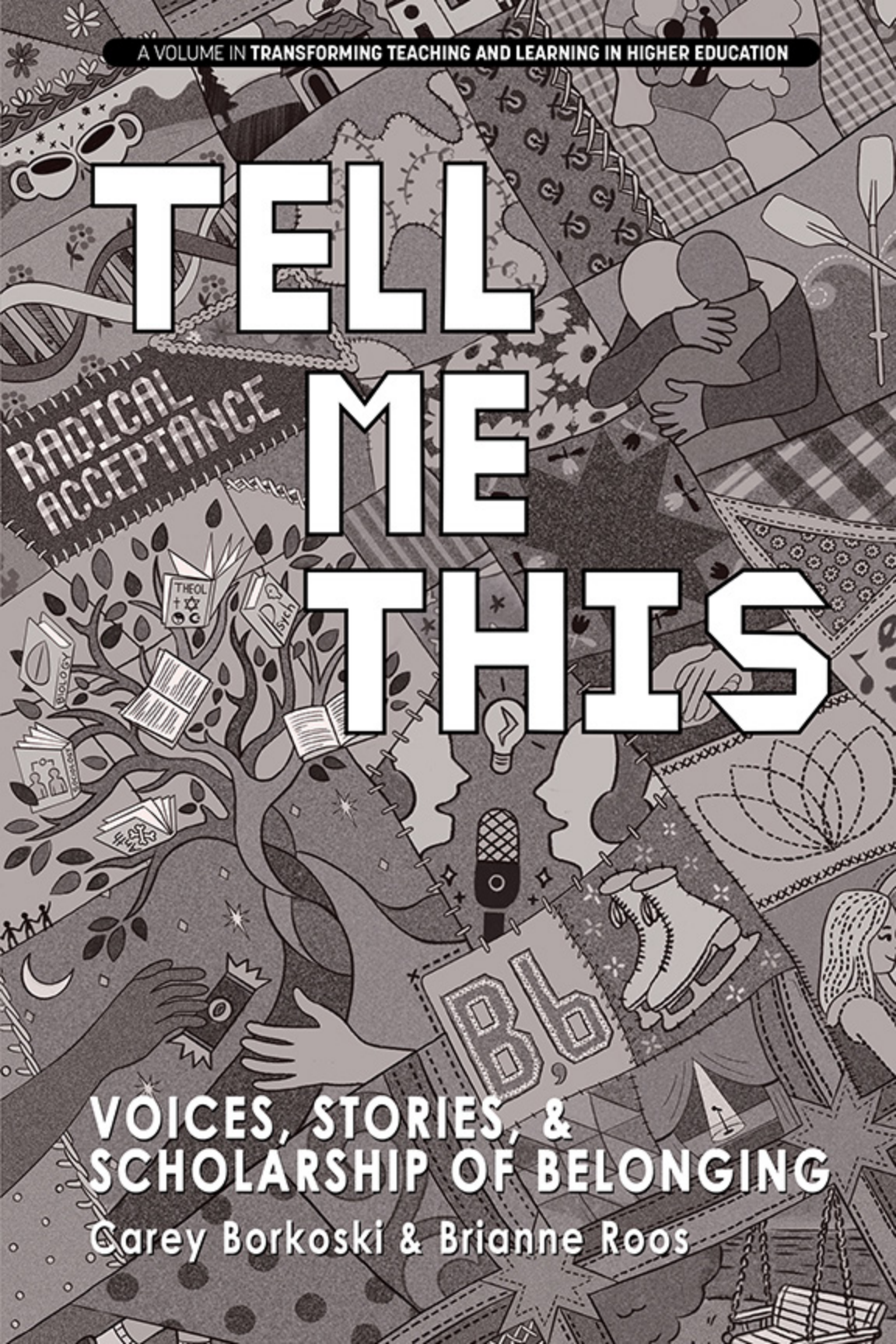


A VOLUME IN TRANSFORMING TEACHING AND LEARNING IN HIGHER EDUCATION



TELL ME THIS

VOICES, STORIES, &
SCHOLARSHIP OF BELONGING

Carey Borkoski & Brianne Roos

Tell Me This

A volume in
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Kristin N. Rainville, David G. Title, and Cynthia G. Desrochers, *Series Editors*

