OUR SEARCH FOR BELONGING

HOW OUR NEED TO CONNECT IS TEARING US APART

HOWARD J. ROSS

BESTSELLING AUTHOR OF *Everyday Bias*

with **JONROBERT TARTAGLIONE**

Foreword by Johnnetta Betsch Cole, PhD

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Praise for *Our Search for Belonging*

"Howard Ross transformed our understanding of both bias and unconscious bias with his wonderful book *Everyday Bias*. Now he is transforming our understanding of why we have people in America both tribalizing and too often fighting each other in damaging and dysfunctional tribal ways. This book is a must-read for anyone who wants to understand the mess we are in today and what we need to do now to give us a better future for our organizations, our communities, and even our nation. This will be another iconic book."

  —George Halvorson, former CEO, Kaiser Permanente

"*Our Search for Belonging* is a powerful statement of hope in a disquieting time. Our social divide is creating major challenges on college campuses, in workplaces, and in society itself. By helping us understand the reasons for the divide and the things we can do about it, Howard Ross has provided guidelines for a future that does not have to be limited by our past. A must-read!"

  —Dr. Kristina Johnson, Chancellor, State University of New York

"Our field has an abundance of talkers, folks who have an opinion they feel obligated to share. We don't need more of either. We need more thinkers, more analysts of substance. In a world where national and tribal boundaries impose a defensive obsession with our differences, Howard has stepped in to fill that void. Legendary IBM CEO Thomas J. Watson, Jr., said, 'We serve our interests best when we serve the public interest.' In my own work I have focused on the thought, 'We talk to one another, not about one another.' In *Our Search for Belonging*, Howard is connecting those dots at a time when our societal survival is threatened. Global, national, local, or tribal—connect and respect are challenges we seem unable to execute. In this book, Howard is providing a mirror that makes us confront that picture and frames how we can navigate a treacherous road to higher, safer ground—a place where your place is not a bad place, and my place is not the only place for me."

  —J. T. (Ted) Childs, former Chief Diversity Officer, IBM

"In a compelling narrative style that rests on a foundation of cutting-edge research, Howard Ross describes a paradox of belonging: a psychological need to be embedded in a group has produced an ideologically segregated America. To erase those tribal boundaries requires a deeper sense of belonging, which Ross suggests we might first achieve in an unexpected place: at work. At work, people see and experience difference as beneficial. And at work, people can learn behaviors that produce a more inclusive belonging."

  —Scott E. Page, PhD, Leonid Hurwicz Collegiate Professor of Complex Systems, Political Science, and Economics, University of Michigan, and author of *The Diversity Bonus* and *The Difference*

"The increasing polarization that exists in our society today can be a real impediment to producing the results we need and want in business and in politics. In this book, Howard Ross helps us understand the importance of breaking down those barriers and provides powerful tools for how to do it."
—**Manny Chirico, Chairman and CEO, PVH Corp.**

"In a nation with so much division, *Our Search for Belonging* is a much-needed read to educate us all on the importance of the inclusion of women and men across all distinctions of diversity both personally and professionally. Howard Ross explores and captures a broad range of topics and issues that I believe is crucial to uniting humankind and our divided nation."
—**Dr. Sheila A. Robinson, Publisher and CEO, Diversity Woman Media**

"*Our Search for Belonging* is a timely and wonderful gift to our national community as we struggle to find connection in the disparate views and feelings that divide us. It offers a guiding light of innovative and creative thinking grounded in impeccable research and scientific observation. This book is a necessary must-read to those wishing to further connect with the better in themselves regarding the isms and biases that we all carry as baggage in our lives. *Our Search for Belonging* is beautiful, powerful, and uplifting as it shares that goodness is latent in us all and how to achieve it."
—**William H. "Smitty" Smith, EdD, Founding Executive Director, National Center for Race Amity**

"If you are at all concerned about how we can pull our polarized nation back together, buy this book. Get copies for coworkers, friends, and especially your children. Howard Ross illuminates practical pathways for courageous leaders to shape a better future for us all."
—**Bonnie St. John, Paralympic medalist and CEO, Blue Circle Leadership Institute**

"Howard Ross has done it again! In *Our Search for Belonging*, Ross puts a human face on America's 21st-century conundrum and in doing so shows a path out of our current quagmire. He delves deeply into our psyche and neurobiologic drive to connect and shows how that drive to belong overshadows political or other external realities dividing us as a country into warring factions. And he shows us pathways toward healing the divide. This is must-reading for everyone across the political spectrum who really wants to make America great again."
—**Robert Wm. Blum, MD, MPH, PhD, William H. Gates Sr. Professor, Department of Population, Family and Reproductive Health, Johns Hopkins University, and Director, Johns Hopkins Urban Health Institute**

"Once again, Howard Ross has tackled the thorny divisive issues of our day—demographic diversity, politics, social justice—by shining the light of humanity on them. Through solid examples, he gives the reader space and context for understanding how and why we all have the potential to create 'us versus them' dynamics. His book serves as a road map that takes the reader on an empowering journey toward owning our part in creating inclusive cultures and helping others to belong."

—Natalie Holder, diversity executive of a federal law enforcement agency

"In this thought-provoking book, Howard Ross delves into one of the most important issues of our time, namely, how the human yearning for belonging can paradoxically sow the seeds of division. Drawing on evidence from a wide range of disciplines, the book delivers potential solutions for mending our fractured society. This book should be required reading for anyone wishing to chart a better course for humanity—in this regard, it could be one of the most important books of the year."

—Sukhvinder S. Obhi, PhD, Director, Social Brain, Body and Action Lab, McMaster University

"In this groundbreaking book, Howard Ross uses his keen insight and decades-long experience in the field of diversity and inclusion to explore how the human tendency to belong and include also leads to tribalism and exclusion. Calling the latter 'bonding against,' Ross uses research in behavioral and cognitive science to show how these 'us versus them' tendencies spring from our evolutionary heritage; in the modern world, they gravely threaten our civic and faith communities, our workplaces, our information ecosystem, and our politics. Unlike many books that diagnose the problems without providing solutions, Ross spends two chapters on how we can bridge our divides by focusing on mutual understanding and coexistence, both as individuals and, perhaps even more importantly, within institutions. From my perspective both as a scholar and consultant on emotional and social intelligence and effective decision-making, this book is a must for leaders who want to ensure that the institutions they lead avoid the disastrous consequences of bonding against."

—Dr. Gleb Tsipursky, author of *The Truth-Seeker's Handbook*; President, Intentional Insights; cofounder of the Pro-Truth Pledge; Assistant Professor, The Ohio State University; and speaker

"This is what the world needs now. Howard Ross articulates what many in the medley of humanity are feeling but struggle to process coherently—or, most importantly, act upon. I hope that the sound research and suggested action plans found in this book will inspire millions of butterfly wing flaps that generate a gentle wind bringing higher levels of harmony for generations to come."

—Dennis W. Quaintance, cofounder and CEO, Quaintance-Weaver Restaurants and Hotels

"Our contemporary conversations about discrimination often focus on individual bias but fail to show how those biases relate to our need for belonging. Howard Ross's accessible book makes this important connection. He examines current events, social science, and neuropsychology to explain this irony—how our 21st-century quest for community separates us from each other. But this isn't a dry academic survey. Ross offers insight gained from his rich experience, candor, awareness, and most importantly, realistic solutions for ourselves and our workplaces to address this paradox. This book should be read by organization leaders, professionals concerned about human relations, and anyone interested in building community consciously and carefully."

—Atiba R. Ellis, Professor of Law, West Virginia University

"Deep knowledge of the science behind unconscious bias and a rich tableau of experience working with the world's leading organizations leads to remarkable practical insight! That is the essence of this much-needed and timely new book by Howard Ross. A must-read for all of us as individuals who increasingly need to decode the complex implications and unintended consequences of our obsession with social media connectivity *and* for leaders and businesses seeking to build inclusive flourishing cultures that bind rather than divide us."

—Shubhro Sen, PhD, Director, School of Management and Entrepreneurship, Shiv Nadar University, and cofounder of Conscious Capitalism Institute

"The economic and political middle have been carved out of the United States. Now the cultural middle (the values and norms that hold us together as a society) is threatened. Howard Ross offers a compelling observation of how we associate with those most like us and how it's created a dangerous polarization. More importantly, he offers a different path forward."

—Brian A. Gallagher, President and CEO, United Way Worldwide

OUR SEARCH FOR BELONGING

OTHER BOOKS BY HOWARD J. ROSS

ReInventing Diversity (Rowman and Littlefield
in conjunction with SHRM)

Everyday Bias (Rowman and Littlefield)

OUR SEARCH FOR BELONGING

How Our Need to Connect Is Tearing Us Apart

HOWARD J. ROSS

with JonRobert Tartaglione

Our Search for Belonging

For Hannah, Mayah, Sloane, Penelope, Davis, and Audrey. May the world that you inhabit be a world of inclusion for all people, everywhere, all of the time.

For all of the healers, in so many forms, who are doing the good work of creating a world of belonging for all.

And for Jake. You touch, move, and inspire me every day with your courage and commitment.

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Foreword

Over the many years that I have known Howard Ross, we have developed the kind of friendship that is rare in our divided country. Our friendship crosses differences of race, gender, religion, and age. We also have a history of working together and a shared commitment to social justice. And since I joined Cook Ross, the firm he founded in 1989, Howard and I are now close colleagues.

In this book, Howard describes how our need to connect with people who are like us is increasingly placing us at odds with people we view as "the other." This dynamic is threatening values that are fundamental to a democracy. Importantly, he proposes what we can and must do about this "us versus them" dynamic that is at the root of our deeply divided nation and world.

