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Perceptions and meanings of belongingness within an orchestra: a narrative study

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BOSTON UNIVERSITY
COLLEGE OF FINE ARTS

Dissertation

**PERCEPTIONS AND MEANINGS OF
BELONGINGNESS WITHIN AN ORCHESTRA:
A NARRATIVE STUDY**

by

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Boston University College of Fine Arts, 2016

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ABSTRACT

Framed in Baumeister and Leary's (1995) theory of belongingness, this study uncovers ways in which a sense of belonging can affect our lives and specifically our performance in musical groups. The theory of belongingness explains that it is a fundamental human need to feel belongingness by forming positive and meaningful relationships with others, and also describes how to achieve and maintain this belongingness. Baumeister and Leary (1995) state that in order for belongingness to be a fundamental human motivation, many criteria must be present among individuals who share social bonds, and satisfying this need requires both frequent interaction and caring context. While there is little research on sense of belonging among musical groups, the experiences that are typical in such groups lend themselves well to the concepts outlined by the authors, making them ideal settings in which to study their theory. In light of Baumeister and Leary's research, questions addressed in this study were:

1. How do study participants describe belonging to an orchestra?
2. With whom do participants share frequent interaction, where do these interactions occur, and how are sub-groups of the larger ensemble formed?

3. How do participants describe caring context within an orchestra, and how are social bonds formed in light of this caring context?
4. How does sense of belonging affect the participants while playing and building bonds in an orchestra and its sub-groups?

Using narrative methods as described by Clandinin and Connelly (2000), this study highlights the engagement of three participants (Robert, Ana, and myself) as we drew out hidden meanings of belongingness in our lives, focusing on participation in an orchestra. My own experience of joining an orchestra provided unique insight and allowed me to be an active participant in constructing narratives along with Robert and Ana. By interacting in the field with the other participants and experiencing what they experienced, I was able to better relate to the feelings of belongingness they described. Field data were collected in the form of recorded audio, observations, personal journal entries, and email correspondence. These data were transcribed and then became interim research texts that the participants and I co-composed together. Data were analyzed and interim and final research texts were written with Clandinin and Connelly's three-dimensional inquiry space in mind.

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CHAPTER I

NARRATIVE BEGINNINGS

It is a commonplace to note that human beings both live and tell stories about their living. These lived and told stories and talk about those stories are ways we create meaning in our lives as well as ways we enlist each other's help in building our lives and communities (Clandinin, 2006, p. 44).

Tracing My Belonging

I grew up in a middle class family, the third of four children, in a suburban Ohio town. I knew I belonged to this group; I felt safe and secure within the walls of our house, and I knew my parents and siblings would be there for me, in some sense. Despite the typical empty childhood threats when things did not go my way (“I’m gonna run away from home, you just wait!”). I felt loved and secure with my family. Looking back, I took this sense of safety and security for granted, never really appreciating the potential of this sense of belonging I had in my family. As I made my way, awkwardly, through my school years, most of my feelings of belonging occurred in school.

Bluebird Reading Group

My earliest feelings of belonging to something that felt different than my family bonds occurred in first grade. “Nicky, I want you to sit over here, on the big blue carpet circle. This is the Bluebird Group,” my teacher said to me one day, midway through the year. A few other students sat there, fidgeting, and I was happy to join them because the rest of the class was watching “The Letter People” on television and I had learned all the

letters years before. She gave us different books than we had been using with the class. *Green Eggs and Ham!* I was excited because I had read that one at home already and I started telling the group what it was about. I can still feel the sensation of the blue carpet circle under my knees; it is as indelible as the looks on my classmates' faces as I described to them the plot of the book. They were curious, impressed, and eager to hear more. I felt special because they were all looking at me and wanted to hear about the book from my point of view.

Up until that day school was fun, but only for recess, art, and music. In class I often had been bored. But in the Bluebird Group we read real, whole books and then talked about the books afterward. We listened to other kids talk about their favorite books from home, and we even wrote stories together, which I found to be more exciting and motivating than anything on television. It wasn't until years later that I realized this was an advanced group, or even understood the concept of being in a separate, more accelerated learning environment. At the time, I felt a close bond to the other students in the group that was formed easily by our reading and sharing together. The big blue carpet circle was our safe haven, and when I was on it, I felt a closeness to my classmates that I did not feel when we went back to the whole class after our Bluebird Group time was over. This was a belonging that seemed somehow different than my bond with my family because I was engaged in learning amongst kids my age who also felt excited about books. I was able to "show off" my reading and knowledge to them, and this made me feel special, but I was also able to learn from them about new and exciting books that I wanted to read on my own.

Research Team

In third grade, my teacher chose me for “The Research Team,” which was a group of four students who not only had good grades in all areas, but also demonstrated a desire to go above and beyond in the pursuit of knowledge. That was me to a T. I don’t remember the day she announced that I had been chosen as a member of this group, but I do recall that much of the year was spent with the three other students on the team, doing extra assignments and more homework. A friend once asked me: “Why would you *want* to have to do more homework?” I was confused at the question because I looked at it as being given more opportunities.

In retrospect, spending time with this small group apart from the rest of the class gave me an enormous sense of pride and accomplishment, but also set me apart from my peers at a time when social bonds that would last for years were beginning to form. Indeed, I felt special and safe in the Research Team when we were given permission to explore the field with microscopes and bring back interesting specimens for the class to study, but I also became aware of the jealous glares of my classmates. Although I might not have been fully aware of it at the time, I was losing a sense of belonging with them. This experience was a turning point. School was fun, and homework became more important than socializing. I felt like I belonged at school; the classroom walls were my safe haven and they provided a sense of security.

Belonging to “Something Big”

Fifth grade was the start of middle school. We went from our tiny, safe, and familiar elementary school building to a large and imposing structure filled with gangly

seventh and eighth graders, ready to shove us into lockers on the slightest whim. I was excited but terrified. For two years, I had been begging my parents to let me start playing the violin, ever since I had seen high school students come and play for us and let us try their instruments. I was fascinated by the violin; it was beautiful in appearance and sound. My parents resisted, predicting that I would probably not stick with it (later admitting it was a financial decision). Luckily, in fifth grade we could choose an instrument to play and join either the band or orchestra, so I chose the violin. Owing to the wonderful reputation of the orchestra program in my district and teachers' insistence that students should receive private lessons outside school, my parents relented and arranged for me to get this much-needed instruction; I was all set.

Being a part of orchestra in fifth grade resulted in many positive emotions; however, I wanted to meet with the group more often, so I felt somewhat deprived of belongingness due to infrequent interaction. I had a stable, caring group to which I belonged, but we only met for orchestra class twice a week.

Belonging in the Basement

Midway through fifth grade I was chosen to join an advanced group of players who would be working with our student teacher, in a room in the basement. At the time, I didn't know it was an advanced group; I only knew that I was being pulled out of the large, safe room of orchestra students and shuffled down a dark corridor downstairs to a dingy room that looked like it was used for storage of old, dead instruments. However, it soon became clear to me that we were given special tasks unique to our group. Akin to the Research Team, I felt special and privileged to belong to this group. The student

teacher pushed us hard and was not as forgiving and nurturing as our regular orchestra teacher. She expected diligent practice and rapid progress. I will never forget the day she singled me out to play alone for the group, and what happened afterwards; it was perhaps the defining moment of my young life and the budding of a devotion to the study and appreciation of music. It was nearing the end of the year, and we had been working with her for some time. I was sad that she would be leaving us soon, because I had built a bond with her in that musty room. She asked me to play “Etude” from the Suzuki Violin School, Book 1 for the entire basement-room class. I was at once mortified to be singled out and yet confident to play because I had practiced it for hours at home. My fingers flew across the strings with ease and our student teacher beamed with pride at the conclusion. After class as we were walking back to the large rehearsal room to pack up, she took me aside and said to me: “Nick, that was remarkable playing today. You have the potential to be a *damn* fine violinist one day. But you need to practice even more, and concentrate even harder.” I was shocked. A teacher had just used a curse word at me! Not only that, but she told me I was not practicing and concentrating enough. I remember having very mixed feelings about the encounter: I was confused because I had been practicing the recommended thirty minutes every single day, but I was also overjoyed that she called my playing “remarkable.” My initial grief at being pulled out of the safe space of the large group and being confined in the basement room led to this pivotal moment in my life. It led to the realization that I needed to go above and beyond the recommended practice time if I wanted to one day belong to an even more elite group: The “damn fine” violinists.

Joy, Pride, Rush

Preparing for and performing concerts became the most important things for me as a junior high school student. Each time we received a new piece of music in seventh or eighth grade I would race home to practice it because I knew that I had a responsibility to the group to be able to play my part well. I took pride in being a member of the group, and I recognized its uniqueness that set it apart from all of my other classes: The success of the group depended on the hard work and dedication of the individual members. Sitting in math class, although it was a subject I loved, my success or failure did not impact the class as a whole. By this time, belonging to orchestra had replaced belonging at school. The emotional rush I felt while up on stage playing to a packed house on concert night was enough to propel me to want to succeed even more in my individual growth because I knew it would benefit the group. I knew that as a contributing member of the orchestra, that I was valuable to it. I was needed as a part of the puzzle, and this feeling was amazing. Nowhere else did I get this sense of belonging, or get to reap the benefits that group membership afforded; exhilaration, pride, and a sense of accomplishment accompanied each performance. Additionally, I began to become close friends with orchestra members, and I lost touch with friends who were not in orchestra.

Responsible Demonstrating

My four years as a member of the middle and junior high orchestras, along with private lessons and hundreds of hours of practicing, had prepared me for the high school orchestra. I had been hearing about it since the start: National and International Champions, 160 members, pressed maroon tuxedos affixed with countless medals, and

trips and trophies galore. I had seen several concerts as well, and I wanted nothing more than to belong to this amazing group. Everyone said they sounded like professionals. Each time I saw them walking through the halls of the middle school in their uniforms (they rehearsed in the auditorium there), I was in awe. You could hear them from afar—their shiny medals clinking as they walked, fancy shoes clacking—and they commanded respect. They had earned their reputation amongst the music students in the district and all over the state.

I had witnessed high school orchestra members demonstrating their instruments to me as a child, and now it was my turn. In tenth grade, I was selected to be a part of a special group that traveled to the elementary schools to recruit students into the orchestra program. “You are responsible for helping students make an important choice today,” our director said to us as we boarded the bus, beginning a long day of travel and performing. “Most students are undecided on which instrument they want to play, so it sometimes only takes a good performance and an exciting demonstration to persuade them.” I knew I needed to do a good job; if the students were as impressionable as she led us to believe, I did not want to turn them off orchestra by failing today. They gathered around us, eyes lit with wonder. Did I look like that when I was in their place so many years ago? We performed some light, pop and movie pieces, plus some holiday selections. They clapped and cheered loudest when they recognized a piece. “The kids love Disney music,” she had told us. “You’ll be surprised at how excited they get when you play one.”

After we performed as a small group, we got to demonstrate our instruments more personally to the students. They lined up in front of us and we played individually, and

even let them try out a violin, viola, cello, or bass. I felt like a teacher, responsible for educating these students about something at which I excelled. “What’s the highest note you can play?” one kid asked me. “I don’t think you want to hear it,” I replied. “It’s pretty high and squeaky.” I was afraid that playing high would turn him off to the violin. “Play it!” he demanded. “Please!” So I said to him: “Ok, and here is the sound it makes when you go down a slide on the playground,” and then proceeded to play, sliding from the highest note all the way down my violin. He laughed and asked if I would show him how to do it, and I gladly obliged. That day changed my life forever. I participated in the demonstration groups the next two years as well, leading it in my senior year. Each time I relished the responsibility and the feelings of joy and satisfaction I received as I taught the students about the violin. To see their faces light up when they heard me play, to delight in the news that so many had signed up for orchestra after our visits, and to realize that I was partly responsible for that was a feeling like none other. During the demonstration group in my senior year, a child asked to play my violin. He had obviously already been playing for a year or two. “Wow,” I said to him when he was finished. “You’re going to be a *darn* good violinist one day.”

Substituting for Orchestra

After I graduated high school and moved on to college I discovered other groups to join, which served to quench my desire for belonging, but in a different and somehow less meaningful way. In my undergraduate years, I joined the collegiate chapter of the national music education organization. Weekly meetings, community fund-raisers, school collaborations, and picnics were all a part of this four-year experience. Much of it

was social, and I ended up making many lasting friendships with members of the group. By my junior year, I was elected president and was responsible for organizing meetings and planning events. I viewed this group as a stepping stone to my career, in which I was supplementing my higher education with leadership skills. Despite a strong sense of belonging, the group did not fully substitute for the feelings I had in high school orchestra. The camaraderie and fun were simply not on the same level, and this was due largely in part to the lack of performance opportunities. I missed playing. I missed the frisson I experienced while seemingly shattering the sound barrier during a Tchaikovsky Symphony and knowing that my friends were feeling that as well, right along with me. Instead, the belonging I felt in this college group was brought about by more of a professional responsibility rather than a personal joy, and that was not sufficient substitution.

Not Belonging

Before commencing this project, I had not belonged to an orchestra since I graduated from college twelve years earlier. As I looked back at my experiences growing up in an orchestra, I longed to rediscover the feelings I felt that came as a result of achieving a sense of belonging there and to fill the void that exists in my life. I wished to discover if the feelings of belonging I experienced as I grew up could be attained once again, and perhaps shape the next part of my life. I maintained contact with people I knew in orchestra, some as close friends, and others as acquaintances; I was reluctant to break these social bonds because they were so meaningful to me during a very important time in my life. Still, I found other groups that have satisfied my need to belong, such as

the college music education group, and more recently in a doctoral study group. I would not go so far as to say that the loss of the belongingness I experienced caused serious health problems, but a sense of loss is present, especially after having narrated my lived experiences for the present study.

Joining an orchestra for the purposes of this study allowed me to reflect on what was missing in my life in terms of belongingness and music. As an active participant in the study, I was able to come to new understandings of how I perceive belongingness overall as well as in a musical setting. It allowed me to learn more about myself and my participants, and I was able to provide implications for further research in the field of sense of belonging in music education.

Belongingness and Narrative

Baumeister and Leary (1995) showed evidence that belongingness is indeed a fundamental human need, based on several criteria laid out in the empirical literature (as described in the following chapter). Further, they hypothesized that in order for this need to be met and sustained, two conditions must be present: First, individuals must engage in frequent interaction with those they have formed bonds with. Second, the relationships they form must be present in mutually beneficial caring contexts. If either or both of these conditions are not met, or are deprived, then emotional and/or physical health will suffer. Although their theory has not been tested in a musical setting, the context of an orchestra is ideal in which to do so: There are regular meetings, or rehearsals, as well as many opportunities for mutually beneficial personal growth and bonding.

Additionally, narrative inquiry has yet to be implemented with such a framework in this particular context. Much can be learned from the way in which participants share their stories of belonging and engage in conversations and dialogue. Since the unique nature of narrative inquiry allows participants to share an equitable balance of power with the researcher, their knowledge and experiences while participating in an orchestra can be told in a way that uncovers hidden stories and reflects upon journeys through life in relation to belongingness. Playing a dual role in this study—as both researcher and participant—allowed me to reflect not only on Robert’s and Ana’s experiences, but also my own. This duality helped maintain the balance we shared as we uncovered new meanings of our experiences: It allowed Robert and Ana to feel more comfortable in telling and reflecting on their stories because they were actively engaged in helping me draw out my stories.

The Research Problem

Consistent with Baumeister and Leary’s (1995) theory, belonging to an orchestra has been an important part of my well-being. This understanding led me to my research problem. Because I have a “pervasive drive to form and maintain at least a minimum quantity of lasting, positive, and significant interpersonal relationships” (p. 497) in my life, many of them associated with performing in an orchestra, I wanted to study belongingness in order to find out how this drive affected me and those around me. Uncovering new understandings about how belongingness can influence relationships, affect, and retention within an orchestra were significant in forming this problem.

Narrative Justification in Current Study

Clandinin and Caine (2013) suggested that there must be three justifications for narrative inquiry: personal, practical, and theoretical. As described previously in “Narrative Beginnings: Tracing My Belonging,” my own lived experiences serve as a starting point in justifying this study. As I engaged in this project, I was eager to examine further those relationships within the orchestra that were most significant, and how those relationships were formed. Additionally, because I was not affiliated with an orchestra for several years, I wanted to explore the extent to which loss of belonging may have resulted in negative affect.

Clandinin and Caine (2013) suggested that practical justification involves addressing the “so what?” questions (p. 174). Results of several studies suggest that positive socioemotional benefits accrue to the individual from belonging to a music ensemble, but none of those studies utilized Baumeister and Leary (1995) as a theoretical framework. I was interested in exploring questions such as how a non-competitive community ensemble influenced a sense of belonging; if frequency of contact was limited to ensemble rehearsals; and which ensemble procedures might qualify as caring. From the outset, I believed that understanding and describing belongingness might have implications for organization of ensembles, as well as for rehearsal pedagogies.

According to Clandinin and Caine (2013), “theoretical justification comes from justifying the work in terms of new methodological and disciplinary knowledge” (p. 174). This study was intended to contribute to a theory of belonging, illuminating belonging in music ensembles. Thus, it also contributed to disciplinary knowledge about how “people

use music to make sense of their musical lives” (Bowman, 2006, p. 9). Methodologically, the study contributed to a growing body of narrative inquiry in music education.

Purpose and Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to uncover how individuals constructed a sense of belonging to a non-competitive, community orchestra. In the spirit of narrative inquiry, I joined a community orchestra sharing experiences and constructing a narrative of belonging to an orchestra with two other participants. Our narratives addressed the following questions, which were framed in Baumeister and Leary’s two-part hypothesis:

1. How do study participants describe belonging to an orchestra?
2. With whom do participants share frequent interaction, where do these interactions occur, and how are sub-groups of the larger ensemble formed?
3. How do participants describe caring context within an orchestra, and how are social bonds formed in light of this caring context?
4. How does sense of belonging affect the participants while playing and building bonds in an orchestra and its sub-groups?

Summary and Orientation

My own narrative beginnings led me to an interest in sense of belonging. I was curious about how the feelings of belonging I possessed as a child and young adult were lost, and how I might regain them. I joined and studied belongingness within a community orchestra to find out. Baumeister and Leary’s (1995) belongingness theory provided a framework for my investigation. The theory had not been used in the context of a musical ensemble, yet an orchestra seemed to offer an ideal setting in which to study how individuals interact with one another while doing something they enjoyed.

In the remainder of the chapters, I have explored Baumeister and Leary’s (1995)

theory of belongingness, provided a rationale using narrative inquiry, introduced the participants, and provided an analysis of our narratives. Specifically, in Chapter 2, I examined Baumeister and Leary's theory in order to determine how others have used and interpreted its fundamental principles. Additionally, I built upon their research to find other ways the elements of the theory have been used in various contexts. In Chapter 3, I explained and justified the narrative methods I used, which were based on research by Clandinin and Connelly (2000), Clandinin and Caine (2013), and Ollerenshaw and Creswell (2002). I introduced the two other participants in Chapter 4 and traced their musical journeys through life, highlighting the times they felt or lacked sense of belonging. Chapters 5 and 6 are my letters to the two participants in which I restoried interviews, conversations, and observations to find out what sense of belonging meant to each of us. Using those data and asking the participants to reflect on them, I further analyzed the narratives (Chapter 7) in order to draw conclusions and implications, which are found in Chapter 8.

CHAPTER TWO

BELONGINGNESS: BUILDING A FOUNDATION

Most would agree that feelings associated with belonging are positive ones.

When we belong to a group we tend to feel accepted and can find comfort in the presence of others with similar interests and goals. In *Motivation and Personality*, Maslow (1970) listed love and belongingness as essential parts of his “hierarchy of needs,” indicating that individuals seek belongingness after more basic physiological and safety needs are met. Maslow also believed that absence of feelings of belongingness could lead to loneliness and alienation; therefore, the fulfillment of this basic need was critical in attaining self-actualization.

Belongingness Theory

Baumeister and Leary (1995) acknowledged Maslow’s position in their influential paper “The Need to Belong: Desire for Interpersonal Attachments as a Fundamental Human Motivation,” but they pointed out that Maslow offered no substantiation for his assertions about belongingness. Thus, the researchers set out to form and test their own hypothesis, in light of empirical literature, that would ideally bring new understandings to the significance of our need to belong and determine whether or not it can be considered a fundamental human motivation. They stated their belongingness hypothesis as follows:

Human beings have a pervasive drive to form and maintain at least a minimum quantity of lasting, positive, and significant interpersonal relationships. Satisfying this drive involves two criteria: First, there is a need for frequent, affectively pleasant interactions with a few other people, and, second, these interactions must take place in the context of a temporally stable and enduring framework of affective concern for each other’s welfare. (p. 497)

The criteria of frequent interactions and caring context were paramount in their research, as they had been theretofore untested, but merely speculated. Further, the authors conjectured that if either or both of these criteria were missing, or deprived from one's life, their emotional and/or physical health would suffer.

Baumeister and Leary theorized that, if belongingness were a fundamental human need, evidence in support of the following claims would be found in empirical literature:

1. Belongingness should produce effects in a broad variety of conditions;
2. Belongingness should have affective consequences;
3. Belongingness should be a focus of cognitive processing;
4. Ill-effects, such as on health or well-being, should result if an individual is deprived of belongingness;
5. Belongingness should elicit goal-oriented behavior;
6. Belongingness should be universal;
7. Belongingness should not be derivative of other motives;
8. Need for belongingness should affect a variety of human behaviors; and
9. Belongingness should have implications that go beyond immediate psychological functioning. (p. 498)

After they detailed these metatheoretical considerations, Baumeister and Leary examined the empirical literature to determine the existence of these phenomena in other studies.

The researchers' findings most relevant to the current study follow.

Easily Formed Social Bonds That Are Not Derivative of Other Motives

According to Baumeister and Leary (1995), bonds should be able to form easily and freely. They pointed to a wealth of research highlighting that social bonds form merely from being near someone, in their close proximity (see Festinger, Schachter, & Back, 1950; Nahemow & Lawton, 1975; Wilder & Thompson, 1980). Tajfel (1970) studied discrimination between groups where members had not known one another prior to the study. Groups were randomly assigned; however, subjects were told that assignment was based on how well they estimated the number of dots shown on a screen. Tajfel found, through subsequent experiments in which subjects were asked to give monetary rewards to either members of their own group or to others, that subjects favored their own group (the *ingroup*) and therefore discriminated against the other groups (*outgroups*). The study implied that social bonds were formed quickly and easily even in a temporary or newly formed group. Brewer (1979) similarly reviewed bias within and between assigned groups in controlled experimental settings, and he found ample evidence supporting ingroup favorability, but noted a stronger tendency for groups to be favorable within their own group, rather than to be hostile to other groups.

Wilder and Thompson (1980) conducted a study examining rival groups. They found that when groups were formed based on enrollment in two “rival” colleges, pre-conceived notions of ingroup favorability could be decreased if a significant amount of time was spent interacting with the group members of the opposing college. As Baumeister and Leary suggested based on these and other studies, (Orbell, van de Kragt, & Dawes, 1988; Elder & Clipp, 1988), “belongingness motivations appear to be able to

overcome some antagonistic, competitive, or divisive tendencies” (1995, p. 502).

Researchers have suggested that simply being with others can cause bonds to form. These social ties help overcome preconceived notions or stereotypes, and also easily form amidst conditions that are life-threatening or produce anxiety (see Latane, Eckman, & Joy, 1966; Kenrick & Johnson, 1979). Baumeister and Leary (1995) suggested that such negative conditions may “stimulate the need to belong” (p. 502). More recently, Oh (2003) examined the formation of social bonds among elderly urban residents and found that the length of time they resided near one another was a critical aspect of maintaining strong social bonds.

Reluctance to Break Social Bonds

Once social bonds have been formed, they are often very difficult to break. Habit, obligation, and deep-seeded feelings of affection can all contribute to this phenomenon. Baumeister and Leary (1995) speculated that human beings naturally put as much effort into breaking relational bonds as into forming them. Breaking bonds can occur due to such conditions as moving away, graduating from school, or termination of a group project. When this happens, people can show signs of diminished affect and display a general reluctance to cut ties with those they cared for. Such reluctance helps explain high school and college reunions, or sending holiday cards. According to the authors, even negative bonds, such as abusive relationships, are not easily broken.

Upon an extensive review of the literature, Hazan and Shaver (1994) found that the effects of breaking a social bond are “built-in” and experienced universally. They suggested that individuals who broke bonds expressed anxiety and distraction due to

urges to rekindle the bond: “individuals report feeling agitated, anxious, and preoccupied with thoughts of the lost partner, coupled with a compulsion to search for him or her, as though trying to undo the loss even if it is consciously known to be irreversible” (p. 14).

Studying women living in and leaving abusive relationships, Strube (1988) found that a large percentage chose not to leave the relationship or returned to the relationship after leaving. Strube examined several theories such as: (a) psychological entrapment, where a woman feels compelled to remain in the relationship because she has “too much invested to quit” (p. 241); (b) learned helplessness, where the woman is conditioned to feel that her actions have no effect on the outcomes of the relationship; and (c) relative costs and benefits, where the woman weighs her options to determine if leaving the relationship is more beneficial than staying. Each theory implied that strong bonds exist within the relationship, bonds that were powerful enough to cause a woman to risk safety and well-being.

