School Belonging: A Review of the History, Current Trends, and Future Directions

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School belonging, at both a school and university level, has been well documented as a predictor of academic and psychosocial success. The construct has been examined by scholars in a variety of different professional disciplines (e.g., education, psychology, sociology) and continues to be consistently researched. Although significant contributions have been made in the field, there are still additional areas of investigation needed, as well as interventions that need to be designed and explored. The current article was designed to review the theoretical foundations of belonging, conceptualise school belonging with respect to how it is presented in the literature, discuss the key variables related to school belonging, present a summary of the predictors of school belonging, discuss school belonging in a university setting, and posit future directions for research.

Keywords: belonging, school belonging, university belonging

The literature reveals that an individual's sense of belonging is an important psychological construct with formative implications for both psychological and physical health across the life span (e.g., Poulton, Caspi, & Milne, 2002; Wadsworth, Thomsen, Saltzman, Connor-Smith, & Compas, 2001). Past research that has investigated belonging has found that those who report a high sense of belonging are more likely to report psychological benefits such as well-being, increased self-esteem, and positive mood (Begen & Turner-Cobb, 2015; Newman, Lohman, & Newman, 2007), improved memory (Haslam et al., 2010), positive life transitions (Haslam et al., 2008; Iyer, Jetten, Tsivrikos, Haslam, & Postmes, 2009), and reduced stress (Newman et al., 2007). Benefits associated with physical functioning have also been reported and include reduced risk of stroke (Boden-Albala, Litwak, Elkind, Rundek, & Sacco, 2005), lowered disease risk (Cohen & Janicki-Deverts, 2009), and reduced mortality (Holt-Lunstad, Smith, & Layton, 2010; Jetten, Haslam, Haslam, & Branscombe, 2009). Moreover, the benefits associated with belonging, whether it be to a group, school or community, have also been found to have lasting effects (Walton & Cohen, 2011; Walton, Cohen, Cwir, & Spencer, 2012). While the benefits of general belonging have been widely accepted, there has not been as much research on the less understood construct of school belonging. The purpose of this article is to provide an overview of school belonging.
research through setting the theoretical context, defining school belonging, discussing the key variables associated with school belonging, presenting the predictors of school belonging as identified in research, highlighting the relevance of school belonging in university settings, and suggesting directions for future areas of research. The main objective of this literature review is to generate a greater understanding of school belonging that may assist future research and practice aimed at investigating school belonging to school and university levels. The implications of a greater understanding of this field may assist educational and developmental psychologists, researchers, and school leaders to address growing concerns related to drop-out rates by students in secondary schools (Kuperminc, Dranell, & Alvarez-Jimenez, 2008) and attrition rates at university-level training (Slaten, Elison, Hughes, Yough, & Shemwell, 2015).

Theoretical Background

Belonging has a connection to seminal work within the field of psychology (Maslow, 1943; Rogers, 1951). Maslow (1943, 1954) first noted belonging in his hierarchy of needs through his theory of human motivation. His theory suggests five fundamental needs that drive the behaviour of individuals in hierarchical fashion. Specifically, Maslow described how all people have a fundamental need for love and belongingness. He theorised that the need for belongingness would emerge only after the physiological and safety needs have been satisfied. Maslow describes the motivation to belong as related to family, friends, community and social groups, and the connections gained through the establishment of these genuine relationships. Maslow’s (1943) work describing the need for belonging has proven to be a powerful construct that has engendered a significant amount of work on human motivation (e.g., Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Brofenbrenner, 1977; Cohen, 1982; Fiske, 2004; Glasser, 1986; Josselson, 1992; Putnam, 2000). In addition to Maslow (1954), other early educational researchers brought the concept of belonging into educational settings specifically. These include the work of Dewey (1938) and his concept of supportive school environments, Vygotsky’s (1962) work on the role of social environment in schools, and Erikson’s (1968) work on social identification in educational settings.

Although there are other psychological and educational theories that allude to belonging (e.g., Bowlby, 1969; Bronfenbrenner, 1977; Connell & Wellborn, 1991; Josselson, 1992; Solomon, Watson, Battistich, Schaps, & Delucchi, 1996; Voelk, 1996), one of the seminal conceptual foundations of belonging research was published by Baumeister and Leary in 1995. The belongingness hypothesis suggests that the construct of belonging is a fundamental human motivator. They define the need to belong as ‘a need to form and maintain at least a minimum quantity of interpersonal relationships’ (Baumeister & Leary, 1995, p. 499). The belongingness hypothesis suggests that the need for belonging is not only innate but based in evolution. They argue that belonging to or interacting with groups provides a greater opportunity for survival through protection, reproduction, shared resources, and eventually affection (Baumeister & Leary, 1995).