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*Voices, Stories, and
Scholarship of Belonging*

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INFORMATION AGE PUBLISHING, INC.
Charlotte, NC • www.infoagepub.com

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

A CIP record for this book is available from the Library of Congress

<http://www.loc.gov>

ISBN: 979-8-88730-889-0 (Paperback)

979-8-88730-890-6 (Hardcover)

979-8-88730-891-3 (E-Book)

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Printed in the United States of America

For Sara Eileen Downey.

Her invitations to “tell me this” taught Carey what it meant to belong.

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Prologue

Life is a fragmented mosaic, but the art of existence is within its combination.

—Talismanist Giebra

At its heart, this book is a compilation of moments, scenes, and, sometimes, complete stories about belonging. The people who shared their stories, the guests on our podcast, kindly and generously told us how they were doing, recounted their experiences of belonging (and not belonging), described their definitions, and detailed how the construct plays out in their lives. Our guests' stories revealed that belonging is familiar, complex, multi-layered, and dynamic. As teachers and researchers, our instinct was to learn more.

This book represents an exploration of belonging, grounded in our systematic analysis of our guests' stories and supported by literature about belonging from multiple scholarly disciplines. It is also about our personal and professional journeys of belonging. For over five years we have read peer-reviewed articles, academic books, and other stories of belonging in the popular press. We explored anthropology, philosophy, political science, human geography, biology, and many others, and we were excited to discover that the multidimensional construct of belonging that our guests repeatedly articulated also lives in the scholarship from multiple disciplines.

The forthcoming pages include a literature review, coded data, discussions of findings, and evidence-informed applications and recommendations.

Tell Me This, pages xi–xvii

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Most importantly, they include our guests' stories. As we hope you will read in these pages, we want to share and honor the lived experiences of our podcast guests. Because of our podcast, we know first-hand that listening and engaging with others in these stories is powerful, and our guests' insights consistently move us as they unfold in real-time during our recordings. While we cannot share our guests' spoken words through the pages of this book, we try our best to let their stories and lived experiences speak for themselves. When possible and relevant, we also share our reflections, struggles, reactions, and processing of what emerged in our data. As qualitative researchers and podcast hosts, we acknowledge our positionality and its impact on collecting and interpreting our guests' stories.

We followed the data wherever it took us, even when it got uncomfortable, confusing, and complicated, and the ten chapters of this book emerged from the process. They include our research story and methods, a transdisciplinary review of the belonging scholarship, an exploration of guests' definitions and conceptions of belonging, and a discussion of belonging to self. We also offer a chapter on embodiment and how the mind-body connection contributes to our understanding of belonging, followed by exploring belonging and the five senses. We conclude the book with examples of mindsets and strategies to foster belonging that emerged from our guests' insights, followed by our conclusion and final reflections.

Appropriately, we begin the book with stories. Just as we ask our guests about their belonging stories, we wanted to offer our own stories to position ourselves and our perspectives and participate in the research by sharing some of our belonging journeys.

* * *

Carey

In preparing to submit our book manuscript, I reviewed one last article about narrative inquiry (Kim, 2015). In it, Kim retells a story about visiting a colleague in her office and seeing a beautiful patchwork quilt hanging on the wall. Her colleague shared stories within the story of this quilt. She described it as "so many pieces of cloth in rectangles, triangles, and other shapes and colors deliberately put together to create a divergent, but convergent whole" (p. xiv). Reflecting on my journey of belonging, this quote resonated. My maternal grandmother and her welcoming ways represented my first experience of belonging, but my journey did not stop there. Rather, my own experience of belonging is like the quilt, a patchwork of varied

experiences and stories. Sewn together, with care and intention, the patches reveal my full, beautiful, and messy story of belonging.

