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Global belonging: from conflict and exclusion to untapped potential

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Abstract

This chapter presents a critical review of belonging research, positing that the pursuit of belonging, while a fundamental human need, embodies complexities that profoundly influence the self. By integrating interdisciplinary perspectives, the chapter explores the intricate interplay between individual and collective identities in the context of belonging. This approach incorporates both etic (universal) and emic (culturally specific) perspectives on belonging through two parts. The first section in the chapter entitled, *The Dark Side of Belonging: Exclusion and division* explores the inherent tensions within the construct of belonging. This section examines how belonging can be weaponised, considers the

psychological impact of exclusion, explores geopolitical divisions and antisocial behaviour, and scrutinises how social categorisations and identity while creating opportunities for belonging, can concurrently create exclusion, othering, and ostracism. The second section, *The Light Side of Belonging: A path to flourishing*, proposes an expansive and globalised conceptualisation of belonging, drawing inspiration from the Overview Effect observed in space psychology. It posits that cultivating a sense of global belonging and shared humanity can transcend the limitations of traditional categorisations of ingroup/out-group dynamics. This section explores how this broadened sense of belonging might influence individual behaviour and perceptions in the face of global challenges, such as geopolitical divisions and climate destruction, potentially fostering a more collective and flourishing global community. By examining belonging through an overview lens, the chapter contributes to the volume's mission of exploring the self in context, specifically a global belonging context.

Keywords: Global belonging; self, geopolitics; thriving communities; climate change

Global belonging: From conflict and exclusion to untapped potential

If we could look from above at our world of 8 billion people, we might see something as complex as a sprawling ant colony, humans building infrastructure and working collectively, constructing, innovating, surviving and, most of all, *belonging*. But do we, as individuals, truly appreciate this sense of togetherness? Despite our vaunted cognitive abilities, we humans are often caught up in our own stories, oblivious to our place within a larger system (Som, 2019). There are parallels in how our brains unconsciously filter out familiar obstructions, like specks on a windscreen or a nose intruding into our field

of vision (Kreitz et al., 2015). This perceptual quirk generally serves us well. If we stopped to fully engage with the enormity of the universe and our smallness within it, could we still find meaning in life and the sense of purpose that drives us to continue pursuing it? Maybe we sometimes need to overlook the bigger picture and focus on the self. Or do we then ignore the delicate ecosystem that sustains us, creating havoc in the world through wars, famine and climate destruction (Ripple et al., 2020)?

The human tendency to focus on and find comfort in the self, a construct that shapes how we live and exist as individuals within our families, networks, friendship groups, workplaces, and society, helps us to navigate and build a sense of meaning in our lives, serving as an important lens through which experiences of belonging are perceived and interpreted (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Yuval-Davis, 2006). Individualistic perspectives of the self are reinforced in psychology. For example, the *spotlight effect* is a term used by psychological researchers to describe how individuals overestimate the extent to which their actions and appearance are noticed by others (Gilovich et al., 2000). Psychological interventions like Cognitive Behaviour Therapy (CBT) have thrived because of a focus on internal cognition (Beck, 2011). The origins of many psychological constructs and observations like empathy, compassion, happiness, motivation, and self-efficacy emerged from our sense of self, as they are deeply rooted in subjective experience (Harter, 2006). Often, it is not until many years later that collective versions of the constructs are studied. This has been observed in research on *collective self-efficacy* (Butel & Braun, 2019) and Gross National Happiness (Ura et al., 2012). Then there are neologisms like *main character energy* and *sonder*, created to remind us that others also live their lives as the main characters in their own stories, immersed in the self.

Without the concept of self, the ability to distinguish and articulate the significance of our own experiences and thoughts relative to those of others would be severely

diminished, potentially rendering human existence an undifferentiated mass of uniformity. The concept of belonging could lose its psychological significance, becoming a mere observation of physical proximity or categorisation, akin to noticing that pencils belong in a pencil case or that rubbish is found in a bin. Disciplines such as sociology, organisational psychology, and *systems thinking* have helped progress Westernised psychological theories towards understanding the influence of the system (or systems) on the individual and how systems can oppress, marginalise, and challenge belonging (Allen et al., 2021; Brewer, 2007; Yuval-Davis, 2006). Therefore, a comprehensive understanding of belonging must incorporate emic and etic perspectives. The emic perspective provides an insider's view, representing the internal subjective experiences and meanings attributed to belonging. In contrast, the etic perspective offers an external, comparative approach that allows for *big-picture*, systemic, and cross-cultural understandings. These perspectives enable a balanced exploration of how belonging is constructed and experienced across individual and collective contexts (Anthias, 2006; Yuval-Davis, 2006).

At the same time, the construct of belonging emerges as being both essential *and* problematic when we consider an individual within a global context. While it fulfils the pursuit of a fundamental human drive at an individual level (Baumeister & Leary, 1995), it also presents a diabolical challenge at a global level. The mechanisms that foster belonging, such as cultural identity, group affiliation, and social identity, may also be seen to inadvertently lead to divisions and exclusion in groups, communities, societies, and even countries. This paradox becomes evident when examining persistent issues such as widespread loneliness, social marginalisation (Lim et al., 2021), geopolitical conflict, food insecurity, and environmental destruction on a global scale. Perhaps there is a critical gap in understanding: *How can individual needs for belonging be reconciled with the need for global cooperation?* This question gains urgency as we face unprecedented global

challenges that require collective action and a shared sense of responsibility. The chapter structures the discussion of belonging in two parts. First, it investigates *The dark side of belonging: exclusion and division*, examining how belonging can be weaponised, the psychological impact of exclusion, the role of geopolitical divisions and antisocial behaviour, and how social categorisations and identities can create both belonging and barriers that lead to exclusion, othering, and ostracism. The second part, *The Light Side of Belonging: A path to flourishing*, proposes an expanded conceptualisation of belonging. Drawing inspiration from the *Overview Effect* observed in space, the latter part of the chapter explores how cultivating a sense of global belonging might influence individual behaviour and self-perception in the face of global challenges. Through an *overview lens*, belonging is examined (and imagined) in relation to the self within a global or even planetary context. This chapter explores whether the Overview Effect can offer a meaningful lens for considering a global perspective on belonging. Can a global sense of belonging address our intrinsic need to belong and the urgent demands of our shared planet to foster a flourishing future?

