

Belonging and Resilience: A phenomenological study

by

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ABSTRACT

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This phenomenological study was conducted to understand more about the relationship between belonging and resilience. Three informants were interviewed. Data analysis of interview transcripts confirmed themes related to the pre-existing literature and revealed three unique themes: resilient persons sometimes display a rate of spiritual and moral development that is advanced, not belonging may facilitate resilience and the developmental process, and informants' stories suggest a relationship between resilience, belonging, and attachment. Implications include that clinicians should conduct proper developmental assessment of resilient persons and tailor therapeutic interventions to accommodate the space of not belonging for resilient persons who are undergoing moral or spiritual developmental leaps.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
Abstract	ii
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION	
Introduction	1
Statement of problem	4
Purpose of the study.....	4
Assumptions of the study.....	5
Definition of terms	5
Resilience.....	5
Belonging.....	7
Methodology.....	11
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW	
Review of related literature.....	12
Resilience.....	12
Etiology of resilience.....	13
Family, stress, coping, and adaptation	15
Traits of resilient individuals	16
Models of resilience	17
Resilience and development	18
Belonging.....	19
Adolescents and belonging.....	20
Adults and belonging.....	22

Belonging, resilience, development, and attachment.....	22
CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY	
Description of methodology and research design.....	24
The Role of the researcher.....	26
Research questions.....	29
Procedure and data collection.....	30
Data Analysis.....	30
Strengths and weaknesses of the methodology.....	33
CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS	
Results.....	36-49
CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION	
Summary.....	50
Advanced moral development of resilient persons.....	50
Advanced spiritual development of resilient persons.....	52
The significance of not belonging.....	53
Attachment, belonging, and resilience.....	54
Concurrence between the results and previous literature.....	56
Family ritual and resilience.....	56
Traits of resilient persons.....	52
Discordance with literature.....	58

In a different voice	58
Development out of time: the integral model.....	59
Conclusion.....	63
CHAPTER SIX: IMPLICATIONS	
Implications	65
Recommendations.....	66
REFERENCES	68
APPENDIX A.....	71
APPENDIX B.....	72
APPENDIX C.....	73
APPENDIX D.....	74

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Introduction

Bronfenbrenner (1979) called for researchers in the social sciences to concentrate on the qualitative realm. Since that time, researchers have followed suit, seeking to discover the context and processes underlying psychological phenomena. Researchers who study the topics of belonging (Hagerty, Williams, & Oe, 2002; Hendry & Reid, 2000) and resilience (Garmezy, 1994; Gore & Eckenrod, 1994; Rutter, 1990) have also made recommendations for the study of process. Resilience researchers have been interested in how protective factors—those conditions in the environment that protect individuals from the risk of dysfunction—influence each other and to what degree. Recently, researchers have questioned how risk factors (those conditions that predispose one to harm) and protective factors interact to create patterns of resilience (Gore & Eckenrod, 1994). Similarly, researchers of belonging have recommended further investigation on what variables affect individual belonging and how (Hendry & Reid, 2000). These questions are not easily answered through quantitative research methods.

The call for process research, along with my interest in systems theory, and curiosity about how resilience is produced, has spurred my interest in the topics of belonging and resilience. In addition, a curiosity about how people behave, think, and act launched me into pursuing a career in the field of behavioral health. As a student of marriage and family therapy (MFT), I subscribe to the philosophy of systems theory, which considers people in the context of their environments and adheres to the belief that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. According to Klein and White (1996), a

fundamental principle of this theory is that every part of the system has the potential to influence every other part, and that these parts are in constant interaction with each other. Therefore, every person has the ability to affect others in her or his family, community, or society. As people enter or exit or shift roles in the system, everyone else and the quality of the system's functioning is changed, for better or worse.

In the descriptions of these key concepts, it is evident that MFT carries the concept of inter-relatedness at its core. The concept of inter-relatedness, along with acceptance, helps to define belonging (Hagerty, Williams, & Oe, 2002; Hendry & Reid, 2002; Resnick, Harris, & Blum, 1993).

As I have embraced and been influenced by systems theory in my personal philosophy and practice, I have become curious about what it is that causes people to enter or exit the system, change roles within the system, or to make choices that change the system itself. As my ability to recognize these patterns of interaction increases, my interest and fascination with the topic of belonging also has increased, because a change in the system usually is reflected in the way in which the individual belongs to that system. How people change in response to their environments and making meaning in the midst of change is a source of particular interest to me. And how people arrive at certain points and how they make decisions is best detected in the stories of those who live them.

In addition to individual stories, stories that mark history and make the news also carry undercurrents of belonging and ruptures in belonging. For instance, the Japanese who were imprisoned in internment camps during World War II were sent out of society

for up to two and a half years' time, ostracizing an entire race from the U. S. citizenship they had proudly claimed for generations (Feagin, 1979).

Another startling example is that of the Columbine shootings in Littleton, Colorado, in which two young men killed 12 of their fellow students and one teacher before taking their own lives. After some investigation into this crime, police determined that the assailants were disenfranchised and ousted as outsiders by their group of peers and were seeking revenge (Barels & Crowder, 1999).

Assimilation of ethnic groups into the mainstream of U.S. culture is another example of how belonging has affected history, as some groups assimilate more readily than others. The factors and the processes that promote or deter assimilation are reflective of societal belonging (Feagin, 2003).

On a more personal note, my ideas about belonging have come from the dynamic of my own family of origin, and from my own personal experience with peers. How my siblings and I fit into our family is based on a set of rules that has been passed on from a long line of expectations that are based on decades of family interaction and history. For instance, I have seen how when our values and lifestyles do not align with parental expectations, our ability to fit into the structure of the family is affected. Also, considering peer groups that I have been a part of, I distinctly understand that there are rules to abide by in belonging to each of these groups, and there are costs and benefits to belonging and to not belonging. Sometimes, I have made important decisions at such junctures, such as challenging my own belief system. These are just a few illustrations of how the concept of belonging has influenced me personally.

Resilience, another concept at the heart of marriage and family therapy, has also caught my attention. First and foremost, I have been inspired to understand more about resilience as a result of working with clients who have lived well despite adversarial life conditions (which is the definition of belonging), and who thrive from therapy practices, such as Solution-Focused and Narrative Therapies, that focus on client strengths (Nichols & Schwartz, 2001). These approaches are powerful in instilling hope and integrity by allowing clients to emphasize what is already good and effective in their lives, and by placing the problem outside of the person or family. These interventions build on the existing competencies of families and individuals.

Again, systems theory has influenced how I view resilience. Because systems theory takes into consideration all of the parts (all of the family members) working together to create a problem or success, it also assumes that the cause of any problem or success within the system is shared (Nichols & Schwartz, 2001). This anti-pathologizing approach is inherent to systems theory, and in particular to the field of marriage and family therapy. Given that the focus on mental health was pathology-based for many years, resilience is a refreshing way to view people who have had troubled pasts.

Closer to home, I have seen friends and family members recreate their lives after tragedy or grief. Similarly, I have seen the people of the United States rework their values, beliefs, and psyches to rebuild a country in grief after the catastrophic terror attacks of September 11, 2001. The way in which people succeed in the face of danger gives me personal hope and strength to help others, and gives me a positive lens from which to see the world.

Statement of the Problem and Purpose of the Study

This study was designed to begin to explore how a sense of belonging may be related to resilience. The results are intended to enhance the quality of the therapeutic process by offering clinicians information about how people experience belonging. Previous research has pointed to the fact that resilience is enhanced by belonging, especially for adolescents (Hendry & Reid, 2000; Resnick, Harris, & Blum, 1993). The focus of this study was to discover, in detail, how people view belonging, and in particular, how they perceive its relationship to resilience. By understanding more about belonging, clinicians will be able to devise and tailor therapeutic interventions that help people draw on their strengths.

Assumptions of the Study

It is assumed, based on previous research, that belonging and resilience are related (Hagerty, Williams, & Oe, 2002; Hendry & Reid, 2000; Resnick, Harris, & Blum, 1993). It is also assumed that the interviewed subjects were able to properly recall experiences that the research is designed to explore, and that they were truthful and forthcoming in answering the research questions.

Definition of Terms

Resilience

“*Resilience* refers to the process of, capacity for, or outcome of successful adaptation despite challenging or threatening circumstances” (Masten, Best, & Garmezy, 1990). In other words, resilience implies the success or “hardiness” of an individual despite an encounter with an earlier hardship. Rutter’s (1987) definition of resilience includes the individual’s ability to change as a result of the stressor. Still another definition delineates three categories of resilience: (1) good outcomes despite high-risk status; (2) sustained

competence under threat; and (3) recovery from trauma (Masten, et al., 1990; Rutter, 1987). One last definition of resilience, which includes the concept of interrelatedness, is offered by Walsh (1998):

Resilience can be defined as the capacity to rebound from adversity strengthened and more resourceful...the qualities of resilience enable people to heal from painful wounds, take charge of their lives, and to live fully and love well...resilience is forged through openness to experiences and *interdependence* with others. (p. 4)

Researchers have developed a language of resilience that has evolved parallel with new findings on this topic. *Risk* indicates a propensity toward harm because of stressors present in the environment (Garmezy, 1994; Garmezy, 1985; Masten, et al., 1990; Rutter, 1985; Rutter, 1987; Walsh, 1998; Werner & Smith, 1992; Wolin, 1993). *Protective factors* are the conditions that guard against risk through the moderation of stress (Garmezy, 1985; Garmezy, 1994; Masten, et al., 1990; Rutter, 1985; Rutter, 1987; Walsh, 1998; Werner & Smith, 1992; Wolin, 1993). *Vulnerability* refers to predisposition to risk (Rutter, 1987; Werner & Smith, 1992). *Risk factors* are those conditions that contribute to the susceptibility of risk (Garmezy, 1985; Garmezy, 1994; Masten, et al., 1990; Rutter, 1985; Rutter, 1987; Walsh, 1998; Werner & Smith, 1992; Wolin, 1993). Risk factors are not threatening alone, but instead multiple risk factors create a cumulative affect (Masten, et al., 1990) that generates maladaptivity. *Stress-resistance* is a state that permits the individual to withstand considerable stress without the result of negative outcomes (Masten, et al., 1990). *Stress buffering* refers to one's ability to employ *moderating factors* (those that reduce stress) to produce a positive

outcome (Gore & Eckenrod, 1994; Rutter, 1987). *Mediating factors* of resilience are those that “negotiate” between stress variables and protective variables to produce the best possible outcome (Gore & Eckenrod, 1994). *Compensatory factors* are “variables that neutralize the exposure to risk” (Zimmerman & Ankumar, 1994, p. 5).

The concept of resilience was formulated during the search for risk factors (Garmezy, 1984; Rutter, 1987; Cicchetti, 1990). Therefore, the relationship between risk and resilience is implicit in the etiology of resilience. The study of risk factors and protective factors together creates a definition of resilience that will be discussed in length in the literature review.

Belonging

The concept of belonging is fundamental to systems theory (Klein & White, 1996) and is implied in attachment theory (Karen, 1994; Hendry & Reid, 2000). Contrarily, belonging is sometimes defined as a unique concept that stands apart from attachment (Hagerty, Hynch-Sauer, Patusky, Bouwsema, & Collier, 1992). Belonging is also an idea that is present in Alfred Adler’s theory of personality, (Sweeney, 1998) and it is a core assumption in many spiritual or philosophical tenets.

