



Your People Are Desperate for Belonging

By [Charles Vogl](#)



It almost doesn't matter what you see and think it means.

No matter the laughs in parks, the noisy cafes or the ever-ongoing phone calls in public, the people around you, and on whom you depend, are likely far more lonely than you know. Really. This is serious. Don't let the strong faces fool you. (Remember, you've felt lonely when no one else could tell.)

Our experience of community has changed in a single generation. The number of people who say that they have no one to talk to about difficult subjects has tripled in the last few decades. Moreover, the size of the average person's social network decreased by one-third in the same time (McPherson "Social Isolation in America"). [Miller McPherson, Lynn Smith-Lovin, and Matthew E. Brashears, "Social Isolation in America: Changes in Core Discussion Networks over Two Decades," *American Sociological Review* 71, no. 3 (2006): 353-75.] In fact, according to a meta-study by Julianne Holt-Lunstadmore at Brigham Young University, more people say that they don't have a confidante than those who say that they do ["Relationships Boost Survival by 50 Percent" *Scientific American*, July 28, 2010,

www.scientificamerican.com/article/relationships-boost-survival.]. (Holt-Lunstadmore. "Relationships Boost Survival by 50 Percent")

Americans, particularly those under thirty, are not participating in formal religious organizations as much as people did even a generation ago. These religious organizations were often the basis for communities of values.

According to a 2012 Pew Research report, "one-fifth of the U.S. public — and a third of adults under 30 — are religiously unaffiliated today, the highest percentages ever in Pew Research Center polling.["Nones on the Rise," Pew Research on Religion and Public Life, October 9, 2012, [http://www.pewforum.org/2012/10/09/nones-on-the-rise/.](http://www.pewforum.org/2012/10/09/nones-on-the-rise/)]" In addition, about three-quarters of these unaffiliated adults were raised with some affiliation, but have chosen to lapse. Note that these statistics do not suggest that Americans think any differently about God or spirituality than they did in the past. On the contrary, overwhelming majorities continue to say that God and spirituality are important.[Ibid.]

Churches aren't the only social institutions to erode. In the 1970s, almost two-thirds of Americans attended some kind of club meeting: Rotary, Lions, PTA, local bowling league, you name it. By the late 1990s, nearly two-thirds had never attended such a meeting[DDB Needham Life Style Surveys, 1975-99, quoted in Robert Putnam, "Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community" *Journal of Democracy* 6.1 (1995): 65-7].

The average time invested by Americans in organizational life (excluding religious groups) declined steadily in the thirty years from 1965 to 1995.[. John R. Robinson and Geoffrey Godbey, *Time for Life: The Surprising Ways Americans Use Their Time*, 2nd ed. (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1999).] Even the number of picnics per capita dropped by 60 percent from 1975 to 1999 while millennials were growing up![DDB Needham Life Style Surveys.]

I haven't even touched on the changing ways we connect, now that we can hide behind text and email. What I hope you understand more clearly today is that you are almost certainly surrounded by people who long to connect in deeper ways.

No question, you can be the difference in a world that is desperate for belonging. There is no reason to wait. The world is waiting for it.

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