The belongingness hypothesis argues that belonging drives goal-directed activity, and the lack of belonging causes adverse reactions (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). The need to belong motivates people to engage socially and form bonds, and the absence of these bonds can often contribute to psychological distress or even physical health concerns. Baumeister and Leary (1995) suggest two main features of belongingness:
the need for frequent personal contacts with others and the perception of a stable relationship. They also argue against the seemingly interchangeable nature of belonging and affiliation by making a sharp contrast between the two terms. Affiliation is not necessarily based on a reciprocal relationship, whereas belongingness requires an in-depth social connection. An important idea of their hypothesis of belongingness is that the need to belong is fundamental to an individual’s wellbeing (Baumeister & Leary, 1995).

**Defining School Belonging**

Although Baumeister and Leary (1995) have defined the overall construct of belonging, belonging to school has been defined more specifically. Willms (2000) defines school belonging as a psychological construct related to attachment to school and underpinned by feelings of being accepted and valued by others (including peers) within the school community. Other definitions of school belonging have incorporated different constructs, including a sense of community (Osterman, 2000), student engagement (Finn, 1993), positive interactions with others (Hamm & Faircloth, 2005), and social identity (Tajfel, 1972). Notwithstanding the broad variability in how school belonging (or belongingness) is conceptualised, the most commonly cited definition of school belonging in the literature is offered by Goodenow and Grady (1993), who define school belonging as ‘the extent to which students feel personally accepted, respected, included, and supported by others in the school social environment’ (p. 80; e.g., Anderman, 2002; Knifsend & Graham, 2012; Ma, 2003; Nichols, 2006). This definition has also been operationalised widely through the use of the Psychological Sense of School Membership (PSSM) scale (Anderman, 2002; Knifsend & Graham, 2012; Ma, 2003; Nichols, 2006) and applies to both secondary school and university settings.

It seems that a review of the literature reveals more consistency in how school belonging is defined than in the terminology used to describe it. School belonging as a psychological construct in empirical research is often described using a range of terms, including school connectedness (Jose, Ryan, & Pryor, 2012; Libbey, 2004), school bonding (Hawkins et al., 1996), school identification (Sirin & Rogers-Sirin, 2004; Wang & Eccles, 2012), school attachment (Hallinan, 2008) and a sense of community (Osterman, 2000). Often, terminology is used interchangeably (Anderman, 2002; Rowe & Stewart, 2009), and a given term’s meaning in a particular context might depend upon the individual author using it (Libbey, 2007). Some theorists have even suggested that belonging is a component of school connectedness (McNeely & Falci, 2004).

School belonging can be closely related to and sometimes included as an aspect of academic motivation research (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Glasser, 1986). For example, Glasser’s (1986) control theory’s classroom application is a theory of motivation that argues against the influence of external motivators altogether and suggests that all motivation is derived from basic human needs, one of which is belonging. Glasser (1986) suggests that if the basic need of belonging is not met, students will have difficulty achieving academic success.

Self-determination theory (SDT) was the catalyst for academic motivation research as it proposed three forms of motivation: intrinsic, extrinsic, and amotivation (Deci & Ryan, 1985). It is theorised that intrinsic motivation consists of three innate psychological needs: competence, autonomy, and relatedness. For the purpose of this
literature review, relatedness (Josselson, 1992) is the most salient psychological need identified by Deci and Ryan (2000), as it is often used interchangeably with belonging. Therefore, an individual’s sense of belonging at a theoretical and empirical level holds implications for the academic outcomes of students (e.g., Anderman, 2002; Baskin et al., 2010; Slaten et al., 2014), a central objective for schools. This has also been supported by specific outcome research that has shown that academic outcomes, among other variables related to school belonging, may play an important role in a student’s connectedness to their school.