Cognitive Processing

According to Baumeister and Leary (1995), because of the nature of cognitive processing and its essential and prime function in behavior, a belongingness hypothesis should predict how we process our thoughts in relation to our social bonds. Indeed, we prioritize these thoughts: “Social bonds create a pattern in cognitive processing that gives priority to organizing information in the basis of the person with whom one has some sort of connection” (p. 503).

Several researchers have shown that the ways in which human beings process information about close friends is different than the ways in which they process

information about strangers. Sedikides, Olson, and Reis (1993), for example, showed through a series of experiments that human beings use relationships to categorize and prioritize information. Studying attributional processes and effects, Anderson (1991) discovered that a strong dimension of the way in which individuals think about causal behavior was the degree of relationship between the attributor and the others involved in the behavior (e.g., the individual behaved a certain way because he was married).

Membership in a group has also tended to play a role in thinking. Howard and Rothbart (1980), for example, found that individuals were more inclined to associate negative memories with outgroups rather than with their ingroup. Additionally, results of several studies suggested that even the mere anticipation of a future encounter or relationship could affect cognition. For example, Monson, Keel, Stephens, and Genung (1982) found that an individual could attribute traits to another by anticipating interactions with them even if such traits were unobservable.

Positive and Negative Affect

According to Baumeister and Leary (1995), similar to the way belongingness should impact cognitive processing, so too should it impact emotion. Achievement of belongingness should promote positive affect and loss of belonging should promote negative affect. Clark & Watson (1988) found that social bonds were strengthened in groups due to the presence of experiences that cause positive affect. Among individuals, Sternberg (1986) studied the formation of the bond of love and noted that it elicited interactions among positive emotions. Intimacy, passion, and commitment worked together in varying degrees of stability to form a loving bond between two people.

“Consummate love,” or love that is mutual and complete in intimacy, passion, and commitment, in both individuals was considered the ideal (p. 124). Similarly, McAdams and Bryant (1987) found that having high levels of motivation for intimacy caused women to feel more gratified in their relationships, and men to feel more confident and less stressed.

Recent studies have found similar relationships between feelings of belonging and affect. For example, Bulkeley and Fabian (2006) found that primary school children were better able to transition to secondary school with the help of a peer-group support system, which increased their sense of belonging and, in turn, led toward more stable emotional health. Additionally, Lin, Ye, and Ensel (1999) used data from a large-scale survey on life events to find a link between involvement in social community groups and mental health. They found that there was an increase in the likelihood of bonding when belongingness was present, and this bonding in turn leads to a reduction in the likelihood of depression. Of note was the examination of distinct elements: Frequency of interaction as well as the level of care and intimacy were both found to affect bonding, suggesting agreement with Baumeister and Leary’s (1995) two-part hypothesis.

This evidence suggests that a sense of belonging through building and forming bonds can increase an individual’s positive affect, yet there is also evidence that being deprived a sense of belonging can adversely affect an individual’s emotional and mental health. Baumeister and Tice (1990) noted that feelings of anxiety can directly stem from being excluded from social groups. Leary (1990) further explained how negative affect is increased at the dissolution of social bonds. He found that being excluded and rejected

by others not only affects our anxiety, but also our levels of loneliness and depression, and can contribute to low self-esteem.

Deprivation

In the previous section, I outlined research that linked absence of belongingness with negative affect. However, Baumeister and Leary (1995) contended that deprivation of belonging led to more serious health concerns that went beyond emotional discomfort. Recall the two-part hypothesis that belongingness consists of frequent interaction and caring context. The researchers not only examined literature on deprivation overall, but they also examined partial deprivation; that is, absence of frequent interaction or absence of stable, caring context.

Overall deprivation. Several studies show the effects of overall deprivation of belongingness. For example, Goodwin, Hunt, Key, and Sameet (1987) found that the physical health and immune systems of subjects who were married, specifically in fighting against cancer, were better than in those who were unmarried. This stemmed from greater likelihood of late diagnosis and poorer likelihood of treatment among unmarried subjects. Similarly, Kiecolt-Glaser et al. (1984) found a correlation between loneliness and stress and the ability of human cells to fight sickness and disease. Specifically, subjects with higher levels of loneliness and stress had lower levels of “natural killer” cells, which are the body’s way of fighting back against illness (p. 10). Other studies, such as those reviewed by Rutter (1979) showed various syndromes, developmental disorders, and illnesses linked to children’s deprivation of caring and frequent interaction with their mothers.

More recent findings support those found by Baumeister and Leary. For example, Sargent et al. (2002) found that deprivation of belonging correlated with depression and sometimes acted as a buffer against depression. Additionally, Gonzales, Suárez-Orozco, and Dedios-Sanguineti (2013) examined the lives of immigrant youths in the U.S. and found that a lack of belonging contributed to high levels of stress, grief, and uncertainty and could complicate the process of adapting to society.

Deprivation of frequent interaction. Gerstel and Gross (1982) studied long-distance marriages and found that while the bonds were often strong enough to make the relationship last, time apart caused stress for the couple. This deprivation of frequent interaction strained the relationship. Noncustodial parents, who usually were men, were the focus of an examination by Wilbur and Wilbur (1988). The researchers described a series of dilemmas that noncustodial parents typically faced and the emotional reactions to them, such as self-defeating behaviors, guilt, loneliness, and lowered self-worth that often result from infrequent visits or denial of visitation rights.

Deprivation of caring. Deprivation of caring also has been examined, but study results have been correlational rather than causal. For example, Coyne and DeLongis (1986) studied marriages and found that unhappily married couples experienced more illness, drank more frequently, and secluded themselves more so than happily married couples, and that such bad marriages were worse for health than being alone.

Baumeister, Wotman, and Stillwell (1993) studied unrequited love and found that those offering their love and those rejecting that love both felt distressed: “Unrequited love emerges from these data as a bilaterally distressing experience marked by mutual

emotional dependency and mutual incomprehension” (p. 390).

Satiation and Substitution

Baumeister and Leary (1995) referred to *satiation* as “the diminished motivation that ensues when the need to belong is already well satisfied, and *substitution* refers to the replaceability of one social bond with another” (p. 515). In other words, when we feel as if we belong enough, we will seek out fewer opportunities for belonging, and if we lose a social bond we can replace it with a similar bond to achieve the belongingness needs that were lost. The authors pointed to a lack of conclusive evidence supporting this part of their hypothesis, but believed further research would support their propositions.

Reis (1990) showed that individuals preferred to nurture close relationships with a small number of people over time. Subjects favored relationships with smaller numbers of close friends with whom they had built strong communicative bonds, rather than with many less intimate acquaintances. Evidence for the theoretical consideration of substitution came from Beckman (1981), who studied relationships between elderly women and their adult children and found that, as the women aged, they were able to substitute social interaction with others for the social interaction they had experienced with their own children. Beckman concluded by noting that social interaction with one’s children as they grow may not be unique, and that it can be replaced by other types of bonds.

Rusbult, Zembrodt, and Gunn (1982) studied substitution in romantic relationships and found that the probability of substituting one romantic relationship for another increased if a “higher quality” alternative existed (p. 1240). In other words, if an

individual found a mate considered more desirable than the current mate, substitution would be more likely to occur and satisfy those needs.

Innateness and Universality

Baumeister and Leary (1995) explained that in order for something to be a fundamental human motivation it would need to be innate, or found among all human beings as a part of our genetic make-up without regard to our surroundings or upbringings. In this regard, however, they noted that belongingness has been difficult to examine empirically due to the lack of recognized and tested hypotheses. Therefore, the authors examined the extent to which belongingness was evolutionary; that is, the extent to which it ensured human survival. For instance, Lauderdale, Smith-Cunnien, Parker, and Inverarity (1984) studied group cohesion and found that a group of individuals who felt threatened by one of their members was likely to cast the member out or ostracize that member. According to Baumeister and Leary's research, threats to group cohesion proved neither innateness nor universality, so this facet of belongingness remains open. They concluded that the innateness of human beings' fundamental need to belong was plausible, but they emphasized the need for more research in order to prove their hypotheses.

In summary, Baumeister and Leary (1995) pointed to a wealth of empirical literature that illustrated their nine metatheoretical considerations about whether belonging was a fundamental human need. The evidence showed strong support for easily formed social bonds that were not derivative of other motives and reluctance to break social bonds. Further, there was strong evidence that human beings cognitively

process information about those in an ingroup, different than about others. Evidence suggested that individuals not only demonstrated emotional affect from belonging or not belonging, but also that deprivation of frequent contact, deprivation of caring context, or deprivation of both led to serious mental and physical health concerns. Finally, there was strong evidence that individuals substituted one form of belonging for another in order to fulfill belongingness needs. There has been less evidence for Baumeister and Leary's theoretical consideration of satiation; that is, as individuals achieved a sense of belonging they needed contact with fewer relationships. Further, innateness of belongingness needs have been difficult to test empirically, so this theoretical consideration has remained open.

Building on Baumeister and Leary

As can be seen from the foregoing review, research on belongingness and its effects were abundant and referred to belongingness in many contexts, such as among adolescents in schools, adults in the workplace, and among university students. Many studies had similarities to Baumeister and Leary's (1995) theory of belonging; some used the theory as a framework (see Somers, 1999; Thau, Aquino, & Poortvliet, 2007; Twenge et al., 2007; Watt & Badger, 2009). Others developed tools to measure sense of belonging (see Somers, 1999). My search of literature did not reveal any studies that used Baumeister and Leary's theory to explain belongingness in a musical context; however, several studies exist in the music education literature that are related to Baumeister and Leary's concepts. These studies can be categorized as follows: (a) belongingness among adolescents in schools, (b) belongingness among adults in the

workplace, (c) belongingness among university students, and (d) belongingness among church congregations.

Among Adolescents in Schools

Baskin, Wampold, Quintana, and Enright (2010) studied urban middle school students and found that those students who were less accepted by their peers were more at risk for feelings of loneliness and depression than those who were accepted and expressed a sense of belonging among their peers. This study supported Baumeister and Leary's (1995) concept that being deprived of a caring context can cause psychological harm. Newman, Lohman, and Newman (2007) also studied adolescents and belonging, specifically regarding peer group membership. They discovered a negative correlation between belonging and problems with behavior in school. The students' perception of belonging influenced their behavior, in that if they sensed belongingness with a peer group, they behaved better in school. Additionally, this sense of belonging positively influenced the student's mental health and sense of self-worth.

Other studies regarding belonging among school students attempted to determine, in part, if and how belongingness was an important factor in education. For example, researchers linked students' feelings of acceptance and belongingness amongst their peers to success and enjoyment in school. Solomon, Watson, Battisich, Schaps, & Delucchi (1996) found that classroom collaborations such as cooperative learning, sharing, and child-centered learning enhanced students' positive feelings towards school. The students in the study had a heightened sense of community within their classroom and, as a result, experienced positive social growth; levels of self-esteem, conflict-resolution, and

empathy were found to be higher in the experimental group than in the control group.

In the setting of an urban school, Goodenow and Grady (1993) found that students with a greater sense of belonging were more successful in their academics and had increased motivation to succeed in school. Similarly, Wentzel and Caldwell (1997) studied the correlation between a given student's number of friendships and that student's sense of acceptance and academic achievement. The researchers found an indirect relationship between group membership and academic success, but they suggested future studies of group characteristics might show other influence on student belongingness.

Among Adults in the Workplace

Paton (2011) studied belongingness specifically within a nursing practice and found that the need to belong influenced workplace morale and productivity. Citing the theories of Maslow (1970) and Baumeister and Leary (1995), Paton concluded that having a strong sense of belonging created happiness and was essential in the retention of novice nurses in the practice. Nurses who sensed the "stable and chronic condition of high belongingness" (Baumeister & Leary, 1995, p. 505) remained in their positions. Thau, Aquino, and Poortlviet (2007), studied *thwarted belonging*, defined as "the perceived discrepancy between one's desired and actual levels of belonging" (p. 840), to predict behavior in the workplace. In this study, subjects who were deprived of belongingness were negatively affected. According to the authors, "when their belongingness needs are thwarted, people react adversely to it because the satisfaction of a fundamental need has been denied" (p. 841).

Among University Students

In addition to the study by Thau et al. (2007), other researchers used Baumeister and Leary's (1995) theory as their theoretical framework to study belongingness among university students. For example, Twenge et al. (2007) showed that caring, enduring, and mutual relationships could be "replenished" by introducing a positive social reminder to the participant after social exclusion occurred. Reminders included brief friendly conversations and positive interactions with the experimenters, as well as writing about family members or loved ones. This served to trigger the replenishment of caring and reduce aggression. Similarly consistent with Baumeister and Leary's theory, Watt and Badger (2009) studied the resistance to breaking social bonds by showing the relationship of homesickness to the need for sense of belonging. Breaking social bonds was shown to cause homesickness, because the need to keep these bonds intact was strong.

Among Church Congregations

Krause and Wulff (2005) studied church congregations and found that participants who reported a strong sense of belonging were more likely to feel satisfied with their physical health. Conversely, when examining a decreased sense of belonging due to negative interaction among church members, the researchers found decreased satisfaction with health. Using Baumeister and Leary's (1995) theory as a framework, Thompson and McRae (2001) studied members of urban Black church congregations and found a strong sense of belonging present on several dimensions such as in worship and Bible study, and in both small and large groups. Results also supported Baumeister and Leary's theory that belongingness relates to cognition and affect. Participants reported

feeling uplifted, renewed, and spiritually healed as a result of their belonging and continually referred to themselves as “we,” indicating their perception of being part of a group.

Measuring Belongingness

Somers (1999) developed, refined, and began validation on a Belongingness Scale (BES), designed to measure belongingness in four environments: family, friends, work/school, and neighborhood. Somers’ four-part BES used items that corresponded to Baumeister and Leary’s (1995) belongingness theory and were used to assess feelings and behaviors during with another individual. Although factor analysis did not support the hypothesized four-factor model, Somers concluded that a test employing four dimensions improved upon unidimensional models proposed by other researchers, which she found to be insufficient in measuring belongingness.

Results pointed to the high validity and reliability of the BES as a measurement tool and as an appropriate test to be utilized in the context of measuring belongingness according to Baumeister and Leary’s theory. Further, the scale indicated higher mean scores on the family and friends environments than on the work/school and neighborhood environments, suggesting a possible hierarchy of priorities related to a sense of belonging.

Somers speculated (consistent with Baumeister and Leary’s theory) that, since participants in the study demonstrated the fulfillment of belongingness needs from one environment, this may have caused belongingness needs to diminish in other environments due to satiation. For example, the author suggested that once needs have

been fulfilled in a dimension that is higher in the hierarchy, such as family or friends, the need to belong should then diminish in lower dimensions, such as work/school and neighborhood.

Belonging to a Musical Group

Although there have been no studies of musical ensembles that apply Baumeister and Leary's two-part hypothesis (1995) directly, there are several studies that explore group membership and a sense of community within large ensembles. Parker (2010), for example, studied sense of community in a choral ensemble, which was defined as "a feeling that members have of belonging, a feeling that members matter to one another and to the group, and a shared faith that members' needs will be met through their commitment to be together" (p. 9). Parker called attention to the meaning students made of participating in a group, and how that meaning translated into their feelings of belongingness. Her results indicated that students viewed their experiences of belonging to a choral group as varied, pleasant, stress-reducing, and as an outlet for personal and social growth. Results were consistent with Baumeister and Leary's (1995) hypothesis that belongingness yields positive affect.

Willingham (2001) found numerous benefits of choir participation, including the fostering of community, restoration and healing, and self-identity. The results of the study indicated that feelings of the participants (i.e., joy, satisfaction, and increased self-worth) were consistent with Baumeister and Leary's (1995) theory of belongingness. Additionally, they were found to cognitively process information about other group members in a positive light. For example, one participant stated:

Singing [in the choir] gives me a sense of belonging to a larger group focused on common goals. It challenges my mind and my body, it introduces me to new and interesting people, it makes me try hard so as to not disappoint my teammates, it lets me speak a common language to a group of different souls, it lets me communicate with strangers out there in the dark. (Willingham, 2001, p. 153)

In a study on motivating factors for high school choral participation, Neill (1998) found that students tended to join chorus primarily for their love of singing, and they formed bonds with ensemble members after joining the group. This suggests that easily formed bonds were often based on mere proximity.

Coffman (2008) studied members of the New Horizons groups, performing ensembles for older participants. The researcher found that members of the New Horizons sample who were over the age of 55 scored significantly above the national average on a standardized health survey. Additionally, when asked to comment on how playing in the group had affected their overall health, responses were overwhelmingly positive and indicated perceived benefits to both physical and mental health. The study may be inversely related to the metatheoretical construct of deprivation, in that group members' health was affected both by frequency of contact with other New Horizons members and a caring environment.

Eaton (2013) studied older string players participating in a community orchestra, and the effect it had on their well-being and self-efficacy beliefs. The researcher noted: "As a multi-dimensional form of self-perceived health, quality of life, and happiness, affecting and deriving from cognitive, physical, and emotional facets of human functioning, wellbeing is both a catalyst for music making and the result of music making for study participants" (p. 214). This increase of positive affect comes as a result of

belonging to a musical group, and it is consistent with Baumeister and Leary's (1995) hypothesis. Eaton also cited a dearth of studies on older musicians outside the New Horizons groups, and of string players in general in this capacity and suggested replications of the study with other age groups and contexts.

Extant studies on membership in musical groups show mainly positive outcomes for participants; however Baumeister and Leary's theory (1995) has not been examined explicitly in musical contexts. Considering Baumeister and Leary's two-part hypothesis, it is reasonable to speculate that membership in an ensemble with strict audition and performance requirements might not be the kind of caring environment that would promote positive socioemotional outcomes. Furthermore, Baumeister and Leary propose that frequent contact with a few people is necessary to establish a feeling of belongingness, and typical bands, orchestras, and choruses comprise dozens of members. How does a sense of belonging cohere within such large groups? Clearly, additional research is needed to give a fuller picture of whether and how belongingness coheres within a large music ensemble.

In summary, Baumeister and Leary's (1995) influential paper guided this study and provided its framework. The authors showed that belongingness is a fundamental human motivation, and they set forth two criteria in which to satisfy our need for it. Although research on sense of belonging in a musical group context is scarce, such groups lend themselves well to the experiences one should feel in order to satisfy their needs. The following chapter provides a rationale for and description of my use of narrative methodology, based on the research of Clandinin and Connelly (2000) as well

as Clandinin and Caine (2013), to better make sense of the participants' belongingness perceptions. Through engaging conversations, observations, journal writing, and restorying the participants came to new understandings of what it means to belong to an orchestra.

CHAPTER THREE

METHOD AND PROCEDURES

Narrative Description and Rationale

Clandinin and Connelly's (2000) seminal book, *Narrative Inquiry: Experience and Story in Qualitative Research* described the characteristics of and rationale for narrative inquiry as a research method. Primarily influenced by Dewey and his theory of experience, the authors described narrative inquiry as a way to "make sense of life as lived" (p. 78). As justification for narrative inquiry, they offered the following: "Experience happens narratively. Narrative inquiry is a form of narrative experience. Therefore, educational experience should be studied narratively" (p. 19). In contrast to formalistic approaches to research, narrative inquiry begins with the researcher's own perceptions of the phenomenon in question. The researcher often delves into his or her past experiences in an attempt to uncover "unnamed, perhaps secret, stories" (p. 62) with the goal of mapping these onto the research problem, as well as to the stories of participants. I began this process with the *narrative beginnings* offered at the outset of this document. I reflected on this writing and used it to form the research questions for the study. Because I was interested in finding out *how* belongingness manifested within an orchestra, narrative inquiry was the design for this study; it allowed me to fully immerse myself in context alongside other participants.

Clandinin and Connelly (2000) explained how narrative inquirers must do their research in the field, "in the midst" of their participants. By this they meant that the

participants' stories did not begin at the onset of the study. The participants' stories began well before they met the researcher and continued after the study ended. Therefore, the researcher was responsible for negotiating entry into the field, as well as negotiating a way to be useful to the participant after the study concludes. According to Clandinin and Connelly, living and working alongside participants was the most common way to negotiate entry into the field.

Narrative in Music Education

Wayne Bowman (2006) advocated for the continued exploration and use of narrative within music education research. He explained the benefits of using narrative in our field, which could offer useful and insightful contrast to the concrete methods and theory that are so prevalent in music education research. Bowman argued that, because narrative offered a unique look into personal lives and lived experiences, it could explain what music can mean to us and how "people use music to make sense of their musical lives" (p. 9). Bowman (2006) also sought justification for "little" narratives, which told small-scale stories of events in individuals' lives, instead of large-scale "grand" narratives, which were designed to tell an all-encompassing and often abstract story. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) similarly referred to grand narratives as strict and unyielding; they believed such stories were not compatible with the fluid nature of narrative.

Use of Narrative in the Present Study

For the present study, I joined a non-auditioned, community orchestra in a large metropolitan area on the eastern coast of the United States. The orchestra was designed

as a community orchestra, so members had a broad range of musical backgrounds, and many ages were represented in the ensemble. As a performing member of the violin section, I was able to experience the feelings of performing within the orchestra and my section as I interacted with other members of the group, including the two participants in the present study. Before and after rehearsals, during breaks, and during social activities, I negotiated relationships with the participants and we built social bonds together. I attended all rehearsals, concerts, and events for the duration of the study; however, I began my participation several months ahead of the study in order to negotiate relationships within the orchestra and get to know participants.

Negotiating relationships with participants gave rise to my purpose while engaged within the orchestra. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) stated:

When narrative inquirers are in the field, they are never there as disembodied recorders of someone else's experience. They too are having an experience, the experience of the inquiry that entails the experience they set out to explore... The narrative researcher's experience is always a dual one, always the inquirer experiencing the experience and also being a part of the experience itself. (p. 81)

Because I was positioned in the midst of this active orchestra and settled in, I was able to observe and interact with all orchestra members, and make informed decisions about which members of the ensemble could add the most to narratives of belongingness. As Clandinin and Connelly (2000) pointed out, narrative inquirers "settle in, live and work alongside participants, and come to experience not only what can be seen and talked about directly but also not said and not done" (pp. 67–68). By positioning myself in the orchestra, I was able to work closely with two participants as we discovered how our sense of belonging in the orchestra was interwoven with our personal histories and senses

of belonging in other settings.

At the first rehearsal I attended, I made a general announcement during the break about my study, inviting interested members of the orchestra to speak with me further about participating. Prospective participants were then given an informational letter (Appendix) that described in detail what they could expect from the study as well as issues of confidentiality and consent. Upon negotiating entry and purpose into the orchestra, I spoke with many members. As I built acquaintances and friendships, I determined who seemed willing to participate. I selected those who expressed an interest in the study, displayed a general sense of belonging, had been with the group long enough to feel as if they belonged to it, and indicated that they had ample time and availability.

Informal conversations with prospective participants took place, in which I sought to determine how they felt they belonged to the group. I asked them to briefly describe to me some ways in which they experienced belonging while participating in the orchestra. Additionally, upon negotiating entry and purpose into the group, I was well situated to observe members interacting and conversing with each other so that I could discover signs of belonging among those who were perhaps hesitant to volunteer. By approaching them and engaging in conversations I discovered these prospective participants as well. From these interactions, I invited one male and one female adult to participate; however, willingness to participate in narrative inquiry, requiring more investment than other types of research, was the primary criterion for invitation. The participants were Robert, a violist, and Ana, a cellist.

Three-Dimensional Inquiry Space

According to Clandinin and Connelly (2000), narrative inquiry exists within a “metaphorical three-dimensional narrative inquiry space, with temporality along one dimension, the personal and the social along a second dimension, and place along a third” (p. 50). In this narrative I told participants’ stories and analyzed them with this three-dimensional space in mind. For example, as we conversed about our autobiographies and how we first became aware of the concept of belonging, we travelled along the *temporal space*, (past and present, alluding to the future), yet we also remained grounded with the *physical space* (place) and context of a particular musical group. Additionally, we conversed about the meanings of bonds we made (*personal* and *social space*) while still considering the physical space of the musical group, in this case the orchestral rehearsal room and the context in which we were rehearsing there.

In the present study, we found the personal and social spaces, also called spaces of *interaction*, to be the prime focus of our meanings of belonging, and we described them in relationship to physical and temporal spaces, also called spaces of continuity. Like Clandinin and Connelly (2000), who referred to a process of inquiry as reflective; we looked *inward* describing experiences in terms of our own feelings, hopes, ambitions, and morals. Looking outward, we described how we perceived others’ reactions to us as well as our sensibilities about their various points of view. Staying grounded in these spaces provided the best way in which to come to new understandings and interpretations of our experiences of belongingness. Furthermore, we came to such understandings over multiple iterations of conversation.

Negotiations

Clandinin and Connelly (2000) suggested four ways in which to negotiate entry into the field: (a) negotiating relationships, (b) negotiating purposes, (c) negotiating transitions, and (d) negotiating ways to be useful. Prior to beginning these four negotiations I first needed to gain entry into the orchestra, so I contacted the administrator and explained my study to her. I described what I would be doing, the time frame, and what I hoped to learn from it. She was delighted to welcome me into the orchestra, and enthusiastically provided details regarding my joining the group. I explained that I would be happy to share my experiences with my own school students and invite them to join, since all ages and ability levels are welcome. My first rehearsal occurred immediately after my dissertation proposal was accepted.

Personal Journal Reflection, March 27th, 2014:

I'm actually a little nervous about tonight; it's my first rehearsal. I've spent the past 13 years standing in front of a group of students, teaching them, conducting them, and now I will be in their place. I have forgotten what this feels like - what it feels like to give control of my music making over to someone else, in a way. I don't know anyone in the orchestra, and aside from preliminary research and observation of the group, I know little about it. The members are of all ages, from 7 to 92, and of all ability levels, from beginners to professionals. That is what drew me to it in the first place, the diversity. Excited to begin, but nervous to experience this role-reversal.

