

The pandemic has affected human connection similarly to the way the weather affects one's clothing choices... dramatically. The world rounded a virtual corner in March 2020 when COVID-19 struck countries with worry and anticipation. The liveliness of small businesses went black, along with stadium lights, concert speakers and the gleaming joy that human connection once portrayed. However, through the resiliency of our beloved species, humanity has reshaped, reformed and reestablished the meaning of human connection to define something that goes far beyond being able to hug a friend, or shake hands with a boss. Human connection has shifted along a spectrum - from being something that once entailed face-to-face contact, to a feeling of hope and mutual relation that as a species, humanity will overcome this daunting obstacle as well as prove that connection is a concept that prevails to be greater than a physical linkage.

The initial stages of the pandemic undeniably caused a separation between people physically, socially and emotionally. Suddenly, the term "social distancing" evolved from a novel idea to a measure that saved lives. Masks and news reports became a standard part of our daily practice. Toilet paper flew off the shelves, and nature flew freely while people were locking down their homes in order to stay away from the deadly virus. Mental health took a toll on a global scale. Increased anxiety and depression among people with no pre-existing mental health conditions was expected, and health care professionals were finding it difficult to manage the stress, anxiety and burn-out while facing a head-on collision of longer hours, overflow of patients, and the progression of threats that this virus caused (Cullen et al). The healthcare industry felt the greatest weight of pain that COVID-19 first brought to our planet. The healthcare heroes were calling for help from citizens of the community to aid in the flattening of

the curve. At this time, the first phase of the newly defined “human connection” was brought to life. People were doing their best to support the hospital workers by donating supplies and money, giving thanks, and most importantly: abiding by regulations to decrease cases as much as possible. As a community, the common goal of defeating the virus and helping healthcare workers became the device that held the key to maintaining connection. It brought out the caring, helpful and selfless acts in people. Lawn signs, donations and praise towards the brave nurses and doctors created an ethereal linkage of connection between us. It was the first phase of redefining the term “human connection” beyond something physical, and challenged communities to get creative in finding ways to stay connected while simultaneously supporting our healthcare heroes.

The next memorable era of the pandemic was “The New Normal.” A phrase that began as a way to bring light to our situation truly embodied our state of living. New. Normal. Into the months of warmer weather and summertime, we fought to create an atmosphere that encapsulated as much human connection as possible. Noticeably, people were using facetime and Zoom as if their lifeline depended on it. Well, it somewhat did. Virtual meeting groups enabled us to connect through a screen, once again molding the meaning of human connection into a new shape. Masks were no longer seen as a separation tool, but the thing that allowed us to see people safely. The air was filled with hope, carrying people through difficult times and proving that not even a deadly virus can take away humanity’s strive for connection. It felt like a turning point where we established expectations and slowly began to stitch the gap that loss of human connection created in the first few months of isolation.

Lastly, through the pandemic, humans have connected by bringing light to the unjust systems of the world. Over the past year, awareness, activism and involvement within the social justice sectors has rightfully caught flame to a revolution. George Floyd's murder devastated people everywhere, causing grief and shock amongst people nation-wide. Floyd's death sent shockwaves to BIPOC communities and allies across the world, creating one of the largest social justice movements in history, connecting people with the common goal of eliminating racism. Human connection once again rewrote its definition, this time breaking boundaries as to what the term represented pre-pandemic. Data collected by Civis Analytics proposed that 15 million - 26 million people across the U.S.A engaged in a form of protest for the death of George Floyd in the early stages of the 2020 movement (Buchanan et al). What would be better defined as "human connection" than people of all backgrounds coming together to demand peace, justice and equity amongst all people? Despite human connection suffering in the mainstream ways, the new and improved meaning of human connection has presented itself. It is no longer a term to describe a singular entity. The pandemic has brought multiple meanings to human connection. From calling a friend for 10 minutes a day, to working together towards solving major issues through activism. Society has yet again demonstrated the fact that human connection is ever changing, and can encompass a feeling of active development within communities.

The reinvention of the term "human connection" throughout the COVID-19 pandemic has authenticated the idea that staying connected as a community cannot be confined to define something purely physical. The waves of doubt, depression and worry pushed the boundaries as to how relationships worked, and how humanity survived isolation from the things we loved

most. I am proud of how we have handled the past year. I am proud of the determination that we showed. I am proud of the fight we are still fighting. I am proud of the Black Lives Matter movement, and how we have demonstrated a commitment to creating equity in our society. Don't get me wrong, I miss the hugs and the handshakes, the physical linkages between humans. But never will I ever allow myself to believe that the COVID virus has completely destroyed our connectedness. In a world where we are required to stay apart - 6ft apart to be exact... I have never felt such a fiercely tendered feeling of connection from my family, friends and peers.

MLA Works Cited

Buchanan, Larry and Quoc Trung Bui and Jugal K. Patel. *Black Lives Matter May Be the Largest Movement in U.S. History*. 8 July 2020, www.nytimes.com/interactive/2020/07/03/us/george-floyd-protests-crowd-size.html.

Cullen, W, et al. "Mental Health in the COVID-19 Pandemic." *OUP Academic*, Oxford University Press, 30 Mar. 2020, academic.oup.com/gjmed/article/113/5/311/5813733.