The Fundamental Human Need to Belong

While contemporary researchers often credit Baumeister and Leary (1995) with popularising the construct of belonging, its intellectual roots extend far beyond modern scholarship. This is easily overlooked in an academic landscape that increasingly favours recent citations. For belonging research, the tendency to neglect earlier works risks leaving the field languishing, especially when the construct has deep historical roots. For example, presocratic philosophers like Thales and Heraclitus explored fundamental questions of existence, change, and continuity, directly informing the understanding of belonging and its dynamic nature (Kirk et al., 1983). Protagoras, a Sophist, introduced the idea that truth is

subjective, emphasising that perceptions of social connection and belonging are not always based on fact (Guthrie, 1971). Aristotle's view of humans as *social animals* aligns with modern thinking about belonging, underscoring the importance of social connections for fulfilling lives (Aristotle, 50 B.C.E/ trans. Jowett, 2009). In the Hellenistic period, the Stoics and Epicureans focused on how individuals could live harmoniously within communities, highlighting the balance between the self and the collective, with Epicureans in particular, emphasising the role of friendships (Sandbach, 1989; Rist, 2010). This emphasis on harmony within social structures is also reflected in Eastern traditions, such as Confucianism, which underscored the value of social cohesion across cultures (Yao, 2012). Although this is a necessarily brief and selective overview, these examples from earlier traditions create a foundation for how belonging is understood today.

The Australian Indigenous population, with over 80,000 years of passed-down knowledge, also offers profound evidence of the significance of belonging long before it gained prominence in the West in the 90s. Rooted in a deep connection to land, the spiritual connection to *country* challenges Western perspectives that often frame belonging as primarily a social phenomenon (see Allen, Gray et al., 2021). While Baumeister and Leary (1995) define belonging as a fundamental human motivation towards forming and maintaining positive interpersonal relationships, Moreton-Robinson (2015) suggests that Indigenous belonging is ontological, based on a deep spiritual and relational connection to the land. This challenges colonial framings of land as property and taxonomies of belonging based on possession or ownership. She also argues that this connection to land is central to Indigenous sovereignty, opposing the doctrine of *terra nullius*, which claimed the land was unoccupied before British colonisation. The land remains unceded.

While much scholarly work centres on interpersonal belonging and the importance

of connections with others, it is essential to acknowledge that belonging can extend to broader domains, encompassing place (Allen et al., 2021; Mohseni et al., 2024) ideas, cultures, memories, and even abstract concepts (e.g., May, 2017). It is important to recognise that the socio-political belonging Moreton-Robinson describes is rooted in Indigenous sovereignty. While it shares commonalities with the emotional or relational sense of belonging discussed in this Chapter, Moreton-Robinson frames belonging within the context of power dynamics and colonial histories. Further adding to the complexity of belonging from a cross-cultural, or etic, perspective is the variation in how belonging is perceived, understood, operationalised, and expressed across different languages and cultures (Abubakar et al., 2017; Cortina et al., 2017; Markus & Kitayama, 1991). Moreton-Robinson's (2015) work is a reminder that nothing is apolitical, including belonging, which can also serve as a tangible and political term when concerned with possession and sovereignty, particularly in the context of Indigenous relationships to land. Such differences show that belonging is shaped by cultural context and histories of power and dispossession. Even the literal meaning of the word belonging itself varies across languages, further illustrating the diverse ways it is conceptualised and enacted (Allen, 2023).

Some disciplines might also question whether belonging is an exclusively human experience. For instance, there is biological evidence for the importance of social bonds across various species, with primatology documenting affiliative behaviours and complex social structures in primates and ethology documenting social behaviours in animals, such as herd behaviours in sheep or flocking patterns in birds (Farine & Whitehead, 2015; Silk & House, 2016). These animal observations are more than just charming analogies for belonging (e.g., Brooks, 2011; Riesman, 1950). Given we are animals ourselves, they suggest that the drive to belong is ingrained in the biology we share with other animal

species.

Speculation that the *need to belong is in our DNA* (e.g., Allen et al., 2021; Carr et al., 2019) is usually framed by the premise that our ancient ancestors relied on social bonds for safety, protection, access to resources, and social cohesion, all of which increased their chances of survival (Page et al., 2017). Certainly, contemporary research points to modern-day survival advantages of belonging (see Holt-Lunstad et al., 2010), with growing evidence from the emerging field of social genomics (Slavich & Cole, 2013). Social isolation, therefore, would have had dire consequences in ancestral environments, reinforcing the idea that the drive to belong has a biological benefit (Holt-Lunstad et al., 2010).

Twin studies offer another compelling perspective on whether belonging is rooted in biology or shaped by experience. Despite sharing identical genetic material, twins often report divergent experiences of belonging, influenced by the environments they grow up in. As Oikkonen (2018) discusses, while genetics may lay the foundation for certain social behaviours, the expression of belonging is far from predetermined. Instead, it emerges through the complex interplay of biology and the distinct social, cultural, and relational contexts that shape individual lives. In this way, twin studies highlight the fluidity of belonging and show that while biology provides the groundwork, a sense of belonging is ultimately forged through personal and collective experiences that differ even among genetically identical people. The putative truth of the claim that the “*need to belong is in our DNA*” requires further research (Sack, 2016, paragraph 1).

A futuristic contribution to belonging research may come from quantum physics. The observation of quantum entanglement, where particles remain connected regardless of

distance (Potter & Simmons, 2021), raises questions about analogous processes in human connections, especially in relationships with close bonds, such as between parents and children. Imagine if quantum effects like entanglement were active within biological systems. This speculative idea could explain how humans maintain deep emotional bonds across vast distances and time, even without physical contact, opening new avenues for understanding our connections. It could also describe feelings of *longing to belong* or explain rising rates of loneliness, as we are living farther apart and becoming more independent with each generation, especially in the West. Anecdotal stories tell of people reunited, like the Chicago man who ate at a bakery for over a decade, which felt like home, only to discover that the owner was his birth mother (Land, 2024) or of twins separated at birth. However, the lack of empirical evidence to demonstrate that these occurrences are more than just coincidences (Tancredy & Fraley, 2006) shows that quantum entanglement is likely a better metaphor than an explanation for deep human bonds.

