

Literature and Coping Skills
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Lecture 22

Feeling Weird, Losing Touch-II

Hello, everybody. I am Ajit K Mishra, your course instructor for Literature and Coping Skills. I am here again with another lecture on this module, Defeating Depression. If you remember in my last lecture I talked about depression, the various types of depression and the causes of depression and how to overcome depression by implying certain coping strategies. So, I hope that lecture helped you understand the implications of depression, the seriousness of depression for our well-being.

So, it is like a dark hole, a manhole in to which we gradually descend if we do not take care of depression and it is a distressing power. So, it is very important that we understand depression, its various types and its impact on our well-being. So, in this lecture I am going to focus on the other aspect of depression, a very interesting one, which most people tend to ignore and do not take care of. I am going to talk about touch.

If you remember I told you all that we are going to talk about feeling weird and losing touch. So that feeling of weirdness is what causes a lot of depression in us or pushes us into the depressive states. At the same time, we begin to lose touch. Touch with people around us and touch with ourselves. So, what are the implications of that loss? Why is touch so very important? Does a touch have the power to lead to depression? So, these are some of the things that I am going to talk about today, with the special focus on the idea of touch and its implications for our well-being. So let us start.

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Well, it is the same manhole that you can recall from the last lecture. The same manhole because it is a manhole of depression in to which people fall unless they take care of their depressive challenges. So, all we need to do is to quickly slide this manhole and place the ladder so that we can promptly move out of the dark hole and we can return to life and begin to live life as we did earlier. So, if we do this, if we cut short the period of depression then there is every possibility that we can return to life.

If that does not happen, we will continue to be inside the dark manhole, where the lid is tightly closed, so that will thwart, that will hinder our return to normal life again, so that does not happen to us we need to take care of depression. So how do we do that? With the help of these strategies, we can do that. As I told you in my last lecture, I am going to focus on feeling weird and losing touch again. So today I am going to focus on this part of feeling weird and losing touch and I am going to talk about losing touch today as I talked about feeling weird in my last lecture.

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But before we begin to think about losing touch or touch as such, the same question again how are you feeling and you are sitting in a dejected manner, sad, are you feeling sad? If you say that, are you feeling lonely? Or you are feeling empty? That means there is no reason, there is no cause for your existence. Are you feeling depressed? Are you also feeling anxious?

So, these are the responses that most of us generally project or offer whenever we are asked this question. When we are in a state of dejection and rejection of course. So, these are some of the feelings that have the power to promptly disconnect us from others. The human connection is generally established through a very very important human organ that is the human skin. So, it will be interesting to note that the human skin is the first human organ to develop in the fetus.

When the fetus is already inside the mother's womb the skin is the first organ to develop. So skin is very important because it gives us the power of tactility or the tactile sense through which we experience the touch of each other and that is how touch plays an important role in our lives. So therefore, it is important that we understand the power of touch in our lives, but before that let us focus on the other side of touch, that is losing touch, since we are talking about losing touch and feeling weird.

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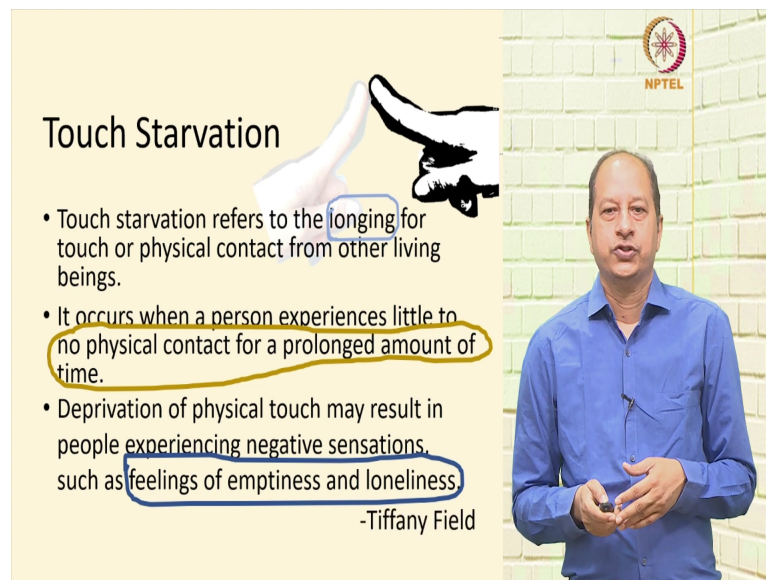
So, what does losing touch generally mean? So, losing touch is all about when you or why you strive to feel the touch of a living thing or a living being and you do not have it and you begin to feel as if you are fast losing touch, you are rapidly being disconnected from people around you, from the living things or living beings around you, so that is exactly what we mean by losing touch.

