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How to Be Okay

Isabel G. Van den Heuvel
Bard College, iv7436@bard.edu

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How To Be Okay

Senior Project Submitted to
The Division of Studio Arts
of Bard College

by

Isabel Van den Heuvel

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How To Be Okay

I began this line of thought with the desire to understand human connection. I want to know how people operate both as individuals being perceived as well as how they connect to each other in small, casual ways. Acts like introducing yourself, or navigating in a crowded place seemed like skills that everyone had learned on the day I had skipped class. This began as a private venture, an intensifying of my day to day attempts of applied observation. My result, rather than gradual mastery of interpersonal relations, was deeper confusion and frustration. I wanted instruction, but the construction of instructions lead me farther from my goal as I became hyper-aware of my own movements and interactions to the point of paralyzation. Something about this tickled me, instructions in which their failure was not their lack of specificity or clarity, but rather the over abundance of information.

The concept of ineffective instruction lead me to the idea of solutions, not just through understanding and instruction, but objects. These objects, such as a “thicker skin” began to depart from the laws of our world, but are based in the language used to express intangible ideas and entertain a “what-if” notion. The language surrounding emotional states, personality and interpersonal relations often is a figurative usage of words typically applied to objects.

Word play takes a role in both complicating ideas, by presenting two sides of a word as well as opening a passage for humor, a quiet acknowledge of the absurdity I saw in the complications of what seemed to be basic functions. Word play is in part how string became a central element of this body of work. Initially string was suggested as an alternative to Sharpie, but then I realized its relation with connection, and its ability to subtly suggest connections or “ties”, suiting it perfectly for illustration of attempts of human connection as in figures outlining the steps of hand holding. String also became the medium for a large wall drawing. Again, the medium served to suggest connection, while also playing with the idea of a thread of thought. In addition the scale of the drawing in relation to the meticulous attention that needed to be paid to the material, embodied the obsessive and overthought nature of the project.

As my thoughts developed, I became increasingly aware of the simultaneous and opposing forces of connection and disconnection. I saw this particularly in physical contact, how a physical act can be either devoid of emotion or extremely emotionally intimate and that the physical actions do not necessarily correlate with the degree of emotional intimacy. In moments of intimacy we still have a physical barrier, skin, that separates us. I began thinking of skin in the sense of a barrier with varying levels of permeability, both with the possibility of protection as well as vulnerability. Using the transparency of kozo paper, I imagined the possibilities of passing the skin barrier and the transparency and delicacy of the barrier. This idea was also worked in the opposite direction with the creation of a “thicker skin”, with the possibility of increased protection.

In the development of this project I became aware of the connection established by disconnection. Initially beginning as a private investigation, and then evolving into a realization of the universality of the struggle for connection and the possible resulting empathy from this realization.

Images