The Lakota Sioux people have incorporated belonging into the nation’s philosophy, and a sense of belonging is the birthright of each tribe member. The emphasis on belonging is woven into the fabric of Lakota philosophy:

Wotitakuye, or kinship, is one of the important values coming from the Tiyospaye. It includes the ideas of living in harmony, belonging, relations as the true wealth, and the importance of trusting in others... Family is the measure of your wealth. They will support you in good times and in bad times. For a Lakota,

belonging to a Tiyospaye or extended family is through birth, marriage or, adoption. Your family even extends out to your Band and the whole Lakota nation. Whenever you travel somewhere, you can expect to be welcomed and supported as if you were in your own immediate family. (Running Deer's Longhouse website, 2003)

Belonging, along with generosity, independence, and mastery, create the Lakota "circle of courage." In this tradition, a balance of all four components of the circle must be present for proper development, socialization, and security (National Education Service, 1996) of the individual; and belonging is the foundation for the other three elements.

Similarly belonging can be seen in the Buddhist precept of "annata." Annata translates to "no self" (Essaybank, 2003). This concept of "no self" reflects the idea of self in the whole, or loss of the self to the belonging in the whole of humankind (Essaybank, 2003; Muller, 1992).

Belonging is, by definition, related to systems theory in the sense that the individual is not isolated, but belongs in context, within families and communities, which comprise larger systems (Klein & White, 1996; Nichols & Schwartz, 2001). Thus, the individual is an integral part an ever-changing system. Families and communities welcome or reject an individual based on the criteria formulated by that particular system, and that individual is expected to meet the criteria in order to belong. Within the contextual framework, an individual learns social skills and passes through developmental tasks by way of relating. Because of this, belonging may be deemed an essential part of development (Hagerty, Williams, & Oe, 2002; Hendry & Reid, 2000).

The systems definition of belonging was furthered by Olson and McCubbin (1983), who formulated the Circumplex Model. This model considers family and individual health as a function of family cohesion and adaptability. With the cohesion dimension, if family members are too close, they are considered “enmeshed,” and if they are too distant, they are considered “disengaged.”

Similarly, Alfred Adler, Viennese psychiatrist, believed that the way in which a child belongs to her or his family has a distinct effect on the family atmosphere and the child’s mental well being. This idea is a central concept to his theory of personality. In Sweeney’s *Adlerian Counseling: An Adlerian Approach* (1998), he links the relationship of attachment and morality to a sense of belonging:

Adler perceived humans as social beings with a natural inclination toward other people...Developmentally, human beings are one of the most dependent creatures at birth. Someone must nurture and care for them if they are to survive... From early dependent experience and throughout life, human beings can best be understood as they interact with others. As children begin discovering themselves, others and the world, their first impressions of the world are predicated upon contact with and through other people... these early impressions develop into rules about life that are used to help them understand, predict, and manage their world (p. 31).

As indicated in this passage, Adler’s perception of belonging included overtones of attachment theory.

For some researchers, the concept of belonging is associated with attachment theory (Hendry & Reid, 2000; Resnick, Harris, & Blum, 1993). To offer some

background on attachment theory, attachment styles are thought to be shaped during infancy, when the infant is dependent on the caregiver (Karen, 1998). It is how the caregiver responds to and interacts with the child that determines attachment style (Karen, 1998; Sroufe, 1979). According to the research of Ainsworth (Karen, 1998), during this phase of life, the individual forms one of three attachment styles: *Secure attachment* is marked by periods where the caretaker provides periods of interest and attention punctuated with breaks from attention (Karen, 1998). An *ambivalent attachment* occurs when the primary caregiver does not consistently respond in good timing to the needs of the child. An avoidant attachment pattern is one in which the caregiver has not responded appropriately to the needs of the infant, leaving the infant insecure. In other words, attachment is about trust, which is the foundation for all other significant relationships, in which the individual will carry the attachment style molded in infancy. (Stosny).

Attachment researchers take the stance that patterns of attachment set the stage for how people relate—or belong—later in life (Karen, 1998; Sroufe, 1979). Attachment theory is disputed by others (Hagerty, et al., 2002; Chess, 1997), who say that belonging has the distinct quality of “fit” between the disposition of the child and that of her or his caregivers. Here, belonging researchers replicate the debate over temperament (nature) and attachment (nurture) that has existed since the 1960s (Chess, 1997; Karen, 1998; Sroufe, 1979). Rutter (2000), however, validates both sides, claiming that neither nature nor nurture are mutually exclusive in contributing to human development. The definition of belonging provided by Hendry and Reid (2002) includes this non-dichotomous view of

temperament and attachment, where both attachment and temperament are recognized as factors related to their definition of belonging.

Object relations theory, which is based on attachment theory, says that individuals identify with the primary caretaker as a “love object.” This relationship sets the stage for all subsequent relationships. The object relations therapist utilizes psychotherapeutic transference to allow her or his self to become the “good object.” In this way, the therapist reworks the basic attachment paradigm of the individual, tearing it down and rebuilding it, from a point of basic trust. The objectification of the caregiver in object relations theory makes the love object, or caregiver an abstract entity.

Methodology

This study employed phenomenological research methods, whereby interviews with three subjects were conducted, transcribed, and studied to find unique themes about the relationship between resilience and belonging. The main question of the study was whether belonging and resilience are related, and all other research questions were designed to get at the underlying process of how these concepts are affiliated and how they influence each other. The transcripts were also combed for themes called for by previous research. Those findings that confirm or elaborate on themes found in previous literature were also noted; these added to the validity to this study.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

In the following literature review, I have focused on the topics of resilience and belonging, and the recent research related to these two topics. The review is intended to provide a background for the research question that explores how belonging affects resilience.

Resilience

Resilience is a broad topic in that the research on it explores the traits of resilient individuals and families; however, it is narrow in that little research involves the in-depth accounts of those people who are considered resilient. In reviewing the literature, I encountered only one qualitative study on this process: the account of Billy, which was presented in the Bulletin of the Menniger Clinic (Stein, Fonagy, Ferguson & Wisman, 2000). The paucity of process research reflects the fact that resilience is a complicated construct (Gore & Eckenrod, 1994; Walsh, 1998), and it, therefore, requires the investigation of multiple variables (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

Current research examines resilience at two levels—the individual and the familial—which both co-mingle with individual health, positively influencing the family and vice versa. Researchers like Rutter, Garmezy, and Werner established the concept of resilience by piecing together ideas from microbiology, neurology, sociology, and psychology (Cicchetti, 1994; Rutter, 1987; Werner, 1992).). How families are resilient in the face of adversity—including poverty, disaster, and loss—is of special interest to the field of Family Studies (McGoldrick, 1999; Walsh, 1998). Forerunners in the field of family resilience were researchers such as Wolin (1984), who has focused on adult

children of alcoholics and resilience, and McCubbin and Olson, who have created models of family functioning and resilience (Olson & McCubbin, 1983; Walsh, 1998). Froma Walsh (1998) articulates the significance of context to the concept of resilience “...Individual resilience is increasingly seen as an interaction between nature and nurture, encouraged by supportive relationships” (p. 4). Therefore, the definition of resilience continues to grow through research that focuses on various interactive factors in the environment and in families that produce strong individuals.

Etiology of resilience

The study of resilience has evolved from a pathological, risk model to a strength-based, resilience model (Barnard, 1994; Bernard, 1993; Garmezy 1994; Masten, et al., 1990; Rutter, 1987; Wolin, 1993). Studies elucidating the factors that contribute to risk predate studies on the prophylactic factors that preserve the integrity of one’s mental, physical, and inter-relational health (Barnard, 1994; Bernard, 1993; Garmezy 1994; Masten, et al., 1990; Rutter, 1987; Werner, 1992; Werner & Smith, 1992; Wolin, 1993). High-risk persons were found to have low birth weight, a schizophrenic parent, low-income status, or urban living environment (Garmezy, 1985; Garmezy, 1990; Gore & Eckenrod, 1994; Rutter, 1987; Werner, 1992; Werner, et al., 1992). Concern over how people’s situations result in negative outcomes led to a body of research that examined the prevention of risk, rather than the promotion of protective factors (Barnard, 1994; Bernard, 1993; Garmezy 1994; Masten, et al., 1990; Rutter, 1987; Werner, 1992; Werner & Smith, 1992; Wolin, 1993). In an attempt to address the problems of at-risk individuals, research investigated the attributes of children who do not succeed. The etiology of resilience lies in the study of risk or vulnerability, which resides in the

maladaptation side of stress, coping, and adaptation (Rutter, 1987). Therefore, the original definition of resilience was the opposite of vulnerability.

The line between health and pathology is, however, thin. Michael Rutter (1987) has described vulnerability and resilience as “two sides of the same coin” (p. 316). While searching for risk factors, people with training in the medical model—namely neurosurgeons and psychiatrists—began superimposing biological concepts from the medical model on those from psychology, in particular, those from human development (Cicchetti, 1994; Rutter, 1985). Specifically, Rutter superimposed the “inoculation effect—the phenomenon that occurs when a small dose of a toxic substance causes a living cell to change and to become consequently stronger and more likely to fight off disease in the future” (p. 503)—onto the concept of resilience. His idea was that people become immunized to stress by enduring a little, leaving them hardier and more resilient in the end (Rutter, 1987).

The shift from a vulnerability model to one of strength occurred as Werner and Smith (1992) documented a longitudinal study of people from the island of Kauai. They coined the term “stress-resistant persons” to refer to people that could withstand and overcome adversity. Instead of finding traits that predisposed people to risk and harm, the results of the Werner and Smith study revealed protective factors that prevented vulnerability. This study was conducted with a sample of over 600 subjects who were followed over the course of 32 years (birth to age 32) to examine coping and adaptation patterns. This study found that two-thirds of adults over 30 years of age, who were “at-risk” as youngsters, matched or surpassed the educational, vocational, and social skills of their counterparts, who lacked risk factors. These findings are suggestive of a shift in

perception: resilience began to be viewed as a source of personal strength, rather than risk being emphasized as a detriment to functioning. This is a factor for clinicians to consider when treating people who have incurred past difficulties; it is a shift that offers the possibility of viewing such people as being empowered rather than simply being victims of their circumstances.

The results of Werner and Smith's study caused the search for protective factors to be a significant issue in resilience research. Protective factors are defined by Michael Rutter (1985) as "... influences that modify, ameliorate, or alter a person's response to some environmental hazard that predisposes to a maladaptive outcome" (p. 600). Protective factors, therefore, are identified to be stress-buffering factors in the larger picture of resilience. That is, protective factors are those that mitigate the effects of stressors. Gore and Eckenrod (1994), Garmezy (1985), and Rutter (1985) suggest that a complex model exists for *stress buffering*, the vehicle by which resilience is delivered. They state that protective factors are building blocks which may provide a cumulative effect to buffer stress when in interaction with one's environment, thus affecting resilience.

Family stress, coping and adaptation

Another way in which to view the relationship between risk and resilience is to look at McCubbin and Patterson's double ABC-X model of family stress, coping and adaptation (McCubbin & Patterson, 1982). (APPENDIX A). This model aligns with Rutter's view on the close relationship of risk to resilience because it incorporates the concepts of risk and resilience, where risk is viewed as any stressor that comes into contact with the individual and her or his family. In this model, resilience is the positive

outcome of “bonadaptation,” and pathology is reflected by “maladaptation,” or negative outcomes (or pathology). Since, this model explains both good and bad outcomes, the relationship between risk, resilience, and environment is easily observed. A change in resources (Bb) and the perception of the family or individual (Cc) determines whether the outcome will be positive or negative.

Traits of Resilient Individuals

Research has investigated the particular traits of people who are resilient. Resilience has been referred to as particular set of characteristics that deem an individual impervious to stress. For instance, Wolin and Wolin (1993) present the “Challenge Model” of resilience, which characterizes resilient people by a few distinctive parameters. These include the qualities that allow them to be insightful and independent, to form meaningful relationships, take initiative, maintain and live by moral principles, and use humor and creativity to move beyond. That all people carry with them the curative strengths is the primary assumption upon which strength-based therapies, such as solution-focused and narrative therapies are based (Nichols & Schwartz, 2001).