While diverse disciplinary perspectives enrich our understanding of belonging, arguably the most impactful and practical insights emerge from those with lived experience, those whom researchers call stakeholders, or more fittingly *right holders*, as described by Hare (2023), reflecting everyone's right to feel they belong. Stakeholder perspectives provide invaluable insights into the practical applications and the personal ways individuals define and experience belonging in various contexts. We have learnt through stakeholders that young children can find belonging in familiar and safe environments and relationships, particularly through unstructured play (Hudson & Allen, 2025). As children grow into adolescence, their sense of belonging becomes more complex but continues to be tied to safety, autonomy, and relationships, especially those with parents and teachers (Allen, Berger et al., 2023; Allen, K.-A., Mulholland, N., 2025). Belonging for university students

is often shaped by their experiences during transition (orientation), their ability to feel like they can be themselves, and their relationships with peers and faculty staff (Allen, Crawford et al., n.d; Crawford et al., 2024). Safety continues to be central, while the ways belonging is considered varies by enrolment stage and status, with alumni continuing to feel a sense of belonging. These evolving perspectives drawn directly from stakeholders show how the need to belong is universal and highly contextual, changing across the lifespan. Given the contextual nature of belonging, stakeholders provide insights reflecting their sensitivity to environmental and ecological factors as well as their individual difference. It is worth noting that academic writing often positions scholars as detached observers of belonging, but we are also stakeholders shaped by the experiences of (or not) belonging.

Various determinants and predictors shape the experience of belonging. It has been argued that this is particularly so for marginalised groups who have historically been excluded or considered not to belong (Faircloth & Hamm, 2005; see Faircloth et al., 2021). Race, socioeconomic status, gender, and disability often influence how individuals perceive their place within social, educational, or professional contexts (Blanchett, 2006; Carter, 2016; Espinosa et al., 2019; Scottham et al., 2008). However, research has shown that individuals and communities who have experienced exclusion can and do experience belonging when intentional structural and cultural changes are implemented within educational environments (e.g., Cortina et al., 2017; Gopalan & Brady, 2020; Gray et al., 2024; Harrison & McLean, 2017; Sánchez et al., 2015). Interestingly, shared experiences of exclusion can foster strong bonds within groups and communities, leading to enhanced resilience and creating a sense of unity. For instance, studies on students from racial minority backgrounds demonstrate that fostering inclusive environments and supportive peer relationships significantly enhances their sense of belonging (Walton & Cohen, 2007;

2011). Furthermore, research on LGBTQ+ individuals highlights that access to safe and affirming spaces is a key predictor of belonging, as seen in environments that actively support identity expression (Day et al., 2019; Heck et al., 2014; Snapp et al., 2015; Woodford et al., 2018). These findings suggest that individuals from groups who have historically faced systemic exclusion can and do experience belonging, often challenging long-held assumptions, when provided meaningful opportunities to belong.

These observations parallel *Heisenberg's uncertainty principle* in many ways (Oxford University Press, n.d.). “The uncertainty principle describes an imprecision in nature resulting in a limit to what we can know about the behaviour of quantum particles and, hence the smallest scales of nature” (Eastwood, 2017, p. 335). Nature is imprecise and limited by operational possibilities (Busch et al., 2007). The closer we come to understanding something like belonging—whether through theory, research, frameworks or the voices of people—the less we understand as we discover complexities and contradictions. We know that the experience of belonging can vary significantly. One individual may feel a sense of belonging in a context, while another does not. Similarly, one group may experience belonging, while another group with the same identity may feel excluded. In one way, belonging has been found to foster wellbeing, togetherness, social support, and mental and physical benefits (Allen, Greenwood et al., 2024; Cook et al., 2012; Walton & Cohen, 2011), yet in other ways, it has been linked to exclusion, division, conflict, manipulation and even abuse. The remainder of this chapter will explore the dark and light sides of this dialectical nature of belonging.

The Dark Side of Belonging: Exclusion and division

Before entering the dark side of belonging, we must first appreciate how important

belonging is for our mental health and wellbeing and understand the true implications of its absence.

The importance of belonging

Belonging is strongly linked with wellbeing and mental health and a buffer against loneliness, depression, and psychological distress (Allen et al., 2018; Allen, Greenwood et al., 2024; Arslan et al., 2020). Extensive research demonstrates that when individuals experience a strong sense of belonging, their mental health outcomes are significantly improved (Arslan, 2021; Shochet et al., 2011). Conversely, the absence or denial of belonging can lead to severe emotional and psychological consequences (Dutcher et al., 2022).

One of the most extensively researched areas concerning belonging and mental health is within educational settings, where a sense of school belonging has been consistently linked to positive socioemotional outcomes. Alternatively, its absence correlates powerfully with depression (Parr et al., 2020). Palikara et al. (2021) examined the mediating role of school belonging in the relationship between socioemotional wellbeing and loneliness in primary school children. Their findings indicated that children who felt a strong sense of belonging to school were less likely to experience loneliness and more likely to report higher levels of socioemotional wellbeing. This relationship extends beyond childhood. Allen et al. (2018) found that school belonging is positively associated with mental health outcomes, such as increased happiness, self-esteem, and psychological adjustment, while a lack of belonging is correlated with mental health problems, including depression, anxiety, and emotional distress. One of the most fascinating implications, however, is that the effects of belonging during adolescence—a time often considered

critical for developing a sense of belonging and particularly sensitive to experiences of exclusion—are linked to adult mental health outcomes up until middle age (Allen, Greenwood.. et al., 2024; Allen et al., 2025; Steiner et al., 2019). Early life experiences that challenge belonging, such as neglect, parental withdrawal, and disorganised attachment—often described as early childhood trauma—may lead to lifelong mental health challenges, even before children are fully aware of these experiences. While the evidence surrounding the impact of belonging from birth is still developing, there are indications that early social bonds may profoundly affect a person's psychological trajectory.

With the well-established links between mental health and belonging, adding systemic exclusion and discrimination to the equation only seems to exacerbate problems. Racism and exclusion reported by Asian Australian populations during the COVID-19 pandemic found a strong correlation between experiences of online racism and feelings of non-belonging, which were associated with poor mental health outcomes, including anxiety and depression (Kamp et al., 2022). Transgender youth, who often face cisnormativity and transphobia in both public and private spheres (i.e., messages that they do not belong), were found to be more vulnerable to mental health issues such as depression, anxiety, and suicidality (Connolly et al., 2016; Toomey et al., 2018). Alternatively, Gotfredsen and Linander (2023) found that when transgender youth had access to safe and inclusive leisure spaces, there was a direct benefit for their mental health outcomes.

