



# The Citizen Connections Report **2024**



In 2023, Citizen released our inaugural Connections Report – the first of its kind to explore the state of social connection. As counselors to global brands with the influence to bring people together, we wanted to gain a nuanced understanding of how people connect. We knew our curiosity was on the right track when the US Surgeon General declared a **“Loneliness Epidemic”** and the WHO created a Commission on Social Connection. In the midst of this pervading isolation, what we found was unsettling; a clear connection deficit, where people desired more connection but were held back.

But the responsibility to address this deficit doesn’t lie solely on policymakers and global health organizations. As architects of conversation and partners to some of the biggest global brands, we know the critical role our marketing and communications industry plays in fostering social connection – authentically and organically.

In 2023, we looked at the drivers of the connection deficit. For the 2024 Connections Report, our approach was to investigate the flip side – a more granular look at the vehicles of connection. And the most intriguing findings were on the **“third place”** – a physical place we go outside our first place (home) or second place (work or school) – as a powerful vehicle of social connection. Many aren’t familiar with the term ‘third place’, let alone why they should have one or how it can facilitate social connection. And therein lies the opportunity for us, along with our brand partners, to play an active role in bridging the social connection gap.



**Nick Cowling**  
CEO, Citizen Relations

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**CITIZEN**  
The Citizen  
Connections  
Report **2024**



***The Connection  
Deficit***



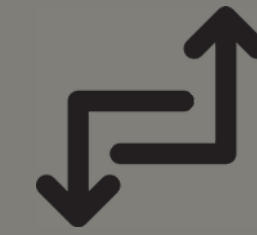
***The Shifting  
Paradigm***



***The State  
of Social  
Connection  
Today***



***The Third  
Place***



***The Role of the  
Third Place  
Today Has  
Changed***



***What's Desired  
In A Third Place  
Is Surprising -  
And Missing***



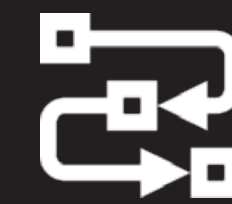
***Younger  
Generations  
See The Most  
Value In  
Third Places***



***Connect  
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***About Citizen  
Relations***



***Methodology***

# The Connection Deficit

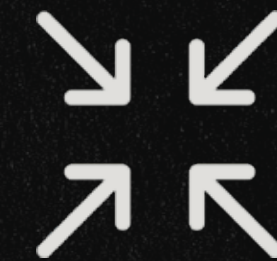
In the aftermath of a global pandemic, coupled with economic and political instability around the world, our ability to connect – whether offline or online – has become more challenging in many parts of the world. Today we are still in the midst of an undeniable loneliness ‘epidemic’.

Last year, our inaugural Citizen Connections Report sought to understand this crisis of connection and the driving forces behind it. With respondents from North America and the UK, the report found a clear point of contention, dubbed **“the Connection Deficit.”**

***“Almost universally, people desire more connection but are held back.”***



**Our report uncovered the three key contributors to the Connection Deficit:**



Shrinking social circles



The need to balance online and offline connection



Mental well-being as a unique barrier

It has become evident that a multitude of factors impact the ability to connect, and that ability influences every aspect of daily life. From nearly 30% of respondents avoiding controversial conversations, to nearly 60% agreeing they’re lonely even when around other people, one thing is clear: we need to move the needle on connection.

# The **SHIFTING** Paradigm

In 2024, we need to first look at the current state of the world, which inevitably affects our state of social connection, before we can unpack where and how to best step in.

## Half of the biggest global companies plan to cut office space. US cities will suffer most

By Hanna Ziady, CNN  
4 minute read · Updated 12:26 PM EDT, Tue June 6, 2023

Economic growth

## Resilient Global Economy Still Limping Along, With Growing Divergences

Likelihood of a soft landing has increased, but growth forecast is lowest in decades

LIFE / EVEN BETTER

## Why community matters so much — and how to find yours

A community can serve as a social safety net, but finding one and becoming a part of it is different from simply making friends.

by Allie Volpe  
Mar 24, 2022, 8:30 AM EDT

Europe

## France's 'beautiful dream' fades as Games give way to political deadlock

By Michel Rose and Elizabeth Pineau  
August 12, 2024 12:44 PM EDT · Updated a month ago

Elections Harris's policy positions Live updates Election 2024 Presidential polls Trump's policy positions Senate races to watch

## Biden makes stunning decision to pull out of 2024 race

The president's decision plunges the Democratic Party into an unprecedented scramble to choose a new nominee at the 11th hour.

10 min 27302

EL PAIS

International

## Venezuela's political crisis enters uncharted territory

The opposition is defending itself against the repression of Chavismo and is calling for transparency in the official results. Meanwhile, they are waiting for negotiations with the international community to make progress



## How this year of elections is set to reshape global politics

Most half of the world's population will vote in national elections in 2024. Here's what we've learned so far.

By Mark Jahn and Sumanta Sen  
Published July 9, 2024 04:30 AM EDT

Home | Culture & Life

THE EXPLAINER

## The unfortunate, ongoing disappearance of 'third places'

People are losing the sublime art of hanging out

Facebook Twitter LinkedIn Newsletter sign up

World + 6 more

## 2024, a challenging year for the humanitarian world

News and Press Release · Source: SI · Posted: 17 Jan 2024 · Originally published: 16 Jan 2024 · Origin: [View original](#)

Opinion Cost of living crisis

## Year in a word: Cozzie Livs

A humorous reference to the less than funny cost of living crisis — here's hoping this term is retired soon

CLAER BARRETT + Add to myFT



WORLD

## What's behind the political crisis in Bangladesh?

By Julhas Alam And Sheikh Saaliq · The Associated Press  
Posted August 6, 2024 2:08 pm · Updated August 13, 2024 5:57 pm · 7 min read

Our world is changing faster than ever. The impacts of these seismic shifts on our ability to connect reverberate clearly. As we navigate a world experiencing several crises – concurrently – we need to count on each other, now more than ever. And brands need to understand the role they can play.

# The State of Social Connection Today

The desire for more connection still remains, with more than a third of our respondents wanting even more social connection than they currently have.



In fact, from over 4,000 respondents across Canada, USA, the UK and Germany



said they want less social connection. Still, more than half feel less connected than they did a year ago.

