

# Bridging to Belonging

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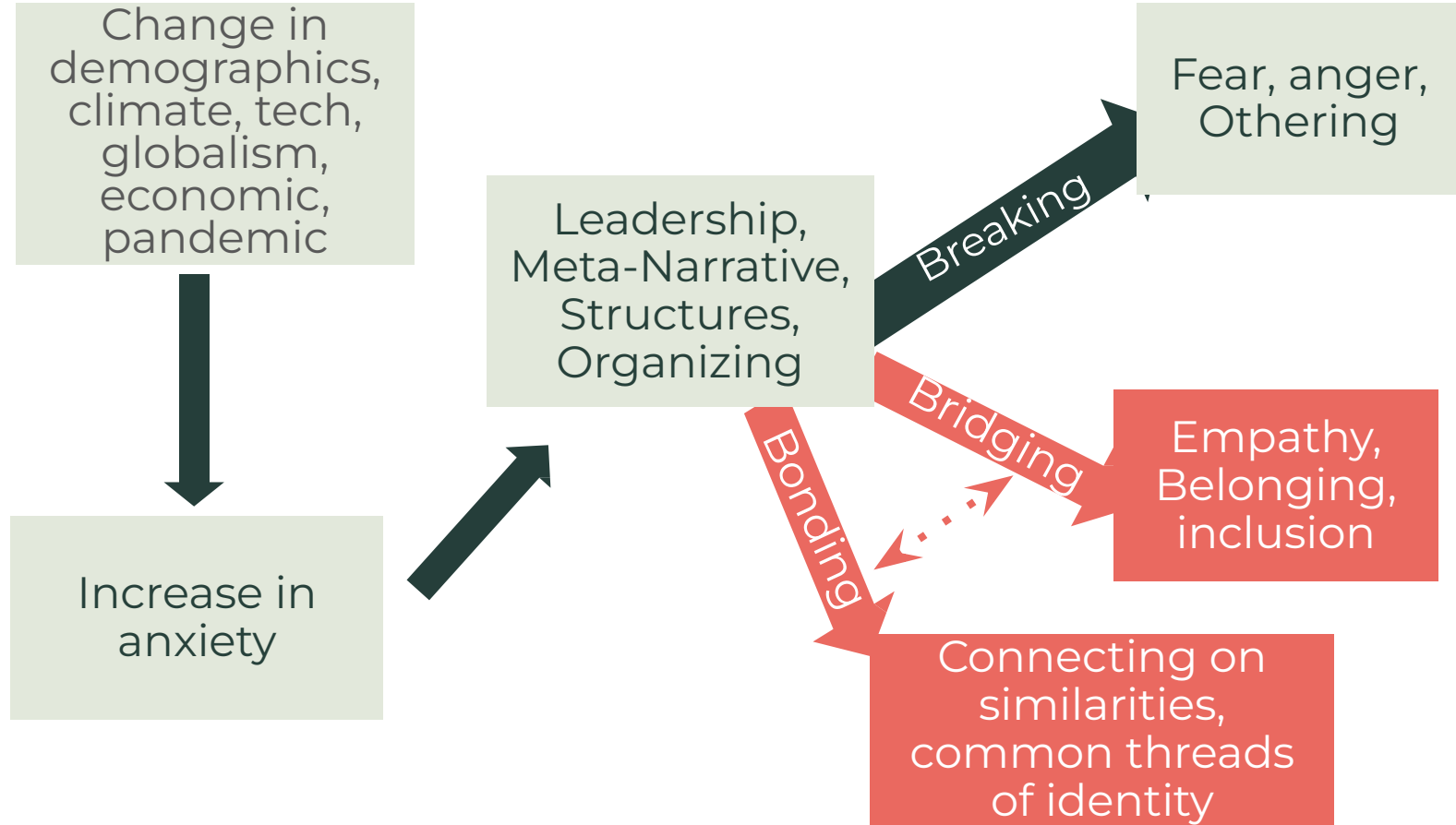
The problem of “Othering” is the problem of the 21st century.