Other evidence for the importance of belonging for mental health comes from the benefits reported. Berry and Hou (2021) found that immigrants who felt a strong sense of belonging to their heritage culture and the broader Canadian society reported higher life satisfaction and better mental health outcomes. Conversely, those who struggled to reconcile these dual identities or felt excluded from either group experienced higher levels

of psychological distress. Similarly, Caxaj and Gill (2017) found that the interplay of cultural identity and belonging was critical for the wellbeing of people of the rural Indian Canadian diaspora (people of Indian heritage who live in rural areas of Canada). Feelings of exclusion and marginalisation—within their communities *and* from broader society—were linked to social isolation, anxiety, and depression. These studies do not represent the experiences of all marginalised groups, an important point that will be discussed further, but they emphasise the critical role of belonging and why humans consider it so important.

However, it is not just about mental health; a lack of belonging has also been found to have severe effects on physical health, with research linking social isolation to higher risks of heart attack, stroke, and impaired immune functioning (Holt-Lunstad et al., 2017; Cacioppo et al., 2015). Moreover, ostracism and social rejection can be as painful as physical injury (*see* Williams & Nida, 2017). Studies show that the emotional pain from being excluded triggers the same neural pathways as those activated by physical pain, such as breaking an arm (Eisenberger et al., 2003).

In total, not belonging is profoundly painful and detrimental to both mental and physical health (Baumeister & Leary, 1995), leaving it ripe for exploitation by others.

The weaponisation of belonging

An obvious dark side of the power of belonging lies in the fact that humans can weaponise it—using exclusion for bullying, pain, and torture. Drabman and Spitalnik (1973) showed that removing individuals from the social environment, such as isolating children in educational settings, is an effective form of behaviour control, which is possible because it denies children the fundamental human need for belonging. This practice has continued for decades and remains debated, yet it is widely used in many contemporary

homes and school contexts (Xu et al., 2024). Isolation is more than just the separation of individuals—it is a clear and tangible signal that the isolated do not belong, even when temporary. For instance, a parent or educator removing a child from a space says through their actions that *you do not belong* in this space at this time. However, such exclusion as a form of punishment is not straightforward. The reason for the exclusion, particularly the *intention* of the excluder, is important. Boccadoro et al. (2021) described altruistic and retaliatory punishments as ways to correct behaviour and reinforce social norms. A parent or educator may have no choice but to exclude a child temporarily if they pose a risk to themselves or others. Similarly, adults are excluded from the community when they commit crimes or endanger societal safety. The key point is that intent is not always malicious. Altruistic punishment aims to uphold integrity, while retaliatory punishment, driven by spite, pushes perpetrators further away. For example, Piggy in *Lord of the Flies* is excluded for his physical differences. As the hostility grows, this exclusion becomes retaliatory (Golding, 1954). While intent is an important factor, altruistic and retaliatory exclusion conveys to everyone concerned that belonging is conditional and that the same mechanisms that create belonging can also remove it (Boccadoro et al., 2021). As emphasised in the previous section, the personal cost of this exclusion makes it more powerful.

Not everyone can belong

The fact that not everyone can belong is an uncomfortable truth that exists (philosophically or perhaps politically) light years away from the inclusive policies, visions, and missions of most educational contexts. A school may have rules for belonging and inclusion, *you can't say you can't play* (Paley, 1992) while being situated in a country that prohibits certain groups from fully participating in society based on their nationality, religion, or legal status (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees [UNHCR],

2015). The concept of belonging becomes more complex and fraught when considering geopolitics, migration, and forced displacement (Yuval-Davis, 2006). For many individuals, particularly refugees and immigrants, belonging is not just an unmet need but an ongoing struggle against exclusion and marginalisation that may be so pervasive it persists throughout an individual's entire life (Ager & Strang, 2008). As geopolitical conflicts, migration crises, and nationalistic policies intensify, the truth emerges that not everyone can, or is allowed to, belong.

This selective nature of belonging in a global society is undeniable for refugees and immigrants who may flee war, persecution, or poverty to find themselves in spaces where their belonging is disrupted (Koser, 2007). The displacement from conflicts in Syria, Afghanistan, and Gaza has left millions without a home or a country (UNHCR, 2020). Refugees and immigrants in their new or host countries may never feel fully accepted in their new countries or be able to return to their countries of origin. If they are accepted, it can take time, sometimes decades, to feel they belong (Ager & Strang, 2008).

In regions marked by war and conflict, the drive to belong can also fuel violence. In Eastern Ukraine, people are mobilised to defend their country, not solely based on politics or nationalism but through their attachment and sense of belonging to their homeland (Aliyev, 2020). This deep-seated connection to one's place can lead people to engage in actions far removed from their typical daily behaviours, moral standards, or usual treatment of others. This impact can persist long after the conflict itself. For instance, in post-apartheid South Africa, the state continued to marginalise African immigrants (i.e., immigrants from other African countries, such as Zimbabwe, Mozambique, and Somalia), contributing to continued outbreaks of xenophobic violence over time (Bank, 2019). While belonging can bring people together, it can also create divisions and conflict that can ripple

far beyond political events (Hogg, 2016). Conflicts and violence of this nature could arise from individuals who feel a strong sense of belonging rather than those who lack it, as one might assume. This dynamic is observed through research on school bullying, where both the perpetrator and the victim may struggle with belonging, suggesting that the need to belong can manifest in harmful behaviours irrespective of whether the need is being met (Arslan, 2022).

Geopolitical conflicts, wars, natural disasters, and shifting political climates are constant reminders that belonging is often fragile and is subject to forces beyond individual control. Events like hurricanes or typhoons can displace entire communities, while political movements and crises reshape social landscapes, reordering who is considered to belong. For example, Ahmed (2019) examined how British Pakistani Kashmiri Muslims experienced heightened exclusion during the *war on terror*, as counterterrorism policies reframed citizenship and threatened the legal rights of specific populations, particularly Muslims, effectively criminalising their identities and alienating them from the broader community. Similarly, Gibian (2012) described post-Civil War American society, where individuals who deviated from the “national imaginary”, such as immigrants and refugees, were often excluded and branded as *men without a country*, perceived as threats to national security and economic stability (p. 37). These examples reveal how legislation and policy can become barriers to belonging. Similar dynamics were at play in former Prime Minister John Howard’s Australia. The *Be alert, not alarmed* campaign encouraged vigilance that disproportionately targeted specific communities, leading many Australians of diverse backgrounds to feel alienated and surveilled rather than secure (Cherney & Murphy, 2016). These cases show that while belonging is universally valued, it is not universally granted, and its disruption can result from complex sociopolitical systems and decisions.