Grandmother

Teacher is not a word my grandmother, Sara Eileen Downey, would have used to describe herself. In her modesty, she also would question my use of the word to describe her. We occasionally disagreed, so I don't mind admitting she was my first teacher. She was grandmother to ten and great-grandmother to seventeen, all with diverse interests, professions, and perspectives. She found space, time, love, and curiosity for us. Unsurprisingly, the podcast, our research, and this book resonate so deeply with me. Our guests' descriptions of their feelings about belonging put me back in my grandmother's home, sitting together in conversation and doing the occasional puzzle. She took time and showed interest in whatever was happening in my life then. She leaned in and asked questions, and when she wanted to learn more, which was often, she would say "tell me this." Little did I know that a few decades later, our podcast by the same name would begin and that her words would be the title of a book that began in her honor. My grandmother didn't talk about me being gay or starting a family with a woman; she just saw me and loved me. Each time we said our goodbyes and closed the door between us, a feeling stayed with me, a sense of belonging that seemed to linger. It was an energy, a sensation, a residue, hard to describe with words but present, and I was not the only one who felt it. Others in our family described a similar experience. After engaging in conversations with Brianne and our podcast guests, I believe that the sensation represented a sense of belonging that we perhaps take with us as we go out in the world. It is a warmth and a brightness that I held onto every time I said goodbye to my grandmother, and I still hold it in my heart today, a few years after we said our last goodbye.

Con-Law Team

If you don't like the road you're walking, start paving another one.

—Dolly Parton

Constitutional Law Team? Before high school, I played golf, soccer, softball, and basketball. I swam, rode bikes, and did any sport or activity that I could find. In high school, I was a varsity athlete in field hockey and softball, and I thought I wanted to be a lawyer (I thought wrong!), so I signed up for a spring elective in Constitutional Law (Con-law). I LOVED it and was invited to join the Con-law Team. I said sure, not having the

slightest idea what this involved. I just knew I liked the topics and loved being on teams. I quickly discovered that this elective class attracted a group of students who had nothing in common save for enrollment in this course. The class roster looked like the teacher had visited the high school cafeteria and randomly selected students from different tables, with a student or two plucked from different cliques. Our teacher created our teams, and those teams were assigned topics and questions to prepare for the local competition. We engaged in debate about a constitutional topic, responded to questions, and made our case, and the judges judged our preparation and performance. We read, talked, and studied some more with no idea what to expect, but our collaborative work was fun and effective. Each round of competition was exciting, and each victory led our team to levels that we didn't know existed. Together, we won the local- and state-level competitions and headed to the National Constitutional Law Invitational. We were off to Washington DC, for a weekend of preparation and competition.

Remember, before joining the Con-law class, the students only knew each other in passing. We did not have much in common except for our strong interest in doing well in this competition. What we soon discovered in studying, debating, eating, and sightseeing together is that when teenagers with nothing obvious in common come together, we became our own connected community with these formative experiences in common. Reflecting on Con-law, I now recognize that this connection was an authentic sense of belonging. I had been on varsity teams, participated in school activities and clubs, and joined a church and other organizations and communities. Yet, this experience, this competition, these people, this space to learn, practice, discover, discuss, and debate is where I felt I belonged the most as a high school student. My curiosity, interest in questions, and a strong desire to learn were all valued and seen. May (2011) describes the temporal nature of belonging as both fleeting and enduring. The weeks of preparation and competition represented deeply felt, authentic, and fleeting experiences of belonging. I got a taste of what it felt like to be seen and valued in the most unexpected context, and my Con-law experience contributed to both my sense of belonging and my strong desire to find true belonging. I am grateful for that class and my Con-law teammates.

Dance Club

Dance is the hidden language of the soul.

—Martha Graham

No words for how I felt, I just knew in my bones and my soul that I was different. In the 1980s, we did not have the language, role models, or

experiences to know that my confusion and questions were wrapped up in my being gay. I struggled to find my place and connect to a collegiate version of a Con-law team, but it never happened. Looking at my college experience from the outside, you would see that I had field hockey teammates, classmates, and friends. I was not alone, but I never had that authentic connection from Con-law. I just never found an enduring sense of belonging. When I graduated, I landed my first job in a corporate setting, where I worked hard to find community, connection, and my place in the world.