Drawing on Robert Putnam's work on bonding and bridging, Howard helps us understand that there is healthy bonding, like the bonding involved in raising a healthy family. But there is also what he calls "bonding against," that is, unhealthy bonding that can lead to exclusion, and ultimately to the kind of hatred and violence that has been openly expressed many times by white supremacists.

In this book, we learn that healthy bridging occurs when we are aware that our point of view is just that—a point of view. And we are willing to listen to and accept another point of view. Howard admits that even he sometimes finds it difficult to do what he is urging all of us to do. I have always found it difficult to engage in this kind of bridging when the other point of view challenges my rights and even my humanity as an African American and a woman. This challenge is even greater when certain individuals and groups are emboldened to openly express racism,

sexism, heterosexism, anti-Semitism, anti-Islamism, ablism, and the range of attitudes and behaviors that are grounded in bigotry and hatred. In the current political climate in the United States, many people are struggling to engage in bridging in their workplaces and even in their families because of starkly different political views.

How, then, are we to engage in healthy bonding and healthy bridging? In this book on belonging, Howard's response to this critical question is similar to the approach he takes in his book *Everyday Bias.* He draws on the neurocognitive science that explains how bonding, like bias, is a natural process that all human beings engage in. He then explains how bonding, like our biases, can take unhealthy, destructive, and dangerous forms. And to avoid the negative consequences that can result from our biases *and* our bonding, we must be conscious of them. Of course, self-awareness is not enough. For when we do not mitigate against negative biases and unhealthy bonding, they feed bigotry and systemic oppression.

As difficult as it is to combat unhealthy bonding, we must do so if we are to ever experience in our personal lives, our work places, our communities, our nation, and our world the kind of peace and justice that we all deserve.

Johnnetta Betsch Cole, PhD,
President Emerita,
Spelman and Bennett Colleges

Preface

You are only free when you realize you belong no place—You belong every place—no place at all. The price is high. The reward is great.

—MAYA ANGELOU

We are living in a world of seemingly increasing separation. After what was arguably one of the most contentious elections in American history, the United States stands torn between two polarized views of the world that are so rooted in fundamental differences that some have compared it to the Sunni/Shia divide in Islam.[1] People are no longer merely disagreeing; instead they are disavowing each other's right to an opinion. The level of outrage seems to escalate and become a way of being, almost an addiction. The Brexit vote in the United Kingdom and the 2017 presidential election in France brought up the same kind of antipathy, and throughout the Western world this same mind-set creates an unceasing flow of polemic and a gap that widens into greater and greater divergence all the time. The rising visibility of white nationalism and white supremacy coincides with the rise of the Black Lives Matter movement. The increased visibility of and support for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people coincides with the attempt to make laws to exclude them from public bathrooms, the military, and other aspects of day-to-day life. Increases in participation by women in business and other aspects of life coincide with an increased awareness of deeply rooted patterns of sexism, misogyny, and sexual harassment.

As Sir Isaac Newton postulated in his third law of motion, "For every action, there is an equal and opposite reaction."

Our tribal nature seems to be emerging with more force all the time, and at an enormous cost to our sense of societal harmony, civility, and cooperation. I have been on this journey myself. As a social justice advocate for all of my adult life, and a diversity and inclusion specialist for more than thirty years, I have prided myself on working to listen to and understand different points of view. And yet, over the past couple of years, I have found myself being pulled much more deeply into the "us versus them" dynamic. As a result, I have been on a quest to understand why it is that people see the world so differently than I do. In the months following the November 2016 election I interviewed dozens of people who voted for Donald Trump and spoke with dozens of Democrats who supported either Hillary Clinton or Bernie Sanders. The interviews have been with some intellectuals, but far more everyday people: drivers in cars and cabs; people sitting next to me on airplanes, or standing next to me in lines; neighbors or people I have randomly come across through social media. The conversations have not constituted formal research, but they have revealed the vast diversity of people on both sides, and how the tenor of our culture drives that diversity toward the extremes.

That inquiry has led me to the exploration that I share with you in these pages. The fundamental question that I have asked myself, and that has guided the research I will be attempting to explore, is: *Why is it that we are drawn so strongly to identify with groups, how does that impact us, and what can we do about it?*

The purpose of this book is to explore the seemingly paradoxical manner in which our compulsion to connect with other human beings often creates greater polarity, leaving us deeply connected with some, yet deeply divided as a society. I will try to establish some of the ways this separation is occurring in our lives today. I will be focusing mostly on the United States, because that is the country where I live and which I know best, and because the confines of these pages make it challenging to go more broadly and deeply; however, the paradigms of behavior that I will be exploring are universal. To that purpose, I will begin by referencing some of the circumstances we find ourselves in at the time of my

writing. We will look at how these patterns are occurring and how they are impacting behavior.

We will also look at some examples drawn from an immense amount of research that points to a seemingly undeniable fact: human beings are inherently social and tribal creatures. It is in our DNA to want to bond deeply with some people and not others. We will be exploring the question: *What is this thing we call belonging, and why is it so important to us?* We will look at the neurocognitive science behind our primary need to belong, to bond with others like ourselves, and how it motivates human behavior, and investigate how it is expressed in our daily lives.

The challenge, of course, is that if we only bond we are going to keep separating. We also have to work more on the ability to bridge across those differences if this great experiment of democracy is going to work. We also need to clarify the difference between how we feel about issues and how we identify and define ourselves by a particular point of view or group, and how that difference impacts our ability to think for ourselves and make wise decisions about issues and people.

I will also be exploring how politics, race, religion, and the media can foster healthy or unhealthy forms of bonding. Due to limitations of space, I have chosen these four domains with a full awareness that I might just as well have addressed gender, sexual orientation, generational differences, socioeconomic status, or other dimensions of diversity. This is not in any way to minimize how these dynamics show up, and I will attempt, where appropriate, to address the intersectionality of many of these distinctions as part of the inquiry into the four I will be focusing on.

Finally, we will explore ways to bridge the divide so that we can create greater harmony and cooperation in our personal, organizational, and civic lives. I will end with a discussion about the workplace environment because we live in a world in which, for many people, the workplace is the most diverse part of their lives. As we will see, our schools are more segregated now than they have been in generations. Our communities have increasingly become political enclaves. Our places of worship, social organizations, and exposure to media and social media all tend, more than not, to put us with people like ourselves. The workplace is the one place where most people have little choice about whom they sit next to and engage with on a daily basis. In that sense, the external environment

creates particular challenges in today's workplaces, but it also may offer the best possibility of a place where people can come to terms with some of these issues and develop ways to bridge. I will be offering suggestions as to how to do that effectively.

I am acutely aware that I have my own limitations in this conversation. As a lifelong political progressive, I will always have a tendency to see the world from that point of view, even as I try to understand others' points of view. As a descendant of Holocaust victims and survivors, I started working on civil rights as a teenager, and spent time organizing for La Raza during the grape boycott of the late 1960s. I have led diversity trainings for hundreds of thousands of people, served as the first white male professor of diversity at a historically black women's college, and been the only heterosexual man on the diversity advisory board of the Human Rights Campaign. I've written two previous books on diversity and unconscious bias.[2] My whole life has been in the struggle for equal rights for all. Yet as a sixty-seven-year-old straight white male, I have lived with privilege my whole life, and despite actively working on understanding and mitigating that privilege for more than fifty years, I know better than to think that it no longer still impacts my worldview and my behavior. While my inquiry into these issues cannot help but be shaped by this, I have also worked to actively understand its impact on the way I and others who represent dominant groups see the world. The purpose of my writing here is not to provide a definitive answer to these questions, but rather to provoke inquiry.

I fully expect that people from both sides of the political spectrum will take issue with some of what I have written. And yet I also believe that there are many people who care about healing the divisions within our world—whether at a personal level, in the workplace, or in the community—and who will be open to my invitation. Please use this text as a catalyst for your own exploration into belief, emotion, and behavior. My deepest wish is that even if you completely disagree with me, you will be left looking for ways that you can personally work in your family, your community, your workplace, or beyond to bridge the differences that divide us. Our current security and the world we are leaving for our children, our grandchildren, and beyond require as much from us.

Let's get started.

Introduction

A Tale of Two Countries

It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of Light, it was the season of Darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair, we had everything before us, we had nothing before us, we were all going direct to Heaven, we were all going direct the other way.

—Charles Dickens

We are living in a society today that can feel at times like it is coming apart at the seams. For some this is mostly what they see on the news or on their social media platforms, because they live in environments that seem largely homogeneous. For others it is the day-to-day experience of living in communities that are torn between "them" and "us," or in workplaces in which there is a constant, underlying nervousness about what we can and can't talk about. Even within families, different political and social perspectives create tensions and separation.

The purpose of this book is to seek to understand these tensions and offer the hope that there are ways to address our differences that can bring healing. It is not impossible. In workplaces all around the country, people are beginning to engage in courageous conversations about difference, because the workplace may be our greatest hope for reestablishing connection between our different "tribes." Target sponsors a workshop to encourage dialogue between white women and women of color to generate greater understanding and mutual support, and pulls employees of all backgrounds together to talk about how the threatened

ban on the issuance of visas to Muslims may impact their Muslim employees. General Mills conducts regular critical conversations in which employees come together to talk about their concerns and find common ground. Governmental agencies, the military, the intelligence community, and hundreds of corporations, schools, and other institutions engage in trainings to better understand how bias impacts their ability to work together. Starbucks attempts to create an opportunity for customers and baristas to talk about race. Some of these efforts have been more effective than others, for sure, but more and more organizations understand that the stresses that exist outside our work environment come to work with us every day and impact how we relate to our fellow workers.

