

Advance Course in Social Psychology

Lecture 31: Communication - Part IV

Welcome back students. I will continue my discussion pertaining to nonverbal communication. We have already discussed about kinesthetics, we have already discussed about proxemics, chronemics. Today I will discuss about haptics with the ancient Greek word haptikos which means touch, the significance or sense of touch in nonverbal communication. This is one of the most important pattern of a nonverbal communication which refers to the ways in which people communicate and interact via the sense of touch. Now the sense of touch is something which carries certain vibes and that transmits to the other person's body and the person can interpret that touch in a very rightful manner.

So touch is the most sophisticated and intimate of the five senses and haptics has been derived from the ancient Greek word haptikos which means touch only. When we are talking about haptics then how we tend to interact with the sense of touch in different situations. For instance it has a categorically different connotations or meanings at professional level. It has a very different connotation as a ritual in any social interaction or it can be considered as a very different sense when we are talking about in terms of interpersonal relationships and intimate relationships that means emotions.

So if we are talk about the categories of haptics then let us talk about the professional or functional expressions through touch through the sense of touch how we convey that message at workplaces and how it is being perceived. This category of haptics has task orientation we pat our co-workers back for a good performance then that message is motivation and encouragement that is that is simply the touch that the person tends to perceive or interpret and it has very effective message to the other person. At the same time it can be in very different form for example touch can be can also mean a sexual advance to the another person. Now the way the person is touching is it has certain vibes that vibe is a real message that is being carried and transferred to the other person and the person is able to decode that non-verbal message. Therefore this category of haptics has task orientation managers know the effectiveness of using the touch while communicating to subordinates for instance a hand on the shoulder mean a supportive gesture or an encouraging gesture or it can be considered as a sexual advance to another person.

At the same time working with others and using touch to communicate a manager needs to be aware of each person's touch tolerance. Now the idea is that even a shake hand can be a very soft which is very welcoming and at the same time a shake hand can be very harsh and stiff which can also give a vibe or message of not being acceptable at a particular moment. This is functional or professional expression of haptic category. The other is social or polite expression this is a ritual interaction for instance again I will continue with the example of a handshake. A handshake can

be considered as a touch for the commencement of a program and at the same time a handshake can be a touch at the end of the program.

In both the examples it is only a ritualistic expression. The initial connection to another person in a professional setting usually starts off with a touch such as handshake. It is not only limited to professional setting but is also an important aspect of youth team sport. Any manager or any authority who shakes the hand with the employee in a very stiff manner and shaking it for a longer period of time then that touch will also be an expression of youthfulness or encouragement or motivation. So in all the three examples of commencement of an event or expression of youthfulness or end of the game in all the three examples of a handshake it clearly expresses a ritualistic interaction which talks about social and polite expression.

This is another category of haptics. The other is friendship or warmth express. For instance any child who touches the face of the mother that soft touch is full of warmth and maybe the child is needing more cuddle or more affection from the mother. This is affection a display of affection through touch that is friendship or warmth expression. It can be physical affection like hugs can serve as an over display of love.

It can be embrace it can be love but what touch and what vibes a person receives that vibe is the message that will make the other person understand or interpret that feeling of friendship or warmth. This is the category of again haptics and the other is love or intimacy. This connotes the emotional attachment that two people express towards each other for example holding hands. This kind of non-verbal behavior has impact on interpersonal relationship. Two people in relationship if one holds the hand the other does not want to hold the hand then that will create a kind of discord between two people and that is very much overt even to the external world that what kind of quality of interrelationship is existing between two people.

So, this has the biggest effect on interpersonal relationship and the amount of touching increases as a relationship moves from impersonal to personal. The more the person is becoming intimate and personal the more the touching or the touch will also increase that will define the intimate relationship between two people. When a couple is holding hands or putting their arms around each other this is a tie sign showing others that they are together. So, this kind of touch is overt although non-verbal but any person can decode the level of relationship between two people. Now in this picture all the kind of categories are easily reflected.