According to Barnard (1994), who offers a review of the literature on resilience, resilient individuals are characterized by (1) being more cuddly and affectionate; (2) having no sibling born within 20-24 months of one’s own birth; (3) possessing a high level of intelligence; (4) having the capacity and skills for developing intimate relationships; (5) being achievement oriented; (6) bearing the capacity to construct productive meanings for events in their world that enhances their understanding of these events; (7) carrying the ability to selectively disengage from the home and engage with

those outside, and then to re-engage; (8) having an internal locus of control; and (9) experiencing the absence of serious illness during adolescence.

In addition to the characteristics listed above, research has shown that resilient people also show the ability to gain social competence (Hendry & Reid, 2003; Benard, 1993; Garmezy, 1985), know how to solve problems (Bernard, 1993; Garmezy 1985), are participatory in positive school experiences (Bernard, 1993), express faith in a higher power, and attend church (Garmezy, 1990; Walsh, 1998).

Barnard named seven characteristics that typify families that produce resilient individuals. First, a good match between the child and parents is important to resilience. This match refers to a fit in temperament between parent and child, which is based on the work of Stella Chess (Chess, 1999). Second, the presence and maintenance of family rituals is integral to resilience. Family ritual has been studied in depth by Bennett and Wolin (Bennett & Wolin, 1984). Third, the ability of the family to be pro-active toward problem solving affects resilience. Fourth, the minimization of family conflict during infancy adds to resilience. In other words, fewer arguments in a family during a child's infancy boosts resilience. Fifth, the absence of divorce during adolescence increases a person's resilience. Sixth a substantial and productive relationship with one's mother increases resilience. Seventh, selecting a stable mate adds to a person's resilience.

Models of resilience

The literature on resilience offers three distinct explanations for how resilience is incurred. Although each of the models agrees that the description of resilience is a "good outcome," the processes by which the outcome is delivered vary.

The first model of resilience is based on the moderating quality protective factors. In this model, a protective factor serves as a catalyst that may either mitigate the effects of a risk factor or may boost the qualities of another protective factor (Zimmerman & Arunkumar, 1994). The second model of resilience, which was referred to earlier in this section, is the inoculation model. In this model, the stressor is equated to a pathogen that, when taken in small doses, “immunizes” or “steels” the individual against future risk (Rutter, 1987; Zimmerman & Arunkumar, 1994). The third model of resilience is the compensatory model of resilience, which introduces the concept of compensatory factors. Compensatory factors are deemed mutually exclusive from risk factors; they do not interact (Garmezy, 1984; Masten, et al., 1990; Zimmerman & Arunkumar, 1994). Instead, risk factors and compensatory factors are said to have an additive affect on outcome. Here risk and compensation are positively correlated (Masten, et al., 1990; Zimmerman & Arunkumar, 1994).

Resilience and development

Resilience is viewed as a phenomenon that occurs within the context of, and as a result of, normal human and family development. With conditions that promote or foster development come new and more sophisticated means to cope and adapt (Rutter, 1987; Stein, et al., 2000; Walsh, 1987; Werner, 1992). An individual who is “at-risk” may appear so if developmental tasks have not occurred due to chronic or acute stress. Overwhelming stress may have a negative impact on development, leaving children who are exposed to catastrophe, poverty, or trauma at a developmental deficit (Stein et al., 2000). If these developmental tasks are achieved—in or out of due time with the expected course of development—individuals exhibit signs of resilience (Masten et al., 1990).

However, when a change in the child's immediate environment is made and undue stress is alleviated, a developmental shift may occur. Consequently, completion of certain developmental tasks at times not only restores the individual to an appropriate developmental level, but also may prompt an immunization to future stresses. In this case, the inoculation model of resilience best explains resilience.

Throughout the literature on resilience, researchers have noted the significance of development to resilience (Cicchetti, 1994; Garmezy, 1994; et al., 1991; Rutter, 1987; Werner & Smith, 1993). Again, the etiology of resilience has emerged as an extension of psychopathology, or a search for risk factors. Cicchetti (1994) and Masten et al. (1990) elaborate that the field of developmental psychopathology, in particular, has had a profound impact in forming the foundation of resilience. Masten et al (1990) explain, "One of the fundamental tenets of developmental psychopathology is that atypical and normative development are best understood in the context of the other, the study of one informing and enriching the study of the other" (p. 425).

In other words, development is a concept that fosters resilience; and these two phenomena constantly interact and influence each other. Stein et al. (2000) offer, "...resilience is best regarded as an interactive process that unfolds over time" (p. 5).

Belonging

The study of belonging is somewhat limited in scope, but literature continues to grow based on recommendations from researchers who consider belonging to be an important element of development and well being. For instance, Hagerty et al. (2002) recommend exploring the relationship between belonging and resilience.

A sense of belonging has been established as an important element of psychological and social functioning (Hagerty et al., 2002). Proposed consequences of a sense of belonging include: “psychological, social, spiritual, or physical involvement; attribution of meaningfulness; establishment of a foundation for emotional and behavioral experiences” (p. 794).

Adolescents and belonging

Adolescents, in particular, require a sense of belonging (Haggerty, 2002; Resnick, 1993). As they pass developmentally from relying heavily on family, to dependence on peers for acceptance and as a barometer of identity, belonging to a group of like-minded friends becomes significant. According to Hagerty et al., “...other life experiences such as those in school and during adolescence also might be important in influencing sense of belonging” (p. 795). Hendry and Reid (2000) also confirm this finding. Adolescents who have a hard time making or maintaining friendships have more health concerns (Hendry & Reid, 2000).

Hendry and Reid’s study further emphasizes the connection of the developmental task of belonging as, “maintaining good friendships and learning how to socially navigate within one’s peer group” (p.3). This social navigation broadens the understanding of belonging because it emphasizes the connection between resilience and the importance of belonging to one’s peer group. According to these researchers, peers also impact self-esteem and buffer against stress. Belonging impacted resilience in that, “friends could keep each other from making more serious social mistakes elsewhere, within a potentially less forgiving group of peers,” (p. 712) and, “...fitting in was part of the larger group of social skills needed to ‘get along’ and be able to handle life situations” (p. 711). In the

Hendry & Reid (2000) study, adolescents reported that feeling supported by friends mediated the effects of stressors such as illness (including depression), friendship problems, and achievement pressures, while assisting with the building of social skills and self-esteem.

Hendry and Reid's (2000) study also revealed other important data about the essence of belonging. The results indicated that a sense of belonging is essential for proper development, including the enrichment of conflict resolution skills and a tolerance for others. Also, the study pointed to the significance of morality through conformity: a "basic rightness for certain kinds of behavior and dress" (p.717). Needing to belong and to conform to the standards of peers was named by the adolescents in this study as important to getting by in life. However, fitting in did not always warrant intimacy. The teens in Hendry and Reid's study discussed the effort and skill required to build lasting, intimate friendships, which appears to be an advanced developmental task for teens. For instance, learning to renegotiate the relationship after a falling out was named as such a skill. Also, bullying was a problem for the teens that were interviewed, and they spoke of the importance of finding ways to mitigate and negotiate the effects of these situations. Gender differences were observed, in that girls sought support and advice from friends when faced with conflict and boys did not. In addition, boys worried about loneliness and being ostracized more often than girls did.

In their 1993 study, Resnick, Harris, and Blum, create a bridge between belonging and resilience, by using both quantitative and qualitative methods to investigate belonging and resilience. The results showed that for adolescents, a sense of spirituality and low family stress, as well as caring and connectedness with adults (at

home or at school), served as protective factors. In addition, these researchers recommended that, “Interventions for youth at-risk must critically examine the ways in which opportunities for a sense of belonging may be fostered” (p. S-3). This study also delineated how protective factors vary by gender. Specifically, the primary protective factor for girls was family connectedness; whereas, for boys, a connection made at school was most important.

Adults and belonging

The findings of Hagerty et al., (2002) suggest that an adult sense of belonging coincides with a perception of one’s mother and father as caring, participation in sports activities, and presence absence? of parental divorce in childhood. Conversely, achieving an adult sense of belonging can be undermined in childhood by an overprotective father, a high school pregnancy, family financial problems, incest, and homosexuality of a family member (including self). This research concurs with Resnick et al. (1993) whose study showed parent-child connectedness to be a very strong factor in maintaining a sense of belonging into adulthood. While warm, supportive relationships proved to benefit an adult sense of belonging, an overprotective father (but not mother) negatively influenced whether an individual carried a healthy sense of belonging.

Belonging, resilience, development and attachment

Attachment is linked to belonging since attachment styles set the stage for making and maintaining future relationships (Karen, 1996; Rosenstein & Horowitz, 1996; Sroufe, 1979) and make a lasting impression on self-esteem. Rutter (1987) integrates the concept of change, or development, with belonging. “Self concepts...continue to be modified by life experiences. It appears that good intimate

relationships, even in adult life, can do much to bolster people's positive concepts about themselves and their worth in other people's eyes," (Rutter, 1987, p. 328).

The relationship among belonging, attachment, development, and resilience is perhaps best elucidated in the example of Billy (Stein, Fonagy, Ferguson, & Wisman, 2002). Billy was a child who was severely neglected and physically abused as a child. The trauma he suffered in his family of origin left him developmentally behind other children his age. However, as Billy passed developmental tasks (making friends, dating girls, playing sports), he became more able, showing his resilient nature. This sense of belonging was afforded him by his stay with a foster family, the Greens. Billy's interaction and belonging with a group of peers was also a part of a developmental process, which blossomed in the presence of belonging to a social group and to a dyadic unit with his girlfriend. In forming these relationships, Billy demonstrated an ability to "attach" or to be interconnected with others, as well as a capacity for resilience.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

Description of Methodology and Research Design

A phenomenological approach was taken in data collection and analysis in order to explore the process of belonging and its role in creating resilience. My intent was to explore the meaning of belonging to persons who are resilient; the main research question of the study was “How does belonging affect resilience?” Because this is a process or “how” question, employing qualitative research methods seemed to be a logical choice for this study. In particular phenomenology was chosen because I was interested in the participants’ lived experiences of the examined topic (Boss, Dahl, & Kaplan, 1996; Creswell, 1994). In addition, researchers who have studied both belonging (Hendry & Reid, 2000; Hagerty, Williams, & Oe, 2002) and resilience (Garmezy, 1994; Gore & Eckenrod, 1994; Rutter, 1990) have recommended that future research focus on the process of resilience.

Before starting this study, I had a hunch about resilience and belonging being related to development. This hunch was based on literature that I encountered during my studies. This literature often cited Bronfenbrenner (1979), who recommends taking a multidirectional research approach to reveal detail about processes of the developing person. His model, based on ecological theory, takes into account a person’s context and environment, which facilitate development over time. Tudge and Tulviste (2000) elaborate on the complexity of this model and on how phenomenological research practices may get at this complexity. These authors reinforce the significance of Bronfenbrenner’s emphasis on studying person, process, context, and time. In this study,

I adhered to Bronfenbrenner's model by examining the person and process over time, taking into consideration the person's context, or environment. To account for the temporal piece, subjects were selected by criteria of whether they were old enough to have passed through developmental stages and to reflect upon these stages. The topic of belonging implies context in its relational definition, representing in itself this aspect of the multidirectional approach. In addition, the informants were asked to elaborate on their history and on their views of the relationship between belonging and resilience. In considering this history, the context of belonging and resilience is addressed. Most of my other research questions refer to the contextual aspects of belonging and resilience. Thus, the research design of this study addresses person, process, context, and time as outlined by Bronfenbrenner.

Research on belonging has spurred curiosity about how belonging is affected over the life span (Hagerty et al., 2002). In qualifying participants for the study, I chose participants who were mature enough to have passed through several developmental stages, and therefore could reflect on belonging retrospectively. To acquire this type of data, phenomenological inquiry allowed me to retrieve large amounts of detailed information and rich, thick descriptions of the subjects' experiences without following them for many years. Resilience researchers are interested in understanding how protective and risk factors interact to create resilience. This relationship may best be discovered through phenomenological studies, where detailed interviews reveal specific, complex aspects of the phenomenon being studied. Prior to conducting the study, I suspected that belonging may be a protective factor to resilience.