What are the implications of this lost touch? Can it lead us to depression? Can it affect our existence, our lives in a negative manner? Are some of the things that I am going to talk about today. So, losing touch is all about touch deprivation or touch starvation. This is also called skin hunger. So why is it called skin hunger? Skin hunger is a natural human desire that has to do with the human skin.

As we all know the human skin is made to experience tactile touch, to to know a variety of things through the feelings of the skin or feelings through the skin. So, if we are deprived of touch, if we are starved of touch that will lead to several problems because we humans are wired to be touched, to experience that. Right from birth until the time we die our need for physical contact remains. So, this is one of the most basic human needs. The need to touch and the need to be touched.

So why is it so? What are the implications? So, if we do not experience touch, if we are touch starved or deprived of touch, which is also known as skin hunger, it can lead a person to several problems. If the person is deprived, if the person is not allowed to experience and feel the touch from the other living things, it can lead to several problems, so that is exactly what we mean by losing touch. It is touch deprivation, skin hunger and touch starvation. So let us focus on touch starvation.

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The slide features a yellow background with the title "Touch Starvation" in black text. To the right of the title is a graphic of two hands, one white and one black, reaching towards each other. Below the title is a bulleted list of three points. The second point is circled in yellow, and the third point is circled in blue. At the bottom right of the text area is the attribution "-Tiffany Field". On the right side of the slide, a man in a blue shirt is speaking, with the NPTEL logo in the top right corner.

Touch Starvation

- Touch starvation refers to the longing for touch or physical contact from other living beings.
- It occurs when a person experiences little to no physical contact for a prolonged amount of time.
- Deprivation of physical touch may result in people experiencing negative sensations, such as feelings of emptiness and loneliness.

-Tiffany Field

As I have already told you, touch or to touch and to be touched are the most basic of human needs. Most basic because we want to feel, we want to experience through those feelings and how does that happen? They happen through the touch experience only, the tactile sense only. So, when a fetus is inside the mother's womb, that connection between the mother and the fetus is established through the touch element, so this is called skin to skin experience in which a mother is very closely connected with a child, because of the skin-to-skin experience. And this skin-to-skin experience allows the baby to develop a few abilities after the birth.

So, researchers experimented with normalcy after the birth of a few babies. They made some of them to be placed inside the incubator and some other babies were allowed to be with their mother, to experience the touch of their mother. And after a few years when the babies began to grow it was noticed, it was observed that those babies who were placed in the incubators showed

lesser abilities, cognitive, psychological abilities in comparison to those babies who were allowed to be with their mother, because those babies experienced the touch of the mother.

So that particular experience allowed both the parent, the mother and the baby to develop certain abilities, so that is the power of touch, because it helps us develop a lot of abilities. If we are not allowed to experience touch then that will lead to touch starvation. And touch starvation can be the result of a variety of things. It is a basic human need. I have already told you all. If we are not allowed to experience touch going through certain, temporary problems for example these days we are passing through difficult times in which touch is certainly regarded as a necessary crime, a necessary evil, because touch is a thing that probably leads to spreading of the Covid-19 infection and that is the reason why our our epidemiologists ask us to refrain from touching each other.

So, this can be a temporary phenomenon because after a while when things return to normalcy, we can again experience the touches of each other, but there can be a permanent phenomenon as well. For example, you suddenly lose one of your loved ones and you cannot experience the touch of that person anymore. So, you know that, the moment you realize that you can experience touch starvation. So, this basic need, needs to be fed, needs to be met.

If that is not done, that will lead to touch deprivation and touch starvation, and the skin hunger will gradually grow and it will promptly lead us to the depressive states. So, touch starvation refers to the natural longing for touch or physical contact from other living beings. It is a natural longing because we humans are wired to be so, and therefore we have this tactile sense. So, it is a natural longing. So therefore, this particular thing- longing is very important here. We long for the human touch; I mean the touch from other living beings around us.

And the second is touch starvation occurs when we experience very little or no physical contact for a prolonged amount of time, for a prolonged period, if we are deprived of that basic need of touch, we can experience touch starvation. For example, during the Covid-19 lockdown the entire world experienced this particular starvation, because they were suddenly deprived of the human touch. So going out, meeting people, being in touch with them, being in connection with

them all these activities were suddenly put or brought to an abrupt stop, abrupt halt and that actually led to touch starvation.