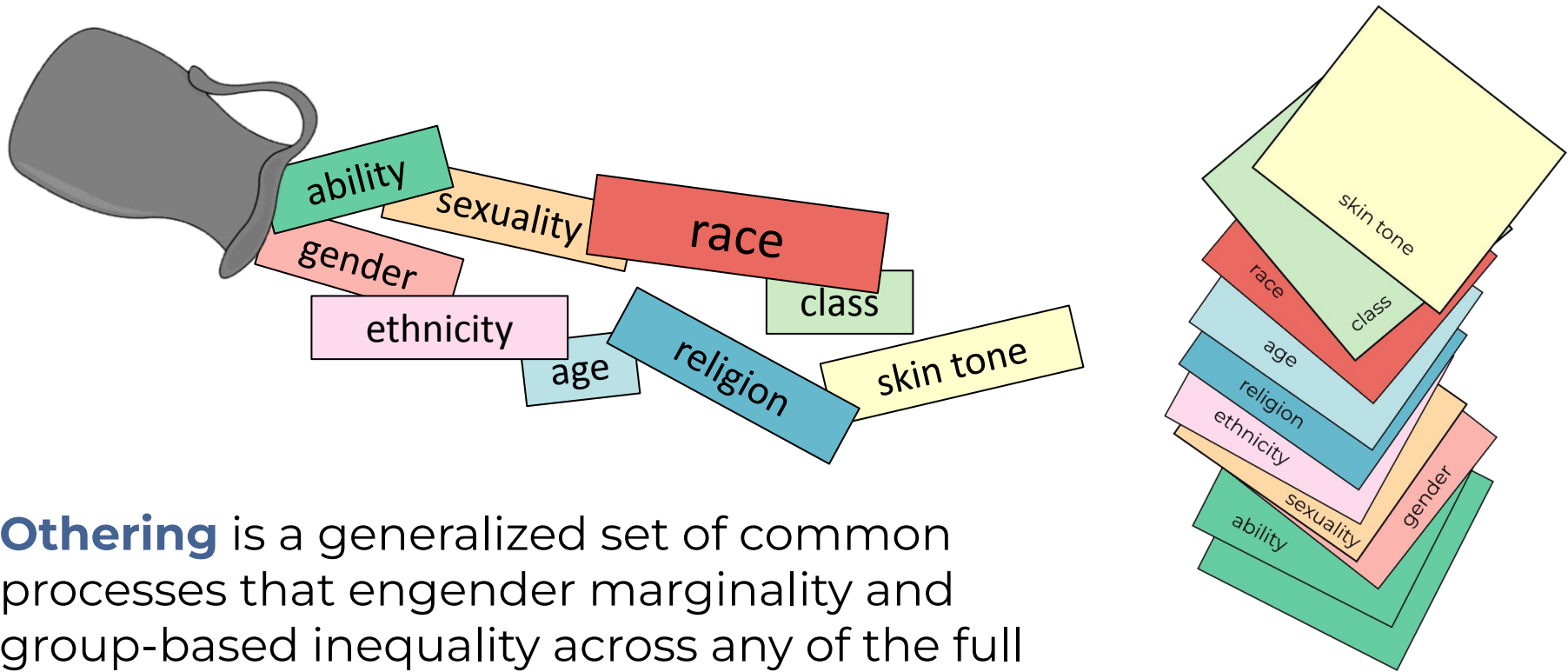


The opposite of  
Othering is *not* saming,  
but **belonging**.



