Fitting in is the greatest barrier to belonging. Fitting in, I've discovered during the past decade of research, is assessing situations and groups of people, then twisting yourself into a human pretzel in order to get them to let you hang out with them. Belonging is something else entirely—it's showing up and letting yourself be seen and known as you really are—love of gourd painting, intense[*fear*](https://www.psychologytoday.com/basics/fear)of[*public speaking*](https://www.psychologytoday.com/basics/stage-fright)and all.

Many us suffer from this split between who we are and who we present to the world in order to be accepted, (Take it from me: I'm an expert fitter-inner!) But we're not letting ourselves be known, and this kind of incongruent living is soul-sucking."

She says so well what I know to be true. Most of my life I have not fit in. I was too smart, too awkward, and too much of a "goody two shoes" in high school, plus I didn't have the right clothes. As you can probably guess, I was pretty different from the other docs-to-be in med school. I still feel really awkward when I'm around other medical doctors. How do I explain that I'd rather dance flamenco than see patients? I'd rather not even try (doctors are way too serious as a group, they scare me a little).

My whole life I've known, usually painfully so, that I'm not very "normal". Yet now I wouldn't want to be. I love what my life has become ever since I decided to be the real me, full time, just over a decade ago.

Are you aware that you spend a significant amount of energy trying to fit in? Have you noticed when you do it? Are you ready to give it up?

I've been in one social situation in the couple of days since reading Brene's article. I was meeting a new group of people, and something someone said triggered a response from me based on something I learned at a Harvard course last month. I mentioned Harvard in my comment, and noticed the person's face tighten a bit. At least I thought so, I'm pretty good at reading people and excessively aware of facial expressions and [body language](https://www.psychologytoday.com/basics/body-language).

I cringed inside, and felt that familiar [shame](https://www.psychologytoday.com/basics/embarrassment). Darn, I probably looked like I was bragging or name-dropping, when really I was just so excited about the information. To me, where I learned the information I referred to makes it highly credible.

This brought up all my usual "shut up and try to act more normal" feelings, but because of Brene (and admittedly with some effort) I dismissed them. So what. I'm a total info nerd and going to Harvard to learn stuff about mind-body medicine is more exciting to me than going to Disneyland. So what if I like to talk about it, too bad.

I'm going to say things that reveal my true passions and thoughts, even if people judge me for it. I'm not going to worry anymore that I'm "too much". I've worried about being too much my whole life. If I don't spend so much energy worrying about what others think of the real me (or trying to hide the real me), I'll have lots more left over for dancing flamenco.

So will you take on this challenge? Will you commit to belonging based on who you really are, and give up the soul-sucking goal of always trying to fit in?