As we will discover, it is natural for us to bond with people we identify with. Whether those groups are formed by family connection, race, gender, or other forms of mutual identity, we have a particular connection to people who are like us, in whatever way we define that. Most people, however, find that it is limiting to the fullness of our lives if we only relate to people with whom we bond. It is our ability to bridge with others that gives us new ideas, new insights, and a deeper, richer perspective on life. It is also very difficult to get the best out of people when they cannot be fully themselves. Organizations that want to thrive will be frustrated if they do not create a sense of belonging.

And most important for our society, the experiment that is democracy cannot work without bridging across differences.

Yet in our country today, those bridges are either in disrepair or burning.

For years, our political system has largely operated as a bell curve. While there were people on the extremes of both liberalism and conservatism, most politicians gravitated toward the middle, with many falling on one side or another depending upon the issues that were being discussed. During the days of the civil rights movement, northern liberal Republicans worked together with many Democrats; however, some southern Democrats teamed up with other Republicans to oppose landmark legislation. Anti–Vietnam War Democrats teamed up with some liberal Republicans to oppose the war, while some conservative Democrats and other Republicans supported it. The notion of politicians crossing party lines to support legislative action of one kind or another was

more the norm than the exception. This is not to say there weren't plenty of other challenges: LGBTQ people were mostly resigned to living in hiding, the rights of people of color were barely being explored, and the rights of women were even more challenged than they are today.[1] Yet the divisions were not as stark as they are now.[2]

Now, however, we have devolved into what we might call a dumbbell curve, in which everything is on the extremes and nothing is in the middle. The most conservative Democrats generally vote more on the liberal side than the most liberal Republicans, and vice versa. And the gap between the two is increasing, even in terms of where we live. We can see this clearly through analyzing what has been called the Whole Foods/Cracker Barrel divide.[3] Whole Foods Market and Cracker Barrel Old Country Store illustrate this polarization as much as any other example. Both companies exist throughout the United States and both emphasize connections to their local communities, yet when you look at the voting patterns of people who live around their franchises, you can see American political segregation in stark relief.

Whole Foods stores generally reside in more liberal/Democratic communities. Cracker Barrel restaurants, on the other hand, generally are in more conservative/Republican enclaves. In the 1992 presidential election, Bill Clinton won roughly 61 percent of counties with a Whole Foods Market in them and only 40 percent of those with a Cracker Barrel restaurant, a 21 percent gap. However, as you can see in Table I.1, that divide has increased every election since then. In 2012, Barack Obama won in 77 percent of the Whole Foods counties and only 29 percent of the Cracker Barrel counties, a 48 percent gap![4]

Year	Presidential Winner	Whole Foods Counties	Cracker Barrel Counties	Culture Gap
1992	Bill Clinton (D)	61%	40%	21%
1996	Bill Clinton (D)	66%	41%	25%
2000	George W. Bush (R)	43%	75%	32%
2004	George W. Bush (R)	39%	79%	40%
2008	Barack Obama (D)	80%	35%	45%
2012	Barack Obama (D)	77%	29%	48%

Table I.1 The Whole Foods/Cracker Barrel Divide

This is not to suggest that there are not counties that continue to have more political diversity, but the trend here is striking. A look at the electoral map bears this out, as does additional research.[5] The result has been that these extreme, homogeneous sides have cannibalized reasonable political discourse and shifted our sense of normalcy from an expectation that we will have to work together to a win-lose dynamic in which each side strives to win at all costs.

At an even deeper level, when we look at the 2016 presidential election totals through another lens, an even more troubling pattern arises. This polarization of voting doesn't only occur in political affiliation; it is a function of demographic identity.[6] People who voted for Trump overwhelmingly represent what we might call the dominant identity groups: 58 percent of whites, 53 percent of men, and 58 percent of Christians. Clinton voters represent the nondominant groups: 88 percent of blacks, 54 percent of women, 65 percent of Latinos, 65 percent of Asians, 71 percent of Jews, and 78 percent of LGBTQ voters. It was more than just a question of issues; it was a question of identity. And this is a critical difference. When we evaluate people based on issues, it is impersonal. When we evaluate people based on identity, we objectify them. It is no longer "I disagree with you on this point"; it becomes "I don't like who you are!" When the people we disagree with politically look different from us and have different cultural backgrounds, it is easier to demonize them as the "other." It also makes it easier for the power dynamics in society, between those in dominant cultural groups (e.g., whites, men, heterosexuals, Christians, people with higher incomes) to have their identity power manifest in the political process and therefore in public policy.

We are living in a time of increasing political segregation that threatens to tear us apart as a unified society. The result is that we are becoming increasingly tribal, and the narratives that we get exposed to on a daily basis have increasingly become echo chambers in which we hear our beliefs reinforced and those of others demonized.

This mind-set does not only impact our political lives. Communities in the United States are becoming more segregated than they have been in years. Racial segregation in public schools is at a rate comparable to

the 1960s, and increasing movement to private and charter schools seems destined to make it more pronounced.[7] According to the Government Accountability Office, the number of high-poverty schools serving primarily black and brown students has more than doubled since 2000, and the proportion of schools segregated by race and class (in which 75 percent of children receive free or reduced-fee lunches and more than 75 percent are black or Hispanic) climbed from 9 percent to 16 percent during that period.[8]

The racial divide in the United States, though never resolved, has emerged more publicly again in response to the killing of numerous black men and women by police officers. African Americans continue to struggle with higher unemployment, poorer schools, lower-quality health care, and, on average, only one-seventh the accumulated wealth of the average white family. This has birthed the Black Lives Matter movement. Yet racial extremists have become more publicly emboldened, demonstrated by a rise in white nationalist and white supremacist organizations and activity. As I write this, the controversy about whether athletes should be allowed to protest is bringing the nation to its knees, as is the appropriateness of Civil War memorials in public places, and questions abound as to whether the 2017 hurricane damage in Puerto Rico is being treated differently because most of the U.S. citizens there are not white. Racial gaps in income and wealth continue to remain significant, and are even increasing as the tension around other societal issues continues to foment.

Fear leads to stronger anti-immigrant feelings throughout the West. Incidents of terrorism by radical Muslims lead to rampant Islamophobia and calls to keep "them" out. Anti-Muslim hate crimes are on the rise, as are those that are anti-Semitic.[9] Fear of difference regarding transgender people leads to transphobic reactions and laws to keep people from using the bathroom of their choice.[10] Attempts are being made to roll back some of the advancement of equal rights for LGBTQ Americans, under the guise of religious rights. Voter suppression laws are passed that will undoubtedly impact people of color and low-income people, at the same time as legal scholars assert there is, in fact, no real evidence of voter fraud for these efforts to "fix."[11] At almost every turn, we see an explosion of "us versus them."

The tension extends to our most fundamental relationships. Thousands of families canceled their usual Thanksgiving dinners after the 2016 elections because of the fear of confronting political divide within their own families, in effect feeling more bonded with their political tribe than with their families.[12] Businesses find it more and more difficult to avoid the tension that these dualities regularly create in the workplace. Studies show that this workplace tension causes not only generalized stress but an increased reticence to talk about "controversial issues," even when they impact the work.[13] Schools have seen a surge in bullying, some children returning home with the message from teachers and peers that their "families will be deported."[14]

At the heart of this division is fear: fear of the other, fear of exposing ourselves, fear of not having control over our own lives, fear for the safety and survival of our friends, our loved ones, and ourselves.

We do not have to accept this division as inevitable. In this book I will be attempting to help explain why we are so pulled to polarized positions, to explain why our demonization of each other is occurring, and to offer hope. There are numerous examples of people and organizations who are attempting to reach across the divide—to create bridges to belonging that can help us remember that it is possible to disagree without being disagreeable, and to remember that we have a shared destiny, whether we like it or not. These efforts are occurring in communities across the country and also in our workplaces. In fact, I will make the case that the workplace is one of the best vehicles we have for building healing and understanding by the very fact that it is one of the few places where people who are different from each other have to learn to work together. I will also offer suggestions as to how we can create that sense of belonging in our families, organizations, communities, and society.

Why Is the Divide So Painful?

Why do these tensions hit us so hard? Because at the same time as we are pulled apart by these political and social dynamics, we are learning at a deeper level that human beings have a strong need to belong, to feel

connected to those around them. We have seen over the course of history how this need to belong can lead people to come together, especially during times of crisis, and achieve remarkable things, as in the mobilization of the United States as it entered World War II. We have also seen how that same need to belong has allowed people to engage in some of the worst events in human history: the Holocaust, slavery, the Rwandan civil war, et cetera. We have demonstrated a blind, and often terrifying, willingness to go along with the crowd, even when the crowd is doing evil. In today's world, the need to connect with those that we relate to, and at the same time stay away from *the other* is creating a degree of tribalism that we haven't experienced in centuries.

The 2016 presidential election, and politics in general, is just one way this divide is manifesting itself throughout our culture. The bigger issue, and the bigger question that underlies this book, is: *How does the inherent need to belong impact us as human beings?* And, perhaps even more important: *Why is this happening, and what we can do about it?*

I will be exploring why it is natural for human beings to feel more comfortable with people in groups to which we belong. It creates a kind of bond that has us feeling safer and knowing what to expect, what is considered normal, and how to relate. However, if we are to transcend the division that we now experience and move toward a more peaceful and equitable societal order, we will also have to learn better how to bridge across those bonded groups. Perhaps what is now seen as "us versus them" can, at least much of the time, be turned into collaborations in which we draw from the best of both.