Once entry was gained, I immediately began negotiating in the four ways that Clandinin and Connelly described.

Negotiating relationships. My relationships with my two participants and other orchestra members began at my very first rehearsal. I joined mid-year, so there was a bit

of curiosity amongst the members. The administrator introduced me and mentioned that I was a strings teacher and professional violinist. I sat in the back of the first violin section next to a high school senior. At the start of the rehearsal and throughout, everyone in the section came up, introduced themselves, and gave me welcoming words. “Glad to have you!” “Welcome!” “I’m going to sit near you; I need all the help I can get!” I felt welcomed from the first few minutes of being there; right away my nerves were put at ease, and that allowed me to begin the process of negotiating relationships with many members of the orchestra. I took to learning names, occupations, hometowns, years of experience, years with the group, and family life. There were two students in my section who were headed off to college soon, so I spent some time getting to know their plans. Where were they going? What would they be studying? Would they take their violins with them? I got to know the conductor, his wife, and family. I engaged in as much dialogue and conversation as I could during each break and social time.

By the second rehearsal my nerves had subsided and had been replaced already by excitement and enthusiasm to play the music the conductor had chosen. During the break, a member of the viola section, Robert, approached me and asked me if I would like to join his string trio. He had a warm face and friendly smile. I was taken aback: It was only the second rehearsal and I was already getting invitations to play chamber music. I learned that he was in his late-50s, was born in Cuba, and came to the U.S. when he was a teenager. He introduced the cellist, Ana, to me that night and she was also friendly and excited to meet me. She also was in her late-50s and was of Filipino descent. Robert and Ana were both amateur musicians who had been playing with the

orchestra for many years. They expressed enjoyment for playing chamber music on the side, and they were looking for a professional violinist for their trio. I thought about it for a few days, and then agreed. It would mean weekly rehearsals and some performances at nursing homes from time to time. After getting to know them more and discussing my study with them over the next several weeks, I realized that they would make ideal participants. They had a wealth of stories to tell, and the opportunity for on-going stories in the more intimate setting of chamber music promised additional rich information for the study.

I began to form solid relationships with Robert and Ana that spring and summer. When the orchestra recessed for the summer, our trio rehearsals continued, so I got to know them on a more personal level. I learned about their lives growing up in Cuba and the Philippines, moving to the U.S., and living their adult lives here. I learned about all of their musical experiences as children and as adults. Most importantly, I learned how belongingness affected their lives, and how it manifested itself within our orchestra. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) noted, “the researcher-participant relationship is a tenuous one, always in the midst of being negotiated” (p. 72). This became evident when I learned that Robert preferred not to be audio recorded, so we negotiated a way in which to get around this during our conversations. I typed as we were speaking to one another and we were able to interact and have many meaningful discussions without his discomfort.

Negotiating purposes and transitions. As I engaged in the collection of field data, I was continually reflecting on my reason for being in the midst of my other

participants; my thoughts focused not only on my research questions, but also if and how they would change as the study progressed, as is typical in narrative research (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000). My beginnings in the group were met at first with curiosity, then with acceptance, and finally with welcoming. My own section was thrilled to have me there right from the start mainly because their numbers were very low. The other sections of the orchestra interacted with me less at first, and then warmed up to me as time went on. Members of the orchestra were curious about my study and wanted to know more. A few offered to help in any way they could. Stopping to jot down notes periodically during rehearsals was at first met with quizzical glances, and then turned to knowing nods as more people learned about the study. I found myself worrying about how I might be perceived in the group as a result of this; would people start to see me more as a researcher rather than a member of the orchestra? To them, would my purpose there look artificial and temporary? How would I transition from the group? As I wrote in my journal after each rehearsal, I took note of the ways that members might perceive my purpose and transitions within the group.

Personal Journal Reflection, October 15th, 2014:

During rehearsal tonight, I noticed several odd looks when I kept stopping to write notes. A woman approached me during break: "How is your research coming along?" I told her it was coming along very well, and that I was excited to be a part of such a wonderful orchestra. We talked about it for a few minutes and then she asked if I would be leaving the group as soon as I finished studying it. That made me pause for a moment. I hadn't really thought about it much, to be honest. Having her ask me right then made me realize that, yes, I would love to continue playing with them indefinitely after I was finished with the research. I would transition from a researcher/member to just a member. I enjoyed every minute of it, I told her. I was forming many new friendships, learning new things about myself, and I was filling a void that had existed for many years. The look on her face, almost a look of relief, was enough to make my whole day; it felt special knowing that she was glad I was there.

My fears of being viewed as a researcher more than an orchestra member were put to rest as I forged new relationships and friendships. I needed to explain my purpose there less and less as time went on and members simply viewed me as someone they could go to for help with a fingering, advice on purchasing a new violin, or just a friendly ear, rather than a researcher. Coming to this realization, gradually, also helped me look at myself in this new way. I was still a researcher, deeply engaged in finding out new insight on belongingness in the midst of this orchestra, but I was first and foremost a member of the group, a part of a dynamic music-making body made better by its tight-knit social structure. Furthermore, realizing that I would stay on as a member of the orchestra after the research ended gave me new purpose there. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) noted that "it is critical to the trust and integrity of the work that researchers do not simply walk away when 'their time has come'" (p. 74) and I had no intention of doing that.

Negotiating ways to be useful. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) explained that often researchers have felt voiceless at the initial stages of their studies as they have collected and interpreted the stories of their participants and omitted their own perceptions. It was important to me right from the start of this journey that I engaged in studying my own stories equivalently to Robert's stories and Ana's stories. I was interested in comparing my own lived experiences before and during my time spent in this orchestra to those of the other two participants; I was anything but voiceless. I would transcend the typical researcher/participant relationship and try to interpret my own stories in a different way, in light of Robert's and Ana's stories. Additionally, I found myself becoming useful not only to the study itself, but also the orchestra. I helped out by offering my expertise on the violin and I participated in fundraising efforts for the orchestra.

Conversations

Primary data in narrative research are conversations that take place between researcher and participant. Because the researcher is alongside the participant in the field, these conversations are two-way exchanges. The researcher shares with the participant as much as the participant shares with the researcher (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000). The main conversations for this study occurred once a month for four months for each participant in a local coffee house, separately at first, and then all together for our final conversation. Other conversations, observations, and email correspondence occurred throughout the study.

Four main conversations occurred with each participant, as noted in Figure 1.

These conversations were organized to highlight “equality among participants and ... flexibility to allow participants to establish forms and topics” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 109). Therefore, I encouraged the other two participants to ask me questions as well, and I participated in a process of continual reflection along with them. Any artifacts employed in the conversation became part of the field text. According to Clandinin and Caine (2013), artifacts can include such items as drawings, photographs, documents, music, poetry, and journal entries, which can often act as antecedents to conversation or to help the stories unfold more easily. For this study, I asked the two other participants to document their first experiences of belonging and how they came to understand it in the context of an orchestra, as I did. These became their *autobiographies of belonging*, and these artifacts along with others the participants brought, such as concert programs or personal memorabilia, accompanied them at our conversations in order to help them share their stories.

As Clandinin and Caine (2013) suggested, conversations were not structured and rigid; neither did they attempt to solve the participants’ problems. Instead, they were a collaborative effort to arrive at new understandings about our experiences of belonging. I recorded and transcribed conversations, forming *field texts*. Field texts, in turn, became *interim research texts* as the participants met with me to review transcripts and other artifacts. Clandinin and Caine (2013) warned that this was not simply a member check process, as takes place in other forms of qualitative research; rather, researcher and participant negotiated which parts of the field text would become public. Paying careful attention to the three-dimensional inquiry space, we were prepared to read and reread the

Example Conversation Topics	Example Questions and Discussions
<p>Sharing the purpose of the study with participants</p> <p>Biographical information</p> <p>Belongingness autobiographies</p> <p>Beginning of the orchestra season</p>	<p>Share the purpose and research questions with the participants, outline a timeline moving forward.</p> <p>Share your belongingness autobiography. How long have you been playing your instrument? Do you play professionally or for fun? How long have you played in this orchestra? Have you played in any other similar orchestras? Talk about the first rehearsal after the summer break. What were your feelings?</p>
<p>Sharing artifacts</p> <p>Perceptions of belongingness</p>	<p>Share your artifacts. Trace their meanings in relation to belongingness.</p> <p>How did you first come to realize the concept of belongingness in general? In the context of a musical group?</p>
<p>Social bonds</p>	<p>Who are your friends in the orchestra? How did these friendships form? Do you and your orchestra friends have social interactions outside of orchestra? Are there former orchestra members with whom you maintain friendships? How are those friendships maintained?</p>
<p>Caring context and frequent interaction</p>	<p>Does the orchestra have any rituals or routines that express care for members (celebrating birthdays, sending cards for bereavement)? Do you participate in them? Are there times when you have felt particularly cared for in the orchestra? Describe the feeling. Is weekly frequently? Discuss activities that are supplementary to the orchestra, but still related to it.</p>

Figure 1. Planned conversations.

field texts in order to make sense of them. More conversation occurred as we reviewed the field texts together and then co-composed interim research texts. I used restorying, or “the process of gathering stories, analyzing them for key elements of the story (e.g., time, place, plot, and scene), and then rewriting the story to place it within a chronological sequence” (Ollerenshaw & Creswell, 2002, p. 332) to preserve the three-dimensional inquiry space.

Analysis

To help construct the interim research texts, I asked the participants to reflect upon each of our conversations. I also restoried our conversations and wrote reflections to both participants. These reflections formed the interim research texts and provided an equitable balance between the participants’ voices in the narratives. As Clandinin, Huber, Murphy, and Orr (2009) explained, these interim texts should be “written as tentative, open texts to be read and negotiated with participants” (p. 84). Therefore, I wrote them to be speculative, questioning, and open-ended, “inviting participants to say more when plotlines seem[ed] incoherent” (p. 84). Several additional meetings occurred with each of the participants, which provided time for our active co-composition of interim texts. The form of the *final research text* is the present dissertation document, with letters from me to the other participants, as well as reflections on these letters, forming the body of the narrative. I followed Clandinin and Caine’s (2013) advice to consider a non-academic audience as I wrote the final text, and represented and restoried my narrative within the metaphorical three-dimensional space. As the authors noted, “there may be times where one dimension foregrounds the inquiry, but all dimensions are

attended to” (p. 173).

In order to better visualize the three-dimensional space analysis, I chose Ollerenshaw and Creswell’s (2002) table format, which they adapted from Clandinin and Connelly (2000). Figure 2 illustrates the general format of the analysis.

<i>Interaction</i>		<i>Continuity</i>			
<i>Personal</i>	<i>Social</i>	<i>Past</i>	<i>Present</i>	<i>Future</i>	<i>Situation/Place</i>
Look inward to internal conditions, feelings, hopes, aesthetic reactions, moral dispositions	Look outward to existential conditions in the environment with other people and their intentions, purposes, assumptions, and points of view	Look backward to remembered experiences, feelings, and stories from earlier times	Look at current experiences, feelings, and stories relating to actions of an event	Look forward to implied and possible experiences and plot lines	Look at context, time, and place situated in a physical landscape or setting with topological and spatial boundaries with characters’ intentions, purposes, and different points of view

Figure 2. General format for three-dimensional space analysis (Ollerenshaw & Creswell, 2002, p. 340).

Through careful discussion with the participants after I had transcribed all conversations and observations, we came up with several key personal feelings that stood out as being meaningful and significant. These personal feelings and beliefs, which were all mentioned repeatedly in our conversations, helped form the themes that were used to construct the overall structure of the narratives. The themes we identified were: (a) pride, accomplishment; (b) importance, responsibility; (c) being in the present; (d) safety, security; (e) increased social bonds = improved sound; (f) completeness; (g) welcoming, comfort, acceptance, and safety leading to improved personal affect; (h) familial feeling,

reunion; and (i) reluctance to break bonds, substitution. The participants further reflected upon these themes as they read and responded to my questions about their narratives.

From these reflections, I discovered four additional themes that gave new insight into our initial perceptions and meanings of belongingness, and were all related. They were: (a) belonging, bonding, and identity, (b) belonging, social support, and mutual learning, and (c) belonging and responsibility. As Clandinin and Connelly (2000) described, we were able to move backward and forward on the continuity plane as well as the place, but were always rooted in our personal inward- and outward-looking feelings. In Figure 3, I have presented an analysis of part of Robert's narrative, with several of the themes listed in the personal dimension and the continuity of the themes through time and place running across the figure.

<i>Interaction</i>		<i>Continuity</i>			
<i>Personal</i>	<i>Social</i>	<i>Past</i>	<i>Present</i>	<i>Future</i>	<i>Situation/Place</i>
Pride, Accomplishment	N/A	Never thought he would be a part of a big orchestra	Now is one	Hopes to remain in orchestra	In the past – outsider looking in. Now, a member of the orchestra.
Importance, responsibility	Feelings from and toward members of his section	Never sat first stand	Does not sit first stand	Hopes to do it again one day	First stand of viola section, the orchestra
Responsibility	Members of outreach group – negative experiences	Several negative experiences happened in the past	Still happening	Will probably continue to happen	Outreach group

Figure 3. Excerpt of Robert's narrative.

It is important to note here that my own personal feelings and reflections played a large role in deciphering the belongingness themes that form the sections of Chapters 5 and 6. Robert's six themes and Ana's four were based on our collective interpretation and shared meanings of belongingness. Since I was an equal participant in this study, it was paramount to include my own interpretations of Robert's and Ana's perceptions and meanings in relation to my own. In doing so, I was able to preserve the equitable balance and integrity of the narrative and better illustrate how belongingness can be interpreted in this context. The first narratives (Chapters 5 and 6) took the form of letters from me to the other two participants.¹ In them, I wrote my own thoughts and feelings in relation to theirs, staying grounded in the personal and social space while traveling temporally and spatially. I asked them many questions and invited them to reflect further on the narratives and respond to me. Their responses and my interpretations of these responses form Chapter 7, which ties all three of our experiences and reflections on sense of belonging in an orchestra together.

Validity

Clandinin and Connelly (2000) reminded researchers that, rather than relying on concepts of validity and reliability, narrative inquirers instead look to other methods of supporting the trustworthiness of their data, such as *relatability*, *adequacy*, and *plausibility*. Clandinin and Connelly stressed that narratives should be in some way relatable to the reader, thus making them more meaningful. Connelly and Clandinin (1990) referred to narratives having adequacy (being good enough), and plausibility

¹ See Rose (1997). I used his concept of writing letters to participants to form these narratives.

(being believable) as other substitutions for the term *validity*. Narrative inquiry typically has very few participants, and delves deeply into their pasts, presents, and possible futures. It is the task of the researcher to compose narratives that help make sense of experiences, and arrive at new understandings based on the experiences of others. It is the job of the reader to interpret these narratives in a way that is most appropriate to their own situations, creating a “place to imagine their own uses and applications” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 42).

Ethical Considerations

Webster and Mertova (2007) recommend adhering to strict ethical guidelines when undertaking narrative research. They list several of these, which I followed in the present study:

- informed consent (do participants have full knowledge of what is involved?);
- harm and risk (can the study hurt participants?);
- honesty and trust (is the researcher being truthful in presenting data?);
- privacy, confidentiality and anonymity (will the study intrude too much into group behaviours?);
- intervention and advocacy (what should researchers do if participants display harmful or illegal behaviour?) (p. 102)

Clandinin and Connelly (2000) also pointed out that narrative researchers must take utmost care in not harming their participants. In order to protect participant identities, I used pseudonyms for participants and all other individuals we discussed, and I kept all data transcriptions in a password protected computer file. During the process of co-composing, I took care to give the other participants a voice in preserving their own

safety and protecting the emotional vulnerability their stories uncovered. For example, when discussing a sensitive or potentially controversial topic or person, I continually reassured Robert and Ana about the confidentiality of the study and reminded them that nothing would be included without their express permission.

The unique and intimate nature of forming narratives led to the discovery of tensions when co-composing the data together. As sensitive information was shared and reflected upon by the three of us, I learned that certain stories and conversations were “off limits” to include in the final document. As a narrative inquirer, it became my challenge to simultaneously hold an emotional space for the stories of Robert and Ana, while balancing the safety of the participants and my own ethical obligations with the integrity of the research.

Further, we continually reflected on our conversations with positivity in mind; we were trying to find ways to produce relevant and meaningful results with many implications for the field of music education. As we co-composed interim research texts together, this equitable balance of sharing and writing allowed all participants to feel safe with what we shared.

CHAPTER FOUR

INTRODUCING THE PARTICIPANTS

Prior to our first scheduled conversation, I had asked Robert and Ana to write an “autobiography of belongingness,” as I had done, and I shared mine with them. I asked them to trace their journey through life, calling attention to the times when they felt like they belonged, and how that affected their lives. I then used these autobiographies and some early conversations to construct the introductions that follow. The stories they told me of growing up allowed me to start to piece together their feelings of belonging not only in everyday life, but also in the context of an orchestra.

Robert’s Homecoming Story

Robert Serrano is a Cuban-American immigrant and retired computer programmer in his late 50’s who came to the US as a teenager in the winter of 1970. He entered the 9th grade in the Bronx not knowing a word of English. His childhood in Communist Cuba was one of family, baseball, and music. His uncles noticed an interest for classical music early on in Robert, and encouraged him to enroll in a local conservatory.

R: Of course I had to do an aptitude test. I had to go before three judges. They put you in a room and they play one key on a piano and then two keys. And I remember that. I was about eight years old. And then they play a little basic melody and I had to hum. They were trying to see if I had good ears for music. I guess I passed the test because they took me in.

N: How did that make you feel?

R: It was great; being accepted. I felt unique.

His education in the conservatory helped build a foundation and a passion for music that would last his entire life. But as a child, Robert was continually at odds between his musical education and his love of baseball and being with his friends, who did not share his musical appreciation. He wrote in his autobiography:

Belonging to the conservatory was a bag of mixed emotions. The ‘machismo’ sentiment was prevalent in the Cuban culture. I didn’t want my neighborhood friends to see me with the violin in tow and I wouldn’t talk about it either. The business of playing baseball was very strong. As a matter of fact, the violin was cutting into my baseball time. So, I would hurry my daily practice and would rush down the block to play baseball with the neighborhood kids.

Furthermore, the directors of the school got wind of the fact that Robert’s family would soon be leaving the country for America.

N: So how long did you study at the conservatory?

R: I think I was there for three years, and then at the beginning of my fourth year, that’s when I was kicked out. I was starting my fourth year, reluctantly (I was getting tired of the violin and wanted to have more free time to play baseball with my friends), so I think I was pulled out of the class – somebody got me (one of the secretaries) and brought me to the director. And he said something like: I hear that you’re leaving the country, and that’s not a good thing. We can’t keep you in the conservatory any longer because the fruits of your studies are not going to benefit the Revolution.

N: How did you feel about that?

R: I was frozen, I was terrified, and I was nervous. My hands started sweating again. It was a shock. When he said that I didn’t actually have to follow my parents, that I could stay in Cuba and he would look after me, and give me a scholarship. I was only twelve years old at the time.

N: So to a twelve year old, that’s pretty intense, right?

R: Yes it’s pretty intense. I just stood there and didn’t say much. He told me I was dismissed, and I got up. Now remember, Fidel came into power – he declared he was going to be Communist, so a lot of people left Cuba. So he lost a lot of professionals, so that’s why for a while he did not allow people to leave the country. All the qualified people were leaving the country. If you were not with

him (a declared Communist, or at least pretended to be), then you had very little chance of getting a good job or getting any type of position. Remember, the government was going to make an investment in me. After so many years, I would have had to go to Russia to specialize in my instrument. So they made an investment in me.

In his autobiography of belongingness, Robert elaborated on this event:

He said I didn't have to follow my parents to the United States. I could stay and continue my music studies at the conservatory. He would make all the arrangements and get me a "beca" (a scholarship with room and board), and would personally look after me. "I know you could turn into a fine musician," he said. "What do you say, do you want to stay here or go with your parents? I said, holding back my tears, "I want to go with my parents." All hell broke loose when I went back home. My whole family was denouncing this outrageous injustice. Everyone was cursing the communists. How could they do such thing to an innocent child? What about your father? Wait until he gets home. He probably would want to go over to the school and grab the director by the neck. He must be persuaded not to do anything. After all this time waiting, we could lose our "salida" (visa). I pretended I was very upset and went to my bed and cried. But deep inside I was glad I didn't have to practice the violin anymore. Now, I can have more time to play baseball.

Personal Journal Reflection, September 17th, 2014:

I heard Robert's story about going in front of the Director of his Conservatory as a child and being propositioned, being given the choice to stay with the school on scholarship or fleeing like a "traitor." As a twelve-year-old, I couldn't imagine being put in a spot like that. He had to feel some sense of belonging to the school he had studied at for several years, but obviously a much stronger one to his family. He chose to go with his family, of course, but to even be asked by the Director to stay behind took me aback when I heard it. When I was twelve I was safe and secure in my sheltered bastion of suburban living, carefree and unknowing of the kinds of situations that can face children all over the world.

Robert's high school years in the Bronx, Queens, and Yonkers were confusing and lacking in any sort of feelings of belonging. He struggled with the language and faced brushes with gang-related crime, although he excelled in math. The violin was far from his mind:

N: So, tell me a little bit about your music between leaving the Conservatory and now.

R: Well, believe it or not, after that I forgot about the violin altogether. I never thought of the violin for a while. I don't wanna do it anymore; that was my past in Cuba. I was more interested in the Rock and punk music movement that was going on. I actually had a guitar, but I never learned how to play. I would carry it with me, though. I would go out with my friends and use it as a fashion statement, not actually playing it.

In his autobiography, he elaborated:

The violin and the conservatory was something that seemed to have happened in a previous life. I didn't miss it. Once in my history class, the teacher passed a violin around for everyone to take a closer look. When the instrument got to me, every one stood in silence, surprised that I could hold it like if I knew how to play. But when I tried to bow, nothing came out.

After high school, Robert was accepted to the prestigious Manhattan College with an engineering scholarship. Music was always in the back of his mind, yet it kept surfacing in various ways—in some capacity, he would constantly be drawn back to music.

R: Fast forward to 1976, when I became interested in music again. (My third year of college).

N: How?

R: Well, I didn't want to study engineering anymore at college, and for some reason, I don't know how, but music was in the back of my mind and I wanted to study it. I think it was in 1976 and I went to a music school in White Plains, NY, and I took violin lessons for the first time in ten years. I had this good violin teacher.

N: So how long did you take lessons?

R: I think it was a little over a year. Maybe two years. And then I stopped and that was the end of that. I don't know why I stopped. It was off and on with the violin. It's been one of those things; I would get frustrated because I couldn't get ahead. I would leave it because I thought couldn't get ahead. I didn't have the

talent and couldn't make progress. I would doubt myself. I would say that I have no time.

N: Why do you think you kept being drawn back to it?

R: It's a mystery. Every five or ten years I would get the itch. The next time I picked it up was in 1980. And I heard this radio program called the Sunday Salsa Show. And I remember the DJ of the program was Richard Dobson, an American guy that loved Latin music, and he would play all the Cuban music and the Latin Music. And he advertised Johnny Colon's Music School in Spanish Harlem. So he used to say: "If you wanna play Latin Music, come to Johnny Colon's!" So one day I decided to go there, because I still wanted to play music, but I wanted to play music that was closer to my heart, which was Latin/Cuban music. So I went to Johnny Colon's. They had a teacher from Haiti, but it was a group violin class with like three or four students. But he played in a Charanga band, which was a very unique Cuban music band that incorporates European instruments with Cuban rhythms and Latin percussion.

N: How long did you study there?

R: I was there very little. Maybe two months. But what happened was a turning point in my life. I think there was a reason why I went there. It was great.

N: Did you like it?

R: I loved it; it was a great experience.

N: What was your next musical experience after that?

R: After that we started playing for about a year, everywhere. We played on the same stage as Tito Puente at a benefit dance for Johnny Colon's music school, on a radio station, at a women's jail, at baptisms, block parties, etc. In late 1981, I quit the band. But it had dismantled anyway by then.

N: Do you miss it?

R: I do miss it. I miss it because the guys were so great. We had so much fun playing together.

I was fascinated with the variety of Robert's experiences with music, but I wanted to know what drew him to our orchestra.

R: There was this monthly community paper that they used to throw on my driveway, and there was an ad for our orchestra, a non-profit organization. And they had an open house in January, 2005. So I called the president, and told him I have some experience, and he told me to come to the open house, and that's how I started. It was exciting and, at the time scary, because I had never been part of a big orchestra like that, a large music group. It was always a good experience playing with them. The music was more doable in the beginning, because we always did arrangements. But then the music got more difficult over the years. But we had fun, we dressed up for concerts and that was fun. I love to play in a group. The difficult part was that I wanted to play better, so that was frustrating. I was working full time, and you know, I was tired coming home so finding the time to practice was difficult for me.

N: When did you switch to viola and why?

R: In the spring of 2010. I just had a desire to play the viola. I don't know what triggered that, but I went to Sam Ash and I tried a viola and I liked the sound, and I've never heard the sound of the viola so close. I just loved it. I think I was getting frustrated with the violin because I couldn't get the sound I wanted out of it. But all of a sudden with viola, it made sense. I had no teacher and I started teaching myself how to play it. Then I got this desire to take lessons and pursue the viola more seriously. I took a few lessons at a music store, but it was only half an hour and it didn't work out. (I had left the orchestra momentarily while this was happening). After that I went back to it. It was like home to me; I had my friends there. It was no pressure there. I knew everybody. They take anybody, so I didn't feel like I had to demonstrate that I knew a lot. I went to viola in the intermediate group.

