

The Power of Face-to-Face and Communal Acts

by

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this thesis is to explore the topic of social integration through face-to-face interaction within the scope of communal acts. Social integration is an integral part of being human. Humans are a social species, therefore, they learn more about themselves and Others by partaking in social gatherings in the community. People have a higher chance of living healthier lives with less health implications if they are socially integrated. This thesis presents a discussion of face-to-face and communal acts and substantial evidence as to why we need more face-to-face with others in the community. Studies and research supporting this claim are presented. Implications of the current research are considered, including the limited research which reveal that social integration is linked to better health. Recommendations highlight the need for clinicians to be adept at working with this population and to do so with a therapeutic stance that reflects the developmental needs of individuals struggling to socialize.

Keywords; social integration; face-to-face; society; community; others; health

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DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my loved ones—for your continuous courage, support, affection and laughter I am immensely grateful. And to those special connections made within the community, thank you for helping me in all things great and small.

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INTRODUCTION

Devote yourself to your community around you and devote yourself to creating something that gives you purpose and meaning.

-Mitch Albom

Keyes (1996) defines social integration as the perception of the amount and quality of relationships to people and institutions in one's society (p. 28). Social integration consists of two elements: first, people differ in the way they feel they belong to an entity such as their neighborhood, community, and society; second, people differ in the way they share something in common with the people who constitute the social entities (e.g., neighborhood) (Keyes, 1996, pp. 28-29). People who feel more social integration probably feel stronger bonds to their community and feel as though they belong to their communities, because they are like the other people and feel accepted by their communities (Keyes, 1996, p. 29).

Keyes (1996) states, "meaningfulness is the perception of the organization and the operation of the social world." (p. 28) Meaningfulness of society is the perception of the quality of the world in which one lives, which includes the concern for knowing about the world. Meaningfulness of society is the positive counterpart to meaninglessness in life (Seeman, 1959, 1991). Meaninglessness entails judgments that the world is incomprehensible, unpredictable, and complicated, whereas meaningfulness of society parallels the concept of anomie (Keyes, 1996, p. 28). Lacking clear guidelines about how to act socially coincides with seeing the world as chaotic and incomprehensible (p. 28). Therefore, caring about and understanding society and obtaining meaning from one's social surroundings are similar to feeling that one has a purpose in life. According to Ryff (1989), healthy people view their life as a coherent whole, lived according to a self-conceived plan (p. 1072). People care about the kind of life they live and find

their lives understandable. Similarly, healthy people probably care about the world in which they live and, at minimum, try to make sense of it (Keyes, 1996, p. 28).

Statement of the Problem

Face-to-face interaction is fundamentally the most powerful human experience we have with others. In this thesis I aim to capture fundamental themes in social integration research and to explore how face-to-face interaction via communal acts, such as volunteering, intersect with better over-all health and less feelings of loneliness. My intention is to explain the complexity of social integration by interpreting the ways in which a lack of social integration can lead to a potentially shorter life span and additional health risks such as depression, heart disease, obesity and a lower immune function, and higher neuroendocrine and cardiovascular activity (Seeman, 1996). I will highlight the challenges to the experience of social integration in an individualistic society and will explore those aspects of growing technologies that affect social integration. In order to best serve the needs of people who have social anxiety, we as counsellors need to understand the social and cultural dynamics that influence individuals. This creates a more holistic and informed perspective through which we may offer more relevant and effective therapeutic supports.

Purpose of this Thesis

The purpose of this thesis is to illustrate the powerful effects of face-to-face interaction through communal acts and explore how we can use social technologies to further promote these acts, promoting social integration. I hope to endow the reader with a comprehensive, evidence based understanding of this field of inquiry. Such knowledge may then assist the reader to more effectively support those who suffer from social isolation or loneliness and find ways to be more socially integrated into the community.

Research Question

Can the face-to-face encounter and interaction through communal acts benefit an individual's overall health (emotional, mental and physical)?

Situating the Author

Through my own experiences, I can attest to the immense benefits of feeling connected to the community and how healing it can be to interact with others. There is a certain level of spontaneity in the spirit of meeting and connecting with Others, something that I find to be inspiring, raw, and admirably sincere. Social inclusion as well as social isolation has been no stranger to me and I suppose it has been this certain closeness to belonging that has resulted in my continued relationship with these questions and dialogues about connection with others.

I have worked in schools for close to nine years and I have volunteered in many programs helping people in our community. I maintain that these supports surrounding face-to-face interaction via communal acts allow us to enrich each other's lives and that they have the potential to drastically influence the human experience and better ones overall health. I would argue that our general discomfort with issues surrounding individualism and less communal involvement, persists as a function of broader sociocultural influences and that we could collectively improve in our ability to engage with one another by bringing awareness to the growing number of people who feel lonely in western civilizations such as Canada (Keyes, 1996).

Structure of the Thesis

This thesis is organized into four chapters which each explore a different dimension of the importance of face-to-face interaction between persons and the contemporary challenges to this. The overarching theme of the research in this thesis is the significance of the communal acts

of face-to-face engagement to emotional, mental and physical health. The thesis undertakes to propose conceptions of social integration that enable, predict, support and explain emotional, mental and physical wellbeing.

Chapter 1 presents the work of two theorists central to the themes to be developed. French philosopher, Emmanuel Lévinas (1906-1995) is the first of these. His philosophy is grounded in the importance of the encounter with, and the primacy of one's responsibility to "the Other". His notion of a literal *face-to-face* (*rapport de face à face*) encounter underlies much of what will follow. This is followed by a review of the work of French sociologist, Emile Durkheim (1858-1917), particularly in light of his thinking about anomie, social health, and social development. Further reflections on the concept of socialization and related concerns will be considered.

In Chapter 2, *Longing for Connection*, will address "two movements of longing": the desire for more meaning and purpose in life and the desire to experience spiritual connection. In this chapter, we will explore the relationship between these two movements and the importance of relational engagement, of human connection.

Chapter 3 will examine the profound impacts, both positive and negative, of certain aspects of Technology, primarily those of social media. The role of digital technology in contemporary life is highly ambivalent and has important implications for both the mental health and wellbeing of individuals and society as a whole. The provocative work of American scholar, Donna Haraway (1944-), particularly the essay "A Cyborg Manifesto" will be evoked as an illuminating gloss on these impacts.

Chapter 4: *The Power of Proximity and Research*, ranges widely, exploring the relationship between ego, compassion and social integration; the power of proximity and

communication; and some of the research that explores the role of face-to-face engagement in both mental and physical wellbeing, including the relationship between social inclusivity and telomeres, a region of chromosomes associated with immunity and longevity. The thesis will be concluded with some reflections on the implications upon practical applications of what has been explored here. From these implications, ideas for emphasizing or increasing *face-to-face* engagement more through communal acts in this era, increasingly dominated by Technology, are made. Suggestions for counsellors and clients are offered.

Chapter 1

Classic Origins of Social Health

In this chapter I will be exploring a number of concepts and ideas with respect to face-to-face interactions and social development and wellbeing. Each of these is related to the centrality of social relationship and engagement for optimal human development. First, I will discuss Emmanuel Lévinas' concept of face-to-face (*rapport de face à face*) and how humankind can benefit from the face-to-face experience through communal acts. I will then outline Emile Durkheim's concept of *anomie* and his research on isolation in the industrial world and further explore the classic origins of social health, social development and socialization. Finally, I will define the five dimensions of social wellbeing, which have been created for optimal functioning in society.

What is Face-to-Face?

Face-to-face quite literally means being within another's sight or presence, and presumably having some sort of social contact (Cohen, 1986). Phenomenologically, the face-to-face relation (*rapport de face à face*) is a concept the French philosopher Emmanuel Lévinas came up with to help define human sociality. It means that, ethically, people are responsible to one-another in the face-to-face encounter and that the human face orders and ordains us (Cohen, 1986, p. 6). By responsible, Levinas means that when humans are face-to-face with one-another they tend to be more responsible (polite, manners, share, etc.) versus when they are alone, there is no one they need to face but themselves. Levinas explains that, face-to-face interaction calls the subject into giving and serving the 'Other,' which refers to; a fellow citizen, a widow, an orphan, a magistrate, but the Other is never only that, never only a phenomenon. (Cohen, 1986, p.7). Parenthetically, the word "Other" is capitalized in this context to acknowledge that Others

are themselves and not merely a reflection of the self (Llewelyn, 2003). The capitalization also serves to emphasize that the place of the other in relation to oneself is to be honoured and privileged, as at least equal to the self, whose existence is similarly elevated through the use of the capital “I”. Philosophers have historically concentrated more on the relationship to things rather than to human beings, while Lévinas was interested in how the face of the Other is much closer to us than *things* (Cohen, 1986). For Levinas what makes the other person Other is not a unique attribute or a unique combination of attributes but the quality of alterity itself (Cohen, 1986, p.7). According to Cohen (1986), “the Other is an ‘other’ because her/his alterity is absolute, indeterminate and indeterminable... In addition, the Other is always a specific Other; a fellow citizen, a widow, an orphan, a magistrate, but the Other is never only that, never only a phenomenon” (p.7).

Lévinas disliked the fact that most Western or European and American philosophies took the self as the starting point of all understanding and perception (Hand, 2008). Many philosophers acknowledged that such a perspective leads people to think of Others as if they were reflections of the self or something to be known or to be figured out (p. 51). This relationship to Others has a certain cost associated with it, namely a tendency to try to dominate Others because they are different. This difference is usually a source of negative feelings or discomfort, ranging from simple discomfort to anger and hatred, which we then struggle to free ourselves from (Bloechl, 2000). It could be argued that even in love we often attempt to overcome the discomfort of our partner’s other-ness by means of control and controlling behaviour Santore, D. (2008).

Ultimately this desire to dominate others or to make them more like ourselves leads to great suffering, including: war, colonialism, slavery, abuse and other social ills (Bloechl, 2000,

p. 45). This desire was, and still is, related to the idea that populations or groups will, more or less, act to satisfy their own needs (p. 46). Lévinas was uncomfortable with this notion and recognized that many religious and non-western philosophical traditions had a less self-centered worldview, which includes but is not limited to the Abrahamic religions of Judaism, Christianity and Islam as well as eastern philosophies/religions such as Buddhism, Hinduism and Sikhism (Osho, Welden & Amore, 1992). These religions all teach that we should not be selfish and that we should connect with, have compassion for, and love others even when they are not like us (Osho et al., 1992). Not only is this teaching part of these religious traditions, it is a fundamentally core doctrine, and accordingly necessary for the survival of humanity, whereas the idea of knowing another from the Western philosophical perspective is a kind of invasion or reshaping of their sense of self (Weng, Fox, Shackman, Stodola, Caldwell, Olson and Davidson, 2013).

Lévinas suggested that we think of our encounters with Others in terms of revelation, and that seeing Others as revealing themselves is to allow the Other to be absolutely *other* (Bloechl, 2000, p. 46). In other words, their existence is not necessarily dependent on ours.

This idea of the Other that Lévinas highlights is important because we can only develop a sense of self through the encounters we have with Others (Llewelyn, 2003, p. 57). The first encounter most people have is with their mother/caregiver(s) and/or members of their family. Eventually, our knowledge of our identity and ourselves expands because of encounters with Others. Similarly, societies develop their sense of culture through interactions with Others, which includes Other societies and the physical environment (p. 58).

The concept of the face is central to the survival of humanity because the face of the Other is a simple reminder that we are not the center of the universe, as it forces us to recognize

that there is something beyond our sense of self, which was formed only because of our encounters with Others (Bloechl, 2000, p. 51). The face of the Other is what brings us awareness of the world and from this perspective Levinas pointed out that if we think of the Other as being entirely separate from ourselves then we not only give them the right to exist but we invite ourselves to act ethically towards them and to love them because our own face calls Others in the same way (p. 50).

Unfortunately, some struggle with this view and with the decision to take responsibility. As a result, they may ignore it or rebel against it, which strains the sense of self and leads to many forms of violence and abuse (Bloechl, 2000, pp. 52-53). In media studies, literary studies, sociology, psychology, and other social sciences, language is used to describe and analyze conflict and the ways in which societies and individuals seek to control and dominate Others on this level. The Others may be “outsiders” or those who are not part of mainstream society or do not hold power, which includes immigrants, minority races and ethnic groups, and/or people with disabilities, additionally those in mainstream society are Others to “outsiders” as well (Bradfield, 2016). This view that people different from us are “Other” is a reflection of mainstream cultural biases and can have complex results; some are overtly hostile while others are more positive (Bradfield, 2016, p. 2). An example of a seemingly extreme tradition, that in fact remains quite mainstream in college fraternities today (predominately in America), is to have blackface parties that recall and replay aspects of North American history and culture, such as slavery and racially motivated police brutality (Finkenstaedt, 1994).

It is critical that we increase our awareness and pay attention to how the Other is portrayed to ensure that we are sensitive to disturbing traditions and mindful of social justice issues. When we take this on as a personal responsibility, we are in a better position to improve

the conditions and treatment of the Others among us, especially those of us who are in positions of privilege. By immersing ourselves in more communal acts with Others we are increasing our exposure to *face-to-face* experiences with people in the community. It is within these encounters that learning and growth occurs. Though we may recognize differences within these encounters, it is also an opportunity to encounter similarities (Keyes, 1998). Thus, it is more than just an interaction, it is an opportunity to clarify misunderstandings or biases one may have about the Other, whether it is with respect to race, ethnicity, gender, social status and so on. Essentially, the more an individual is integrated into society through communal acts the more likely they are to interact with Others and possibly rid themselves of ingrained biases or stereotypes (Keyes, 1996, pp. 30-31). This allows for growth and a deeper understanding of what it feels like and means to be part of a community in a modern and diverse society.

Emile Durkheim and the Negative effects of the Industrial Revolution

Durkheim's concept of anomie referred to societal conditions and their impact on the individual (Durkheim, 1951). Furthermore, anomie is derived from the Greek word Nomos, which means absence of law (Durkheim, 1951). As cited in Keyes (1996), according to Durkheim, periods of economic, social, or political change result in a state of anomie or normlessness, and periods of anomie can lead to deregulation of desires and suffering (p. 26). Anomie, therefore, was a social condition that encouraged a personal state within an individual (Keyes, 1996, p. 26). Durkheim hypothesized that, as an expression of suffering, societies and groups experience an increase in suicide rates (Hodwitz & Frey, 2016). Thus, he highlighted the vital importance to stay connected to one another through communal acts in society.

In the last 45 years, global suicide rates have increased 60%, leading to one successful suicide every 40 seconds (World Health Organization, 2013). Within the context of these

increasing rates, suicide has captured the attention of theorists and health professionals alike. Health professionals tend to focus on preventative measures and protective factors and theoretical research tends to focus on explanatory and predictive factors (Hodwitz & Frey, 2016). Therefore, the research of sociologists like Durkheim is critical as it explores the ways society views the growing crisis of social isolation today, and what we can do as individuals to minimize our experience of social isolation.

Durkheim was particularly struck by the effects of the economic system. Eventually, the idea that the economic system was influencing people's minds in peculiar ways – literally driving them to suicide in ever-increasing numbers – would become the focus of his entire scholarly career (Hodwitz & Frey, 2016). This was the immense insight unveiled in Durkheim's most important work entitled "Suicide," which was published in 1897. The book chronicled the remarkable and tragic discovery that suicide rates appear to skyrocket once a nation has become industrialized and consumer capitalism takes control (Hodwitz & Frey, 2016, pp. 236-237).

Durkheim observed that the suicide rate in Britain during the late 1800s was double that of Italy and yet Britain was "richer" meaning it was more industrialized and controlled by consumer capitalism (Durkheim, 1951). Durkheim's focus on suicide was intended to shed light on a more general level of unhappiness and despair in society. According to Hodwitz and Frey (2016) "suicide was the horrific tip of the iceberg of mental distress, which increased drastically as a result of modern capitalism" (p. 237). Durkheim attempted to explain why people had become so unhappy in modern societies by highlighting five crucial factors: (a) individualization; (b) excessive hope; (c) too much freedom; (d) atheism; and (e) weakening of the nation and family (Hodwitz & Frey, 2016, p. 237).

In traditional societies people's identities are closely tied to belonging to a clan or a class. However, modern capitalism places more value on individualism –the first factor – which states that it is up to the individual to choose every aspect of their life, including what religion to practice, who to marry, what to do for work, and so on. According to Durkheim (1951), if things go well it is common for the individual to take all of the credit, however if things go badly the individual finds themselves in a difficult and often lonely position, for it means that there is no one else to blame but themselves (Hodwitz & Frey, 2016, p. 238). Unfortunately, without collaboration and a sense of community, failure results in the individual being judged poorly, which is a burden of life in modern capitalism.

The second factor, excessive hope, is related to capitalism as the beliefs imparted by a capitalist society revolve around success and becoming successful. “Capitalism raises hopes that everyone, with enough effort and hard work, can become the ‘boss’ and obtain limitless luxury” (Hodwitz & Frey, 2016, p. 237). The opportunities within a modern capitalist society may seem endless, but so are the possibilities for disappointment. It is easy to become deeply dissatisfied if an individual is unable to achieve their goals or dreams, which is often a result of many socioeconomic and systemic factors (Hodwitz & Frey, 2016, p. 237). Not being able to reach certain financial goals can result in tormenting thoughts for individuals, which is an aspect that Durkheim found to be an annoyance of capitalism (Abrutyn & Mueller, 2014).

The third factor outlined is that we have too much freedom. One of the complaints against traditional societies – strongly voiced in Romantic literature – was that people needed more ‘freedom’ and rebellious types complained that there were far too many social norms that told you what to do (Abrutyn, & Mueller, 2014, p. 328). Capitalism – following the earlier efforts of Romantic rebels – relentlessly undermined social norms (Abrutyn, & Mueller, 2014, p.