In the first there is a pat on the back this is functional expression, shake hand, a social or polite expression, embracing or hugging, this is again warmth or it can be about emotional attachment. So, in all the examples, pictures different kind of touches are expressing different kind of messages

to the public. So, this is how touch has a very important significance in non-verbal behavior. Next comes the context of touch. There are different context and dimensions that touch can interpret.

It is not only that touching a person and the person gets the message. There are certain parameters which defines the intensity of the touch and how it has been interpreted by the other person. Social psychologists have given identified certain dimensions that describe the context of touch. For example, the first is intensity. How long the touch has been experienced by the person.

The touch is that you touch and go away or it can be that you pat the back and you keep your hand on the shoulder of the colleague for a longer period of time. That is intensity and duration. It is soft or hard or it is for how much time the hand was placed on the shoulder of the colleague. So, intensity relates to how delicate or strong the touch is. For example, the handshake.

Duration, it relates to how short or prolonged the touch was. That you are shaking hand with the other person for just touch and go back or it is for continuously maybe for 2 seconds or it can be that you are patting the back of your colleague for maybe 2 seconds or more than 2 seconds. So, this is intensity and duration. It also talks about location. It refers to the area where the person was touched.

That means, what kind of advances the other person is making, it all depends on the location. It can be about pat on the back, it can be a shake hand. Whatever the location is there, the touch will define whether it is a warm encouragement or it is a professional encouragement. Frequency which represents the number of touches that happen. An instrument of touch, it refers to the touch with other body parts like feet, hands and other objects as well.

So, it is not about that simply touching and the non-verbal communications initiates. It also involves certain parameters such as intensity, duration, location, frequency and instrument of touch. For how long the touch was continued, how strong the touch was there, where it was touched and which part of the body the touch was felt by the other person. When all these factors come together, then only we can say that the non-verbal communication in terms of haptics has taken place which carries a specific hidden message in that touch. The other is meaning of touch.

The touch reveals different meanings. Even when we are talking about certain parameters in terms of intensity, duration, location, frequency and instrument of touch, every time there is some meaning of touch. It is positive emotions, it is playfulness, it is controlled, it is ritualistic and accidental touch. For instance, when we talk about positive effect or emotion, these touches communicate positive emotions and occur mostly between people who have close relationship.

So here if I go about this diagram, this picture, then these touches can easily identify the quality of relationship between two people who are very much close to each other.

Playfulness, this touch serves to lighten an interaction. Control, this touch is initiated by the person who attempts to influence. These touches can be further classified as compliance, attention getting and announcing a response. You can take the other person holding the hand and then announce for some exciting news. Then you are actually controlling that environment so that the message can be easily delivered to the other person or to the other members in the public event or group event or any social event.

So, this is control that you are gaining some attention at the same time or maybe you are just embracing the other person or partially hugging the other person and then announcing your decision. So, you are getting some attention and at the same time you are taking some control and support from the other person in the situation so that the message can be conveyed. The other is ritual which consists of getting, greeting and departure touches. When we welcome for example, in Indian cultures we fold hands before the other person to welcome the guest and at the same time how we say goodbye to the other person. These are all the cultural aspects or rituals where touch plays a very important role in greeting and departure.

The other is accidental touch. These touches are perceived as unintentional and have no meaning and are mainly of brushes. For instance in any crowded place when we are passing by we tend to brush with the other person which has no meaning, which is accidental and the person does have no criteria to decode or infer any message in that touch. So, this is how it is along with the intensity, duration, location, frequency and instrument of touch. When these parameters are being considered in haptics then definitely the meaning of touch also accompanies with those parameters.

It can be in form of emotions, positive emotions, it can be about playfulness, it can be about control, ritual or any accidental touch. So, we are through with this nonverbal communication in form of haptics, in form of chronemics, in form of kinesthetics, in form of body movements and in form of proxemics. I will extend this discussion in the next lecture. Thank you so much. Thank you.