I don't think that it is being hyperbolic to say that we are in a time of crisis. My hope is that this book will create a greater understanding of why that crisis is occurring, and chart a path that can help us build greater connection in our families, communities, and organizations. We'll start by getting a better understanding of what belonging is and why we need it.

It is natural for us to want to look for solutions, and we will get there. Yet my thirty-five years of professional experience in creating sustainable change has taught me that over the long term, transformational change occurs *only* when we understand why we do the things that we

do. In this case that means exploring why it is that human beings are so driven to live in and be influenced by the groups that they identify with.

It is no accident that people demonstrate a universal desire to fit into groups. The need for belonging is an inherent survival mechanism. We will start by exploring why that is, how it impacts us, and how both the human brain and the mind are geared toward belonging, even at times when it separates us from others.

Chapter 1

Wired for Belonging
The Innate Desire to Belong

*The essential dilemma of my life is between my deep desire to belong
and my suspicion of belonging.*

—J H U M P A   L A H I R I

A Tale of Three Colleagues

The annual holiday party at Munchester Industries is a raucous event.
The company has about seven hundred employees, and for the holiday
gala they all gather with their families in tow. The party has a huge buf-
fet, an open bar, people dancing to the sounds of a DJ's music, and a
clown making balloon animals for the children. People are gathered in
small clusters, either at tables or standing around chatting. On the sur-
face this looks like any number of company parties we have all seen be-
fore. However, this year the party has a different tone, coming just six
weeks after the 2016 presidential election. The room is abuzz with con-
versations about politics, mostly people celebrating or commiserating
with their friends. Waiting for drinks, three employees stand together in
awkward silence, their countenance seemingly different from most of the
people around them, suggesting politeness but not much more. A tall,
blond-haired white woman, with two children at her side, shifts from
foot to foot, her eyes looking around the room, almost as if she wants to
escape. A shorter, darker-skinned woman stands quietly by the side. The
third person, a tall white man, appears friendly, even gregarious, alter-
nating between trying to make conversation with the two women and

making side comments to a shorter, brown-skinned man who stands behind him. Who are these people? What's going on?

To answer these questions, let's rewind the clock to that morning. . . .

CASE STUDY

Joan Smith woke up at 7:00 AM, as she usually did on a workday. After her morning rituals, she proceeded to one of her regular patterns: looking at her smartphone. Joan checked for any emails and then went directly to her news feed, where she saw the morning headlines from some of her usual sources: *Breitbart*, the *Daily Caller*, and the *Drudge Report*. Her newsfeed was still humming with a sense of victory and celebration over the surprising results of the election. She checked her Facebook page and her Twitter account, where she found articles posted by several of her friends, including an interesting one on religious suppression, posted by one of the women in her church's book study group. Almost all the posts agreed with her politically. She then wandered down to her basement to put in some time on the treadmill, while watching the morning news on *Fox and Friends*.

Joan has been working at Munchester Industries for the past two years in a clerical position. She was able to get the job after her marriage ended following several years of stress that were triggered by her husband's layoff from his job of sixteen years at the local processing plant. The divorce has been hard on her because of her strong religious values and belief in keeping families together, but her husband's work challenges resulted in changes in his behavior that made staying together untenable. He is still looking for full-time employment. Though he does make some money as an Uber driver, he has very little to contribute to Joan and their twelve-year-old son and nine-year-old daughter. Joan is fortunate that she has benefitted from both material and emotional support from her church community, which has helped her get through these hard times.

At the encouragement of her family, Joan has started dating again. She went out with a man she met at a friend's dinner party, however, the conversation was somewhat limited because Joan quickly realized that he was a Democrat and she didn't want to get into any political arguments. As it is, she doesn't talk about her politics at work; most of the people who work at Munchester tend toward the liberal side.

After finishing her exercise, Joan showered and got ready for work. Today is the company party, and the office would be closed in the late afternoon for the festivities, which would go into the evening. Just last night she was getting her mother's advice, because she was feeling nervous about the party, not wanting to find herself in a position of having to defend her political stance. She planned on having her friend drop the kids off at the party. Given all of the alcohol that they have at these events, she has mixed feelings about them being there, but she received a lot of pressure from her coworkers that this was a must-attend event, family included.

CASE STUDY

Barry Jones sat at the breakfast table with his husband, Sam, and their eighteen-year-old daughter, Jennifer. Jennifer is Sam's birth daughter from his previous marriage, and she has recently come to live with them. Barry and Sam have been together for almost sixteen years, and last night they celebrated their third wedding anniversary with Jennifer and a small group of family and friends. The event was very pleasant, although family gatherings have been considerably more muted since the election. Most of Barry's family are Republicans, and most of Sam's are Democrats. In addition, Sam's father is a Mexican immigrant, having come to the United States more than twenty years ago; he became a naturalized citizen in 2006. The tension somewhat limited conversations to superficialities and pleasantries, which was just fine for Barry and Sam—they didn't want a repeat of the incident that occurred at Thanksgiving, when Sam's sister and Barry's father got into a political debate that was so heated it threatened to ruin the holiday dinner.

The family was watching the morning news on MSNBC as they ate, but Barry was, as usual, multitasking between breakfast conversation, watching the news, and looking at his news feed, mostly articles from *BuzzFeed*, the *Huffington Post*, and the *Daily Kos*. The news seems increasingly bothersome to Barry, who voted for Hillary Clinton, though he was a Bernie Sanders supporter in the 2016 primaries. He had no problem making the switch because he was so offended by Donald Trump's comments about Mexicans, Muslims, immigrants, and women, not to mention the Republican platform positions on LGBTQ rights. Being Jewish and having had family members

who were lost in the Holocaust, Barry is highly sensitive about examples of what he perceives to be bigotry. He also didn't want their daughter to have a president who would speak and act the way he perceives that Trump did about women. As a result, watching the news over the last month or so has felt like a living nightmare to Barry, and he has been spending a lot of time with a community organizing group of late, trying to figure out how to get more Democrats elected to Congress.

At 7:45 AM, Barry and Jennifer said goodbye to Sam and got in the car. Barry planned to drop Jennifer off at school and then drive about twenty minutes to his job at Munchester Industries, where he is the director of human resources. He plans to see Sam and Jennifer this evening at the company holiday party, although for many of his fellow employees, the mood lately has been more funereal than celebratory.

CASE STUDY

In another part of town, Fatima Mohammed, having completed her morning prayers, was also getting ready for work, with the morning news from the BBC playing on her television set in the living room. Her eighteen-year-old son, Malik, is about to head off to school. It has been more difficult lately to get him out the door, as he has experienced some taunting by his fellow students, one of whom "jokingly" asked him whether his family was going to get deported now that Trump was elected. In addition, because of the recent killings of young black men by police officers, Fatima is always concerned about Malik's safety when he is out driving. Fatima was born in the United Kingdom to parents who had immigrated years before from Afghanistan. She came to the United States on a student visa in 1992 and met her husband, Daanesh, in school. Daanesh was from a family of Somali immigrants who had come to this country when he was just a boy. They were married in 1996 and she officially became a U.S. citizen the following year.

Daanesh graduated from the University of Maryland in 1996 and then went to medical school at the University of Michigan. He has been practicing medicine for more than ten years, but recently has encountered some difficulties due to interactions with several patients who questioned whether they wanted to be treated by a Muslim, especially one with very dark skin.

Fatima watches the news every day with apprehension, because her brother Rashed, who followed her to the United States as a student eight years after she came, decided to enlist in the U.S. Army after he graduated from college, and is now stationed in Afghanistan. Rashed was excited about serving his country and was well received by army recruiters, who thought that somebody with his maturity and knowledge of language and culture would be a valuable asset. He has been trained in mediation and conflict resolution, which often puts him in sensitive situations. He plans on retiring from the military after he completes twenty-five years, and then going to graduate school. Fatima not only worries about Rashed's safety but also is frightened by the anti-Muslim political rhetoric that she is constantly hearing on the news.

Fatima has worn an abaya and hijab for most of her life, in keeping with her family's religious traditions; however, at her mother's request, of late she has decided to go with more typical Western dress when she goes to her job as an engineer at Munchester Industries. On the weekends, and when she goes to her mosque—which she has been attending more frequently lately because she feels comforted being with "her people"—she still wears her traditional dress, but she became tired of being looked at suspiciously and has also read too many articles about Muslim women being harassed, and so she has decided it is safer and easier to "when in Rome, do as the Romans do."

As they stand in line at the party, the inner world of each of these three individuals is present in the way they are relating. There is not all that much in the buffet for Fatima, because she follows halal practices and avoids alcohol. Not wanting to bring attention to herself, she eats what she can and drinks a bottle of water. Joan has her children with her, and is somewhat uncomfortable with what feels to her like the public display of affection that Barry is showing toward Sam in front of them. She had heard rumors that Barry was gay from others in the company, but feels somewhat like he is rubbing it in her face, and she doesn't like her children being exposed to it. Barry, on the other hand, is aware that he and Sam may make people uncomfortable at times, but frankly he thinks that's their problem. After all, company policy is very clear, and Munchester even recently received a high score on the Human Rights Campaign Corporate Equality Index.[1] Fatima knows Joan fairly well, given Joan's

clerical position in the engineering department; however, she has recently noticed a chill in their relationship, especially during the presidential campaign. While Fatima seems nice enough, the "Muslim thing" still makes Joan feel uncomfortable. Both of them met Barry when they came to work at the organization, and they also attended a human resources training he gave a couple of months ago, talking about new employee practices that have been instituted.

