

# FITTING IN



Needing to belong is a powerful force, writes TARNYA DAVIS.

DESPITE our modern Western culture of individuality, where we are all encouraged to be ourselves and other life slogans with varying levels of usefulness, most of the time many of us also feel a strong urge to fit in. In almost a tribal way, we feel the urge to belong and recognise that stepping outside the norm too often holds some risk for us.

There is a biological drive to fit in that extends back to our evolutionary past, where to be completely excluded from the tribe was literally a matter of life and death. Where being on the outer of a tribe would mean no access to food, water, shelter or mates.

It was a perilous place to be.

We are therefore programmed towards needing to be accepted into our small communities. Our anxiety at not fitting in can hark back to the times when we literally relied on each other for survival.

Acknowledging the importance of connection and belonging is useful for us, particularly in the face of our segmented lives where connection needs to be a conscious choice. Connection and belonging can drive much of our behaviour, even to the extent that at times it may influence how we think and behave and sometimes takes us away from what we might think and how we might behave if we were acting alone.

Group think and peer pressure don't just influence teenagers as the famous Milgram experiment showed.

Perhaps a sign of the goodness of our society is also about how we treat those who sit on the fringe.

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