Over the past year, it seems that people have taken the U.S. Surgeon General's report on the loneliness epidemic to heart. Our data shows us that 43% of respondents identify as 'strong' or 'social' connectors, indicating that they seek connection with others. There's a renewed appreciation for community and creating a culture of belonging. As a society, we're seeing a shift toward slowing down and prioritizing social connection, whether it's through the resurgence of IRL dating, run clubs or the growing popularity of group hobbies like knitting. Together, we are trying to recreate a sense of community.

*Although  
we've made  
progress  
on the  
quest for  
connection,  
the gap  
still exists.*

Of the respondents who are craving more connections, nearly 70% are those who categorize themselves as 'strong' or 'social' connectors - an indication that opportunities for connection are hard to come by, even for those actively seeking them out.



# The Third Place

Bridging the gap doesn't have a one-size-fits-all solution; the quest for connection is nuanced and differs between generations, age groups, and even connector types. But our research has found one key element that can fill the void.



## *First Place*

## *Second Place*



## *Third Place*

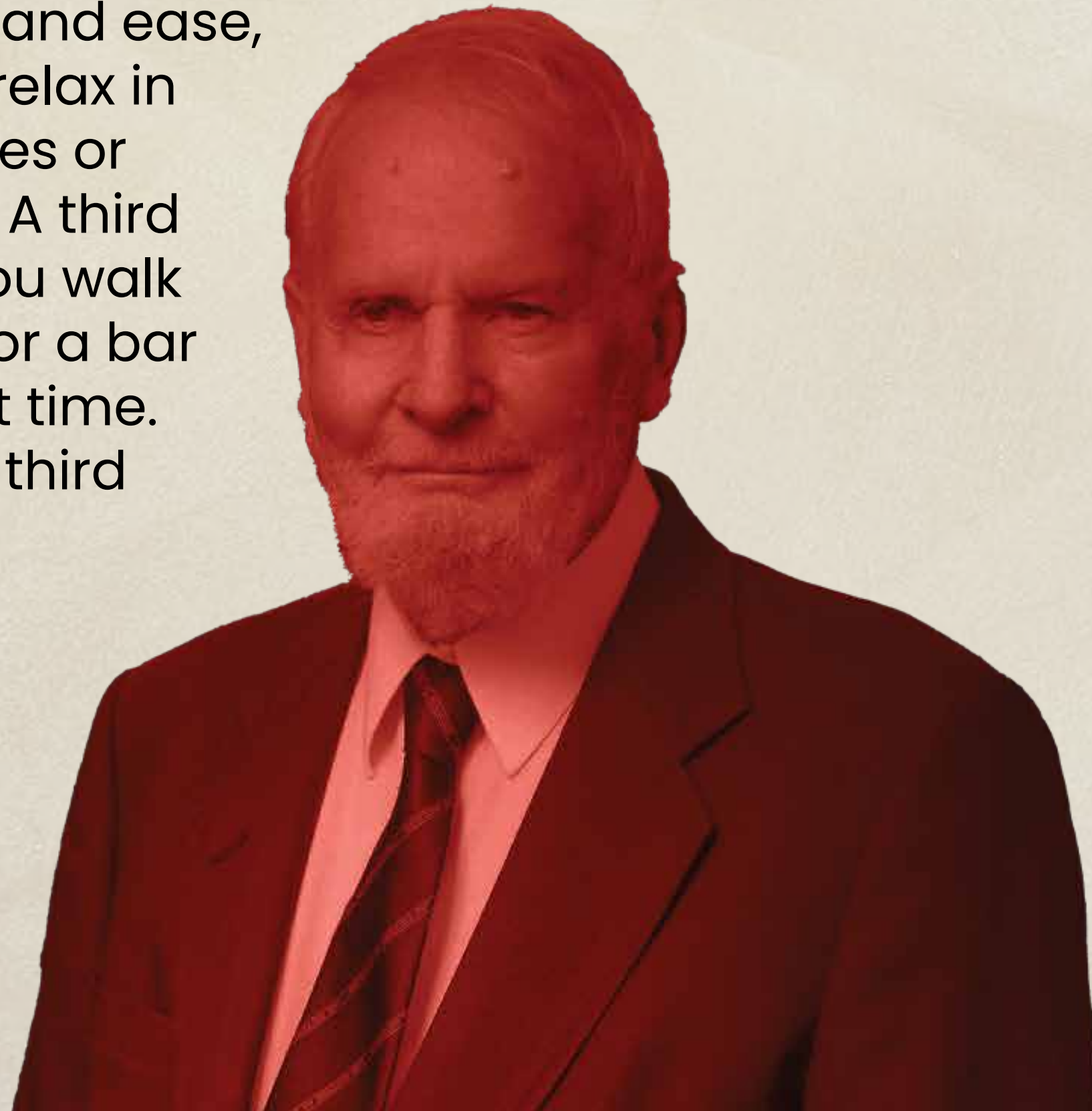


*The Third Place has the power to close social connection gaps across generations.*



# But what is a “Third Place”?

Coined in 1989 by American sociologist, Ray Oldenburg, a “third place” is a physical space where a person spends time when not at home (the first place) or at work/school (the second place). It’s a place of belonging and ease, where people gather to relax in public, meet familiar faces or make new relationships. A third place can be the park you walk through every morning, or a bar you’re visiting for the first time. What’s important is that third places serve as anchors of community life and can foster more creative interaction.

