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ME, MYSELF & I : An Exploration of Loneliness Today

PREPARED BY FURTHER&FURTHER

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We are a team of 10 SENIOR **RESEARCHERS**, *PRODUCERS*
and FILM MAKERS.

Based in Montreal, NYC, Chicago and London
we conduct research in the most human and authentic way possible.

We have a unique immersive ethnographic approach to qualitative
research building trust with our subjects, spending real time in
their world and following the story wherever it takes us.

Because the truth has never been harder to find.

lululemon MillerCoors Spotify DICK'S SPORTING GOODS adidas CapitalOne facebook The New York Times BACARDI Constellation Brands BEER DIVISION TELUS truth initiative INSPIRING TOBACCO-FREE LIVES

introduction

In every contextual research project we've done recently, the topics of feeling alone and a fervent desire to find your tribe have bubbled up in conversation.

At the core of loneliness is a set of very simple desires.

People want a place to go, things to do, and people to do them with.

There's a universal need to belong.

And that seems harder to find today than ever before.

So: we set out to figure out why.

This is that story.

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a silent killer

Loneliness is now an epidemic-sized problem.

A problem with the same impact on mortality as smoking 15 cigarettes a day.

A problem even more dangerous than obesity.

A problem that seems emotional, but also elevates one's risk of heart disease, cognitive decline & metastatic cancer.

Over half of Americans report sometimes or always feeling alone.

Over half of Americans feel that they are isolated from others.

Over half of Americans don't have a meaningful in-person social interaction (such as talking to a friend or spending real time with a family member) on a daily basis.

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GLOBAL DESPAIR

And it's not just Americans.

The entire world is lonely.

A million people in Japan have been classified as "hikikomori" - those without friends, who have remained isolated at home for at least six consecutive months.

In Denmark, often thought of as the world's happiest country, a "March Against Loneliness" movement is growing.

Wales is mapping out "loneliness risk areas" … and using government funds to transport those affected to activities they might be interested in.

And last year the UK appointed its first Minister of Loneliness.

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YOUNG PEOPLE

Far from the stereotype of a lonely old person in a nursing home, Gen Z wins the dubious honor of being the very loneliest generation today, with Millennials close behind.

Loneliness is the number one fear of young people today -- ranking ahead of losing a job or a home.

This generation is hyper-open with talking about their struggles with depression, anxiety and loneliness, and almost wear them as a badge of honor to show that they're an open sensitive person.

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So what *is* loneliness?

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Loneliness is

not about quantity.
It's about quality.

Loneliness is

an aching absence.

*The desire for **more** than you have at a given moment*

Loneliness is

the shortage of authentic, deep connections that build trust.

Loneliness is

perceived as modern-day failure.

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Loneliness is

particularly exacerbated by societal & situational change

Change being something we're not particularly short on at the moment …

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tech is an EASY CULPRIT

We're addicted to our smartphones.

And most articles have them being blamed for this uptick in loneliness & depression.

They're correct, in many ways.

Smart phones have made it easy to look at other people's lives (fabricated facade or not) and feel like your own doesn't measure up.

To measure yourself & your life in likes and comments.

To feel like everyone you know is out doing something wonderful, while you sit at home.

To feel like you have a large network of "friends" … but no one to actually sit on the couch and hang out with.

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but society

IS EVOLVING AT A MAD PACE

Throughout this project, we've found loneliness is much more closely related to how quickly the world is changing — particularly for young people.

