

## Book Review

## The science of creating connection and bridging divides by Cohen, G. L.

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Geoffrey L. Cohen, a social psychologist and Stanford University professor reminds us that a sense of belonging is as crucial as food and shelter. In his book *The science of creating connection and bridging divides*, Cohen explains that when people experience division and exclusion, the threat to their sense of belonging triggers a similar response in the brain to physical pain. Exclusion affects our self-esteem and our performance; it can even make us sick. The ability then, to change the effects of belonging insecurity is a powerful skill.

Cohen (2022) describes in three parts how situations can be crafted to create a strong sense of belonging for ourselves and others, what the causes are of ‘belonging uncertainty’ and how we can bridge the divides and foster belonging in schools, work, and our communities. In the first two chapters (Part One) Cohen explains the art of ‘situation crafting’ that prompts us to consider how we can shape situations to generate change and what we can do to support people who are at risk of exclusion. Through situation crafting we can create new roles and reference groups for people that support new identities, affirm people, and promote participatory practices.

Part Two focuses on the ‘causes and cures’ of belonging uncertainty. In this part, Cohen (2022) discusses why people often seek belonging by excluding others and what we can do to bridge the divides. Spanning six chapters, this part covers common mistakes people make, such as the ‘fundamental attribution error’ that leads us to blame the person rather than the situation they are in, and the confirmation bias that leads to people only looking at information that supports their own views, and ignoring other perspectives and possibilities. Section Two also explains why we stereotype others and how we can stop doing it. Among the ‘cures’ mentioned are reaffirming our norms and values, reflecting on how we ourselves might be contributing to stereotyping and, coming from a place of humility, asking questions, and respectfully listening to the answer to get to know the other person better. While the ‘cures’ may not sound novel, what is new perhaps is the realisation that we are able to craft situations that diminish belonging uncertainty for others as well as ourselves. “Sometimes the slightest gesture of appreciation and support can turn a situation that feels strange and threatening into one that feels inviting and welcoming” reiterates Cohen (2022, p. 276).

The last part (Part Three) comprises five chapters on how we can foster a sense of belonging in our own bodies and minds, in our schools, workplaces, community and policies, followed by some key takeaways on how we can all foster belonging. The power that is in the situation is a power we all have: we can observe a situation and take notice when another person is finding it difficult to find their feet. We can grow an awareness of how we can purposefully strengthen the sense of belonging for others. “By helping to foster belonging in others we will also feel more connected, empowered and fulfilled” (Cohen, 2022, p. 423). What I found most interesting about this book was to read about how we can use situation crafting to construct changes in our own and other people’s situations. This book allows you to consider different perspectives, how to use empathy and consider timing as well. It

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therefore helps people not to take the concept of belonging for granted and reflect deeper on how a person's situation might be affecting one's sense of belonging.

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### Reference

Cohen, G. L. (2022). *The science of creating connection and bridging divides*. WW Norton Company.