

Why is it crucial for humans to engage in social interaction? This work investigates human interaction, presence, and communication. There are a variety of the different forms of human communication, ranging from “gestural” to “haptic” communication. There is even cultural specific non-verbal communication, such as the “thumbs-up” gesture, which signals approval in English-speaking countries, but is considered rude in other countries. We also communicate through the use of touch. Contact stimulation is such an important factor in communication, considering that skin is the body’s largest sensory organ. Social interaction is vital for us to evolve; we are fueled by the need to form social bonds because of our instinctive longing to belong within a community.

As an artist, I strive to give inanimate objects life, to connect the viewer directly with my work. I give mundane objects, such as a plastic bag and wood, human characteristics. This kinetic sculpture is a breathable cube with human qualities. The longer you interact with the object, the more your breathing becomes synched with the object. Since there are various pumps attached, viewers engage in unintentional collaboration, collectively bringing the object to life. The pump represents the human diaphragm, which in turn, fuels the sculpture. The plastic skin gushes out of the cube as the air supply is activated. There is a wheezing sound that accompanies it, as if the being is gasping for air. Participants play an instrumental role here, for the “being” remains static otherwise. It is only when it is activated that the work reaches full potential.

Nina

I latch my right hand onto the loop of my Bubbie's dark blue jeans to hold on for safety as we cross a mere 10 feet from corner to corner. Her one stride is my three steps. I wave at a few passerbyers, wondering why they are making high-pitched babytalk voices at me; I just exchange an innocent smile. Not a care in the world. These golden years of floating around, naive and feeble-minded, are the ones we have to learn from the most. When was the time that saying "hi" to the person in line next to you stopped coming as an instinct. I don't remember when it all stopped. When the overwhelming feeling of my feet jolting forward to bring me into the air, overturning rush that sent my stomach fluttering and my hair cascading down with every rise and fall...was replaced by the overturned rush my stomach feels when I have to think about college applications. Where does the gap of innocence end and experience begin?

We go from friendly creatures at the beginning of our lives, thirsty for adventure and new information, to being stuck in the constant endless cycle of the schedules of our lives. Too blind to see the evolving world around us. We go about our daily life passing by nameless blank faces and distant beings. After passing by strangers, I began to ask myself, "How many people will we pass by in our lifetime, in grocery stores or on the way to work, but never meet because we are too caught up in our own plans?" "How does your life take different turns, depending on the course of your actions?" I go for my morning run, passing by a multitude of people—just them and me on a tight, narrow path—but it is so difficult or surprising for them when I acknowledge their existence by sharing a friendly "Good morning!" We all start out as strangers, but we don't have to end up being strangers.

There are a variety of different forms of human communication, ranging from gestural communication to haptic communication. Gestural communication is dealing with the non-verbal transmission of ideas, feelings, messages, and signals by using hand and body movements. An example of this is a head-nod, crossing of the arms or legs, and one's posture. There is even culture-specific non-verbal communication, such as, the thumbs-up gesture, which generally signals approval in English-speaking countries, but is considered rude in other countries. Creating a circle with your thumb and forefinger means "ok" in Western cultures, but in Japan it is the sign for money and in Arabic countries, it is perceived as a danger. If you ever had that crazy loud Italian aunt, you would know that she tends to do a lot of hand-waving, excited shouting, and large gestures. Showing enthusiasm is a lot more common in the Italian culture than in American society.

The ways people and other animals communicate and interact via the sense of touch is known as "haptic communication." Touch is extremely important for humans and is vital in providing information about surfaces and textures. 7% of the impact you make upon others depends on what you say, by your body language 55%, and how you say it 38%. 93% of emotion is communicated without the use of substantial words (Cummings, 2011). Touch is such a powerful tool that oxytocin, the "happiness hormone" in the brain, is released when a person is caressed and comforted. The absence of touch in a relationship compels it to be incomplete. Michelangelo once said, "Touch is to give life." It would be logical that contact stimulation is such an important factor in communication, considering skin is the largest sensory organ in our body. The majority of adults carry around at least eight pounds of skin. Skin is not commonly thought of as an organ since it is our external coat.

For some cultures, affection isn't just shown on one's birthday or when a tragedy strikes; showing one's feelings for the other is a way of life. The most affectionate people are found in Spanish, Argentine, and Italian cultures. The word "romance" actually originated from Rome, which would make sense considering their loving nature. The amount we engage in physical

contact in different cultures varies because of how different cultures handle personal space. In Spanish speaking countries it is usually common to kiss each other on the cheek as a friendly greeting, but in other countries it is frowned upon. We have developed this need for a “personal bubble” that it has become offensive if a stranger accidentally bumps into you while being squished on the subway. Some people are very touchy, while others need to be an arm’s length away from human contact at all times.

Why is it crucial for humans to engage in social interaction and exchange social support? This is a subject matter that I ponder during times of solitude. Without relying and caring for our loved ones, I don’t think the human race would have made it as far as we have. Social interaction is vital for us to sustain continuously living and evolving; if it is lost, you are no longer human in a sense. As humans, we are fueled to form social bonds because of the need to belong in society. The “belongingness hypothesis” states that it is widespread that humans have a need to form and maintain interpersonal relationships with others. This can be the result of one’s choices or the choices in their lives. There was a study conducted on suicide by Emile Durkheim, one of the founding fathers of sociology. Durkheim found that the most likely pool of people to engage in suicide are males, and unmarried people. This is due to the fact that, collectively, these individuals have the least amount of social interaction. Even human health is correlated with social interaction. It is shown that people who are lonesome are more likely to suffer from cardiovascular problems, stress, and depression. “Much like the threat of physical pain, loneliness protects your social body. It lets you know when social connections start to fray.” So, it might be inferred that social interaction helps one cope with common issues such as divorce, stress, and work.