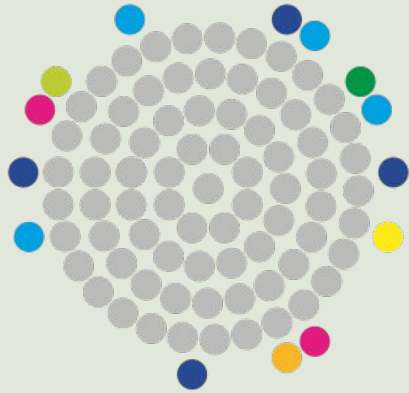
# Rapid Change Produces Collective Anxiety



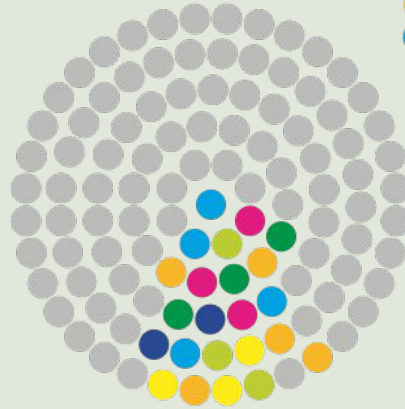


**Othering** is a generalized set of common processes that engender marginality and group-based inequality across any of the full range of human differences.

# Belonging without othering



Exclusion



Inclusion



Belonging

# Belonging

- Inclusion
- Agency
- Recognition
- Connection



# Reflection

- Think of a time where you experienced belonging.
  - What did it feel like?
  - Where was it?



***Breaking** is about  
turning on each other.*

***Bridging** is about  
turning toward each  
other and building  
something together.*



Bridging companions the path to expand  
belonging.

Without bridging, it is not possible to build  
a society in which everyone belongs.

# Bridging is



**Intentionally engaging across difference**



**Empathetic listening**



**Narrative sharing to connect to understand**

# Bridging is not



**Compromising**



**Agreeing**



**Abandoning Values**

# Narratives of Othering and Belonging



**Breaking:** When a group turns inwards and explicitly pushes away from other groups who are seen as dangerous or a threat.



**Bonding:** Connecting to people like you in some important way



**Bridging:** Ties to people who are unlike you in some important way; stories, structure contact. Willing to listen.

There are **short bridges** and **long bridges**.

Some bridges require more effort to build and maintain.

Others are a short distance.



*“Bridges are made to be walked on.”*  
- bell hooks

# Making change and bridges

- The need for change may need to happen in a shorter time than bridges can be built
- Long bridges and short bridges can take a long time to foster, develop, and cross
- **Use Targeted Universalism to—at minimum—avoid breaking** when bridging will take more time



# Bridging happens not only between individuals, but between groups and institutions as well



- Bridging expands the circle of human concern to build a more inclusive “we”
- Bridging is not same-ing
- Bridging engages power
- It contains multitudes
  - Short vs long
  - Weak vs strong
  - Transactional vs transformational
  - Across elevations

# Reflection

- What bridges have you crossed in the past?
- What bridges do you think would be useful to build?



# How do we bridge in a fragmented environment?

*The solution to othering is bridging, not more othering.*

*While many groups may view “breaking” as a way of protecting themselves from external forces who seek to blame, injure, or divide, this response harms movements’ ability to build power. As we know, there is power in diversity, numbers, and transformation—all of which require cross-group engagement, not merely in-group bonding.*



# Cracked containers

When there's a crack in the container—when the context in which we live is broken—everyone feels othered and our solutions need to be more radical.

North Sound is one of those containers.



# Create new containers where people are valued and connect

- An opportunity to move beyond polarization and toward co-creation.
- Structural belonging requires mutual power, access, and opportunity among all groups and individuals within a shared container (such as a society, organization, club, etc).
- Shared value and/or experience.



# Transactional vs Transformational Bridging

## Transactional

Coalitions of interest that unite to accomplish a shared goal.

Once the objective is accomplished, the group may dissipate.

## Transformational

Relationship across chasms.

Requires healing, deep understanding, a change of mind and heart, and an appreciation for one another's shared humanity.

# Power Matters

- Bridging may look different where there is a power differential. **Power is positional, structural, and hierarchal.**
- People can gain power through **linking social networks** and **creating social capital**.
  - Individuals can build relationships with institutions and individuals who have relative power to access resources.
- **Power also shifts.**



# Addressing power

- Who has the most power in the room?
- Who has the most space?
- Who has the most authentic voice?
- How is power being used?
- What are each parties' sacred symbols?
- Whose perspectives shape both the “problem” and the “solution”?
- How can leaders reinforce marginalized voices and ideas?
- How can we bridge and link despite power differentials?