Then, one night, we went into the city, and I had my first experience at a gay dance club. Outside, I could feel the beat of the music, and as we opened the door, IDs were checked, and hands were stamped. I could see the lights, hear the music, and see all the people. Moving deeper into the club, I watched people dancing, smiling, singing, laughing, and moving to the beats. I grabbed a friend and went to the middle of the floor. My soul smiled. I was home, able to exhale and be me in the moment on the dance floor. I did not want the night to end. I had found my people, my community, a place where I could be me, even though I was not entirely sure who that was or would be. In that moment on the dance floor, I did not have to think very hard to be me. I could feel a gut sensation of belonging, and I relished the ease of acceptance and belonging.

The stories of my grandmother, Con-law, and the dance floor are representative patches on my quilt of belonging. There are more stories, of course, as our respective quilts are made of infinite patches. As someone unable to come out of the closet until I was in my thirties, my search for and experiences of belonging extend across much of my life.

* * *

Brianne

My belonging story takes place in a boat. More specifically, in a rowing shell, before sunrise, on chilly mornings in Baltimore during college. My alarm went off at 4:15 a.m. I put my feet on the ground, then turned around and made my bed. I dressed in the dark, working through the pile of clothes I had set out the night before, each layer stacked in the order in which I would put them on. I microwaved the oatmeal poised in a cup, eating it on my way to the van that would take us from campus downtown to the boathouse. We drove ourselves to practice in those days—half-asleep students driving 12-passenger vans full of fully-asleep teammates through Baltimore City seemed perfectly fine then. Remarkably, or maybe miraculously, we always made it to and from practice safely. We arrived at the boathouse, shaken awake by the van doors, stepped out into the darkness, and quickly

jogged before listening to the lineups for the morning. Then we move inside to stand by our boats, our eyes slowly adjusting, minds groggily waking, and bodies ready to go. If you have ever seen a team move rowing shells, it is a beautiful site that relies on precision, taking direction, moving together, and mutual trust—all of which resonate deeply with me.

We walked the boats down the docks, lowered them into the water, and then eased ourselves into the boats, counting down to signal to the crew that we were ready before shoving off. Pushing off the dock with one hand, holding our oars to steady the boat in the other, feeling and hearing the bubbles beneath the honeycomb-thin hull, the moon lit the sky. In that moment, there was nothing but the eight rowers and our coxswain, the water, and our boat. No orders from the coach yet, no aching muscles. Just an awareness of stillness, a posture of readiness, a desire to work—and sometimes very cold hands. The coach came around on his launch, gave instructions and the plan, and we executed. We worked hard to achieve the short-term goals for that day, thought ahead to the next race, and learned over hours, days, weeks, months, and years on the water that we were working for more than those goals or the next race. We were working for the perfect stroke. And every single stroke over all of those practices was an opportunity for that moment of absolute synchronicity. It was a challenging quest, and success depended on the selfless persistence of every person in the boat. Persistence is almost synonymous with rowing and with me.

The sun rose as we practiced, and by the time we lifted the boats out of the water and returned them to the racks, the rest of the city was awake. Back on campus, we grabbed breakfast on our way to class, comparing blisters, lamenting our fatigue, dreading the afternoon workout, and building lifelong friendships. The blisters, fatigue, and relationships were real. I never liked when the alarm went off so early or the condition of my hands, cracked ribs, or torn hamstrings. But I loved rowing. I loved rowing because it was a place where who I was at my core was seen and valued. I have always been a hard worker, but my work ethic had never been indulged with such intensity. I have always thrived on self-discipline and made my bed in the morning, but never quite so early. I have always had friends, but never any as close as the rowers. There was a sacredness to our work as we witnessed the darkness turn to light every morning, as we sliced the flat water with our oars, leaving puddles behind us, fleeting evidence of our meters of effort. Together, we felt the deep cold of frosty mid-March mornings give way to the welcomed warm air of spring.