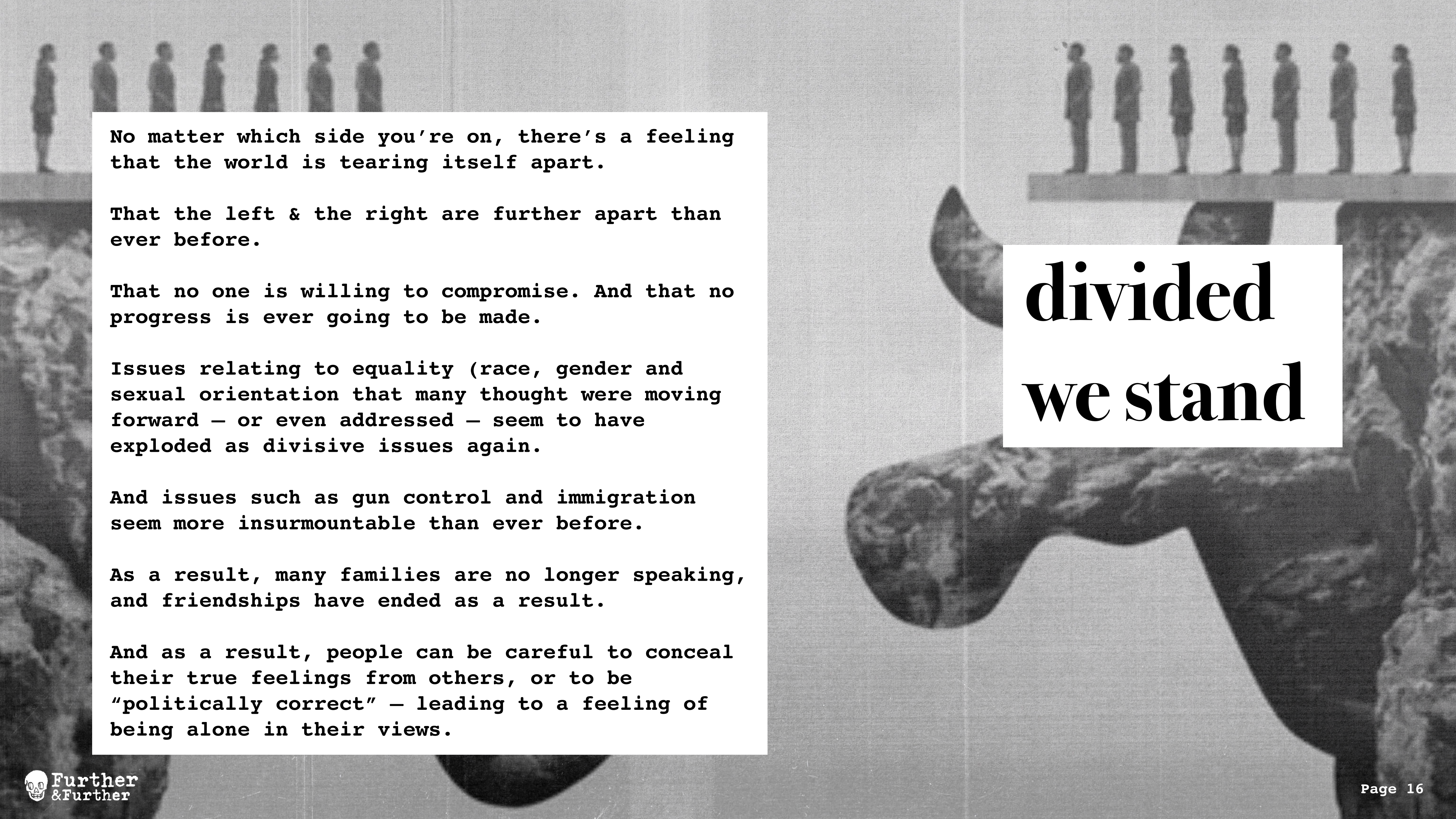There used to be one path forward.

Goals to set and reach.

And tribes to join. People together with you every step of the way.

It was a structure that made SENSE.

But the world looks far different than it used to.

And every day brings a new version of "reality".

Leaving us all a little lost and very, very lonely.

No matter which side you're on, there's a feeling that the world is tearing itself apart.

That the left & the right are further apart than ever before.

That no one is willing to compromise. And that no progress is ever going to be made.

Issues relating to equality (race, gender and sexual orientation that many thought were moving forward — or even addressed — seem to have exploded as divisive issues again.

And issues such as gun control and immigration seem more insurmountable than ever before.

As a result, many families are no longer speaking, and friendships have ended as a result.

And as a result, people can be careful to conceal their true feelings from others, or to be "politically correct" — leading to a feeling of being alone in their views.

divided we stand

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Work used to be a bastion of stability & friendship.

A place to talk about TV shows & establish everyday rapport with people who start to understand your life arc.

But the economy is changing.

And people are getting jobs wherever they can.

Often freelancing.

Often trying to make money off a creative pursuit they truly love.