# Risks of bridging

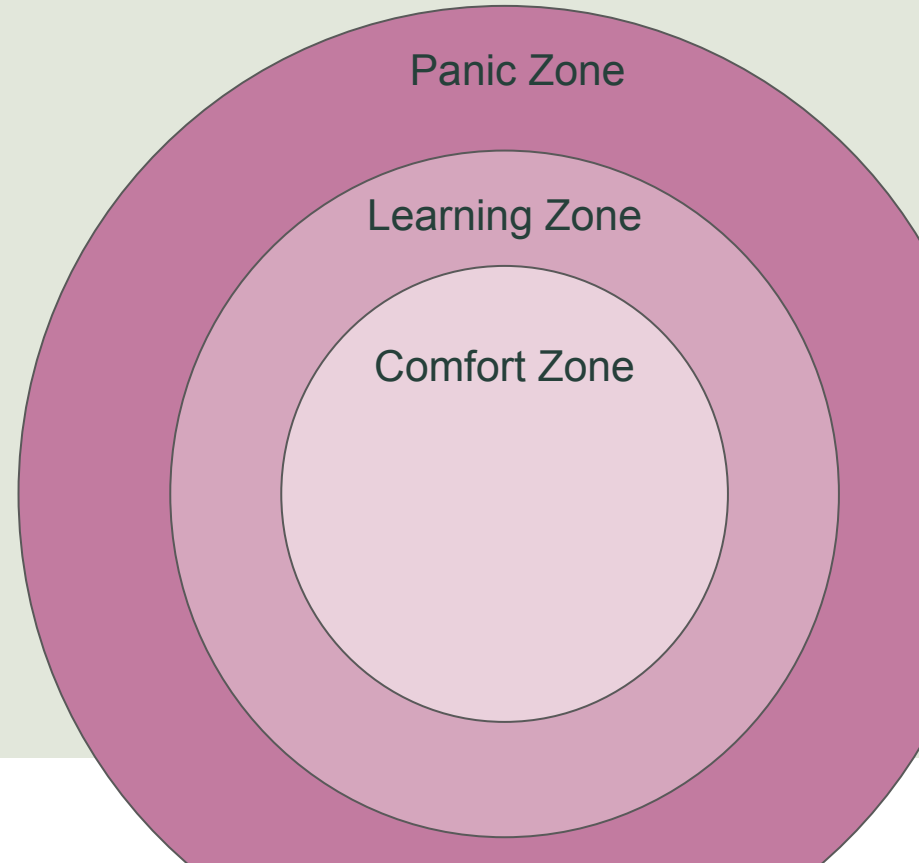
1. **Risk of being hurt** (being hurt in the encounter of bridging)
2. **Risk of ostracization** (being called a traitor by your community)
3. **Risk of transformation** (fear of being changed by the other)
4. **Risk of not bridging** (what happens if we keep breaking?)

# The Learning Zone Model

The Comfort Zone: what you do is routine and familiar.