329). As cities become more complex, more anonymous and more diverse, people do not have as much in common with each other, and the rules or norms that individuals and groups may have internalised are no longer applicable. More choice and freedom is involved in making decision about such things as: What kind of career should you have? Where should you live? What kind of holiday should you go on? What is a marriage supposed to be like? How should you bring up children? In very confident moments we like to think of ourselves as fully up to the task of reinventing ourselves, or working everything out in our lives. However, Durkheim (1951) argues that, in reality, we are often simply too tired, too busy, too uncertain – and there is nowhere to turn. Under capitalism, the collective answers get weaker, less specific (Abrutyn, & Mueller, 2014, p. 329), which often leave us feeling hopeless or lost.

The fourth factor discussed is atheism. Although Durkheim was an atheist himself, he worried that religion had become implausible just as its communal side would have been most necessary to repair the fraying social fabric (Abrutyn, & Mueller, 2014, p. 330) Despite its factual errors, Durkheim appreciated the sense of community that religion offered: as cited in Abrutyn & Mueller (2014) “Religion gave men a perception of a world beyond this earth where everything would be rectified; this prospect made inequalities less noticeable, it stopped men from feeling aggrieved” (p. 329) Durkheim also saw that religion created deep bonds between people. For example, a king and a peasant worshipped the same God and they prayed in the same building using the same words. In a religious setting, they were offered precisely the same sacraments and riches, status and power were of no direct spiritual value.

Capitalism had nothing to replace this with. Science certainly did not offer the same opportunities for powerful, shared experiences (Abrutyn, & Mueller, 2014, p. 330). Durkheim was especially taken with elaborate religious rituals that demanded participation and created a

strong sense of belonging. For instance, a tribe might worship its totem, or men might undergo a complex process of initiation. According to Abrutyn, & Mueller (2014), the tragedy – in Durkheim’s eyes – was that we had done away with religion at precisely the time when we most needed its collective consoling dimensions and had nothing much to put in its place (p. 332).

Today in America we are seeing politicians being idolized, often in spite of moral indecency. The number of church followers is decreasing in rural suburban parts of America where attendance to Sunday Church (a communal act) was once a time for individuals and families to connect with Others in their community (Wilcox, 2012). As Wagner (2018) illustrates, it currently seems as though a number of political rally supporters (specifically Trump rally supporters) are opting out of attending church to spend time preparing for political rallies, which has incidentally coincided with the increase in crime in these rural areas. This supports Durkheim’s belief that a lack of religious involvement can lead to violence and hate, and a lack of unity within a community.

Weakening of the nation and of the family is the fifth and final factor. In the 19th century, it seemed as though patriotism was growing to be so powerful and intense that it might take up the sense of belonging and shared devotion that once had been supplied by religion (Wagner, 2018). Similarly, family seemed to offer the experience of belonging that society needed as well. However, Durkheim was unconvinced and claimed that although we invest hugely in our families, they are not able to provide the same stability or access to the wider community (Hodwitz & Frey, 2016, p. 252). As cited by Hodwitz and Frey (2016), Durkheim, argued that our society was individualistic, and stated that by adulthood children are hardly tied to their parents; they do not expect to work alongside them nor do they expect their social circles to overlap (p. 252). In the modern world people are longing for a larger sense of belonging, a

feeling that they are part of something more valuable than just themselves (Hodwitz & Frey, 2016, p. 252).

Durkheim was a diagnostician of our ills and showed us that modern economies put tremendous pressures on individuals and left them vulnerable to authoritarian guidance and lacking communal solace (Mueller & Abrutyn, 2016). Durkheim grappled with how we can create new ways of belonging, how we can take some of the pressure off individuals and find a better balance between freedom and solidarity, and how we can generate ideologies that will allow us not to be so tough on ourselves for our failures and our setbacks (Mueller & Abrutyn, 2016, p. 880).

Social Development

In this section, factors that pertain to social development will be covered, exploring the role of nature and nurture in influencing a person's social development, the effects of social isolation, and the importance of care and human interaction in early years for proper emotional and mental development. Furthermore, five theories of development will be outlined: (a) Freud's Id, Ego, and Superego; (b) Piaget's Four Stages of Cognitive Development; (c) Kohlberg and Gilligan's Theories of Moral Development; (d) Mead's Theory of Self; and (e) Erik Erikson's Life Stage Theory.

In order to understand social development, one must consider the age-old question: nature or nurture? Nature is the part of human behavior that is biologically determined and instinctive (Chen et al., 2018). Much of human behavior, however, is not instinctive – it comes instead from how one is nurtured (Chen et. al., 2018, p. 605). The nurture part of behavior is based on the people and environment in which one is raised, and it is this second part – the social

environment that determines human behavior – that sociologists tend to investigate and have many different theories about (Chen et. al., 2018, p. 605).

People develop their personalities and learn about society and culture through a social process – known as socialization (Grusec, 2011). This raises the question of what happens if one does not have people around? As Grusec (2011) points out, social isolation affects our emotional and cognitive development (p. 245). To get a more in depth glimpse into how and why social isolation affects us, I will outline sociologist Kingsley Davis' (1947) case study on Anna. In the winter of 1938, a social worker investigated a report of child neglect on a small Pennsylvania farm and found, hidden in a storage shed, a five-year-old girl named Anna. She was unwanted by the family she was born into and was passed from house to house among neighbors and strangers for the first six months of her life. Eventually, she ended up being kept in a shed with no human contact other than to receive food. Davis (1947) observed Anna for years after her rescue and wrote about the effects of this upbringing on her development.

When Anna was first rescued, she was unable to speak or smile, and was completely unresponsive to human interaction (Davis, 1947, p. 433). According to Davis, even after years of education and medical attention, her mental development at age eight was less than that of a typical two-year old, and she died of hemorrhagic jaundice at the age of 10. Davis' (1947) study of how isolation affects young children was only one of many that have shown how a lack of socialization affects children's ability to develop language skills, social skills, and emotional stability, ultimately affecting them for the rest of their lives.

Freud's Id, Ego, and Superego

There are different theories about how we develop personalities, cognitive skills, and moral behaviors, many of which come from psychologists such as Sigmund Freud. In one of

Freud's main theories, which pertained to the development of personalities, he claimed that we are born with something called an *id* (Sletvold, 2013). The id can be thought of as one's most basic, unconscious drives, such as a desire for food, comfort, and attention (Sletvold, 2013, p. 1023). For example, all that babies know is what they want, but since they cannot communicate that, they will continue to cry until they get what they want. Nevertheless, people develop the ego and superego to balance the id (Sletvold, 2013, p. 1024). According to Freud, the ego is the voice of reason, and the individuals' conscious efforts to rein in the pleasure-seeking id. The superego is made up of the cultural values and norms that we internalize and use to guide decision making.

Metaphorically, if the id is the devil on your shoulder, the superego is the angel on the other shoulder, and the ego is the mediator who intervenes when the angel and devil start fighting. It could be argued that much of Freud's work has not stood the test of time. However, his theories about how society affects our development and personality have influenced researchers and educators for many years (Sletvold, 2013, p. 1026). Swiss psychologist Jean Piaget is one such researcher influenced by Freud's work, and spent much of his career in the early 1900s studying cognitive development (Carey, Zaitchik & Bascandziev, 2015).

Piaget's Four Stages of Cognitive Development

While researching ways to measure children's intelligence, Piaget noticed that children of similar ages tend to make similar mistakes (Carey, et al., 2015, p. 37). Piaget suggested that there were four stages of development: sensorimotor stage, preoperational stage, concrete operational stage and the formal operational stage (Carey, et. al., 2015, p. 37). Psychologist Lawrence Kohlberg (2018) later expanded on Piaget's model of cognitive development to incorporate stages of moral development. Kohlberg (2018) claims that a child's sense of what is "right"

begins with what he called the pre-conventional stage, in which “right” is merely what feels good to the child. According to Kohlberg (2018), they then experience the conventional stage, where what is right is defined by what society and the people around them tell them is right. Finally, children end up in the post-conventional stage, where they begin to consider more abstract ethical concepts aside from just right or wrong (Kohlberg, 2008, p. 12).

Kohlberg and Gilligan’s Theories of Moral Development

At such a young age, a child does not realize that grabbing the candy bar they want at the store is wrong – because they are used to getting what they want. However, a combination of societal norms and guidance from parents/caregivers convinces them that stealing is wrong (Kohlberg, 2008, p. 12). According to Kohlberg (2008), over time, “children learn that morals have gray areas. For instance, stealing is wrong if it is just for fun, however, it might be considered ‘less wrong’ if you are stealing to feed your family.” (p. 14). Eventually, children reach a point where they are able to think about things like freedom and justice, and realize that societal norms regarding what is right may not always line up with these principles or their personal stances and beliefs (Kohlberg, 2008, p. 16).

What if we consider laws around who is considered eligible for marriage? It was only until very recently that gay marriages became legal in Canada. A ruling of the Court of Appeal for Ontario on June 10, 2003, declared the federal definition of marriage unconstitutional and thus opened the door for gay and lesbian couples to legally marry in Ontario (MacIntosh, Reissing & Andruff, 2010). Other provinces followed suit until the federal Civil Marriage Act on July 20, 2005, made same-sex marriage legal nationwide (MacIntosh et al., 2010, p. 80). On the ground that something is the law, is it right? How someone feels about this question may depend on a number of factors, including their socialization.

Carol Gilligan, an American psychologist who started out as a research assistant and collaborator with Kohlberg, explored how girls and boys experience these stages differently (as cited in Gottschalk, 2007). She realized that Kohlberg's original studies were limited to male subjects, which may have biased his findings (Gottschalk, 2007, p. 6). When she expanded the research to look at both male and female children, she found that boys tended to emphasize formal rules to define right and wrong, which she called a justice perspective, whereas girls tended to emphasize the role of interpersonal reasoning in moral decisions, which she called a care and responsibility perspective (Gottschalk, 2007, pp. 6-7).

Gilligan argued that these differences stem from the cultural conditioning that girls receive, to fulfill ideals of femininity (as cited in Gottschalk, 2007, p. 6). She thought that we socialize girls to be more nurturing and empathetic, which influences their moral interpretation of behavior. Furthermore, Gottschalk (2007) argued that women in our society tend to naturally form more bonds and friendships with people in the community (p. 6). What does this tell us about our society? Although, Gottschalk (2007) argued that women in our society tend to naturally form more bonds in the community I believe Gottschalk is speaking to women's tendencies in a general sense. Throughout my nine years of work experience in schools and the community, I have come across women who are isolated just as much as men are, if not more. It is important to acknowledge that social isolation is not subject to a particular gender, but rather it is a societal problem as we are becoming more individualistic and less collectivist (Holt-Lunstad, Smith, & Layton, 2010).

Mead's Theory of Self

American sociologist George Herbert Mead, was one of the founders of the sociological paradigm known as symbolic interactionism (Athens, 2007). Mead believed that we figure out

who we are through other people, and his work focused on how we develop a “self.” (Athens, 2007, p. 137). All social interactions invite one to see themselves as someone else might see them – something Mead described as “taking on the role of others.” (Athens, 2007, p.137).

According to Mead’s model, we learn through imitation; we watch how others behave and try to behave like them (Athens, 2007, p.138). The last stage in Mead’s model occurs when we learn how to take on multiple roles in multiple situations (Athens, 2007, p.138). In this phase, we weigh our self and our actions not against one specific role, but against a ‘generalized Other’ – basically, a manifestation of all of our culture’s norms and expectations (Athens, 2007, p.138).

Erik Erikson’s Life Stage Theory

Another theorist, German-born psychologist Erik Erikson, came up with his own eight-stage theory of development that starts from infancy and goes until old age. Erikson based these stages on the key challenge of each period of life (as cited in Knight, 2017). When one is a toddler, for example, their biggest challenge is getting what they want – or as Erikson puts it, gaining autonomy, which helps one build skills and confidence in their abilities (Knight, 2017, p. 1049). Once they become a young adult they have plenty of autonomy, however bigger challenges arise, such as developing intimate relationships, falling in love, finding friends and so on (Knight, 2017, p. 1049). Every life stage, from when one is born to when one dies, features different expectations that inform what we see as markers of social development (Knight, 2017, p. 1050). For instance, moving out, getting married, and having children are all societal markers of social development as an adult (Knight, 2017, p. 1050). An individual's quality of socialization will determine how exactly they perform the role of “adult,” therefore, different agents of socialization shape who we really end up being (Knight, 2017, p. 1050).

The theories discussed above focus on how we evolve in childhood. Although each of these theories are slightly different, they are important because it has been determined that early childhood experiences have lasting effects into adulthood, and influence how we socialize, and connect with Others. In the next section I will be covering the topic of socialization to further expand on social development.

Socialization

In this section on socialization, the following topics will be explored: (a) the five different types of socialization; (b) anticipatory socialization from the individual's family; (c) the "hidden curriculum" in schools and James Coleman's study of teenage social groups. I will also explore the role of media in socialization, and finally, discuss total institutions and how they can act as a form of re-socialization.

The social process through which we develop our personalities and human potential, and learn about our society and culture is known as socialization (Lahire, 2017). All of us are surrounded by people, and those people become a part of how we act and what we value. Regardless of the many theories, we are socialized by interacting with *Others* (Pinker, 2015). With this in mind, there are some questions that we might want to consider: From whom do we learn about the social world? Which people and institutions have made us who we are today?

Socialization is a life-long process, and it begins in our families. An individual's family is their first source of what is known as primary socialization – one's first experiences with language, values, beliefs, behaviors, and norms of your society (Pinker, 2015, p. 73). French sociologist, Pierre Bourdieu, referred to cultural capital as the non-financial assets that help people succeed in the world, which are first taught to children by their parents and guardians (Francis, 2015). As Bourdieu argues, some of this cultural capital may seem fairly innocuous,

such as reading a book to a child (Laberge, 1995). However, it teaches the value of reading as much as it helps the child begin to recognize written language (Laberge, 1995, p. 136).

Moreover, the presence of books in the home is associated with children doing well in school. According to Laberge (1995), another important form of socialization that starts in the home is gender socialization, which involves learning the psychological and social traits associated with a person's sex (p. 137).

Gender socialization starts from the moment that parents decide on a gendered name or when nurses decide to place a pink or blue hat on the baby. Other group memberships, such as race and class, are important parts of initial socialization as well. Race socialization is the process through which children learn the behaviors, values, and attitudes associated with racial groups. According to Mazzone, Thornberg, Stefanelli, Cadei, & Caravita, (2018), racial discrimination is partly the result of what parents teach their children about members of other races (p. 403) Similarly Lahire (2017) states, class socialization as one which teaches the norms, values, traits, and behaviors we develop based on the social class our family is considered to be a part of (pp. 2-3). This may help explain, for instance, why more middle and upper-class children go to college; not only can the families afford to send them, but these children are expected to attend because they are raised in a home that normalizes college attendance, based on their class membership.

Gender, race, and class socialization are all examples of anticipatory socialization – that is the social process in which people learn to take on the values and standards of the groups that they plan to join (Shields, 2002). Shields (2002) illustrates, that small children anticipate becoming adults, and they learn to play the part by watching their parents (p. 366). However,

children also learn through secondary socialization, the process through which children become socialized outside the home, within society at large. This often starts with school.

According to Shields (2002), schools are often children's first introduction to bureaucracies, as well as to systems of rules that require them to be in certain places at certain times, or act in ways that may be different from what they learned at home (p. 366). The educational experience comes with what sociologists call a hidden curriculum – that is, an education in norms, values, and beliefs that are passed along through schooling (Shields, 2002, pp. 366-367). For instance, a spelling bee's main goal is to teach literacy and encourage kids to learn how to spell, but something as seemingly benign as a spelling bee can have many hidden lessons that stick with children. Inman & Mayes (1999) contend that competitions in school teach students that doing better than their peers is rewarding, and it enforces the idea that the world has winners and losers (pp. 16-17). When your only socialization is your family, you just get one perspective on race, class, religion, politics, and so on. However, once the individual goes out into the world, they meet many people from many backgrounds, and the exposure to such diversity teaches them about factors such as race and ethnicity, social class, disability, and gender and sexuality from various perspectives and stances (Santrock & Santrock, 2014). This allows us to explore and choose our own worldviews and beliefs, which may be different from that of our family.

School becomes not just a classroom for academic subjects, but also for learning about different kinds of people. Furthermore, schools are also where children are exposed to one of the most defining aspects of school-age life: peer groups. According to, Santrock & Santrock (2014), peer groups are social groups whose members have interests, social positions, and usually age in common (p. 254). As individuals get older, their peer group has a massive impact on the

socialization process (Santrock & Santrock, 2014, p. 255). Hence, the importance of communal acts and continued face-to-face connection.

In the late 1950s, American sociologist James Coleman (2006) began studying teenagers – how they interacted and how their social lives affected their education. He interviewed teenagers in nine high schools in the Midwest, asking them questions about what social group they identified with and who else they considered members of their group (Coleman, 2006). Based on these interviews, Coleman (2006) identified four main social categories: (a) nerds, (b) jocks, (c) leading crowd, and (d) burnouts (p. 41). With these social categories came social prescriptions – behaviors that were expected of people in those groups (Coleman, 2006, pp. 41-42). Coleman (2006) found that certain things were important to the members of certain groups, like being a good dancer, smoking, having money or getting good grades (p. 42). In testing the students' IQs and assessing their grades, Coleman (2006) determined that whom teenagers hung out with affected how well they did in school (p. 42).