A lot of researchers have already conducted research into this particular phenomenon which was the consequence of the Covid-19 lockdown. So, in this case if there is no or very little physical contact for a prolonged period of time that can also lead to touch starvation. And then deprivation of physical touch may result in people experiencing negative sensations, such as feelings of emptiness and loneliness. When that happens, when people are suddenly disconnected, they are suddenly deprived of touch from other living beings around them, that leads to feelings of emptiness and loneliness.

And when these feelings become stronger, they promptly turn into what we call depressive states. Prolonged period of sadness, emptiness, loneliness. So, depression is not far away when there is touch starvation. So, in this case it is all about feelings of emptiness and loneliness. So, when people begin to feel empty and lonely that can be because of touch starvation, they are starved or deprived of touch.

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So, what can be the consequences of touch starvation? We all long for touch, because it is a basic human need, both a biological and a psychological need. So, when that happens people tend to

be less happy and more lonely, so that is one big reason why we can see people, a lot of people around us either less happy or lonely because they are disconnected from their loved ones, because they cannot experience the touch of their loved ones.

So that has either disappeared or they have been separated and they have been separated either by distance or or by some other reasons. So, this disconnection, this loss of touch leads to less happiness, that means more sadness and loneliness. And then such people also experience depression and stress, because the serotonin system, the neurotransmitter that is called a serotonin, which is our natural antidepressant and stress reliever gets disturbed because of touch starvation. This is one big reason why serotonin does not function properly.

And then, now touch starvation leads to poor bonding levels, because touch helps us bond with each other. I cited the example of the mother and the child, so that is probably the strongest of all bonding types. So, we also have a similar bonding in life. We have bonding with our family members. We also have bonding with our friends and people around us. So, the bonding level will go down when there is no touch or very little touch.

You will be surprised to know that the United Kingdom and the U.S. are two of the most touch starved nations in the world. On the contrary, France is a very powerful, touchy, feely, nation that means people experience a lot of touch experiences in France in comparison to those in the United Kingdom and the United States. So, the UK and U.S. people are far more touch starved.

And we in India are also fast or rapidly moving towards that particular state because of the invention of technology into our lives. We are gradually getting separated and disconnected from each other. So, this poor bonding level is also the consequence or consequence of the touch starvation. And then such people who experience starvation experience strong mood and anxiety disorders.

So, when it comes to mood and anxiety disorders, we can say they are experiencing depressive states. They are passing through depressive states. If somebody is deprived of touch for a long long time there is every possibility that such people will enter the realm of depression. And such people do also experience alexithymia, a state in which you are unable to either comprehend or

interpret your emotional experiences. So, you suddenly lose your control over emotional experience. You can neither understand nor interpret your emotional experiences or you cannot regulate that.

So, then such people will also develop a fearful-avoidant attachment style. That means you will not be comfortable developing attachments with the living things around you. You will begin to withdraw. You will begin to show less attachment styles. So, these are some of the consequences of touch starvation, which tell us that touch is extremely important. That brings us to the idea of the power of touch.

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Why is touch so very important? By now you must you have figured out that touch is extremely important, because it is a biological and a psychological need. It is extremely important because it tells us we exist. It tells us that there is somebody for us. It assures us. So, it gives us a sense of assurance.

Imagine the moment somebody gives you a pat on your back. You suddenly feel so assured, so special. When somebody touches your head, your forehead or soothes your forehead, comforts you in that manner you feel so special, so relaxed, why is it so? Because of the sense of assurance that touch gives us. I am very much here for you.

This is a kind of touch that the nursing practitioners give to their patients. The medical practitioners give to their patients. This is a kind of touch a mother gives to the child, the baby. This is a kind of touch a friend gives to another friend. This is a kind of touch a teacher gives to the students. So that is very important. It gives us a sense of assurance. Yes, there is somebody for us, yes, we matter. So, this touch is very, very important.

And then we come to the real and the symbolic aspects of touch. It can be real; you can touch people actually. You can experience touch and what is so very important about this particular type of touch is that when we actually touch people that gives us a greater amount of benefit but when that is not possible especially when the lockdown was implemented, it did not allow us to move out and meet friends, people or relatives and experience social touch or be it the psychological touch.

So, in such cases, in such periods or situations, the symbolic touch can also make up for the absence of real or actual touch. The symbolic touch, for example with the help of our smartphones we can send hugging, kissing, patting icons to our friends, so that they also help a lot. Although they cannot match the intensity of the real touch but they can make up for the absence of the real touch.