We lived the juxtaposition of the silence of sleeping kids on the way to practice and the pumping of music and laughter on the way back to campus. Every. Single. Day. Persistence, sincerity, connection, and, for me, faith.

These values made boats go fast; they are the secret to the perfect stroke. They are also my core values. The alignment of the recipe for success on the water with my values fostered belonging. I was seen, my strengths and gifts were recognized, needed, and celebrated, and I never could have articulated this at the time. I just knew what I felt: warmth, deep joy, support, and ease. The work was not easy, but there was an ease to belonging and feeling connected to oneself and others, and rowing offered that to me.

Today, more than 20 years after I rowed my last race, I write this book in an office with an old college oar hung overhead, and most of the pages were written at 5:00 a.m. The dog wakes up with me, and as I open the door to let him out, I consciously take a breath of the early morning air, and I am immediately brought back to the boathouse for a quick moment. The mornings have always been a gift, a time for me to tap into my core values of persistence, sincerity, connection, and faith. It is a time to belong to myself and to write as a means of connecting with others.

And finally, this story ends with one more detail: I married the coach!

* * *

Each person's quilt looks different, and our guests shared many and varied examples of belonging in their lives. We hope that our stories and those in this book resonate, generate warmth and familiarity, inspire curiosity, and create opportunities for you to consider your own experiences relative to belonging—to think about your belonging story.

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Acknowledgments

The words in this book are a compilation of work and contributions by many people whose stories inspired us to think deeply about belonging. Thank you to our Tell Me This guests, who generously shared their definitions, insights, experiences, and time with us on the podcast. Your stories are the essence of our work, and we have loved learning with you.

Thank you to Dr. Alice Waldron, whose thoughtful edits helped to shape our first drafts of these chapters. Alice, thank you for your questions, clarifications, and careful eye for detail that guided our writing and revisions.

As teachers, we were thrilled to welcome students into the process of book writing. Special thanks to Anna Tignor, Olivia Brown, Elena Mugno, and Alexa Weyer who spent many hours learning about belonging through writing, editing, and collating references. We anticipate that this book is the first of many times we will see your names in print because you are such strong thinkers and writers. Thank you for contributing to this work!

To our families in Massachusetts (Susan, Colby, Henry, & Sara) and Maryland (Jason, Deirdre, & Bridget), thank you for giving us the time and space to complete this project and, most of all, for making our homes places full of love and belonging.

A final note. It should be evident from the stories, ideas, and reflections on the pages of this book that this project reflects our belief in *yes-and*. It has been hard, uncomfortable, confusing, exhausting; and surprising, joyful, exhilarating, rewarding, and nourishing. Having space and time for this

kind of experience is due, in part, to our families and to the tremendous friendship we share. Rumi said that “those doing soul work, who want the searing truth more than solace or applause, know each other right away,” and this was true in our case. Long before our commitment to writing this soul-filled book, we connected around ideas of community, authenticity, vulnerability, and courage. It is a privilege, an honor, and a gift to work together, and we are grateful for our collective sense of belonging that continues to grow, change, and strengthen as a result of our collaboration.

Introduction

Our Story and Our Methods

Tell Me This. It seems appropriate to begin with these three simple words because they are the heart of the origin story of this book. As shared in our prologue, Carey's grandmother, Sara Eileen Downey, invited everyone—family, friends, and strangers alike—into conversation using the phrase “tell me this.” As a child and into adulthood, Carey remembers her grandmother's warm invitation and attentive listening filled with genuine praise and pride, no matter the story that was told. Eileen Downey probably never spoke of belonging specifically, but she was Carey's best belonging teacher. She exuded warmth, openness, curiosity, and acceptance, which we would later appreciate as pillars of belonging. Most importantly, she provided space for Carey to be herself, to share her stories, and to be appreciated and loved unconditionally. At the time, Carey did not attempt to unpack and describe her grandmother's ways; she just knew how she felt in her grandmother's presence.