In some of the schools, getting good grades was considered an important criterion for the “leading group” – also known as the popular kids – but in other schools, it was not as important. In the schools where good grades were not a sign of popularity, students who scored high on IQ tests actually did worse on their exams than similarly smart students at schools where good grades made you popular (Coleman, 2006). Coleman's study showed that we do not just pick peer groups that fit into our existing traits. Rather, peer groups help mold what traits we end up with.

Family, schools, and peers have been highlighted thus far as some of the main forces that influence someone's socialization, to which media is as well. According to Vaterlaus, Patten, Roche & Young, (2015), media consumption is a strong contributor to people's socialization (p.

151). Both television and the internet are significant parts of North Americans' lives, and how we consume our media is affected by social traits, such as class, race, and age (Vaterlaus, et. Al., 2015, p. 152). A study conducted by Lenhart (2015) found American youth who come from low-income families (\$30,000.00 or less per year) had the highest percentage of social media use (particularly Facebook use) compared to their higher-income counterparts (p. 38). The study's findings are important because it sheds light on how the media we consume will also impact us dramatically.

There are also more forceful types of socialization, such as *total institutions*. Total institutions, a term coined by Erving Goffman, are places where people are completely cut off from the outside world, and face strict rules for how they must behave (Goodman, 2013). The term "total institution" refers to places like the military, prisons, boarding schools, or psychiatric institutions that control all aspects of their residents' lives – how they dress, how they speak, where they eat, where they sleep (Goodman, 2013, p. 81). In a total institution, residents undergo resocialization, where their environment is carefully controlled to encourage them to develop a new set of norms, values, or beliefs (Goodman, 2013, p. 81). Such institutions do this by breaking down the individuals' existing identity and then using rewards and punishments to build up a whole new belief system (Goodman, 2013, p. 81). According to Godfrey & Brewis (2018), soldiers are good examples of this, as they are given the same haircut and uniform, expected to reply to questions in the same way, and are put through the same grueling exercises (p. 654). This process re-socializes the soldiers and places extreme value on their identity within the group, making them more willing to value self-sacrifice if their unit is in danger (Godfrey & Brewis, 2018, p. 663).

Essentially, people and institutions have been powerful influences in shaping each one of us (Goodman, 2013, p. 82). Some further questions we might want to individually consider include: Who has been the biggest influence on our socialization? Who do we think that we have influenced?

Five Dimensions of Social Well-Being

According to Keyes (1996) there are five dimensions of social well-being that may capture the social side of human wellness. Social well-being is an individuals' assessment of their place in society; how they feel their world functions, and how they see themselves operating in their communities (Keyes, 1998). Analyzing an individual's social connectedness is therefore critical for understanding optimal functioning. Keyes (1996), uses two terms to describe two types of people in society. First, the high scorer, is the person who acknowledges and accepts the complexity of the world, thinks the world is intelligible, believes that society and social events are somewhat logical and predictable, finds society interesting and cares about what is happening in their community (Keyes, 1996, p. 63). Second, the low scorer, is the person, according to Keyes (1996) who sees society and social events as irrelevant, does not care about what happens in their society or community, and views society as chaotic, unpredictable, and incomprehensible (p. 63).

Keyes (1996) outlines the first dimension of social well-being as the *meaningfulness* of society, which is the perception of the quality of the world in which one lives. Meaningfulness concerns the perception of the organization and the operation of the social world, including the concern for knowing about the world (Keyes, 1996). High scorers care about the kind of world they live in and they understand what is going on in the world, despite the ailments that occur daily (Keyes, 1996, p. 28). They also understand that they do not live in a safe and perfect world;

they simply make sense of the bad, as well as the good, whereas low scorers care less about their society and they believe that they live in a chaotic and ambiguous world (Keyes, 1996, p. 28).

Meaningfulness of society is the positive counterpart to meaninglessness in life (Seeman, 1991), which parallels Durkheim's (1951) concept of anomie; meaninglessness entails judgments that the world is incomprehensible, unpredictable, and complicated (Keyes, 1996, p. 29). Lacking clear guidelines about how to act socially coincides with seeing the world as chaotic and incomprehensible (Keyes, 1998). On the other hand, caring about understanding society and obtaining meaning from one's social surroundings are similar to feelings that one has a purpose in life (Settersten, 2015). According to Ryff (1989), healthy people view their life as a coherent whole, lived according to a self-conceived plan (p. 1070). Similarly, Cacioppo, Cacioppo, Capitanio and Cole (2015), suggest that healthy people care about the kind of life they live and the world in which they live, and at minimum, try to make sense of it.

The second dimension of social well-being is *social integration*, which deals with the perception of the amount and quality of relationships with people and institutions in one's society (Keyes, 1998, p. 122) Social integration consists of two elements: first, people vary in the degree to which they feel they belong to an entity such as their neighborhood, community, and society; and second, people differ in the degree to which they feel they share something in common with the people who constitute the social entities (e.g., neighborhood) (Keyes, 1996, p. 30). Individuals who are more socially integrated might have stronger bonds to their community and feel as though they belong because they feel as though they are similar to the other people in their community and will therefore be accepted (Keyes, 1996). In this case, high scorers see their communities as a reflection of themselves while low scorers do not feel as though they belong to society, or have connections with other people (p. 30)

Social integration resembles social cohesion, which Durkheim (1951) theorized as a tantamount to coordination of activity. Cohesion occurs inasmuch as people are integrated through norms and a sentiment of fondness for their society (Keyes, 1996, pp. 30-31). Society operates smoothly because people are connected to each other through means that coordinate activity (Cacioppo et al., 2015; 2014). According to Seeman (1991), cultural estrangement is the disjunction between the self and the society in which one lives (p. 305). Society provides values, attitudes, and lifestyles.

Social integration may be the social counterpart to psychological autonomy and independence, which Ryff (1989) highlights as markers of optimal functioning. Autonomous individuals guide their behavior from their own standards and resist pressures from the outside to conform and go along with others; from this perspective, healthy people, in the psychological sense, are not afraid to think for themselves and to reveal who they really are to other people (Keyes, 1996, pp. 30-31)

Existential philosophers like Kierkegaard, Heidegger, and Sartre analyzed the conception of society as a menace to living an authentic life (Macquarrie, 1972). Therefore, too much reliance on society and Others is unfavorable to becoming an individual, since the emphasis – at least in Western cultures – is on the development of uniqueness (Keyes, 1996; Macquarrie, 1972) Indeed, according to Keyes (1996), “the psychological conception of optimal functioning qua autonomy conceives of society and others as a potential threat to realizing one’s own unique potential” (p.30).

In other words, development and socialization in Western cultures serve, for the most part, to distinguish one’s self from others, mentally, physically and emotionally (Markus & Cross, 1990; Triandis, 1989). On the contrary, social well-being through social integration favors

the psychological ideal of personal independence, because the healthy person feels unique and autonomous yet still feels that she/he belongs to a community (Keyes, 1996, p. 31).

The third dimension of social well-being is *acceptance* of Others, which pertains to the individual's perception of other people and involves evaluating the character and qualities of people (Keyes, 1996). Within this dimension, Keyes (1996) states that high scorers tend to trust other people, and believe that others can be altruistic, industrious, and are generally happy. On the contrary, low scorers tend to have the opposing view of human nature (Keyes, 1996, p. 31). This conception of the acceptance of others is not unique as several researchers have attempted to measure attitudes towards Others in one guise or another (Wrightsmann, 1991). As social beings, people confront other human beings daily, so the ability to accept Others in all of their complexity is a criterion of health (Keyes, 1996). In fact, several approaches to mental health and functioning propose acceptance of oneself as the staple of good health (Keyes, 1996, p. 31) and a prerequisite for acceptance of Others. Ryff (1989) argues that people who feel good about themselves and accept both the good and the bad aspects of their lives exemplify good mental health. Fundamentally, acceptance of Others is the social counterpart to self acceptance.

The fourth dimension of social well-being is *social contribution*, which is the degree to which people feel that they have something of value to give to the world. Furthermore, social contribution is the belief that one is a vital member of society, and that they can contribute to the successful operation of the community (Keyes, 1996, p. 32). This concept also closely resembles Alfred Adler's (1938) early formulation of the centrality of *Gemeinschaftsgefühl*, or social interest. Self-efficacy is the belief that one can perform certain behaviors, or the belief that one can accomplish certain objectives (Gecas, 1989). Social responsibility involves feeling normative pressures and personal obligations to present behavior that contributes to the operation

of society (Keyes, 1996). Social contribution pertains to what degree people feel that whatever they do in the world is valued by society and contributes to the commonwealth. High scorers care about whether their activity is socially valuable and believe that others see their activity as valuable (Keyes, 1996).

Generally speaking, people strive to realize their potential through activities like work, but unfortunately, workers often feel alienated from their work and their colleagues, which also leads to estrangement from oneself (Seeman, 1983). Activities such as work are a means to obtain rewarding outcomes, however, what people feel when they perform their occupational duties does not coincide with what they feel when they obtain the rewards and compensation for their work (Keyes, 1996, p. 32). The concepts of alienation and self-estrangement suggest that social well-being consists of a sense of social contribution, or that one is a valued and productive member of society (Harvey, 2018).

Social contribution also coincides with Erikson's (1968) description of generativity during middle adulthood. This is because, between the ages of 40 and 60 years old, people confront the task of preparing the next generation of youth to be productive members of society. According to Erikson regardless of whether they are parents, generative individuals tend to volunteer, tutor youth, attempt formally and informally to help others, and try to convey to others their experience and wisdom. Performing generative acts is part of social contribution. However, contribution includes the generic perception that one is a valuable member of society, and that one feels that others value whatever one has done or is capable of doing (Harvey, 2018, p. 140).

The fifth dimension of social well-being is *social actualization*, which is an individuals' perception of the trajectory of the social conditions surrounding them (Kenrick, 2017).

Furthermore, according to Kenrick (2017), it is the extent to which a person feels concerned about the evolution of society (p. 520). Beyond concern, social actualization is the strength of one's belief that society has the potential to grow, and includes the belief that institutions and people in society actively try to improve themselves (Kenrick, 2017, p. 521). Social actualization therefore includes the belief that society is dynamic and perfectible, and assumes that people judge society and its progress based on how change or social inertia makes them feel (Maslow, 1943).

Kenrick (2017) and Keyes (1996) are presenting that people who score high on social actualization care about the evolution of society (p. 520, p. 63). These individuals either see the world getting better or they at least see the possibility for change and improvement. On the other hand, low scorers are more similar to social fatalists; they do not care about whether society is evolving, nor do they believe that society can get better (Keyes, 1996, p. 63). In short, healthy people are hopeful about the condition and future of society, and less healthy or unhealthy people feel despair and cynicism about the world and its future (Keyes, 1996, p. 63).

People vary in the extent to which they feel they possess control over themselves and their surroundings (Keyes, 1996, p. 35). Social actualization is paramount to self-determination because social actualization is the individual's sense that the world we live in controls its destiny." (Keyes, 1996, p. 33). More so, Keyes (1996) suggests, "social actualization is the social counterpart to the perception of personal growth (p. 34). For Ryff (1989), personal growth is related to individuals' openness to new experiences and their desire and effort to continually grow. While it captures the ideas of growth and development, social actualization refers to individuals' perception of the growth and development of the world around them (Ryff, 1989, p. 1071),

It can be argued that the medical and psychological models of mental health overlook the social side of the conception and expression of mental health and well-being (Atkinson, 2011). This continues to be problematic because as multiple sources have shown, the quality of social integration an individual experiences is a useful measure/indicator of one's mental health.

Levinas (cited in Cohen, 1986) was quite unique in his exaltation of the Other. Levinas reminded us that not only do we exist in relation to other persons but also that this relationship invites us into an ethical stance of love and care for the Other. Durkheim, often cited (e.g., Wikipedia) as the “principal architect of modern social science”, explored, among other things, the effects of anomie, a breakdown of social norms resulting in personal unrest, alienation, and uncertainty. His diagnosis of the ills of society (including his extensive research on the phenomenon of suicide) includes an understanding of the importance of community solidarity. The figures identified in the history of social development have also each contributed significantly to our understanding of the centrality of the Other in individual development. This overview provides a foundation for what will follow.

Chapter 2

Longing for Connection

"The intellect wants a summary meaning—all well and good for the purposeful nature of the mind. But the soul craves depth of reflection, many layers of meaning, nuances without end, references and allusions and prefiguration's. All these enrich the texture of an image or story and please the soul by giving it much food for rumination." (Moore, 1994, *Care of the Soul* p. 235)

In this chapter I will be exploring the need for people to experience spiritual connection and how this can be achieved through communal acts. Humankind has been exploring spirituality and its meaning and purpose since the beginning of time. Many humans are aware that something greater exists and possess a desire to be connected to it. The search for spiritual connection is a part of the human condition. Thomas Moore (1994) wrote in *Care of the Soul*, "When the soul is neglected we experience obsessions, addictions, violence, loss of meaning and emotional pain. By caring for the soul, we can find relief from our distress and discover deep satisfaction and pleasure in life" (p. 190). The idea of a soul has captured the imagination of many people for centuries and continues to be a mystery and much-studied area.

Two Movements of Longing

For many in the present-day there is a desire to search for a deeper or more spiritual meaning in life. There are significant reasons for this development and in order to expand on this, two movements will be explained, which illustrate the longing for spiritual connection and the ways it can be obtained through communal acts.

First movement of longing. The first movement addresses the desire for more meaning and purpose in life, and the second movement focuses on the desire to experience spiritual connection, with both movements attending to the ways in which these desires can be obtained

through communal acts. Throughout this exploration, questions come to life, such as: How do we make sense of our life? What are we living for? How do we live a more meaningful and purposeful life?

In order to understand such questions, the rapid growth of science and technology as well as their dominant place in contemporary society must be taken into consideration. It appears now that one decade of change in our age is the equivalent to centuries of change in previous generations. Sigmund Freud suggested in the early part of the 20th century that our need for religion and spirituality would diminish with advances in science and technology (as cited in Kronemyer, 2011) Furthermore, he believed we would come to know ourselves better. However, we are more spiritually hungry than ever before, which brings forth that argument that Freud was wrong in his assumptions about religion and spirituality. Although there have been tremendous technological advances, humankind is still left feeling a sense of emptiness, and continues to wonder about meaning and purpose. There is considerable psychological anguish in the world and humans look for ways to alleviate this anguish.

Through my life experiences, I have observed that many of North Americans are isolated in comparison to some places around the world, where communal living is more prominent. For example, as an Indo-Canadian woman, when I compare India's social society to Canada's, I notice a drastic difference in the degree of communal living. Canada appears to be more of an individualistic society, in contrast to my experience of India as a communal society: "Within India, it is generally agreed that family interests should take precedence over individual interests. Because of their age and experience, parents are considered better qualified to determine which decision is in the interest of the family... furthermore, longer the stay in Canada, greater the preference for individualistic norms." (Dhruvarajan, 1993, pp. 65-68).

Although, with the rise of technology and free trade, parts of India are becoming more individualistic, I continue to experience a spiritual sense of community across the land. In India people seem to inherently know that in order to live a healthy life they need to participate in communal acts. However, in Canada this does not appear to be as much of the culture and participation in communal acts does not seem to be a valued part of a healthy lifestyle.

Dhruvarajan (1993) states, “the industrial revolution, capitalism, urbanization, materialism and individualism have all contributed to the division of communities.” (p. 68). Therefore, political, social and economic forces have acted against the creation and maintenance of a sense of community. As a result, humans have become isolated from one another and aloneness or loneliness have become more prevalent. This sense of isolation has contributed to a growing number of people feeling lonely, empty and depressed (Fischer, 2011)

Humans have a genuine desire to be in relationships with others. It is in our nature to be social, to be connected to each other. As Setterson (2015) poignantly highlights, “All of human nature’s deepest principles have social roots: Longing and belonging. Appreciation. Compassion. Mattering. Purpose. These and other central needs involve or are met by other people” (p. 223). However, because of our struggle with isolation and alienation, one of our societal responses has been to use technology as a distraction. While the ways of exchanging information rapidly grow with new and interesting ways of communication, this way of communication is unlikely to satisfy our deepest desires.

A study conducted by Capitano, Hawkley, Cole, & Cacioppo (2014) examined how loneliness was influenced both by social network size using a population-based sample of older adults, and by the extent to which individuals believed that their daily social interactions reflected their own choice. Participants were drawn from year five of the Chicago Health, Aging,

and Social Relations Study (CHASRS) - a longitudinal, population-based study of non-Hispanic White, African American, and non-Black Latino American persons born between 1935 and 1952. Of the 163 participants, 23 failed to provide data for one or more of the primary measures used in this study (i.e., loneliness, social choice, network size), resulting in a sample size of 140 (Cacioppo, Hawkley, Ernst, Burleson and Berntson, 2006).

Loneliness and social network size were measured in the first survey packet of the day, and participants reported on social choices in a daily diary completed at home at bedtime on each of three consecutive days. Loneliness was assessed using the well-validated 20-item revised UCLA Loneliness Scale (Russell, Peplau, Cutrona, 1980). Participants completed standard psychological surveys, health and medication interviews, anthropometric measurements, and a cardiovascular protocol (Capitanio et al., 2014). In daily diaries, participants were asked how much time they spent that day: (a) alone, with no one around; (b) around others, but not communicating with them; and (c) with others, talking or listening to them. For each type of social situation, participants were asked to what extent the time was spent this way by choice (range=1, not at all my choice, to 5, completely my choice) (Capitanio et al., 2014).