Underground belonging

In certain contexts, and at a civil level, the need to belong can fuel destructive behaviours, drawing people into harmful groups like gangs and cults (Allen, Morriss...et al., 2023). These groups can exploit belonging to entrench members, promoting violence, aggression and coercion. For example, gangs may emerge as a response to exclusion, providing members with identity, social connection, common interests, or a shared purpose, often when more prosocial or normed opportunities to belong are not available, however, membership may lead to antisocial or aggressive behaviour (Goldman & Hogg, 2016).

History has shown us that ostracising or rejecting individuals from society due to their physical traits or behaviours can also lead to tragic outcomes, such as school shootings or gun violence. Martin Bryant was widely reported to have experienced longstanding social isolation and bullying before he murdered 35 people in Port Arthur (Sutton, 2021). The Port Arthur massacre illustrates how a lack of belonging may drive individuals toward mass violence, while a 2023 stabbing in Sydney that specifically targeted women further highlights how social rejection can fuel hostility toward others (Kellerman, 2013). Criminal gangs can also lead to violence and offer others a sense of belonging that was otherwise unmet. *Social Identity Theory* explains how group affiliations shape self-concept, reinforcing ingroup loyalty and hostility toward perceived *outsiders* (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Matusitz and Repass (2009) argue that gangs exploit this loyalty by casting outsiders, rival groups, and authorities as adversaries. In Nigeria, university-based gang cults use religious and ethnic divides to reinforce cohesion, often through violent acts like arson and intimidation, showing how belonging can be weaponised for social harm.

Violence can be central to gang membership, as seen in initiation rituals. Murer and

Schwarze (2022) note that gang initiations go beyond brutality; they solidify bonds through shared violence, isolating members from mainstream society. In Mexican *narcocultos*, violence is further ritualised, with acts of torture and beheadings used to solidify cartel control and build identity. Bunker et al. (2010) describe these acts as practical and symbolic displays, often involving figures like Santa Muerte to create a quasi-spiritual form of cartel belonging.

Like gangs, cults can also manipulate belonging, targeting isolated individuals seeking meaning. Harris et al. (2018) note that cults form cohesive social units where members' identities are subordinated to a group ideology, fostering an *us versus them* mentality to strengthen solidarity and reinforce the group's aims and norms. This psychological coercion has been known to use rituals, as seen in groups like the Mafia, which employ shared meals and communal living to simulate loyalty and family bonds. Such shared acts can reinforce group identity, heighten the perceived value of membership, and impose substantial costs on disloyalty, consequently isolating members from broader society. The process of leaving such groups can be challenging, although possible (Harris et al., 2018). Berger et al. (2017) identify stages of desistance among gang members, showing the psychological impact of *breaking away* from the relationships forged. The triggering events that lead members to consider leaving, such as personal victimisation or disillusionment, may challenge their sense of belonging. Paradoxically, the promise of belonging that draws individuals into these groups often becomes a trap. Metcalf (2012) illustrates this in gang memoirs, such as Sanyika Shakur's *Monster*, showing how gang life imposes identity at the cost of freedom. As such, belonging to gangs or cults has significant consequences, where members become entrenched in cycles of violence and crime with limited exit routes.

Sorority groups serve as another example of the dark facet of belonging, where the desire for acceptance can push individuals toward risky, even harmful, behaviours. Hazing rituals associated with university fraternities and sororities impose social and physical trials that exploit members' need for connection. The tragic case of Chun (Michael) Deng, who died in a hazing ritual for the Pi Delta Psi fraternity, shows how these rituals can weaponise belonging to enforce loyalty and result in dire consequences (Shapiro, 2023). Research highlights the prevalence of binge drinking, risky sexual behaviours, and coercion within fraternity/sorority settings (Ragsdale et al., 2011). While the promise of camaraderie may be attractive to members, initiations involving psychologically and physically taxing activities, framing belonging as high stakes rather than high support can lead to unsafe environments and harmful behaviours. Ragsdale et al. (2011) found that fraternity members who frequently binge drank were more likely to engage in physical fights and unprotected sex, while sorority members were found to report greater risks of sexual victimisation, injury, and driving under the influence.

Gangs, cults, and sororities aside, the discomfort of not belonging can be so strong that even otherwise average individuals will compromise their values to avoid it. Fabbri and Carbonara (2017) illustrated this with a study in which participants acted as third-party punishers in a modified dictator game, penalising *dictators* who unfairly took tokens from others. When participants were then shown their peers' responses, many adjusted their punishment decisions to align with the group, even at a personal loss. This behaviour demonstrates how the fear of exclusion may push people to adapt their choices, often at the expense of personal values or autonomy. The need for acceptance frequently drives individuals to suppress their identities, adopt behaviours they would otherwise avoid, or conform to norms they privately disagree with. Conformity, however, operates as a double-

edged sword. Some people find belonging through conformity, while others who cannot or will not conform face exclusion. Thus, the same social norms that foster belonging for some create barriers for others, reinforcing divides between those who belong and those who do not.

Othering and belonging

At the core of identity lies a complex entanglement with belonging, revealing a darker side where the need to define *us* versus *them* can foster exclusion and marginalisation. Scholars examining the intersection of identity and belonging are increasingly aware of how identities, whether based on race, gender, culture, or socioeconomic status, often emerge within, and sometimes against, established social structures that reinforce separation (Anthias, 2018; Collins, 2021; Tatum, 2017). Identity groups can offer community and support, yet they also serve to delineate boundaries, enabling stereotypes and oppressive systems that sustain inequality. The Indian diaspora in Fiji is a case in point. Indians were initially brought to the country as indentured labourers in the early 1900s; thereafter, their Fijian-born descendants were denied recognition as Fijian (V. Mishra, personal communication, November 20, 2024), tarred with this pejorative label. Under certain governments, they were excluded from the education and healthcare opportunities available to native-born Fijians, emphasising how belonging, when tied to rigid identity categories, can deepen social divides (Prasad, 2006).

In contrast, identity can also positively benefit individuals and communities in terms of belonging. Representation and awareness of identities have enabled groups and communities to coalesce and articulate their specific needs, providing a platform to advocate for recognition and resources (Rong et al., 2023). In Fiji, this has meant educational and political advancements resulting from identity awareness (Prasad, 2006). In

terms of gender identity, increased visibility has allowed younger generations to identify as gay, lesbian, or bisexual much earlier than was possible in previous generations (Bishop et al., 2024; Russell & Fish, 2019). Moreover, transgender individuals have gained earlier access to interventions, facilitating personal alignment with their gender identity (Pucket et al., 2022). This visibility has also opened opportunities for pioneering individuals to challenge systems that previously oppressed particular groups. In the context of gender and sport, for instance, female rugby players have challenged traditional femininity norms by participating in a hypermasculine sport while simultaneously navigating societal expectations by reinforcing heteronormative identities (Ezzell, 2009). This is an example of *defensive othering*, where socially perceived marginalised individuals distinguish themselves from others within their group, reinforcing dominant group norms to gain acceptance. Taken together, this highlights the complexities of identity formation, where belonging is sought by resisting dominant narratives and distancing the self from navigating negative attitudes and stigma (Ezzell, 2009).