Some choose to be alone and find comfort in solitude, while others could never imagine such an idea. At least for me, a high-school teen, it is an unspoken but widely known accepted belief that you have to always have to walk with a friend to the next class, even if it’s just down the hall. The thought of looking lonesome around one’s peers is shunned upon. Henry David Thoreau, in *Walden*, discusses the feeling of oneness with nature when he distances himself from society and its issues. His neighbors are only a mile or so away, but he feels as though he could be in Africa. It is the comfort of being in solitude and the ease of having human contact close if needed. He states, “Ah! I need solitude. I have come forth to this hill at sunset to see the forms of the mountains in the horizon — to behold and commune with something grander than man. Their mere distance and un-profoundness is an infinite encouragement. It is with infinite yearning and aspiration that I seek solitude, more and more resolved and strong; but with a certain weakness that I seek society ever” (*Journal*, 14 August 1854). The idea of “consequential strangers” relates to Thoreau in the way that he felt at peace while in solitude, but content at the thought of having human contact close. This also frequently occurs in cities, as “familiar strangers.” The repetition of walking paths can eventually build up trust and comfort between common faces one sees on the way to pick up morning coffee. Robert Putnam wrote in his book, *Bowling Alone*, about how Americans are becoming less and less connected to one another: “To those concerned with the weakness of civil societies in the developing or post-communist world, the advanced Western democracies and above all the United States have typically been taken as models to be emulated. There is striking evidence, however, that the vibrancy of American civil society has notably declined over the past several decades.” Can we even foster strong relationships between our family and our communities anymore? He thinks America’s “social capital” is declining; the quantity and quality of our relationships with others is decreasing. Social capital is also the system of relationships among people in a specific society, allowing that society to operate

effectively.

Since 1950, Putnam has been surveying the decline of "social capital" in the United States. The downward fall in communication is a cause for concern since social capital is directly linked to the increase in political, civic and economic benefits. Putnam claimed that individuals born before 1930, who experienced the Great Depression and World War II, are more trusting individuals. The following generations that experienced the Vietnam War, Watergate, television, or suburbanization are less likely to be civically engaged, or contribute to the production of social capital.

As humans, we all yearn for comfort and contact. In the case of Temple Grandin, her autism made it uncomfortable for her to turn to other human beings for physical touch. Autism is a medical condition that develops in childhood and causes issues in forming relationships and communicating with other people. Even though the idea of physical contact was repulsive, Grandin still craved the stimulating feeling of touch. This generated a feeling of "skin hunger," which is the desire to be touched after a long period of deprivation. There were cases during WW II where babies in orphanages developed "failure to thrive" or even died when deprived of human contact. Out of the five senses, touch is the only one essential for human life. Grandin is an autism consultant and activist for the livestock industry on animal behavior. Due to her distance from human touch, she turned to an invention of hers. She created a "squeeze box," which is a deep-pressure device designed to calm hypersensitive persons. There are positive results on people with autistic disorder, animals, and even college students. Grandin visited her aunt's ranch, where she noted the way cattle were confined in a squeeze chute for inoculation, the cattle immediately calmed down after pressure was distributed, which is where the concept for the squeeze box came from.

In the 1950s psychologist, Harry Harlow, observed the dependency of monkeys and maternal deprivation. Harlow compared his experimental subjects to children and press reports universally treated his findings as major statements about love and development in human beings. These monkey deprivation experiments had powerful implications for any and all separations of mothers and infants, including adoption. A baby monkey spent most of its life span comforted by its cloth mother and less than one hour a day on the wire mother. It had been predicted that the variable on contact comfort would be very important but had no clue that it outweighed all the other variables including nursing. As the baby monkey was frightened by Harlow in the experiment, it went running to the safety of its cloth mother, was comforted, and then all the fear disappeared.

At the prime year of being a five-year-old, I wouldn't say that social skills are nearly up to par, perhaps adequate, but we can definitely learn from the interactions of youngsters. Psychologist, Erik Erikson, developed one of the most well-known and influential theories of development. Ego identity is one of the main elements of Erikson's psychosocial stage theory. Through social interaction, it is the conscious sense of self that we develop. Our ego identity rapidly evolves, and is influenced by experiences throughout the course of our life. Social interaction at a young age usually consists of exchanging giggles or holding hands. These beginning years of life on earth are naïve, transparent, and pure. Children don't sugarcoat what they are thinking; it just comes straight out, uncensored. They have no reason for censorship because children have yet to adapt to that practice in their lives. I believe children are adored, not just for their appearance, but for their quality of innocence...something that, over time, slowly diminishes from us all.

Why is social interaction important for humans? Communicating and interaction is vital

to the continuation of our society. It doesn't matter if we are speaking in English, Spanish, Italian, or sign-language; we are all united under one common goal—communicating and exchange of ideas, either verbally or physically. It is proven that we need human interaction and the comfort of our loved ones to sustain living a contented life.

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