Results revealed three distinct clusters of individuals: (a) individuals with large networks who believed they had high choice were lowest in loneliness, (b) individuals with small social networks who believed they had low choice were highest in loneliness, and (c) the remaining two groups were intermediate and equivalent in loneliness. The results showed that loneliness was highest among those with small networks who felt they had little choice over their levels of social interaction, lowest among those with large networks who felt they had more choice over their levels of interaction, and intermediate among those that possessed either, but not both, high levels of social interaction and choice over those levels (Capitanio et al., 2014).

This study verifies the importance of communal acts because when we are socially connected to others we are communicating with them; talking or listening to them *face to face*, which decreases levels of loneliness. Loneliness was highest among those with small networks, who felt they had little choice over their levels of social interaction. It appears as though, there could be many factors that contribute to why these individuals felt they had little choice over their levels of social interaction, such as mobility, disability, communication barriers, socio economic status, and psychological health. However, I am suggesting, if these individuals could access communal activities to increase their amount of communication with others they would feel less lonely and more integrated, therefore more hopeful about life. We want to know and be known by others. We want to care for others and be cared for by others.

Second movement of longing.

The second movement is the desire to experience spiritual connection and how it can be obtained through communal acts. The definition of *spiritual* varies, so for the benefit of my argument I will use Watts' (2017) explanation of what it means to be spiritual: first, to believe there is more to the world than meets the eye, more than the mere material. Second, attend to ones inner life -- to mental and emotional states -- in the hopes of gaining a certain kind of self-knowledge. Third, to value the following virtues: being compassionate, empathetic and open-hearted (Watts, 2017, p. 1). While the first movement, the longing for meaning, might be met by such secular goals as social and financial status, or even social service, this second longing refers to transcendent, more intangible goals, goals related to the ultimate values that are often referred to Spirit"

It appears that religious traditions often hold that humankind's identity is intricately related to an 'Absolute Other,' higher being, or God. According to Hart (2005), the very idea of

God is of something that sustains and sharpens what we mean by experience, with the result that the experience of God requires a God of experience. Again, Hart (2005) suggests that God and experience are intersecting, notions that match together like hand in glove. Correspondingly, God or a higher power or spiritual connection can be experienced through communal acts, such as volunteering, because it involves being compassionate, empathetic and open-hearted with others in a shared space.

While there are many questions about religion, for centuries and up until now, people have not given up on their need and desire to experience a higher power. Spirituality has an affiliation with religion, however, spirituality is connected to how one perceives the world around him or her, one's interactions with living things and or one's work in community (Watts, 2017, p. 1). Spirituality in the modern age is not necessarily a belief in a higher power, but rather a belief that what we do on this earth has a great impact on our spiritual wellbeing (Hart, 2005).

Major religions of the world, such as Buddhism, Islam, Judaism, Sikhism, Christianity, among others, are based on a view that a higher power exists and that we are connected to this power. These spiritualities are often seen as rational, dogmatic, intellectual and for the most part driven by male thought (De Cruz, 2018). New-age spirituality is seen as non-traditional, less rational and more focused on lived-experience (Watts, 2017, p. 1). In response to a felt emptiness, new-age spirituality responds with a seeking for enlightenment and intimate contact with the supernatural. This spirituality has diverse views of a higher power or God, often presenting God as a force or a power within humans.

The sensed need for spirituality in North America becomes intricately connected to contemporary current events, including the election of Donald Trump in the United States of America (USA). Bradford Wilcox (2012), a sociologist at the University of Virginia, concluded

that, “rates of religious attendance have fallen more than twice as much among whites without a college degree as among those who graduated college” (p. 228). These non-college-educated whites are the Trump base, supporting him at every rally (Wagner, 2018). Establishing causation is difficult, but we know that culturally conservative white Americans who are disengaged from church, experience less economic success and more family breakdown than those who remain connected, and they grow more pessimistic and resentful (Wilcox, 2012, p. 229). Economic characteristics, current and past family characteristics, and attitudes toward premarital sex each explain part of this differential decline (Wilcox, 2012, p. 230).

Today, American society is witnessing the moderately educated white population participating in Trump rallies and reverting to violence and hatred instead of human values, which are normally preached in churches. Religion is becoming increasingly deinstitutionalized among whites with moderate levels of education, which suggests further social marginalization of this group. Furthermore, trends in the labor force, American family life, and attitudes appear to have salient ramifications for organized religion. Sociologists of religion need to once again attend to social stratification in religious life (Wagner, 2018).

Spiritual questions – Who are we? Why are we here? How can we learn to live together in peace and harmony? – all lead to a need for spiritual conversations with others, which, in turn, invite a greater awareness of the dignity and value of all humans. Such an awareness, which is one of the goals of spirituality, awakens greater spiritual freedom, a realization of vulnerability, and values for humility and compassion. Finally, humility and compassion will lead to greater awareness and wonder at the relationship between the self, other, and a higher power.

Spirituality today is not just about religion but is also about psychology (Jaffe, 1990). Carl Jung, the son of a Swiss pastor, looked for alternative approaches to spirituality in

psychotherapy (Jaffe, 1990). Jung concluded that God was a part of a collective unconscious to which all human beings belong (as cited in Jaffe, 1990). Abraham Maslow (1998), an atheist humanist and part of the *human potential movement*, believed that peak experiences of ecstasy were available to everyone. Carl Rogers, a member of a religious family and credited with the *self-realization movement*, believed that the resources to solve our problems resided within us (as cited in Barefield, 1968).

It can be argued that post-modernism has revived our interest in emotion and intuition as valid sources of knowledge. In post-modern discourse, people's perspective on life today changes from an objective, external base to a subjective, internal base (Rousseau, 1991). Many people want to experience life through a sense of self-worth and not from structures imposed by large institutions. Post-modern psychology provides interpretative frameworks to understand people's emotions, behaviors and psychology. Post-modern sociology provides interpretative frameworks to understand how people's emotions, behaviors and psychology are affected by exposure to society (Rousseau, 1991). While people are searching for ways to better understand themselves, I believe there is also a desire to be better connected with others. Such spirituality teaches us that there is more to life than materialism, consumerism, economy and entertainment (Moore, 2016).

Without a spirituality that respects the integrity and wholeness of people and community, the human experience will be without intention and unity of purpose. Unfortunately, for as long as this continues, we will remain at the mercy of external forces that do not have our spiritual well-being as their focus. On the bright side, communal acts can bring our society together, allowing for more *face-to-face* and more interaction with the 'Other,' which will bring about

positive experiences, increase levels of spiritual connection and decrease levels of loneliness (Capitano et al., 2014).

I am suggesting that North American society needs to consider more spiritual ways of life, which encompass varied forms of communal acts, such as ritual or ceremony-based practices, both of which play powerful roles in creating both social cohesion and connection to Spirit. Ceremony is an essential part of traditional Native healing where physical and spiritual health are intimately connected, body and spirit must heal together (Schwing, 2008). Additionally, other cultures share the importance of rituals and ceremonies, however, in terms of Native culture, traditional healing ceremonies promote wellness by reflecting Native conceptions of Spirit, Creator, and the Universe. (Schwing, 2008, p. 73). An example of a ritual or ceremony which anyone (regardless of what religious or cultural identity they belong to) can participate in is community yoga. The practice of yoga can be both a spiritual and communal act (Villate, 2015). Yoga classes are considered a ritual for one's peace of mind and heart while connecting with others in the community. (Villate, 2015, 44). Many yoga studios also promote inclusivity by having further events which promote socialization within their participants. By participating in activities such as yoga, it may address the sense of alienation and discouragement addressed earlier in the chapter. By participating in communal acts, one can regain a sense of integrity and the need to reconnect with the self and others. Spiritual connection, in other words, is social integration obtained through participation in communal acts.

Chapter 3

Social Media and Human Connection

No exploration of the importance of face-to-face, communal engagement would be complete without at least some reference to the role of technology and technological change. Indeed, this topic alone is worthy of a much extensive treatment. The social and personal effects of technology are often well understood only after significant time has passed. Simply consider the effects of innovations from the printing press, the steam engine, the telephone, and then automobile. The impact of digital technology, including the role of the Internet, is current, ongoing, and omnipresent (Bridle, 2018). What follows will of necessity be broad-brush and limited in scope.

McIntosh (2011), reflecting John MacMurray's writing about technology and science, states, "We shall use science to get what we want and to do what we feel most worth doing. And if we begin to feel that nothing is really worth doing we shall use science to amuse ourselves and to distract our minds from the deadly boredom of living a life that has lost its meaning because we have lost our faith" (p.150). It is astounding that this quote is from the early 19th century, and speaks quite accurately to what science, technology and in particular, social media are being used for today. It appears that MacMurray had a great deal of insight into the nature of human beings and how science would become a tool for amusement and distraction. Today, we are dealing with a hybridization of technologies that further expands the already universal nature of media as a means of communication (Chadwick, 2013).

In this chapter I will be exploring some aspects of these issues. I will be limiting my inquiry to two areas in particular. Presented first are some reflections regarding the ambivalent effects of social media on persons and society. I will outline the positive and negative effects of

social media as one aspect of technology, and its relation to human connection. Then, a few reflections on Donna Haraway's (1985) *A Cyborg Manifesto* may assist us in charting a way forward in these times of rapid change. Her work relates to advancements in technology, our perception of technology, and our understanding of its evolution.

It appears that many people are presently finding themselves feeling lost, alone, and depressed in North America's fast paced society (Capitanio et al., 2014). The individualistic value system, with its emphasis on independence and individual success unfortunately encourages social media use. While it is a form of socializing the individual remains alone in the physical/humanistic sense (Adolf & Deicke, 2014). According to Adolf & Deicke (2014), excessive social media use can be a lonely experience, especially when living in an individualistic society, because it is easier to become more isolated from the *face-to-face* experience (p. 2). Individualization, as a social theoretical concept, represents a historical process that results in increased individual freedom; decisions and actions are increasingly a matter of personal choice and obligation (Scannell, 2007).

Allegedly, for many, life becomes a flexible project that (involuntarily) entails the responsibility of orchestrating one's individual biography (Beck, 1993). Through these decisions an individual defines her/himself and defines her/his position in society. However, individualization does not only refer to the *breakdown* of prior forms of social bonds and structures. Instead, it is composed of a two-fold pattern of *in & out* (Keupp, 2010), which according to Beck (2004, p. 128), includes three important aspects. First, individuals are weak due to their removal from traditionally prescribed social forms. Second, they are confronted with the loss of traditional security; and finally, they are re-embedded through a new type of social commitment (Adolf & Deicke, 2014, p. 4). Beck's (2014) perception is grounded in his concept

of *reflexive modernization*, which suggests a first modernity — industrial society — as leading to the current stage of a second modernity (p. 129). The first modernity instated a disbandment process causing many individuals to be increasingly detached from traditional environments and lifestyles, including strong bonds within families and other powerful social institutions that were the main socializing entities of first modernity (Adolf & Deicke, 2014, p. 4). New societal patterns evolved, in turn demanding the development of new ways of integration. This shift is implied in Beck's conceptualization which addresses the individual's dis-embedding (non-integrating) as well as its re-embedding (integrating) (Beck, 1993, p. 149).

There are interesting parallels in the development of contemporary patterns of social communication. Online communication creates a vast array of possible choices through its variety of sources and content (Adolf & Deicke, 2014, p. 4). Accordingly, individuals are increasingly required to choose among a panoply of contents to be consumed, appropriated and reproduced. This typical account of online communication corresponds with the notion of *reflexive modernity* in general. An individual increasingly constitutes her/himself through his own choices rather than by following predetermined biographical paths (Adolf & Deicke, 2014, pp. 4-5).

With this in mind, there is a widespread argument that the individualistic value system in North America is having negative effects on our wellbeing (McIntosh, 2011 p. 105). For instance, the increased popularity of social media, which is often used in place of *face-to-face* interactions, has drastically changed the way we interact and communicate with one another. It has arguably diminished the prevalence and breadth of in-person interactions. According to a study conducted by Straub, Keil, & Brenner (1997), results showed that a low individualism society possibly predisposes a culture against computer-based communications because these

media mute the group effect, where as a high individualism society has increased use of computer-based communications (p. 4). Furthermore, knowledge workers in collectivist cultures cannot pick up cues about the social situation as readily from computer-based media and, therefore, would be inclined, overall, toward media such as face-to-face across all communications tasks (Straub, Keil, & Brenner, 1997, p. 4). Human beings' desire and preference for human connection has not changed. However, the ways in which human connections are made have evolved over time (Elhai, Dvorak, Levine, and Hall, 2016).

Society is witnessing negative as well as positive effects related to the increased use of social media or social network services. In this paper, social network services will refer to what Kwon and Wen (2010) define as, "...an individual webpage which enables online, human-relationship building by collecting useful information and sharing it with specific or unspecific people" (p. 254). Many social network service sites, such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and so forth, allow their users to join or create groups so that they can interact with others who have similar interests. According to comScore (2007), several major social networking sites experienced dramatic growth in 2007, and today the popularity of social media has grown astronomically. The number of people who feel they are benefiting from social network services is also increasing dramatically (Cunningham, 2012). However, Cunningham (2012) notes that despite the perceived positive impact of the services, there are potential problematic psychological effects of using social network services, and research is still in the early stages (p. 2).

As I continue this exploration, it is important to acknowledge that there are numerous outcomes and consequences that can result from increased social media and technology use, both positive and negative. As Wadhwa (2017) emphasizes, although social media, technology and

other individualistic living dispositions can be used as distractions, it is also possible to connect with members from the community and improve human living conditions by means of technological advancements.

Negative Effects of Social Media

It is unquestionable that digital technology, as it manifests in social media is having a profound effect on global culture. Facebook is but one of many manifestations of this development, but since it is ubiquitous and omnipresent, its influence will be significantly cited in what follows. In August 2009, the number of American visitors to Facebook reached more than 90 million and it was ranked 5th on the Top 50 US Web Properties list (comScore, 2009). This statistic underlines the significance and relevance of what follows.

Academics have disputed the positive and negative impacts of social media for some time; on one end social media allows people to make new connections, expand their networks, and maintain relationships. On the other hand, there is an increase in youth who report being victims of cyber-bullying or cyber-stalking (Cunningham, 2012). Furthermore, these forms of harassment can lead to depression, low self-esteem, and anxiety (Cunningham, 2012, p. 5). The negative effects of cyber-bullying, including the challenges of forming and maintaining relationships in online environments, resulting in the loss of *face-to-face* communication will be addressed in what follows. Additionally, the following questions will be explored: Which population is most at risk with social media exposure and why? Are technological advancements such as social media moving humanity further away from *'face to face'* connection?

It can be argued that contemporary social media systems expose people to a *phony* way of life. Recent studies have found that over 90% of university students have Facebook accounts (Cheung, et al., 2010). While Facebook can be used to facilitate study, students use it mainly to

communicate with friends, look at photos and user profiles of other persons, and to pass the time, avoid boredom and procrastinate (Pempek et al., 2009). It seems that when one is entrenched in social media, a separation of mind and heart occurs, which manifests as a form of distraction (Hollis & Was, 2016). According to a study conducted by Hollis and Was (2016), the distracting nature of social media and technology may greatly increase the likelihood of mind wandering (p.104). They concluded that mind wandering often leads to performance and accuracy errors during activities that are demanding and require concentration. In a study designed to examine the relationships among working memory, interest, mind wandering and performance, 126 participants from a large Midwestern state university completed three complex span tasks, responded to mind-wandering probes while watching two online lectures and rated interest in the lecture topics (Hollis & Was, 2016, p. 106). Higher levels of mind wandering via social media predicted lower levels of academic performance. Lower levels of working memory capacity predicted higher levels of mind wandering and lower levels of academic performance (Hollis & Was, 2016, p. 110). Higher levels of topic interest predicted lower levels of mind wandering. A novel mind wandering probe, thinking about or using another technology such as social media, accounted for 29% of all off-task thinking (Hollis & Was, 2016, p. 110).

Despite (or because of) feelings such as emptiness, people continue to seek fulfillment through social media, in the form of 'likes', comments and number of friends (Ahuja, 2013). Some argue that humans have set the intellect free with the overuse of social media, without much regard for its implications for our neurology, psychology, and overall social and emotional wellbeing (Skues, et al., 2012).

Social media usage by adolescents is at an all-time high. Current research shows that over half of teenagers aged 13-17 (56%) go online several times a day, 12% report once-a-day

use, 6% of teens reported going online only weekly, and 2% go online less often (Lenhart, 2015). Studies show that adolescents who belong to lower income households are more likely to have higher social media usage (Johnson, 2017, p. 8). Facebook is the most popular social media site, with over 71% of usage from teenagers aged 13-17, followed by Instagram with 13% and Snapchat with 2% (Lenhart, 2015, p. 2). Smart devices have helped increase access to these social media sites.

The adolescent population is at high risk for negative social media exposure because the average teenager spends 7.5 hours a day on the Internet, accessing social media outlets (Ahuja, 2013.) The Internet has gone from being an additional source of communication to a primary source of communication for most teenagers (Johnson, 2017). Also, as mentioned, teenagers have easier access to the Internet due to mediums such as cell phones, laptops, and handheld devices. This not only puts them at risk of becoming a victim of cyber bullying but has also created a cyber-bullying epidemic among teenagers around the world (Johnson, 2017). Studies have shown a positive relationship between the increase in Internet time and an increased risk of cyber bullying victimization, particularly by strangers (Lee, 2017).