As it turns out, active listening, radical acceptance, and the feelings or actual senses of belonging we experience in our bodies were big ideas that

emerged from the podcast about belonging that we host, called *Tell Me This*. We try to emulate Carey's grandmother when we invite our guests to share their stories of belonging during the pandemic, in leadership, and in relationships. Like Eileen Downey always did, we approach each episode with openness and curiosity, eager to learn from our guests' stories. Sometimes, we connect dots across guests' ideas, and other times, we are blown away by new insights; we learn and expand our understanding of belonging with every single story. As the podcast progressed, we realized that belonging was permeating our lives beyond our conversations. Carey is in a same-sex marriage and is a mom to three children, a 10-year-old son, and 8-year-old boy-girl twins. Brianne is in a heterosexual marriage and is a mom to two teenage daughters. We are both teachers and leaders in higher education. We volunteer at our kids' schools and in our communities and churches. We are both daughters and sisters. Belonging shows up in all of these roles and relationships, and as our own stories converged with and diverged from our guests' stories, we began to see patterns and connections, all contributing to our understanding of what it means to belong or be excluded, how it feels to belong (or not), and things we can do to support belonging for others.

The integration of belonging in our daily lives with our families, in our classrooms and advising meetings, on the podcast, in our recreational and research reading, in the shows we watch (*Grey's Anatomy* and *Ted Lasso* are two of our favorites), and in our research and writing brings the construct to life and prompted us to write this book. The brilliant bell hooks (1994) and her discussion of transformational teaching and learning resonates with us because of her emphasis on integration, authenticity, and belonging. In hooks' experience, the most powerful moments happen when a classroom is a place of community, in which teachers are honest and sincere and model the vulnerability of being their true selves with students. Similarly, the best teachers invite students to share their lived experiences and then use those experiences as part of the learning—valuing, validating, and connecting students' lives to the class content. This recognition of students and teachers as whole people and the explicit integration of life inside and outside the classroom fosters belonging, community, and transformational learning. We find ourselves in a similar state of integration, of seeing and feeling belonging in different ways across our lives. We are in a continuous state of exploratory learning.

Methods

As trained researchers, we appreciate the systematic process of identifying a research question, designing a study that is best suited to address the

question, collecting and analyzing data, and drawing conclusions. In fact, Carey is a research methodologist, and she taught Brianne's doctoral research methods courses. Yet, this book has different, more organic roots.

Inquire, Listen, Reflect

Long before we formally engaged in reading, reviewing, and coding data for this book, we were asking questions, actively listening, and regularly reflecting on the conversations and learning from the stories our guests shared on the podcast. Our podcasting routine is collaborative, inquiry-based, reflective, and iterative. Podcasting and interviewing individuals over several years throughout a variety of experiences that included presidential elections, political turmoil, a global pandemic, racial injustice, graduations, career changes, births, deaths, and many moments in between led us to adopt a practice of openness and an ongoing process of learning.

After starting the podcast in 2019, Carey invited Brianne to co-host in 2020, and we had the unique privilege of conducting a season of interviews with guests about belonging during the pandemic. Those conversations are among the most poignant and powerful we have encountered because we (hosts and guests alike) were living through the days of social distancing, forced online teaching and learning, fear, uncertainty, illness, and staggering death counts. At the same time, our nation's racial reckoning began to unfold. We intended to explore belonging, learn from our guests, process life in 2020, and try to connect what we learned to existing research in a way that would appeal to an audience of academics and non-academics.

Our guests and their stories are varied, diverse, and, in many ways, universal. To take in the complexity and unique experiences, over time, we created a process that includes space for us to listen and ask questions of our guests, contribute to these conversations, debrief post-interview, reflect and connect across podcast episodes, do our best to metabolize what our guests shared, and then prepare for subsequent episodes. Even before we transcribed the data, we were making connections and seeing patterns.