Our conversation came around to the present, to the first rehearsal of our orchestra after a summer break. I was a relative newcomer, but Robert had been with the orchestra for some time and I wanted to capture his feelings about the new season.

N: What were you feeling?

R: I think that it went well. I got a feeling of recognition that some of the suggestions that I made over the years were being implemented. I met a new violist, and we introduced ourselves and she looked more at ease. So more people were introducing themselves and it felt better.

N: So talk about how you felt being at a rehearsal after not rehearsing with the group all summer. What did it feel like?

R: It was like a homecoming. I wasn't at my best, energy-wise, I was tired that day, but going over there I got energized and it was a great feeling coming back and seeing the people I have been playing with over the years, and making music again together. At the same time, you have new challenges with the music again. I always try to do the best I can with the music. I feel like I'm progressing slowly, but surely. I think that I would have more fun if I could be a better musician, if I could play better, because I wouldn't be so preoccupied with reading the music.

Robert's use of the words "home" and "homecoming" when talking about the orchestra stuck with me after that conversation. When asked what he hoped to gain from the study,

Robert replied:

I hope to learn a bit more about the dynamics that go on when people belong to a group and their motives for some of their behavior.

Robert had a wealth of knowledge and plenty of fascinating stories to contribute to my study. He was well known in the orchestra, and so he was able to provide a lot of insight into the dynamics of the group.

Like Someone You Had Loved Before: Ana's Story

Ana Zobel is a medical researcher in her late 50's and of Filipino descent. Quiet, somewhat reserved, and extremely passionate about music, she enthusiastically agreed to participate in my study. Ana was born in the U.S., but moved back to the Philippines for school, and faced a language barrier because she did not know Tagalog:

My mother enrolled me in a Catholic school upon our arrival, and I quickly discovered that I felt out of place. I spoke only English (I understood the dialect spoken by my father to his sisters, and the dialect spoken by my mother to her siblings. These are two different "languages" since they are from different islands. To understand each other, my parents spoke English at home). So for the first year or so, although English was the language of the classroom, I had no friends in school. I couldn't speak Tagalog, which was the language of the playground, didn't know any of their games, and wasn't familiar with the food. They made fun of me and mimicked my accent.

Ana lacked a sense of belonging at school, but she had strong bonds with her family. As she grew up, her household included her parents, brother and sister, as well as her two aunts, one of whom was a musician. Her aunt gave her some instruction on the piano, and planted an early seed in the appreciation for and love of music. When Ana married, her husband was offered a job in the U.S. and they moved here to start a family. Her three children each played a musical instrument, but her youngest son chose the cello, which influenced Ana powerfully.

N: So let's jump ahead to when you had this very interesting urge to start taking up the cello.

A: Thirteen years ago.

N: Why do you think you did it?

A: It was all my youngest son's fault (laughs). My other son was already doing piano and violin. And my youngest decided on the cello, so I had never heard it up close.

N: And he was really good...?

A: Yes, he became very advanced quite quickly. Even the small cello, he managed to get a good sound out of it. It was the first time I had been that close and had heard it and seen it and touched it myself, and I was fascinated by it. We had a piano, violin, and trumpet in the house, but there didn't seem to be anything familiar about them as much (expect for piano, of course). But I found I had lost the facility for playing piano and I wasn't willing to invest the time to get back to back to where I was before.

N: You said in your autobiography: "There was something about it that was somehow intensely familiar as though I had intimately known it in a previous life."

A: Yeah, I had. I don't like to use the word resonate, because it's a common term to use with an instrument, but that's the only way I can describe it. Like I had heard it a long time ago and I had liked it back then, but I hadn't heard it in a long, long time and all of a sudden, it's like someone's voice. Like someone you had loved before, or who you were very close to, and then you'd been separated

for a long time. And all of a sudden that person might pick up the phone and call you out of the blue and you instantly know who it is. That's the only way I can describe it.

N: So you found a teacher and took lessons during your lunch break. That's interesting, for seven years.

Ana joined the orchestra ten years ago after seeing a flyer at a luthier shop. Her experiences were terrifying at first, but now she considers the weekly rehearsals the highlight of her week.

N: So just describe overall, what was it like for you playing in a group like this for the first time?

A: Oh, it feels like... at first I was terrified, at the very beginning. After the first four measures my first night I was lost. I had to stop playing and watch my stand partner and she had to tell me where we were; I was humiliated. But now, it feels like you're going to someone's... almost like a reunion once a week. It's the same people, with occasional new people who stick out like sore thumbs. You know immediately that they are new. But everybody else, like people in other sections take the trouble to greet you, or I try to greet them also, and say hello. It's really the highlight of my week, orchestra. It's close to my home, so I have time to get my cello from home after work. When I describe the long day to people who aren't musicians, they ask "How can you do that, and more than one day a week?"

N: Because it's not work, it's enjoyment; we love it!

A: Right. And if not for my family, there is a third orchestra that I would join which meets Mondays. I started to feel guilty, so I don't do that. I asked myself, why sit in the office when I could be playing something?

Ana had a few years of early music instruction, and then put it aside until much later in life, when she took up the cello again after being inspired by the sound her son made. Her experiences making music in our orchestra once a week soon grew to many more endeavors, including chamber music, summer music academies and clinics, and two additional orchestras.

Personal Journal Reflection, September 24th, 2014:

Ana's passion for music seems to know no bounds! As an amateur musician, she actively pursues so many venues and gives a large amount of her time in seeking out new ways to enjoy playing the cello. After talking with her tonight for the first time in this extended conversational setting, I was amazed at how much music she participates in. And the fact that she started later in her life gives new meaning to my words of encouragement to all the parents of my students I've told: "It's never too late" to start an instrument when they express regret at not knowing how. Also, it almost seemed to me like Ana is trying to make up for all the lost time she went without music in her life... and that is exciting to me.

When asked what she hoped to learn from the study, Ana replied:

I've found myself being drawn into trying to understand the underlying reason for the close relationship and affinity I have for the orchestra. I never tried to analyze it before; I just knew that it enriches my life immeasurably. Learning about this behavior through your research and methods gives me a better understanding of myself and others too.

Ana's kind-spirited demeanor and passion toward music drew me to her instantly. She was committed to the study right from the start, and was always eager to offer much more than I requested. Further, the stories and experiences of belongingness in her life allowed us to create rich and insightful narratives.

CHAPTER FIVE
A LETTER TO ROBERT SERRANO

Dear Robert,

I have immensely enjoyed our time spent together these past several months. At the start of this study, I knew barely anything about you, and now I consider you a great friend. What initially drew me to you as a potential participant in my study were your warm and friendly disposition as well as your enthusiasm while playing in our orchestra. When you approached me the night of my second rehearsal and asked me to be in your chamber group, it served to plant the seeds of a now blossomed sense of belonging I feel in the orchestra. You have been and continue to be a wealth of knowledge and insight, and of fascinating stories that gave me new appreciation for the dynamics of the belonging we experience while playing in an orchestra.

As you know, our first conversation dealt with mostly biographical stories from your past, and how you ended up in the orchestra. During the second conversation, we touched on your artifacts as well as how you conceptualize sense of belonging in general and while playing with the group. At the third conversation, you can recall that we had a lively discussion about social bonds and how they are formed. Finally, at our fourth conversation I invited both you and Ana to join in, and we conversed about how caring context and frequent interaction can contribute to sense of belonging in the orchestra. I transcribed and restored our conversations, considering the three-dimensional space analysis approach, and I have identified several key themes that I wish to discuss with you further. I included data taken from my own personal observations of the orchestra,

as well as my own journal entries. I welcome your input after you read this letter.

Meanings of Belonging

I identified several key themes that you describe as feelings that manifest themselves as result of belonging to our orchestra. They are: (a) pride and accomplishment, (b) importance and responsibility, (c) being in the present, (d) safety and security, (e) improved social bonds = improved sound, and (f) completeness.

Pride, Accomplishment

Recall when I asked you to bring some artifacts that represented your participation in our orchestra. I told you that they could evoke special feelings about the group, symbolize your participation in it, or just call to mind the nostalgia you may feel. I also brought a few artifacts that evening, including pictures of myself playing in my very first concert with you. I felt a sense of pride and acceptance that night, and the photo helps me remember those feelings. It was my first concert playing in this orchestra, which became integral to my own sense of self-worth and served to fill a void in my life that existed since college. The other picture was of one of me standing in my tuxedo, holding my violin. I took it of myself to use for the front page of a fund-raiser we did for the orchestra last spring:

N: This was the fundraiser online where they wanted us to raise \$500 each for the orchestra.

R: So you dressed up for that?

N: Well, we needed a picture of ourselves on the website, so I wanted to look nice. I wanted to look professional and feel proud of the fundraising. Since this was my first year, I wanted to try to give back to the orchestra as much as I could.

R: Did you raise much money?

N: I raised \$500.

R: That's very good. Wow! That's a good amount. That's a very good amount.

N: I asked my friends and family and I posted it on social media and everything, asking people about it, telling people about it and telling people it was a part of my study, and I would love it if they could help out in any way.

R: So was it hard for you to ask your friends to donate?

N: No, because I wrote that they shouldn't feel obligated and only to donate a little bit if they wanted to, or come to the concert to show their support and some did, as you met three of my friends who came to the concert. But I figured that I should try hard to give something back, you know, in any way that I could. I wanted to try to figure out a way to be useful to the group. It was a little overwhelming at first, trying to fit in and meet new people, and trying to explain to everybody why I was there.

I felt proud to represent the group at the concert, and I felt proud to be able to raise the money as well. When I shared this story with you, you seemed pleased. I remember developing a great respect for you by this time; I had learned about your life and what you went through to get here, and your opinion of me was very meaningful.

Then, you shared your artifacts with me. You brought several concert programs that you had saved:

R: These are my collection of concert programs.

N: Why did you keep them?

R: I wanted to have a memento of my experiences with the orchestra.

N: Why?

R: It was something with my name on it that shows that I participated in those concerts with the orchestra. It fascinated me to see my name on the programs because to this day I cannot believe I am actually playing with the orchestra.

N: Why not?

R: Because I never thought I was a good enough player to be part of a big orchestra like this. I always thought that I lacked the necessary skills to play in a symphony orchestra. But then, the orchestra is very accommodating; they take players of all levels.

N: When you look at the program, just leaf through all of them, the old ones too, what feelings do they evoke in you?

R: I get a feeling of accomplishment and kind of nostalgia when I see a program from way back.

Years ago, you felt that you would never be good enough to participate in a large, accomplished community orchestra such as ours. You felt that you would never be a good enough musician to be able to handle the music. Now you have been playing with our orchestra for quite some time, and you are very successful. You feel pride and accomplishment at this feat, and rightly so. Your feelings of belonging to the orchestra give you this sense of pride because as an outsider looking in, you once felt as if it was unattainable. Robert, would you please elaborate more on this sensation?

I echoed your feelings of accomplishment. I too feel like I accomplished a lot in my life to be able to not only sit and participate in such a dynamic orchestra, but also to get the opportunity to study it and learn from those who participate in it, ideally contributing to the body of research in my field. Judging from your stories of growing up in Cuba and then coming here, and the hardships you faced, it would make sense that your feelings of accomplishment are warranted! I would like to know more about what it feels like to achieve so much in your life and to have come so far.

Importance, Responsibility

Robert, your story about getting to sit first stand in the viola section at a concert was interesting. When I asked you to elaborate on it, you told me that it made you feel important to be sitting in a role with so much responsibility:

R: And this particular concert was videotaped, but what was special to me was that they actually put an excerpt of the video on the orchestra website. And since I was sitting right up front with the principal violist, everybody could see me.

N: How did that make you feel?

R: It made me feel important. It was a big responsibility, being up front. But the principal violist asked me to come up front and play with her. It was an honor. One of my co-members emailed and said – “oh, you are on the website!” And that’s how I found out that I was on the excerpt from the concert.

When I heard the story, I felt compelled to compare it to my own experiences playing in the demonstration group in high school. I was given a huge responsibility and I did not take it lightly. I felt important, but as I noted in my autobiography, I also felt a sense of joy in seeing the looks on the kids’ faces as I demonstrated the instruments. I am curious as to how the time spent sitting in the front of the section (and this was your first time, was it not?) affected your overall sense of belonging. Did you feel like more of a leader? Did you feel that your section members were depending on you to help them with their music? Did you feel like you belonged in that spot? When I have led sections, I felt tremendous responsibility to not only play my part impeccably, but also to provide guidance to those in my section.

At a later conversation we had, we discussed your participation in a sub-group of the orchestra that performs for the community in various capacities:

R: Well, I've belonged to it since I joined, many years ago. At first I was having problems with the music, and then I became more comfortable. Basically, it's a group of orchestra members who go out to nursing homes, senior citizen centers, hospitals, and usually play chamber music- mostly strings and sometimes flutes too. The music level is easy to medium. I have enjoyed playing with them because it's a good feeling; it's very rewarding when you play for the sick or elderly, and you bring them some music and you see that they are very grateful.

N: Do you feel like you know the people in the group well?

R: Yes, I think so. Too well maybe! Sometimes they hold me to too high a standard. But I like to keep it more relaxed. People come and go in the group, so I just like to enjoy it and be less strict about it.

N: So why do you stay with it?

R: Because I enjoy playing for the people.

N: You've been doing it for eight years, do you think that you're reluctant to quit?

R: I figure it's a chance to keep practicing the music and keep learning. I'm using outreach partly to get enjoyment for playing for people, but also there is self-interest. I'm improving my skills of playing in public. And I'm learning things. I don't want to close the door on it permanently. Even though I've had some bad experiences in it, I enjoy it. I enjoy playing.

N: I find it interesting that you're still in the outreach after all these years, despite some issues you've had in it.

R: Like I said... I enjoy playing for the people, and I'm improving my skills.

You talked about how you have been with the group for many years, and even though you do not always agree with everything that goes on there, you are reluctant to quit. Do you feel like since you are so invested in the group that it is your responsibility to perform with them? You have such a vested interest and long history with it that I am wondering if you are reluctant to *break the bonds* you have formed with this group. I sensed a hesitation in your voice when we discussed it, and I am guessing that you were

trying to be as polite as possible when we were conversing about the events that transpired in this group. I would love to hear more about why you continue with this group, aside from the joy you get while you play for the community, and if responsibility is a factor. Later, I will delve into the caring context of interaction you experience in this group versus that of the large orchestra. Please keep this on your mind until then.

Being in the Present

You mentioned another feeling you get when playing in the orchestra that goes hand in hand with your feelings of belonging, and that is your feeling of “being in the present.” You described it as an “escape” from the problems and worries of life and that it was very therapeutic:

R: I like playing in the orchestra because when I'm playing with them, I'm in the present. I don't have to try to remind myself to be in the present. It's such a powerful experience. Nothing else exists but the moment. Very rarely do I think about anything else; my family, problems that I have at home, at work. So in a way, playing in the orchestra is like an escape, I'm just enthralled in the moment. I feel like I'm present and nothing else exists. And I think that it's very therapeutic; it's sort of like a meditation, but you are completely awake. All of your senses are attuned to the music; you are focused on the music with all your energy.

N: What about the sensation you get when you play the music, and you're focused, and you are also aware that everyone else around you is also experiencing that? Like when I'm playing, when I'm playing by myself, violin, it's very therapeutic, and I'm very focused, but it's a whole different experience playing with a group, because I know that I'm contributing to a group effort to making the kind of music that I couldn't make by myself. So, that experience of playing with the group is very profound for me.

R: For me it's the same way. The way your performance blends in with the other instruments, it's a wonderful experience. You are making a sound and contributing to the harmony of the whole orchestra. It's really a unique experience. It is very joyful. And especially when you know your part well and you don't make mistakes, it's rewarding. I guess it activates some part of your brain that gives you joy.

This conversation led us directly to the topic of safety and security, which I will delve into more below. When we talked at a later date about being in the present while playing, you elaborated on it:

R: If we are always anticipating the future we're missing out on our life, and music forces me to be in the now. When I'm in the group playing, the music makes me concentrate on the magic of it. All of a sudden, you forget about your problems. When you are in the present, you are happy and there is no suffering. If you are able to be 100% in the present there is no suffering. Playing in the orchestra does that for me. It forces me to be alive!

I sense that this is one of the main reasons you choose to play in the orchestra. These wonderful emotions you are describing must contribute to your well-being and livelihood. Surely, the ability to block out your problems and stresses and just focus on the music and “magic of it all” goes a long way in helping you enjoy the orchestra. When I play the violin by myself, I can do what you are describing, but not to the same degree. I can immerse myself in the music and the experience of making a beautiful sound, but it is missing the element of sociality that I believe provides a key ingredient.

Safety, Security

During our second conversation, Robert, I felt we delved very deeply into not only how you and I perceive feelings of belongingness in general, but also how they affect us personally. You gave me remarkable insight into this concept, and echoed the research of many psychologists. We both talked about how the sense of comfort we can get while playing in a group contributes to the sounds that we can produce. The sense of security and safety in our section allows us to play without fear of being reprimanded or humiliated, and this sense of security stems from the bonds we formed with our section members. We also agreed that social elements directly contribute to the feelings we get

while playing and that we are made to feel safe and secure if we share bonds with other members. Robert, would you please reflect on the excerpts from our conversation below, where you described how you felt while playing in our orchestra?

R: You know, the fact that you feel more comfortable when you know them at the personal level, and that comfort gives you a better ability to play. You're not afraid to make mistakes. You know that you're not gonna be judged harshly if you make a mistake. You know the people surrounding you. They're not strangers to you. There's very little tension in that respect. Since I didn't get the same feeling when I tried another orchestra and I quit right after the first rehearsal because this orchestra is like a family and that one was not. I didn't get that feeling in the other orchestra that I tried. There is a comfort zone here that I didn't experience anywhere else, precisely because I know the people, and have known them for many years and also because it's part of the orchestra's mission of all levels, regardless of their proficiency. So, you don't have to prove anything. So you can be yourself and play at the level you can play, and you know that you're not going to be reprimanded if you make a mistake. They don't expect perfection from you.

You discussed your experiences in another orchestra that you tried and noted that because the feelings of security were missing, you did not continue there. You also referred to this “comfort zone” later that evening when describing the general concept of belongingness and what it can provide:

R: Belonging makes you feel peaceful, comfortable. It releases your stress. I know when I go to Miami and I spend five days with my family, it's a great feeling. It's hard to explain. The comfort like a little puppy feels when he's with his mother. (laughs) Belonging is something that provides that comfort zone. It's like tranquility to overcome some of the obstacles and discomfort that you experience in life. If you don't have that sense of belonging, I think everything is harder. Like a kid that can venture out to do things, he always comes home to his family. That's your anchor, that's your tribe. That's why you are able to take risks. If you don't have that sense of belonging I think you are always afraid to take chances.

Your family was important to you while growing up, and continues to be to this day. In your autobiography of belongingness, you mentioned that you felt protected by your

extended family, particularly your grandfather and uncles. The safety and security one can feel in their own family is the earliest memory of belonging that many people have; you and I, as well as Ana discussed this early memory. In an orchestra, the way we perform can be affected by that sense of security and that feeling of family we may experience. Later on, we discussed the parallels between one's family and the bonds we can form in an orchestra:

R: There are some parallels in that you feel comfortable playing with the orchestra as you would feel being around your family. So there's a warmth that you get that is very similar with both. And then there is the reward part. When you have a caring, loving family you experience some of that in the orchestra. Not at the same level of course. You look forward to meeting family members just like you look forward to meeting your friends in the orchestra. We belong to something.

N: Why do you think we need to feel like we belong?

R: It's part of our nature; it's part of our make-up. Our DNA. Humans were not meant to be alone by themselves.

N: That's who we are as human.

R: Right. And we need approval. It means a lot to me I guess when I got the approval from my father when I did something and I got his approval, and my mother's approval. We're always looking for approval; we need other people as a guide to tell us if we are on the right track. Unless we have those parameters, we don't know if we are doing the right thing. So that's why when you go out your mother tells you what is wrong and what is right. You're always looking for approval, even if you were really advanced in your spiritual life, you wouldn't care about these people's approval, but the truth of it is that it's important.

N: Transfer that into orchestra. How does it come into play?

R: The approval that you're looking for in the orchestra is that you play correctly.

What did you mean by this, Robert? Did you mean that if we play correctly then the members will approve of us more? As humans we crave acceptance, and perhaps what

you are saying is that the orchestra members will give us the acceptance we need, but is it conditional upon playing correctly. I think we would both agree that our orchestra is a stress-free environment and, as I recalled above you said you felt a comfort zone while playing, and that “you don’t have to prove anything. So you can be yourself and play at the level you can play, and you know that you’re not going to be reprimanded if you make a mistake.” So I gather that you feel comfortable playing because you are surrounded by people you have bonded with, but yet you still want approval from them and you want to do your best and play the best you can. Is this correct? I believe this topic warrants some further discussion and I welcome your input.

Increased Social Bonds = Improved Sound

Nothing can compare to the feelings I get in an orchestra when we are rehearsing or performing and I look around and see the other members enjoying the music and experiencing what I am experiencing. Do you also take time to observe your fellow members while they are playing, Robert? Above, I recalled our conversations about feeling safe and secure in the orchestra and experiencing a comfort zone, especially if we have social bonds with those we are making music with. But how can this contribute to the sound we are producing individually and as a group? For me, I play better when I am more confident, and I am more confident if I am more comfortable. Sitting next to someone whom I share a social bond with allows me to play with more confidence because I know she will not judge me if I make a mistake. You remarked how you felt this way as well. Recall this conversation we had about our sections and the bonds we formed within them.

R: Since the time you've been in the orchestra, have you made any friends? Have you bonded with anyone?

N: Yes, but mostly in the first violin section, because that's where I sit. For example, Stacey, because I'm her stand partner. Grace, because we're both teachers, and we talk about teaching. Also, Andrew and Alecia. They're both very nice, and Alecia always asks me for fingerings and help with the hard parts and stuff. Ji Soo, one of my students who also plays with the orchestra. I introduced her to the group, and we often chat about school orchestra. She gets a kick out of playing in the same section as her teacher (laughs).

I noted at that point that the concept of proximity was coming into play. Since I sit near these people, I was more easily able to form bonds with them. Sometimes, that is all it takes to form a bond with someone, by merely being close to them. In my situation, it was easy because all of the members of my section are so nice. You continued:

R: It's been my philosophy that if you get to know a lot of people you create a comfort zone that allows you to perform the music better, in my opinion. Because I think that when you have that comfort, you're not afraid to make mistakes and they're more bound to forgive you if you do. Whereas, if, for example, suppose you don't know your stand partner, you feel like you're not playing right, that maybe they will judge you if you make a mistake. I'm a firm believer that the more you socialize with your orchestral mates, the better the sound. I'm also a firm believer that the orchestra can go even further in terms of this.

I agree that our orchestra can go further with social bonding. Later, I will ask you to reflect on ways in which the orchestra provided opportunities for bonding and what more can be done. After seeing the social bonding that takes place and then hearing the results, I strongly believe that there is a relationship between the two. Conversing with you and Ana also provided valuable insight into this phenomenon. Additionally, reflecting on my own experiences as a music teacher, I can see the social bonds that are formed within my own orchestra classes from the start of sixth grade until they leave me at the end of eighth. Obviously, fostering a sense of belonging among my students in my classes is an

important part of my approach to teaching. Every student is welcome, regardless of their ability level, just as in our orchestra, Robert. In my classes, there are tremendous gaps in ability, from beginners to extremely advanced. So that each student feels successful, I choose music that everyone can enjoy, and I often modify the music so that even beginners can play with the full group, sitting alongside students who have years of experience. I offer many opportunities for chamber music in order to get students interacting with each other in smaller groups. You and I bonded largely as a part of our participation in a string trio with Ana, as this setting allows for more socializing. Further, when I reflect upon my time spent in high school orchestra, I recalled feeling an incredible sense of belonging to that group and how it dramatically shaped who I am today. The friendships I made there and the life lessons I learned nourished my love of music and of sharing it with others. Without the social bonds I formed in high school orchestra, I would not have enjoyed it at the level I did, and it would not have affected me in such a profound way.

Completeness

I want to delve deeper into a topic we discussed at our second conversation, Robert, and that is *completeness*. As you may recall you expressed the sentiment that feeling like you belong contributes to your completeness as a human being:

R: You would live very badly without belonging to anything or having any type of human relation. Yes, you could survive, but you would not be a healthy person emotionally or psychologically. You would not be a whole person. You become whole when you actually relate to other people. Because I do believe that we are part of a bigger body. We are made complete when we relate to other people and we draw from the experiences of other people. We draw from the knowledge of other people. If you are religious and believe in God, I don't think that God gave the exclusive to anybody. I think that the way you find the mysteries of life by

relating to people of different background is the genius behind the Creator. He made us all so that we are compelled to reach out and be with other human beings, and find out what they think, and ask their opinions, and to relate to them. In that process, that's when you become a whole person. That's when you start deciphering all the mysteries that surround you.