Although adolescents are most at risk for cyber bullying, the ‘Gamergate’ controversy is an example of how cyber bullying can also affect adults. The ‘Gamergate’ case is a well-known cyber bullying case, which verifies the lasting effects social media can have on a targeted individual. Eron Gjoni accused his former girlfriend, on his blog, of having sexual intercourse with a prominent gaming journalist, Nathan Grayson, to obtain better news coverage for her game (Kaplan, 2014). A blog is a webpage where users can publish information on a range of topics. Blogs are an outgrowth of online diaries, where people keep track of their personal lives, and are typically interactive and allow users to leave comments (Cunningham, 2012, p. 4)

Critics began to use the Twitter hashtag (#) gamergate to argue that gaming journalists were too connected to the gaming industry, actively colluding with the industry to promote a social justice agenda and focusing on cultural or social aspects of games, as opposed to assessing their technical and play features (Perreault et al., 2018) However, as Massanari (2015) explains, the hashtag was used predominately to target and harass women. It was also used to harass minorities in game development by means of death threats and releasing the personal information of game developers and critics (Chess & Shaw, 2015). Gjoni's former girlfriend experienced depression, anxiety and suicidal ideation after being targeted and cyberbullied (Perreault & Vos, 2018).

Studies have shown the negative effects of cyber bullying on adolescents, which include depression, anxiety, low self-esteem, absences from school, and increases in suicidal ideation (Johnson, 2017). Cyber bullying has contributed to widespread mental health concerns among teenagers. The new emphasis on cyber bullying and adolescent suicides has been stimulated by current news media highlighting the connection between cyber bullying and adolescent suicides (Nixon, 2014). Research shows that the primary causes and conditions of cyber bullying include: anonymity, approval, boredom, instigate jealousy, no perceived consequences or projection of feelings, protection, reinvention of self, and revenge (Notar, 2013). Anonymity is a major contributing factor to cyber bullying as it allows individuals to bully or harass someone without having to take responsibility for their actions. On the contrary, traditional bullying is less prevalent because an individual does not have anonymity and is forced to come *face-to-face* with their victim and is viewed as responsible for their actions.

In order to decrease the negative effects of social media such as cyber bullying, preventative measures must be put into place, such as an increase in age restrictions on social

media sites and more parental and or caretaker involvement and approval. According to Consumer Reports, an estimated 7.5 million preteens – including five million under the age of 10 – are part of the social network in violation of Facebook's terms of service (Farrell, 2011). A study funded by Microsoft Research in Cambridge reported that many parents aided under age users by lying about their child's age or merely being unaware of Facebook's age limits (Farrell, 2011). According to Microsoft, 78% of parents said they would let their child join a website in violation of age requirements; only 53% of parents said they knew the site had a minimum age and only half of those knew that it was 13 years of age (Farrell, 2011, p. 2). There is something inherently wrong with this, and if any change is to be made with respect to cyberbullying, caretakers and parents need to be more educated and aware of the repercussions of early social media exposure.

It is crucial for caretakers and or parents to become more involved in their child's social life, as it reinforces and encourages adolescents to engage with the caretaker and/or parent, especially if they are being cyberbullied. It is also important for caretakers and/or parents to provide enough supervision whilst adolescents are using the internet. It would be beneficial for adolescents to be more actively involved with their community through leisure activities, such as joining sports teams, recreational centers, music programs, art programs, and so on. Access to these types of activities contributes to why kids from higher socioeconomic status spent less time online, because many community activities today cost money. Therefore, government funding for such important programs should be considered a necessity. In addition to decreasing the opportunity for cyberbullying, involvement in leisure activities provide greater likelihood for children and adolescents to connect with others *face-to-face*. This allows for the opportunity to meet more adolescents of a similar age in a safe environment, to learn new things, and most

importantly, to decrease their chances of becoming depressed or lonely (Capitanio, Hawkey, et. Al, 2014)

The shift away from *face-to-face* communication to online communication has formed a new idiosyncratic and potentially harmful dynamic in social relationships for teenagers, including cyberbullying, and internet harassment (Lenhart, 2015). Social media, such as Facebook, is changing the way adolescents communicate with each other. Lenhart (2015) documents how adolescents are accessing these social media websites more frequently and for such extended periods of time that it increases exposure to the harmful effects of cyber-bullying and internet harassment, which include loneliness, anxiety, depression, and suicidal ideation (p. 4).

Although Facebook is a popular and influential form of social media, some argue that it is important to be critical of Facebook, especially in the areas of commercialism and privacy (Cunningham, 2012, p. 3). Since Facebook relies on advertising revenue to support its business model, much of Facebook users' personal information is provided to advertisers, which can lead to data mining, or the use of personal information to market products (Cunningham, 2012, p. 3).

North American society tends to value logic over emotion. However, feelings, inclinations and impulses drive us and help determine direction in our lives (Pavlovich, & Krahnke, 2012). Empathy, therefore, it is important to distinguish the movement of one's emotional way of life from ones' logical way of life and not simply rely on one's logic-mental ideas, a shift referred to as emotional intelligence (Goleman, 2012). It is critical for humans to be in touch with how they are feeling when sitting for hours behind a screen. If one is feeling alone, depressed or unmotivated after hours of technology exposure via social media then it is safe to

say that social media is having negative effects on their personal drive, feeling of connectedness, and/or mood (Lin, 1999, p. 479).

As people become less intimate with their fundamental emotions, it appears that they can lose their capacity to understand the meaning of life and the importance of intimate relationships (Khvorostianov, & Remennick, 2017). Contrary to this belief, it could be argued that becoming less intimate with one's emotions does not necessarily mean they will lose the capacity to understand the importance of intimate relationships. Regardless, studies conducted suggest that when people who are connected to their reality – their emotions - their community – they derive benefits from helping others, such as reduced distress (Cialdini, Darby, & Vincent, 1973; Midlarsky, 1991) and improved health (Schwartz & Sendor, 2000).

Although there are a number of repercussions and negative effects resulting from the increase of technology and social media exposure, it is important to also acknowledge some of the benefits. In the next section positive effects of social media will be presented such as ways in which the social media platform can be used to engage communities and bring forth the realities from around the world without censoring via news channels etc.

Positive Effects of Social Media

Social media has been instrumental in creating what Howard Rheingold terms “smart mobs,” to which users can announce social protest for enacting social change (as cited in Cunningham, 2012, p. 58). Additionally, social media has created new jobs and contributed to economic development by allowing companies to better market to the public. Accordingly, it is important to ask the questions: Can social media use be beneficial? And if so, how?

In this section, the following concepts will be explored: (a) Distraction and the ways in which it was manifested prior to social media – before social network sites (SNSs), people read

newspapers and/or spoke over the telephone to distract themselves; (b) The positive outcomes of SNSs and its connection to democracy - through social media people can share things they see happening, that mainstream news media does not reflect; (c) Online platforms and how they are helping people find romantic connections who would otherwise find it very difficult to date; (d) Social capital and its formation and maintenance; and (e) the encouragement afforded via the emergence of online groups to further face-to-face interaction through communal acts.

Many scholars across the world are studying the effects of social network sites not only on individuals, but also on society as a whole. Facebook has hired hundreds of students who have acquired PhDs out of top universities to study the social effects of social network sites (SNSs). The questions at the forefront of these studies remain, “are SNSs beneficial for us? Do SNSs encourage further face-to-face interaction through communal acts?”

Boyd and Ellison (2007) describe SNSs as web-based services, and describe some of the purposes they serve:

....[SNSs] allow individuals to construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system then articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and view and navigate their list of connections and those made by others within the system” (p. 211).

Essentially, SNSs are promoting social engagement by using the web as an avenue. On the contrary, the very common narrative we read, see and hear of today is that social media has negative effects on our health. But does it really? Is it just our perception that it has negative effects on our health? Do we need to understand and learn ways to use SNSs in a healthy manner?

According to Elhai et al. (2016), some of the population indicates having anxious feelings after being on social media; however, anxiety generally has existed for before we had technology, the first known use of the term, according to Miriam Webster was in the 15th Century., beginning in the early 20th century, and possibly even earlier. The evolution of the telephone, now commonplace throughout society, provides an example of how people react to the introduction of any new and major technology. Concerns regarding social media were also relevant to the telephone, following Alexander Graham Bell's patent of the device in 1876. The same themes have emerged again and again: awe, skepticism, fear, and contempt are all pit stops on the way to world-wide normalization (Pool,1983). The telephone was criticized because it was believed that it would lead to a rude and ill-mannered society, as one could easily be interrupted while having a conversation over the phone (Pool, 1983).

Did it lead to a rude yet civil society? The answer to this question is subjective and opinions will differ depending on whom one asks. However, as Haraway (2016) asserts, technology was created by humans for human use and if we consider history, the human species has always been 'rude yet civil' (p. 67). With this in mind, one could argue that the telephone did not have a negative impact. In fact, its creation had many positive benefits. Needless to mention, there is complexity and subjectivity in such matters. The debate around the creation of the telephone is related to social media because many people today (including educators and researchers) believe that technologies such as social media are detrimental to our health. However, what if we learn to work with it for the betterment of the human experience, and as much as possible resist and overcome the negative connotations associated with technological developments? Given the importance of face-to-face interaction within communal acts, it is vital to acknowledge and understand how social technologies are transforming the nature of face-to-

face interaction. I suggest that we use the social media platforms beyond online communication by creating safe online groups via Facebook, Instagram etc., which encourage group members to meet face-to-face in shared communal acts such as volunteering, safe rallies, group activities etc. (____).

Among young adults, relationships with peers are important both for generating offline benefits, commonly referred to as social capital, and for psychosocial development (Vaterlaus, Patten, Roche, & Young, 2015). Social capital is an elastic construct used to describe the benefits one receives from one's relationships with other people (Lin, 1999, p. 471).

Boyd & Ellison (2007) suggest that intense Facebook use is closely related to the formation and maintenance of social capital. There is growing scientific evidence that social media can be beneficial (p. 220). In a survey of undergraduates at a large university, Facebook use was found to be correlated with distinct measures of social capital, including bridging social capital; which highlights the informational benefits of a heterogeneous network of weak ties and bonding social capital; which further highlights emotional benefits from strong ties to close friends and family (Boyd & Ellison, 2007, p. 218). Essentially, young people with lower self-esteem appeared to benefit more from their use of Facebook than those with higher self-esteem (Boyd & Ellison, 2007, p. 221). Furthermore, it gives young people the confidence to engage in face-to-face interactions with like-minded people, for example, charitable local volunteer groups. Findings such as this suggest that more research on the role of social network sites among young adults is needed, since maintaining friendships through SNSs like Facebook may play an important role in psychological development (Boyd & Ellison, 2007, p. 224).

The link between SNSs and the concept of social capital supports the idea that one can acquire resources from social connections. Essentially, being in any social network provides one

with resources. Having social capital can be compared to having neighbors. For instance, in a neighborhood ones' neighbors might help shovel snow, contribute to new worldviews or insights, and provide emotional support or even physical resources, such as money. The idea behind the relationship between social media and social capital is that communication of all forms helps us build relationships. We are aware from a long history in sociology that to build a relationship and to build energy into a friendship means investing time and effort into that relationship.

People often tend to think about the negative effects technology – social media specifically – is having on individuals and society as a whole, but forget about the ways it is benefiting relationships. Optimally, people should be using SNSs to communicate and further *face-to-face* meetings and encounters. A clear benefit of SNSs, such as Facebook, is that it can strengthen weak relational ties with such individuals as colleagues or casual acquaintances. It appears that most people surround themselves with like-minded others. However weak ties with others who may have different ways of viewing the world provide people with different information and alternative perspectives. Gaining exposure to other opinions and views, even within short-lived relationships or interactions, can provide novel information and can ideally help expand ones ability to relate and connect with people from different backgrounds and experiences (Prochazkova & Kret, 2017). There are benefits to remaining open and to understanding those who are different, as it facilitates belonging, self-worth and connectedness (Prochazkova, & Kret, 2017, p. 100). According to Prochazkova & Kret (2017), the remarkable capacity to share others' affective states and empathize with others is the key characteristic of many of humanity's modern achievements (p. 99). The development of social cognition is

closely related to the development of emotional and affective communication between an infant and his or her mother (Adolphs, 2001; Francis et al., 1999; Simpson et al., 2014).

The Internet has become a principal venue for social interaction. There is a growing body of literature suggesting that the Internet and its communication tools facilitate the maintenance of existing relationships (Katz & Rice, 2002); the formation of romantic connections (McKenna, Green, & Gleason, 2002); the construction of virtual community (Rheingold, 1996); and most notably, the emergence of online friendships (Parks & Floyd, 1995). The use of SNSs in the last few years indicates an interest in the potential of the Internet to create new relationships. As previously discussed, Facebook.com is a prime and relevant example of a social network where people communicate and foster friendships with one other in cyberspace (Wang, & Stefanone 2013).

A Cyborg Manifesto

Having reviewed some of the arguments and a range of research highlighting the ambivalent, multifaceted influence of social media in the lives of persons, it may be useful now to assume a more reflective stance. What are some of the broader implications for human and social development embedded within this most recent and ongoing wave of technological shift?

A Cyborg Manifesto, written by Donna Haraway (1985), has been widely influential in society and popular culture, particularly with feminists who now recognize, through Haraway's work, that they have the right to voice concerns and call for change, which can be done effectively by means of the internet (Weed, 1989). Haraway (1985) sees our connections to technology as a cyborg connection between machine and individuals. Society's reliance on the internet – which can certainly be understood as a cyborg, machine-human connection, is a power that might easily be overlooked (Shields, 2006). The majority of people in the western world do

not leave their homes without their smart technology such as cellphones, GPS systems, Apple watches, iPads, and so forth. Robots are becoming more and more integrated in our worlds, public and private, as well as personal and professional. Haraway (2016) has predicted this increase in technology as sculpting our society to become more integrated and connected with our technologies.

Before we can begin to understand *A Cyborg Manifesto*, we need to understand the definition of a cyborg. According to the Oxford Dictionary, a cyborg is a fictional or hypothetical person whose physical abilities are extended beyond normal human limitations by mechanical elements built into the body (“Cyborg”, 1989). Haraway (1985) goes beyond the idea of a fictional character, and refers more to technologies and technological devices, such as the development of iPhones and Androids. There are currently real-life cyborgs that exist today, of which Neil Harbison, who was born colorblind, is an example; he has an implanted antenna on his head, which augments his senses and allows him to hear color (Cyborg Arts, 2018).

Some may think of this as an example of transhumanism, a sort of global thought experiment to explore how we can use technology to expand human capacities of intelligence and lifespan. However, Donna Haraway’s (1985) guide via *Cyborg Manifesto* is much more ordinary, commonplace and contemporary. Haraway’s invitation to her readers is to understand how new technologies have always been a part of humanity (as cited in Haraway, 2016). We are seeing a rapid growth in “smart” technologies. Regardless of the fears that some researchers have concerning the excess use of smart technology, we can see the positive impacts it has had on people’s lives. For example, we are more globally connected because of the internet, social media services and smart technology.

In *A Cyborg Manifesto*, Haraway (1985) elaborates on the idea of the cyborg and talks about it as mixed material semiotic; a mixed physical and ideological tool for thinking about what kinds of futures we want to bring into being. Haraway presents this idea in the following statement:

...by the late twentieth century, our time, a mythic time, we are all chimeras, theorized and fabricated hybrids of machine and organism—in short, cyborgs. The cyborg is our ontology; it gives us our politics. The cyborg is a condensed image of both imagination and material reality, the two joined centers structuring any possibility of historical transformation. (p. 7)

In terms of the cyborg, this is a figure that is both imaginary, which reflects some of our material realities that is simultaneously, both machine and human (Shields, 2006, p. 210).

Haraway (2016) also rejects the idea of original purity and speaks about the fluidity and non-dualistic nature of the cyborg:

The cyborg is a creature in a post-gender world; it has no truck with bisexuality, pre-oedipal symbiosis, unalienated labor, or other seductions to organic wholeness through a final appropriation of all the powers of the parts into a higher unity. In a sense, the cyborg has no origin story in the Western sense. (p. 8)

The cyborg is made of parts, as opposed to a whole. It is part of a body; it is organic material; it is electronic material; it is the circuits on earth and it is of both human life and animal life (Weed, 1989, p. 174). And its presence challenges many fundamental dualisms that we have taken for granted. Haraway (2016) discusses the problematic nature of dualities, which have been deeply rooted in western culture, in the following terms:

To recapitulate, certain dualisms have been persistent in Western traditions; they have all been systemic to the logics and practices of domination of women, people of color, nature, workers, animals—in short, domination of all constituted as others, whose task is to mirror the self. Chief among these troubling dualisms are self/other, mind/body, culture/nature, male/female, civilized/primitive, reality/appearance, whole/part, agent/resource, maker/made, active/passive, right/wrong, truth/illusion, total/partial, God/man. (p. 59)

According to Haraway, there are many dualisms that we can extract from the western tradition of philosophy and science (as cited in Weed, 1989, p. 178). With regards to what Haraway (2016) is posing, what does this mean for the future of technology? Three themes come to mind while reading Haraway's work: (a) what kind of future do we want to build *with* technology; (b) what kind of future do we want to build *for* technology; and (c) *who* might be building these futures?

It appears that Haraway's (2016) first provocation of the cyborg is that we need to rewrite our beginning with the origin myths from western Judeo-Christian heritage; the myth of the 'Garden of Eden' positing an originally pure past, the so-called state of Paradise where human nature and God were unified before a tragic break (Weed, 1989, p. 210). The story of a primordial, unified origin foreshadows the idea that there is only one technology, one person, one philosophy, one future that will come and save us from our brokenness. This idea remains illusory, unfulfilled, and still to be proven. We would be wise to resist the siren call of such hopes.

