Building Belonging in a Time of Othering

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The problem of “Othering” is the problem of the 21st century

And the possible demise of the nation state and the planet as we know it
STOP "OTHERING" ME!

WHAT'S "OTHERING"?

YOUR KIND COULD NEVER UNDERSTAND.
There are two competing visions:

One is a smaller and smaller hierarchical we that fears, dominate and controls the other and exploits the earth.

The other vision is an expanding we that shares the earth and each other with dignity and respect and care

These are different not only different visions, they are different we’s.
Othering is a generalized set of common processes that denies someone’s full humanity based or them being less than and/or a threat to the favorite group.
“I don’t see race. I am colorblind.”

“All lives matter!”

“You & I are human. We are the same.”
The opposite of Othering is *not* saming but belonging.
Not Belonging Has Consequences

A Black Yale Student Was Napping, and a White Student Called the Police

The Yale campus. A graduate student in the university’s African studies program said she was harassed for taking a nap in a common area. Dave Sanders for The New York Times

Starbucks C.E.O. Apologizes After Arrests of 2 Black Men

"..."
Belonging or being fully human means more than having access. Belonging entails being respected at a basic level that includes the right to both co-create and make demands upon society.
A Beloved Community
Dr. King’s Legacy is a Call for Belonging
Bridge — Listen, engage, organize, practices love
Belonging connotes something fundamental about how groups are structurally positioned within society as well as how they are perceived and regarded. How are they positioned in the collective narrative? Do they get to help shape the story of us.
Belongingness Intervention

- **UT-Austin Intervention** – A belonging intervention had substantial impact.

- **Effects of the Intervention**
  - Tripled the percentage of African-American students who earned G.P.A.s in the top quarter of their class, and it cut in half the black-white achievement gap in G.P.A.
  
  - Significantly decreased the number of health visits by African-American students.

Vanessa Brewer
Belonging impacts health, performance, life expectancy, mental and emotional well being. Belonging is communicated through structures, culture and personal interactions.

In addition to demographic change, technological change, inequality and migration, another stressor is hyper-individualism.

Both post-traumatic stress disorder – the trauma experienced by veterans – and even post-partum depression – are exacerbated by our hyper-individualistic society, that does not make people feel care for or connected to each other or the earth.

In his book “Tribe,” Sebastian Junger writes “Modern society has gravely disputed the social bonds that have always characterized the human experience.”
Who are we?

Americans are experiencing anxiety over changing individual and collective identities. What will Trump’s presidency mean for our identity as Americans? As we approach “majority minority” level demographics, how will our racial and other identities change?
As diversity grows, so does anxiety.

Increase in diversity

Increase in anxiety

Leadership, Meta-Narrative

Fear, anger, othering

Empathic listening and practice.

Breaking

Bridging
Breaking: When a group turns inwards and explicitly pushes away from other groups who are seen as dangerous, a threat and less than

Bonding: Connecting to people like you in some important way without disparaging others

Bridging: Ties to people who are unlike you in some important way; stories, structure, contact
Examples of breaking social capital:

White Nationalism

**BREAKING**
Social ties among an exclusive group who explicitly push away from other groups who are seen as dangerous or a threat.
Examples of bonding social capital:

**BONDING**
Social ties that link people together with others who are primarily like them along some key dimension. These are genuinely easier to build than bridging social capital.

- FAMILY
- NEIGHBORHOOD
BRIDGING Social ties that link people together with others across a cleavage that typically divides society.

Examples of bridging social capital:

- LGBTQ

Mosque in New Zealand
Humus Bar located in Tel Aviv

- Offers a 50% off discount on meals shared between Jewish and Arabic people

- Owner: “We hear a lot of extremists on the news, on Facebook, on TC, and it seems like everything here is very bad. But I wanted to show that everything here is not so bad.”

Image from NY Times.
There is **hard breaking** and **soft breaking**. Hard breaking is building a wall, a travel ban, or outright exclusion.

Some bonding/breaking is defensive:
- Booker T. Washington’s campaign for self-help under the oppression of Jim Crow segregation is an example of this.
- Similarly, break away or autonomous movements such as those initiated by the Kurds of northern Iraq is defensive breaking.
There are **short bridges** and **long bridges**.

Some bridges require more effort to build and maintain. Others are a short distance. Bridge with the other including in our selves.

As bell hooks reminds us, bridges are walked on.
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PGcbFj4J_gc
Authoritarianism Rising: The Threat to Democracy and Democracy

Dorian Warren
Míriam Juan-Torres
Michael Tesler