I was fascinated by this statement and it made me start thinking more deeply about drawing from the experiences of others to achieve our complete selves. Each person in our orchestra brings something different to the table, and each has his or her own life experiences. By conversing, spending time with, and rehearsing and performing with you and Ana I am drawing on your experiences and in the process becoming more complete. Is this what you mean? In what ways could we apply this more practically to our concept of belongingness within the orchestra? It is somewhat intangible to say that we can be more complete people by drawing on the knowledge of those who surround us without putting it into practice and observing the results. I agree that we would not be emotionally or psychologically healthy if we lacked any sense of belonging, and the research substantiates that, but I am wondering how our concept of belonging to an orchestra makes us feel more complete and in what ways it can emotionally or even physically manifest itself.

I want to share with you a journal entry I wrote one evening late last year after rehearsal. In it, I reflected upon learning from those around me, particularly those in my own section:

Personal Journal Reflection, October 15th, 2014:

I love my section! It's small, only seven of us this year, but we work together so well. We're all different ages, from 13 to about mid 60's. Amateurs, professionals, students. During rehearsal tonight, even though we shouldn't, people in my section chat quietly and laugh and joke. My stand partner, Stacey, was telling me about her experiences in music throughout her life, and that she was getting back into it after many years of inactivity. She said she regretted not continuing with the violin after high school but is so glad to be back into it, and a part of a great orchestra. Peter is a lawyer and he was telling me about a case he is working on and that he finds playing with the orchestra to be a great stress-reliever. Grace is pregnant with her first child and is starting to show. A woman who sits near me, but in the second violin section, asked me for help with her music later and I gladly agreed to go over it with her. I am learning about the lives and experiences of my section-mates and in doing so, I'm becoming more of a presence in the group but also I'm making some good friends. Looking back to last spring when I first started, I was nervous and anxious, partly because I didn't know anybody and the concept of performing in a group was partly forgotten. Now, I can relate to those around me and I'm comfortable and happy being among them.

From this story I can start to put more of a practical use to your idea of drawing knowledge and experience from others to enhance our sense of belonging. In learning about those around me, those who I perform music with, I started to think of my own experiences there in a new way, from the point of view of others. The reciprocal relationship became apparent: The woman was depending on me to help her with her music, and I was depending on her support, presence, and social capacity as a new friend. In engaging with others in my section, I also came to have new understandings of their lives and who they are as people, and in doing so I felt more connected to them. We can discuss more about sub-groups later on, but for now I want to thank you for your insight on completeness, Robert.

Frequent Interaction and the Formation of Sub-groups

The theory of belongingness, as described by Baumeister and Leary (1995), has two parts: frequent interaction and persistent caring. Robert, in our final conversation, you, Ana, and I discussed the first of these:

N: Baumeister and Leary's belongingness theory is partially defined by the combination of "frequent" interaction and a caring context. Is "weekly" considered frequently?

R: Yes, I think so, yes. But we have to complement that with some social activities as well.

A: I think it's just enough, but it's also over the course of years. There's a core group in the orchestra that has been there for at least five years. And then there are those that come and go. And the conductors change sometimes too. I would almost disregard the conductor. What's the longest we've even had one?

R: Three years I think.

A: So, yes, weekly is enough.

R: We're also lucky that we have a long season, from September to May. Some orchestras have shorter seasons.

A: They have bigger gaps between concerts.

R: Right, we're pretty consistent with our rehearsals.

A: Right after the concert we meet again, yes.

R: So to answer the question, yes, we meet frequently enough to develop the belongingness. What's missing is the social aspect.

We will come back to the missing social aspect later on, but for now I am glad that you, Ana, and I all agree that meeting weekly for our two and a half hour rehearsals is considered frequently enough. We must consider the summer months when the orchestra does not meet. During those months, both you and Ana noted that you use other musical

endeavors to substitute for orchestra, such as chamber music, outreach groups, and string clinics because we are deprived of the frequent interaction of the weekly rehearsals.

These activities serve to quench your thirst for not only music in the absence of orchestra during the summer, but also your belongingness needs. We rehearsed weekly in our trio all summer and that, for me, was a good temporary substitution for orchestra. Without it, I would have sought out some other opportunity to be a part of a group. Do you feel the same way, Robert?

Our frequent interactions seem to be primarily with those in our own sections.

However, you may be an exception to that rule, Robert! I wrote this after one rehearsal:

Personal Journal Reflection, October 8th, 2014:

I was observing Robert during break tonight. What a social butterfly! He engaged in conversations with several different people in just 10 minutes. He had a bag of pretzels and offered some to someone. He shared an amusing story to someone else. He walks among the orchestra, laughing, talking, and generally just having a good time.

That was one of the reasons that drew me to you: your ability to relate to others and to engage in open and honest dialogue with them. During breaks, when many people stay in their seats and practice, look at their phones, or talk to their own section members, you navigate your way through the rehearsal room and strike up conversations with whoever you meet. That aside, we both agree that we are closest to our section members. I told you stories of interacting frequently with my own section members and how it affected me, but then I was interested in more detailed knowledge of how you frequently interact with your section. Recall this conversation:

N: So talk about your relationships with the people in the viola section.

R: I am always joking around with the teenagers in the section. I like to act “childlike” and joke around with them. What I do is I go down to their level, and I pretend I am a teenager also, and it’s fun. Maybe it’s because I am longing for that time, and I wish I could relive it. I can relate to them. But I can also become an adult and bond with the others as well. For example, I talk to a woman in her 80s in the section; I relate to everyone in the section. I try to adjust my delivery and interaction according to the age group.

N: We talked about proximity. So why do you think you’ve made these bonds with these people? Is it because you’re sitting with them and able to interact with them more easily? And you’re able to interact with them better?

R: Right, and besides, I learn from them, I have fun with them. It’s about playing the music and it’s also about having fun. It releases stress. The viola section has a lot of easy-going people in it. In the orchestra, you see people who are approachable and those who are not so much. I try to say hello to everyone, and introduce myself. And make small talk. But it doesn’t work with everybody. Some people have a wall and they don’t allow you to get close to them and allow the bonding to materialize. And that’s fine.

I found it fascinating and admirable that you could relate so easily to the younger members of your section. That would not be easy for many people your age. How does it affect your comfort level within the section when you can easily interact with others there? I am guessing that it is a tremendous boon to your confidence and personal affect in feeling like you are someone those kids can not only look up to, but also enjoy your company. Am I correct?

Our time spent participating in the large ensemble is largely made up of rehearsing, which gives us very limited time to interact with others on the social level as a group, or even one-on-one. Therefore, there have been many opportunities for smaller sub-groups to form that can allow for more intimate engagement with each other. You, I, and Ana participated in several of these sub-groups and they helped nurture our sense of

belonging in profound ways. For example, you and Ana were a part of a community service group that consists of several players who go out and perform for nursing homes, hospitals, and schools in order to spread music and good cheer around. In this group, you made new friends and improved your musicianship, but also encountered some challenges. We had a lengthy conversation in which you expressed some of these. Do you remember? Afterwards, we discussed the reasons you are still with the group:

N: So why do you stay with it?

R: Because I enjoy playing for the people.

N: You've been doing it for eight years, do you think that you're reluctant to quit?

R: I figure it's a chance to keep practicing the music and keep learning. I'm using outreach partly to get enjoyment for playing for people, but also there is self-interest. I'm improving my skills of playing in public. And I'm learning things. I don't want to close the door on it permanently. Even though I've had some bad experiences in it, I enjoy it. I enjoy playing.

N: I find it interesting that you're still in the outreach after all these years, despite some issues you've had in it.

R: Like I said, I enjoy playing for the people, and I'm improving my skills!

Robert, I know you have been with this sub-group for many years now, and I know that you get great personal satisfaction from the fact that your skills as a violist are improving, but considering the stress it puts on you—stress that is not present in the full orchestra—it is interesting that you choose to stay with it. What is lacking in this group is the “comfort zone” you spoke so eloquently of, and therefore the caring context is missing. I ask again, could it be that you are simply reluctant to break the bonds with the others in the group because they are such strong social bonds? I would appreciate your additional thoughts on this matter.

Other sub-groups that are often formed in our orchestra are chamber groups. I have special feelings for the power of bonding within this type of group simply because it is what allowed me to get to know you and Ana so well. There are several chamber groups that were formed by members of the orchestra, and they meet with regularity. Our trio, as you know, meets weekly, and we delight in performing for the community. At each rehearsal, I look forward to not only playing incredible music with you and Ana, but also in our lively discussions and debates. Robert, I think you would agree that we learned so much about each other in our trio, way more than we could have in just the full group. As a result, we formed strong bonds that we take back with us to the orchestra that increase our comfort level, safety, security, acceptance, and completeness there. The trio is the perfect caring context not only to supplement the orchestra, but also to work together with it to foster increased bonding. It is that concept that I will ask you to reflect on next, if you will.

Caring Context and the Building of Bonds

I would like explore now the concept of caring context, as that is the second part of Baumeister and Leary's theory of belongingness. Earlier in my letter I recalled a conversation we had about the parallels between a family and an orchestra, specifically our orchestra. Recall saying: "When you have a caring, loving family you experience some of that in the orchestra. Not at the same level of course. You look forward to meeting family members just like you look forward to meeting your friends in the orchestra." And then you compared the feelings of safety and security one can feel in their family to the feeling we get in the orchestra. You also compared our orchestra to a

family when you expressed concern that a different orchestra you tried did not make you feel that way: “Compared to other orchestras it is really comfortable. It is like family here, and very comfortable.” You also on a few occasions expressed the desire for the conductor and administrators to do more to nurture the “family feeling” within the orchestra. These caring contexts that can and do occur in our orchestra and with the people you have formed bonds with go hand in hand with your descriptions of how *you* perceive belongingness in the group, Robert. Above, you described several feelings you experience as a result of your participation and these feelings nurture your sense of belonging. Do you think you would experience them as fully without the caring context the orchestra and its members provide? Speaking for myself, I experienced most of what you described above, and the context of our orchestra was the perfect setting.

Earlier, I remarked on the concept of proximity in building bonds and how it helps us more easily form them. We also had a discussion about this:

N: So who are your friends inside the orchestra?

R: Oh, inside the orchestra? Well I guess you're more close to the people in your own section.

N: Why do you think that is?

R: Because you're so close to them, in their proximity. It's obvious. It used to be that your friends are people who are near you, on in your neighborhood, or in your school or town.

N: But does the proximity rule hold true in the orchestra?

R: I think so, definitely in the orchestra. I used to play in the second violin section, so that's why I made some friends there too. Stacey, for instance, I was friends with her, but I lost touch because I moved to the viola section, and she moved to the first violin section. I was friends with two flutists. I used to joke around with them a lot; we had inside jokes.

N: It's so interesting that you mentioned proximity and how it affects making social bonds with people, because according to Baumeister and Leary, who developed the theory of belongingness, that is one of their main tenets.

So it would seem that we both formed bonds quickly with those who sit around us. Other ways in which you built bonds with members of the orchestra are social events, which you mentioned there are a dearth of lately:

R: We just need more ways to interact personally with each other, and to create more of a family feeling.

A: I know when the last conductor left they circulated something to sign to wish him luck.

R: I think the orchestra should do more of that, to make us feel even more welcome.

A: There is a newsletter, but I don't think anyone is taking care of it right now.

R: Yeah, it used to be monthly.

A: It would be a good place to keep us informed for new events happening in people's lives.

R: It would help the orchestra...

A: ...feel more connected.

R: Yes, and help the feeling of community.

A: They need someone with a lot of time to do that, it would be very valuable.

R: This year they announced the new members to everybody.

A: The administrator introduces new members to the sections.

N: I think they do that more on a section basis – they do a good job of that.

R: They need a Facebook or a blog or something to help keep us more connected.

A: There is a Facebook page.

R: Not like that one. I mean one where all the orchestra members can post and help them stay connected.

N: How would that help the sense of belonging that we feel?

R: I think that you would know more about the people you play with at the personal level. Like what's happening with their life, what their interests are, where they're going. I think that there is room for improvement.

N: So you wish more stuff like that would happen?

R: Definitely. More social activities that are organized, either impromptu or pre-planned. I think in the past, most of the events are focused around fundraising.

N: We have the end of the year party, which is really fun.

A: Yeah, and sometimes they do unexpected things, like people bring refreshments for rehearsals, which is nice.

R: We should have a yearly dinner for the members. Where you dress up, bring your spouse, and we don't have to pay for it, or get a cheaper group deal. I would love to participate in something like that. It's not about the food; it's about meeting your co-players in a social atmosphere.

A: Right, especially those you don't sit near.

R: Yeah, I still don't know some of the wind and brass players. Or the coaches.

During the above conversation you expressed concern that there are not enough opportunities for social bonding going on in the orchestra. You strongly believe that there is plenty of interaction, but just not enough of the social variety. Going back to your philosophy that “if you get to know a lot of people you create a comfort zone that allows you to perform the music better,” it would seem that you make it your mission to interact socially as much as you can, partly in order to improve your playing. Is this accurate? I agree that there could be more social activities within the group to further nurture the members' senses of belonging. I asked you and Ana to compare our orchestra

with one that lacks any kind of social elements, and only focuses on rehearsal and concerts; for instance, an auditioned orchestra with strict performance requirements. You both agreed that in order to foster the sense of belonging, like the kind that we all feel in our orchestra, social engagement is necessary:

N: Is it reasonable to speculate that membership in an ensemble with strict audition and performance requirements might not be the kind of caring environment that would promote positive socioemotional outcomes?

R: I think that in our orchestra since there are no auditions. It's a good thing in that it takes the pressure off of you.

N: Right, you both talked about not feeling bad about making mistakes and not feeling pressured. And that was important to you.

R: Right, because the expectation from the conductor is not there and you can be more relaxed. Compared to other orchestras it is really comfortable because of this. It is like family here, and very comfortable. On the other hand, it's also a little dangerous because it's not as easy as you might think it is. You do have to know how to play! Some have not lasted because it's not that easy; it takes work and practice.

A: To compare a more selective orchestra to the corporate world, where you come in with a résumé and experience, and you apply for a job and they take you in. I can see how you could still gain that sense of belonging.

R: You will develop a sense of belonging over time whether it's selective or not, I think.

A: It depends on time spent together, and like you said: the caring context and frequency.

R: It's all relative...

N: But, what I'm talking about is comparing an orchestra like ours to one where you audition to get in, and everyone is expected to be able to play the music right away. Therefore, the rehearsals are more limited, and social elements are very limited.

R: Ok, right, yes, you need the opportunity to interact to nurture the belongingness. You need the social elements.

A: Right, bonding together takes time and lots of interaction.

Since I have only been a member of this orchestra for less than a year as of this writing, I can only comment on the social engagements I was aware of in that short time. The social activities I know of so far are: several pizza nights, which give the members opportunities to interact; breaks during each rehearsal in which we can socialize; a gala party and auction; and an end of the year party. There are others that I was not a part of, such as special concerts for chamber music, and outreach groups. There was also a big trip to perform in Washington D.C. a few years ago that Ana spoke about. I liked your ideas on additional social opportunities, and I would love to discuss them further, Robert. I believe that these social gatherings are the essence of the caring context we are exploring which is necessary to foster a sense of belonging. It is during these events that the seeds of friendships can be planted and nurtured, and additionally, we can use them as settings to “draw from the experiences of others,” as you said.

Recall when we discussed the breaking of bonds that you had formed with members that had moved away. You expressed regret that they left and that you missed them. Of note were members of the second violin section, in which you used to play before switching to viola. You recalled a doctor and a nurse, both of whom you bonded with and who have since left. Also, you knew a very kind woman who did a very generous thing:

R: Particularly I remember one summer, four or five years ago. There was this lady who played the cello who was from Scotland, and she was the nicest lady. She told me, “Robert, I couldn’t attend the workshop, would you like to take my place?” And I asked how much, and she said it was free! She gave me her spot in the workshop for free. I’ll never forget that.

How did that make you feel inside? I know that this woman is no longer part of the orchestra, and I am curious if you still keep in touch with her. I ask that you reflect more on the breaking of social bonds and reluctance to do so.

Robert, I wish to conclude this letter to you by asking you to reflect upon what you have read and try to put your experiences into the framework of the main concepts of my study: Your meanings of belongingness within the orchestra, your descriptions of caring context within the orchestra, your meanings of frequent interaction, and your meanings of the forming and breaking of social bonds. After you have thought about this, I welcome you to respond so that we may continue the dialogue.

Sincerely,

Nick

CHAPTER SIX
A LETTER TO ANA ZOBEL

Dear Ana,

This past year has been so rewarding for me in getting to know you. I feel as if I know you so well now after all we shared with each other. I learned a great deal about myself from conversing with you, interacting with you, and just building our friendship. That night we met, when Robert introduced us and you both asked me to be in your string trio, I sensed a kindred spirit. What I was not expecting was the passion and commitment you bring to your music, and to your love of the cello and sharing that love with others. Robert said it perfectly one night: "I've never met someone with more enthusiasm for the music than you, Ana. You have that energy for it, that passion!" I look forward to getting to know you even more in the future, and am excited to continue sharing our stories and growing musically together.

Looking back, our first conversation together dealt with biographical stories from your past, and how you ended up in the orchestra. At our second conversation, we examined the artifacts I asked you to bring in, and we discussed how these help us think about sense of belonging within the group. During the third conversation, we discussed social bonding and the ways in which we form them. Finally, at our fourth conversation I invited both you and Robert to join in, and we conversed about how caring context and frequent interaction can contribute to sense of belonging in the orchestra. Ana, I transcribed and restored our conversations and identified several key themes that I wish

to discuss with your further. I included data taken from my own personal observations of the orchestra, as well as my own journal entries. I welcome your input after you read this letter.

Meanings of Belonging

We identified several key themes that you describe as feelings that manifest themselves as result of belonging to our orchestra. They are: (a) responsibility; (b) welcoming, comfort, acceptance, and safety leading to improved personal affect; (c) familial feeling, reunion; and (d) reluctance to break bonds, substitution. I have included questions and points for further reflection in each of these sections that will help us draw out even more meanings, which I will then present in a later chapter of my dissertation. I welcome you to be as candid as you wish in your responses.

Responsibility

Ana, in our many conversations and correspondences together, you spoke frequently of the responsibility that comes with the feelings of belonging to this group. To you, it is very important to take on the duties of cello section member, orchestra member, and responsible adult. First, recall this story you shared with me about an experience you had very recently with a young student who was a new member of the orchestra. A friend of yours, Greg, who is a teacher in the orchestra, contacted you and asked you to be this student's stand partner and to help her out on her first night, and you gladly obliged:

Greg introduced me to the girl and I invited her to sit in the chair I saved for her. She didn't have the music but that was fine since I figured we would share a stand and my music anyway. "I've haven't seen this music before. And there a lot of

notes for the cello!" she said (it was a four-part early Mozart symphony) and I said "Well we only rehearsed it once last year so we're not very familiar with it either." While the conductor was working with the violins, she looked around curiously, "Have these people been here very long?" "Some of them have been here for several years," I said, "like me. Others are checking the orchestra out, like you. I think you're the youngest here today."

We counted out our notes and she did fine. I counted our rests and tried to cue her in when our entrances came up. By the time the conductor had us take the music from the top a second time, she was already more comfortable and could laugh at his jokes.

At the end, Greg came over and said to her: "You had a panicked look on your face at first then the next time I glanced at you, you seemed less nervous." I walked with her towards the waiting area and met her mom. I suggested she fill out an application so the office has her information, and I got her copies of the music. I said to her: "I hope you decide to come back." She turned to her mom, "I really liked it!"

I remember what it felt like to be surrounded by strangers who all knew each other and the music, and have to sight-read. It must have been extra stressful knowing her teacher is sitting right across from her.

I chose this story because I felt that this little girl was the orchestra's guest for the evening and it was our responsibility to make sure that she felt welcomed. We all wanted her to have a good time playing with us for a couple of hours even if she decides not to come back. It was a chance to show how we all help each other.

So Greg and I hope that we made it memorable and that it encourages her to join an orchestra, even if it isn't ours.

Ana, I was touched by this story and I want to take a moment to reflect on it, and I hope you do as well. You felt a personal responsibility to help the girl feel welcome that evening. You went out of your way in guiding her through the music, encouraging her, offering advice, and following up at the end of the rehearsal so that she would feel encouraged to return. I believe that, in some way, you were trying to get her to feel the same feelings of belonging that you feel: warm, welcoming, comfortable feelings that

would put her at ease in the anxious state she was in. Is this correct? Would you feel this much of a sense of responsibility if you lacked feelings of belonging to the group?

Another time, you spoke about your responsibility to the group when we were conversing about doing our best while playing:

I'm trying to be more aware of the other parts, and I'm trying to listen to other people more, but also sometimes I'm painfully aware of when my intonation is just not there. So I feel like I've let the group down if I make a mistake and I have to stop playing. I feel personally responsible for trying to be better the next time.

You feel as if you need to play your best and that you will let down the group if you make mistakes. This must be a very strong feeling, Ana, to make you stop playing. I wonder, do you think that the section will think less of you if you make mistakes and do not stop playing? Have you ever experienced a situation in the orchestra where people around you judge you for your mistakes, reprimand you, or put you down? I gather not, but your own sense of responsibility toward the group is so strong that it must counteract this. Please elaborate on this.

You once again mentioned feeling responsible when you were asked to sit in the first stand:

A: Wonder of wonders! One night the conductor asked me to sit up front. So I ended up in front!

N: How did you feel sitting in front?

A: I was nervous at first. I felt the conductor's confidence in me was entirely misplaced! (laughs). The music now is much more difficult. It was good for building my confidence. I try to pay attention to how the other section leaders lead their sections. So I try to count carefully and help lead the section to the best of my ability.

These and other stories you shared with me, Ana, speak volumes of your own integrity.

You feel a personal sense of responsibility toward the orchestra, and this stems from the fact that you feel you belong to it. I also noticed that your attendance at rehearsals has been impeccable, despite the fact that you are in two other orchestras and our trio, which all meet weekly. I know you are participating in these groups because you enjoy them, but I wonder if you also feel obligated to attend every week. You are a fixture in the cello section; your presence there doubtless makes others feel comfortable and welcome. You are someone that the members know they can go to for a kind and friendly conversation. You also participate in the community service outreach group with Robert, and I will recall our conversations about that later. Your presence in the group goes far beyond mere participation; rather, you feel a vested interest in the group's success. Based on our conversations, Ana, your responsibility stems directly from the sense of belonging that you developed over the past ten years in the orchestra. I believe that if you were deprived of the feelings of belonging you describe your responsibility in learning the music and being accountable in that regard could suffer. Do you agree? Also, would you like to lead the cello section again? If so, why? If not, why not?

You faced a dilemma recently that directly challenged your sense of responsibility toward our group and toward another orchestra you are in. Recently, a concert for both groups was scheduled on the same day and you had to choose which to attend. After deep thought for several weeks, you came to the conclusion that the other orchestra needed you more and chose to do that concert:

N: Let's talk about the decision you made in choosing which concert to play, in the context of belongingness.

A: Well I certainly felt a strong belongingness to our orchestra. I felt that I was a part of the group, and that I should play it. With the other orchestra, I don't know the people as well; they are mostly strangers to me. I noticed that very few people came up to me and introduced themselves. And it wasn't as organized as ours.

N: So did you feel bad at not getting to do our concert?

A: Yeah, like during the break, and warming up, I was thinking about what our orchestra was doing: getting set up, getting ready for their concert. I found my thoughts drifting to it.

N: What was the main reason that motivated you to not do our concert? Did you feel like they maybe didn't need you as much because of the large cello section?

A: And because of the music. And you had told me that it should be based somewhat on need. And I thought about it, and thought you were right. The other orchestra had only a few cellos and probably needed more.

N: So you made the right choice, but felt you maybe missed out on something?

A: Right, yeah.

So even though you felt much more of a sense of belonging to our orchestra, you chose the other one instead. When you were trying to decide, I noticed that you were having difficulty with it and so we had a brief conversation about it. We went over the pros and cons of doing each concert, which included the fact that you actually wanted to do ours more, but felt that since the cello section is so large, and the other's is so small, that you would be more helpful to it. In this particular case your personal sense of responsibility, not related to your feelings of belonging, helped you make your decision. During the other orchestra's concert, you mentioned that your thoughts kept drifting to ours, and what we were doing and how the concert was going. I got the impression that you missed us and wished you were there, but also that you knew you had made the right decision. Is this correct?

Welcoming, Comfort, Acceptance, and Safety Leading to Improved Personal Affect

Just as you felt responsible for the orchestra, demonstrated in part by the story above as you welcomed the new student, you also feel welcomed yourself. This welcoming feeling you experience, I believe, is a large part of your overall feelings of sense of belonging. Recall one of your earliest experiences with the orchestra. You spoke of how you found the group and how you felt at your first rehearsal:

A: There was a flyer at the luthier we were using at the time. I was looking for a group where it wasn't so competitive, and they were welcoming of people with different levels of abilities. The luthier suggested that I check it out because she knew about them. So I emailed someone affiliated with the group, and they told me to come to a rehearsal to check it out, no commitments, no fees. So that's what I did. It was exactly what they said. When they notice that you're new, they tell you where to sit and welcomed you.

N: Your first night, were you nervous?

A: Yeah, because the season was underway; everyone had the music. I just wanted to sit in the back and sit under the conductor's radar or be noticeable for any reason. After the first four bars, I was totally lost; all the markings. I didn't know what they meant.

N: So at that first experience, you were nervous and anxious, but there were people there to help you?

A: Yes, several. And some of them are still there after these years.