**Variables Related to School Belonging**

Research has identified a number of important variables related to school belonging (e.g., Blum & Libbey, 2004; Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2009), such as extracurricular activities (Dotterer, McHale, & Crouter, 2007; Shochet, Smyth, & Homel, 2007), academic motivation, (Anderman, 2003; Whitlock, 2006), mental health (Holt & Espelage, 2003; Shochet, Smith, Furlong, & Homel, 2011), gender (Ma, 2003; Sanchez, Colón, & Esparza, 2005), and race and ethnicity (Bonny, Britto, Klostermann, Hornung, & Slap, 2000). Social and emotional characteristics and how these enhance feelings of school belonging for students and vice versa have also been investigated, with positive findings (Samdal, Nutbeam, Wold, & Kann, 1998; Sirin & Rogers-Sirin, 2004; Uwah, McMahon, & Furlow, 2008). Social and emotional characteristics relate to an individual’s ability to manage emotions and create positive relationships, and include variables such as self-efficacy, self-esteem, and self-concept (Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning [CASEL], 2003). In addition, researchers have also found positive correlations between school belonging and variables concerned with support from others, such as peer support, teacher support, and parent support (Garcia-Reid, 2007; Hallinan, 2008; Wang & Eccles, 2012). Further research has focused on school type (Brutsaert & Van Houtte, 2002; Ma, 2003), school location (Anderman, 2002), and year level (Read, Archer, & Leathwood, 2003).

Of particular note in school belonging research is the relationship between school belonging and academic achievement, mental health outcomes, and maladaptive behaviours.

**Academic Achievement**

Sirin and Rogers-Sirin (2004) examined the impact of psychological and parental factors on academic achievement of African American students. Researchers selected 336 African American students and their mothers from a large database and administered questionnaires that included a measure of school engagement involving nine items, five of which examined school identification defined as a students’ sense of belonging to their school. After analysing the data, researchers found that the strongest predictors of academic performance were educational expectations and school engagement. Results also indicated a significant relationship between school engagement and self-esteem (Sirin & Rogers-Sirin, 2004).

**Mental Illness**

The literature has also demonstrated that mental illness (e.g., anxiety and depression) may also contribute to low levels of school belonging (McMahon, Parnes, Keys, &
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Viola, 2008; Moody & Bearman, 2004; Shochet et al., 2007). Newman, Newman, Griffen, O’Connor, and Spas (2007) found a significant inverse relationship between school belonging and depressive symptoms. They found that during transition from middle school to high school, students’ sense of school belonging tends to decrease and therefore depressive symptoms increase (Newman et al., 2007).

A study by Anderman (2002) examined the relationship between school belonging and psychological outcomes. The researcher accessed a large sample of students (N = 20,745) from schools across the United States (N = 132). Within the study they selected measurements of school belongingness (individual and aggregated), school problems, social rejection, optimism, self-concept, and depression. The results indicated a significant negative correlation between individual perceptions of school belonging and depression, social rejection, and school problems. However, Anderman’s (2002) study also indicated a positive correlation between aggregated school belonging and grade point average (GPA), social rejection, and school problems. These results suggest that the more students feel a collective sense of school belonging the more rejection those students on the outside feel and the more problems they will encounter (Anderman, 2002).

Shochet, Smith, Furlong, and Homel’s (2011) study of school belonging and psychological factors investigated the impact of school belonging on negative affect in adolescent students. Using the Psychological Sense of School Membership Scale (PSSM; Goodenow & Grady, 1993) and the Children’s Depression Inventory (CDI; Kovacs, 1992), researchers surveyed 504 seventh- and eighth-grade students in Australia. Researchers found that school belonging was a significant predictor of negative affect in adolescents (Shochet et al., 2011).

Maladaptive Behaviours

Previous research has also shown a relationship between school belonging and behaviour concerns (Loukas, Roalson, & Herrera, 2010; McNeely & Falci, 2004). McNeely and Falci (2004) analysed survey data from a large sample of adolescents (N = 20,745) and found that the more connected students felt to their teachers in particular, the less likely they were to engage in what researchers referred to as six health-risk behaviours (cigarette smoking, drinking to the point of getting drunk, marijuana use, suicidal ideation, sexual behaviours, and weapon-related violence). More recently, a study by Loukas and colleagues (2010) examined data from 476 sixth- and seventh-grade students in order to determine the role of school connectedness on conduct problems. The results indicated that school connectedness was a moderator between negative family relationships and conduct concerns. Therefore, school belonging has been shown to be highly effective in school dropout prevention (Kuperminc et al., 2008; Pittman & Richmond, 2007; Slaten et al., 2015).