The story of primordial origins suggests that we belong in, and are part of, a pristine Nature. From this, it follows that any kind of technology that we develop disrupts the innocent

ground, corrupting it, and making us less pure (Weed, 1989, p. 210). However, if we loosen our grasps on the dualistic myths – purity myths and of origin myths – that stress purity as being black and white, we can then make new space for technology as a part of who we are rather than something that is degrading who we think we ought to be.

This also means challenging the enlightenment heritage of mind-body dualism; the belief that our mind is somewhere in our brain and our body is our possession; that our mind knows the world through the mind, but it is not the same as our mind as our person (Katz, 1988). This idea is famously traced back to French philosopher, Rene Descartes (1637) who coined the term ‘Cogito, ergo sum’, which translates to, “I think, therefore I am”, as a first step in demonstrating the attainability of certain knowledge. It is the only statement to survive the test of his methodic doubt (Katz, 1988, p. 5). With “thought”, Descartes (1637) refers to anything marked by awareness or consciousness. Having proved that he is a thinking being, Descartes then goes on to prove that we know the existence of the mind better than we know the existence of the body (Katz, 1988, p. 5). This capacity to reflect on a mind as separate from a body, separate from the world, a mind that stands outside the world, reveals the kinds of dualism that the cyborg demands that we rethink.

It appears that Haraway’s (2016) second provocation of the cyborg emphasizes the need for us to pay attention to the changing face of labor as it goes hand in hand with the advancement and use of technology. The first thing to consider is the feminization of the workforce and the growth of women laboring outside of the home, as part of the global workforce, yet still having to do the work in the home (Shields, 2006, p. 212). The second thing to consider is the descaling differentiation of wages between laborers and managers since much of the work that is being done is not valued. It is not considered work of the mind (Shields, 2006, p. 211). However, with

the rise of social media we are becoming free agents of our work, and if we learn how to use social media and successfully market ourselves, we can make a living by sitting at home behind a computer screen (Cunningham, 2012, p. 3). It is possible for women today to have children and be responsible mothers while still working from home even, for example, as a CEO of an online business. It is because of technological advances such as social media platforms that people can monetize them and find stable employment (Wadhwa, 2017, p. 23).

Haraway's (2016) final provocation is to invent new ways of thinking about technology in society, including what technology means in a society. McIntosh's (2011) understanding of civilization is that we cannot work backwards to a 'pure state' because we have always been a society that is disordered and we always will be (pp. 14-15). Another way of thinking about technology in society has come from science and technology studies, which have given rise to the Actor Network Theory (ANT). In sociology and political science, the idea of a network conveys a fixed set of relations or connections between nodes, whereas the ANT network is quite different: "...an expression to check how much energy, movement and specificity our own reports are able to capture" (Rydin, et al., 2016, p. 5). The sets of associations or relationships between elements are always mobile, requiring work to create and maintain (Rydin, et al., 2016, p. 5). This theory allows us think about humans as agents and technological systems, not unlike the technologies, and the institutions in which the technologies are developed. For example, we can have many relationships, all of which unfold in many directions of power, including relationships not only with individuals but also with institutions, cultures, traditions, histories, and so on.

Haraway (2016) is inviting us to think about making a future with, and through technology because technology is made by people, for people (p. 67). Generally, we tend to tell

stories about technologies as though they are agents of change or higher powers in our western mythos that are driving us forward without any will exerted by us. However, they are in fact made by people and do the things that people designed them to do. Therefore, we need to be cognizant about technology as it furthers the interests of people while also questioning and remaining curious about how technology is being used, who is using it, and who is being empowered by it and/or oppressed as a result of it (Cunningham, 2012, p. 3). For example, technologies, such as social media, can give voice to women and begin to help eradicate patriarchy by providing women with a platform to share their stories and unite globally. Technology helps inform women, providing them with a voice and allowing them to find connection in the move towards gender equality and freedom. As we move into the future, it is important that we recognize the complexity of technology and the ways progress can be complicated, and consider who might get left behind and/or be made more vulnerable as technology progresses.

Finally, Haraway (2016) asks us to cross-examine: Who do we want designing the cultures and economy of the future? Who are we designing for? Who are we designing with? (p. 66). Technology may seem to be accelerating faster than we anticipated. However, if we learn to use it to make lives better rather than to make lives more different, we will see the positive effects it can have on society (Wadhwa, 2017, p. 23).

Do Haraway's (2016) ideas provide us with a way of thinking forward at this juncture? Having explored some of the research (itself framed dualistically as positive or negative) regarding the effects on persons of social media, do new possibilities present themselves? Can we imagine ways in which the current technological turn creates openings for new, creative ways

of being together on this planet? Let us turn now to explore some other aspects of the topic of face-to-face community, with hopes that these reflections may contribute to such developments.

Chapter 4

The Power of Proximity in Communal Acts and Research

In this chapter I will be exploring the following: how controlling the ego can increase compassion for others; the positive effects of proximity and communication; the science (research) of face-to-face interaction; specific research on lengthening of telomeres affiliated with social integration; and, the power of proximity in communal acts, with specific examples from a multi-nation study into the relationship between human connectivity and longevity. It is hoped that this wide range of reflections is suggestive of further lines of research. Ideally, it will contribute further significance to our understanding of the critical importance of direct, face-to-face interactions.

Control the Ego & Practice Compassion

Humans are profoundly social beings, as are our primate ancestors. Genetically, our DNA seems to predispose us to socialize, interact, and engage with others (Iervolino, Pike, Manke, Reiss, Hetherington, & Plomin, 2002). As social beings we are driven to connect. However, according to a 2008 CPP Global Human Capital Report presented by Michael Patterson at a Strategic Capability Network event in November in Toronto it was presented that, 85% of the respondents said they occasionally have conflict in their lives with other human beings and 29% (nearly one-third) say they have conflict with others in their life always or frequently (Silliker, 2011). In the same survey, 49% of respondents attributed this to personality clashes or ego. (Silliker, 2011, p. 2) This is a striking attribution as it suggests the strength of a discourse regarding “ego”, in itself just a three-letter word, but with the power to shape or strengthen or sever a broad range of relationships.

What is known as “ego” might be said to be the natural condition we express when it comes to what we desire. Subconsciously, there is an internal conversation going on in our minds around how well we are doing, looking, talking etc. (Machan, 2013). An individual's family upbringing, their educational background, their life experiences, all contribute to the individual's sense of the world (Machan, 2013, p. 15). At the core of our being, humans want to be respected and want to matter (Machan, 2013, p. 15). A question which tends to circulate in phenomenological debates is, if the ego was given to us by nature, how can it be self-destructive? A specific example of this is, ego versus alter ego which is a Husserlian and a Merleau-Pontian way of thinking. According to De Preester (2008), one way of thinking about ego is via two phenomenological paths that serve to unravel the conceptual–philosophical underpinning of the mirror neurons system hypothesis, in which both ways of thinking are entangled (p. 138). The mirror neurons system explains how the process of understanding an action performed by another registers in the brain, additionally there is a common neural substrate for both action, observation and execution (De Preester, 2008, p. 139). Essentially, when one witnesses another acting from a place of ego (self protection), it may cause the observer to also react with ego as a way to protect themselves. Therefore, this system is responsible for the mapping of a visually perceived action onto its motor representation in the brain of the observer (in addition, there is also evidence for auditory mirroring). The hypothesis is that one's mirror mechanism enables individuals to recognize actions made by others, because the neural pattern elicited in their premotor areas during action observation is similar to the one internally generated to produce that action (hence the name “mirror neurons”). In brief, the role of the mirror neurons system is to match an external, unknown event to an internal, known

event., in which the characteristics of mirror neurons are effectively used in the explanation of action understanding and imitation (De Preester, 2008, p. 140),

Many philosophers such as Jacque Lacan and Sigmund Freud and researchers such as Chandra Sripada and Anna Freud have been intrigued by the ego and many believe the ego (as a construct constituting the whole of our habitual patterning) can be more damaging to our well-being than it can be good.

According to Machan (2013) psychological egoism mean's that everyone does what one benefits from in terms of some objective standard of well-being, not based just on what one desires or likes. (p. 17)

“If being physically healthy were a primary good - such that whenever one's physical health is enhanced, one would be benefited whether or not one chose it as a priority - then psychological egoism would imply that everyone is always acting to enhance his or her health” (Machan, 2013, p. 17)

Although, in terms of psychological egoism, it means that everyone does what one benefits from in terms of some objective standard of well-being, not based just on what one desires or likes (Machan, 2013, p. 17). Accordingly, if being physically healthy were a primary good - such that whenever one's physical health is enhanced, one would be benefited whether or not one chose it as a priority - then psychological egoism would imply that everyone is always acting to enhance his or her health (Machan, 2013, p. 15). Whatever the standard of goodness or well-being or being benefited came to, psychological egoism would mean that one is always motivated to act to fulfill this. However, this is problematic since it appears that people evidently do not always aim to benefit themselves by some standard of goodness or wellbeing, acting instead against their own interests (Machan, 2013, p. 15).

So, psychological egoism most reasonably implies that we do what we desire or want, quite apart from whether it benefits us. (Machan, 2013, p. 15). Machan (2013) argues that despite psychological egoism's troubles, we can make good use of psychological egoism as a technical device, for example, in the analysis of market behavior - of how people act when they embark on commercial or business tasks (p. 31) Just as it is constitutive that we have certain physical organs and functions - a heart, brain, liver blood circulation, motor behavior - so it is that we will act to advance our own well-being and attempt to benefit ourselves (Machan, 2013, p. 31). Unfortunately, psychological egoism leads to "empty speech" (mental chatter) which is out of touch with lived experience, as it merely reflects in words the way the ego chooses to see itself (Hill, 2004, p. 31).

According to Hill (2004) empty speech allows us to take pleasure in having somebody there to listen to us speak, and seeing our words register in their eyes and on their face "empty speech (mental chatter) is out of touch with lived experience, since it merely reflects in words the way the ego chooses to see itself" (p. 31). Mental chatter (an individual's own repeated thoughts) are like empty speech, providing the ego with its own echo, which functions as a protective barrier against hearing what another may have to say (p. 31). It also prevents the individual from having to hear himself/herself speak from any other place than the ego, articulating its concern with its own point of view, which limits the individual's opportunity for growth and learning (Hill, 2004, p. 31). Therefore, this is evidence for the importance of interaction with Others especially via communal acts which can drastically positively impact an individual's personal dialogue.

The ego is the problem as the ego itself, as a constellation of habitual responses, never creates connection with others. In the opening verses of *The Dhammapada*, perhaps the most widely read collection of Buddha's teachings, the Buddha (1976) says:

We are what we think
 All that we are arises with our thoughts.
 With our thoughts we
 make the world. Speak or act with an impure mind
 And trouble will follow you
 As the wheel follows the ox that draws the cart.
 We are what we think. All that we are arises
 with our thoughts. With our thoughts we make the world.
 Speak or act with a pure mind
 And happiness will follow you
 As your shadow, unshakable. (p. 21).

A primary technique of Buddhist meditation consists of bringing the mind to rest on an object. Normally, we are in the habit of constantly thinking, in line with the intentions and confines of our ego (Hill, 2004, p. 35). Indeed, as we cultivate simple awareness in meditation, we observe our habits of thought, subsequently becoming more aware of our thoughts, opening the possibility of altering our interactions with others.

The Buddha tells us that thinking is one of the ways that the ego manages to separate us from the simple awareness of (lived) experience (Hill, 2004, pp. 35-36). For the Buddha, it is this thinking in the service of the ego which Freud called ego consciousness, that makes it so difficult for human beings to live with "suffering" (Hill, 2004, p. 35). On the contrary, we can live more authentic lives if we stay consciously connected to Others in society.

The ego consists of the narcissistic fascination of "I" with the "me" and the longing of the "I" for the ideal "me" (Hill, 2004, p. 39). The "I" engages in a struggle to hold onto that image of the "me." This view of narcissism follows in the footsteps of the Buddha's insight into the insubstantiality of the self in his doctrine of Anatta; it also resembles the concept of the "false self" in the work of Donald Winnicott, as Mark Epstein has pointed out (Epstein, 1995, pp. 37-

38). By contrast, what we find in the Buddha's teaching is a more radical concept: what we discover when we emerge from behind our identification with ego is not the image of a true self, but "emptiness" (Hill, 2004, p. 40). This Buddhist "emptiness" is not a complete void or absence, as is sometimes misconstrued, but rather a cipher for the radical openness and contingency of human being. Furthermore, I am suggesting, if we move away from our ego and behave with compassion for Others, we then become closer to our truer self and can feel more fulfilled. As translator and teacher Ken McLeod (n.d.) notes:

At the core is compassion and emptiness." This key phrase from the Tibetan Mahayana tradition says that compassion is as fundamental to our being as the indefinability of being itself and that the open, fluid, and inexpressible quality of being is itself compassion.

We must have more awareness around our ego so that we are more able to constrain the force of its habitual functioning. This way we would be able to connect with others without being speculative, we would think outside of "me, myself and I." In the next section, Power of Proximity and Communication, I will further expand on the positive effects of face-to-face with emphasis on communication and power of proximity.

Power of Proximity & Communication

In terms of proximity in the face-to-face experience with Others, communication is a key factor of bringing about connectedness. There is sacred space created during a face-to-face encounter which trumps all beliefs that individuals can benefit from relationships formed via social media, phone etc. Research conducted by Albert Mehrabian (1972) shows that 7% of communication is words, 38% of it is tone and inflection but over 55% is in fact body language. The 55% of communication which is body language includes, micro facial muscles such as the

rolling of the eyes. How easily we become distracted when speaking to another for example, leaving eye contact to look elsewhere etc. This highlights the importance of nonverbal communication channels compared to verbal channels. Two research studies (Mehrabian & Wiener, 1967; Mehrabian & Ferris, 1967) formed the basis for the 55/38/7 formula. The Mehrabian and Ferris (1967) study consists of a predecessor formula to the 55/38/7 formula: 60/40. The 60/40 formula they created represents the comparison of importance between facial (60%) and vocal (40%) components in regard to a person's attitude (Mehrabian, 1972). This formulation is highly supportive of the importance of a face-to-face embodied encounter between persons. This can be for many reasons. Most importantly, it can create opportunities for the recognition and clarification of miscommunications, misunderstandings and misinterpretation of emotions, feelings etc, each of which at times, over the phone or via social media can be either ignored or exacerbated. For example, if you take two acquaintances who have different political views comment on an online forum or post, one of them can easily be offended by the other's comment. There is no way to readily confirm what the other means; is it sarcastic? Are they being rude? In a face-to-face encounter, as Lévinas (2006) has claimed, one will naturally resort to thinking twice before making a comment which may come off as rude (Mehrabian, 1972).

Mehrabian's (1972) formula was created for a specific context- when the nonverbal channel and the verbal channel are incongruent (not matching). "When there are inconsistencies between attitudes communicated verbally and posturally, the postural component should dominate in determining the total attitude that is inferred." (p. 8). Reflection and analysis needs to occur to fully grasp what the person's current emotions are at that moment.

One way for an individual to increase the accuracy of communication is by applying the three C's of Nonverbal Communication: context, clusters, and congruence (Thompson, 2015). Context includes the environment in which the situation is taking place; the history between the people; and other factors such as each person's role. Looking for nonverbal communication gestures in clusters prevents us from allowing a single gesture or movement to be definitive in determining a person's state of mind or emotion. For example, crossing your arms at your chest can be a sign of being resistant and close-minded, however, if the person's shoulders are raised and their teeth are chattering, they might just be cold! Congruence has been addressed previously in regards to the formula. Do the spoken words match the tone and the body language? After someone falls, and they verbally state they are fine, however their face is grimacing, and their voice is shaky, one might want to probe a little deeper.

The 55/38/7 percentage and the 3 C's of Nonverbal Communication remind us that, when trying to understand others, a single gesture or comment does not necessarily mean something. Instead, these theories allow us to take note and observe more to get a better understanding of what is going on. In the next section, Science of Face-to-face, I will present some of the research which illustrates the benefits of face-to-face interaction and social integration.

Science of Face-to-Face

With how many people in your life do you feel close enough to share a personal problem? A representative national survey in 2004 was done where this question was asked to hundreds of people across the United States (Seppala, Rossomando, & Doty, 2013). The findings suggested that the mean number of close others (people felt to be close enough to share a personal problem with) was two. The mode (chosen by the greatest number of respondents) was

zero! That amounted to over twenty five percent of Americans who said zero, one in four people who do not feel that connection (Seppala, et. All., 2013, p. 412)!

There is growing support within both biological and human sciences for the importance of social connection and ways in which individuals can improve social connection in their lives. Firstly, we must understand what happens when we are absent of social connection or lacking social connection in our lives. Data shows that people with low social connection have more anxiety, depression and it has been linked to suicide and also to violence (Hawkley, Masi, Berry, & Cacioppo, 2006). Therefore, perpetrators of violent acts tend to be people who were severely isolated (Hawkley, et al., 2006). Lack of social connection impacts humans even at the cellular level where individuals find greater inflammation for people who are very lonely (Seppala, et al., 2013, p. 425). In the industrialized western world, when individuals take care of their health it is often connected to going to the gym or eating a proper diet, both of which are construed as solitary activities. It is more rare to see connections made with the importance of social connection. Ironically, studies have shown that low social connection, is far worse for humans than smoking, obesity or high blood pressure (Hutcherson, Seppala, & Gross, 2008, p. 720).

On the other hand, when social connection is present, a healthy level of social connection predicts greater psychological well-being, better physical health, increased immunity, faster recovery from disease and even longevity (Seppala, et al., 2013, p. 420). A highly socially connected individual has a higher chance of feeling connected to others, they have a 50% increased chance of longevity. It is in light of such findings that writers contend that “we're wired for connection” (p. 421).