As is often the case these days, the conversation quickly turns to the daily news. Barry is quite outspoken in his views, but both Joan and Fatima find themselves increasingly uncomfortable even being in the conversation. Joan has learned to not discuss her political views at work, because employees of the company are, more often than not, judgmental about conservative views like hers, and she is not interested in getting into debates or being judged by her colleagues. Fatima, on the other hand, finds that any discussion of politics leaves her feeling very vulnerable. She definitely does not feel comfortable talking about her faith in public. The social interaction on the surface is superficial. The silence underneath the conversation is deafening.

The characters depicted above are not real, although they could be. They are a composite of traits, all drawn from people with whom I have met. Most of us can relate to the situation they find themselves in at the party. Questions abound in their minds: *What's normal anymore? What is it safe to say? How much can we disagree without being disagreeable? Will my job be in jeopardy if people find out what I believe in?* And often, *How quickly can I get back to my people so that I can feel comfortable just being myself?*

Most of us like the feeling of belonging to groups around us. Whether it is being accepted by our friends and neighbors or being part of the in-group at work or school, there is something safer and more secure about being accepted and included. The need to belong is essential to human survival. In his landmark 1943 paper, "A Theory of Human Motivation," Abraham Maslow introduced his now ubiquitous "hierarchy of needs."[2] In it, Maslow postulated that "human needs arrange themselves in hierarchies of prepotency. That is to say, the appearance of one need usually rests on the prior satisfaction of another, more pre-potent need. Man is a perpetually wanting animal."[3]
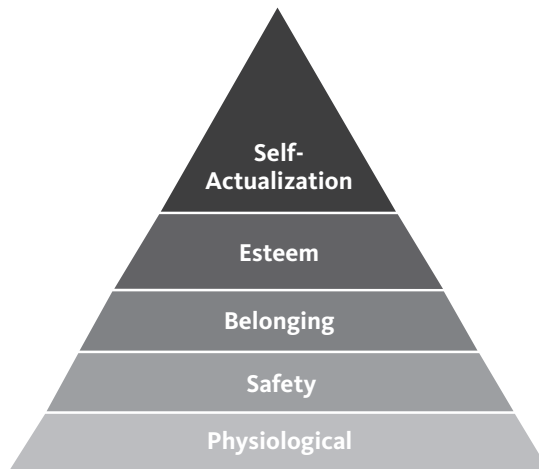
Figure 1.1 Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

Anybody who has taken a basic Introduction to Psychology course is probably familiar with Maslow's model, often depicted as a pyramid (Figure 1.1).

According to Maslow, our physiological needs are the first that must be satisfied, followed by our needs for safety, belonging, self-esteem, and finally self-actualization. While Maslow's model has been challenged for representing a predominantly individualistic cultural model, it has remained a bedrock of the study of human development for more than seventy years.[4]

Within American culture, this is consistent with our tendency to place a high value on individualism.[5] In 1831, Alexis de Tocqueville, in his historic study of American culture, *Democracy in America*, identified individualism as a fundamental distinguishing characteristic of democracies, and the capitalist American democratic model in particular. Tocqueville recognized the essential role that individualism plays in separating people from society: "Individualism is a considered and peaceful sentiment that disposes each citizen to isolate himself from the mass of his fellows and to withdraw to the side with his family and his friends; so that, after thus creating a small society for his own use, he willingly abandons the large society to itself."[6]

According to Maslow, the desire to fulfill our personal physiological and safety needs are preeminent, and breed a certain sense of individualism that has each of us seek to get what we need to be fulfilled in those dimensions.

More recent research indicates that Maslow may have missed the mark. There may be no greater human need than the need to belong. Human beings no doubt have remarkable survival skills, and yet we rely on our social groups to survive. Throughout human history, we evolved to live in cooperative societies that have grown larger and more diverse all the time. For most of our history, we have depended on those groups to help us satisfy both our basic physiological needs and our social and psychological ones. Just like our need for food or water, our need for acceptance emerged as a mechanism for survival. For most of our history, it was rare that a solitary individual could survive living in jungles, in forests, or on vast plains. We needed others in order to get our physiological needs met.

Every human being starts life in total dependency. A newborn baby is incapable of meeting its own physiological needs or needs for safety and will survive days, at most, if it "belongs" to nobody. The first imprint that we have on our core psyche is "I exist because you exist."

This inherent need to belong has created, particularly in more individualistically oriented Western countries, an inherent tension between an ethos of individualism and the need to connect, belong, and rely on others to survive. Many people, even psychologists, have underestimated the impact of social exclusion on the individual experience, even as it contributes to all manner of negative societal behavior, including sociopathic behaviors such as murder.

How does this group connection manifest in our lives?

Bonding and Bridging

In his landmark study of social capital, *Bowling Alone,* Harvard sociologist Robert Putnam identified two fundamental ways that we form social connections and identify our sense of belonging that are distinct
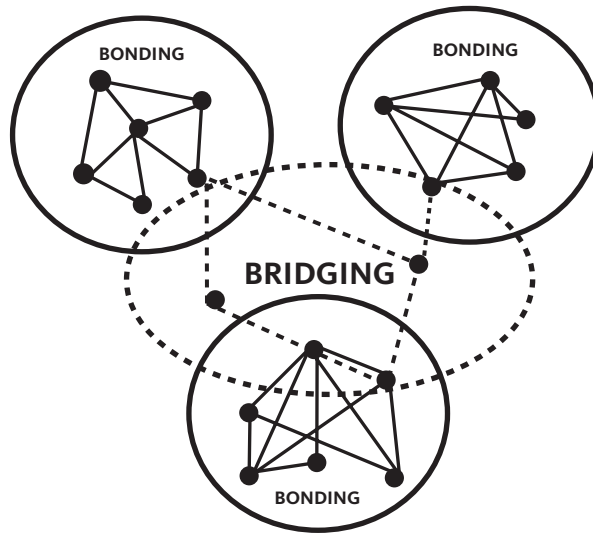
PUTNAM: FORMS OF SOCIAL CAPITAL

Figure 1.2 Bridging and Bonding

when we are connecting with in-groups or out-groups; he refers to them as *bonding* and *bridging* (Figure 1.2).[7]

Bonding is generally present in the fundamental connection between members of in-groups, especially homogeneous ones. Because members of a group share cultural norms and values, and because we are naturally more empathetic toward people in our own groups, bonding can be valuable as a sort of social safety net that can protect us from outside groups. In many societies, the maintenance of relationships of family and tribal identification can even help provide basic survival needs, especially when the larger social structure is in breakdown. There are some circumstances in which the decline in trust in the existing leadership structure or political system can encourage people to rely more on their in-groups than at other times.[8] This can be especially true when a group is marginalized or oppressed by another group. The networks of support within African American churches in the United States, for example, have provided a necessary social safety net against racism and segregation for generations, as did the NAACP, the National Organization for Women

(NOW), and charitable organizations that formed to help support Jewish, Mormon, and Catholic communities. We bond with those we feel we share the greatest and most important connections to, and with whom we have a common perceived fate.

Bridging, on the other hand, generally occurs when people form connections in socially heterogeneous groups. Bridging can be critical to mutually beneficial relationships between groups, as between different countries in a global sense, between a group and its allies in an identity sense (e.g., LGBTQ and heterosexual people; men and women; whites and people of color), or between different individuals in a personal sense. Bridging facilitates the sharing and interchange of ideas, information, and innovation and can be an important factor in building agreement and consensus among groups representing diverse interests.

Bridging can broaden and extend social capital by increasing what has been called the "radius of trust" that people experience.[9] This is a particularly important part of a healthy, diverse, and inclusive environment, as well as in an increasingly global world order. Bridging usually occurs as a result of some perceived shared interest or goal that creates something larger or more important than the differences that exist between the bridging parties, and most often includes some expectation of general reciprocity—"If I'm there for you, I expect that you'll be there for me."

Bridging often occurs in coalitions that form situationally in order to deal with a common challenge. For example, when apartheid was still in place in South Africa, Mangosuthu Buthelezi's Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP) worked closely with Nelson Mandela's African National Congress (ANC) to fight the common enemy of the apartheid government. At that time their destiny was shared, they needed each other in order to win the fight, and they shared the values of democracy over oppression. However, shortly after apartheid fell, they returned to their bonded groups and were back in opposition to each other.

Bonding generally occurs because of a perception of understanding other people and of being understood, whereas bridging is generally formed out of mutual need and desire. Belonging is fundamentally based in bonding; however, bridging can be a way of creating belonging. The challenge, though, can be that one person or group's bonding can be another's bridging.

This often happens in relationships between people who are members of dominant and nondominant groups. As a general rule, people in nondominant groups are more likely to maintain an awareness of their group identity and to be seen by people as a member of their group. The perpetrators of the 9/11 attacks, the San Bernardino, California, shootings, the Fort Hood, Texas, shootings, the Boston Marathon bombing, and other terrorist acts are often referred to as "radical Islamist terrorists" (a term that often has racial overtones as well) in the parts of the Western world in which Muslims are a minority group. On the other hand, the white perpetrators of the Oklahoma City bombing, the Charleston church shootings, the attack at the Sikh temple in Wisconsin, or the attack at the synagogue in Kansas are almost never described as "radical terrorists," and the Christian ones are rarely, if ever, described by their religious affiliation. This often plays out in media coverage.

This dynamic is fluid rather than fixed. When members of different groups interact, this movement between bonding and bridging can sometimes be confusing and upsetting. White women, for example, often see themselves mostly as women, without a particularly strong focus on their racial identity. As members of a nondominant gender group, they feel connected to all women.