And often doing those alone. (Or in a glass cage at a "coworking space".)

The traditional idea of a "9-5 office" is declining … along with a built-in structure to meet new friends with similar interests, face-to-face.

And along with guaranteed socializing every day.

a survivor's ECONOMY

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It's become more and more frictionless to move across the country -- or the world -- leaving the hometown social networks that can take years to construct.

People are moving somewhere for an interesting time, not for a long time.

It might be for a job that they don't have intentions of staying at past a year.

It might be to try out a new city.

… but half of 18-35 year olds have moved to a new city, with no intention of making it a permanent home.

Many we speak to talk about the struggle to find permanent, deep friendships while living these endlessly mobile lives.

And many talk about the struggle to maintain existing friendships from afar, as everyone is going through the trajectory of life at a different pace, scattered all around the world.

transitory

LIVING

Beyond struggling to find new friendships, many people are delaying both marriage and kids -- or skipping them altogether.

They feel too young. They feel too poor.

The person they love lives in a different city.

They're still exploring the fluidity of their own sexuality & gender.

What used to be a hunt to find stability — or The One — has turned into a free-for-all swipe party through human after human.

And even if they *want* a partner, very few are finding one.

Many say that sleeping with multiple people a week makes them feel even lonelier than being alone.

swipe

life

People aren't as religious as they used to be.

And most young people aren't religious at all.

They've seen the scandals.

Watched angry, hateful acts performed around the world in the name of a god.

They feel like many churches look down on their own beliefs or preferences … or those of their friends.

Over half of young people now identify as having no religion at all.

But with that massive societal shift, yet another building block of community is lost -- a steady place to go once a week, where you will be welcomed in.

The world is getting a lot more secular.

And also lonelier by the day.

god is dead

In the global cities to which people are flocking, there's a pervasive narrative around "hustle culture".

That you need to work 70 hours a week to be successful.

That your work should be your life & your passion.

That you need to compete for any chance of getting ahead.

That the individual is more important than the collective.

And that it's weak to ask for help. To show any signs of weakness. To admit to vulnerability.

Or to be open & honest about what you really need from others.

& a lack of
vulnerability

Social, political and technological changes have resulted in a broader series of connections for people but a loss of depth, authenticity and trust.

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Resulting in a global society that's absurdly lonely.

And in hordes of humans desperate to find their people … but very unsure of how to best go about it.

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How can brands help?

LONELINESS IS...

not about quantity. It's about quality

the desire for more than you have

a shortage of authentic, connections that build trust

perceived as modern-day failure

exacerbated by societal & situational change

And the tragedy of loneliness is that lonely people quickly lose confidence and the social skills to connect. The more lonely you feel the less able you are to make meaningful connections. Breaking this cycle might be the silver bullet...

BUT HOW ELSE CAN BRANDS HELP?

IRL communities

Communities that transform people's lives, that involve face to face connection (online relationships do not address feelings of loneliness). Be like this popular mans group in Montreal

https://montrealgazette.com/news/local-news/the-social-network-cote-st-luc-mens-club-combats-loneliness-isolation

connect the DISCONNECTED

Create face to face experiences and feelings of trust between groups who seemingly don't have much to do with each other. Be like this bar in Tokyo.

https://japantoday.com/category/features/lifestyle/tokyo-bar-only-lets-you-in-if-you-come-alone-%E2%80%93-no-bringing-your-friends-allowed

address DATING DYSTOPIA

A major struggle related to loneliness ... especially for young people. If Axe helped confused guys feel confident surely a brand can help people find someone who wants an actual relationship. Books like this are growing in popularity.

https://offlinedatingmethod.com/

design for ALTERNATIVE LIVING

The people who are actively trying to solve their loneliness problem are exploring alternative ways of living. They are sharing spaces with other lonely people or those needing support. Designing the home to address loneliness is an emerging trend.

https://www.forbes.com/sites/sarazeffgeber/2018/12/15/consider-home-sharing-to-prevent-isolation-and-loneliness/#3bc1e1f270b9

DESTIGMATIZE loneliness

Brands can help destigmatize it and make loneliness a cultural conversation. Raising awareness and providing means to share experiences.

Be like Tea with Strangers.

http://www.teawithstrangers.com/

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