

The cost of the community

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Modern society expands societal awareness faster than it grows our capacity to matter. The revival of wanting the 3rd place reveals a profound truth about our society today: we lack true community. With the rise of social media, news outlets, and online in general, we should feel more connected. However, this creates a paradox as we feel more alone than ever. The issue is the communities have evolved.

There is a quote attributed to totalitarian leader Stalin, "A single death is a tragedy; a million deaths is a statistic" that may relate to this issue in an absurd way in terms of scale. This quote at its core speaks to human psychology, and our struggle to analyze on large-scale, instead better relating and emphasizing on a smaller one. When translated to our social presence, it relates to our failure to feel purposeful as small clubs and communities shrink. The decrease of importance in clubs and smaller settings—whether it is book clubs, coffee clubs, or small towns—in exchange for national connection and online connection gives humans the feeling they matter less.

Many humans feel less significant now. We are meant to impact a small community, up to 150 people to be exact, and this was very possible. However, with the rise of social media and broadening connections (even focusing much more on national politics than local), humans are forced to comprehend they are a small number in a large crowd. This helps explain the lack of action to deal with large issues and politics as people ask: What can one person do?

Humans also crave to be in control, which is exponentially more difficult in large settings and online, where millions of people may have opposing views and their own take. In turn, many cannot control as much as they once could and are struggling to grasp this. The combination of the sheer size of a “community”, especially if online, and the loss of control heavily weighs on us.

The failure to feel as if one matters often leads to a loss of identity and what defines us. Many are feeling this currently and choose (per my illusion article) to numb this profound struggle. They avoid community altogether as they increasingly relate it to feeling small, and choose instead to scroll and block the feeling.

This is why small communities matter. Clubs, sports, and other communities restore this feeling of purpose. Instead of comparing yourself and your place within millions, one can focus on making an impact with those close, and reforming an identity with them. However, we cannot forget the large scale, so while this may not be a true solution, it is a start. To get out of this paradox, we must acknowledge it first, which society often fails to do.