Predictors of School Belonging

Although school belonging is a growing body of research, there has been some work to identify predictors of the construct (Goodenow & Grady, 2003). Despite discrepancies in terminology, which might arguably dilute the potency of research drawn from the field, research has identified that while terminology varied considerably, consistent themes emerged from the broad variety of terms used in the literature; for example, school environment, student safety, teacher supportiveness and caring, parent
support, and peer relationships through extra-curricular activities were all noted as being important contributors to a sense of school belonging (Libbey, 2004).

This current literature shows that the school environment is a salient variable in predicting student belonging (Loukas et al., 2010; Slaten et al., 2015). Studies investigating environmental contributions to school belonging have identified a number of influential themes such as classroom climate, the availability of recreational spaces, opportunities to play and socialise, and school size (Anderson, Hamilton, & Hattie, 2004; Chan, 2008; Waters, Cross, & Shaw, 2010). A study by Anderman (2002) found results indicating that school location is a major predictor of school belonging. The research suggested that students’ sense of belonging was lower in urban school settings as opposed to suburban schools (Anderman, 2002).

Most studies that have investigated school environment with a student’s sense of belonging have focused on student safety (i.e., Cunningham, 2007; Garcia-Reid, Reid, & Peterson, 2005; Hallinan, 2008; Holt & Espelage, 2003; Shochet et al., 2007; Whitlock, 2006). Findings consistently demonstrate that perceived safety is positively associated with school belonging. Cunningham (2007) investigated bullying norms and whether or not students felt that teachers intervened effectively when bullying occurred, and whether or not they felt teachers viewed it as a concern. Findings suggested that the perception of healthy norms concerning bullying was positively associated with school belonging. Similar findings were reported by Hallinan (2008), who concluded that feelings of safety positively influenced school attachment. The studies by Garcia-Reid et al. (2005) and Shochet et al. (2007) also demonstrated that feelings of safety at school influenced school belonging, but this influence was mediated by support from others. When feelings of safety had been jeopardised, as in the case of repeated victimisation, Holt and Espelage found that school belonging was reduced. Thus, these studies show a clear relationship between feelings of safety and school belonging. Therefore, a school’s practices related to fostering a safe environment should be a consideration in supporting school belonging within a school setting.

The important role of the teacher in supporting school belonging has been widely supported across a range of studies (Anderman, 2003; Bowen, Richman, Brewster, & Bowen, 1998; Brewster & Bowen, 2004; Garcia-Reid, 2007; Garcia-Reid et al., 2005; Hallinan, 2008; Shochet et al., 2007). A study by Anderman (2003) found that teachers play a significant role in predicting the sense of school belonging students feel. The study surveyed 618 middle school-aged students and found that when teachers are able to promote mutual respect among peers and provide a safe instructional environment for students there is a stronger sense of school belonging. This study also noted that school belonging decreased over time (Anderman, 2003).

Crouch, Keys, and McMahon (2014) also found the importance of teacher support for student school belonging in a cohort of students with disabilities. Using a mixture of self-report and objective measures (teacher observations), data were collected for 115 students that explored the role of the teacher-student relationship in school belonging for young people with and without disabilities. As found by previous research, school belonging was lower for students who perceived their relationship with their teachers as negative, and higher in students who reported a positive relationship with their teacher. Interestingly, it was found that the teacher’s ratings of a student’s school belonging were consistent with the student’s self-reported ratings of school belonging. This finding extends school belonging research, which is mostly conducted through
self-report measures by students and emphasises the importance of the student-teacher relationship for school belonging.

Slaten and colleagues (2015) conducted a qualitative study examining the educational needs of marginalised youth in an alternative high school. Researchers analysed the data collected from these interviews and generated several domains, which were related to the educational needs that participants felt their school was meeting. One of the salient themes cited by participants as an educational need was their sense of belonging in school, and as part of that, the genuine relationships students felt with teachers and/or administrators. Students identified school belonging in the form of relationships with school faculty as a primary motivation to stay in school as opposed to dropping out (Slaten et al., 2015). Thus, there is a role for support from school administrators as well as from teachers to foster student school belonging.