While identities create avenues for belonging, they can also magnify *othering* by creating more varied ways to exclude and marginalise others. Tensions have surfaced within communities previously perceived as unified, where intersectional factors such as socioeconomic status or cultural background have strained a once-shared identity. Jensen (2011) examines this among young ethnic minority men in Denmark, highlighting the influence of media portrayals. He identifies varied responses, including capitalisation on their position as 'the other' and refusing the imposed identities (Jensen, 2011). Furthermore, deliberate forms of othering, where groups exclude others to affirm their identity, have further enabled subgroup cohesion. For instance, Gormally (2019) discusses how male youth gang members in Scotland leveraged racial othering against Roma migrants to

reinforce their sense of belonging. These young men, marginalised by broader social systems, found a sense of power through exclusion, showing how marginalised groups may, in turn, marginalise others to assert identity.

While othering is often seen negatively, it can also serve as a tool for empowerment. Muftee and Rosales (2022) examine how racialised women artists in Sweden use art to challenge their marginalisation, creating spaces to express their unique identities and confront societal narratives that seek to define them. These artists draw strength from their shared experience of exclusion, using it to shape identities that resist the dominant social order.

Othering can also be wielded for strategic purposes. Self-othering is employed as a political tactic within some right-wing discourse, where right-wing leaders may construct narratives of exclusion and victimhood to solidify group identity and distinguish themselves from a perceived leftist elite (Orkibi, 2022). This tactic shows how those in power can frame themselves as marginalised to strengthen group cohesion. Identity construction, therefore, is not solely based on personal experiences of marginalisation but can also be used as a deliberate strategy to assert dominance and maintain control over others (Modood & Thompson, 2021).

For marginalised groups, balancing belonging with experiences of othering can be challenging. Indian communities, for instance, face obstacles tied to their distinct skin colour. Similarly, African immigrants¹ in Australia, as shown by Udah and Singh (2019), encounter racialised exclusion that restricts their social mobility and shapes their identity in response to this exclusion. Song (2020) highlights how women from marginalised

¹ In the study, participants came from a range of African regions, including Nigeria, Ghana, Sierra Leone, and Liberia (West Africa); Uganda and Tanzania (East Africa); Rwanda and Congo (Central Africa); Somalia, Eritrea, Sudan, and South Sudan (Northeast Africa); and Zimbabwe and Botswana (Southern Africa) (Udah & Singh, 2019).

backgrounds navigate complex intersections of gender, religion, and nationality, dealing with patriarchal norms within their communities while also facing racial and cultural othering in their host countries. These examples underscore the dual burden for those managing intersecting identities in often unwelcoming spaces.

Belonging and identity are constantly evolving concepts. For example, the term *Asperger's* was widely used and embraced by many individuals within the neurodivergent community until it was subsumed under the broader umbrella of autism spectrum disorders in the Diagnostic Statistics Manual (DSM-5). This amendment to diagnostic criteria influenced how many individuals identified, demonstrating how an identity can be created and taken away (American Psychiatric Association, 2013).

While each person uniquely holds multiple identities, intersectionality illuminates the intricate nuances within these overlapping social categories (Crenshaw, 1989). Although othering, often seen as the darker side of belonging, can be divisive, it may also foster belonging within subgroups, driving collective change (Modood & Thompson, 2021). Our understanding of identity is in a state of continuous evolution. The struggle to belong and navigate multiple social categories is not the dark side of belonging but does appear in ways that are complex and require consideration.

Belonging and its paradoxes

The darker sides of belonging, seen in gangs, crime, and exclusion, can foster both trauma and a sense of community for perpetrators and victims. This creates a paradox. The belonging-trauma paradox (Allen et al., n.d) captures this complex relationship. As described previously, belonging can become a source of trauma in environments where it is built through exclusion, coercion, or violence. However, trauma can also create belonging,

especially when individuals form tight-knit communities out of shared hardship, adversity, or experiences. Survivors of traumatic events, like natural disasters or violence, often find solidarity in collective suffering. Conversely, this paradox emerges in contexts like hazing rituals or peer pressure, where the desire to belong draws individuals into harmful or traumatising situations. The belonging-trauma paradox emphasises the dual nature of belonging, where belonging can act as a force for healing and connection but also inflict harm, especially for those marginalised or excluded from mainstream groups (Allen et al., n.d).

III. The light side of belonging

If we were to observe humanity from space, the presence of gangs, cults, and individual identities might appear inconsequential as we hasten away from Earth. In the same way that we do not speculate about the identities or the romantic lives of ants, our own affiliations and identities may seem trivial at such a scale. This section adopts a broader perspective, exploring a *lighter side* of belonging. It does not necessarily explore the benefits of belonging, already well established in the literature (Allen, 2020; Lambert et al., 2023; Walton & Brady, 2020) but considers its potential to address large-scale challenges.

Before this can occur, we need to reconceptualise belonging, taking it beyond something individuals strive to achieve and seeing it as a shared reality that permeates boundaries. This shift requires us to look beyond the self, including personal identities and goals, and expand our view to encompass a collective, global conceptualisation of belonging. Perhaps the most effective way to embrace this perspective is to imagine ourselves from a distance, from space.