I used a convenience sample, recruiting three students from the Marriage and Family Therapy program at the University of Wisconsin-Stout. Criteria for inclusion in the sample included people who self-identified as “having a painful childhood,” as the concept of resilience implies a level of achievement despite hardship. Enrollment in graduate level studies was considered an indication of the former, and designation of a painful childhood was considered an indication of the latter. The three participants fit both facets of resilience.

Voluntary participation was ensured in the following manner: I made a general announcement in classrooms about the nature of the research and the commitment it would involve. The potential participants were then asked to contact me in person, at a later time to express interest in participation.

All three participants were women. They ranged in age from 26-58 years. Age was used as a criterion for inclusion to ensure that participants had passed through adolescence, which is a period of accelerated development and is most associated with risk of maladaptation (Bernard, 1993; Resnick, Harris, & Blum; 1993; Stein, Fonagy, Ferguson, & Wisman, 2000; Hendry & Reid, 2000).

The Role of the Researcher

Prior to conducting the three interviews, I was interviewed by a colleague, who served as a research assistant. This interview was intended to establish my biases about resilience and belonging before being influenced by the ideas of the interviewees. Creswell (1994) describes this interaction between the researcher and the research as unfolding, whereby the researcher’s opinions are impacted by the responses of the informants as the interviews and data analysis occur (p. 153). To help measure this

influence, I used this interview as a point of reference at the beginning of the research process. I transcribed the interview and searched for themes, using data analysis procedures that were similar to those employed in analyzing the informants' interviews. Several biases surfaced in thematic form in the transcripts: (1) I believe that belonging is a spiritual issue; and belonging can occur while one is alone, if in union with nature or with God. (2) I think that common experiences or ideas put people in belonging relationships with one another. (3) I understand human behavior from a developmental perspective. (4) My definition of belonging includes unconditional acceptance.

This first excerpt combines my spiritual and the ideological view of belonging:

...as strangely as this sounds—it's when I'm alone. And...uh...I can appreciate beauty around me...and I feel like I belong to the world or I sense of self that's peaceful in that greater picture. Or I can just kind of look back and think, "Oh, yah." Sometimes if I realize that ideas are not stuck within me...that they're greater...you know...that they're part of something bigger and that other people have had those experiences or can relate, I guess...

Here, I express my views on belonging, which describe belonging as a phenomenon that all people experience as being part of the human race or as part of the human condition. Reflecting on this, I understand that my tendency is to feel that all people belong, regardless of whether they are included, or feel included. My personal definition of belonging is one that stems from my religious upbringing in the Catholic Church. As a Catholic, I learned that it is important to treat all people with respect: to "treat others as you want to be treated," and "to love your neighbor as yourself." More recently, I have adopted Buddhist beliefs, which have also influenced my personal definition of

belonging. Buddhists consider suffering a human condition which all people share. In this common experience, and in striving for relief from suffering, the individual dissolves into a pool of belonging-ness.

It is also my belief that belonging and ideology are related, as expressed again in this excerpt from the transcript:

You know, I come back to this as a sharing of ideas. And I think when there's a sense of belonging and a sharing of ideas...

This belief about ideology is born out of my placing importance on a search for a political orientation and voice that is reflective of my own personal values and morals. By discussing my personal views with friends and colleagues, I have refined my beliefs, making it possible for me to find a political—or ideological—sense of belonging.

Another bias that was shown in the transcript was that of my perception of belonging as a concept related to development:

the process I think that's universal, or should be...in order for people to um...be able to...I think it's almost a developmental thing. Like if people don't have this (belonging), they get stuck developmentally, and can't move on.

This bias has been influenced by my theoretical orientation as a marriage and family therapist. Marriage and family therapy—especially the branches of experiential and strategic therapies—see people's problems as a result of developmental glitches, whereby failure to complete a developmental task causes systemic or individual pathology. Because I have been trained this way, when I view people's problems I look for developmental markers.

In the transcript, I found several passages indicating my belief that belonging is associated with unconditional acceptance. This excerpt demonstrates that bias:

Like a desire to fit in or a place that...um...a person could go and not be judged. I think that judgment is a part of that as well...unconditional...or maybe not completely unconditional...but there's respect involved.

Upon reading this, I also detect my personal belief in tolerance for others despite differences. Tolerance and respect of others' differences are two personal values that I hold. These values again, reach back to religious teachings of my past.

Research Questions

I used the following questions to investigate the meaning of belonging to each interviewee:

1. Do you think that a sense of belonging is related to resilience? If so, how or in what ways?

Question #1 was the main research question on which all of the others are based. The other questions help to answer how resilience and belonging are related and to discover the process underlying the relationship between these two concepts.

2. What does "belonging" mean to you?
3. How do you know when you belong? Can you give an example of a time when you felt you belonged? Can you give an example of a time when you felt you did not belong?
4. Where do you find a sense of belonging? When is this feeling strongest and why?
5. When—if ever—has belonging helped you?

6. What do you think is the relationship between the belonging you described and where you are now in your life?

Procedure and Data Collection

At least 24 hours prior to the interviews, I provided a list of the seven aforementioned research questions to each participant. I conducted all three face-to-face interviews in private, pre-arranged locations on the University of Wisconsin-Stout campus. The interviews lasted between 45 to 60 minutes and were tape-recorded. The questions were asked one by one. Discussion off the interview topic was kept to a minimum. However, when it appeared that the participant was confused by a question, I sought to clarify the question by offering alternative definitions or further explanation of the material. In addition, I asked one follow-up question, which was, "Is there anything else you would like to add about belonging or resilience?" One month after the interviews were conducted, the participants were contacted by e-mail or phone call to corroborate the results. They each were provided with a rough copy of the results section and their respective transcript. They were then asked to examine the conclusions for accuracy. In addition, I requested that the subjects give advice on how to improve on the conclusions I made, based on their responses.

Data Analysis

The research design was based on recommendations made by Creswell (1994), who combines the ideas of several other experts on qualitative research. Creswell calls for high accountability and sensitivity of the researcher to the informants of the study

through reporting researcher biases. He also highlights that an “eclectic” approach to data analysis is intrinsic to and standard in qualitative research practices.

I transcribed the tape-recorded interviews within one week’s time of the interview date. I then printed the transcripts and searched for recurrent themes. To obtain this meaning, or “lived experience,” from the interviews is the goal of phenomenological research (Boss, Dahl, & Kaplan, 1996). As I read the transcripts, these themes emerged from the responses of the participants, and I coded themes by subject matter in the margins of the printed transcripts. For instance, “d” was the code for development and “s” was the code for spirituality. Later, on the computer, I translated the codes into colors, and each category was assigned an identifying color. This color-coding system was a visual aid that helped identify participants’ by subject category. For example, development equaled pink instead of “d.” The colors were used so that these themes could easily be identified and referred to when writing the results section of this paper. Subsequently, these themes were analyzed for validity by comparing participants’ responses to the literature on resilience and belonging, a method that is recommended by Creswell (1994) to improve the validity of the study. I drew conclusions based on the commonality of the participants’ accounts, a method called reduction and interpretation by Creswell (1994, p. 154). Unique responses were referred to as recommendations for future research. At this point, I used “member checks” (p. 158) to enhance the validity of the study. Discussing the analysis of my findings with each participant to get feedback enhanced the accuracy of the categories I made and the conclusions that I drew about the categories and themes. Adjustments were made in the categories or conclusions when my

interpretations did not resonate with the participants' views of the results based on the participants' feedback on the interpretation of the findings.

I took precautions in keeping respect for human subjects by not singling out any person or persons in requesting an interview. Because the interviewees are identified as colleagues of the investigator, these measures were strictly adhered to.

Upon recruiting the participants of this study, I ensured voluntary participation by using practices, which are described in the *participants* section above. Before conducting the interviews, I relayed the risks and benefits of participation in the research (in detail, point by point) before each interview was initiated, and I reiterated that participation in the project was not mandatory and that the subject could revoke the commitment to engage at any time.

Subjects were afforded confidentiality by several measures: (1) I conducted and transcribed the interviews, thus eliminating the number of persons exposed to the identities of the subjects; (2) The transcripts lack descriptors—such as names or initials—that may be used to specifically identify subjects. The initial “EE” for interviewee demarcate the subject's responses on all transcripts; (3) All tape-recordings were destroyed after transcriptions were completed; and (4) I took an oath of confidentiality with each informant to hold all rendered information in confidence. This oath was taken in writing in the form of a confidentiality clause in the Consent Form (APPENDIX E). The methods employed in this project conformed to the norms of phenomenological research. Therefore, due to the personal, introspective nature of the subject matter at hand, there was a risk that interviews could unearth unexpected emotions, triggering an emotional reaction in participants. All participants were provided with a list of three

local clinics that provide therapeutic services, should they have been needed to mitigate the effects of such reactions.

Participants in this study were informed of the possible benefits of participation. A potential benefit of research participation was the opportunity for participants to develop deeper understanding of their own beliefs, attitudes, feelings, and cognitions. Informants may, in turn, be able to draw on these understandings in the future as a point of strength and resilience.

Strengths and Weaknesses of the Methodology

The research questions, as intended, resulted in rich, thick descriptions of participants' lived experiences related to belonging and resilience. The purpose of the study was realized in the depth of the interviewees' responses, which allowed the researcher a glimpse at each participant's process of resilience. Also, the participants were able to reflect on their experiences with belonging, which added the element of history called for by Bronfenbrenner's (1979) multidirectional approach to research.

Because of the small sample size (three participants) of this study, the suggested findings are tentative and exploratory. The participants were all from similar backgrounds (middle class, Midwestern) and ethnicity (white, European), thus narrowing the scope of the study. Because the participants were all women, the results may not reflect male realities about belonging and resilience. Because belonging research (Resnick, et al., 1993; Hendry & Reid, 2000) and resilience research (Masten, Best, & Garmezy, 1991) have noted differences in responses based on gender, this study only reveals a partial view on these topics. This study was not intended to yield gender-specific results; only women participants were interviewed because no male participants

volunteered. Because the sample did not include male participants, future studies might examine differences between male and female responses, as well as further explore the range of female responses. Although the scope of the study was limited in a number of ways, the results may provide direction for future research.

Another strength of the methodology was that participants had specialized knowledge that helped them be articulate in responding to questions. Because they all had previous exposure to the concept of resilience and a working knowledge of this concept, they could skillfully apply it to their personal situations without needing a basic explanation of the terminology.

Additionally, the 24-hour period to ponder the research questions assisted in eliciting thoughtful, honest responses. This extra day was given due to the abstract nature of some of the questions, and resulted in the desired richness of the participants' accounts.

One last strength of the methodology was the validity checks, which provided both internal and external validity to the study. The interview that was conducted prior to collecting other interviewees' responses, helped to establish validity through reflexivity (Johnson, 1997). Further validity was provided through triangulation with literature (Johnson, 1997). Participant feedback (Johnson, 1997), or member checks (Creswell, 1994), also added to the validity of the study. In this way, the informants gave feedback on my interpretation of their statements.

Another possible weakness of the study was the oversight in getting a "control" interviewee—that is—one who was not resilient, a procedure recommended by Creswell

(1994) to improve the validity of the study. This interview could have then been compared with those of the resilient participants.

This study was an initial exploration of how resilience is affected by belonging. A phenomenological approach was employed to yield rich, thick descriptions of the participants' processes of belonging over time. Ethical considerations were addressed to respect the informants' anonymity and to account for any repercussions from the effects of the study. The strengths of this study included the informants' knowledge of the research topics, internal and external validity confirmation, and my accounting for personal researcher biases.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS

In response to the research questions, the participants gave feedback on their impressions of and experiences with belonging. Many of the statements included detail sufficient to capture a glimpse at process, which was the primary goal of the research methodology.