The literature also provides evidence that it is not only the social support of teachers that is found to correlate with school belonging, but also the academic support provided by teachers. Stevens, Hamman, and Olivárez Jr. (2007) explored the effect of teachers who used mastery goal orientation and academic pressure on a total of 434 early adolescents (average age 12.71 years). Mastery goal orientation involves teachers assisting students to acquire new skills and master new situations through the development of personal goals (see Dweck, 1986). The findings suggested that students reported feelings of school belonging more when their teachers were perceived to promote mastery goal orientation in the classroom. A second finding revealed that teachers who applied academic pressure were also more likely to influence school belonging (Stevens et al., 2007). These teachers were more likely to challenge students and encourage their ideas, and request they explain their academic work. Notwithstanding these results, the most important finding by Stevens et al. (2007) was that the more teachers promoted learning over performance, the more students felt like they belonged to their school.

It is not only a support and caring relationship from teachers that appears to be an important variable for fostering school belonging, but parent support as well. Kuperminc et al. (2008) conducted a study to investigate the variables that may mediate the relationship between parental involvement and achievement of Latino students. Researchers surveyed 195 middle and high school-aged students and assessed their perception of parent involvement, school belonging, and academic competence. Teachers were also asked to provide data in the form of rating their expectations for student academic attainment. For the sake of the study, researchers were able to access school records to use grades as a measure of academic achievement. The results of the study indicate that school belonging mediated the relationship between parent involvement and academic adjustment (Kuperminc et al., 2008). Slaten et al. (2014) examined the impact different types of belonging, including school, had on the way students make career decision. The results demonstrated that school belonging significantly contributed to career decision making, and the more a student felt that they belonged in school the more confident they were in making a career decision (Slaten et. al., 2014).

In addition to teacher support and parent support, peer support through extracurricular activities has also been shown to be a strong predictor of school belonging. Studies have found that students who engage in extracurricular activities report a higher sense of school belonging compared to their peers (Blomfield & Barber, 2010; Waters et al., 2010). Time spent on these activities is seen to be a positive predictor of
school belonging for both boys and girls (Dotterer et al., 2007) and is largely influenced by the adolescent’s relationship with his or her parents (Shochet et al., 2007). Knifsend and Graham (2012) found that students who are moderately involved in extracurricular activities (i.e., two activities) feel a higher sense of school belonging than either students who are not involved at all, or students who are involved in too many. Thus, there appears to be an optimal level of extra-curricular activities for fostering a sense of school belonging. Booker (2004) surveyed African American students ($N = 61$) in a mixed methods study. The researcher utilised the quantitative research to determine a relationship between school belongingness and academic achievement and the qualitative methods to gain a further understanding of what the students perceived to influence their sense of school belonging. The results indicated that the students perceived both teacher and peer relationships to be the most significant influences on school belonging. Additional research was conducted by Shin, Daly, and Vera (2007), who examined the relationship between school engagement and peer norms (both positive and negative), peer support, and ethnic identity. Researchers surveyed 132 seventh- and eighth-grade students and found peer norms to be a strong predictor of school engagement (Shin et al., 2007). Thus, with respect to school belonging, it appears that the relationships students have with teachers, parents, and peers are central to fostering positive connections with school.

**School Belonging in University Settings**

As previously mentioned, the construct of school belonging can manifest differently across various groups and settings. A recent trend has started to focus school belonging research on young adults in collegiate settings. Among the college population, research has shown belonging to be related to psychological adjustment, motivation, and (Pittman & Richmond, 2007, 2008; Guiffrida, Lynch, Wall, & Abel, 2013). In addition, researchers have made attempts to make models of school belonging on college campuses more culturally relevant (Guiffrida, 2006; Tierney, 1992). The purpose of this section is to discuss the most recent trends within the body of school belonging literature and identify opportunities for future research.

Further research has suggested that while school belonging may be related to academic performance, it is not necessarily related to college students’ persistence to graduation (Guiffrida et al., 2013). Guiffrida and colleagues (2013) made this distinction, noting that students with high GPAs are not always motivated to finish college for various reasons. The study examined the relationship between GPA, intention to persist, and motivation as it relates to Deci and Ryan’s (1985) SDT. A sample of college students ($N = 2,520$) were asked to complete questionnaires that included measures of competence motivation, autonomy motivation, need for relatedness, intent to persist, and GPA along with demographic information (SES, race/ethnicity, gender, and 2- or 4-year institution). After analysing the data, researchers determined there was a significant relationship between relatedness and GPA. With regard to students’ intention to persist, only the measure of relatedness to school faculty was shown to have a significant relationship. The results lacked support for the other measures of relatedness (relatedness to home-altruistic, relatedness to home keep-up, and relatedness to school/peers; Guiffrida, 2013).