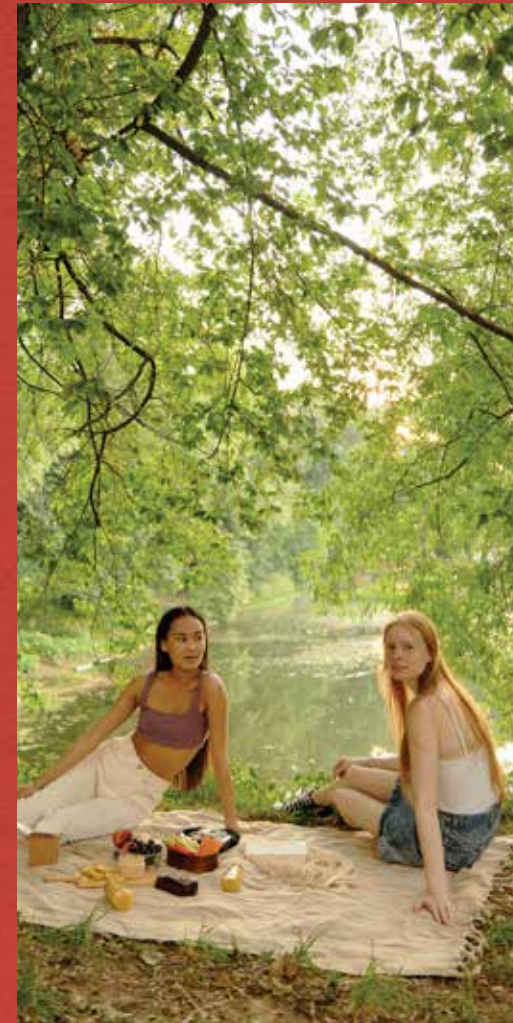


Former Starbucks CEO, Howard Schultz famously began positioning the company’s locations as the “third place” in the brand’s marketing strategies, with an emphasis on comfortable seating and soothing music to invite customers to stay for longer periods of time.

# 83%

of people have at least one third place

And yet, the third places we know and love are disappearing. Whether it's Tim Horton's closing their dining area in Canada or Costa Coffee shutting down stores in the UK, shopping malls going under due to a rise in online shopping (accelerated by the pandemic) or the lack of funding to keep movie theaters and public parks alive, many of the third places we frequent have seen a steep decline. And with that, so has our ability to foster new and existing relationships.



*Parks*



*Restaurants and bars*



*Coffee shops*



*Library*



*Shopping mall*



*Gym*



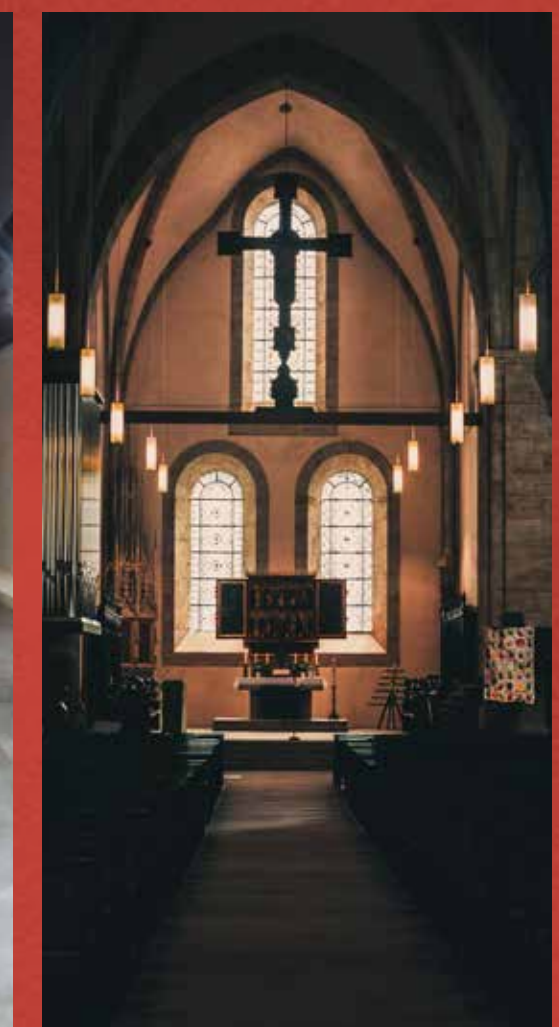
*Movie theater*



*Bookstore*



*Museum/  
art gallery*



*Church*

# The Role of the Third Place Today Has Changed

The role the third place plays has become more urgent than ever as our “second place” – our workplace – has eroded.

When over half of the biggest global companies continue to cut their office spaces, people lose out on the chance to further develop social connections. No more water cooler chat, grabbing lunch together or stepping out for after-work happy hour – all of which have previously helped us build relationships with those outside our immediate circles. These days, many people’s first place isn’t just their primary place. It’s nearly their only place.



Simultaneously, as a younger cohort enters the workforce, what they look for in a workplace has changed compared to older generations, often seeking more flexibility in order to maintain work-life balance. Gen Z, particularly, crave that flexibility but are still interested in an office culture, especially the community-building and mentoring they get out of the office space. Not surprisingly, those that have a stronger preference for remote work in comparison to their older counterparts feel more of an impact.

Thus, our need for a “third place” is presumably greater than ever; a way for us to work our social muscles and build relationships, big or small.



34%

A white icon of a person sitting at a desk with a laptop, representing a remote worker.

of people who struggle to find a third place are remote workers.

Understanding the role of a third place today is tough – so much so that even the brands who made the third place a part of their foundational ethos are struggling. Starbucks, decked out in plush leather chairs and ambient music, popularized the “third place” persona, encouraging consumers to spend hours at the cafe. Today, Starbucks has majorly shifted its personality, focusing more on creating a community through its mobile app rather than physical space. With a less experiential approach that has converted their space into more of a coffee depot, Starbucks has entered into the quick-service arena alongside tough competition.

The opportunity for brands lies in not just creating a space for consumers to connect with each other, but to meaningfully connect with the brand. The perception that brands serve their stakeholders, not their consumers, creates an opportunity to take back the narrative. Having a community-first approach, building a space with purpose – beyond just comfy chairs – and participating with the consumer will help foster connection. The key for brands is to work with their audience to understand what they need to help them better connect with and within a third place. Then, help deliver on these needs without pressure for purchase. Don't think branded pop-ups: think strategic partnerships to optimize existing spaces in a way that better serves your audience, supporting studios or gallery spaces with better equipment or kitchen spaces, creating an intentional area for gym-goers to connect and refuel post-workout, or outfitting cafes in key locations with games and entertainment that helps folks meet new people with shared interests. Brands need to look through the lens of how they can infuse everyday spaces with meaningful third place energy.

## Take it a step further



The travel luggage brand, Monos, recently touted the importance of “third places” – especially when exploring a new place. Beyond just recognizing their importance, a brand like Monos could create communal spaces in top solo travel destinations to foster meet-ups of like-minded adventurers.



According to our data,

25%

Gen X

& 29%

Boomers

participate in travel-based online communities, signaling an opportunity for Monos to target this segment with IRL experiences curated for them.