My colleague Rosalyn Taylor O'Neale, an African American woman, describes it this way:

> African American women, on the other hand, tend to relate from both of their nondominant group identities and are usually very aware of race as a distinguisher. The impact can often be a presumption of more connection on the part of white women in the relationship than is experienced by black women. White women, as a result, can occur as being presumptuously intimate in their connection with black women, who still may see them as "the other." While the white women think they are bonding, the black women can experience the same exchange as bridging. When people openly discuss these differences, it can ease some of the related social pain.

A similar example occurred after the Pulse nightclub in Orlando, Florida, was attacked by Omar Mateen, a Muslim, on June 12, 2016, and

forty-nine of the mostly LGBTQ attendees were killed. In the aftermath, many conservatives who had taken anti-gay positions in the past found themselves in the uncomfortable position of deciding whom to align with or against: the gay community, about whom they had expressed homophobic judgment for years, or the "Muslim terrorist" who committed the murders.

These dynamics are occurring today across political parties. It seems profoundly irrational for families to be unable to sit at the same holiday table with their closest family members; however, each has bonded with his or her political brethren, and now they are all faced with bridging with people they have known their whole lives. At that moment the question seems to be "Where do I really belong?" and, even more important, "Where will I be safe?"

It is important to understand that bonding and bridging can be both positive and negative, both healthy and unhealthy. As a general rule, positive bonding and bridging are directed *for* something. We bridge with another group to get things done or to establish people's rights, as in the case of the ANC and IFP. Negative bonding and bridging are often *against* something, as in the coalitions of white supremacist groups that have bonded around their common efforts to suppress people of color, Jews, Muslims and others who are not white Christians.

In either case, we strive to connect because the pain of separation is a prime threat to our sense of survival.

Social Separation Syndrome and Addiction

Brandeis professor George N. Appell has described a sense of isolation as *social separation syndrome*.[10] Consider your own experience. Can you remember a time when you were not invited to a friend's birthday party or other social event? Or times when you felt like your friends were ganging up on you or teasing you? It's not hard to recall how insecure these circumstances can make us feel. We often begin to question ourselves and our worth because of the reactions of others. The same feelings can emerge when we find ourselves to be the "only": the only woman in a group of men, the only person of color in a group of whites, the only les-

bian or gay person in a group of heterosexuals, and so on. There is an increased sense of conspicuousness and a vulnerability to this kind of isolation that almost anybody can relate to.

One of the places where social separation has been found to be particularly powerful is in its impact on addiction. For some time, addiction has been characterized as primarily a chemical dependency. To combat such addictive tendencies, counselors have used counteracting chemical agents (such as methadone for heroin addicts) to reestablish normalcy to our altered neurotransmitters, opioid receptors, and mesolimbic pathways.[11] While it would be foolish to ignore the role physical dependency plays in catalyzing addictive tendencies, it appears equally foolish to ignore the role that social connectedness can play in moderating the likelihood of engaging in such addictive practices to begin with.

How many people do you know who have tried to curb addictive behaviors such as overeating, laziness, too much TV, drug use, or drinking and found it much easier when doing it in partnership with somebody? How much easier is it to get out of bed to exercise when you know somebody is meeting you at the gym or waiting outside for you to go for a run? How much harder is it to eat that thing you shouldn't when everybody at the table with you has jointly committed to eating healthier?

Social environments impact addiction. Canadian psychologist Bruce Alexander and his colleagues Robert Coambs and Patricia Hadaway started by getting laboratory rats hooked on morphine.[12] For fifty-seven consecutive days, the rats would have access to only a morphine solution to consume in order to meet their need for water. Once they were addicted, a second option of unlaced tap water was introduced, giving the rats an opportunity to choose between the new, drug-free water or the water laced with morphine. Addiction models that rely on the theory of drug-induced addiction would have predicted that rats would continue to indulge in the morphine solution regardless of their social circumstance, but Alexander and his team questioned this traditional view.

In their studies, the researchers divided the rats between two distinct social environments: a small, barren cage where a rat would be housed by itself, or Rat Park (Figure 1.3), a large, open space where rats were housed among many others and had access to a variety of toys, tunnels,

Figure 1.3 Bruce Alexander's "Rat Park"

and opportunities for stimulation. They then observed the rats to see how those who had become addicted in the solitary confines of a small, cramped cage would react when placed in Rat Park.

The findings were stunning. While rats who remained in cages continued to opt for the morphine cocktail, the addicted rats who were transitioned to Rat Park overwhelmingly chose the plain water over the morphine solution. It appeared that addiction depended heavily on social variables. For rats confined to a small, cramped cage, a morphine kick might be a way to cope with the otherwise bleak nature of their lives. However, for rats afforded the luxury of Rat Park, such a coping mechanism proved unnecessary. These findings are not unprecedented. Drake Morgan, an addiction specialist at the University of Florida College of Medicine, and his colleagues conducted a similar study with macaque monkeys.[13]

The same can be true for human beings. Forced separation can be devastating to the human psyche. Researchers at seven medical schools collaborated to study the impact of solitary confinement on a group of

recently released prisoners and found that they were two and a half times more likely to show post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) symptoms than prisoners who were not in solitary.[14] There was also an increased number of suicide attempts among the group. Dr. Aaron Fox, associate professor of medicine at Montefiore Medical Center and one of the lead authors of the study, said, "If exposure to solitary confinement causes PTSD, then it may be harmful and dangerous and something we should think twice about. If people with PTSD are placed in solitary confinement, that's also a problem, as it's exacerbating their mental health problems." Robert King, a prison reform activist who himself was wrongly incarcerated for thirty-two years, including twenty-nine years in solitary confinement, said, "I can tell you from experience: If you've done time in solitary confinement, you've been damaged. Even if you survive it, it has an impact on you."[15]

During the Vietnam War, a large number of soldiers became addicted to heroin. While many still struggled with addiction when they returned home, a remarkable percentage of them simply stopped using.[16] From a traditional viewpoint of addiction as a purely chemical dependence, this seems exceptionally peculiar, but when viewed through the lens of the rat and monkey studies, it makes perfect sense. These soldiers were regularly exposed to horrific atrocities, immense stress, and extended periods of anxiety while in Vietnam. They were thrown into an environment with people they didn't know and for whom the normative behavior included drug abuse. Their social environments were often nightmarish, so they sought refuge in the temporary fix afforded by drug use. When they returned home to social environments devoid of such carnage and despair and were back with people they had known and loved all of their lives, the need for such a coping mechanism dissipated. In fact, it wasn't just addiction that was impacted. Lt. Col. Angel Lugo, of the U.S. Air Force, shared this example with me:

> Early in my enlisted career, I was an Airman Leadership School instructor. As part of our program, we invited a few of our local "living history" icons (POWs, Tuskegee Airmen, etc.) to speak to the students from time to time. I soon became good friends with one retired officer who was a Vietnam POW for more than seven

years, including time at the notorious Hanoi Hilton during his ordeal. He talked about the tap code that prisoners used to communicate with each other. He highlighted the tap code methodology and greatly emphasized how the communication system soon became the lifeline for the prisoners. It established their sense of community; they taught each other different languages, mathematics, and other subjects. But the next words out of his mouth blew me away. He soon realized it wasn't the beatings and torture that drove some prisoners to their demise; it was their hopelessness and loss of faith and ultimate decision to unplug from the tap code system. They literally isolated themselves, crawled up in a corner, and died.

One of the greatest examples of the benefits of social support in addressing addiction are twelve-step programs, particularly Alcoholics Anonymous. AA was founded by Bill Wilson (or "Bill W." to those in the program) and Dr. Bob Smith in Akron, Ohio, in 1935. Wilson had joined the Oxford Group, a nondenominational movement that had been created to help members get and stay sober. Wilson had felt a "kinship of common suffering" that drew him to the group, and he put himself into an alcohol rehabilitation program just days after attending his first meeting, never to drink again. After focusing more on the "science" of sobriety, rather than solely on religion, he was able to achieve his first success at helping another to achieve sobriety with Smith, another member of the Oxford Group. By 1937, Wilson had separated from the Oxford Group and formed what is now AA.

Over the years, AA has become the best-known sobriety network in the world. Including the original program and other spin-offs for drug abuse, overeating, and other issues, millions of people every year use the program, largely because of the sense of belonging that it gives them. Consider these testimonials from participants I interviewed in the program:

Lydia: Before coming into the program, I felt lonely in general. I always had a group of friends with common interests, but I didn't know what a genuine connection was. I come from a

single-parent family and was raised where everybody else seemed to have Mom, Dad, and the white picket fence, so I felt like an outsider. I drank to numb the feelings of loneliness. When I came into my first meeting, I found so many different kinds of people who didn't fit in. People from sixteen to their eighties, representing all races, creeds, and economic walks of life. The ease of knowing that they know exactly where I'm coming from is such an important part of it. Not being judged makes it easier to open up to things that are challenging for me. I know I have people who will be there anytime, day or night, for anything I'm going through.

Emily: In every way, shape, and form the alcoholism tried to make me alone. Before, I always had a support group, my mom and dad and friends. It was never a lack of support; it was a lack of me using it. The way my mind played me was by convincing me that I was so different that nobody would support me. But when I was drunk, I wasn't miserable anymore. Alcohol gave me a break from me. People were trying to get me to stop but I wouldn't, so I decided to try to find another group of people who wouldn't try to stop me. They were more hard-core. I didn't feel lonely at that point because I had finally found people who acted like me, so finally I wasn't alone or rejected because of my behavior. I could feel like I was normal. AA for me is the home that I never knew I was missing. Now I have a safe place. We can share about anything. We laugh about stuff that other people wouldn't be able to hear. I now see that I'm a small part of a large community. The relief I get for myself now is by supporting other people.