Our process included:

- listening, noticing, naming, and exploring with guests in real-time;
- reflecting with each other and processing what we heard post-interview;
- identifying connections among guests that lead to a deeper exploration of stories and experiences; and

- engaging with articles, books, and other source material to expand our understanding of belonging

All of this happened before any traditional qualitative coding occurred. By way of an example, our first podcast guest of Season 4, Jennifer (pseudonym), spoke eloquently about radical acceptance. Jennifer explained that Buddhism, Buddhist-inspired writing by Brach (2003), and her strong beliefs and scholarship in Christianity combine to inform her definition of belonging. We explored the idea of radical acceptance by talking about definitions, research, and practical examples of what radical acceptance looks like with students and colleagues. We interrogated the word “radical” to better understand what it meant in the context of belonging. Notably, the idea of radical acceptance stayed with us throughout the season, and we connected back to it during subsequent podcast episodes.

Our living in the podcast data regularly provides a unique opportunity to create real-time connections, moments of inquiry based on data already shared and experienced, and to continuously reflect and iterate on our discoveries. As the podcast developed, we realized that the insights shared in each episode were parts of the story of belonging, and the podcast evolved into an opportunity to collect and analyze the transcripts as data for our research. We secured institutional review board approval to use our podcast interview data to explore our research interests, and our affinity for podcasting organically merged with our area of research and scholarship.

From there, we looked both forward and back. We continued to podcast while using qualitative research methods to systematically code the transcripts of existing episodes. We used otter.ai to transcribe our episodes and Nvivo for organization and qualitative analysis, which included a combination of a priori and emergent coding (Saldaña, 2021). Our a priori codes came from a prior study on Season 2, belonging during the pandemic. We felt that many of the codes from that study would be relevant to this research, and we used the applicable a priori codes and were also open to new emergent codes as we analyzed Seasons 3 and 4. We began with parallel coding, where each of us coded the same four episodes, two each from Season 3 and Season 4. Then, we met to discuss our a priori and emergent codes, and we developed a preliminary shared codebook. At that time, we eliminated the a priori codes that seemed to be pandemic-specific and did not arise in the Season 3 and Season 4 episodes (e.g., deep fatigue).

Our next step was our first cycle of independent coding. Individually, we coded our assigned episode transcripts, and met regularly during the process to ensure intercoder reliability by discussing our respective emergent

codes. We added codes to our shared codebook, merged similar codes, and removed codes that were not used at all. After the first complete coding cycle, we added all of our codes to a Google jam board, which functions as a virtual whiteboard. Initially, we collaboratively clustered the codes by grouping them according to commonality (Saldaña, 2021). Four major themes emerged: definitions of belonging, belonging to self, five senses of belonging, and tools of belonging. From there, we worked within the themes to further categorize the codes into subthemes, such as feeling an *ease of belonging* and feeling a *vibe of belonging* within the five senses theme. We co-constructed the sub-themes by working on the jam board simultaneously and also independently, and then we met again to talk through our rationale for grouping codes into particular subthemes. Our process included a combination of categorical and phenomenological theme development. Saldaña (2021) describes categorical themes as something that “is,” while phenomenological themes are interpreted and determined by what the researchers feel a statement means.

We cannot wait to share the story of belonging with you—the story of belonging as we understand it, as we interpret it from the experiences of our podcast guests and from the many people whose work informs the scholarly literature around the topic of belonging. This book is our attempt to synthesize and integrate the input of many to offer our take on this concept that is part of everyone’s everyday lives. Yet, it does not get the attention commensurate with its omnipresence. We share our guests’ belonging stories using pseudonyms to both honor the stories shared and respect their privacy. We also write this book in the first person because we want to connect with you by emphasizing our positionality as authors whose work and insights were developed by our lived experiences by our own stories. We will share a bit about our stories here so that you better understand our perspectives and blind spots and so that you may appreciate the authenticity with which we approach our research and writing.