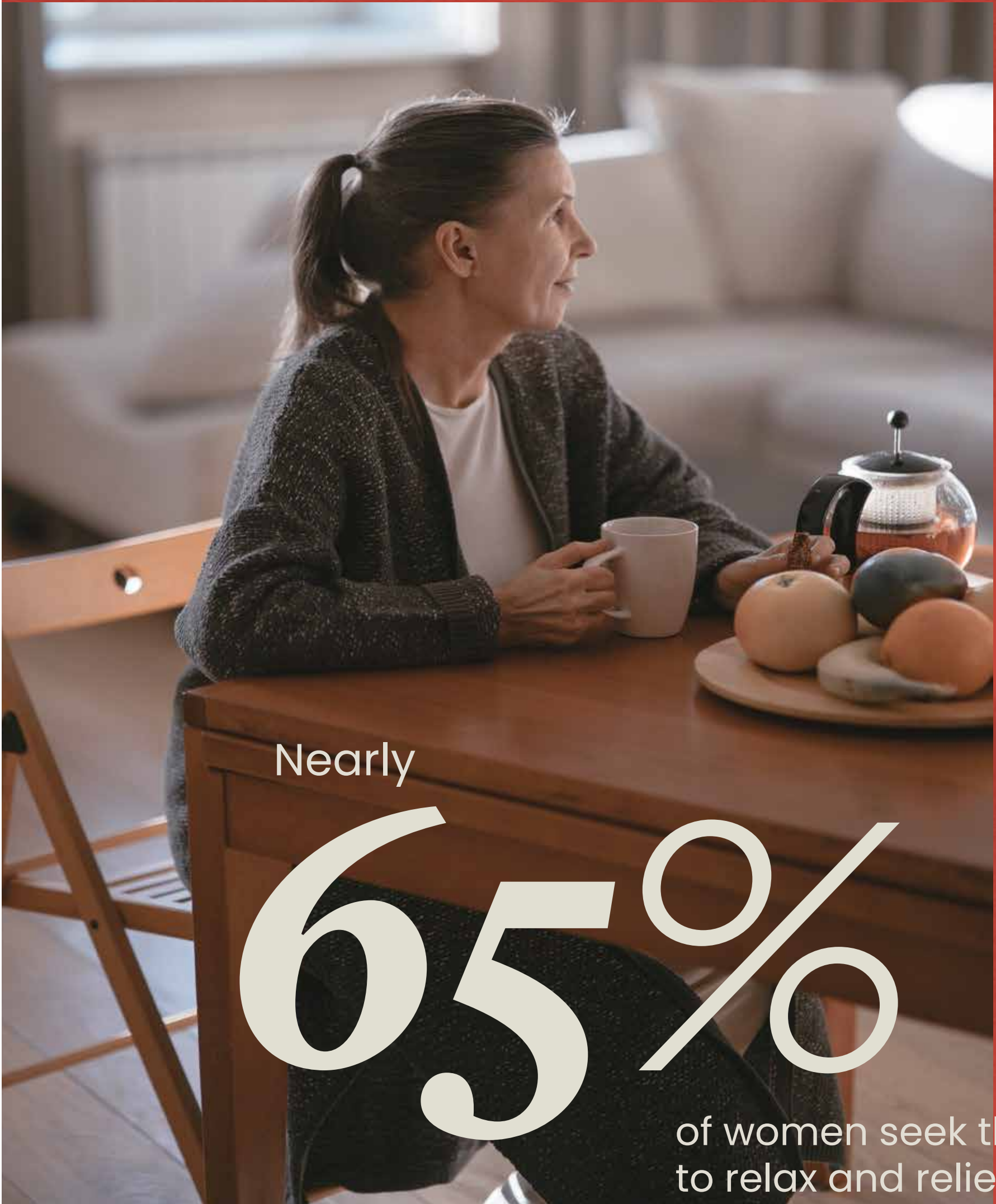
# What's Desired In A Third Place Is Surprising - And Missing

Despite the third place being important, it's often a struggle finding a third place that meets today's desired needs across genders and generations.



65% of people have experienced difficulty finding a third place that's right for them.

Understanding the motivations for visiting a third place is the first step. And the findings are unexpected.



Nearly  
**65%**

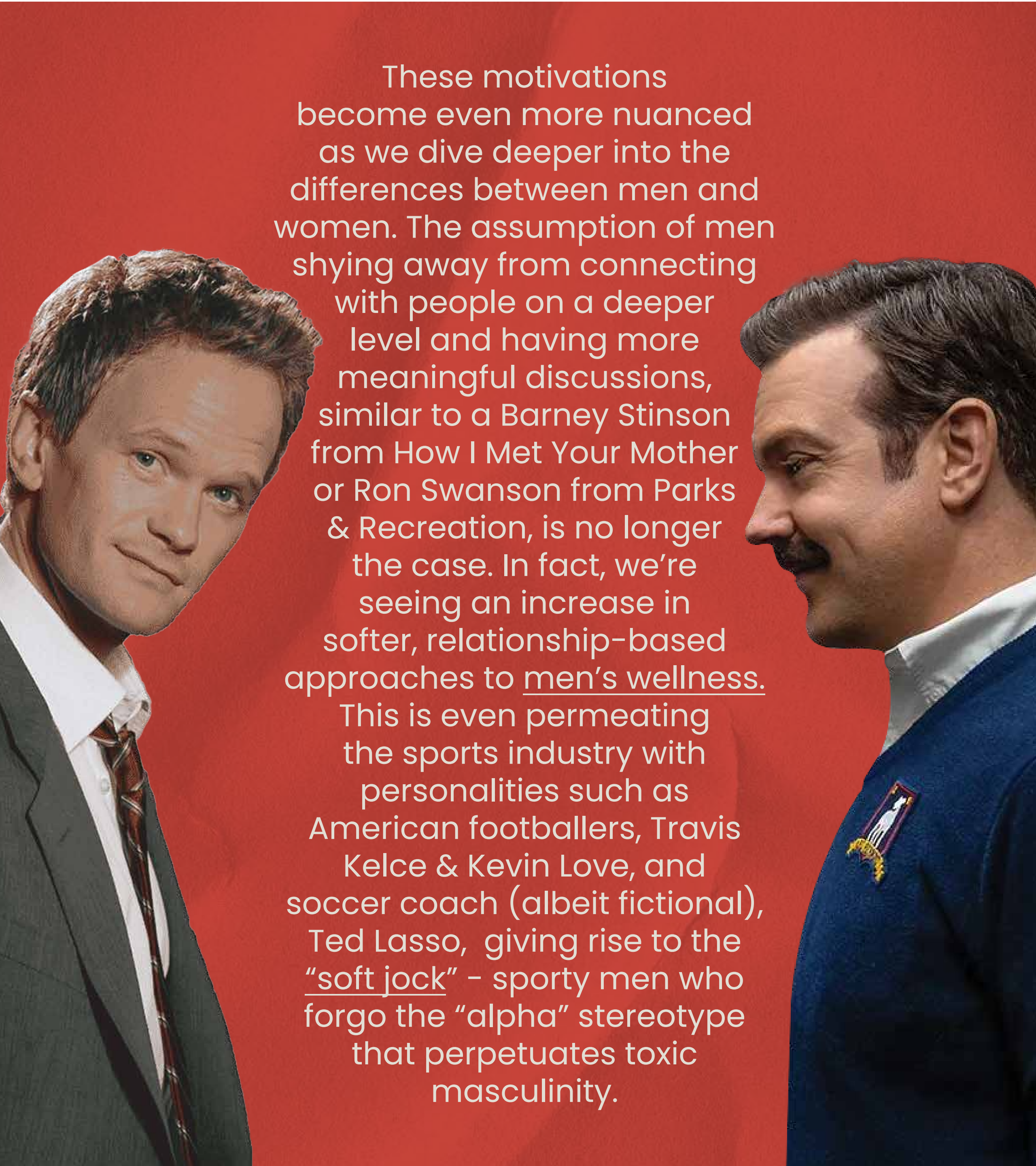
of women seek third places to relax and relieve stress & over 40% want an escape from responsibility.