The message comes across loud and clear: belonging keeps them sober.

The same can be true about people who join gangs as a means of protection, as a way of dealing with the torment and threats from other gangs, or if their friends or family members belong. In order to fit in with other gang members, they may also begin to wear certain colors, distinctive

hairstyles, or other types of clothing. They may use gang terminology and get involved with gang activities. And they often may find themselves engaging in behavior that would be considered inappropriate, illegal, or insane in other circumstances. Belonging, it seems, brings rules of normalcy of its own making.

In many workplace environments, employee resource groups (ERGs) can play a similar role. An evolution of what we use to call "affinity groups," ERGs (sometimes called business resource groups) provide a way for people in underrepresented groups (women, African Americans, LGBTQ employees, etc.) to bond and create mutual support networks that can help them function more effectively within the dominant environment.

The Power of Social Groups

Our relationships with our social groups, either through social isolation or through blind belonging, can contribute not only to outward acts of violence but also to violence against oneself. A study conducted at San Francisco State University found that LGBTQ teens who experience high levels of rejection from their families during adolescence (when compared with young people who experienced little or no rejection from parents and caregivers) were more than eight times as likely to have attempted suicide, more than six times as likely to report high levels of depression, more than three times as likely to use illegal drugs, and more than three times as likely to be at high risk for HIV or other STDs.[17]

It is also important to recognize that the more threatened we feel, the more we pull back into our most core group identities. It is no coincidence that hate crimes or other rampant discriminatory behaviors tend to occur with far more frequency when people are in times of high stress and insecurity. Think about the rise of intolerance in Nazi Germany, Mussolini's Italy, after the Taliban took over in Afghanistan, and so on. During times of upheaval, it's all too easy to find a scapegoat to blame for our discomfort. Our current indictment of Muslims and immigrants clearly follows this same pattern.

This threat dynamic is exacerbated by the increased diversity in the world around us, and especially by increased worldwide migration. There

is substantive scientific research showing that humans benefit tremendously from diversity in domains such as decision-making, problem-solving, and creativity.[18] But we also know that sudden increases in diversity can present challenges to social cohesion. When diversity expands rapidly, and in especially visible ways, it causes people of all races to withdraw into their own groups and disengage from social institutions that we generally think of as community-building, such as civic associations, PTAs, and bowling leagues, creating a "turtling effect," as if people were proverbially pulling back into their shells.[19] This effect may be motivated by different stimuli, depending upon the group, but it is generally driven by some manifestation of fear of the other, real or imagined.

What Is Belonging?

We define ourselves by the groups we are a part of and are accepted in. Those groups might be at our very core (family), or they might be social, religious, political, identity, cultural, and/or economic groups that share some sense of common purpose, experience, or goal.

The Merriam-Webster dictionary defines *belonging* as "close or intimate relationship." My experience is that in terms of our experience of groups, belonging has five major qualities:

- A sense of shared identity, in that we see people in the groups we belong to as "us"
- A shared destiny: the belief that what happens to you might also happen to me
- A sense of interdependence, in that we rely on each other in some way, either directly or indirectly
- A general sense of shared values: we may not agree on everything, but we generally share a set of overall values that connect us
- An ability for people to feel fully able to be themselves

The last is probably the most important of all because it distinguishes a true sense of belonging from those times when we feel like we have to go along with the crowd in order to be accepted. It requires permission

for people to bring their full selves to the group, and doing so takes enormous courage and vulnerability for most human beings.

Belonging tends to build a feeling of security in which members may feel included, accepted, and related, and generally conform to some agreed upon way of being, thereby enhancing their sense of well-being and security. In more simple terms, people who experience belonging feel less alone and less isolated, and they experience a greater sense of well-being. This doesn't mean that we don't disagree; however, in groups of belonging, those disagreements do not alter our shared identity.

Brené Brown has emphasized that belonging is built on our ability to experience and share our sense of shame and our vulnerability, and certainly most of us think of the groups we are most deeply bonded with as places where we can safely expose those parts of ourselves. In that sense, our feeling of belonging is deeply tied to our feeling of self-acceptance, because without self-acceptance we are more likely to be more tentative as to how much of ourselves we share with others.[20]

When we do not belong, it is significant, and the impact can be dramatic. Isolation is a complicated topic, primarily because there are multiple ways in which it can be conceptualized. We can think of *objective* social isolation as a definitive state of being, where one is physically cut off from social contact. Individuals in solitary confinement or on a deserted island would qualify as isolated, as they literally have no sources of connection available to them. However, social isolation can occur in a subjective manner as well: we may *experience* ourselves as isolated, even while we are surrounded by people and opportunities to connect.

In his 1994 autobiography, *The Long Walk to Freedom,* the late South African president Nelson Mandela wrote about his twenty-seven years in captivity under the apartheid government. "I found solitary confinement the most forbidding aspect of prison life. There is no end and no beginning; there is only one's mind, which can begin to play tricks. Was that a dream or did it really happen? One begins to question everything."[21]

Yet even Mandela, deprived of his freedom and locked away in objective isolation, refused to internalize his experience of being a prisoner. "I have never regarded any man as my superior, either in my life outside or inside prison," he said in a letter to the South African commissioner of prisons in July 1976, while he was still incarcerated.[22] Knowing that

he was in the right and that his imprisonment was the fault of an im-moral system actually gave him the strength to maintain himself, even in the face of unbearable conditions. Even while isolated, he remained connected, psychologically and spiritually, to his community.

So how do we ensure that people feel connected? Contrary to what many cynics have abrasively suggested, ensuring that people feel included is not simply a matter of unnecessary coddling or indicative of a genera-tion plagued by weakness and entitlement. We now have a litany of stud-ies that demonstrate the profound negative repercussions of ignoring our fundamental need to belong, to be part of a group that we identify with. What's more, it's not *objective* social isolation that's fueling the ma-jority of these findings, but rather *subjective* social isolation; simply *feel-ing* lonely leads to dramatic health deficits. Although loneliness is an inherently mental construct, its implications for our health are by no means limited to simply our mental health; loneliness also manifests in serious physical symptoms.

The three people in the opening scenario of this book all live and work in environments with many people around them, yet Fatima feels isolated at times because of her religion, Joan because of her political views, and Barry because of his sexual orientation. Isolation and loneli-ness can be more about our experience than whom we are with.

Loneliness can impact health at all levels, and a wide range of scien-tists have been proving it for years. One study found that individuals with fewer social ties were at a significantly higher risk of dying from cancer and heart disease.[23] The subjects with the fewest social connections died at more than twice the rate of their well-connected peers during the course of the longitudinal study. John Cacioppo and William Patrick cite scientific evidence to show that it only takes feeling lonely to pro-duce chronic health issues.[24] In another study, researchers identified a variable that in terms of being a risk factor for illness and early death was comparable to better-known dangers such as smoking, obesity, and high blood pressure. That variable? Social isolation.[25]

When we feel like we don't belong, we also experience a dramatic reduction in our cognitive performance. University of Virginia research-ers found that children from schools with elevated rates of bullying perform significantly worse on tests than children from more tolerant,

inclusive schools.[26] And if you think that the students' cognitive impairment had something to do with their young age, think again. Roy Baumeister, professor of Psychology at Florida State University, and Jean Twenge and Christopher Nuss, from San Diego State University, had two groups of healthy adults complete a GRE-style test, with the only difference being that one group was told, following a fake personality test, that their results indicated they were more likely to be alone in the distant future, while the other group was provided with neutral feedback. The results were stunning: adults simply made to *imagine* being lonely in the future answered, on average, 39 percent of the test questions correctly, while the control group averaged 68 percent accuracy![27]

Feeling socially rejected can also sap our motivation and willpower. Dealing with social pain for long enough can sometimes lead us to throw in the proverbial towel, and empirical evidence supports this claim. Researchers have found that socially excluded individuals are less likely to "stand up to challenges" and instead respond to obstacles with pessimism, apathy, and avoidance.[28] If you've ever coped with loneliness by seeking refuge in comfort foods, you're not alone: disconnected individuals have dramatically poorer health habits, including being 37 percent *less* likely to exercise but significantly *more* likely to eat a diet high in fats.[29] While people may sometimes say, "I'm sick and tired of being lonely," the evidence suggests that it might be more accurate to say, "I'm sick and tired *because* I'm lonely."

Most of us have any number of groups to which we belong. Our family is, for most people, our most basic source of belonging (and, as we all know, families can be fraught with all kinds of dysfunction). We might also be defined by belonging to a particular racial, ethnic, or national group, a religious or spiritual group, a workplace, an interest group, or a social organization. Our level of belongingness to each group varies, but these places of connection fill a critical need nonetheless.

Though our desire to connect may be a universal impulse, to whom we are wired to connect is far more constrained. Through much of our evolutionary history, we lived in small, often isolated tribes. Being considered a member of a tribe was critical, as membership conferred benefits such as the right to share in communal resources and the luxury of group protection. An individual typically could not belong to different

tribes simultaneously. The distinction was a simple one: you were either in our tribe, and hence one of "us," or out of our tribe, and consequently one of "them." Survival during this period depended heavily on our ability to differentiate members of our own tribe, who represented safety and security, from members of competing tribes, who represented danger and uncertainty. Tribalism has equipped humans with a hypersensitivity to signals of group membership and a reflexive urge to favor those whom we deem members of our own tribe over out-group members.