These accounts provided rich descriptions of the relationship between belonging and resilience. Each participant told a story that revealed a unique developmental history. Specifically, the accounts indicated that resilience may be affected by belonging in the sense that belonging promotes the developmental process. Although the informants' stories were individualized, sometimes the themes in their accounts overlapped. Some of the reports reflected ideas about resilience or belonging found in existing literature. The participants reported on topics relating to development, attachment, family ritual, spirituality, tolerance, and values/ morals/ ideology.

In addition, four unique themes of playfulness, authenticity of self, perseverance of character, and unconditional love/ acceptance surfaced in the transcripts. The two most prevalent themes that surfaced were unconditional love or acceptance and development, on which all three participants commented. The accounts reflected a developmental process that surfaced in all three interviews. This still seems in process? Although each process was unique, some parallel themes provided continuity for discussion. At times these themes are intertwined, giving a complex picture of the interaction between them and the phenomena of belonging and resilience.

All three interviewees described belonging as a developmental issue, and the stories that were relayed through the interview procedure were indicative of the developmental process. Participant #1 framed her developmental process with ideology and spirituality at its core. Participant #1 offered the following statement, which links belonging and development:

...my first instinct would be, 'No, you don't have to belong to be resilient.' But, yet, at those times...when I think back to um...those times when I felt like I belonged...it did...I took enormous strides in myself, in finding out who I was...at those points.

In the interviewee's words, "I took enormous strides in finding out who I was...at those points." She describes the way belonging created a developmental scaffolding that connects her to her identity (in her words, "who I was"). This participant named the groups that she has belonged to, how these groups influenced her, and how she utilized the group's ideology:

So, you know I go around and I take parts of ideology that I believe or that fit with me and that's how I live my own life. So, I don't know if I fully belong to Christians or feminists or I fully belong to the MFT program because I'll take what parts of it that I want.

After Participant #1 named the groups she has belonged to, she described the process of finding her identity as one in which she belonged to a group, identified with the group ideology, and finally developed a unique ideology, taking what she needed from the group's ideas. She then merged core group concepts with her own and eliminated the ideas that diverged from her personal values. At the point in which her personal ideas did

not match the group's ideology, a developmental leap occurred, whereby belonging to the group became less important than "being honest" with oneself or "being true" to oneself. Participant #1 equated this honesty with resilience. The process is more clearly outlined in the following excerpt:

You know part of feeling like I don't belong is other people accepting me or my views however they differ from theirs...Um...for me, I just had to be honest with myself. I felt like...for in order for me to belong...I have to agree with what you say...I can't be honest with myself. So, for me to be resilient, I have to be honest with myself...So, I don't know if it's as much a sense of belonging with...um...other people as it is with just belonging with myself and being true to myself.

Participant #2 also described her developmental process being promoted by belonging. As a child, she strove to belong, but she didn't find a sense of belonging in her group of sisters; then she experienced a sense of belonging with her own children, as she started a family. Ultimately, she found belonging as her spiritual growth blossomed into feeling authentic and being herself. However, she still wrestles with belonging when old emotions (from the times with her sisters) trigger her need to be "let in" or to "get it right," creating disparity with her feeling of authenticity. Participant #2 spoke of the resilience she has acquired as being paradoxical in relation to belonging. Although she did not fit in with her siblings as a child, she also claims belonging has helped her. Here she claims that the "not belonging and being second for everything," was both a source of pain and a means to resilience.

I grew up in a house with five girls... and there was a lot of talent in our family...always into music and art and poetry... We would always do dances and sing...and I can remember coming up where the oldest would be...we would make a line...and then I came up as the littlest one. And I can remember the panic if I didn't get the steps right. It was like my whole life flashed before my eyes. And it was life or death for me...it was like survival...I knew...I came into the belief that I would not get it right...Um...and totally mess up because I could not do the steps...and somehow I saw my whole life before my eyes...I was finished if I don't do these dance steps right, 'cause they won't let me in... It's...it's...it's a catch 22...because I have a sense of resilience because of the environment that I lived in day after day...and a sense of not belonging, and being second for everything.

Participant #2 then described how needing to belong became a pattern for her. She also told of how she struggles with needing to belong and how she reflects upon this. She went on to use developmental language to put meaning to that struggle, naming it as “a turning point from inside”:

It's like it set a pattern for me...that when I contemplate now, that sense of belonging...I can take that all the way back there...and think of how it was in school as a teenager...I took it into marriages with me. When I'm on the outside, I've got to learn how to do it. I know if I don't, the chances are that I'm never gonna get it right. So, it's an issue from and a pattern that I'm really sinking into these days...As a turning point from inside.

After receiving feedback from Participant #2, I understood that “the pattern I’m really sinking into these days” refers to examining her process of struggling to overcome “getting it right” and “being second.”

Here, Participant #2 tells about how belonging facilitated her emotional, mental, and spiritual developmental process:

Belonging is a springboard for me to go into other areas where, somewhat, I have a desire to go and I don’t know the outcome, and I have no guarantees... That could mean emotionally, mentally, spiritually... The more I have a sense of belonging, the more I move out in directions of the unknown... In retrospect, seeing that I had a sense of belonging... I can come into my own creativity and my own authenticity... that’s very spiritual.

Participant #2 went on to tell more about how belonging inspired authenticity and how this influences her being at “home” with herself. She confirmed through post-interview feedback that the “integrity... alignment... oneness” was a place that she arrived at through an evolution of learning to belong and to be at peace with herself even when she does not belong:

I think of this as my true self, which is kind of hard to put into words or paint a picture of because it’s more of a... a feeling that “I’m in my body, and it’s safe here. I’m all right here. I don’t need to go and travel—dissociate—and somewhere... go out... to get a connection... to get a sense of acceptance or advice.” It feels like I’m home right now. It comes from within me. It feels like there’s... It could be integrity... alignment... oneness... It’s almost a remembrance of who I was before I separated in order to survive.

Participant #3 narrated her process of belonging and resilience as a moral process, with a precocious sense of morality developing at a “young age” and mellowing or becoming richer with age and as trust develops. In several statements, she referred to “the right thing to do,” indicating that she was accessing her sense of morality to make decisions. She also stated that her values are more important than belonging, which echoes the statements of Participant #1:

I think my values, and how I am and what I think are more important than belonging somewhere...I think the more you age, the more you learn, the more you know what's right and what's wrong. This gives you a sense of belonging. Although, even at a young age, I knew what was right and what was wrong, and what to believe in and what not to believe in... That I don't necessarily have to have the help of others. I mean, it's nice to have the help of others, but it's not necessary. If you know your own beliefs, and you know what's right, I don't think you have to belong.

In the above excerpt, Participant #3 alludes to her developmental process in with the words, “the more you age, the more you learn...” In post-interview feedback, Participant #3 reported associating resilience with the choice to belong or to not belong.

Later in the interview, she recalled her experience with trust and belonging and how this factors into her personal resilience. Participant #3 described in detail how trust and belonging was formed in the specific relationship of her marriage:

But I think that hardships and stuff that you learn from...you know...stuff you've learned in your past, um...like when [my husband] was going through his depression, that brought us really closer together. And to me that's a big part of belonging. If you consider it that...I don't know. But, I mean he had trust in me

to...you know...he would tell me everything. I think that's important...I just think trust is a big thing to belonging.

Below, she discusses belonging and resilience in relation to her best friend and certain family members.

I must say what I said before...[my husband] and my family...and my best friend...And I think that's because through good times, through bad times...no matter what, they're there for you. You can always count on 'em. And for me, that's the biggest sense of belonging...when you have someone like that you can trust. And laugh with, and have a good time with. And we don't have to be anywhere in particular to be having those good times. We could be driving in a car. I mean...just doing fun stuff. That's belonging to me...Because a lot of times you do have to go through hard times to be able to trust or really know that person. You know, that you belong. I guess there are situations where it's not true, but I think hardships are a big time on your sense of belonging...definitely.

In the above account, Participant #3 mentions trust, a key component of attachment. Either trust or compassion (another feature of attachment) were present in all of the informants' interviews. As seen in the above excerpts of Participant #3's interview, trust was directly mentioned several times. Participant #2 mentioned trust in relationship to herself, and Participant #1 described belonging as a process that reflects the attachment process.

Participant #2 discussed trust, but in oneself versus trusting others. She equated trusting herself with letting down "defensiveness" so that she didn't need to "protect" herself, and therefore, she could be more "authentic":

I feel a sense of belonging when I am in a system functioning... where I come into that system... with strong sense of belonging... and I'm connected with my true self... and there's an authenticity there... I don't have to come into the system having to be protected and defensive and not *trusting* myself...

Over the course of Participant #1's interview, she reported a relationship of belonging that mimics part of the attachment process. This is similar to the attachment process in which the individual identifies with the object through attention and alternates the attention with breaks from the attention, also called "enjoyment." Participant #1 described identifying with the ideology of a group (attention) and then breaking from the attention during a developmental push, when she took a part of the group ideology and incorporated it with her own break in attention: enjoyment. Afterwards she may or may not have turned toward the group again.

Overtone of compassion are found in the account of Participant #3, who sacrificed her own sense of belonging to help a friend. Participant #3 told a story about her family moving from a neighborhood where, "Everyone hung out with everyone. And I always thought that was the right thing to do." As the family moved to a new neighborhood, she found a new group of friends. These friends did not include Participant #3's choice of a friend, who was scorned because of her weight: "And I really did not care if I belonged or not, because no one was gonna tell me I can't be friends with my friend that's a little overweight." Later, she got into a fight with the others, who shunned both her and the friend. However, the fight made Participant #3 more dedicated to what "she thought was the right thing to do." She said, "It made me feel good for sticking up for my friend, who, I guess, I believed in." In this example, Participant #3

showed tolerance as well as compassion, for her friend, who was discriminated against by the group of peers because of her weight.

Tolerance was also noted in the response of Participant #1, who expressed an implied value of tolerance in the following quote particularly in the words, “I was accepting of them”:

And if I was to die, that is what I’d want people to think of me and to know who I am...is that I cared for others...I did what I needed to do for my fellow human beings...and, I was *accepting* of them...

Tolerance is noted here as a level of accepting others; this was confirmed in post-interview feedback. Participant # 1 named this acceptance, or tolerance as an integral part of her character.

Two of the participants said that they would rather not fit in with peers or into social groups than to abandon their values. This sense of morality, personal ideology, or doing what is right was a common theme for Participants #1 and #3. Participant #3 expressed that her value of being a trusted friend was more important than belonging with the larger group:

I think my values, and how I am and what I think are more important than belonging somewhere...And I really did not care if I belonged or not, because no one was gonna tell me I can’t be friends with my friend that’s a little overweight...

Later, participant #3 revisited the subject of morality, which is interlaced with resilience, indicated below by her words, “That I’m a stronger person...I can make decisions and be strong on my own.”:

... That I'm a stronger person, and that I stick up for friend and I can make decisions and be strong on my own. That I don't necessarily have to have the help of others. I mean, it's nice to have the help of others, but it's not necessary. If you know your own beliefs, and you know what's right, I don't think you have to belong...

Participant #2 also claimed that her ideology and values were more important than "putting this label on yourself" and belonging to a group. The passage below illuminates that sentiment:

Because you're putting this label on yourself. I'm saying, "I'm a feminist," or "I am a Christian," or, "I'm an MFT student." So, everybody has common ground. So, people are more apt to accept you because you have this label on yourself... Um... where you fit into the group because of this label... Um... but it's at the point where you start to discover differences, people aren't accepting the differences that you have. That made me feel like I wasn't part of the group anymore, and I didn't belong... You know part of feeling like I don't belong is other people not accepting me or my views however they differ from theirs. Um... for me, I just had to be honest with myself.