I too have felt very welcomed by the members of the orchestra. The administration, section leaders, conductor, and other members all made me feel like I belong and am not some outsider looking in. In a very short time I was "one of the gang," and this was a good feeling, which went a long way toward my personal affect each night at rehearsals. I drive over an hour each way to get to the rehearsals, but it is never a bother; I look forward to greeting and being greeted by the members and playing alongside them. We

spoke about this, how it is an ongoing thing that begins with a new member's very first day:

A: So [the orchestra administrators and members] always make a point to greet new people. And they make sure the new members feel comfortable that they have what they need, and if they have any question they can come to them, or point them in the right direction.

N: Right, they've done that with me several times so far. They've come up to me and asked how I am doing, etc., and it's very welcoming.

A: Right, they keep an eye out for people who are obviously new, and they want the orchestra to grow, and they've certainly seen it grow over the years. So I think they feel a very protective attitude to the orchestra, and they want everybody to feel the same way they felt, and to have a good experience with the orchestra, and they do make a point to make sure you have a good time, because that's what it's all about.

Compare these examples of welcoming to the other orchestras you are currently in or have been in, Ana. We had conversations about your experiences in these groups, and from what I gathered, you do not feel as welcomed there as you do in our group. We will reflect more later on the importance of social bonds and belongingness, but for now, recall when you told me:

A: The feeling is different in the other groups because I don't have a history with them; I don't know them very well. People there will chat more and greet you, but it's not the same.

N: So the social aspect of the groups affects how you play?

A: Yes. I don't know the section leader and the section very well, so I don't have the trust that I have in our orchestra. It's definitely a different feeling. I feel almost like I'm there for myself, not because I'm part of an orchestra. I know it will come in time.

It is obviously important to feel welcome when you are part of a group. If those feelings are missing, it can change your personal affect and make you feel like an outsider and

that you do not belong. In other orchestras you are in, you alluded to not having enough time in them, so you were not able to develop the feelings of belonging you experience here, and that you feel it “will come in time.” I wonder, how long will it take you to develop a strong sense of belonging and at what point, if ever, will you realize that your continued participation is dependent on these feelings emerging?

I grouped welcoming, comfort, acceptance, and safety together in this section because they are all related. Robert and I spoke at length about the latter three, as we agreed that they are all large parts of how we perceive belonging in our orchestra. He even spoke of a “comfort zone” that he experiences. Based on our conversations, Ana, you seem to share some of these same perceptions. Recall this conversation where we discussed the overall concept of belonging:

N: How does it make you feel inside when you feel like you belong to something, anything?

A: I think it makes you feel much more comfortable. It's like one less thing you have to worry about. You feel like you will be accepted no matter what.

N: Acceptance. Comfort.

A: Yeah, and so even if, say, you lost your job or had some unfortunate thing happen to you or a family member, you could still always count on support and they would do it unconditionally. I think that it's a feeling of safety. You feel you can take some risks within the group, and you have the luxury of failing in something without the condemnation that might happen outside the group.

Now, transfer that into our orchestra. How do you perceive this sense of safety, acceptance, and comfort? Based on what we conversed about, the feelings you get in our orchestra, which you have been in for some time, are absent in the other orchestras you are in. These feelings make you feel special, joyful, and excited about being part of the

group. They are the “highlight of your week,” and that it has been a “life-saver” for you:

A: You're making me think about many things that I hadn't thought about before in that context! Like, the orchestra is the highlight of my week. It is special. I think it is just by chance that I landed in that particular orchestra after all those years. A lot of people have stayed. We see the young kids grow up and stay in the orchestra. They choose to stay with it because it's a great orchestra.

N: I think it's very relevant that you are in other orchestras. You get different feelings playing in our orchestra than in the other groups, mostly because you have been in it longer and you feel like you know the people better. You fit in, you belong, you feel safe and secure. You've developed bonds with people over the years, and that affects how you feel when you play.

And later:

A: I think it's been a life-saver for me. Because other than family and work I've found something that I also feel passionately about. I hope that everybody has something like that in their life. Maybe it's art, theater. It's really been a life-saver for me. It's really balanced my life and helped me get through the challenges in life. Once we leave the rehearsal room you know you're going back to life and facing the challenges of it.

The effect the orchestra has had on your life is very profound, Ana. You work a full-time job as a busy medical researcher, which must be stressful. At the end of a long day, you are looking for something you enjoy and look forward to, and that is orchestra. You use it as stress-relief, escape, and enjoyment yet you also take it very seriously and hold yourself responsible for a high level of excellence. Without the joyful experiences of playing in the orchestra, and the warm, safe, and secure feelings you get as a result of feeling like you belong there, what would you do with your time each evening? Say, for instance, you were suddenly deprived of your musical experiences in the orchestra for whatever reason. How would you cope with the loss and what would you use as substitution?

Familial Feeling, Reunion

Ana, you mentioned several times that you get a sense of family within our orchestra, and that there are many similarities between the bonds of a family and the bonds in our orchestra. You developed a strong bond with your family growing up, and mentioned that you felt more comfortable around adults and conversing with them from a young age, largely due to your father hosting his work events in your home. Today, you have a wonderful, loving family with three grown children in which you nurtured the love of music. The love and trust one feels for one's family can also be experienced in an orchestra. You made this comparison:

A: In Philippine culture, usually the eldest person in an extended family becomes the head of the clan, so to speak. In the case of my family, my father happens to be the person whom his other siblings and cousins consult when there are important decisions to be made.... Let's say family property, or issues that affect the family as a whole. That is similar to what a conductor would be doing; being aware of what is happening in all the sections and promoting harmony... like when a certain part of the family might have a dispute with another side and they needed to somehow moderate it.

N: That's interesting. So the conductor is comparable to patriarch or the matriarch of the orchestra.

A: Right. But not just the immediate family, but the extended family as well.

I loved your comparison of the conductor as the patriarch or matriarch of the orchestra, Ana. To me, it feels like my section is my immediate family, and the other members of the orchestra are my extended family that I do not see as often, but I still care about. Robert and I also conversed on this topic at length. In our final conversation he mentioned several times that there needs to be even more of a family feeling that is created in the orchestra.

Recall next this conversation, where we were discussing the feelings of returning to rehearsals after a whole summer off:

N: So try to think about the first rehearsal after the summer, two weeks ago, and we had not been rehearsing all summer, officially. What were you feeling? Tell me about what was going on inside your head.

A: I thought it was exciting. Seeing everybody and the level of excitement was high, and people would be looking around exclaiming on who was new and greeting people. It was like a family reunion. That's the only way I can describe it.

N: Robert called it a homecoming. So those are similar ideas. Because it is in a way. And I felt the same way as you do. I felt this kind of electric sense of excitement for begin there amongst all those people, more than last year. And just remembering, you know, how much fun it was. When I joined it, I knew I was joining for this study, but I didn't know it was going to be such a great experience. And how many great people I was going meet, and am still meeting. And not having that over the summer, for me, is a little bit of a void, which I talked about in my proposal. Growing up in a large orchestra program that sort of shaped my childhood and young adulthood, and then played in a college orchestra, but after that, there were no other groups I played with.

A: It feels like you're going to someone's... almost like a reunion once a week. It's the same people, with occasional new people who stick out like sore thumbs. You know immediately that they are new. But everybody else, people in other sections take the trouble to greet you, or I try to greet them also, and say hello.

We agreed that it was like a reunion returning to the group after the summer. To see the people you have not seen in a while felt warm and exciting. I live far from my family, so I do not get to see them much, but the orchestra provides a wonderful substitution for the familial feelings I am lacking as a result of the distance. I was not anticipating this when I joined; in fact, I knew I would be studying sense of belonging within the group, but I was not prepared to feel such a strong bond so fast for the people in the orchestra, particularly you and Robert. Your youngest son sometimes participates in the cello section right alongside you, Ana. We did not discuss the feelings this brings you, and I

am curious as to if you experience a dual sense of family because of this, and what that feels like.

Reluctance to Break Bonds, Substitution

Since you developed such strong bonds with people in the orchestra and the orchestra as a whole over the years, your reluctance to break these bonds is apparent, Ana. This is typical; we find ourselves holding on to the bonds we have made and these bonds can profoundly affect our life choices. Recall, for instance, talking about a member of the orchestra who moved away. You remarked that if it were you, you would be very emotional. Then, we had a conversation about these feelings:

N: Think for a moment how you would feel if, for whatever reason, you had to leave the orchestra. What would you feel like and why? And what would you do?

A: That's one of the reasons that when my husband talks about retiring and perhaps moving back to the Philippines full time and there aren't, as far as I know, there are no real community orchestras and places to play. And not to have a place to play and get together with other people who may not be professionals who love music, I think is one of the reasons I would want to stay here longer.

N: What would you do to fill the void if you couldn't find an orchestra?

A: I know there are some professional orchestras, so maybe I would talk to some music teachers and ask if there was interest in putting a small ensemble together.

N: So you would really try hard to find some sort of substitute for this orchestra? That's a big part of the theory of belongingness: substituting for lost belongingness. What sometimes happens to someone when they lose feelings of belonging is that it can affect one's physical and emotional health and well-being. We try to find some sort of substitute for it. For me, that's one of the main reasons for this study. I played in orchestra all through grade school and high school, and it shaped my whole childhood and young adulthood. After college I didn't play in any orchestras until this one. That's from age 22 to 35 without any orchestral playing. So there was this void that I didn't even fully realize. I mean, I knew there was something missing, and after I started doing research on the topic I figured it out. I had had such a great experience playing, and I hadn't been

getting that for so long, and I needed to fill it. I filled it with other things; keeping busy with higher education. But in the process of doing this research, not only am I finding out about belongingness in myself and others, I also am filling the void that I had experienced. For me, the loss of belongingness really had a big effect on me in that I didn't have anything to do musically. I got to stand up in front of kids every day and see their joy in playing with a group, but I didn't get to experience it.

A: For me, it's the desire to be with a group like this orchestra that influences my future plans. Some people would retire and maybe move somewhere warmer, but I would prefer to stay in this area, because I know that there are many musical opportunities here. Not just to play, but also to watch and experience. It influences my future plans; I would not consider moving to another part of the country right now, unless I knew that there was something like this already existing there and that I wouldn't have to start from scratch.

The last statement speaks volumes, Ana. You are so invested with this group, that it would influence your decision to move, and to where. Reflect on that for a moment, if you will. The void that you would no doubt experience without the orchestra would be exacerbated by not only losing the music you care so deeply about, but also the bonds you made with people in the group. That is why we seek to substitute for lost bonds. We can find these belongingness needs in any number of contexts: family, groups of friends, committees, clubs, and relationships. For you and me, we find the most contentment doing something that interests us most: music. In the absence of an orchestra, should you decide to move one day, you would seek out small, more easily formed chamber groups in which to experience music. While the opportunities for making social bonds are lessened in this context, you would “take what you could get,” correct? I mentioned above that the orchestra helps substitute for my deprived feelings of belonging in living so far from my family.

In the summer months when orchestra does not rehearse, we talked about how we substitute for, again, not only the music that is lost, but also the bonds. It is difficult to keep in touch over the summer with all the people we are close to when we do not see them, so we seek out other people in other contexts we enjoy, such as chamber music and outreach programs:

N: So orchestra ends in May and doesn't start until September. So, you have those musical opportunities in the summer months like chamber music, and...?

A: Chamber music, cello camp, and my regular quartet, and the trio.

N: So you're keeping yourself very busy, musically, during the summer months. So do you think that provides enough musical substitution for the orchestras during the summer?

A: It's different, the pressure is different. But I find myself listening to the radio and hearing music we played in the orchestra, and it triggers these memories of what we played. So in a way I miss it, but it's also good to have other musical opportunities to substitute for it. Do you feel that way too?

N: Definitely. This past summer, I didn't do anything in terms of music except our trio. But I definitely missed the orchestra. We had just had the one spring concert and then it was over for the summer, so I really missed it. So I was so happy when it started in September, because I wasn't getting enough music in the summer. Chamber music is so different that it didn't really substitute for orchestra.

I went on then to explain the concept of substitution, which was interesting for me since you had already described how you experienced it personally:

N: One of the things the authors talk about is substitution. So we could say that you've lost the music of the orchestra over the summer, so you substitute other musical things for it. We could also say that you've subconsciously lost the belongingness from that group and you go to other outlets to substitute for it. Either is probably true in some way. They also talk about satiation, which means that once you are "full" of belongingness needs, you stop seeking them out, or seek them out less. I think we would both agree that you're pretty satiated with music and belongingness, no? (laughs) You keep joining more orchestras. Is it because you love music so much, or you're seeking out a better fit?

A: It was the music, the repertoire, and the convenience of the commute. I wanted to play more and different music. Plus, there are a couple people I know in one of them, so I felt comfortable.

N: But now you're finding that it's a little bit too much for your schedule?

A: Right, and it took me awhile to decide which concert to play when there was a conflict.

Your meanings of belongingness, Ana, are very similar to mine and Robert's. We all feel the need to substitute the loss of the orchestra over the summer months. I do this with our trio, and this allowed me to not only experience the joy of music during the summer, but also to build the bonds with the both of you even more. After the summer of rehearsing with you each week, our bonds were strengthened, and when fall came around and we started rehearsing with the orchestra again, I felt very happy in knowing you and he were among the group. In fact, you now sit closer to me since the conductor moved the cello section next to the first violin section; it is wonderful sharing the music with you, Ana.

You so immersed yourself in music that most evenings are occupied with it in some capacity. You bring your cello with you to work so that you can go right to rehearsal afterwards. You arrive home late and your family adjusted to it so that you can eat together at a later hour. What would all this music be like to you without the accompanying social bonds you formed? How would it affect your experiences of playing in the groups, particularly our orchestra?

Frequent Interaction and the Formation of Sub-groups

Now I would like to turn toward the second of four questions this study seeks to answer, Ana, and that is: With whom do participants share frequent interaction, where do these interactions occur, and how are sub-groups of the larger ensemble formed? Earlier, I wrote to Robert and asked him to reflect on several of our conversations about frequent interaction, and now I ask you to do the same. Recall our fourth conversation where the three of us met together. You and Robert both agreed that our weekly rehearsals could be considered “frequently” enough to satisfy your sense of belonging, but it was conditional. The conditions were that there needed to be enough social interaction to complement the frequent interaction. According to Baumeister and Leary (1995), if we are deprived of either the caring context or the frequent interaction, sense of belonging will suffer. I believe you and Robert may disagree with each other on this point, as he feels there needs to be much more social activity than there currently is. You and I are satiated in that regard, correct?

We share frequent interaction with everyone in the orchestra as we are rehearsing with them. We form a body of music, a unified ensemble that comes together to play, enjoy, and share our gifts. However, our interactions with most of the other members are somewhat limited to merely playing at the same time. We interact more frequently with those around us in our section, and those with whom we formed sub-groups. The sub-group of our section is formed for us; we had no choice in the matter. Sub-groups we choose to form are chamber groups and community service groups. Our trio meets every week, year round, and we perform for various events and community functions. Mostly,

we do this for enjoyment as we share a desire to make music in a small group setting. I think we can both agree that this sub-group also meets frequently enough to satisfy our belongingness needs.

Caring Context and the Building of Bonds

I will now recall some of our conversations that focus on the caring context (or lack thereof) that we should experience to feel belongingness. This caring context occurred in the orchestra as a whole, as I already recounted, but also in other settings and among you and others. Regarding how you built bonds over the years, Ana, you explained that most of them are in the cello section. This is in part due to their proximity to you, and the fact that bonds can form more easily as a result:

N: So, predominantly, where are those people in the orchestra? Where do they sit?

A: Well, mostly in the cello section. And also the principal chair second violin too because we were assigned to be in a quintet together. So normally, I wouldn't play in a small ensemble with a flute or oboe, but for this one it was a violin, oboe, flute, viola, and me.

N: So you made friends with these people from being in that chamber group with them?

A: Right, I mean, I knew them from the orchestra, but I never played with them. And I never made small talk with them until we joined the group.

N: So now when you see them in the orchestra, you make conversation with them. So you also said that a lot of other people you are friends with are in the cello section. Why do you think that is?

A: Well, I guess it's the time we spend together in the section together, and in sectionals. Plus the section leader's cello camp that he started a few years ago.

N: Plus the fact that you're sitting right near each other helps too, right?

A: Right, and we switch our seats around from time to time as well. I've had various players as my stand partners over the years and have gotten to know them. Now, I sit next to a student cellist. Plus, some of them also play in Outreach, so we tend to see them more than usual.

N: So you get to spend the most amount of time with people in your section, so you feel like you know them the best. And that's how it is with me as well, and for most people in the orchestra I think; they feel the most comfortable in their own section. It provides the best sense of security. Like, for instance, if you were to take your cello and go sit in the violin section and play, can you imagine the amount of discomfort you would have?

A: I think it would confuse me totally!

N: Right, it would be very confusing. First of all, you're playing something totally different than those around you; second, you don't really know the people around you as well as those in your own section, so that sense of security is also gone. So it provides that sense of security and comfort being in your own section, in close proximity.

A: Physically near?

N: Right. Bonds are more easily formed. And that's what we find happening in our sections of the orchestra; bonds are more easily formed within them. Even with me, despite my efforts to really get out there and meet people in other sections, I just feel the closest to those in my own section. But you can only do so much out of your own section, like at breaks and before and after rehearsal; the most time is spent with your section during rehearsals. Talking to your stand partner, joking around with your section, being at sectionals.

The bonds you formed within your section perhaps started as a result of proximity, but were then nurtured due to the atmosphere of caring that exists there. Is this correct?

When I asked you if you felt comfortable going to your section leader with any questions or problems with the music, you replied: "definitely... he is very approachable." Recall this conversation, in which you elaborated on your section and section leader:

A: [The cello section leader] is a teacher, and used to have another profession. He handles sectionals. He's very calm, and he doesn't make you feel like you made a mistake, and doesn't say that you're wrong and do it again; he's very non-threatening.

N: So at sectionals, do you feel like it's laid back enough that you can make a mistake and not be reprimanded or embarrassed?

A: Yes, definitely. Plus, he runs the cello camp as well. And he knows your individual level, so he can make suggestions with you in mind, it's not only that we know him, but he knows you and what you can do. He helps you stretch a little more.

N: Would you say that he cares? Does he provide a caring context in which to play?

A: Yes, definitely. He wants the cello section to sound good. And because that there are enough of us that we can make an impact on the orchestra. We could derail, inadvertently, the music! So, he takes a lot of care in the section. There are times when we are not able to finish everything because he starts to go more slowly, especially if he sees some of us are having a hard time.

N: So you feel comfortable in your section now? I remember you talking about when you first started, at your first rehearsal you were mortified. You couldn't play the music.

A: Well yes, I knew the notes, but the tempo threw me off, and there were markings that I didn't understand. Back then, everybody knew the music. It was not the first rehearsal of the season. For me, though, it was a sight-reading and listening exercise and I had to be careful that I didn't stick out too much.

Both you and Robert remarked that it is important that you feel comfortable while you play, and that this comfort contributes to your music making. It appears that your section leader has fostered a warm and friendly environment in which to enjoy the music and grow as a musician. Perhaps that is one reason the cello section is so large.

I too experienced a caring context within my section and among its members. I would like to share with you a personal journal entry I wrote one evening following a sectional rehearsal:

Personal Journal Reflection, November 13th, 2014:

Tonight we had sectionals. Periodically, we are divided by section into various rooms and the coaches work with us on passages that the conductor has identified that need extra attention. Sequestered in our little room, the group of eight first violins rehearsed for an hour, led by the concertmaster, Grace. I love sectionals. They give us a chance to not only hone our skills as individual players and as a section, but also to interact more closely with those we sit near. I've already developed bonds with the members of my section, and those bonds happened more easily as a result of these small group settings. We banter and joke and have a great time. I feel comfortable enough to add to what Grace is saying and give my own advice, fingerings, and technique tips. Grace appreciates the help, and we have bonded over the fact that we are both teachers. In fact, there are three strings teachers in the section: Grace, Greg, and myself. We have formed somewhat of a sub-group within the sub-group, as we often share teaching stories and tips with each other. I feel very connected to Grace and Greg and in light of that, it makes me feel more comfortable playing amongst them. Tonight we were sharing amusing stories about concert season and its fast approach. The other members sometimes chime in when they hear us talk about our students, and they remark on stories of their experiences as music students in the past. I think they look up to us for our knowledge of strong pedagogy, but they also feel equal in the section; no one is set apart and our camaraderie is growing every week.

The sub-group of my section was formed automatically yet the bonds I formed, and am still forming, grow each week. Sitting amongst these friends and acquaintances feels comfortable and safe and allows me to experience the joy of music making without stress or fear of reprimand.

Over the years, you formed many bonds with other members of the orchestra. Some bonds were formed easily; others perhaps took much more time. The easiest bonds to form are often those that are formed from proximity, and this occurred quite naturally for you, Robert, and me in our respective sections. Other bonds were formed in the community service group that you participate in. This outreach group performs for nursing homes, hospitals, and schools.

N: So let's talk about the Outreach program. How did you get started in it?

A: Well, Ronald and Betty are the coordinators. And they asked me if I wanted to join it. So it seemed like a very satisfying way to get to play music with other people and give pleasure to people who are not able to go out and enjoy music.

N: How long ago did you join it?

A: I think like eight years ago. So, it's almost like being able to play in a small ensemble. Sometimes there are six of us, sometimes twelve. The music is recognizable and easy. The coach is also an easy-going person. So it's been another opportunity.

N: Do you feel like you belong in that group?

A: Yes, definitely. I feel almost obligated to go to all rehearsals, even though we play the same thing over and over. Because some of the people are new, so it adds a little something more to the texture of the music. It makes you listen for it more. So it's been a really great group to be with because we also play holiday concerts, like for Veterans' Day and Christmas at hospitals and nursing homes.

N: Do you feel like you are provided with a caring context in that group as much as in our orchestra?

A: I would say yes, because it's mostly the same people, just a smaller group. It's been mostly the same people for the past six or seven years. People do come and go, but it's a core group.

N: So you enjoy it?

A: Yes, I think it makes me feel as good as I hope it makes our audience feel.

Ana, it appears that you enjoy being a part of the outreach group, and you have no plans to stop. This sub-group allows you to experience the enjoyment of playing your cello, but also interacting with others in a social setting. It also seems like you get satisfaction from sharing your gift of music with others, and this provides you with another outlet in which to do so. I wish to conclude this letter to you by asking you to reflect upon what you have read and try to put your experiences into the framework of the

main concepts of my study: Your meanings of belongingness within the orchestra, your descriptions of caring context within the orchestra, your meanings of frequent interaction, and your meanings of the forming and breaking of social bonds. After you have thought about this, I welcome you to respond so that we may continue the dialogue.

Sincerely,

Nick

CHAPTER SEVEN

REFLECTING ON OUR MEANINGS OF BELONGING

I wrote letters to Robert and Ana that began to bring light to our meanings of belonging. Within these letters, I asked them to reflect upon many things that were addressed in our conversations, and to answer some questions which would help us understand our experiences of belongingness. These experiences were framed by Baumeister and Leary's (1995) two criteria for satisfying our fundamental need to belong: Frequent interaction and caring context, as well as some of the criteria that the authors deemed necessary for belongingness to be considered a fundamental human motivation. Our reflections and answers along with my interpretations of them form the present chapter.

Belonging, Bonding, and Identity

True to Baumeister and Leary's (1995) theory, Robert, Ana, and I formed the most and easiest attachments to those in our close proximity, in this case the members of our section. At the very first rehearsal I attended, I formed bonds easily with almost all members of my section, but not many others. While I made other bonds in time, I formed the first with these people, and without much effort. Being confined to these sections for the majority of our participation in the orchestra facilitated the formation of these bonds for Robert and Ana as well. Ana illustrated how bonding occurred in the cello section.

Yes; much of this is because of the section leader's personality. Once, his stand partner didn't show up. He looked back at us and said "Come on guys! Someone sit next to me!" No one moved; I figured "What the heck. I have nothing to lose and everything to gain." So I joined him and he was very happy to have me. I found that I knew more than I realized and he made me more confident. When we were done, he complimented me and I could tell he was sincere about it. The

conductor didn't have to correct us much so I think we did well. During sectionals, he makes it a point to go slowly and explain things carefully. He always finds something to praise so we all feel like we accomplished something. I think the current oldest member of the orchestra is in the cello section but he's a feisty guy and plays along and does his best. Like the rest of us, he makes jokes about his eyesight and slow reflexes. "Well, if there are three flats, one of them is optional." Or "This part is marked pianissimo. Since there are 16 of us, maybe half of us should just air-bow." We love him.

In describing these two members of her section, it was evident the fondness Ana had for them. These small personal interactions made her feel welcome in the section, as if she was cared for by those around her. I could relate to her feelings: I would much rather experience the joy of music making amongst people I share bonds with because I take great satisfaction knowing that they are appreciating what I am. I love the connectedness I feel while playing Mozart next to someone I just shared a joke with. I love the feeling of pure gladness I get when I sit amongst my section members in a sectional and have good-natured arguments about the best fingerings for a passage. I love the sensation of just being amongst people I love while doing the thing I love most.

With time, Ana's frequent interactions extended beyond the cello section to other members of the orchestra, and she began to feel strongly about the bonds she made and within the orchestra and its sub-groups. Ana recalled reading a book about community orchestras in which the author made an uninformed comment about our orchestra. Ana felt mild hostility and outrage toward the author:

I was initially so annoyed that I considered emailing him to set him straight, but then I just felt sorry that he didn't "get" our orchestra. I was surprised at the depth of the feeling of outrage I experienced when I read what he wrote about our orchestra. It was as if he had insulted my family. He was clueless about our organization, and made a statement without knowing anything about it, without interviewing a single member.