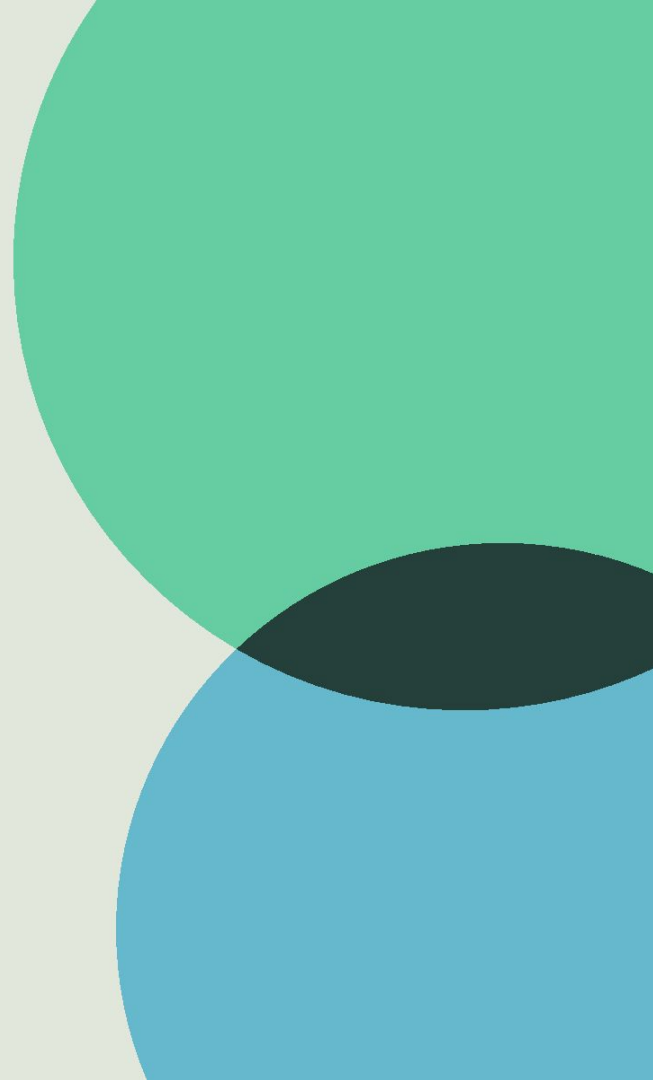
The Learning Zone (or Growth Zone): you experiment, stretch your abilities, and develop new skills.

The Alarm Zone: where you're operating outside your knowledge and understanding, causing you to feel overwhelming and panicked.



# Some Keys to Bridging

- Bridging is inter-group not intra-group, it means reaching outside or beyond your group.
- Bridging is not “same-ing”, it acknowledges and honors different identities rather than erasing them.
- Bridging is built on connection and requires empathetic listening rather than evaluative listening and sharing stories rather than facts and data.



# Trends we're noticing on campus right now

**A deep desire to bridge or have opportunities to bridge but also a lot of fear about:**

- **Being hurt by the other (or in general) when bridging**
  - This has to be tackled on both a personal and institutional level and is very much tied to the systems of safety we create and power imbalances we challenge
- **Being ostracized from one's group when reaching out to bridge with another**
  - This could be tackled by doing some shorter bridge work within groups doing long bridge work but also by creating spaces of abundance rather than scarcity
- **Being changed by the other**
  - This comes up when people feel as though being asked to bridge must come at the expense of their own perspective, as if the goal is to agree not understand. A focus on values rather than identities can help ease this.

**All of these fears interact with and deepen each other especially as we get further and further away from each other's stories and humanity**

# Some ways we are responding

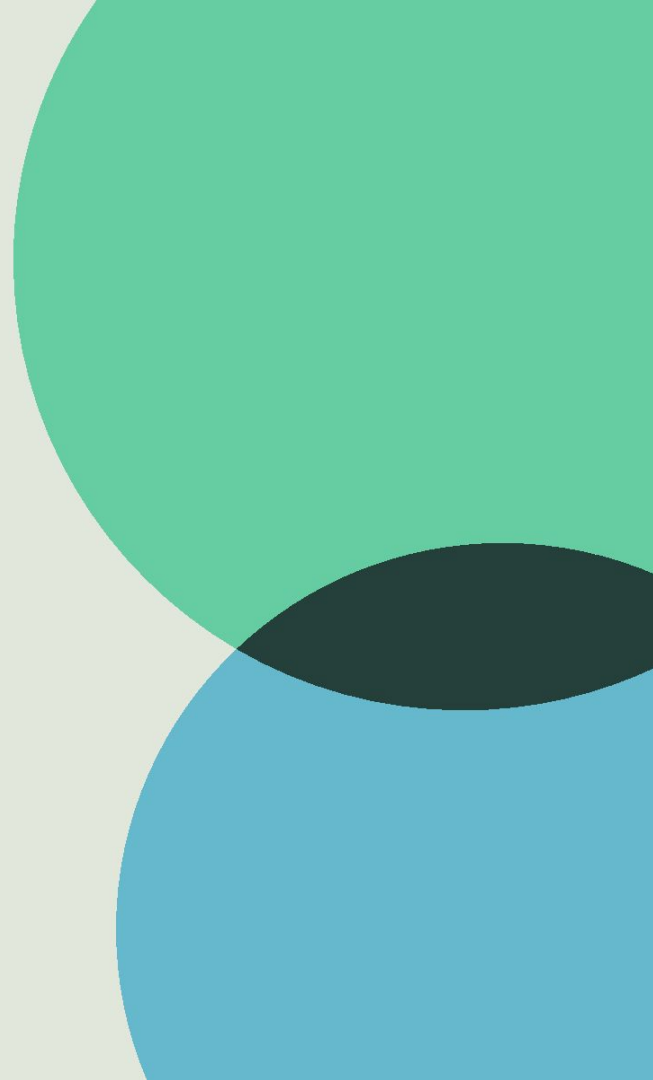
Calling these fears forward and naming them:

- Sometimes when we ask people to listen to the stories of others they think that we are asking them to abandon or invalidate their own
- Sometimes when we ask people to consider the relationship their stories have to power they think we are dismissing their pain

# Some ways we are responding cont.

## Setting the stage for “psychological proximity”

- By creating spaces for people to connect around emotions, values, stories, and unique perspectives rather than issues, or the single-stories of identity-based perceptions



# Some ways we are responding cont.

## Being “soft on people hard on structures”

- By listening for the structures that personal narratives being shared have in common and, as we invite people to be soft on/with each other, invite them to consider and investigate how the power dynamics of those structures exist within, around, and act upon those stories

# Reflection

- What can you do personally and professional to promote belonging?
- Who have you othered implicitly or explicitly? How do could or did you bridge to them?



# Reflection

- How does or would bridging change your interaction at work or home, or with your neighbors?



# Stories and Narratives

Who's in the stories? Who is left out? Who is telling the story? Who is the protagonist/villain? Who is the audience?

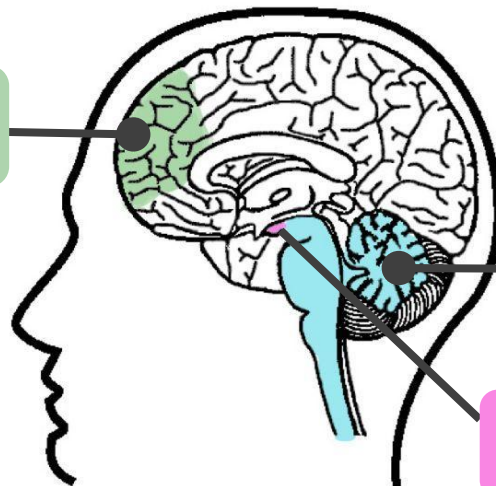


How do we expand our circles to include everyone in our stories and narratives?

# Who are we talking to?



**Prefrontal Cortex**



**Reptilian Brain**

**Amygdala**

# Reflection

- When your amygdala is activated, how is it quieted?





**‘Each person  
thinks their  
burden is the  
heaviest’  
- Bob Marley**

# Belonging without Othering

From the story of  
“me and mine”

me/my  
group

Everybody  
else

To the story of  
“us and ours”

Everybody  
(including me  
and my group)

# Bridging to Belonging Case Series



## Overview

This Bridging to Belonging Case Series captures real-world examples of bridging and belonging through writings and podcast interviews. In this series, we analyze a range of breaking moments and bridging opportunities across different scales and contexts, such as schools, movements, governments and communities. In the case series we hear from leaders implementing the work, and individuals who have experienced the transformation of bridging to create belonging.

