may moderate one’s sensitivity to the attributes of SoNB</i> – <i>Individual characteristics may moderate the impact of SoNB on self-concept and emotional experience</i>

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – <i>Individual characteristics may moderate the impact of self-concept on emotional experience</i> – <i>Attachment styles may moderate sensitivity to SoNB and cognitive and emotional responses to SoNB (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991)</i> – <i>Belongingness Orientation may moderate cognitive responses to SoNB (Lavigne et al., 2011)</i> – <i>A sense of control in terms of perceived ability to diminish SoNB may moderate the choice of resolution strategies (Knapton et al., 2015; Maner et al., 2007)</i> – <i>Intensity and valence of emotional response may be moderated by individual attribution processes (Arnold, 1960; Weiner, 1985; Siemer et al., 2007)</i> – <i>Individual attribution style may moderate the choice of resolution behaviours (Welbourne et al., 2007)</i>
Organisational culture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – <i>Organisational culture may provide the context in which SoNB can manifest</i> – <i>Organisational culture, particularly psychological safety, may impact quality relationships (Liange et al., 2012)</i> – <i>Organisational culture may moderate the relationship between absence of quality relationships and SoNB (Liange et al., 2012)</i> – <i>Organisational culture may exacerbate one’s SoNB (Liange et al., 2012)</i> – <i>Organisational culture may moderate the relationship between SoNB and self-concept (Reis et al., 2016)</i> – <i>Organisational culture may moderate the impact of SoNB on self-concept</i> – <i>Organisational culture in terms of psychological safety, may moderate the choice of resolution behaviours (Hewlin, 2009)</i>