Then, Ana went on to describe how her feelings about the author related to her sense of belonging in our orchestra:

I doubt very much I would have felt that way if I didn't have the close relationship that I do with the orchestra. I'm very proud of the orchestra too, just as I would be of family or a close friend who has accomplished a wonderful thing amidst great odds. I find myself using "we" or "our" when referring to the orchestra, but using "they" or "their" when I mean The Other Orchestras.

I had a follow-up conversation regarding the outrage Ana felt when thinking about the book she read, and we reflected on it together. We agreed that we both felt very protective of the orchestra and this affected our reactions when there was an external threat (or, in this case, disparaging remark) made toward it. Such nurturing and protection of close relationships invoked Baumeister and Leary's (1995) exploration of ingroup favorability.

I then asked Ana to reflect on the building of bonds within the orchestra, and how they related to the caring context among the members. She replied:

The music we create is one thing, but the friendships we develop make it doubly rewarding to be there. We have seen the kids grow up, leave for college, show up for a rehearsal even for one night if they're home, hear of someone's kid getting married, then celebrate the birth of a first grandchild. All this is something really precious these days.

These experiences were *precious* to Ana, formed over the years due to the caring context that was provided for her in the orchestra and by its members. In her reflections, Ana alluded to multiple meanings of the word "precious." Valuable, dear, and fragile all came to mind when I read Ana's response. Her experiences in the orchestra were obviously valuable because she persisted in them, and interactions among the orchestra members provided important and treasured memories for her. These experiences were

also dear to her; they made her feel both sentimental and joyful, even while she was reflecting on the orchestra. Finally, Ana seemed to feel that the relationships within the orchestra could be fragile and disappear altogether if they were not consistently nurtured. This went beyond a sense of favoring the ingroup, as Ana had expressed when she spoke about her outrage at the critical remarks of the book author, toward protection of the orchestra, and the relationships formed within it, as valuable resources. Why was the orchestra worthy of this kind of protection? Ana alluded to an answer:

When you identify with a group, every little thing that happens to that group automatically impacts you in some way. I think the social bonds that are forged reinforce the sense of belonging, and that feeling, in turn, creates stronger bonds. The common denominator throughout is a love of music and respect for one another.

I depicted Ana's cyclical conceptualization of identifying with the orchestra in Figure 4.

According to Baumeister and Leary's theory, a sense of belonging should form quickly and easily, as it did for Ana, but then the frequent interaction within a caring context, where there was a "mutual love of music and respect for one another" deepened and strengthened Ana's bond to other orchestra members. Over time, Ana's identity became tied to our orchestra because of her sense of belonging. She had a very high regard for the orchestra, and she attributed much of her happiness to participating in it. Ana felt a responsibility to protect and nurture the orchestra not only to maintain her sense of identity, but because she assumed that other members' identities were equally tied to the ensemble and they also derived happiness from their participation. She reached out to me, believing that I would come to identify with the orchestra in time.

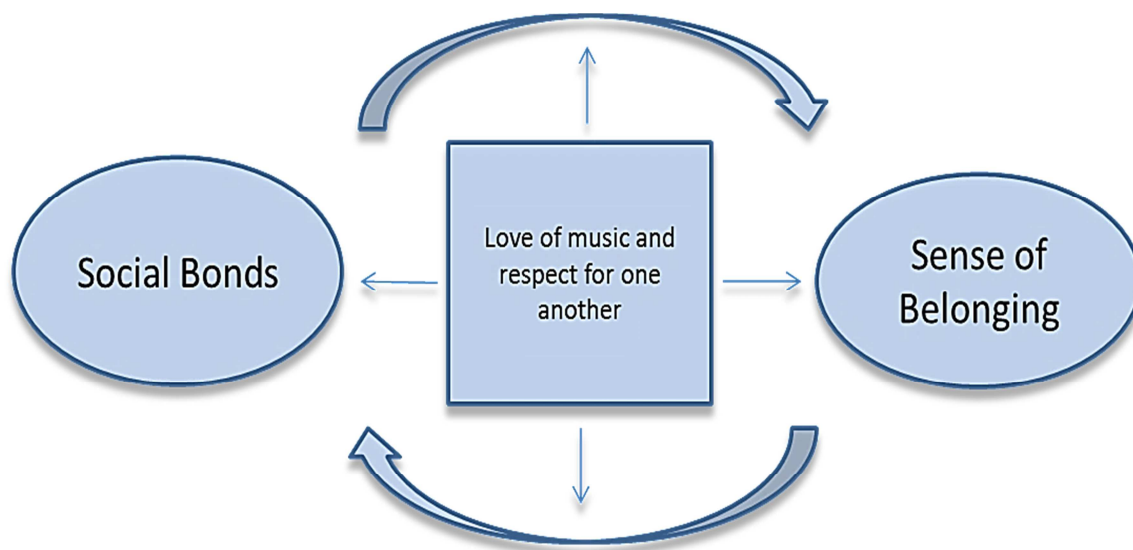


Figure 4. Ana's conceptualization of identifying with the orchestra.

Ana's identification with our orchestra caused me to reflect upon my school orchestra experiences. In contrast to Ana, who joined an orchestra as an adult, my identity was formed out of the belonging I felt in school orchestra, from the very beginning of feeling safety and security in the middle school group. From belongingness in the basement, to the joy and pride of accomplishment in an award-winning orchestra in high school, and finally to the responsibility of demonstrating for and recruiting younger students, my identity was shaped by my experiences in these groups. In the absence of these feelings of belongingness—feelings that were nurtured over time and that are still precious to me—I would have taken on a very different identity. My life as a musician and educator would never have been given the chance to take shape, as I would have sought to find belongingness in other, non-musical ways. Likely, I would have gravitated more toward academic clubs and activities, finding comfort as I did in my early days in

the Research Team.

The ways in which Ana's identity was tied to her sense of belonging in our orchestra came into focus even more clearly when she told me the story of her participation in the other orchestra:

The original motivation for joining the 2nd orchestra was the chance to play the entire *Magic Flute* with a local opera company, and to try out the orchestra that the 1st violin (in my quartet) plays in. During the 2nd season, I expected the cello section at least to greet me but no one did. When I sat down beside someone and set up my stand and was tuning, another cellist arrived, stood over me and practically shouted (raised voice) that I was taking her seat and that she ALWAYS sits beside that person. I apologized and moved to sit behind her. Meanwhile the other person just sat there quietly looking straight ahead, never saying a word to explain to the other that being relatively new, I had no idea that they were permanent stand partners. It would have been nice if that person had simply explained that if that other lady showed up, I would have to move. Another cellist in front threw me a somewhat sympathetic glance, shrugged, and rolled her eyes. That behavior left a bad impression on me. It showed a lack of consideration and manners. I decided that I would only play in that orchestra if I liked the pieces they were planning to play for the season.

Ana had frequent interactions with this other orchestra, but she was deprived of a caring context; consequently, bonds with the other orchestra's members did not grow. She commented: "I feel almost like I'm there for myself, not because I'm part of an orchestra." Even though Ana was surrounded by a large orchestra she felt alone and unsupported, and she decided to return only when opportunities to perform specific repertoire warranted her attention.

Belonging, Social Support, and Mutual Learning

Like Ana, Robert referred to our orchestra as a family, but he was more interested in relationships of support:

An orchestra does not have to be a place where you are handed the music and you are expected to either "sink or swim." There should be a whole support system to

nourish the less skillful musicians, especially the ones that are committed and show a desire to learn. That support system is the one that will develop strong bonds to the organization, not unlike the support we get from our own families and friends.

He noted that he had come to exhibit a level of comfort among the members of our orchestra because of the safety and security he felt in the environment—similar to that of his family:

I remember that I was shy as a teenager. But that was only with the people outside of my house or with strangers. I wasn't shy with my family and friends. Quite the contrary, I was very outspoken, argumentative and opinionated. I guess this is the same comfort level with the orchestra. And this comfort equates, in my opinion, to better music making.

Robert's perception of a caring context was tied to his notion that, if social bonds were strong within the orchestra, the orchestra's sound would improve. I asked him to reflect and elaborate on this notion, and he responded:

Feeling safe and secure contributes a great deal to the sound. Since you are less likely to be nervous and are more relaxed, the execution of the instrument is improved, resulting in a better sound individually and hence for the group. In most jobs and in school, they make a point for everyone to get to know each other. This is extremely important for whatever task is ahead. It's hard to concentrate on work when you are always wondering what is this person like that's next to me and what does he/she think of me.

In relationship to Baumeister and Leary's (1995) theory, Robert believed that feelings of belonging were based on the opportunity to perform in a judgment-free zone. He felt that once the zone was created, positive affect was achieved, not only in the personal experience of comfort, warmth, and acceptance but also in the collective experience of better music-making and an improved orchestral sound.

Reflecting on my own sense of safety, security, and familial feelings while playing in this orchestra, I was compelled to juxtapose it with musical groups in which

those feelings were absent. My youth orchestra in high school, for example, served as a stark contrast to not only the present orchestra, but also my school group at the time. It was an audition-only group that attracted advanced players from the area and met weekly. Although I felt honored and proud to be part of such a group, my sense of belonging never really manifested, even after five years of participation. I wondered why this was: Was it due to the lack of opportunities for any real social activity apart from short breaks? Or perhaps due to the cut-throat audition and ranking process? Or maybe to the absence of any extra sub-groups, like chamber music groups?

My best guess is that it was a combination of all of these, combined with a sparse rehearsal and performance schedule that could hardly be considered frequent—meeting just seven months of the year. The conditions that were present in this group lent themselves well to a robotic and cold performing group, and not to a fun place in which to make friends and enjoy music together. Looking back, I wonder why I stayed in it so long. Indeed, while reflecting on the *lack* of safety, security, and family I felt in this youth orchestra I became more aware of how Baumeister and Leary's (1995) theory offered such a powerful interpretation of my feelings. I was not aware at the time how my belongingness needs were suffering in that group, but as I reflected on it, I realized that I retained no social bonds with anyone in that orchestra, nor did I consider it an influential part of my educational growth.

Robert clarified that his interaction with other orchestra members was not for the sake of achieving a better sound; instead, the improved sound came as a by-product of interaction:

I try to interact with the others members. But it is not something I do consciously or with the conscious objective to improve my own playing. I think members should try to get to know each other for its own sake, because we are humans. My theory about the resulting benefit of this socialization to the better sound of the orchestra is a byproduct of such interactions and acquaintances. But it's not something that can be forced to obtain the desired result. In other words, we cannot say to Mary, "Mary, I want you to meet John because we're going to sound better."

In fact, Robert firmly believed that there was a dearth of social activity in the orchestra. With this frank and straightforward comment, he explained that a lack of social activity also meant a lack of opportunity for the formation of *complete* human beings. Robert stated: "We are made complete when we relate to other people and we draw from the experiences of other people. We draw from the knowledge of other people." Robert's desire to understand others' experiences extended beyond those with whom he felt friendly:

Yes, everyone brings something to the table. And many a times, you can't help being with someone. You cannot always be with the people you like. What good would that do you? You wouldn't learn anything that way. You would not learn from that person and he would not learn from you. In an office environment, everything is perfect and harmonious. Then, here comes the "trouble maker." He or she belongs there, contrary to everyone else's opinion. That's the way God wants it to be. That is His justice and Mercy at work, so that the ones that need to "grow" can learn from the ones that have evolved more. I once had a boss I detested. I really did not like this man. But he taught me something that has stayed with me for the rest of my life. He used to say that in his religion (he was Jewish) we learn from everyone. So, every person is a teacher.

This deeply spiritual commentary was key to Robert's meaning of belonging. He believed that, even when there was some discomfort, individuals could still learn by taking time to understand the knowledge and experience of those in their environments, even those they did not necessarily like. Robert believed that, by drawing on the experiences of others, we not only opened doors to new relationships with them, but we

also gained insight into ourselves. Such self-understanding led concurrently to a greater sense of completeness and to a fuller sense of belonging.

This profound insight into belonging no doubt explained Robert's will to continue performing in the orchestra's outreach group despite some animosity toward other members and disagreement about the way the group was run. He was learning about others' experiences—whether it was their experiences performing in public or their experiences using music to interact with the elderly—and he was gaining insight into his own experiences, even if he did not find the repertoire particularly challenging. In fact, Robert felt a tremendous responsibility to promote interaction among the members of our orchestra, and perhaps that is why he reached out to me so soon after I joined the ensemble.

Although I did not necessarily share Robert's spiritual conviction, I sensed early in my rehearsals with our orchestra that, as I learned more about the lives and perspectives of my fellow violinists, I felt more connected to them. Moreover, as I rehearsed with Robert and Ana in our trio, I believed I was drawing on their knowledge and experiences, and that feeling became more intense as we conversed and drew out one another's stories for this dissertation.

Summary

Ana, Robert, and I all initially described belonging to our orchestra in terms of Baumeister and Leary's theory, especially in terms of frequent interactions, particularly with those in our sections. We also experienced the orchestra as a caring context, describing feelings of safety, acceptance, and family. From that grounding, our meanings

of belonging took different directions. Robert's meaning of belonging was based on a spiritual belief that humans were made as interacting creatures, and that they experienced growth, self-understanding, and completeness only through social interaction with others, even with those they did not necessarily like. Because of this belief, Robert supposed that a by-product of meaningful social interaction and social support in our orchestra would be improved musical affect, both of individuals and of the ensemble.

Ana's meaning of belonging was tied to her identity. She had developed such an attachment to the orchestra over her many years of performing in the ensemble that she felt pride in its accomplishments, as one would be proud of family members. Furthermore, she derived much of her happiness from the relationships that had been built within the ensemble. Because Ana's identity was so closely tied to the orchestra, she described belonging as precious, something to be nurtured and protected, not only for herself, but also for all the members of the orchestra.

Although I felt welcomed and accepted in our orchestra, I had spent less time as a member of the orchestra than either Robert or Ana. In our conversations, I relied mainly on comparing my experiences of belonging to our orchestra with prior experiences in orchestras. I agreed with Ana that musical enjoyment and friendships were twin benefits—each amplified the other, and I agreed with Robert that knowing my section mates' experiences and points of view helped me feel more connected to them. Despite my short tenure in this orchestra, I felt certain that my need for belonging was satisfied in it—more so than ensembles or other groups I had joined in the past.

Our three somewhat disparate meanings of belonging all resulted in feelings of

responsibility toward our orchestra. Robert felt responsibility to promote social interaction among the members of the orchestra, whereas Ana primarily felt a responsibility to protect and nurture the orchestra as an identity resource for other players. Because our orchestra filled a need for belonging that recently had not been met in my life, I felt a responsibility to play well, and to contribute to the relationships within the orchestra, and the orchestra, in turn, continued to bring me feelings of safety and happiness. Why did these feelings of responsibility accompany our senses of belonging?

Belonging and Responsibility

I first asked Ana if she would feel a sense of responsibility if she lacked a sense of belonging to the group. Her reply referenced a story she had told about helping a new, student cellist:

If I felt no sense of belonging to the orchestra, I would likely have been too busy looking out for myself; making sure I had my music and didn't make too many mistakes. I would not have initiated much conversation; maybe at most, I would have introduced myself. Well, then again, I hope I wouldn't be as selfish as that sounds, and that I would have noticed if someone beside me was totally lost and unhappy, and made some effort to help! It must have been successful because she did in fact come back! And I let her take my seat next to the 1st cello because it would be easier for her to follow the conductor and she would learn a lot in a short time by sitting next to a very accomplished player.

I also asked her if it would make a difference in her attitude if her sense of belonging were deprived or did not exist:

Yes it would definitely make a difference and I already see it in the somewhat more casual attitude I have towards the other orchestra I've only recently joined. With the other orchestra, I have no qualms or guilty feelings if I miss a rehearsal. In our orchestra, I know my absence is noticed because the conductor almost always tells me "Hey Ana! We missed you last week." So I won't be absent without a very good reason.

In both of these responses, Ana's view of the orchestra as a valuable identity resource

was evident. Although the student cellist was new to the orchestra, Ana saw that there was potential for this young player to identify with the orchestra; indeed, she hoped the student would identify with the orchestra and would continue returning to rehearsals. So Ana made sure that the cellist was in a position where she could easily see the conductor, and where she would feel supported, being surrounded by experienced players who could help. In the case of the orchestra where Ana did not sense belonging, she admitted to having a less responsible attitude; she did not identify with that other orchestra.

Recognizing Ana's sense of responsibility, I was intrigued by her dilemma about which concert to attend when they both occurred on the same day, so I asked her to speak more about it. Even though her feelings of belonging to our orchestra were stronger than her feelings of belonging to the other orchestra, she chose to attend the other orchestra's concert. The cello section in the other orchestra was simply more in need, and she felt that our large orchestra could still play well with one less cello. When I asked her to talk about her feelings and what happened after the concert, she replied:

I think this was the first (hopefully the last) time I didn't play in a concert. I've missed rehearsals but I always play in the concerts. I felt particularly bad that I wasn't able to tell my usual stand partner (a young lady in middle school) that I wouldn't be playing in the concert because she had missed the last rehearsal. We play from my music which had notes and bowings written in. I thought about her that day and hoped that she would have her music or be able to share a stand with someone else. The next time I saw her, she said "Ana! Where were you??? I was waiting and I didn't know you weren't going to play with us!" I felt terrible. The other orchestra played some great music so I don't regret it totally, but yes I missed the camaraderie and happy excited chaos just before OUR orchestra concerts.

Ana felt a responsibility to help a struggling cello section in the alternate orchestra at the same time she felt a responsibility to nurture and protect our orchestra.

She felt badly for leaving our orchestra, and especially her younger stand partner, but in the end, she believed she should play where she was most needed. Ana felt she made the right decision in this instance, but she hoped the situation never arose again. Ana was bound by her will to “do the right thing,” in attending the other concert, rather than to attend our concert, which is what she would have preferred. This would suggest that her sense of responsibility was in a state of conflict, and the stress she experienced when faced with the dilemma of choosing brought light to the complexity of how we make decisions based on the bonds we share with others.

Ana joined the other orchestra not as a means to seek out belongingness, but rather to satiate her *musical* needs. However, because of a general association between belongingness and orchestra, Ana assumed she would encounter a safe space in the other orchestra, in which she could maintain her own sense of identity. Furthermore, she assumed that others around her would feel similarly. This security and mutual concern for each other’s well-being, which Ana (perhaps naively in this instance) sought to encounter in the other orchestra, did not exist.

I then asked Robert to elaborate on his responsibility to the group and how it affected his continued participation. Robert felt great responsibility to play well and perform his best, saying, “I do maintain a personal ethic in whatever I pursue, like learning music. I like to do it to the best of my abilities and have respect and honor in the subject.” Because Robert had been a member of the orchestra for many years, he knew and trusted many of the players, and he experienced our orchestra as a judgment-free zone:

True friends will never judge you and will forgive any mistakes you make. But the majority of the [orchestra] members would like for you to play well. And here is when you feel obligated to seek their consent and approval for the way you're playing. So, it feels good when you are able to please (musically) your friends and the not-so-much-friends.

A responsibility to play well and contribute to the orchestra was like an obligation to Robert, and he admitted, "It's hard for me to do something half-way or not see it through completion. I have a terrible fear of quitting or doing mediocre work." But Robert believed that not only he, but also the entire orchestra would perform more expressively if members had greater opportunities for social interaction and social support—if they had opportunity to learn from one another.

Although Robert felt a responsibility to play well, it seemed possible that he felt even more responsibility to promote social relationships within the orchestra. During breaks in our rehearsals, Robert always was the first to get out of his seat and start a conversation with another member of the orchestra. Although Ana and I agreed that many of our interactions occurred within our respective sections, Robert talked and laughed with members of the orchestra well beyond the viola section—it did not matter whether they were teenagers or octogenarians, Robert tried to relate to them. He was acting on his belief that human beings are meant to interact, that they are completed and fulfilled in a constant process of learning from one another. Because of his conviction, Robert not only interacted with other orchestra members, but he also felt a duty to promote social engagement among orchestra members. In fact, he was often at odds with orchestra administrators as he expressed this necessity for greater social interaction. Because of the responsibility he felt, he gave priority to the orchestra over many other

affiliations in his life, working toward its continued successes through promotion of social engagement.

Even though I had been a member of the ensemble for a short time compared to Robert and Ana, I quickly developed a sense of responsibility to the orchestra. Even missing a single rehearsal due to illness caused me to feel some emotional distress. I worried about my absence and how it might have hindered the others in my section who I felt obligated to help. I discovered that my feelings of responsibility were coupled with the feelings of belonging I had attained. My feelings of belonging when playing in the group were so strong at the culmination of the study that they affected my mood and health: I got upset when I had to miss a rehearsal; I missed my friends and acquaintances when I was not there; and I associated my feelings and experiences in the group with other parts of my life. I felt an even closer bond to this orchestra than with any other to which I had previously belonged. It almost seemed like a reciprocal relationship—one of mutual concern—with the group as a whole: I had a responsibility to it to do my best and remain a valued member, and it kept me feeling safe and happy.

Some months after I finished collecting data I moved to a town that was much farther from our orchestra, and I was faced with the decision of staying with the orchestra or leaving it. Staying with it meant a 90-minute commute to rehearsal and back home again, but in the end it was not a difficult decision for me to make: I had developed such a sense of belonging to the orchestra, and built strong bonds with Robert, Ana, and others that I could not think of leaving. Indeed, I felt it was my responsibility to remain active with the group because I belonged there. My section depended on me to help them, the

orchestra depended on me for my fund-raising efforts, and my friends depended on me to be there for them. I was not going anywhere.

Summary

How can the sense of responsibility that appears to accompany a sense of belonging be classified? It might be viewed as a cognitive response to belonging; the three of us made choices to act responsibly, and therefore prioritize our relationships in the orchestra, based on our feelings of belongingness. Still, for each of us, the decision to act responsibly was not merely cognitive—it was full of emotion. For all three of us, a sense of responsibility stemmed from feelings of safety and security. Without the familial feelings we experienced, we would not have felt a strong sense of responsibility toward the group. Still, especially for Ana and Robert who were longtime members of our orchestra, the sense of responsibility did not originate solely from their own sense of belonging, but also from desiring belongingness for others. Ana wanted to protect what she viewed as most precious, and Robert wanted the members of the orchestra to learn from one another, and ultimately to feel completed.

As can be seen in Figure 5, the three of us experienced a sense of belonging and a sense of responsibility as cyclical in nature. According to Baumeister and Leary (1995), the bonds we share with those around us influence our thoughts and actions in relation to them, particularly in how we prioritize our associations. With this cognition as the controlling factor, our sense of belonging leads to a sense of responsibility, which then leads back to stronger feelings of belongingness and increased positive affect. When this cyclical relationship between belongingness and responsibility exists under an umbrella

of safety and security, we may feel the responsibility to reach out to others so that they, too, experience a sense of mutual support and identify with the group. Robert, Ana, and I clearly experienced safety and security within our orchestra, we prioritized the group in thought and action, and we experienced positive affect. Robert felt a responsibility to share his belongingness with others in the form of promoting social engagement and mutual support, while Ana chose to help others identify with the orchestra as she did, and treasure their experiences. I did not seek to share the manifestations of my feelings of belonging with others, most likely due to my relatively short membership in the group, but I could imagine reaching out to others as my tenure with the orchestra continued.

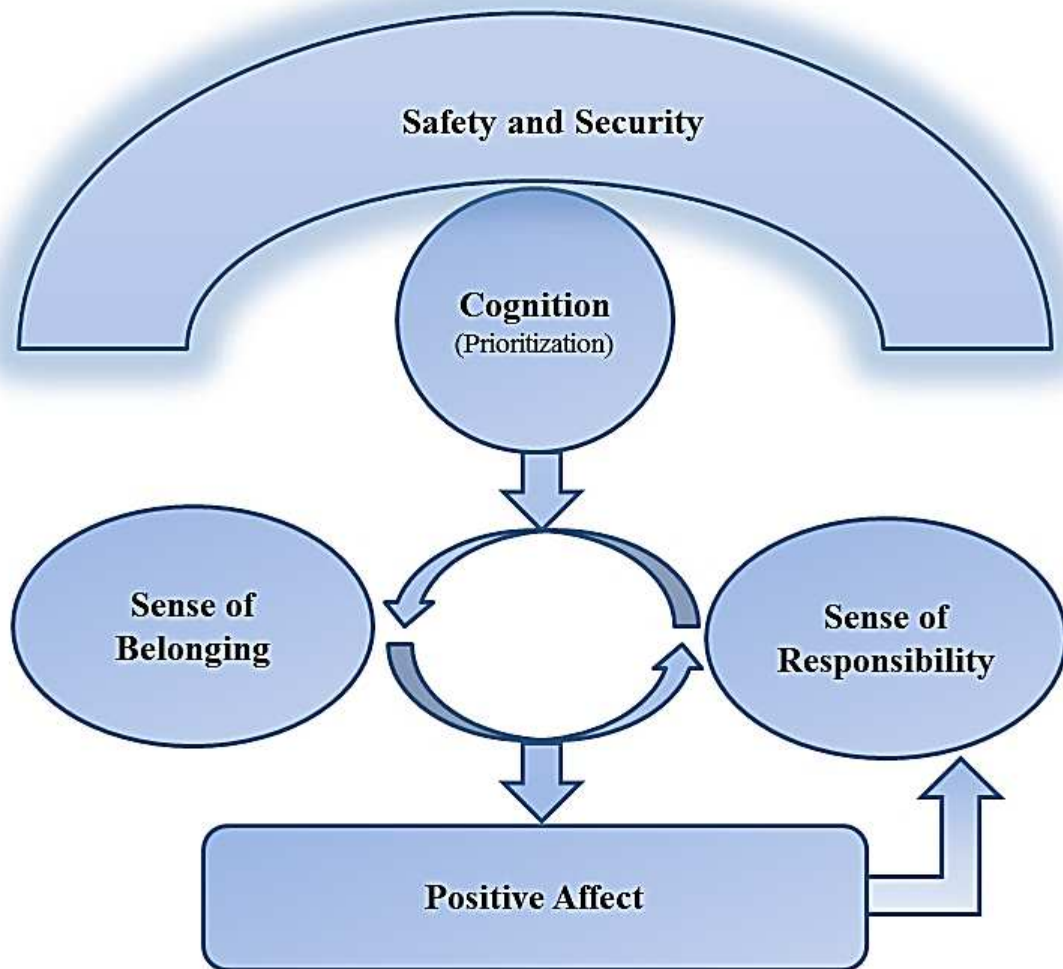


Figure 5. Sense of belonging and sense of responsibility.