So, it is better to go for the symbolic touch when it is not possible to experience a real or actual touch. So, trust and bonding is very, very important when it comes to our interpersonal life, interpersonal communication. It is very, very important that touch gives us a sense of trust and bonding, so that is the kind of trust a mother has with the child, a teacher has with the students, a friend has with the other friends and probably your boss has with the colleagues. So, it is very, very important that we all know the power of this particular type of touch, because it leads to the establishment of trust and bonding.

And then that also leads to important motor skills, because it has been found by researchers that those children who are exposed to a greater amount of touch during their growing period show a great amount of motor skills in comparison to those children who experienced limited touch

experiences. So, this also leads to greater motor skills, greater cognitive abilities, that is exactly what research has established.

And then we come to the final, and this may not be the final, because the power of touch is so pervasive and so important that it just goes on and on and on. So, another very important aspect of touch is healing, because it tells us that there is somebody who can take care of us and there is somebody who can definitely do something to heal us. So, for lone people have trusted, the power of hands to heal, and that is one big reason why the word surgeon comes from two Greek words.

These are those two Greek words, hand and work. So together they give us a meaning of word surgeon. So, it is up to the surgeon to heal the ailment in some body part. Now this particular aspect is extremely important because it tells us that with the touch of our hands, we can heal people. We can give them moments of relaxation. We can help them overcome their worries, their depression, their grief and a lot of things and that is the reason why the medical system depends a lot on the power of hands, the power of touch when it comes to healing.

And we can also recall exactly Mother Teresa, one of the most popular missionaries of charity, how she actually used her hands, the power of touch to heal people, to give them relief from pain and suffering, so that is the power of touch when it comes to healing. So, I am reminded of a few very interesting examples.

One of them is from the Bollywood blockbuster, Munna Bhai MBBS in which the idea of the magical hug, which is very popularly called “Jadu ki jhappi” in that film. So, the entire film which is all about practicing healing through the power of touch is based on the idea of this particular magical hug. And there is something else, when we look at the Vicks VapoRub advertisement you can see the power of touch.

It is the power of touch that actually leads to relief. Why is it so? It is very important for us to note, why is it so? I will tell you that there is a nerve that is located here, right at the bottom of our nape, right here. So, when you press that nerve gently, we all feel relaxed. Especially when

people are pressed in these areas gently, the upper shoulder and then the bottom of the nape. We feel extremely relaxed, why is it so?

It is because of the vagus nerve that is located there. The vagus nerve in fact sends signals to the whole body that it is time to relax. So, the vagus nerve is associated with the relaxation that we all need. So, and then we all have these neurotransmitters that get activated the moment the vagus nerve is activated. So, it is all about the power of touch that leads to so many things, assurance, trust and bonding, greater motor skills and then wonderful healing.

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And then we come to the neuroscience of touch. I thought it is probably important for you to be a little aware of the neuroscience of touch so that you can also understand the power of touch in a better manner. So now when it comes to the power of touch the C tactile afferents, CTs, I mean there are a set of fibers in our skin that register gentle stroking touch, so that is, that is a power of these receptors or transmitters. They very quickly understand a positive touch and a negative touch, a good touch and a bad touch and they send signals to the brain accordingly.

So, if it is not a positive touch it will not send the right kind of signals to the brain and the whole body will not feel relaxed, will not experience trust and bonding, will not experience the power of healing. If it is not the right kind of touch, the good and the positive touch. So, it is kind of gentle stroking touch in which the C tactile afferents get activated and these these fiber ends, these neurotransmitters or receptors, neuroreceptors they promptly send messages to the brain and the entire message is sent around the whole body and then the whole body responds accordingly.

Now these neurons are very, very important because they play a major role in developing the social brain. Apart from this biological brain we also have a social brain and that is the brain which makes it possible for us to live and lead a proper, social life or to have a social, a good social existence, and it is the same brain that also helps us withstand stress through our

interpersonal relationships. So therefore, these neurons play a very, very important role when it comes to sending the right kind of signals to the brain.

And when these neurons get stimulated because of this gentle stroking touch, now the two positive hormones, stress relieving hormones oxytocin and dopamine they get released and the moment they are released that leads to lowering of the level of cortisol, the stress inducing hormone in our body.