Nearly a  
***third***

of men seek third places to connect with new people



Our research found that women are more likely to visit third places as a means of stress relief/relaxation and to escape from responsibility, whereas men visit third places to connect with people - both old and new. These nuances don't just exist when it comes to third places, but are a clear reflection of our preferences as a society today.



These motivations become even more nuanced as we dive deeper into the differences between men and women. The assumption of men shying away from connecting with people on a deeper level and having more meaningful discussions, similar to a Barney Stinson from How I Met Your Mother or Ron Swanson from Parks & Recreation, is no longer the case. In fact, we're seeing an increase in softer, relationship-based approaches to men's wellness.

This is even permeating the sports industry with personalities such as American footballers, Travis Kelce & Kevin Love, and soccer coach (albeit fictional), Ted Lasso, giving rise to the "soft jock" - sporty men who forgo the "alpha" stereotype that perpetuates toxic masculinity.

Women, on the other hand, seek escapism and independence even when they're traveling, which is at odds with the traditional archetype we have of women as natural social connectors.

According to Plus Company's latest travel report, 72% of women in the US and Canada say they like to travel solo. This appetite for female solo travel has increased by 62% in the last three years, brought on by a desire to leave behind domestic responsibility (83%) and find freedom.

These nuanced differences, that go against the stereotypical assumptions of how men and women connect, create a huge opportunity for brands to think outside the conventional boxes and curate niche experiences for consumers that satisfy their specific needs for social connection.

Along with understanding what motivates people to visit a third place, we also sought to understand what many perceive third places are lacking.

Of all things missing, the top three were:



