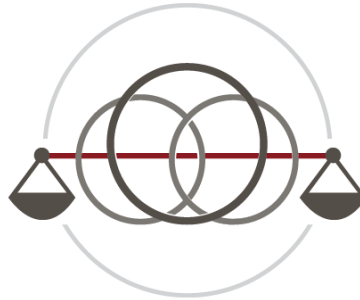


GRUTER INSTITUTE

FOR LAW AND BEHAVIORAL RESEARCH



**The Evolution of Kissing and Adaptive Trade-Offs in Human Contact:
Perspectives in Evolutionary Biology, Immunology, Human Behavior, and
Implications
for the Increasingly Isolated Digital Age**

**The Royal Society
Carlton House Terrace
London, England**

March 15-16, 2024

**Convened by the Gruter Institute for Law & Behavioral Research
With Support from Gordon Getty**

Co-Organizers:

Monika Gruter Cheney, J.D.

Oliver Goodenough, J.D.

Andrew Torrance, J.D., Ph.D.

Isabel Behncke, Ph.D.

Organizing Goals

Kissing represents perhaps the highest rate of pathogen exchange between humans and plays a significant role in both mate assessment and bonding mechanisms. Understanding kissing and other proximate human to human contact in an evolutionary context provides critical information about the role of pathogen exchange in the context of the immune system. What do we know about the effects on the immune system when pathogen exchange via either kissing or proximate human contact decreases or increases? What are the impacts on human behavior when such pathogen exchange decreases or increases? What do we know about the role of the five senses being employed in both kissing and in proximate human contact? What forms of contact are platonic, and what is the role of physical attraction in such behavior? How is human contact mediated by social and cultural norms? How has it been regulated and controlled by law? Not all close contact is welcome or appropriate. Legal and societal rules and expectations are changing here as well. When a Spanish soccer federation official kisses a winning player, is this exuberance or abuse, what are the standards for capacity and consent?

These topics are not only of high interest in evolutionary theory, but they are critical to understand as humans in the increasingly isolated, digital, post-COVID-19 pandemic world. When kissing is viewed abstractly as one end in the continuum of human contact, it leads to broader questions about human interaction.

During the pandemic, most countries mandated reduced pathogen exchange, particularly outside of immediate family members. But it is the digitization of our lives, which started before the pandemic and has continued at marked speed since the pandemic, that appears to be having an even more robust and seemingly permanent negative effect on the extent to which we engage in face-to-face proximate human contact. Consider the number of non-family members a person typically encounters in a given day today versus 50 years ago. While this may have increased in some more passive contexts such as public transport, it appears to have decreased in other more active social contexts such as in-person work and in-person gatherings.

Consider further, the decreased use of the five senses in the “social” encounters that we have when such encounters are done virtually. With AI and the “attention economy” having their own Cambrian Explosion, reduced face-to-face encounters and isolation – what we might consider the opposite of kissing - will only increase. What are the implications of such “environmental change” for human society, including our immune systems, mental health, law, and institutions? What insights might we gain for technology and institutional design?

We are fortunate to have a preeminent, interdisciplinary group of scientists, legal scholars, historians, economists, and other thinkers gathering together to participate in this discussion. In order to provide a useful arc to the symposium sessions and allow ample time for discussion, we have organized the two day symposium into sessions focused on the topics outlined below; these topics are meant to serve as a useful starting point, not a comprehensive pool of topics.

Symposium Format

We have organized the two days into four broad session topics, as outlined below. We anticipate that individual talks will last approximately 20 minutes followed by five minutes of questions. In addition, we have slated additional time for general discussion at the end of each session. We have done our best to match participants with session topics, however, if you should prefer to speak in a different session, simply email Monika Cheney (mgc@gruter.org) to indicate your preference.

**Arrival Day March 14: Opening Dinner 6:30pm May Fair Hotel
Stratton Street, London**

Day 1 - March 15:

7:30 – 9:00 Breakfast Available for Stafford Guests in the Game Bird Restaurant

**9:00 Royal Society, Wolfson Room
Introductions**

Session I: Kissing in Evolutionary Context

Chair: Andrew Torrance

Pathogen Exchange/Parasite Loads

Paul Ewald

Stuart West

Ashleigh Griffin

David Haig

Immunology/Immune System Tradeoffs in the Course of Evolution

Holly Swain Ewald

Penny Riggs

12:30 - 1:30 Lunch

Session I: Kissing in Evolutionary Context Continued

Pathogens in the 21st Century

Christiana Scheib

Matt Ridley

General Discussion Chair: Andrew Torrance

Session II: Social and Behavioral Analysis

Chair: Oliver Goodenough

Bonding Mechanisms and Function

Lydia Hopper

Rachna Reddy

The Role of the Five Senses

Terence Kealey

**6:00 Drinks Reception, Dinner & Music: No 4 Hamilton Place
4 Hamilton Place, London, W1J 7BQ**

Day 2 - March 16:

7:30 – 9:00 Breakfast Available for Stafford Guests in the Game Bird Restaurant

9:00 Royal Society, Wolfson Room

Session III: Kissing and Society

Chair: Lydia Hopper

History & Anthropology

Joe Henrich

Sophie Lund Rasmussen

Troels Pank Arbøll

Ullica Segerstråle

Kissing, Law & Institutions

Oliver Goodenough

Rebecca Purdom

Carlton Patrick

12:30 - 1:30 Lunch

Kissing, Law & Institutions Continued

Andy Morriss

Andrew Torrance

Susan Dudley

2:30 Session IV: Kissing and Human Contact in Contrast to Human Isolation

Chair: Monika Cheney

Isolation and Lack of Personal Contact from Digital Lifestyles, Social Media and AI: Effects Human Behavior

Isabel Behncke

Virginia Postrel

Rosalind Arden

Jevin West

General Discussion

Dinner: 6:30 pm The Marylebone Hotel, The Palm Room, 47 Welbeck Street London