## How to use these cases

Each written case and podcast can be read or listened to alone, as they each tell a compelling bridging to belonging story. However, we encourage readers and listeners to use the series as an opportunity to gain different perspectives and examples of bridging to belonging. Each written case has one or two podcast interviews that can be used together to get multiple perspectives of the same project. For example, the written case that outlines Belong Circles also has two podcast interviews that accompany it; one interview is with an organizer and the second one is with two people who've participated in Belong Circles. Using the resources together allows readers to learn about Belong Circles from multiple perspectives.

## Try the workshop

This 90 minute workshop offers modules on the topics of Othering, Breaking, Bridging and Belonging. The workshop allows for an interactive discussion using dynamic case studies of real world examples of bridging. Our curriculum includes a Facilitators Guide, Visual slide deck, Case Studies and Discussion Questions.

# Belonging Colorado



## **Belonging: bridging beyond othering**

Belonging Colorado is a bold, new effort to bring people together in new ways, grow resilience in our state, and expand Coloradans' sense of who belongs. We are seeking to invest in good ideas for building connections across lines of difference—racial, ethnic, socioeconomic, political affiliation, age, and more. Our state is not immune to the trends of social division and disconnection affecting our nation.

At a time of intense challenges—social, economic, and environmental—it is more essential than ever that Coloradoans work effectively across differences to bridge divides and support the long-term health, resilience, and well-being of our state.

