



ellen krug  
writer, lawyer, human

## Beyond Labels, Beyond GIPs: Understanding "Other"

Humans are "hard-wired" to be with others who look, think, and act like they do. This combination of group-identifying behavior and grouping and labeling pervades many things in day-to-day life and enables marginalization of those who are "them" or "Other" compared to "us."

On the other hand, all of us—even students—are hard-wired for empathy, even for altruism. As I like to say, 98 percent of us have good empathetic hearts and want to do the right thing; it's just that many aren't paying attention, or don't know what the "right thing" is, or they're afraid to engage for a variety of reasons.

Because of my status as a transgender woman and the radical difference between my voice and appearance, I'm "Other" in today's society. It wasn't always that way—until 2009, I was at the top of the pyramid presenting as a high-earning, hard charging white-color male civil trial lawyer with power.

Today, I have perspective fueled by having lived two different lives, in two different genders. I'm also an idealist who believes in the goodness of humans and their willingness to change for the greater good.

I truly believe we can get past "Othering" those who are different from "us." To do so takes being uncomfortable, along with honesty, mindfulness, fearlessness, compassion and a darn lot of work. I've undertaken that work as my idealism pushes me forward.

If you're willing to undertake the hard work, you can get past "Othering" too. I just know it!

### 1. Our Internal "Othering": The Five Constants

- The absence of a "Human Owner's Manual."
- We are what we are—genes and family (or how for many, their "human house" is built with faulty blueprints, cracked foundations and tilting roofs).

Despite our individual challenges, humans have at least Five Constants in common:

- Constant No. 1: Our absolute clinging to **Core Fears**—fearing aloneness or the loss of a loved one (more aloneness); fearing health problems or

poverty; fearing that "Other" will take away from "us"; fearing being made "Other"; and of course, the fear of dying alone. Core Fears drive us both consciously and subconsciously.

- Constant No. 2: The effects of **Binary Thinking**—good vs. bad; right vs. wrong; success vs. failure; gender and sexuality are immutable, one-way streets.
- Constant No. 3: Everyone has personal **Mantras**—the Muzak-ish chatter of our lives. Those mantras can either push us forward or hold us back.
- Constant No. 4: The invisible hand (and power) of **Authenticity**; like water, you can't grab it, but for sure it's inside us, alive. The reality is that everyone needs to live authentically.
- The last Constant, No.5: **Grit and Resiliency**—everyone has both in varying degrees. The key is reminding people of these critical assets.
- Other Factor No. 1: Confidence building or destruction.
- Other Factor No. 2: Heart speaking—how others are attracted to people who are vulnerable and willing to say the things that others fear saying (e.g. "My heart is hurting because of..." "I'm struggling due to..."). (Or, do you know about the work of Brene Brown?—see below.)

## 2. Our External "Othering": How the Deck is Stacked toward Grouping and Labeling

- Neurobiology at work: Grouping and Labeling.
- The concept of GIP (Group Identifying People)—insider vs. outsider—everyone can be made "Other." Please let me prove that.
- Awareness that explicit bias and implicit bias are hard-wired despite our best wishes.
- Humans want to do the right thing—hardwiring for empathy and compassion.
- Fear holds us back.
- When given examples of how to be empathetic, humans will show up in droves (Google "Breakfast with Dads Dallas"  
<https://www.today.com/parents/dallas-school-needed-stand-ins-dads-600-men-showed-t121019>)

## 3. Getting Past Internal and External "Othering" via Bravery, Human Familiarity, Commonalities and Mindful "Shallow Water" Conversations

- It takes bravery to engage with someone who is "Other"—but everyone has the grit to do it.
- Remember the **Four Commonalities**: (1) a desire for a child to succeed; (2) the need to be free of physical or emotional violence; (3) a desire for twenty minutes of personal peace; and (4) the need to love and be loved. Thus, anyone you speak to will have each of these desires and needs.
- Employ Ellie's trick: "Hey do you have a kid in your life?" Or, "Do you have a pet?"



- **Familiarity breaks down barriers.** Remember Ellie's voice—but maybe you like her anyway?
- Recognize that underlying the conversation is fear—fear of saying the wrong thing or of not having enough to talk about or of being judged by your GIP for having reached out to someone who is “Other.”
- Finally, gaining exposure to “Other” makes it easier to understand where that human is coming from; with understanding comes tolerance. Given time, tolerance can turn into respect and acceptance.

#### 4. More on Grit, Resiliency and Hope

- Grit—you (and those you interact with) have it.
- Resiliency—looking in the rearview mirror to see how far you've come.
- Hope—it's real, it exists, and it works. Just ask black-color humans—400 years since the first enslaved African to America; hope for a just country persists.
- Normalizing the un-normal: where will it end?
- Guarding against fatigue—we're back to the reality that getting past “Othering” takes a darn lot of work.
- An order for self-care. (Talk, touch, therapy and a favorite food...)