Though most of us rarely traverse a landscape as physically treacherous as the ones our ancestors did, the thick residue of tribalism continues to obscure our view of the world. For those hoping to promote untethered connectedness that supersedes racial, ethnic, and geographic barriers, it is crucial to understand that such a goal is, in many ways, counter to our biological predispositions. We have not evolved to facilitate unconditional connection between any and all groups. Extensive research in multiple cultures around the planet has determined that we are likely to experience less empathy for people who are in different racial groups than we are.[30] This dynamic happens in all areas of our lives. In schools or workplace environments, it may occur as cliques that include some and exclude others.

This is not to say that there aren't groups in which people actively try to build connection across differences. In cases such as that, what can unite us is our common desire to connect despite our differences.

The implicit need to categorize individuals into in-groups and out-groups—"us versus them"—is so fundamental to our nature that we automatically do so even when categorizations are purposely trivial. Polish social psychologist Henri Tajfel divided individuals into groups based either randomly or on incidental differences (such as what kind of chewing gum they liked).[31] Participants were then given opportunities to anonymously allocate money to other individuals within the study. Logically, favoring a stranger about whom you know absolutely nothing aside from his or her preference in chewing gum doesn't make a great deal of sense, but this is precisely what Tajfel found. When provided with minimal information about those around them, individuals instinctively looked for even benign signals of group membership they could latch onto. The result is people disproportionately giving money to strangers

with whom they share an unimportant characteristic. Our penchant to favor members of our own tribe prevails even when the identity under which our tribe is constructed is inconsequential.

This dynamic can lead to situations when an incident, a statement, or a circumstance can cause a relatively sudden shift in the perception of whether someone is in an in-group or an out-group. Whether we look at past events, like the O. J. Simpson trial, or more recent ones, like the shooting of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri, or the Colin Kaepernick–inspired protests by football players and other athletes, black and white people who had felt connected before the incident often found themselves suddenly feeling different from each other afterward, knowing that there were two completely different reactions based on race, the level of trust they had in the police or justice system, and how it impacted them personally.[32]

Out-Group Homogeneity

We also relate to groups differently, depending on both their in-group/out-group status and their dominant/nondominant status in our societal structure. For example, in the United States, whites, men, heterosexuals, and Christians are dominant cultural in-groups based on their prevalence and power. Once people have been labeled as members of an out-group, they tend to be stripped of their individuality. This has been labeled the *out-group homogeneity effect*. We tend to see the groups to which we belong as a collection of diverse and unique individuals while other groups are perceived to be a uniform assortment of clones and sycophants: predictable, derivative, and otherwise unoriginal. Taken to the extreme, deindividualization leads to dehumanization, which has obvious large-scale consequences, as proven throughout history.

Think about how much easier it is to distinguish people of one's own race versus distinguishing those of a different race. All of the statements that we have heard about how "all of them look the same" bear this out. Studies have consistently shown that we attribute greater personal variability to the members of our own in-group while seeing members of out-groups as largely similar in their personalities, tastes, preferences, and motivations.[33] In one study, ninety sorority members were asked to judge

the degree of differences among their own sorority sisters and two other groups. Every single participant judged their own sorority members to be more dissimilar than the members of the other groups.[34]

Let's think of this relative to how racial groups are seen in the United States. Who is more likely to see the differences between African Americans, Caribbean-born blacks, and African-born blacks—people from those groups or people from other racial groups? The same is true for Hispanics or Latinos from Cuba, Mexico, and Puerto Rico; Asians from China, Vietnam, Korea, or Japan; and whites who are Jewish, Mormon, or Catholic and from completely different cultural backgrounds. From the outside, many of these groups seem homogeneous, but from the inside we know that significant differences can exist.

An unfortunate consequence of the out-group homogeneity effect is that it makes it easier and more automatic to stereotype groups of which you do not consider yourself a member. If we already tend to view members of out-groups as being homogeneous, deploying stereotypes becomes not only easier but in a sense a logical (though problematic) labeling device. As I wrote in my book *Everyday Bias,* this stereotyping contributes dramatically to conscious and unconscious biases that impact not only our beliefs but our behaviors as well.[35]

Even if you are a member of a group, your survival isn't guaranteed, especially if your identity is aligned with a nondominant group. People who are in out-groups societally have to pay more attention to group identity in order to survive than do people who belong to in-groups. If you are a woman in a predominantly male environment, it is more necessary for you to pay attention to the gender dynamics of the group in order to be safe and successful in it. This concern is exacerbated by public examples of misogyny or sexism, as we have seen with Bill Cosby, Roger Ailes, Bill O'Reilly, and Harvey Weinstein, and as we saw during the 2016 presidential election with Donald Trump. The same is true for race. People of color are more likely to be aware of dynamics of race than whites are because they need to be in order to survive and thrive in a white-dominant culture. It can even impact the way one perceives oneself. If you are heterosexual, for example, how often do you think about your heterosexuality? However, if you are LGBTQ, you probably include that in your thinking in various ways on a regular basis (for example,

"Whom do I tell?" "How much do I tell?" "Are they reacting to me the way I think they are?"). On the other hand, imagine if you were the only straight person in a large group of LGBTQ folks. All of a sudden, your heterosexuality is in the forefront of your thinking. You have never felt more straight in your life!

Our identity brings with it a whole set of expectations. Because we belong (or are assumed to belong) to a particular group, we are expected to go along with that group in terms of beliefs and behaviors, and we often do. In the period following World War II, social scientists conducted hundreds of experiments designed to help us understand how the Nazis were able to turn one of the most cultured countries on the planet into a genocide machine virtually overnight. Some of these experiments are well known. In 1951 Solomon Asch's conformity experiments showed that people will tend to conform to a group's viewpoint, even when they see that the evidence against it is obvious.[36]

Other experiments by Stanley Milgram and Philip Zimbardo demonstrated how our identification with a group, and particularly authority within our group, can lead to behavior that goes beyond the irrational to downright deadly.[37] Once we have identified with a group, their behavior begins to seem "normal" to us, and the behavior of others therefore seems "abnormal," "sick," or "evil." This is especially true when our group is the dominant cultural group, because our view of ourselves then becomes the prevalent view in the broader culture. When faced with a conflict between what we know is right and our desire to go along with the predominant group behavior, we tend to go along. It simply *feels* like the right thing to do.

Our tendency to identify ourselves by group keeps us safer: we know who our friends and enemies are very quickly and easily. But it is not only about safety, and it starts very young. According to Sarah Gaither, a social psychology professor at Duke University:

> If you build your identity around a group, it's important to define what that group *isn't*. That's what really ends up pushing kids to be more exclusionary to other kids. Over the course of elementary school, physical aggression is replaced by tattling, and then eventually by gossip—both ways of drawing boundaries, and of

keeping an errant peer in their place. The act of shutting people out, then, doesn't necessarily have much to do with the ones on the outside; more often, it's an act of self-preservation.[38]

This is a great example of what I described earlier as "bonding *against*." Our group identity is clarified and strengthened by knowing that "we're not one of them." We ultimately rely on "us versus them" thinking in order to define ourselves, define the other, and figure out how to be safe and successful in our lives. By doing this we allow ourselves to be clear about the norms of group behavior that we are expected to follow; to be clear about whom we should be afraid of and protect ourselves from; to know whom we can trust and whom we must distrust; and to know whom we can harm and whom we must keep safe. Our understanding that we can feel more comfortable when one of the people outside of our group is harmed than we do when one of our own is harmed is the reason we eschew fraternizing with the enemy. It is harder to defeat a foe when you identify their humanity than when you assign them to objectified groups and dehumanize them (e.g., "Japs," "gooks," "Islamic terrorists," "socialists," "racists," or "fascists"). We define ourselves by who we are *not* just as much as we do by who we *are*, and sometimes even more.

We have a strong pull toward dualism. It is very natural, and sometimes even automatic, for human beings to choose sides. In fact, we have a strong tendency to create either/or, right/wrong, them/us dynamics in our lives. Think about how many times things that are really more along a continuum are divided into two parts so as to increase our ability to deal with them: day becomes night and night becomes day at a moment. The same can be said about hot and cold. We even do this where people are concerned. People or "for us" or "against us," "one of us" or "one of them." We have a tendency to want to separate the world into dualities.

This imposed simplicity makes it easier to deal with life at some level, but it also blurs the nuance and complexity of life. This is the case with our tendency to see the world as "us versus them."

But how do we decide who is "us" and who is "them"? Given our previous look into the world of politics, let's start there.

Chapter 2

The Politics of Being Right

I think people involved in politics make good actors. Acting and politics both involve fooling people. People like being fooled by actors. When you get right down to it, they probably like being fooled by politicians even more. A skillful actor will make you think, but a skillful politician will make you never have to think.

—DONNA BRAZILE

In September 1894, a French housekeeper who was working in the German embassy found an unsigned and undated letter, torn into six pieces, that was addressed to the German attaché. The letter seemed to indicate that confidential French military documents were about to be sent to a foreign country. The housekeeper took the pieces of the letter and gave them to the French counterintelligence agency. The letter found its way to the French minister of war, General Auguste Mercier, who had been roundly criticized by the media for being incompetent. General Mercier immediately initiated two separate investigations of the matter.

A suspect was quickly identified: Captain Alfred Dreyfus, a Jewish artillery officer who was the only Jewish officer on the General Staff. As the investigation continued, the pall of anti-Semitism, as well as rumors about Dreyfus's personality and character, led to a biased and one-sided analysis of the "evidence." Despite objections by some about the reliability of the evidence, the case proceeded with fanfare. Dreyfus's home was searched, his background was investigated, and any specious piece of information became woven into the fabric of the case against him.

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