In an attempt to adequately research this growing body of work, scholars have made attempts at identifying predictors of school belonging that are specific to college
population (Freeman, Anderman, & Jensen, 2007; Slaten et al., 2014). Freeman and colleagues (2007) evaluated college students’ sense of school belonging within the classroom and the university as a whole. They attempted to examine the relationships between school belonging, academic motivation, and instructor characteristics. Data were collected from a sample of college freshmen \( (N = 238) \), and the results indicated that social acceptance and pedagogical concern of instructors were large predictors of school belonging on a college campus.

A more recent study by Slaten and colleagues (2014) employed a Consensual Qualitative Research (CQR) design in order to analyse the meaning of belonging to students on a college campus (Hill, 2012). Researchers were able to identify several domains related to university belongingness: valued group involvement, meaningful personal relationships, environmental factors, and interpersonal factors. With this study, Slaten and colleagues (2014) determined that school belongingness looks different at the university level than at the school-age level. Previous studies of school belonging on college campuses have employed modified versions of the Psychological Sense of School Membership (PSSM; Goodenow, 1993) to measure school belonging (Pittman & Richmond, 2007, 2008). The results found by Slaten et al. (2014) do not disprove Tinto’s (1988) theory, nor do they disprove the results found by previous studies (Guifford et al., 2013; Pittmann & Richmond, 2007, 2008). However, the results do suggest the need for a more appropriate measure of school belonging at the collegiate level.

Due to the fact that school belonging at the collegiate level is still a growing area of research there are opportunities of future research to be completed. As work by Slaten and colleagues (2014) suggests, school belonging looks different for students enrolled at a university than it does for students enrolled at a local high school, and there are many different variables that could be researched within this topic. In addition, there is a growing desire for school belonging work that is culturally sensitive and/or specific (Guiffrida, 2006).

**Discussion and Future Directions**

Although school belonging as a construct has garnered a substantial amount of attention in the literature, there are still some gaps that need to be tended to by academic researchers. Some preliminary qualitative research has suggested that students on the margins of the educational system find it exceedingly difficult to experience a sense of belonging in school (Slaten et al., 2015; Slaten et al., 2016). Previous school belonging research has been limited in understanding the needs of youth in poverty, under-represented minorities, students with disabilities, students with behavioural problems, and other marginalised youth as these relate to their experience of belonging in academic settings. Future quantitative studies should focus specifically on marginalised populations and how these students may or may not differ in their experience of school belonging from their majority peers.

In addition to the need for increasing research focused on marginalised populations’ experience of school belonging, intervention researchers have neglected to design studies that involve testing interventions that may increase a student’s sense of belonging in school (i.e., SEL interventions, student mentoring, restorative justice practices). The majority of the scholarly productivity literature regarding the construct of school belonging has demonstrated how a strong sense of school belonging
significantly improves student outcomes, and yet there has been little research on examining what interventions help enhance this sense of belonging for students in the school setting. Future research should include the measurement of school belonging alongside psychosocial interventions that are utilised in schools to ascertain whether or not current intervention strategies have an impact on students’ level of belonging. In addition, new intervention strategies could be designed to target school belonging specifically, and assessed through experimental and quasi-experimental studies.

Finally, although school belonging in the K-12 school system has received a significant amount of attention, researchers have neglected to examine how school belonging is different based on developmental level and school building (i.e., elementary vs. secondary vs. post secondary). Perhaps the most glaring deficit area is a sense of belonging for university students. Scholars have begun the process of attempting to define the construct as there are many differences between university and primary and/or secondary school settings (Slaten et al., 2014; Slaten et al., in press). There is a need for more research in this area, most notably to develop a valid and reliable measure of university belonging based on an acquired definition from pioneering scholars in the field (e.g., Slaten et al., 2014). Future qualitative work is needed to inquire about how students define a sense of belonging at the university level, with the hope of using this information to create a future instrument to measure the construct and begin looking at outcomes and predictors of university belonging. The implications of a greater understanding of school and university belonging contribute to the field of educational psychology and how the psychological, social, and academic needs of students can best be met to ensure successful educational outcomes across their lifespan.

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