Early astronauts Yuri Gagarin and Alan Shepard were among the first to witness Earth from above, describing its beauty and the profound realisation of our planet's fragility (White, 2014). Others who followed also reported a deep sense of transformation, seeing geopolitical borders as arbitrary and recognising the importance of a healthy and thriving planet over national or political interests (Som et al., 2019; Yaden et al., 2016). This cognitive shift, termed the *Overview Effect* by Frank White in 1987 based on his interviews with astronauts, describes the awareness that emerges from viewing Earth as a shared home. Space exploration has allowed many astronauts to encounter the Earth in ways that challenge their traditional understandings of shared humanity (Weibel, 2020; Yaden et al., 2016). Observing Earth from a distance has been described as evoking a sense of awe and wonder, challenging personal beliefs about culture and religion (Yaden et al., 2016). Even awe (in its own right) can challenge existing perceptions about self-concept and personal identity by prompting profound alterations in self-awareness and identification, leading individuals to experience a sense of unity with others and a broader understanding of their place in the world (Yaden et al., 2016; Keltner & Haidt, 2003). Astronauts who experience the Overview Effect describe it as a profound emotional experience that is life-changing and transformative in the way it reshapes their worldview and influences their actions long after they return (Kanas, 2020; Yaden et al., 2016). Could a sense of belonging to something greater, a sense of *global belonging* inspired by the Overview Effect, trigger a renewed commitment to causes beyond the self, such as environmental stewardship and social responsibility? Global belonging could be imagined as a broad and unbounded form of belonging that transcends individual, local, and national identities and recognises humanity as interconnected and beyond the boundaries of geography, culture, or social categorisations alone. Could such a shift in perspective bridge cultural, national, and religious divides, promoting global cooperation and empathy? Could a simple shift in perspective help us

tackle issues like war and famine to create truly thriving global communities?

Using the Overview Effect to examine a global belonging perspective, the following section will explore a *zoomed-out* perspective to offer an alternative view of the self within the vastness of the universe, examining the global challenges tied to belonging covered in the previous section, such as geopolitical divisions, antisocial behaviour, and othering.

Evidence for the Overview Effect

Research evidence shows that the Overview Effect serves as a catalyst for positive psychological transformation (Yaden et al., 2016; Voski, 2020), fostering outcomes such as an increased sense of environmental responsibility (Ihle et al., 2006), heightened interconnectedness with others (Yaden et al., 2016), and other benefits including enhanced wellbeing, increased altruism, improved emotional resilience, and greater engagement in pro-environmental behaviours (Kanas, 2020; White, 2014; Yaden et al., 2016). Yaden et al. (2016) describe the experience of witnessing Earth from a unique perspective to be related to *broaden and build* theory. Broaden and build refers to how positive emotions can build our social resources and ability to cope and create a broadening of attention (Fredrickson, 2001). Research evidence further supports this, indicating that the Overview Effect promotes shifts in self-perception and values and a deeper appreciation for human life (Yaden et al., 2016).

Ihle et al. (2006) observed that astronauts often return from space with increased positive psychological outcomes, including an “appreciation for the fragility of Earth”—a heightened sense of global responsibility, greater involvement in environmental issues, and increased engagement in activities that support environmental sustainability (p.100).

Similarly, Voski (2020) demonstrated increased awareness of humans' ecological impact after experiencing the Overview Effect, noting that astronauts also frequently report an acute awareness of Earth's fragility, increased awareness of existing environmental degradation, a sense of urgency related to climate emergencies, and changed environmental attitudes and behaviours. Further research by Kanas (2020) supports these findings, linking the Overview Effect to a better understanding of the unity of *humankind*. Thus, the Overview Effect emerges as a powerful motivator for ecological and social responsibility, with significant psychological impacts.

Simulating awe and potential for global belonging

If the Overview Effect is to be harnessed for its related benefits and to examine global belonging in the future, its inaccessibility to the general population remains a barrier. However, virtual reality (VR) simulations offer a promising solution for the wider public, including educational contexts (Loy et al., 2024; Stepanova et al., 2019; van Limpt-Broers et al., 2024). Loy et al. (2024) demonstrated that a VR simulation of Earth viewed from space could also evoke feelings of awe, significantly impacting participants' global self-investment. Participants reported shifts in perspective akin to those described by astronauts, illustrating that VR may be an effective medium for engendering the Overview Effect.

Awe could be particularly relevant to global belonging because it encourages a shift in perception beyond the individual to a broader awareness of something greater than the self—such as, in the case of the overview effect, the planet—where experiencing awe may disrupt self-focused cognition, fostering a more collective mindset that is central to the idea of global belonging. Loy et al. (2024) also examined the link between the Overview Effect and pro-environmental actions, finding that while VR did not directly increase participants' willingness to support the Paris Climate Agreement, it indirectly fostered this behaviour by

creating feelings of awe. Their results point to the importance of awe as a catalyst for environmental action, suggesting that awe-inducing experiences like the Overview Effect could inspire collectively motivated behaviours to protect the planet.

van Limpt-Broers et al. (2024) provide further evidence for the potential to simulate the Overview Effect, investigating neurophysiological markers of the Overview Effect using VR simulations combined with electroencephalography technology. Their study revealed that participants exposed to Earth-viewing experiences in VR exhibited decreased activity in the beta and gamma frequency bands during moments of awe, suggesting a relaxation of typical cognitive patterns and an increased openness to new perspectives. Other evidence for this comes from Gallagher et al. (2014), who also revealed reductions in theta and beta brainwave activity when viewing Earth from space, indicating changes in cognitive processing. The evidence for reduced brain activity corresponds with astronauts' accounts of the Overview Effect as a transformative experience, characterised by a fading of everyday concerns and a profound sense of interconnectedness.

These findings show the potential for virtual reality to be used as an educational and psychological tool to promote an immersive Overview Effect experience, which has not been replicable in all previous studies utilising static images or less immersive media (see van Limpt-Broers et al., 2024). By accurately recreating visual and emotional experiences akin to space travel, VR simulations may facilitate the psychological benefits associated with the Overview Effect. Although it is important to note that awe-inducing experiences do not need to be limited to VR, it is worth considering the impact of other potential awe-inducing interventions through creative arts, music, storytelling, and outdoor experiences. However, more research is needed to fully explore different approaches, including VR, and their potential to build a sense of global belonging.

Limitations of the overview effect

While accessibility presents obvious barriers to experiencing the Overview Effect, other important limitations warrant consideration. White's (1987) interviews show that an individual's background, context, and existing worldviews may influence their Overview experience. That is, the foundation from which the experience emerges. An example of this could be considered through an Australian Indigenous peoples lens, where deep connections to land and kinship are central to culture through sophisticated knowledge systems. "Zooming out" may not be the only path forward – to truly understand, we must also "zoom in" to understand the foundation of people's beliefs and the effects on their perceptions of, and actions in the world (J. Phillips, personal communication, December 2024). This also brings forward another potential limitation. With the emphasis on individual transformation, the Overview Effect could work against its aim of building collective appreciation and global belonging. Future Overview Effect research and applications must grapple with how to achieve meaningful individual relevance while maintaining its core insights about humanity's relationship with Earth.