Above, Participant #1 stated that "where you fit into the groups because of this label," which means that the label is associated with specific group ideology. This was confirmed, according to post-interview feedback given by Participant #1. She said, "it's the point where you start to discover differences" which is also the point when, "I just had to be honest with myself." These words indicate that Participant #1 values making her own decisions over being identifying with the group's ideology.

Another theme that was common to the responses of all three participants was that a sense of belonging coincides with unconditional acceptance, free of judgment. This unconditional positive regard was associated with a true self, or the core self in the accounts of the interviewees. Participant #2 described how this unconditional response is a form of self-acceptance, which comes from an internal point:

I can just breathe and relax and be who I am...and there's no defensive posture. There's just acceptance.

In the above passage, Participant #2 spoke of being in harmony with one's true nature. Below, Participant #1 gives a relational explanation of acceptance, factoring in how others offer acceptance and belonging, as if it is an invitation:

...to me I think belonging means...um...having a sense of yourself...but being part of a group and being able to be yourself and know who you are within a group of people. And people having that...um...unconditional acceptance of who you are.

Participant #3 considered acceptance as part of belonging:

I would imagine it feels right. You get a sense of self-satisfaction and uh...when I'm with my friends and my family, that's where I belong. Because I'm with people that I'm myself with. I don't have to put on an act...and I usually won't anyway. Those are the people that are going to accept me for the way I am.

Participant #1's account shows the struggle between having a sense of belonging and holding to personal values and ideology. The following comment demonstrates this struggle as well as themes of tenacity or perseverance of character:

It's given me passion... I'll fight and fight and fight against the grain and get exhausted, but yet...that's why it's so crazy...you keep coming back to doing it because you have this ideology... So, I guess, you know, that has to do with the resilience, or with perseverance of coming back and doing what you believe you have to do. I have to as a Christian or I have to do as a feminist or I have to do as a human being on this earth.

The topic of spirituality came into the interviews with Participants #1 and #2.

Participant #1 said that belonging is something that she felt on a deep level within herself, or in her "inner territory":

I never get a sense....I never get a sense of belonging in the external world, but I know so well when I belong somewhere in my inner territory. My inner space is mentally, emotionally, spiritually.

Participant #2 gave a detailed account of how resilience and spirituality came together for her:

So, you know, although I wouldn't think you have to belong to feel resilient, those times when I did feel like I belonged, were very powerful times in my life...I felt a sense of wholeness in a way...Um...the one time when I felt myself grow more spiritually...um...I was in junior high at that time. And I was thinking, you know, I was just overwhelmed by um...my family situation and how things were in my life at that time...and I can remember um...I was praying...I prayed for like four-and-a-half hours straight or something like that in the middle of the night... and I never saw a shooting star before and I looked up in the sky, and I said, "God, if you hear my

prayer now, show me a shooting star.” And I saw one! That was...when I felt I became more spiritually sound...

During post-interview feedback, Participant #2 confirmed that this incident led to a time of belonging for her, as a Christian.

Another theme that surfaced during the interviews was that of playfulness in relation to belonging, on which Participants #2 and 3 commented. This playfulness seemed to tie into behaving as the aforementioned “true self,” or not having to put on airs. Participant #2 relays:

A playfulness...where we were doing a talent show with the guitar....something ...it seems like it was...around that...were we would do our total silly stuff...and we were doing something—the four of us—and it didn’t matter where you went or what came out of you. It was a total feeling of, “this is play, we’re all acceptable.”... There’s no having to put on anything.

Participant #3, said, “To me belonging should be fun...” She also said: And for me, that’s the biggest sense of belonging...when you have someone like that you can trust. And laugh with, and have a good time with. And we don’t have to be anywhere in particular to be having those good times. We could be driving in a car. I mean...just doing fun stuff. That’s belonging to me...

In the account of Participant #3, the theme of fun associated with family ritual was present in one of the interviews. She mentioned family ritual as a source of strength that adds to the relationship between resilience and belonging:

Well, I think a lot of times, through hardship, um...and opposite too...through good times and happiness...graduations, stuff like...you know...stuff like that... I mean it doesn't have to be a bad thing.

Overall, the informants gave unique pictures of their personal experiences with belonging and resilience. However, the themes present in the individual accounts sometimes overlapped to provide consistency in the exploration of how belonging and resilience may be related. A pattern that is noted in this study is the development afforded by belonging. Likewise, the informants' stories of belonging revealed a pattern that mimics attachment. The results paint pictures of development and attachment that realize the goal of finding process in the accounts of the participants. Other results hint at specific trends of belonging in those who are resilient.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

In this chapter I will further explore the themes of this study. Drawing on theories of moral and spiritual development, including the works of Kohlberg, Fowler, Wilber and Gilligan I will address the findings that accelerated moral and spiritual development of resilient persons that appears to be afforded by belonging. In addition, I will use attachment theory to extrapolate the findings that point to the relationship between attachment, belonging, and resilience.

In exploring the relationship between resilience and a sense of belonging, three recurrent themes surfaced: First, a sense of belonging seems to sometimes promote spiritual or moral development, sometimes at a rate that is quicker than that expected in the normal developmental process. Secondly, the informants reported that periods of not belonging had the same effect on spiritual or moral development; a feeling of not belonging sometimes promoted spiritual or moral development. Third, resilient persons, when discussing resilience and a sense of belonging, use attachment language. Words such as *compassion*, *trust*, and *acceptance* are used frequently by the informants. In addition, some of the themes from previous research on the topics of resilience and belonging were detected in the responses of the informants. At other times, the results provide alternative explanations or disagree with existing literature on belonging.

Advanced moral development of resilient persons

Although this study points to resilient persons having a pattern of development that is more reflective of non-linear development, traditional models are useful in

interpreting the informants' responses. For instance, Kohlberg's (Rich & DeVitis, 1985) model provides a gold standard, hierarchical paradigm for moral development.

Kohlberg's model provides these steps: At Level I, avoiding punishments and receiving rewards drive the individual's actions. At Level II, receiving approval or maintaining social order guides behavior. At Level III, promoting equality and human rights and acting on universal ethical standards is at the crux of whether or not to act.

In applying Kohlberg's model (APPENDIX B), the informants' responses illustrate a high level of moral reasoning, with many responses ranking on Kohlberg's model at Level III. The informants discuss tolerance in an implicit fashion and acceptance in an explicit fashion, both concepts in Level III. Participant #1 demonstrates her capacity for tolerance in these words, "And if I was to die, that is what I'd want people to think of me and to know who I am... is that I cared for others... I did what I needed to do for my fellow human beings... and, I was accepting of them."

Hagerty et al. (2002) point to the importance of "learning how to socially navigate within one's peer group." When considering the results of this study, "social navigation" takes on a sophisticated meaning. Specifically, Participant #3 discusses her social situations from her adolescence, in which she rises on the moral ladder, in grade school. The scenario, in which she "sticks up for a friend" signifies a precocious, conventional level of morality. An altruistic metaphor, indicating Level III thinking, is also present in stories of belonging and resilience by Participant #1 about caring for others. She says, "And if I was to die, that is what I'd want people to think of me and to know who I am... is that I cared for others... I did what I needed to do for my fellow human beings... and, I was accepting of them." This remark also contains overtones of tolerance,

especially when she speaks of being “accepting of them.” Thus, the informants’ responses augment the findings of Hagerty, et al. (2002), which concluded that belonging promotes tolerance.

Advanced spiritual development of resilient persons

Fowler (Rich & DeVritis, 1985) provides a standard similar to Kohlberg, but in the area of spiritual development. Fowler delineates three different faith-identity relationships you do apply: polytheistic (faith and identity without an organizing center), henotheistic (self-justification and indulgence), and radical monotheistic (people relate to each other through bonds of trust and loyalty).

The responses of the informants most often fit into the area of radical monotheism, especially in the responses that have relational overtones and themes of trust. Fowler’s radical monotheism can be linked back to the responses of Participant #1, 2, and 3. When Participant #2 says, “When I have a sense that I already belong... There’s an ease in my interactions. There’s an ease in communication...it’s more *authentic*...,” she is expressing a way of relating, in which belonging helps her to be. She confirmed, through post-interview feedback, that the “ease in my interactions” is related to trust. Participant #3 talked about trust in several segments of her interview, and about how belonging had affected her resilience, especially in conjunction with the trust. In an example, she said, “I guess it was just how I was brought up, which I owe to Mom and Dad. There’s that circle, that trusting circle, the belonging.” Participant #1 offered responses that fit into the category of radical theism, when she discussed her loyalty to understanding others.

Fowler (Rich & DeVritis, 1985) also comments, on faith and its link meaning and trust. Fowler believed that:

Each person is born with a capacity for faith, but it requires a nurturing environment to grow...It is the way that individuals find coherence and meaning in their lives; it is a person's way of relating to others against a backdrop of shared meaning and purpose... What is this quality of life? It is an active mode: a way of trusting, committing, and relating to the world; and by these commitments, as in the family (but not limited to the family), values are conferred that may be of transcendent worth. Thus, linkages are formed with others and institutions which we play a part; these linkages are based on trust and loyalty. (p. 33)

Here, Fowler mentions trust, which is another key component of attachment.

The developmental process was relayed by Participant #2 as one in which advances were made “emotionally, mentally, spiritually...”. Participant #1 also mentioned spirituality, in that her spirituality was furthered by her sense of not belonging. She enumerated an instance where she was alone in deepening her sense of spirituality. Participant #2 discussed her development in terms of spiritual, emotional, and mental progression.

The significance of not belonging

Overall, the informants reported that a sense of belonging afforded personal development, allowing them to connect and explore new ideas and relationships. On the other hand, the decision not to belong facilitated breaks, which inspired leaps in moral and spiritual development. It is during these leaps that facilitated a connection to a Higher Power or to self.

According to the responses of the informants, whether to belong or to not belong was sometimes a difficult moral decision that needed to be made. At these times, the informants report reaching beyond their comfort zones to do the right thing. Aspects of morality, specifically, tolerance, values, and ideology were mentioned by the informants. This is reflected in the words of Participant #3, when she says, “And I really did not care if I belonged or not, because no one was gonna tell me I can’t be friends with my friend that’s a little overweight... [Speaking up] made me feel good for sticking up for my friend, who, I guess, I believed in.” In this statement, Participant #3 suggests that she made a moral decision to place herself outside a crowd of popular friends to “stick up” for her friend, who, according to Participant #3, was unpopular due to her weight. She reported in post-interview feedback that this instance caused her to adhere to her values, which became strengthened by the move to do what was right.

Similarly, Participant #2 conveyed the heartache associated with being the outsider. During the interview, she justified the pain as part of the process of resilience. This was also conveyed in the post-interview feedback of Participant #2, who claims she struggled with being left outside of her group of sisters. However, in the post-interview feedback, Participant #2 claims that this struggle helps her to move forward spiritually. Therefore, the struggle over “not getting it right” and “being second” provided her (and continues to provide) with introspection that facilitated her spiritual growth.

Attachment, belonging, and resilience

The participants make reference to attachment by speaking frequently of compassion, acceptance, and trust. At other times, they report having a process that mimics attachment in their experiences with belonging and resilience. As previously

mentioned in the discussion, the responses of the informants frequently draw on the language of attachment. This is not surprising, since attachment and belonging are both fundamental relational concepts. Given the responses of the participants that reflect attachment language, I would posit that a connection among attachment, belonging, and resilience exists.

For example, Participant #3 mentioned trust in multiple statements made in her interview. She said, “And I think that’s because through good times, through bad times...no matter what, they’re there for you. You can always count on ‘em. And for me, that’s the biggest sense of belonging...when you have someone like that you can trust.” Likewise, features of attachment were found in the accounts of Participants #1 and #2, whose process of moving in and out of groups appears similar to the process of attachment. The informants reported a process of moving in and out of groups or situations, sometimes with ease and at other times with pain. The process seems to echo the process of attachment, and they report being secure enough in themselves or in their faith to part from the group so as to grow.