#### 5. Specific Ideas on Bridging and Outreach to “Other”

- Understand that “Other” is broader than race, religion or LGBTQ status—it encompasses introverts, persons with mental health issues, gender queers (non-binary people), persons with disabilities, persons with addictions, veterans, and it crosses class and income lines.
- Critical to outreach is the use of imagination—real imagination—and understanding that many institutions, for the most part, are imagination-phobic.
- Think differently (more imagination) about potential collaborators—the social worker/psychotherapist community as partners; the gamer community (as a way to reach introverts).
- The value of “Talking Circles” as a way of opening avenues for everyone to have a voice; there can be different Talking Circles for different constituencies (culture leaders, to address tough topics they alone can address; staff/team members, to get a read on how people really feel).
- The value of real allyship, which is a form of action and not simply a status.
- Mentoring and sponsoring on steroids—Big Brothers/Big Sisters, training on how to be a real sponsor. Mentoring changes lives!
- “Reverse mentoring”—pairing a culture leader with a team member from a marginalized community and then immersing that culture leader into that community. Seeing is believing; believing is feeling; feeling produces real, lasting change.
- Accountability—so incredibly lacking in our society and in many workplaces/organizations.
- Finding those who inspire and then empowering them regardless of their station. *People won't act out of compulsion, but they will act out of inspiration and hope.* We need to nurture and empower natural leaders.

- We can't change if we don't admit things about ourselves or aren't open to hearing unwanted things from others.
- Remember the power of vulnerability—it draws us in and keeps us close.
- Compassion for others and for self—so critical! I am finding that **almost all Americans have compassion for others as a core identity**. You would never know it from social media...

## Quick Resources

- Brene Brown on understanding and valuing the power of human vulnerability: [https://www.ted.com/talks/brene\\_brown\\_on\\_vulnerability?language=en](https://www.ted.com/talks/brene_brown_on_vulnerability?language=en)
- Tony Hoagland, "The Cure for Racism is Cancer," *The Sun Magazine* (September 2018) <https://www.thesunmagazine.org/issues/513/the-cure-for-racism-is-cancer>
- Rebecca Muller, "14 People on the Moment of Kindness that Changed Their Lives," *Shine* (December 4, 2018) [https://advice.shinetext.com/articles/14-people-on-the-moment-of-kindness-that-changed-theirlives/?utm\\_campaign=SMS&utm\\_medium=BroadcastPopCulture&utm\\_source=Shine](https://advice.shinetext.com/articles/14-people-on-the-moment-of-kindness-that-changed-theirlives/?utm_campaign=SMS&utm_medium=BroadcastPopCulture&utm_source=Shine)
- Sheryl WuDunn and Nicholas Kristof, *Half the Sky* (New York: Vintage, 2010) (a groundbreaking book about the second-class status of women in the world and how women and girls have overcome crushing adversity).
- A University of MN professor-inspired and led organization promoting reconciliation/communication across divides is Better Angels (<https://better-angels.org/about>). See their paper, "Talking Across the Political Divide," <https://better-angels.org/features/talking-across-the-political-divide>

## Personal Contact

Ellen (Ellie) Krug at [elliekrug@gmail.com](mailto:elliekrug@gmail.com) [www.elliekrug.com](http://www.elliekrug.com)

Author, *Getting to Ellen: A Memoir about Love, Honesty and Gender Change* (2013)

Book website: [www.gettingtoellen.com](http://www.gettingtoellen.com) (Book available on Amazon, Kindle, etc.)

Twitter: @elliekrug (feel free to Follow me)

Facebook: Ellen Krug Minnesota (feel free to Friend me)

LinkedIn: Ellen (Ellie) Krug (feel free to Connect with me)

Sign up for my newsletter, *The Ripple*, by clicking on "Newsletters/Media" at [www.elliekrug.com](http://www.elliekrug.com)

Host, "Ellie 2.0 Radio," AM950 (Twin Cities), Mondays 7:00-8:00 a.m. See website for podcasts: <http://www.am950radio.com/>

*My Standing Offer:* any human can contact me relative to gender or sexual identity or anything else related to surviving the Human Condition. I'm a good listener and willing to meet with anyone in a public place or speak on the telephone for up to an hour. My email is [elliekrug@gmail.com](mailto:elliekrug@gmail.com).

Thank you. Please have compassion for yourself and for others!

ellie

*Encouraging Open Hearts and Thriving Human Spirits*