Advancing belonging theory and research, impacts and implications

The Overview Effect provides a potential direction for future research by offering a pathway to explore elements of the dark side of belonging discussed in this chapter, such as geopolitical divisions, antisocial behaviour, and the process of othering - some of the most collective and pervasive problems of our time. A shift towards a global perspective may improve attitudes and behaviours related to our shared responsibilities, foster an appreciation of the collective, and promote global wellbeing and a perspective that extends beyond the self. Specifically, the sense of awe associated with the Overview Effect and linked to enhanced empathy (Yaden et al., 2016; Voski, 2020) may have implications for mitigating antisocial tendencies. It could encourage individuals to view others, especially

those from different backgrounds, through a more inclusive lens (Yaden et al., 2016) or to adopt a position that focuses on our commonality, most importantly, the fact that we are all human. It may be worth asking: could the Overview Effect inspire greater social cohesion and collaboration by fostering collective commitments to issues like the climate emergency? Research shows that astronauts often report adopting pro-environmental behaviours and advocacy following their space experiences (Voski, 2020), but more is needed.

It is also worth considering whether the Overview Effect has the potential to change understandings of social identity or group dynamics to push the boundaries of what we consider to be true belonging. Could a global identity that transcends current distinctions challenge longstanding notions of in-groups and out-groups deeply entrenched in 20th-century psychological theories, a period rife with structural racism, classism, and sexism? Early theories and frameworks in psychology at the time reflected a society defined by division and hierarchy. Subsequent research has mostly built on these theories. But could (or should) we hold these theories further to account and speculate whether they perpetuate the view that belonging is inherently exclusive? What if these foundational theories have subtly prescribed *norms* that we have accepted as reality, thereby unwittingly perpetuating them? As society has evolved, so too have ideas of inclusion. Many visible signs of inequities are challenged (though some remain deeply entrenched). Have our psychological models, theories, and frameworks, which have remained largely unchanged, kept up with our evolving understandings of inclusion?

Future researchers and theory builders could reimagine global identity as a form of global belonging—not to replace notions of individual or group identity but to expand them. This shift may represent the next phase in the evolution of belonging, inclusion, and identity

research, aligned with increasing commitments and interests in building thriving and flourishing communities. Such a possibility moves beyond traditional identity theories, opening doors to explore the self within a reconceptualised form of belonging. Here, global belonging prevails over division, differences, and distinctions. These ideas may seem aspirational, but they are congruent with emerging research that shows what is needed for communities to flourish (Goodman et al., 2023).

Viewing global or community flourishing as a collective goal is not a new concept. Many cultures, including Australian Indigenous cultures, have long upheld community wellbeing, where the flourishing of each individual is inseparable from that of the group. In these communities, if one member struggles, for example, with mental illness, the wellness of the entire community is affected. In fact, Indigenous languages describing mental illness are claimed not to have existed prior to invasion. These perspectives align with many traditional and historical collectivist ideals worldwide. Future research may return to these earlier ways of thinking.

Positioning existing psychological theory within an Overview Effect lens reveals new possibilities for understanding belonging. Take, Allen et al.'s (2021) belonging framework, which integrates competencies, opportunities, motivations, and perceptions within cultural and temporal systems as predominant determinants for belonging. While this system acknowledges the influence of social and cultural environments, it stops short of addressing the larger global, universal context. This limitation raises a critical question: *If belonging is a fundamental human need, what happens when the environment to which one belongs—the planet itself—is threatened?* As climate crises accelerate, displacing populations and disrupting ecosystems, we confront a scenario where physical belonging may become more and more at risk. In such a future, the absence of a healthy, inhabitable

planet would leave humanity with nothing physical to belong to.

By reimagining Allen et al.'s (2021) framework from an expanded, *zoomed-out* perspective, we might re-examine belonging to incorporate aspects of a global belonging where opportunities also include opportunities to engage in pro-environmental behaviours or initiatives that foster connection or belonging to Earth as a collective home. Perceptions could encompass the viewing of oneself as part of a larger system or adopting a collectivist mindset. Motivations could be expanded to include collective goals and a shared drive to support global wellbeing. In this expanded view, competencies would also emphasise abilities tied to sustainable living, global cooperation, and environmental consciousness.

This reconceptualised framework would incorporate a global *overview* perspective to remind us that belonging operates on both emic and etic levels and that personal experiences and global dimensions of belonging are essential when considering flourishing communities and a sustainable future.

Throughout the literature, belonging has been explored primarily at the individual level. The emphasis is on focusing on the self through individual differences and personal perspectives positioned within a broader system, mostly encompassing local or immediate contexts. A global belonging perspective zooms out a step further. However, moving towards such a perspective to tackle global challenges will take time (if it happens at all). Cultivating a global sense of belonging would acknowledge that belonging is not just an individual human right and need but a collective one. Advancing the idea of global belonging through further research and theoretical development could contribute to self-psychology, where many other individualistic constructs benefit from a broader perspective.

Educational settings

As we plant the seeds to explore the construct of global belonging, its potential implications for educational settings warrant careful consideration. While it would be premature to make specific recommendations, this emerging concept raises important questions about how educational institutions might evolve to meet global challenges. Further theoretical development and research are needed before considering practical applications. This includes work on how to define and operationalise global belonging in educational contexts, and careful examination of potential benefits and risks, particularly in terms of cultural relevance and universal applicability. Important considerations include how such an expanded view of belonging might interact with existing educational approaches, and what unintended consequences might arise. As we move forward in exploring these possibilities, close interdisciplinary and research-practice collaboration between researchers, educators, and the community will be essential. This emerging area of study reminds us that while global belonging holds promise, its development must be approached thoughtfully and carefully as we understand this construct more fully.

Conclusion

A sense of belonging, particularly when viewed through a zoomed-out Overview Effect, opens the potential for new directions in psychology and related fields. A broader perspective positions belonging as a personal and cultural pursuit but adds a rarely explored global dimension. By shifting the focus from the self to a collective, approaches like the Overview Effect have the potential to consider a global belonging perspective positioned to tackle pressing global issues such as geopolitical conflicts, antisocial behaviours, and societal divides. It seems that the more we understand about belonging, the less we know, but we are also on the precipice of unlocking new understandings about our planet that are yet to be discovered. How will animal communication or potential life on other planets

inform our sense of belonging? In the words of Madonna, "Life is a mystery," but we should challenge the idea that we must stand alone. Perhaps the true evolution of belonging research lies in recognising that even when we stand alone (as our self), we remain undeniably, unavoidably, and inextricably linked to one another and our shared planet.

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