Findings from the field of neuroscience are increasingly being evoked to support the importance of connection. Connection is something that's intrinsically natural to us, mirror

neurons in our brain help us to resonate with other people (Seppala, et al., 2013, p. 421). To resonate here means the ability to mirror what is going on with others. For example, if someone you are close to walks into the room before you have exchanged any words you can generally tell whether they are doing well or not (p. 420). When we observe someone internally we are mirroring them and that is at the basis of empathy (p. 417). Therefore, when someone comes in and frowns, for example, it activates the micro muscles in our face or frowning and we know that something's not right. Retrospectively, the exact thing occurs with smiling muscles. The emotion regulatory effects of social connection may be both biological and cognitive. Furthermore, animal research suggests that oxytocin and opioids, released in affiliative contexts, may serve as a protective factor, decreasing the stress-induced cortisol levels and exerting a calming effect on the nervous system (Lungwitz, Stuber, Johnson, Dietrich, Schartz, Hanrahan, and Truitt, 2014).

It could be assumed that some believe they are isolated individuals, not connected to Others, however, from alternative perspectives, this is simply not true (Lee, & Robbins, 1998). Following the logic of neuroscientific research, our brain is wired in such a way to connect, to feel empathy and to get a sense of what might be going on with someone (Davidson, Kabat-Zinn, Schumacher, Rosenkranz, Muller, Santorelli, et al., 2003). We are connected at this level even though it may be difficult for some to recognize. Lack of connection, from this perspective, is a problem. Several decades of literature such as Putnam's "Bowling Alone" (2000) support the contention that there is an increase in loneliness happening in the United States and elsewhere. (Rauch, Decker, & Woodside, 2015). Seppala's, et al., (2013) presenting statistics from 2004 are a good example of this. People are distancing themselves further from one another and

ironically the number one reason that people seek therapy today is loneliness (Holt-Lunstad, Smith, & Layton, 2010). The question remains, how can we increase social connection?

Some people identify as introverts and do not feel comfortable with other people, and tend to avoid socializing with others (Holt-Lunstad, Smith, & Layton, 2010, p. 2). According to Tsai, Miao, Seppala, Fung, & Yeung (2007), another assumption in North America is that in order to connect with others an individual must be attractive, successful and fit (p. 1102). It is unfortunate that people feel the need to change their appearance or achievements in order to connect or fit in. However, the findings of neuroscience provide support for the contention that this is not a “natural” state of affairs (Hutcherson, Seppala, & Gross, 2015). The benefits of social connection have nothing to do with the number of friends one has. An individual could have a thousand friends, but if they do not feel connected on the inside, they do not reap any of the benefits of social connection (Hutcherson, et al., 2015, p. 2). The benefits of social connection are therefore tied to one's subjective feeling of connection to Others (Hutcherson, et al., 2015, pp. 6-7).

The secret to increasing the lived experience of social connection may be found in the development of compassion for both self and others. Currently, people seem to assume that they are not compassionate beings, following the dominant narrative that humans are innately selfish people (Buettner-Janusch, 1978). On the other hand, research data supports the position that while self interest is a factor in our experience, compassion is innate or instinctual. This is not only true for human beings but also is true for the rest of the animal kingdom (Ishii, Sato, & Izumi, 2014)

In a study conducted by Ishii, et. Al. (2014) found even rats (animals often used in negative comparisons) will go out of their way to help another rat who is suffering, and like

primates, will actually pay a price go over obstacles and make that happen (p. 398-399).

Primates will also help when they see another in need. Such altruistic behavior is seen in toddlers as young as two. In order to examine whether compassion is innate rather than learned, researchers at the Max Planck Institute work have explored the help-providing behavior of two-year-old (Santrock & Santrock, 2014, p. 178). They observed that in a room with an experimenter who needs help, after having dropped something and is desperately trying to reach for it, the two year-olds will get up and walk over and help (Santrock & Santrock, 2014, p. 185). In further research, experimenters put all sorts of obstacles across the room and the toddlers had to crawl over and under to respond. The implication of this work (and hope generated by it) is that this a natural tendency continuing to influence the perceptions and behaviors of adults (Santrock & Santrock, 2014, p. 186).

A study by Halevy, Bornstein, & Sagiv (2008) conducted with economics in an economics game paradigm in which participants were given a certain amount of money, where they could either act fairly so they could share that money with the other participants or they could keep it for themselves and hoard it when they were given only a few seconds to think about (p. 405). The first, immediate response is to share. However, if they are given a few more minutes to think about it, they might change their mind (Halevy, et. Al., 2008, p. 405) What is important to note, is that the first instinct is to share. Dale Miller's research at Stanford University (2016) has also shown that people's first instinct is to share, but examination of the cognitive patterns of adults suggest that sometimes they stop themselves, thinking that other people might think that they are merely acting out of self-interest (p. 112). The cultural norm suggesting that we are all self-interested maintains significant power, but that first instinct is actually to share (Zlatev & Miller, 2016, p. 115).

Extrapolation from ethology can be challenging, but nevertheless suggestive. Oftentimes we attribute the phrase ‘survival of the fittest’ to Charles Darwin. In fact, it was something that was coined by Herbert Spencer. He had a particular agenda with it, the justification of social and racial hierarchy (Weikart, 2009). Furthermore, as Dacher Keltner from UC Berkeley has pointed out, Darwin's message could better be translated as ‘survival of the kindest’ because compassion is what has helped humanity survive over time (Keltner, & Haidt, 1999). In addition, Robert Sapolsky at Stanford Medical School has presented interesting findings from research with a troop of savanna baboons in Masai Mara Reserve of Kenya. Half of the males within this troop had died from tuberculosis. Because of the circumstances of the outbreak, interestingly enough, it was the more aggressive males who died, leaving a cohort of atypically unaggressive survivors (Sapolsky, & Share, 2004). Subjects were observed each summer from 1978–1986, and continuously since 1993. An additional troop, Talek Troop, was observed continuously since 1984 and Sapolsky (2004) noticed these behavioral patterns persisted; males leave their natal troops at adolescence; by the mid-1990s, no males remained who had resided in the troop a decade before (p. 537). Critically, the troop’s unique culture was being adopted by new males joining the troop (Sapolsky & Share, 2004, p. 538). Over all, Sapolsky & Share (2004) found the following through their observations; features of this culture in the behavior of males, including high rates of grooming and affiliation with females, and a “relaxed” dominance hierarchy and physiological measures suggesting less stress among low-ranking males (p. 544).

The research suggests that while the alpha or dominant males are fighting and consuming most of the food, the other males are “left behind” with the ladies. Thus, they reproduce more and leave a stronger genetic trace. In one situation, this tendency was amplified when the alpha males who had hogged food in a human waste dump started dying off since the food was

contaminated and poisonous. Those left alive were the most cooperative males. Interestingly, that tribe of baboons thrived in this much more cooperative atmosphere. The same is true of humans because when we cooperate regardless of opposing views on lifestyle etc., we thrive and can live more fulfilling, peaceful lives.

In the next section I will be discussing a study conducted by scientists at UC San Francisco which tested how healthy lifestyle changes including social integration dramatically increases telomeres length in human beings.

Telomeres

Some research from biology suggests the importance of social connectedness in the fields of immunology and aging. A study conducted by (Ornish, Lin, Chan, Epel, Kemp, Weidner & Blackburn, 2013) demonstrated for the first time that changes in social support, along with diet, exercise, and stress management may result in longer telomeres which are the parts of chromosomes that affect aging. It is the first controlled trial to show that any intervention might lengthen telomeres over time (Ornish, et al., 2013). The study was conducted by scientists at UC San Francisco and the Preventive Medicine Research Institute, a non-profit public research institute in Sausalito, California, which investigates the effect of diet and lifestyle choices on health and disease (Ornish, et al., 2013, p. 1112).

This study gives hope to individuals who feel they are bound by “bad genes,” because these findings indicate that telomeres may lengthen to the degree that people change how they live. Research indicates that longer telomeres are associated with fewer illnesses and longer life (Ornish, et al., 2013, p. 1112). Telomeres are the protective caps on the ends of chromosomes that affect how quickly cells age (Ornish, et al., 2013, p. 1113). They are combinations of DNA and protein that protect the ends of chromosomes and help them remain stable (Ornish, et al.,

2013, p. 1112). As they become shorter, and as their structural integrity weakens, the cells age and die quicker (Ornish, et al., 2013, p. 1115).

In recent years, shorter telomeres have become associated with a broad range of aging-related diseases, including many forms of cancer, stroke, vascular dementia, cardiovascular disease, obesity, osteoporosis and diabetes (Ornish, et al., 2013, p. 1118). For five years, the researchers followed 35 men with localized, early-stage prostate cancer to explore the relationship between comprehensive lifestyle changes, and telomere length and telomerase activity. All the men were engaged in active surveillance, which involves closely monitoring a patient's condition through screening and biopsies (Ornish, et al., 2013, p. 1118). Ten of the patients embarked on lifestyle changes that included: a plant-based diet (high in fruits, vegetables and unrefined grains, and low in fat and refined carbohydrates); moderate exercise (walking 30 minutes a day, six days a week); stress reduction (gentle yoga-based stretching, breathing, meditation). They also participated in weekly group support where they would interact, socialize with others in the community (Ornish, et al., 2013, p. 1118). They were compared to the other 25 study participants who were not asked to make major lifestyle changes.

Ornish, et al. (2013) found the group that made the lifestyle changes experienced a “significant” increase in telomere length of approximately 10 percent (p. 1117). Further, the more people changed their behavior by adhering to the recommended lifestyle program, the more dramatic their improvements in telomere length. Further By contrast, the men in the control group who were not asked to alter their lifestyle had measurably shorter telomeres – nearly 3 percent shorter – when the five-year study ended.

The researchers say the findings may not be limited to men with prostate cancer and are likely to be relevant to the general population, because the telomeres were looked at in the

participants' blood versus their prostate tissue (Ornish, et al., 2013, p. 1117). The latest study is a follow up to a similar, three-month pilot investigation in 2008 in which the same participants were asked to follow the same lifestyle program. After three months, the men in the initial study exhibited significantly increased telomerase activity. Telomerase is an enzyme that repairs and lengthens telomeres.

The latest study was designed to determine if the lifestyle changes would affect telomere length and telomerase activity in these men over a longer time period (Ornish, et al., 2013, p. 1117). This is a breakthrough finding that needs to be confirmed by larger studies. Telomere shortening increases the risk of a wide variety of chronic diseases, and researchers believe that increases in telomere length may help to prevent these conditions and perhaps even lengthen lifespan. Particularly, the increased social support (60 min support-group sessions once per week) proved to have great positive effects on the participants. This research provides breakthrough evidence on how crucial and critical socialization within our community is, with high emphasis on face-to-face interactions. Exercise and good nutrition alone would not have made a difference, however, the incorporation of meditation and social support groups did (Ornish, et. Al., 2013, p. 1117).

In the next section; Power of Proximity in Communal Acts, I present findings from the five "blue zones" of the world as well as Holt-Lunstad et al. (2010) A seven yearlong study on the connection between social relationships and mortality.

Power of Proximity in Communal Acts

Two decades ago a causal association between social relationships and mortality was proposed after a review of five large prospective studies provided support for the hypothesis that social relationships predict mortality (House, Landis, & Umberson, 1988). Following the

publication of this review, the number of prospective studies of mortality that included measures of social relationships increased exponentially (Holt-Lunstad, Smith, & Layton, 2010).

Current evidence indicates that the quantity and/or quality of social relationships in industrialized societies are decreasing. For instance, trends reveal reduced intergenerational living, greater social mobility, delayed marriage, dual-career families, increased single-residence households, and increased age-related disabilities (Putnam, 2000). More specifically, over the last two decades there has been a three-fold increase in the number of Americans who report having no confidant—now the modal response (McPherson and Smith-Lovin, 2006). Such findings suggest that despite increases in technology and globalization that would likely foster social connections, people are becoming increasingly more socially isolated. The nature and extent of the association between social relationships and mortality is of increased importance (Holt-Lunstad, Smith, & Layton, 2010).

In the developed world everywhere, women live an average of six to eight years longer than men do which is a large gap (Eskes, & Haanen, 2007). In 2015, *The Lancet* published an article showing that men in modern industrialized (wealthy) countries are twice as likely to die as women are at any age. However, there is one place in the world according to Susan Pinker's research, where men live as long as women (Pinker, 2015). Sardinia, an Italian island in the Mediterranean between Corsica and Tunisia, is one of five remote mountainous “blue zones”, where super-longevity is common to both sexes (Pinker, 2015, p. 44).

What exactly are “blue zones”? A National Geographic expedition, lead by Dan Buettner, to uncover the secrets of longevity, evolved into the discovery of five places around the world (Loma Linda, CA, USA; Nicoya, Costa Rica; Sardinia, Italy; Ikaria, Greece; Okinawa, Japan) where people consistently live over 100 years old. These have been referred to as Blue Zones

(Buettner, & Skemp, 2016). Dan Buettner and his team of demographers, scientist and anthropologists were able to distill the evidence-based common denominators of these Blue Zones into nine factors that they call the Power 9 (Buettner, & Skemp, 2016, p. 318).

The first Power is to move naturally: according to Buettner the longest-lived people do not run marathons or join gyms. Instead, they live in environments that constantly encourage them into moving without thinking about it. For example, these people generally all grow gardens and do not have mechanical conveniences for house and/or yard work (Buettner, & Skemp, 2016, p. 319).

The second Power is purpose: the Okinawans call it 'Ikigai' and the Nicoyans call it 'plan de vida'; for both, it translates to "why I wake up in the morning." According to Buettner an individual knowing their sense of purpose is worth up to seven years of extra life expectancy (p. 319).

The third Power is downshift: unfortunately, stress is a part of the human experience which means people living in the Blue Zones still experience stress (Buettner, & Skemp, 2016, p. 318). According to research conducted by Seppala, et al. (2013) stress leads to chronic inflammation, associated with every major age-related disease (p. 420). The difference between people living in blue zones versus others is that the world's longest living individuals implement routines to shed that stress (Buettner, & Skemp, 2016, p. 319). For example, Okinawans take a few moments each day to remember their ancestors; Adventists pray; Ikarians take a nap; and Sardinians participate in happy hour (Buettner, & Skemp, 2016, p. 319).

The fourth Power is the 80% Rule: There is a 2500 year old Confucian mantra, Hara hachi bu—which is said before meals and it reminds them to stop eating when their stomachs are 80% full (Buettner, & Skemp, 2016, p. 319). Therefore, the 20% gap between not being hungry

and feeling full could be the difference between losing weight or gaining it (p. 319).

Furthermore, people living in the Blue Zones eat their smallest meal in the late afternoon or early evening which is considered their last meal for the day (p. 319).

The fifth Power is the plant slant: Which means that beans, including fava, black, soy, and lentils, are the cornerstone of most centenarian diets. Meat (mostly pork), on the other hand, is eaten on average only 5 times per month. Additionally, serving sizes are 3 to 4 oz, about the size of a deck of cards (Buettner, & Skemp, 2016, p. 319).

The sixth Power is wine at 5:00pm: All Blue Zones (except Loma Linda, inhabited by Seventh Day Adventists) drink alcohol moderately and regularly. According to Buettner's research, moderate drinkers outlive nondrinkers or excessive drinkers (Buettner, & Skemp, 2016, p. 319). In terms of amount, it is one to two glasses per day (preferably Sardinian Cannonau wine), with friends and/or with food. This correlates with the vital importance of face-to-face through communal acts. As Buettner discovered, it is the act of consuming and enjoying wine moderately with friends, family and food that is significant. This contrasts significantly with dominant American culture in which consumption of alcohol has negative connotations arising from usage patterns: not only do some people consume it in larger quantities, but also it is used for purposes other than either ritual or socialization with friends and or family in other words, not infrequently as a mode of self-medication, e.g., as a depressant (Ahern, Galea, Hubbard, Midanik & Syme, 2008).

The seventh Power is to belong; to an organization, to a volunteer cause or to a religious community. Buettner's (2016) research presented that attending faith-based services at least four times per month will add four to fourteen years of life expectancy (p. 38). Durkheim's (1951)

research also presented similar findings, in which he found people who belonged to a faith community lived more fulfilling lives.

The eighth Power is to put loved ones first; successful centenarians in the Blue Zones put their families first. This means keeping aging parents and grandparents nearby or in the home (which lowers disease and mortality rates of children in the home as well). In addition, Blue Zone individuals commit to a life partner (which can add up to 3 years of life expectancy) and invest in their children with time and love. This is a cultural cycle which is transmitted to younger generations ensuring, or increasingly the likelihood, that they will be there to care for their own aging parents when their time comes (Buettner, & Skemp, 2016, p. 319).

The ninth and final Power is “right tribe”; The world’s longest lived people chose—or were born into—social circles that supported healthy behaviors. For example, the Okinawans created moais which are groups of five friends that committed to each other for life (Buettner, & Skemp, 2016, p. 319). Furthermore, research from the Framingham Studies shows that smoking, obesity, happiness, and even loneliness are contagious. Hence, the social networks of long-lived people have favorably shaped their health behaviors (Christakis, & Fowler, 2007).