At times, when the informants speak, using attachment language, the attachment process does not seem to involve a love object, but an aspect of ideology, trust in oneself, or trust in a Higher Power. When Participant #2 “takes what she needs” and then moves on, this pattern mimics the turning toward and away from that is characteristic of a secure attachment style. Perhaps, in resilient persons, attachment style is a comprehensive style, which forms an abstract pattern of belonging, including not only other people, but also ideas or a Higher Power. The processes and language of the informants hint at this possibility.

Concurrence between the results and previous literature

Many of the themes that surfaced in the interviews confirmed previously existing literature, adding to the validity of the study. These themes include: the relationship between resilience and family ritual (Wolin, & Bennet, 1984); the accelerated moral and spiritual development of resilient persons (Wolin, 1993); the link between internal locus of control and resilience (Barnard, 1995); and that those who are resilient often express faith in a higher power (Garmezy, 1985; Walsh, 1998). Qualities that Wolin (1993) attributes to those who are resilient are shown in the results of the study. Those traits include: insight, independence, ability to form meaningful relationships, ability to take initiative, maintain and live by moral principles, and creativity to move beyond troubling times.

At other times, the results of this study contradict the findings of existing research. In particular, the results of this study question the Hendry & Reid (2000) finding that those who belong have a tendency to display better social coping skills. Say here what was true for participants in this study; 1 senetence In addition, Hagerty, et al. (2002) found that belonging helps to promote the construction of meaning in an individual's life while the results of this study suggest that sometimes not belonging may be as important in promoting the construction of meaning. Quotes from the participants will follow to offer specific examples of how these concepts were reflected in the interviews.

Family ritual and resilience

Participant # 3 mentioned family ritual and resilience, when she said, "Well, I think a lot of times, through hardship, um...and opposite too...through good times and

happiness...graduations, stuff like...you know...stuff like that... I mean it doesn't have to be a bad thing." This comment reflects the conclusions made by Wolin & Bennett (1984) that highlight the relationship of family ritual and resilience.

Traits of Resilient Persons

The traits of resilient persons that are enumerated in Wolin (1993) were reflected in the responses of the informants. First, Participant #1, demonstrated her *insight* when she said, "both of those times are very influential in my life now...very powerful parts of me. And they influence um...everything I do... It influences everything I do and how I will be...how I live my life and how I lead who I am."

Then, Participant # 3 shows her *independence* in this comment: "...That I'm a stronger person, and that I stick up for friend and I can make decisions and be strong on my own...That I don't necessarily have to have the help of others. I mean, it's nice to have the help of others, but it's not necessary." She later spoke of her *ability to form meaningful relationships*, as indicated by the words, "I think being married to (person) is a good feeling of being "belonged." Participant #2 also discusses her relationship with her children throughout the course of her interview, showing her *ability to form meaningful relationships*. Participant #1 told of her *ability to take initiative* when she says, "So, I guess, you know, that has to do with the resilience, or with perseverance of coming back and doing what you believe you have to do. I have to as a Christian or I have to do as a feminist or I have to do as a human being on this earth." Participant #1 discussed her *ability to maintain and live by moral principles*: "And if I was to die, that is what I'd want people to think of me and to know who I am...is that I cared for others...I did what I needed to do for my fellow human beings... and, I was accepting of

them.” All participants demonstrated their prowess at *using creativity to move through troubling times*. For instance, Participant #1 told of a time when she prayed during a turbulent time with her family. Then, Participant #2 mentioned her moving beyond “being second” to her sisters. In addition, Participant #3 reported that she was able to help her husband in moving through a bout with depression.

Discordance with literature

At other times, the results of this study contradict the findings of existing research. In particular, Hendry and Reid (2000) found that belonging was a social skill that facilitated the ability of adolescents to “handle life situations” in the future. Hendry and Reid’s study did not include later assessments of the participants’ propensity to cope. In contrast, I found evidence for believing that those who are resilient learn to cope later in life despite a status of not belonging.

In addition, Hagerty, et al. (2002) report that a sense of belonging results in spiritual involvement and an attribution of meaningfulness in one’s life. In contrast, the results of this study suggest that not belonging sometimes increases the likelihood for deep spiritual experience, and consequently, an attribution of meaningfulness to life.

In a different voice

Gilligan’s research has found that women use different words than men to discuss development. Women’s language is one of “caring and interpersonal responsibility” (Rich & DeVritis, p. 117) and men’s language is one of “individual rights, liberties, duties, and their attendant protection” (Rich & DeVritis, p. 117). The responses of Participants #1 and #3 carry the “different voice” of female moral language that Carol Gilligan refers to in her model of development. For instance, Participant #3 says, “I

guess belonging—to me—is important to [be with] the people I really care about.”

Participant #1 also offers caring language, “So, I guess, you know, that has to do with the resilience, or with perseverance of coming back and doing what you believe you have to do. I have to do as a Christian or I have to do as a feminist or I have to do as a human being on this earth.” Because the participants’ language reflects this “different voice,” a variance in male versus female responses may be anticipated. In particular, this is where results may be gender-specific. Since no male informants were interviewed in this study, the outcome of this study may or may not be completely applicable to resilient males. However, future research may investigate and compare how men and women experience belonging and resilience, according to the developmental languages spoken by the respective genders.

Development out of time: the integral model

When the participants discuss the choice of belonging in order to grow (or to do what is right), they do not, however, fit into the mold of the Fowler model. Not only do the responses not fit into the mold, but the responses indicate that a unique kind of spiritual development is occurring, which may only be explained in the context of resilience. Here, Wilber’s (2000) model may provide a better explanation for the non-linear development that the informants report. Both Participant #1 and Participant #2 directly indicate how belonging factors into their spiritual growth. Participant #2 describes how belonging helped her spiritually, “In retrospect, seeing that I had a sense of belonging...I can come into my own creativity and my own authenticity...that’s very spiritual.” Participant #1 says, “Um...when I started becoming really spiritual and

praying a lot and spending time...um...reading the Bible or going to church or...you know, it clicked with me and those are two very strong points in my life.”

Ken Wilber’s (Wilber, 2000) view, echoes that of Wolin (1993), especially his sentiment that development can occur in a non-sequential timeframe. Wilber speaks of an individual’s ability to take quantum leaps in development, when the right moment appears, or in his words, “any moment we can open our eyes wide enough”:

With the traditionalists, I agree that these higher realms of being (or higher states of consciousness) are potentials that are available to us in any moment we can open our eyes wide enough. And the reason they are to some degree available is involution: all of these potentials were made available during efflux or involution, when Spirit threw itself outward to create the realms of soul, mind, body, and matter, realms that await rediscovery by any and all who can transcend the shallower to find the deeper. (p. 4)

My research implies that—given the window that resilience provides in the context of belonging or not belonging—those who are resilient may experience such eye-opening moments.

The developmental process is relayed by Participant #2 as one in which advances are made “emotionally, mentally, spiritually...”. Participant #1 also mentions spirituality, in that her spirituality is furthered by her sense of not belonging. She enumerates an instance where she was alone in deepening her sense of spirituality. Participant #2 discusses her development in terms of spiritual, emotional, and mental progression. This would correspond to Wilber’s model, as explained by a non-linear progression, which is called the Great Nest theory of development. The Great Nest model (APPENDIX C) is a model in which, “...not a ladder, chain, or one-way hierarchy, but a series of concentric

spheres of increasing holistic embrace. The Great Nest of Being is a holarchy, composed of holons, a development that is envelopment,” (Wilber, 2003, p.2).

Both Participants #1 and #2 describe intense and personal episodes of spiritual development; these instances occur, as per the informants’ reports, in solitude, or in a place of not belonging. Participant #1 offers the aforementioned story of the incident when her sense of spirituality grew in junior high school. Likewise, Participant #2 describes her unique experience:

I think of this as my true self, which is kind of hard to put into words or paint a picture of because it’s more of a...a feeling that “I’m in my body, and it’s safe here. I’m all right here. I don’t need to go and travel—dissociate—and somewhere...go out...to get a connection...to get a sense of acceptance or advice.” It feels like I’m home right now. It comes from within me. It feels like there’s...It could be integrity...alignment...oneness...It’s almost a remembrance of who I was before I separated in order to survive.

Wilber (2003) offers a way to understand Participant #2’s comments:

Those individuals, for example, who have a strong religious experience, *satori*, or enlightenment, almost always report that they are simply rediscovering something that they once knew (in eternity) but forgot (in time). Profound mystical experience always carries the sense of “coming home,” and never the sense of stumbling onto something completely unknown. Plato, in that regard, was quite right: this type of spiritual knowledge is a remembering, not an inventing. And we remember our higher states because they already are there, as potentials, awaiting a rediscovery of something we possessed, not in childhood, but in a concept of involution in order to be true to the phenomenological evidence of spiritual experience...

The reason that Wilber’s philosophy is significant is because it validates the informants’ testimonies, making meaning out of not belonging, which may perhaps contribute to resilience. Because the informants mention spiritual progression in the context of

belonging and resilience, I deduce here that not belonging offers a significant space for spiritual development to occur.

Wilber's (2000) model takes into account many aspects of a person's psyche and environment by incorporating the four quadrants of development: intentional (individual interior), behavioral (individual, exterior), cultural (interior, collective), and social (exterior, collective). (APPENDIX D) Wilber's integral model provides a holistic look at the subject of development. Bringing together many models he offers an explanation that includes an understanding of the evolution of consciousness along with traditional hierarchical development, and considers the empirical alongside the phenomenological. In addition, Wilber believes that development may happen in a sequential manner or alternatively according to a system that is entirely unique. Wiber (2003) states:

...any given future development will be a mixture of at least these five factors: the potential for higher development contributed by Spirit; the person's own autonomous intentions and desires; a person's actual behavior patterns; social systems and institutions; cultural values and shared meanings—all of which have aspects that are always open and free (in addition to the many aspects that are conditioned, determined, or karmic and habitual). (p. 2)

The integral model uses many dimensions to get at the richness of the experience of human development, and is therefore a useful tool for reflecting the integrity and the depth of the informants' responses. Indeed, no two informants' narratives were alike, and Wilber's ideas affirm the unique responses rendered in the interviews of this study. Wilber's model considers "many truths," thus it recognizes and espouses the varied paths that an individual may take to reach and transcend developmental stages. In this way, Wilber's thinking is very much in alignment with Bronfenbrenner, who also saw the value in the phenomenological, multidimensional exploration of development. Because

of this, I feel the integral model offers the most accurate, comprehensive, and illustrative explanation for the informants' moral and spiritual development processes. Wilber also adopts the idea of hierarchical development, such as those drawn forth in the research of Gilligan and Kohlberg. And, Wilber tells how to identify developmental progress. "One such pattern is that each succeeding stage involves an increase in perspectivism and thus an increase in the capacity for mutual care and compassion." (Wilber, 2000, p. 57) Here, Wilber mentions compassion, which is also a key component to attachment.

Conclusion

Some of the findings of this study buttress the research on resilient persons. The traits of those who are resilient were named by Wolin (1993) as insight, independence, ability to form meaningful relationships and to take initiative, maintain and live by moral principles, and creativity to move beyond troubling times. These traits were intrinsic to the informants' experiences, as per their reports. Other traits such as the accelerated moral and spiritual development of resilient persons (Wolin, 1993), the link between internal locus of control and resilience (Barnard, 1994), and expression of faith in a higher power (Garmezy, 1985; Walsh, 1998) were also found in the reports of the informants.

In addition, work of Wolin and Bennet (1984) made the connection between resilience and family ritual; and family ritual surfaced in the interviews.