CHAPTER EIGHT

REFLECTING ON NEW UNDERSTANDINGS

Reflecting on Theory

I was captivated by Baumeister and Leary's (1995) theory. It opened my eyes and brought me on a new journey in life, allowing me to fill a void that had existed for fifteen years. I studied their theory of belongingness, applied it to how we interact with each other within an orchestra, and made some incredible discoveries about how Robert, Ana, and I perceived belongingness, and how we acted based on our perceptions of belonging to an orchestra. Through narrative inquiry, I was able to explore how belonging circulated in personal and social spaces and I came to new understandings about how our belongingness may be related to identity, mutual learning, and responsibility.

The theory of belongingness has provided a fascinating framework in which to study meanings and perceptions of belongingness as experienced within an orchestra. In Baumeister and Leary's (1995) article, the authors highlighted several ways in which the theory could be applied, such as in prison reform and religious organizations, but I wonder if they had ever envisioned it as a framework for interaction in a musical setting. I have learned that musical groups are ideal settings in which to study sense of belonging due to the close-knit bonds that can so easily form and the intimate nature of performing alongside others who share an appreciation of music.

The participants' narratives pointed to many similarities in the empirical literature found in seminal article "The Need to Belong: Desire for Interpersonal Attachments as a

Fundamental Human Motivation” (Baumeister & Leary, 1995) as well as to other studies related to the theory of belongingness. Participants described forming bonds quickly and easily with those in close proximity to them. I experienced these initial bonds formed by proximity from the very first rehearsal I attended. By the end of the evening, I had already started bonding with several members of my section sitting near me.

Additionally, social bonds quickly formed in new groups, such as in the trio I joined with Robert and Ana. These bonds were then strengthened over time due to the lasting atmosphere of a caring context within the orchestra and among its members. The mutual support Robert, Ana, and I developed was directly related to the bonds we shared.

As we shared and reflected on stories of bonding and mutual learning, we also discovered that we were hesitant or even unwilling to break the bonds we had formed over the years in the orchestra and various sub-groups. Baumeister and Leary (1995) asserted that due to habit and obligation, we feel the urge to keep the bonds we have formed, and when they are broken, we can show signs of decreased affect. Robert displayed regret and sorrow for members who left the orchestra, and he missed them; however, he made no attempts to rekindle these broken bonds as the bonds were weak. He was also reluctant to leave his outreach group despite some animosity he faced there; he felt connections to members of the group that were strong enough to overcome any negative interactions that occurred. Similarly, Ana expressed reluctance to move to a new area due in part to her strong bonds in the orchestra. I viewed my participation in the orchestra as a great responsibility and it related to the bonds I felt there. Without the presence of those bonds, I would not have placed so much emphasis on continuing to

participate in the group, promote it, and help it to the best of my ability.

As Baumeister and Leary noted, “social rituals involving greetings and farewells serve to assure others of the continuation of one’s relationships with them” (p. 503).

Each May there is an end-of-the-year party, full of celebration and laughter, but an air of sadness also exists: We know we will not see each other and make music together for a few months. By coming together to celebrate the end of a season, we were also affirming our desire to reunite for another year of music-making together in September.

Furthermore, Robert, Ana, and I all found ways to nurture some of the bonds we formed through playing with our trio and with community service groups during the summer.

We demonstrated our unwillingness to break bonds by staying active in these groups, which served as suitable, albeit temporary, substitutions.

I continually observed and experienced, along with Robert and Ana, the relationship of the presence of belongingness to positive affect and stronger social bonds, and the absence of belongingness to negative affect, as Baumeister and Leary (1995) described. This helped me make some interesting interpretations about our own identity and mutual concern for one another. We felt happy while performing in the orchestra and trio together, and that in turn strengthened our bonds with each other. The sense of belonging that we felt as a result of feeling safe, secure, and mutually cared for by those around us led us to feel accepted, free from judgment, and also strengthened our bonds. These conditions were ideal for having what Ana referred to as “precious experiences.” Conversely, Ana felt negative affect from a lack of belongingness in another orchestra she joined, and no strong bonds were formed there. As a result, she had second thoughts

about remaining in that group. Therefore, with the presence of this positive affect under conditions of safety and security, we will be more likely to take on a responsibility to share our belongingness with those around us. Without these conditions present, we will be less likely to take on any meaningful sense of responsibility toward the group.

Experiencing a deprivation of sense of belonging can also have ill-effects on personal affect, as I noted when describing how I felt at the possibility of missing a rehearsal.

Through cognition, we prioritize thoughts about others based on our perceived bonds with them, and our cognition, in turn, influences behavior. Ana, Robert, and I prioritized our orchestra, expressing how we felt a deep responsibility toward the group and an obligation to do our best. Robert noted that his personal sense of responsibility toward the group affected his decision-making and how he felt obligated to promote social interaction within the group. Ana expressed concern over letting her section down, feeling responsible because of the way she thought about them in relation to her own sense of belonging. I related sense of belonging to responsibility similarly to Ana in that my own identity was related to the responsibility I felt to the group, and this stemmed from feeling belongingness there.

Because conditions of safety and security were present in the orchestra, we experienced mutual caring for the group and for those around us. This was particularly evident for Robert and Ana, who took on a responsibility to share their sense of belonging with others in their own ways. Both viewed the orchestra as their ingroup and devoted—by prioritizing—cognitive processing to the people in this group. As a result, their sense of belonging led to a sense of responsibility and increased personal affect,

compelling them to share this with others in our group. This pattern of cyclical behavior began as mere thought processes based on the favoring of others in our safe and “judgment-free” zone. Baumeister and Leary (1995) pointed to cognitive processing as predictive of our thought process in favor of our ingroup, but this study went well beyond that notion to suggest a new way of thinking about how prioritization of thoughts affects responsibility.

My interpretations of the narratives show the relevance of belongingness in music education research, and although there were no music education studies that fully addressed Baumeister and Leary’s theory, there were several music-related studies that had similar ideas to this study. Willingham’s (2001) study indicated multiple ways in which self-growth and feelings of community caused participants to cognitively process positive thoughts about fellow group members; however my inquiry uncovered ways in which cognition was a controlling factor in our sense of belonging and sense of responsibility. My own sense of responsibility toward the group stemmed from how I felt connected to my section members and thus obligated to do my best to help less advanced players. Ana similarly felt responsible in her section and took on mentorship roles to new students, just as she was mentored in the past. Robert’s obligation of responsibility related to pleasing his fellow members by doing a good job with the music and advocating for more social opportunities.

I also found agreement with Neill’s (1998) study, in which bonds were formed at first due to proximity, and then strengthened over time. Ana, Robert, and I all considered those in our sections to be our closest friends in the orchestra (apart from one another).

The bonds we formed with our section members began as mere proximal bonds and then developed into strong and lasting friendships as we were given the opportunities to frequently interact with them in sectional rehearsals.

While I did not observe any apparent positive or negative physical health attributes as a result of fulfilled belongingness needs in this study, as in Coffman's (2008) and Eaton's (2013), emotional health was likely affected. Participants' narratives described a wide range of positive emotions associated with feeling belongingness within the orchestra. Robert expressed feelings of safety and security as well as a profound level of completeness as a result of the belonging he felt there. Ana's "precious experiences" over the years were the result of enduring bonds she had made, which amplified the joy she received from making music: "The music we create is one thing, but the friendships we develop make it doubly rewarding to be there." These experiences were both meaningful and valuable to her, but also fragile. Without frequent nurturing, they can disappear. Personally, I found myself anticipating each Thursday evening because I would get to interact with a group of wonderful people with whom I felt a strong connection. This connection made the music so much more enjoyable and fulfilling.

In Parker's (2010) study, participants described their feelings of belongingness as varied, pleasant, stress-reducing, and an outlet for personal growth. My study expanded upon this research by not only showing how sense of belonging is positive and beneficial, but it also connected belongingness with a sense of responsibility toward mutual learning. Robert described his personal growth as a musician in relation to becoming a *complete* human. This stemmed from his drawing on the experiences of those with whom he

shared bonds: “We are compelled to reach out and be with other human beings, and find out what they think, and ask their opinions, and to relate to them. In that process, that’s when you become a whole person.” This concept of mutual learning as a gateway for greater self-understanding may be key to understanding belonging in a music ensemble. Ana demonstrated that her sense of belonging was an outlet for personal growth; she placed a high value on becoming a better musician and she expressed appreciation for developing musicianship in the presence of caring and supportive friends. However, Ana she moved beyond growth as a person to associate her very *identity* with the orchestra. Further, her identity as a responsible member of a group in which she felt a mutual caring for compelled her to reach out to others in hopes that they would come to identify as she did. These new understandings warrant further research to better understand not only how we identify ourselves by feeling belongingness within a group, but also how we are prompted to reach out beyond ourselves.

Reflecting on Narrative

This study allowed me to do as narrative inquirers do: to live in the midst of my participants, and to explore their perceptions and experiences in a unique and intimate way. It was an optimal way to uncover the roots of belongingness because we could trace our own lives and find new meanings in events we experienced. It guided us through the complex three-dimensional space of our experiences and helped us tell and retell stories in insightful ways.

As humans, our vulnerability often lies with how we perceive ourselves within as well as in relation to others, and our belongingness plays a large role in this vulnerability.

The sense of belonging we have (or lack) can affect our self-esteem and emotional well-being. Therefore, narrative inquiry can provide effective and sensitive strategies for uncovering insight as we navigate participants' vulnerabilities as well as our own. It can give us the tools to carefully and thoroughly uncover deep meanings from experience. Furthermore—and unique among research approaches—narrative allows our participants to become equal partners in the sharing and composing of preliminary research. This can perhaps offer an added duality: How do participants describe their experiences of belonging to the very research project they are a part of? As they trace the meanings of their experiences, participants are actively engaged in the process of collecting and interpreting the research. Feeling a sense of belonging to a narrative inquiry team might contribute to participants' insights on their experiences of belonging overall.

As a novice researcher but experienced educator, I found narrative inquiry to be the perfect tool for sharing my life experiences and also learning a great deal from my participants. As Clandinin and Connelly (1990, 2000) directed, we made meaning of our experiences, and put them into context in a relatable, adequate, and plausible way so that others can benefit from them. In the process of sharing these experiences with one another, Robert, Ana, and I all came to new understandings about ourselves and each other. The process of continual reflection for an extended period of time helped us realize how valuable our participation in this orchestra truly was, and how important bonds within the group were. As we continue to make music together, we also continue sharing precious experiences, and will always be reflecting on what we have learned.

As I engaged deeply in the midst of this narrative inquiry, I continually reflected

on my own responsibility to represent the stories of my participants in a fair, honest, and meaningful way, while respecting their privacy and safety. As mentioned previously, narrative researchers have the obligation to share an equitable balance of power with their participants as they co-compose together, yet certain tensions will arise as the narratives form that may compromise the integrity of the research. In this study, certain stories were considered “off limits” by my participants, so they were not included. Their exclusion did not alter the insight into the research questions in a meaningful way, but rather it allowed me to build even stronger trust with the participants by showing them this respect and offering a balance of power.

Reflecting on Educating

How can we use this new knowledge to reflect on our own teaching? How can we apply belongingness theory in our classrooms and orchestras in order to find new ways to educate our students and improve our programs? This study uncovered a wealth of benefits stemming from the sense of belonging experienced by the participants, including joy, security, improved sound quality, and responsibility. Conversely, being deprived of this sense of belonging negatively affects us. As humans, it is our desire to seek out and experience feelings of belongingness, and these feelings contribute to our well-being and health. As music educators, it is our responsibility to foster an appreciation for music in our classrooms, and understanding that our classrooms and ensembles make ideal situations for belongingness to occur can help us succeed in that.

The participants in my study—Robert, Ana, and I—described belonging to an orchestra in a multi-faceted way. We felt pride, responsibility, safety, completeness,

welcoming, comfort, and familial emotions in relation to feeling belongingness while we actively engaged in making music and building bonds. These emotions were further described as positive, uplifting, energizing, and rewarding. Additionally, our senses of belonging affected our actions and decision-making in the orchestra and in our lives. The combination of a caring context in the orchestra and among its members with the frequency of the rehearsals satisfied the participants' belongingness needs. These findings can have important implications in the field of community and school orchestras.

Fostering a sense of belonging within school or community orchestras can provide benefits to group morale, quality of music, and retention rates. My participants described positive affect resulting from feeling like we belonged. We associated our feelings of belonging with happiness and safety while playing, and indicated that our cognition in regards to the orchestra and its members was affected by these feelings as well. We processed our thoughts about group members and non-group members based on our perceptions of sense of belonging.

Implications from an increase in affect suggest that other school or community orchestra members might similarly experience a general sense of happiness with their group: They may enjoy making music among friends, and the bonds they form can amplify the enjoyment they receive from the music. Participants in my study felt safe, happy, and secure within our group, and this stemmed directly from our sense of belonging. This safety, happiness, and comfort in turn improved the sound we were able to produce as an orchestra. As Robert remarked, "Feeling safe and secure contributes a great deal to the sound. Since you are less likely to be nervous and are more relaxed, the

execution of the instrument is improved, resulting in a better sound individually and hence for the group.” Further research might investigate whether other community orchestra members and school students experience improved sound production within the orchestra in relation to this feeling of safety. Similarly, as they play with more confidence and relaxation, they might thus experience a decrease in fear of failure because they will be surrounded by people who care for them and give them a feeling of security as they perform.

As I participated as an orchestra sub-group in this study, I came to some fascinating new understandings about the importance of participating in chamber music. In this small, intimate setting, Robert, Ana, and I engaged in hundreds of hours of music-making, laughing, gossiping, story-telling, and political debate. We learned from one another as we engaged in an activity that we all immensely enjoyed: We became friends in the midst of playing Beethoven together. We gave each other sage life advice between movements of Mozart’s *Eine Kleine Nachtmusik*. The sense of belonging that formed in our trio, as Ana described, strengthened our bonds, which in turn strengthened our sense of belonging. Chamber music offers an outlet for taking the enjoyment of music we share and adding a social element, which is critical in nurturing sense of belonging. With frequent interaction and a caring context of mutual concern for one another, this outlet has powerful implications in music education for building responsibility, trust, and bonding. Further, the skills gained by playing in a chamber group, such as social skills and the responsibility of playing an independent part, can transcend into students’ lives by playing a significant role in their development and well-being. Regardless of their

continuation of music after high school, students can use these skills in other groups they choose to join. Speaking personally, many of the bonds I formed in chamber groups as a youth still exist today, lasting and unbreakable.

Further, our belongingness contributed to the responsibility we felt toward the group. Other members of school and community orchestras who feel personal responsibility toward their respective groups may similarly have more of a vested interest in them and may go to greater lengths to help them succeed. This was the most profound discovery I made in this study, and I feel it can have broad implications in our field. I ask the music educator: How responsible would you say your average students feel toward the success and well-being of the group? Do they have an interest in seeing it succeed, or are they merely trying to get an A in class or enjoy the music? We should place a bigger emphasis on developing students' senses of responsibility, and this can be achieved by providing ways for their senses of belong to develop as the two are intimately related. This can be fostered best under an "umbrella" of safety and security within the group, where students and members feel like they are in a judgment-free zone and can best learn from the experiences of others and share their own experiences and senses of belonging.

Participants emphasized the importance of social events for helping members establish and strengthen social bonds. These bonds in turn were shown to improve the cohesion of the individual sections as well as the orchestra as a whole by creating a comfort zone in which to perform music. Feelings of safety and security while playing as opposed to fear of reprimand and humiliation are the result of placing this emphasis on bond-building. Creating a safe space for music-making, free of judgment—rather than a

reliance on competition or intimidation to motivate students, which instead can breed anxiety and fear—is more conducive to establishing a strong sense of belonging. As teachers and conductors, we can better nurture an atmosphere of caring concern amongst our students if we first demonstrate it ourselves by offering a welcoming space in which to make music. Providing a safe and comfortable outlet to seek help with the music will facilitate bond-building and improve morale within the section. We can encourage section leaders and more advanced members to be available and willing to help others around them. Additionally, if our rehearsals are more frequent, they will allow for ample time to build strong and healthy bonds.

Presumably, we want our orchestras to be happy and productive groups, but may tend to emphasize rehearsal strategies and classroom management, overlooking the creation of a caring and stress-free environment. As a teacher I often overlook what is important in favor of getting done what needs to be done, such as standardized assessments, administrative duties, and attending meetings. This study suggests that an ideal learning environment should place importance on social events, which will allow for more bonds to be made. Sub-groups such as chamber music and community service groups offer additional outlets for members to get to know one another, build bonds, and interact more frequently.

In principle, retention rates in school or community orchestras can be improved as a result of the strengthening of social bonds among students and members. With strong bonds established and a lasting sense of belonging, members will be more reluctant to quit the orchestra because it would mean breaking the social bonds they have created and

depriving themselves of sense of belonging. Additionally, without a fear of failure, which as a youth can be a significant catalyst in the decision to quit a group, students may be more likely to remain in it. Just as Ana described, the bonds she formed with members of the orchestra were so strong and her connection to the group was so profound that her reluctance to quit affected the way she lived her life: She had a hard time imagining her life without the orchestra, and therefore would be very unlikely to quit. Members of orchestras may similarly experience this strong sense of belonging in their groups, which could potentially affect their decision to remain with it longer.

Fostering a strong sense of belonging among our students can provide a wealth of benefits in our classrooms. I challenge music educators to reflect as I have done on learning to understand how belonging, which is one of our most basic and fundamental human *needs*, can be used to look at new ways in which our students and our programs can be more successful.

EPILOGUE

I'M DAMN FINE

As a music educator, I found myself asking more and more questions, as is typical in constructivist research: Where do I go from here? How will I use what I have gained in my classroom? What will my experiences in the orchestra and in developing a sense of belonging to it teach me and others? How and when will I negotiate closure with my participants and the orchestra? My experiences with Robert and Ana are far from complete; I plan on continuing to perform with the orchestra and trio and gaining the full benefits of the strong sense of belonging I have acquired.

I turned inward and reflected on how this all began and realized how my past experiences of belongingness influenced my career choice, guided me in my profession, and led me to an interest in this study. My life as a musician and educator developed from a complex series of positive and inspiring events, but stemmed from just one: My encounter with that student teacher in fifth grade. Her name was Miss Hankins.

Dear Miss Hankins,

It has been 25 years since you told me I could be a *damn fine* violinist if I put my mind to it, and I would like to share with you my reflections on a journey that you helped begin. You have gone on to become a successful educator, no doubt inspiring thousands of students just as you inspired me. You put the spark into the minds of your students

that they could go far, and you minced no words in doing so. You made me feel like I was special, and that I could succeed no matter what, but most importantly, you taught me that I belonged.

You instructed me in the art of violin in a small class in the basement, where we were pulled out of the large orchestra if we were ahead of them. Do you remember? We were both just beginners: You were just beginning your training as a music teacher in the classroom, and I was beginning my journey as a violinist. The class in that basement room did not belong upstairs. Upstairs, they were playing “Hot Cross Buns,” while you led us in the sublime works of Bach, Mozart, and Dr. Shinichi Suzuki. No, we belonged with you, Miss Hankins, in your wonderful dusty storage room. Near the end of the school year, you were saying your goodbyes and you pulled me aside in the hallway after I performed a piece for the class and told me: “Nick, that was remarkable playing today. You have the potential to be a *damn* fine violinist one day. But you need to practice even more, and concentrate even harder.” Indeed, I did have the potential, but I had yet to experience someone vocalizing it in such a way! After that, I doubled my efforts and went on to participate in a wonderful school orchestra program, developed a strong sense of belonging there, and eventually followed in your footsteps as a strings teacher. Since you were such a large part of setting me on the path that led me here, I would like to share with you what I have discovered. I would also like to ask you about your own journey since then. Please reflect with me:

Two years ago, I began a study in which I would explore the meanings and perceptions of belongingness while participating in an orchestra. I realized that my lack

of belonging to one since college was negatively affecting my life and I wanted to find out why. Based on my research, I have come to some conclusions on how sense of belonging can affect us as we participate in an orchestra. The ways in which we interact with other members with whom we have built bonds and the feelings we get as a result of our mutual concern for one another can have broad implications in our field. As a teacher trainee, you must have been keenly aware of the power of belonging, Miss Hankins; I witnessed it. You nurtured a genuine context of caring concern among the students in your class. I at first felt confused and scared to be leaving the safety of the large group, but it was short-lived. Down there, you pushed us hard and were strict and sometimes unforgiving of our mistakes, but we always knew you cared about us. Did you know back then that your concern for our success was so evident? I wonder how you took your experiences with us into your own career as a teacher upon graduation. Did we inspire you as you inspired us?

I discovered that a sense of belonging can affect our students' positive emotions while performing in class. They are happier when they feel like they belong to the group and will enjoy making music when they feel accepted. Their sound can improve if they experience high levels of belongingness because they are surrounded by those with whom they share important bonds. They will also feel more connected to the class and feel more of a vested interest if they develop a strong sense of belonging, and their responsibility toward the group will increase. Students are less likely to quit if they feel connected to the group; the retention rates from year to year are affected by sense of belonging. They will experience a reluctance to break the bonds they have made and will

not want to be deprived of the caring context they have become accustomed to. I have a newfound appreciation for the power of belongingness and I plan to develop new strategies in my classes to harness it. I plan to encourage the formation of even more sub-groups such as chamber music, jam sessions, and social events in which students can interact more socially and develop bonds with others in the orchestra.

I have filled the void that led me to this study by joining an orchestra and continuing in it. I have made incredible friendships and had wonderful experiences playing amongst people I care about. I would love to hear your thoughts and reflections on my research and on this letter. As someone who made such a difference in my life, I value your input more than you can know.

Thank you, Miss Hankins. I am now, truly, damn fine.

Sincerely,

Nick Rzonsa

APPENDIX

Description of Study for Potential Participants

Name of Study: Perceptions and Meanings of Belongingness within an Orchestra: A Narrative Study

Principal Investigator: Nicholas Rzonsa, Boston University Doctor of Musical Arts Candidate

The purpose of this information is to acquaint you with my doctoral research through Boston University. If any of the statements or words in this form are unclear, please let me know. I would like to discuss the study with you and I would be happy to answer any questions.

The purpose of my study is to uncover how individuals construct a sense of belonging to an orchestra. You are invited to take part in the study because you are an adult member of a community orchestra and have expressed interest in the study.

The study will last approximately six months, from September 2014 until February 2015. Your involvement in the study will not be day-to-day. Rather, it will primarily involve conversations with me and another orchestra member. Concurrently with our participation in the orchestra this Fall, we will engage in four main conversations (of no more than 90 minutes each) that focus on ways in which belongingness has affected our lives. These conversations are not designed as interviews, but rather as casual open dialogue in informal, quiet spaces where we will uncover new understandings of belongingness and what it means to us and to others. If you are interested in participating, you should have an active engagement with the orchestra, and willingness to write a short autobiography about your past experiences of belonging, specifically with regard to musical groups. Additionally, you will be asked to write a few short letters to me in which you reflect upon the conversations we had.

Each of four conversations will be audio-recorded. I will transcribe the audio recordings and then schedule a follow up conversation where we will review the transcript together, discuss the accuracy of the transcript, and decide together which parts are most important to tell the story of belonging, especially to an orchestra. Thus, at these meetings you will be an active participant, or co-composer of the research text. These meetings will take no longer than 120 minutes each. Additional conversations may become necessary if we feel new discoveries warrant them. These conversations will be shorter in duration, lasting no longer than 60 minutes each. At the conclusion of the study, we will discuss ways in which the research can be useful to both of us and what implications it may have in the context of belongingness within orchestras.

Please keep in mind that narrative inquiry research yields in-depth and rich information so plan on supplying as much information as you are willing to provide. As I have previously stated, you will guide me on what you want to be included in the final co-constructed story as well as what you would rather not be included.

There are no benefits to you from taking part in this research and you will not be paid for taking part in this research. Participating in this study is your choice. You are free not to take part or to withdraw at any time for any reason. No matter what you decide, there will be no penalty. If you decide to withdraw from this study, the information that you have already provided will be kept confidential. We will keep the records of this study confidential (regardless of whether or not you choose to remain in the study from start to finish) by storing all data on a computer that is password protected.

If you have any questions about the above information, please contact me at _____. My faculty advisor for this study is Dr. Karin Hendricks, who can be reached at _____. You may obtain further information about your rights as a research subject by calling the Boston University CRC IRB Office at 617-358-6115.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I look forward to hearing from you.

Nicholas Rzonsa

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