Blue Zones started as a way of conceptualizing and further understanding the healthiest lifestyles that lead to vitality and longevity. Dan Buettner and his team of demographers, scientist and anthropologists posit that Blue Zones provide a model to guide the design of the healthiest lifestyles possible for individuals and for entire communities. (Buettner, & Skemp, 2016, p. 321)

Supporting the “Blue Zone” findings and hypotheses, is Susan Pinker’s (2015) research in Sardinia, which has both biological and sociological elements. Her research started with the genetic profile. She discovered that genes account for only 25 percent of their longevity whereas

the other 75% is lifestyle (p.7) These findings reflect the study outcome of the famous Danish Twin Study which established that only about 20% of how long the average person lives is dictated by our genes, whereas the other 80% is dictated by our lifestyle. (Herskind, McGue, Holm, Sorensen, Harvrad, Vaupel, 1996).

According to Pinker (2015) social isolation is the public health risk of our time, as a third of the American population claim they have two or fewer people they can depend on (p. 11). Generally speaking, in “blue zones”, people are never left to live solitary lives. This contrasts markedly with lived experience in “developed” parts of the world (p. 68) Architecturally, Sardinia, is a dense area with houses in rows, tight alleys and streets in which the villagers’ lives constantly intersect. Pinker discovered that in the blue zone of Sardinia, as people age across their lifespans they're always surrounded by extended family, friends, neighbors, priests etc. (p. 45).

Julianne Holt-Lunstad is a researcher at Brigham Young University and she addressed this very question in a series of studies of tens of thousands of middle-aged people. She looked at every aspect of their lifestyle; their diet, exercise, marital status, how often they went to the doctor whether they smoked or drank etc. (Pinker, 2015, p. 68) In the seven year-long study conducted by Holt-Lunstad, Smith, and Layton (2010), the objective was to determine the extent to which social relationships influence risk for mortality, which aspects of social relationships are most highly predictive, and which factors may moderate the risk (p. 1). Holt-Lunstad and her team found across 148 studies (308,849 participants), the random effects weighted average effect size was $OR=1.50$ (95% CI 1.42 to 1.59), indicating a 50% increased likelihood of survival for participants with stronger social relationships (Holt-Lundstad, et al., 2010, p. 1). Data across 308,849 individuals, followed for an average of 7.5 years, indicate that individuals with adequate

social relationships have a 50% greater likelihood of survival compared to those with poor or insufficient social relationships (Holt-Lunstadt, et al., 2010, p. 8). These researchers claim that the scale of this effect is comparable with quitting smoking and it exceeds many well-known risk factors for mortality (e.g., obesity, physical inactivity) (p. 9). According to them, (Holt-Lunstadt, et al., (2010), “the findings reveal significant variability in the predictive utility of social relationship variables, with multidimensional assessments of social integration being optimal when assessing an individual’s risk for mortality and evidence that social isolation has a similar influence on mortality to other measures of social relationships” (p. 13). The overall effect remained consistent across a number of factors, including age, sex, initial health status, follow up period, and cause of death, suggesting that the association between social relationships and mortality may be general, and efforts to reduce risk should not be isolated to subgroups such as the elderly. Significant differences were found across the type of social measurement evaluated (p,0.001); the association was strongest for complex measures of social integration (OR=1.91; 95% CI 1.63 to 2.23) and lowest for binary indicators of residential status (living alone versus with others) (OR=1.19; 95% CI 0.99 to 1.44) (Holt-Lunstad, et al., 2010, p. 2).

Holt-Lunstad, et al., (2010) make the provocative and hopeful claim that just as physicians, health professionals, educators, and the public media currently take risk factors such as smoking, diet, and exercise seriously, social relationship factors should be added to that list (p. 14). With such recognition, medical evaluations and screenings could routinely include variables of social well-being; medical care could recommend and promote enhanced social connections; hospitals and clinics could involve patient support networks in implementing and monitoring treatment regimens and compliance, etc. (Holt-Lunstad, et al., 2010, pp. 13-14). Consequently, health care policies and public health initiatives could similarly benefit from

openly accounting for social factors in efforts aimed at reducing mortality risk (Holt-Lunstad, et al., 2010, pp. 13-14).

Individuals do not exist in isolation; social factors influence individuals' health through cognitive, affective, and behavioral pathways (Holt-Lunstad, et al., 2010, p. 14). Efforts to lessen mortality via social relationship factors will require innovation; furthermore, social relationship based interventions represent a major opportunity to enhance not only the quality of life but also survival of human-kind.

As we have seen in this chapter, there are numerous arguments, each supported by a range of philosophical inquiry, qualitative and quantitative research that highlight the centrality of face-to-face engagement for our human species. Some might argue that the times in which we find ourselves mirror those in which Durkheim (1951) laid the ground work for his sociological understanding of societal breakdown and anomie. In light of such centripetal tendencies, it seems critical that counselling psychologists and others responding to the plight of lonely and isolated individuals maintain a stance of hope and develop effective salutary practices. It is with this project that I shall now conclude.

CONCLUSION

It seems in one sense, that spirituality might be about the connection to something other, or larger or universal – but spirituality is also intimately connected with the here and now, with the intricacies of daily life and personal relationships.

-Ross Laird

This thesis proposes that there is value in human contact, specifically in face-to-face interaction through communal acts; in other words, through social integration. This may be achieved through a range of pathways: volunteering, attending local community meetings, being a part of a community group or simply by interacting with ones neighbors and getting to know the people who you live around. I have explored the classical origins of social health, humankind's longing for connection, the impact of social media on human connection and the power of proximity and scientific research. The field of research on social integration, particularly the benefit of face-to-face interaction, is truly interdisciplinary, with sociologists and psychologists documenting important ideas and findings each year. I invite further expansion of these efforts. We must welcome more diverse forms of research to pave the way for new forms of knowledge and understanding that may ultimately endow us with the kind of expertise that lends itself to providing more sophisticated social supports. Moreover, this openness to multiple forms of knowledge exists as a means through which we convey an attitude that respects human sociality and connectedness. Furthermore, as a competent, knowledgeable, and significant stance which arguably aligns with themes identified in the developmental literature.

Suggestions for Counsellors

Multicultural counselling involves two main parts: an understanding of the client's worldview and the recognition of a counselor's own cultural values and bias. (Arredondo, Toporek, Brown, Jones, Locke, Sanchez, & Stadler, 1996). It is hoped that the explorations developed in this paper might be helpful in clarifying the importance of different stances toward the notions and experience of autonomy versus relatedness. In order to work progressively with diverse clients, a counsellor must recognize any previously held ideas that they have established about a population based on their ethnicity, nationality, race, etc. (Arredondo, et. al., 1996, p. 1). The Association for Multicultural Counselling and Development (AMCD) notes three core competencies in multicultural counselling; (a) counsellor awareness of own cultural values and biases, (b) counsellor awareness of the client's worldview, and (c) culturally appropriate intervention strategies (Arredondo, et al., 1996, p. 2). These competencies help to ensure that individuals of all backgrounds receive the quality of help they deserve.

A counsellor must be cognizant of any cultural values or bias that they possess and recognize their limits of practice. In order to expand their skills, counsellors must acknowledge their own racial and cultural heritage and the effects of oppression, racism, discrimination, and stereotyping. Counsellors must also seek out additional learning opportunities to improve their understanding of different cultural populations.

A counsellor must recognize that their client's world view is different than their own. To achieve this understanding, counsellors must be aware of their emotional reactions to other racial and ethnic groups, possess knowledge of the population with whom they work, and familiarize themselves with culturally appropriate research. Mental health and school counsellors competent

in multicultural counselling recognize that a client's race and culture influence their personality, decision-making skills, vocational choice, and reasons for or willingness to seek any mental health help.

A counsellor with cultural competence respects their client's religious views, values, beliefs, indigenous practices, and languages. Counsellors must understand the characteristics of therapy and its impact on cultural groups. Counsellors should also maintain knowledge of family dynamics, hierarchy, bias in assessments, and discriminatory practices that may impact their client. Counselling professionals who are culturally skilled are able to engage in communication – both verbal and nonverbal – that transcends race or nationality and eliminates prejudice.

Clinical Recommendations for Working with Isolated Individuals

Feeling lonely is a common human emotion experienced by many at some point in life. Intimate friendships take time to develop, and sometimes it is useful to help deal with the loneliness by having clients share their experiences with a counsellor. From a counselling perspective, breaking the cycle of loneliness requires finding its cause, then identifying any existing dysfunctional ways the client deals with it. The next steps usually include identifying the settings and conditions under which one feels willing to communicate with others, and finally encouragement to take the 'risk' of contacting new people or former acquaintances, which is facilitated by the counsellors ongoing encouragement and support (Peplau & Perlman, 1982).

Loneliness does not necessarily correlate to a negative or permanent state. Rather, it could be viewed as an indicator that important needs of the client are not being met (Peplau & Perlman, 1982, p. 112). The counsellor can help the client to identify which needs are not being met in the client's situation. Furthermore, the counsellor can teach them how to gain a healthy,

functioning self-esteem to achieve a positive sense self-acceptance, and find relating to others is both achievable and enjoyable (Murphy & Kupshik, 1992). A client's loneliness may result from a variety of needs or situations. A counsellor can encourage the client to think of themselves as a whole person and not to neglect their other needs just because their social (friendship or companionship) needs are not being met. According to Murphy & Kupshik (1992), some points for counsellors to consider when working with the lonely client is to encourage the client to:

- Realize that many experience loneliness at some stage in their life and it is not permanent. Loneliness is especially common when transitions or change are occurring.
- Get together with the people they know, even if they are not who they want to be with right now. Human contact makes more contact easier. Take risks about revealing themselves by saying what is on their mind. Teach the client how to be assertive if they are passive.
- Encourage the client to learn how to see their detachment. Notice the difference between loneliness and solitude.
- Do everything they would normally do with a partner or friend. Many times, it is not the partner or friend they are missing, but the activities and hobbies they once shared. This can be beneficial to those who are grieving the loss of a loved one.
- Set up social activities when they are not feeling lonely. Planning in advance is beneficial as it encourages routine.

Cognitive Therapy

Cognitive therapy starts with the idea that what we think shapes how we feel. Depression, which tends to be a common denominator amongst those who are isolated or feel lonely, may

stem from having thoughts or beliefs that are not based on evidence, such as "I am useless," or "Everything goes wrong because of me." Changing these beliefs can change a client's view of events, and their emotional state. Cognitive therapy looks at current thinking and communication patterns, rather than the past. The counsellor works with the client to confront and challenge inappropriate thoughts by encouraging different ways of viewing a situation. Cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) pairs cognitive with behavioral therapy, to address both thoughts and behaviors.

Interpersonal Therapy

This approach focuses on interpersonal relationships. Depression, for instance, may stem from a person's relationship with others. Learning skills for improving communication patterns may help the client to manage the depression and combat loneliness. The counsellor can help the client to identify relevant emotions, and where the feelings are coming from. Then they can help them to express the emotions in a healthier way. For example, someone who responds to feeling neglected by getting angry may trigger a negative reaction in a loved one or in a potential new relationship. Learning to express the hurt and anxiety calmly can increase the chances of the other person reacting positively. The client learns to modify their approach to interpersonal problems, understand them, and manage them more constructively.

The findings presented in this thesis validate the importance of social integration to multicultural competence, as individuals who are socially integrated have a broader, worldly understanding of diversity and the benefits of it. Understanding the primal importance of face-to-face interactions, as variously explored in this paper, will position the counseling psychologist to privilege perspectives and actions favoring communal, social engagement.

Suggestions for Clients

The following section provides suggestions for clients that are grounded or supported by the findings presented in the preceding. Each suggestion is informed by the hypothesis that face-to-face interactions have significant benefit, for both individuals and society as a whole. Though being alone in times of crisis or difficulty can be healthy and essential for emotional processing and healing, too much of it can begin to spiral into a darker, unhealthy place—and can often lead to debilitating depression that requires medical attention and treatment (Chang, Sanna, Hirsch, & Jeglic, 2010). Similarly, depression can be the springboard for individuals who have gone through troublesome situations and can be the reason for the development of isolating and antisocial tendencies (Chang, et al., 2010, p. 1243). Both isolation and depression can be traced to heightened levels of cortisol, the hormone produced when one is under duress (Anderson, 2010). Age and illness have both been cited as major factors for the onset of depression, loneliness, and self-isolating tendencies; in fact, a 2010 study by the AARP found that about one in four adults over the age of 45 would consider themselves lonely—a feeling that is intimately linked with both isolation and depression (Anderson, 2010, p. 1). Key findings from the study also revealed that lonely respondents were less likely to be involved in activities that build social networks, such as attending religious services, volunteering, participating in a community organization or spending time on a hobby. Loneliness was a significant predictor of poor health (Anderson, 2010, p. 1).

Low self-esteem and a fear of rejection are the two most recognized traits that can lead an individual to self-isolate in order to protect his or her self (Heinrich, & Gullone, 2006). Often, because being alone actually feels safe and comfortable, an isolated individual may not even recognize that depression—sometimes severe depression—can manifest from little to no social

interaction over time. It is important that both isolating tendencies and signs of depression blooming from them are taken as serious mental health complications, and that professional treatment is vital to beginning the healing processes. (Heinrich, & Gullone, 2006, p. 697).

While social interaction can seem daunting and unimaginable for those who usually shy away from or are afraid of social situations, overcoming those mentalities is crucial to the treatment process (Jebreel, Doonan, & Cohen, 2018). Group therapy, while potentially intimidating at first, is a great first step to engage with other people who are going through similar struggles and emotions. Group therapists create a warm environment from the outset, allowing participants to begin their journey in socialization and positive interactions with other individuals who have been separate in their struggles, but together in their decision to heal. Not only will it be clear that you are not alone in the ways you feel, but you will be learning how to deal with those isolating tendencies right alongside others who need the same support. Continuing modes of group therapy in an official or unofficial setting is important for the recovery process. Furthermore, seeking out local meetings that revolve around these struggles, or even joining a community chat room where you can feel a sense of oneness when you are no longer in treatment are fantastic ways to gradually propel yourself into other ways of social interaction.

In addition to group therapy there are many ways to keep fostering a more social lifestyle and to begin breaking isolating tendencies and many of them can lead to engaging opportunities and even friendship. The following suggestions are ways to include social integration into ones lifestyle: (a) participating in clubs or hobbies (b) getting a pet (c) staying active (d) volunteering and (e) mentoring.

Finding a local chapter or group that engages in an activity you're interested in is a great first step to meeting people, and the best part is that you already know you have common ground. Many libraries have book clubs or circles that are engaging for readers of all ages, and oftentimes film nights that can foster discussion.

Pet ownership has long been flaunted as a way to control depression and other mental health disorders, and it is an excellent way to begin socializing with others (Lem, Coe, Haley, Stone, O'Grady, 2016). Owning a dog, for example, allows you to make a deep connection with an animal and use that as a springboard to connect with others who have similar compassion and attachments to animals. Dog parks, social dog walking, and puppy playgroups are great ways to not only keep your pet healthy, but allow for you to feel safe in your interactions with others.

Exercise has also been proven to help people engage with others and themselves (Stower, 2014). Challenging oneself physically can be rewarding on its own, however, when physical challenges are shared and celebrated with others for example through a running club, a recreational league, a hiking group, a gym or a yoga studio, there is a shared sense of accomplishment. Exercise also reduces stress, which can help balance the hormones at play under the umbrella of depression (Stower, 2014).

Volunteering is a great way to do something for others and research shows that it benefits people of all ages by increasing feelings of self-esteem, respect, motivation and wellbeing. There are numerous ways to connect to others through volunteering: as a member of the local neighbourhood watch; through offering expertise and support as a mentor or counsellor for those who are in need; through becoming involved in a charity that one is passionate about; through the use of skills and experiences can help others achieve their own goals in life; through the involvement of friends and neighbours in community projects. Individuals can work together to

create a communal garden or start a book club. Volunteers can offer help in a crisis. If the local community has experienced a bad flood or fire, help is needed food and shelter, and with the clean up after the event. Volunteers are needed to help people in need in developing countries. Support is necessary for teaching children in schools and helping to build houses and hospitals

Mentoring, listening and counselling are all forms of peer support, as are initiatives where colleagues, members of self-help groups and others meet as equals to give each other support. Supporting peers by sharing knowledge, experience and emotional help is incredibly valuable. Peers can offer advice, coping strategies and empathy that professionals may not be able to. Some ideas on how to mentor: mentor students to help them adjust to a new school or college; help someone who has a mental health issue, such as depression or anxiety; it can improve confidence, self-awareness and symptoms; offer advice to help people with chronic illnesses, such as diabetes, help a friend, colleague or family member reconnect with communities and social networks.

Additionally, with the rise of social technologies such as social media, we can use them as platforms to further interact and integrate face-to-face. For example, follow your chosen charity on Facebook, Twitter or Instagram and join in with the conversation. Further, sign-up to receive your charity's newsletter and keep up-to-date with the work they're doing-suggest local group meet ups to connect etc. Furthermore, use social media platform to arrange a fundraising event in your local community or at work.

There are many ways to engage and interact beyond mental health treatment and group therapy. Nevertheless, some people may feel intimidated to try. The knowledge that one is not alone is a key to mustering the bravery to get out into the world and begin taking steps to healthily socializing with other people. Love and support from one's friends and family (and

pets) can be a great way to find the confidence to take those first steps. With time, you will feel self-assured in your social interactions, keeping isolation and its attendant depression at bay.

Given that much of what I have explored here exists within the context of the ongoing technological developments that shape our lives, I feel that it may be appropriate to end with these words from artist and writer James Bridle (2018): “Ultimately, any strategy for living in the new dark age depends upon attention to the here and now, and not to the promises of computational prediction, surveillance, ideology and representation. The present is always where we live and think, poised between an oppressive history and an unknowable future (p. 252).” May we live and think, and move forward, fully embodied and present, with the Others with whom we share this magnificent world.

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