**Food & drink**

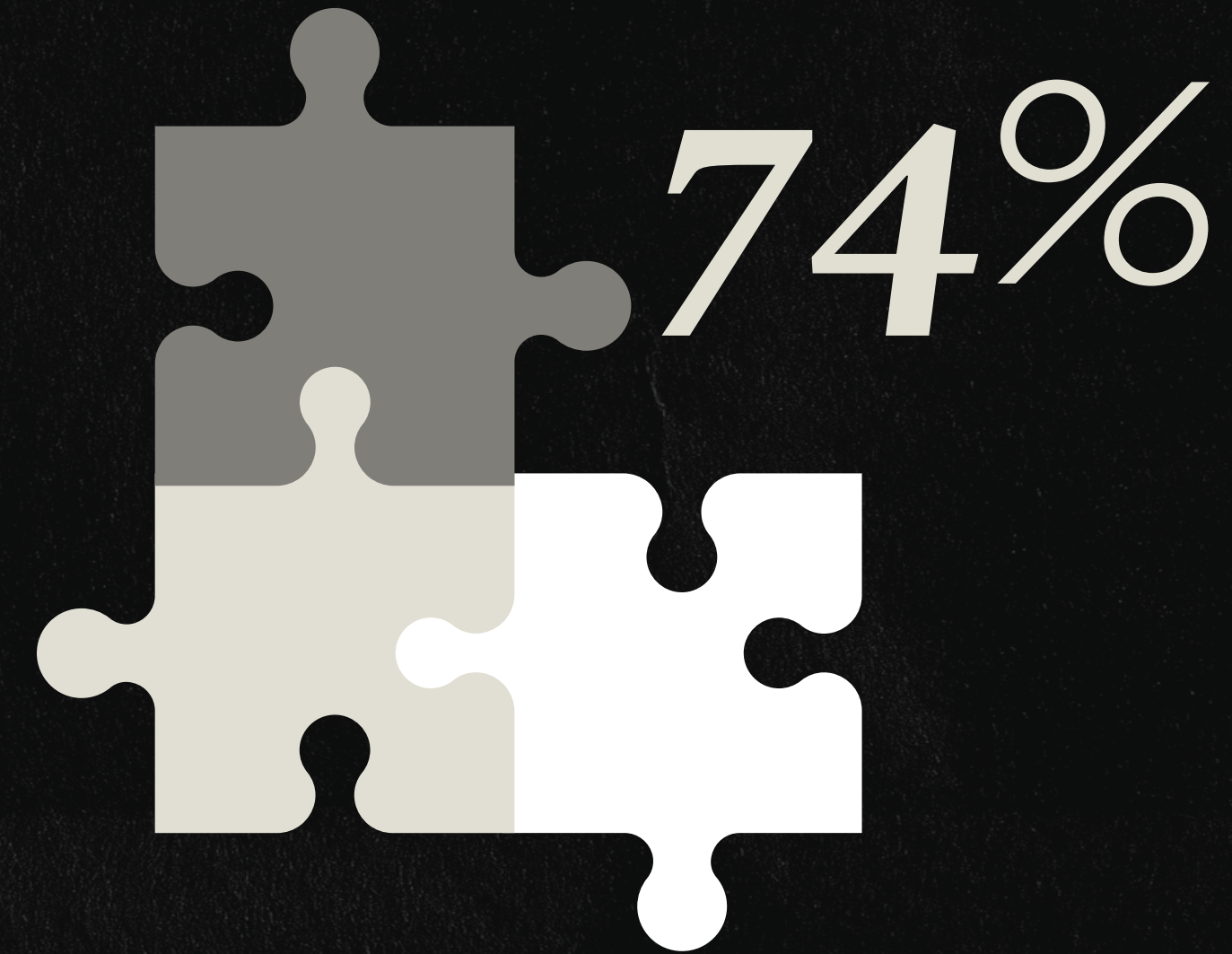


**Convenient hours**



**Bathroom access**

Equipped with these insights, brands can make sure to give people exactly what they're looking for in their third place – either by creating a space of their own or partnering with an existing space to provide consumers with a curated experience. Brands that want to create a third place should keep the focus off their priority (path to purchase) and shift into what consumers prioritize togetherness. Though counterintuitive, this will lead to better brand results since quality time together and safe spaces to connect are priorities that cross gender and generational divides, and speak to all consumers.

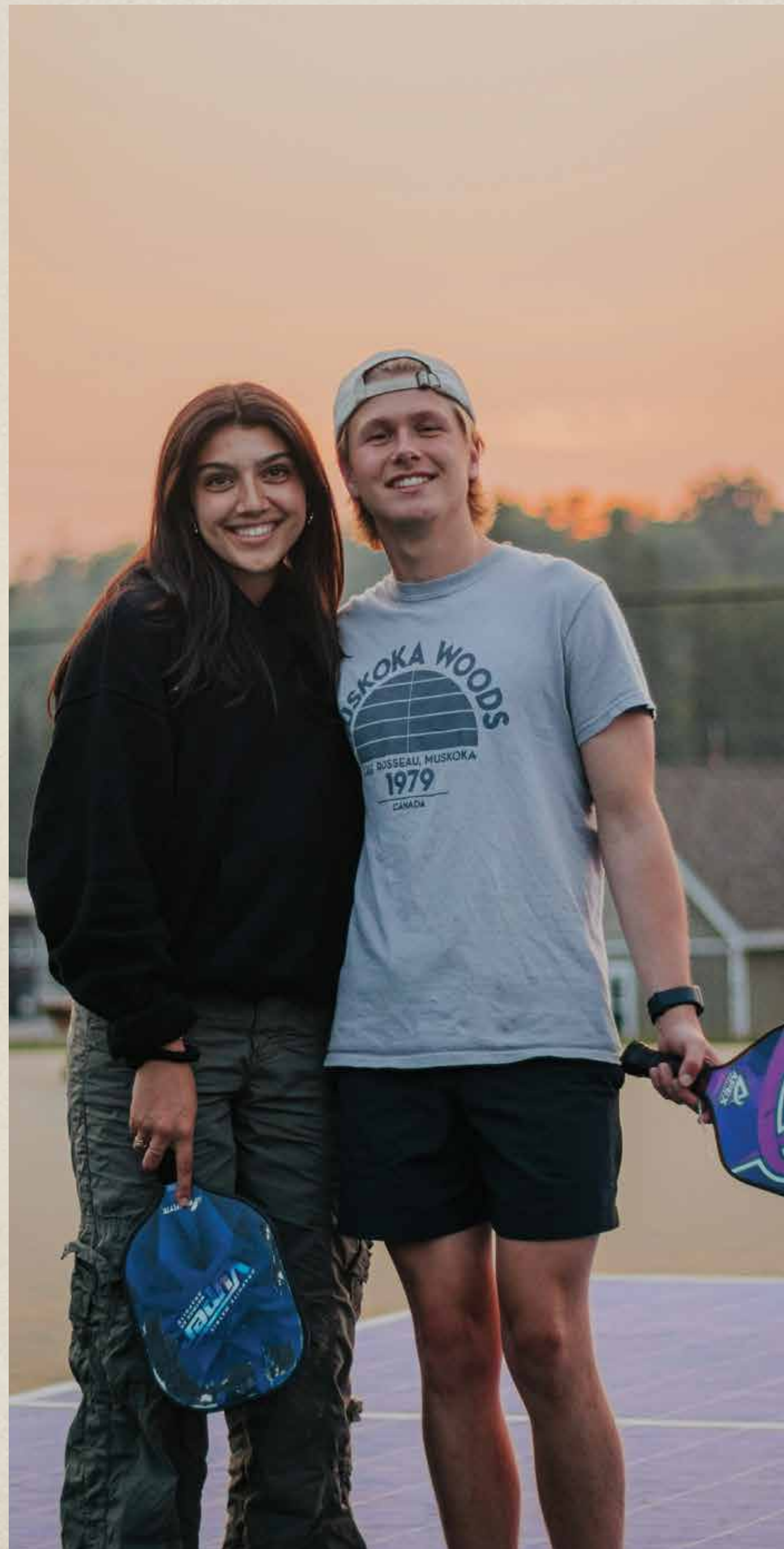


of respondents identified that there's something missing in their "third place"



# *Third place community building*

People are seeking to build community bonds through activities – movement-focused or otherwise. Hard seltzer brand, Vizzy, has already taken advantage of the power of pickleball in Canada through their partnership with the Professional Pickleball Association. Similarly, U.S.-based nutrition brand, Gainful, recently partnered with the Lunge Run Club – the dating app’s singles run club – for an event in New Jersey. Meanwhile, young people are opting for supper clubs (like style influencer Erika Veurink’s EV salon) or embracing book/cookbook clubs, sans phone.