Positionality

We are both white women who have lived with all of the associated privileges of whiteness and grew up in comfortable suburban homes with excellent educational opportunities. Both of us played sports in college, Carey as a field hockey goalie and Brianne as a rower. Carey went on to a master’s in economics, a PhD in public policy, and an EdD in education. Brianne has a master’s in speech-language pathology and an EdD in education. We earned our EdD degrees at Johns Hopkins University, where we met. Both of us have had many and varied professional positions in and out of

academia related to our respective fields, and we both agree that we are teachers at heart. Our teaching is informed by our lived experiences as an economist and speech-language pathologist, respectively, and our work in those roles is informed by our experiences in education, sports, and growing up at home. In other words, this book represents our perspectives that were formed with input from our own experiences of belonging (and not belonging) throughout our lives, both personally and professionally.

Our experiences form our perspectives, and those perspectives inform our positionality. Part of our work as podcasters and researchers is writing a positionality statement. We share our working draft here, and we feel it will always be in draft form, as our learning about our privilege and blind spots is ongoing.

As hosts of the podcast, we acknowledge our positionality as white women and Carey as a member of the LGBTQ+ community. We understand that our podcasting space includes the inherent power and privilege of whiteness. Understanding the oppressive system of white supremacy culture, we take care to cultivate safety, wherein minoritized individuals may willingly share their stories. Rather than adhering to a strict set of podcast guidelines of questions and time, we aim to create organic conversations that center our guests' expertise and lived experiences. For example, we offer guests a set of questions that frames (rather than dictates) the flow of our discussion. Honoring the rhythm of conversations and the essential contributions of guests, we also hold space for episodes that last from 30–90 minutes, and our editing is limited to adding music and reducing long pauses. We intentionally include minoritized voices and diverse genres in the source material, learn with and from guests and listeners, and acknowledge that we are on our journeys of antiracism and allyship. Using interviews from several podcast seasons and post-interview narratives from guests, we consider how podcasts promote storying, flatten the research process hierarchy, and offer soul-nourishing (Phillips et al., 2018) insights into our guests' lived experiences.

Inquiry and curiosity are at the core of our research and podcasting. We want to learn more, to keep growing, expanding, and making connections. Training in coaching informs how we show up in our learning. Carey is a certified coach with clients and a business, while Brianne took a coaching course, and she shows up coach-like. For us, belonging is knowing and feeling comfortable with our true selves and a sense of ease and acceptance when our true selves are seen and valued by others. We both believe that individuals hold a tremendous amount of knowledge and understanding and try to actively listen, ask good questions, and acknowledge and honor the gifts that come from vulnerability. We are consistently awed by our guests' insights that arise when given the invitation to share.

Conclusion

We are intentional about learning from people with different perspectives—people whose identities, occupations, education, and geographic location, among others, vary from our own. We hope this is evident in our podcast guest list. From a scholarly standpoint, our doctoral studies trained us to learn about education from multiple disciplinary perspectives. We read literature from various disciplines, learned about their methods of inquiry and research, and developed a great respect for examining problems through different lenses and synthesizing multiple perspectives.

Looking to understand our guests' experiences and descriptions of belonging more deeply, we approached our research for this book in the same way—by seeking work from varied disciplines and over time. We found ourselves immersed in historical texts, with fascinating descriptions of belonging that date back to the 1800s with work by Kierkegaard. We explored belonging through different faith traditions. We examined ethnographic accounts of belonging by anthropologists and large quantitative studies about belonging in organizations. We found that belonging is deeply connected to the relationship between self and society, a sociological concept, and we landed in the psychology literature for quite some time.

We consulted with faculty colleagues in theology and psychology, eager to contextualize our emerging knowledge in their fields and to connect with our guests' stories, which remain our richest data source. We also want to acknowledge that even with our efforts to talk with people from multiple professional backgrounds and diverse experiences, we realize that most of our guests are highly educated and in professions that afford them privileges and opportunities that are not universal. Consequently, while the stories and experiences described in the pages of this book are varied, we also know that there are still so many untold stories of belonging. The following chapter is a literature review that spans multiple disciplines, and we hope will provide a scholarly and relatable foundation from which we will share our emerging understanding of belonging informed by our guests' stories.

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