# Conclusion

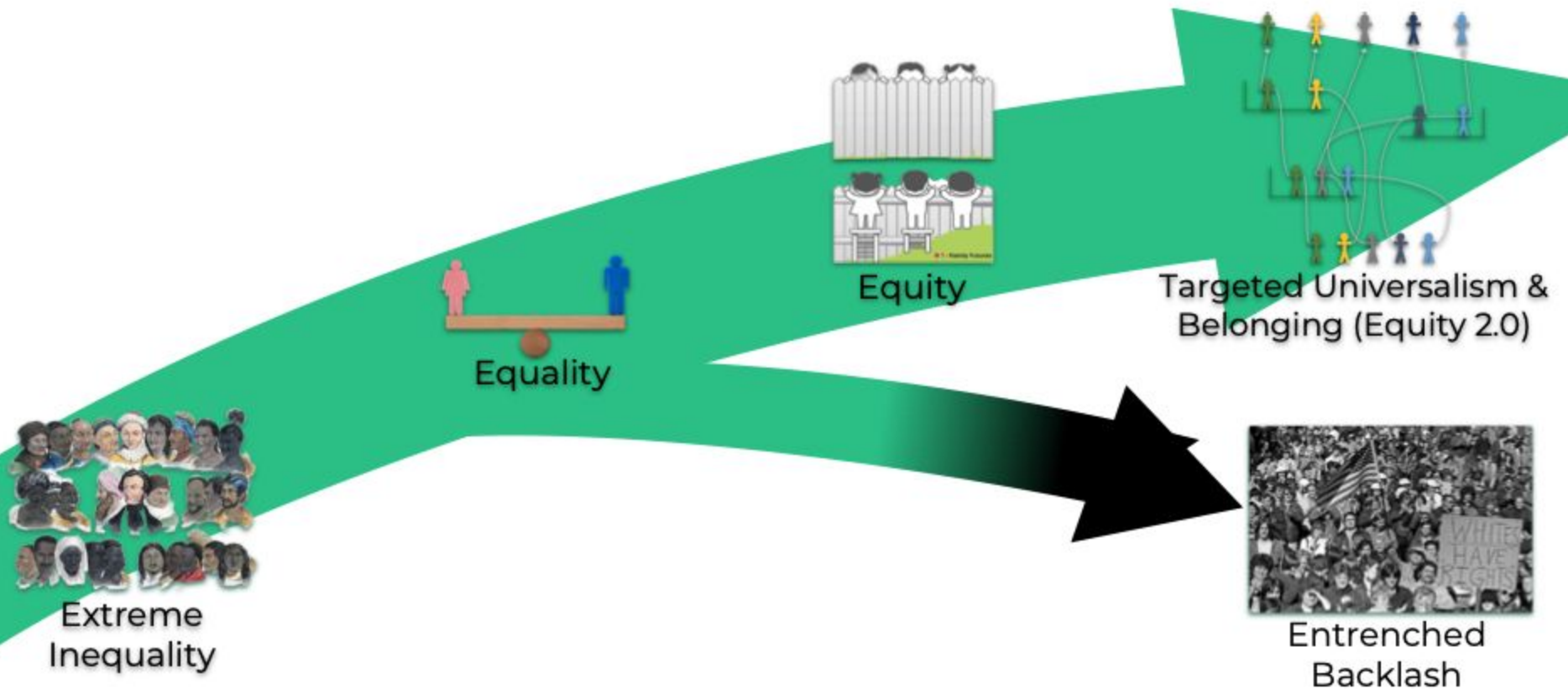
*Thank you all!*

For additional information, check out OBI  
University at <https://obi.org/>.



# *The arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice (belonging)*

-Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., "Remaining Awake Through a Great Revolution." Speech given at the National Cathedral, March 31, 1968.



# Structures do work: power and position matter

People are situated differently with regard to structures and infrastructure.



People also impact these relationships and can change the structure of the system.



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<http://www.payvand.com/news/07/apr/Hearing-Impaired-Tehran-ISIH11.jpg>

# Structures are not neutral.

Think about the design of airplanes.

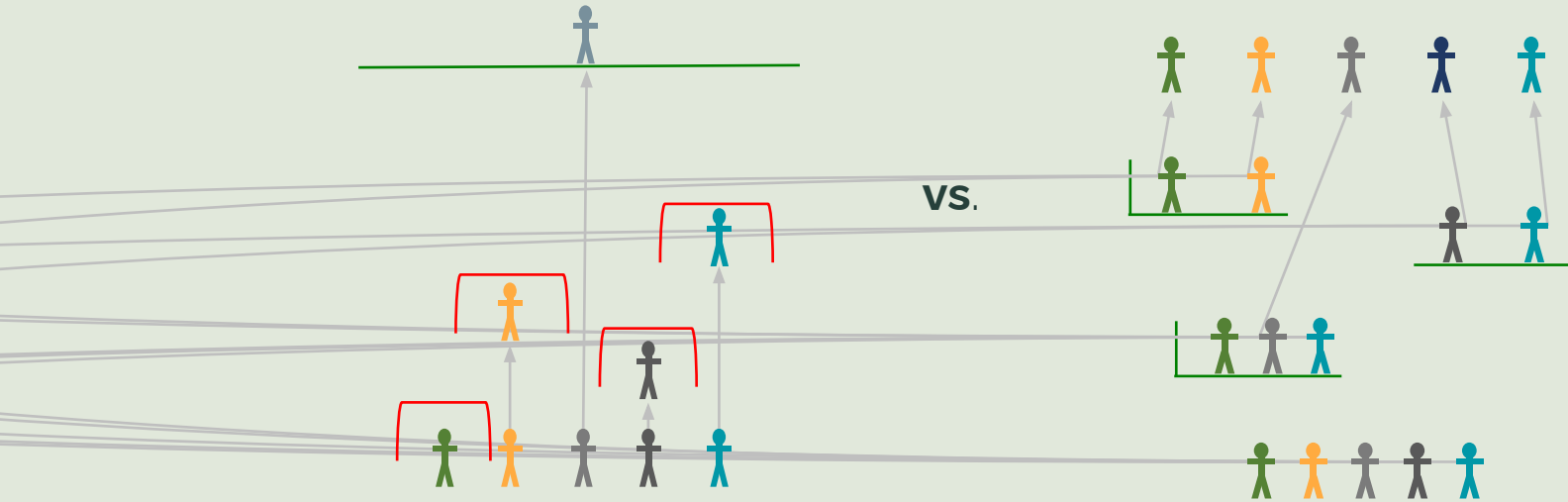
How might they be biased?



# The TU Framework

**Structural inequity** produces consistently different outcomes for different communities

**Targeted universalism** responds with universal goals and targeted solutions



# Thank you!