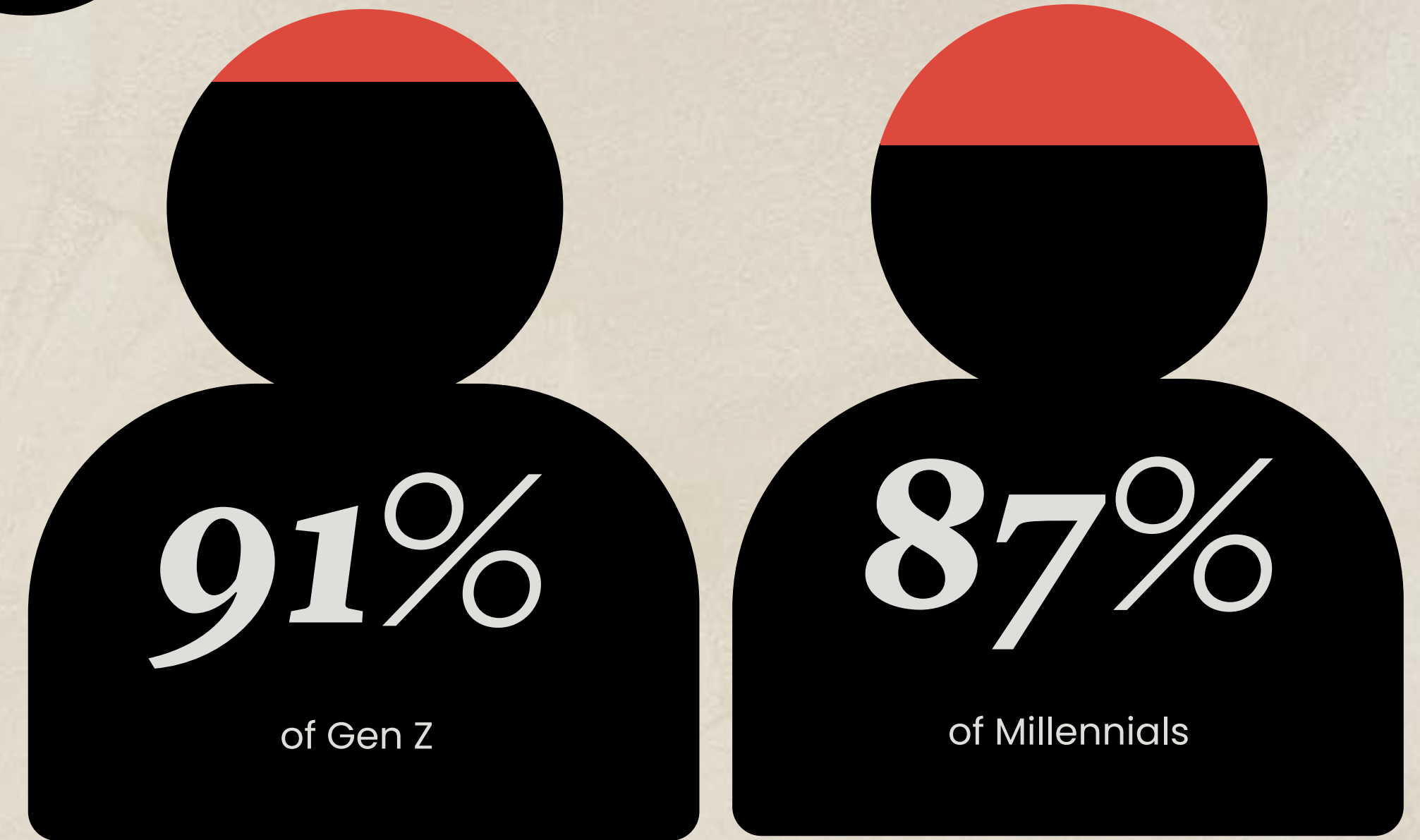
The way for brands to stand out in this space is to stand up for something, by creating spaces without any expectation of purchase or monetary gain – an approach that will win them brand love and loyalty and will bring in revenue when done authentically.

Given the emotional importance of bromances, brands need to think outside the usual environment and provide men with the opportunity to create meaningful connections. Different consumers are organically seeking out experiences that resonate with them on a deeper level. Let’s help them find those experiences.



# Younger Generations See The Most Value In Third Places

While society tends to lump younger generations into one group - one that prefers a digital lifestyle - our data says otherwise. We already know that Gen Z and Millennials can't be defined by a single set of characteristics; there's a wide variety of distinguishing subcultures within the two generations. But our research found that overwhelmingly, it is this younger group of people who find value in the "third place."



have at least one third place

Not only do they find value in their third place, **85% of Gen Z and Millennials** would make quality of life sacrifices in order to save their third place.

# Could you live without it?



Nearly a quarter of Gen Z would give up sex in order to save their third place



More than half of Millennials would give up social media and dining out to save their third place



More than a third of Gen X would give up eating out to save their third place

We already know that these younger generations have a very different experience in the workplace, with so many having entered the workforce during the pandemic. But while some prefer remote work, the places they would have had at their disposal to develop IRL connections are steadily decreasing. According to [The Guardian](#), 750 youth centers in the UK have shut down in the last decade and music venues and [nightclubs](#) are in freefall. Even certain public spaces, such as public parks and city squares, are becoming inaccessible for this group without raising suspicion of loitering/misbehaving. The Third Place gaps for this younger generation are truly everywhere.

The bottom line for brands: think beyond the purchase funnel. Connection drives trust, and trust drives loyalty. Instead of creating experiences with sales at the top of your mind, explore opportunities (big and small) to invite audiences in, and just be – the sales will inevitably follow.

It's no surprise then that we're seeing a sharp increase in interest-based activities, such as crocheting, becoming popular with a younger audience. Older generations grew up in the era of Cheers, Seinfeld and Friends where connection and belonging were found at a regular 'hangout' spot - today's young adults want that same social connection but have to look harder to find them, letting their personal interests lead the way.



From supper clubs that let you dine with strangers to silent reading parties and the romanticization of public libraries on TikTok, this cohort is desperate for IRL connection. It's especially evident when we look at how this group chooses to date - according to Eventbrite, attendance at dating and singles events grew by 42% from 2022 to 2023. And our own survey found that Gen Z and Millennials use third places to explore new interests (58%) and find community (48%).

As the largest demographic with purchasing power, brands are constantly looking for ways to resonate with Gen Z and Millennials. What better way than to meet them in the places they are actively seeking? But the key to this is to look beyond the stereotypes and prioritize common ground over tropes. Instead of focusing on generational lines, brands should look to facilitate connection between people with common interests and desires that credibly align with their own. By facilitating connections amongst one another, brands can move people from passive engagement to fandom. Imagine a telecom company hosting a phone-free event. Or a fashion show without photos (as per The Row). Counterintuitive thinking is what will facilitate connections among audiences based on shared interests, values and needs.