The responses of the informants may best be explained through the use of the Ken Wilber's Integral Model, which embraces linear and non-linear development. At the same time, the more traditional models of development, such as those put forth by

Fowler, Adler, and Kohlberg, also helpful in understanding the moral and spiritual development of the informants, giving points of reference for comparison

The findings of this study seem to contradict those of Hendry and Reid (2000), in that Hendry and Reid found belonging to be important in developing coping skills and the results of this study suggest that coping skills may be facilitated by periods of not belonging. The work of Carol Gilligan suggests that the findings of this study may not reflect the experiences of men.

IMPLICATIONS

CHAPTER 6

This research has suggested that not belonging is at times important in upholding the moral and spiritual framework of resilient people. Given this finding, perhaps clinicians need to assess clients for signs of developmental markers where not belonging and taking a leap of faith, or going within for answers, becomes more important than or equally important as belonging. Likewise, the fact that having the experience of not belonging for periods of time can be significant to resilient persons may make it important for the therapist to teach a new type of coping skill that involves moving in and out of belonging, so that the client may reach her/his full potential. In addition, accurate assessment, which takes into consideration all four quadrants of Wilber's (2000) Integral Model, will broaden the lens of the therapist and allow for the design of more precise and fitting interventions. The Integral Model allows for development that occurs out of linear timing, viewing it not as pathological, but as one alternative. Here, it is important to bear in mind that it is the strength found in moments of not belonging that create resilience that can later be accessed to move the client through troubling times or into un-actualized areas of development.

Wilber's look at development that occurs outside of a traditional, hierarchical progression may cause us to look at clients in a different light. When we meet with a youngster who has been "parentified," for example, we may be witnessing the result of a developmental leap rather, not a pathological role, as is often assumed. Therefore, when we encounter a client that is young, but advanced because of resilience, this strength can be named and accessed so that future successes can be built from this point. Strategic

Family Therapy has already harnessed some of this truth, particularly in interventions where children are empowered appropriately in the family to help when parents cannot (Madanes, 1990) . In addition, it is sometimes a younger person, who is more morally or spiritually advanced, who desires change in the family unit, making that individual the actual (or changeable) “client” according to brief therapies.

Satirian Experiential Therapy and Hellinger Family Constellation Therapy have the concept of belonging at their core (Satir, 2000; Hellinger website). These therapies allow for a client to observe her/his place in the family unit, and to observe her/his belongingness. The clinician who employs the interventions of these therapeutic frameworks should be aware and take caution in moving clients too quickly into a place of belonging, should that individual be undergoing moral or spiritual strides in development that are facilitated by experienced of not belonging.

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It is not my intention to insinuate that our clients all take on renunciate lifestyles away from friends and family. As a student of marriage and family therapy, ready to start my practice with families and couples, I would recommend just the opposite—that is in many circumstances. At the same time, to stand alone, at least for a while, is sometimes

a sign of indelible strength and courage that is chosen or developmentally appropriate instead of pathological. This can easily be mistaken or misunderstood by people who are trained to be relationship makers and healers. My hope is that this exploration of the complex and interconnected relationships between belonging and resilience will help other therapist to create therapeutic spaces that are big enough to hold clients' unfolding journeys of both belonging and not belonging.

Recommendations for future research

While writing up the research, several questions surfaced in my mind. These questions provide suggestions for further research: *Does attachment style relate to a way of relating to God and abstract concepts? Does belonging provide a temporary secure attachment to allow developmental growth, or does not belonging provide a necessary break from attention (interest) that provides growth? Does object abstraction foster the capacity for ideological and spiritual growth spurts?* These questions may interest attachment theorists and developmental theorist for future investigation.

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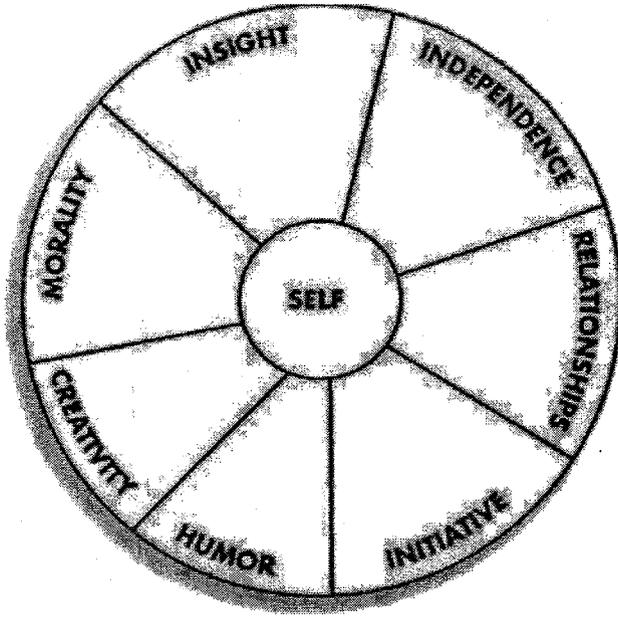
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<http://www.projectresilience.com/framesconcepts.htm>

Appendix A.

McCubbin's Double ABCX Model

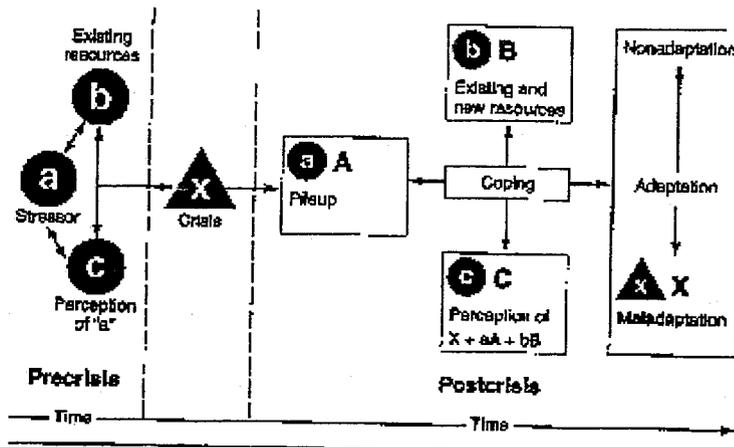


Figure 14-4 The Double ABC-X Model



SOURCE: "Family Adaptation to Crisis" by Hamilton T. McCubbin and John Patterson in *Family Stress, Coping, and Social Support* (p. 46) edited by A. Elizabeth McCubbin, 1982, Springfield, IL: Charles C Thomas. Copyright © 1982 by Charles C Thomas, Publisher. Adapted by permission.

Slide 11 of 33

Appendix B

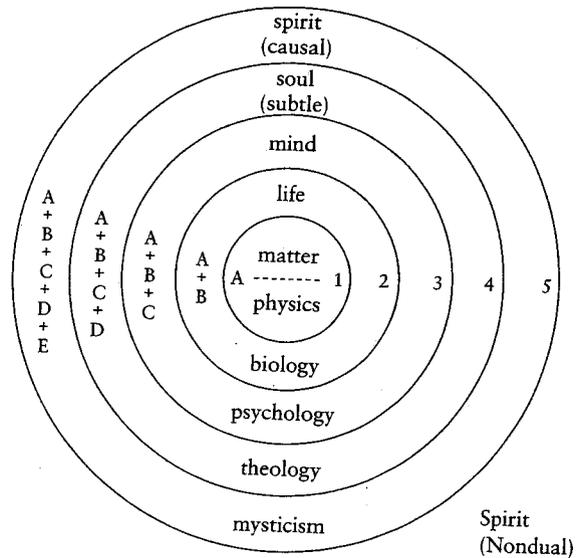


FIGURE 1. *The Great Nest of Being*. Spirit is both the highest level (causal) and the nondual Ground of all levels.

nial philosophy, and it would therefore be a crucial ingredient of any truly integral psychology.

For the last three thousand years or so, perennial philosophers have been in nearly unanimous and cross-cultural agreement as to the general levels of the Great Nest, although the number of divisions of those levels has varied considerably. Some traditions have presented only three major levels or realms (body, mind, and spirit—or gross, subtle, and causal). Others give five (matter, body, mind, soul, and spirit). Still others give seven (e.g., the seven kundalini chakras). And most of the traditions also have very sophisticated breakdowns of these levels, often giving 12, 30, even 108 subdivisions of the levels of being and knowing that can be found in this extraordinarily rich Kosmos.

But many of the perennial philosophers—Plotinus and Aurobindo, for example—have found around *a dozen levels of consciousness* to be the most useful, and that is roughly what I have presented in the charts (pp. 195–217).² My basic levels or basic structures are listed in the left column in all the charts. These are simply the basic levels in the Great Nest of Being, each transcending and including its predecessors—whether we use a simple five-level scheme (matter, body, mind, soul, spirit) or a slightly more sophisticated version (such as the one I have presented in the charts, and which I will explain as we proceed: matter,

Appendix C

general classes. It eventually became apparent that these four classes represented the interior and the exterior of the individual and the collective, as can be seen in figure 5. The upper half of the diagram is individual, the lower half is communal or collective; the left half is interior (subjective, consciousness), and the right half is exterior (objective, material).

Thus, the Upper-Left quadrant represents the *interior of the individual*, the subjective aspect of consciousness, or individual awareness, which I have represented with the cognitive line, leading up to vision-logic. (Fig. 5 represents developments, starting with the Big Bang, up to today's average mode of consciousness; it does not cover transpersonal developments, which we will discuss in more detail later.) The full Upper-Left quadrant includes the entire spectrum of consciousness as it

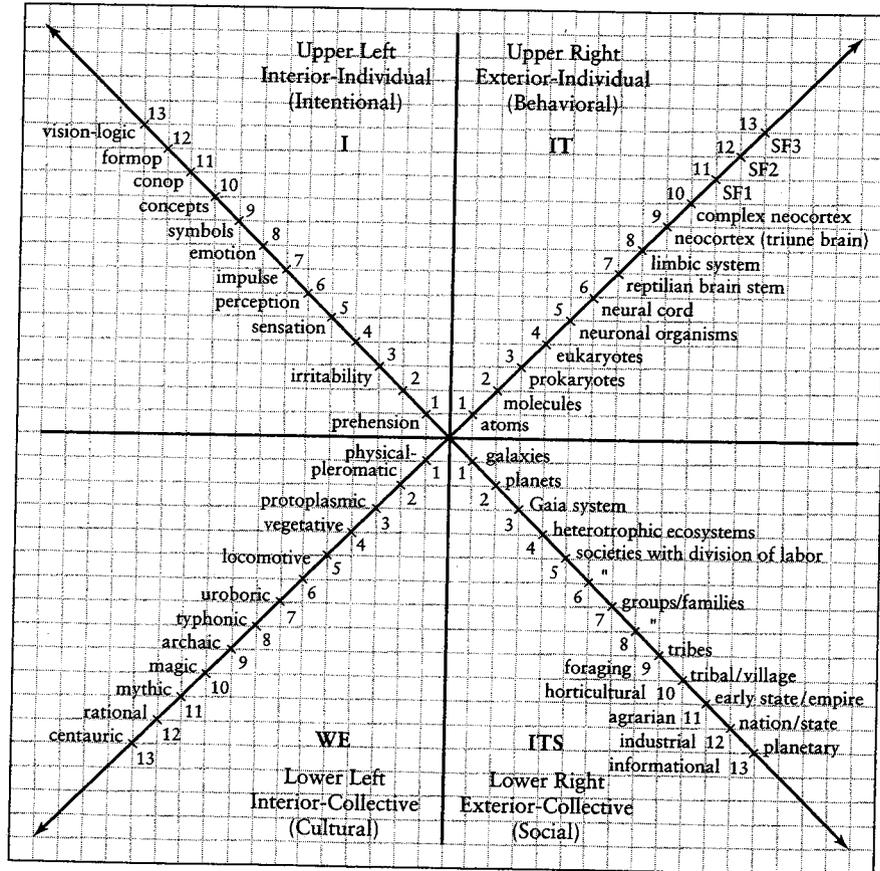


FIGURE 5. The Four Quadrants

Appendix D