So, what I mean to say is when somebody is touch starved, is experiencing skin hunger or touch starvation, the person suddenly begins to experience the rising levels of cortisol in the body. That means you you become sad and then your mood becomes low, it drops and then you are stressed, because the stress level is induced. The higher stress level is induced by the secretion of this stress hormone cortisol.

So, when that happens, we need a touch, an assuring touch that there is somebody for us, and that particular assuring touch will heal us, because the moment that happens it relate to the release of oxytocin and dopamine and these two hormones will gradually lower the cortisol level and the same person who was experiencing sadness a while ago will begin to feel good and will begin to feel happy and cheerful.

So that is the reason why you might have noticed whenever a baby begins to cry the cortisol level goes up. The mother takes the baby and then begins to pat the baby. After a while the baby is relaxed. The crying goes off, because this particular thing happens there, so that is the power of touch. And then we all know it improves healing and decreases pain.

Many researchers, especially in medical science, have established the fact that cancer patients who experience a great amount of positive and effective touch experience lower pain levels and they also experience higher healing levels. So that is the reason, that is the power of touch.

And then touch also positively influences the serotonin system. Once the serotonin system, the transmitter that in fact helps us take care of both our psychological and the biological needs, so if the serotonin system works well, it is fine, it is it is proper that means the entire, the whole body

will experience well being both psychologically and biologically. So that is the power of serotonin and that is the power of touch, because it improves the serotonin system.

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And then to one of the most important things that is how to cope with touch starvation, because we have discovered that touch is extremely important and when we are deprived of touch, when we experience skin hunger or touch starvation that will lead to serious consequences, so that we do not run in to those problems, it is important that we learn how to cope with touch starvation.

So, we need to cope with touch starvation because of this particular need, this particular thing that is, I mean we need to satisfy the body's desire for touch and thus we can protect our mental well-being. So, seeing touch as I have already told you can also give us some of the benefits of feeling touch, if not all the benefits of feeling touch. Whenever we are deprived of touch owing to certain reasons, we can depend on seeing touch.

For example, watching television shows or films in which a lot of touching scenes are projected, so that will lead to something that is called vicarious touch. It is a vicarious touch because the mirror-neurons will fire and you will begin to experience the same kind of touch that you see on screen. So, this is one big reason why most researchers have found that those elderly people who are separated from their children have to go away in search of a job.

The smartphone has given a wonderful, wonderful medium to lower touch starvation, because the video calls that happen through the smartphones, they help lower the touch starvation syndrome. So, these elderly people are actually benefiting from the video call option or the video call technology that is available on smartphones. So that is an instance of vicarious touch.

And then there are various other ways, journaling, yoga, dancing when the entire body experiences touch sensations. So, we can experience that, for example people can write down their feelings. If somebody is touch starved, they can think about alternatives, the other options to restore the touch phenomenon in them and then yoga we all know is extremely helpful in restoring the touch needed in the body. The feeling of touch in the body and then dancing of course.

Now this is a very, very important thing and this is one big reason why people, they prefer pets at home, especially pups, dogs at home, because it gives them a tremendous amount of relief when they just run their hands over the dog's skin, especially the hairy skin, because that gives you a ruffling sensation, and that particular touch relieves you and the pet as well. So, the animal touch is also equally important.

And then if you can also remain social through the digital channels when you are touch deprived, you are touch starved because of certain reasons that will also help you a lot. Now remaining social through digital channels because that is how we say keep in touch. I am keeping in touch with my friends although we are not near, I am still keeping in touch with my friends.

And then to the most important thing that is the touch trap. While touch is very, very powerful, it is magical, it is a basic human need but one needs to know the limits of touch. So that one does not fall into the trap that we call the touch trap. That means if somebody is given excessive touch that means the person will become extremely dependent on that particular touch. The person will be conditioned to that particular touch and in the absence of that particular touch the person will experience severe depressive disorders.

And this is exactly what the very famous behaviorist John B. Watson in 1928 talked about. He said that parents need to prevent themselves from giving excessive touches to their children.

They need to give them minimum touches only, so that the same children do not grow to be mawkish adults, adults who cannot know or do, what to do in times of depressive disorders or challenges, mental challenges especially, so that these children do not turn out to be mawkish adults. It is very, very important that the parents do not expose them to excessive touch. So therefore, it is very important that we also cope with the touch trap, so that we do not become excessively dependent on the power of touch.

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So that is how we come to the end of this lecture. I hope you have enjoyed our discussion and you have liked the things that I talked about and this lecture has probably helped you understand and discover the power of touch in our lives. So, thank you very much for joining me.