## The new hangout spot?



Popular bubble tea brand, Chatime, has picked up on Gen Z's IRL craving, as well as their preference for non-alcoholic drinks.

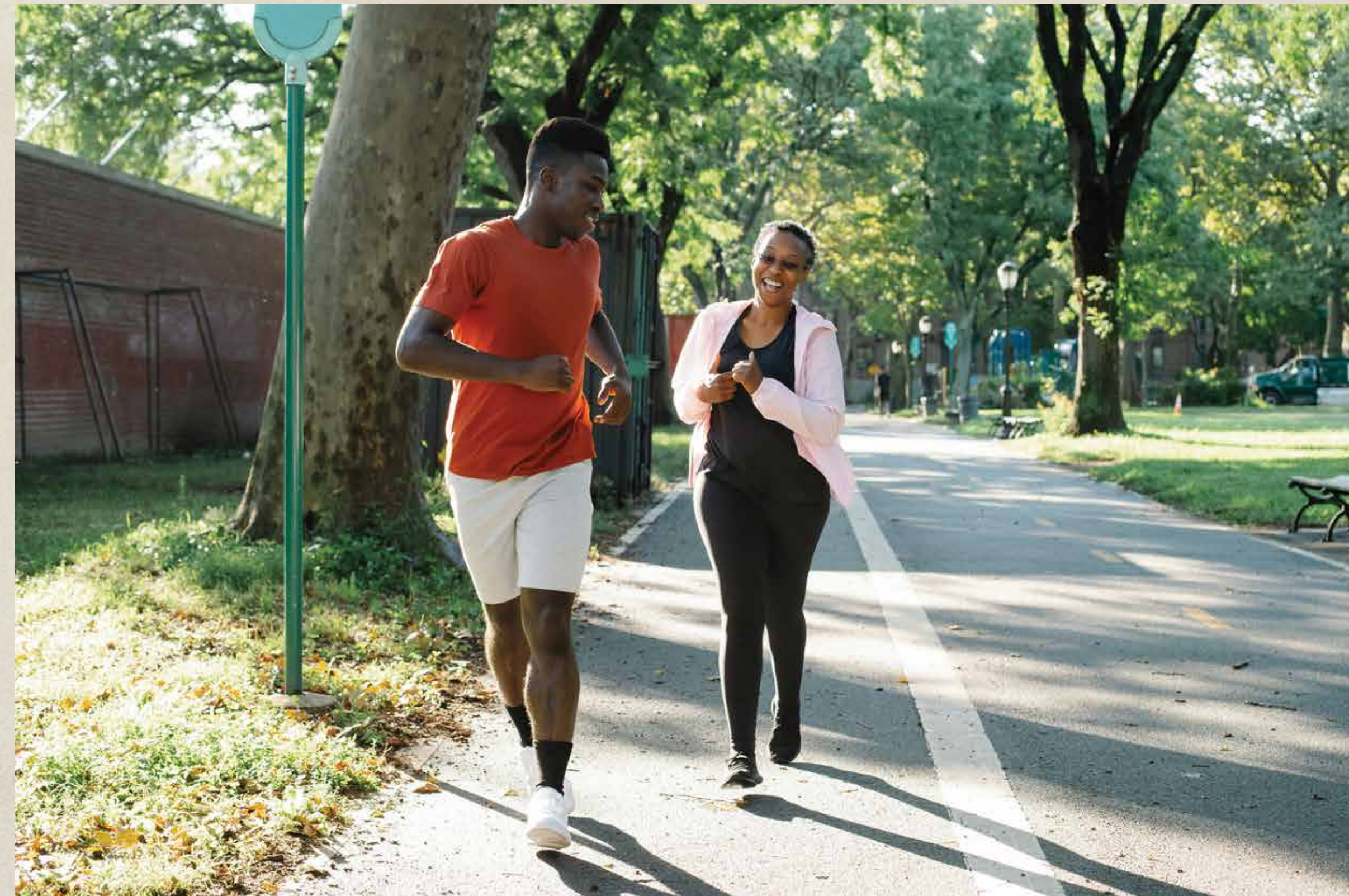


The brand's new campaign positions itself as the go-to evening hangout spot for younger people at any occasion - from man dates to thank-you get-togethers.

# Connect with Citizen

We all know the key to influencing consumers is through prioritizing their needs and values and supporting them in a credible way. A clear and tangible purpose is the essential foundation for any brand work to resonate and it's no different when it comes to facilitating connection. Today, we know our social connection needs are not being met. And with this iteration of the Connections Report, we want to help brands understand the opportunity in front of them; third places serve an integral touchpoint for consumers and a significant opportunity to make an impact.

As architects of communication, Citizen Relations' mission is to make every conversation count - and we know that conversation is the catalyst to connection. The findings in this report are a mere glimpse of our data and our team of experts are here to help them best fit for your brand. Get in touch with us on our website at [www.citizenrelations.com](http://www.citizenrelations.com) or email us at [info@citizenrelations.com](mailto:info@citizenrelations.com) to get the conversation started.



# About Citizen Relations

Citizen Relations is a modern PR agency, built to help our clients architect impact through conversations with their most important audiences. To solve big challenges with the right solutions, our PR practitioners, strategic planners, creative teams, digital experts, creative technologists, researchers & analysts, designers and experiential team all work together to change opinions and attitudes or cause action and transactions across every stage of the audience's journey.

Citizen has ten offices across North America and Europe, and was named Campaign's Global PR Agency of the Year 2024 (Bronze), Strategy's PR Agency of the Year (Gold) and PProvoke Media's Consumer PR Agency of the Year in 2023. The agency's work has been awarded from across the world from such shows as The Clios, Webbys, The One Show, LIAs, PRWeek Global and the Cannes International Festival of Creativity.





# Methodology

The Citizen Connections Report 2024 is our second annual study on the state of social connection. Our survey gathered insights on respondents' desire for connection, participation in online interest-based communities, and use of third places. The survey was carried out by Citizen Relations & RKI in May 2024, sampling 4,146 adult citizens of Canada, US and Europe (1,025 in Canada, 1037 in US, 1,022 in the UK, and 1,062 in Germany). The margin of error is overall, plus or minus 2 percentage points, 19 times out of 20.