



Social Interaction. Video-Based Studies of Human Sociality.
2020 Vol. 3, Issue 1
ISBN: 2446-3620
DOI: 10.7146/si.v3i1.120246

Social Interaction

Video-Based Studies of Human Sociality

Human-to-human touch in institutional settings:

A commentary

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This special issue contributes an innovative perspective on multimodality and on touch between humans, documented in video-recorded, naturally occurring social interactions from multiple institutional settings. Contributions examine a timely topic and provide detailed accounts of how institutional professionals use touch in their daily practices. It is an inspiring collection of studies that covers a broad range of contexts and age groups – sports, health professionals and patients, photographers, children, caregivers, and teachers, among others. Scholars represent various perspectives: linguistics, anthropology, sociology, psychology, and educational sciences.

Touch has not been a focus of social interactional studies until recently and was largely neglected in the study of communication. For a long time, studies on multimodality in interaction addressed meaning-making as expressed through talk and the visual mode in social encounters. Earlier research has made substantial contributions to the explication of how the body in face-to-face interactions is a visually available, temporally unfolding field for coordinating social actions (C. Goodwin, 2000, 2018). In addition to talk, gaze has been described as a significant method by which participants coordinate their behavior, treating each other's bodies as mutually accessible visual fields for the ongoing co-production of intentional action (see also Goffman, 1963 on "body gloss"). Both language and the visual modality have been foregrounded as crucial for coordinating human action in social interaction.

Recently, in line with the "corporeal turn" (Crossley, 1996; Streeck et al., 2011; Meyer et al., 2017; Mondada, 2019), a growing number of interactional studies are beginning to unravel how physical contact between people is used for numerous social purposes (see Goodwin & Cekaite, 2018; Cekaite & Mondada, 2020). The research interest in touch in social contexts takes into account the relationality of tactile engagement. More specifically, the communicative potentials of touch are not only related to the forms of physical contact, but also to the social relations between the participants. Simply stated, one cannot touch the other without being touched, and letting another touch oneself escalates the balance of intimacy. The "corporeal turn" that characterizes the social sciences and humanities is also extant in neuro-biological and psychological areas of

research that examine touch by using different methodologies. For instance, by measuring MRI reactions, or oxytocin levels, neuro-affective experiments in laboratory conditions investigate with great detail how skin fibers and receptors react and contribute to the experience of touch (Ellingsen et al., 2016). Interview studies and reports used in psychology and nursing studies present explicit accounts of social actors' experiences and remembrances of touch in concrete and abstract social situations and work scenarios. Such approaches can contribute quantifiable data concerning the reported patterns of physical contact used in different institutional and social relations (Suvilehto et al., 2015). These research perspectives acknowledge that the experience of touch in naturally occurring encounters is dialogic, dependent on the social situations and relations, and that physical contact is coordinated with multiple modalities, but methodologically their procedures are less adapted for such analysis.

What is at the core of interactional studies is their detailed attention to the coordinated attunement of bodies in social interactions. By examining talk and embodied action within the situated activity systems (Goffman, 1963), the interactional perspective on touch thus has a lot to contribute to the understanding of touch in professional encounters. This special issue contributes to the development of a comprehensive analytical approach of how to examine touch in its natural habitat, as part of a corporeal sensorium in social interactions between humans. An interactional approach to touch takes inspiration from C. Goodwin's (2000, 2018) work on contextual configurations, according to which the multimodal interactional sensorium is not limited to the configuration of co-present humans but is also made meaningful within spatial and socio-material formations. The multimodal interactional approach that is proposed and developed (see also Cekaite, 2010; M. H. Goodwin, 2017; Nishizaka, 2017; Goodwin & Cekaite, 2018; Cekaite & Mondada, 2020; Burdelski, 2020) offers possibilities for exploration of various types of touch, such as affectionate, controlling, and instructive, and other forms of physical contact used for emotion regulation, diagnostics, instructions or affiliation.

The special issue brings together contributions that systematically explore the use of touch in institutional contexts in situations where touch is used for

professional, instructional, and social relational purposes. Institutional practices of physical contact are characterized by specific aims of the communicative encounters and social relations that may differ from informal ones in families, between caregivers and children, and between friends and romantic partners. The interactional approach used in the present collection of articles considers various social dimensions of interpersonal touch and shows the normativity of touch practices in professional practices between institutional representatives and lay participants (health professionals and patients, teachers, children and students). The approach taken offers a detailed rendering of how the meaning of various types of touch appears and develops within the emergence and flow of situated institutional activities. The contributions show the multiple ways in which the type, location, and timing of touch, together with other modalities, contribute to its social and communicative potentials and features. The detailed interaction analyses acknowledge the variations and the emergent and transformative character of touch conduct and physical contact. This is shown, for example, in how diagnostic touch transforms into a doctor's comforting touch of a patient diagnosed with a fatal disease (see Raia, M. H. Goodwin & Deng), or how multiple forms of touch practices are transformative and concurrent with various purposes of conflict management activity in teacher-child encounters (see Burdelski).

One of the significant insights presented in Mondada & Burak's study concerns practices of professional touch and vision in photography. Much in line with C. Goodwin's (1994) work on professional vision, the study highlights professional knowledge that characterizes successful photo sessions. Notably, these practices are described as co-dependent on the professional vision and touch: when bodies need to be arranged by photographers for photographs, touching is employed as a targeted and sanctioned matter, but also as a potentially delicate matter. So-called "professional vision cum touch" involves achievement of perspectively appropriate postures and body positionings. When photographers manipulate their clients' bodies, touch practices are clearly related to the prospective visual outcome. Here, a parallel with C. Goodwin's (1994) seminal study on professional vision can be drawn: professional vision in archeologists' practices clearly involved skillfully touching and manipulating the objects of

excavation. In Mondada & Burak's study, "professional touch skillfully addresses issues of professionalism, normativity and accountability" and the concurrent and prospective visual features of the practice.

Skillful perception of touch and vision as intertwined is a characteristic of a majority of human practices. The integration of professional touch as a part of combined multisensory perception is shown in A. Nishizaka's study of Japanese midwifery practice. By investigating traditional examination through which a midwife together with her patient feels the fetus, the study shows the combination of visual and tactile perception, arguing that "perception itself, not merely the environment for interaction, can be multi-modal or multi-sensory." *Perception-in-situ* is an empirical issue that is accessible to the participants, and to the analyst who, by examining the details of physical practices, can trace the participants' perceptions and co-perceptions.

Altogether, contributions to the special issue show that health institutional encounters are characterized by various types of physical contact. While in some contexts touch constitutes an integral part of health practitioners' practices, in others it presents an embodied practice that is usually associated with relational, rather than instrumental, diagnostic approaches. For instance, Kuroshima, in her study of therapist and patient's accountability in medical massage sessions, shows that the professional and patient's perceptions are interpreted and manifested in various epistemic domains of expertise. They constitute a matter of negotiation between professional embodied knowledge and the patient's first-hand bodily experiences.

In a multi-perspectival, theoretically rich study on the various forms of touch during medical encounters with an advanced heart failure (Adhf) doctor who practices relational medicine, Raia, M.H. Goodwin and Deng show that professional touch in health care is not limited to diagnostic functions. Rather, by adopting the theoretical lens of Relational Ontology and Phenomenology, the authors propose a novel way to interpret the health professional's caring, comforting touch. The study highlights the existential power of caring touch as a form of "reciprocal sharing of existential experiences in caring-for-the-Other" that accompanies the transition into a space "where death is part of living."

The variety of tactile and haptic actions towards child patients are outlined in a study on touch in pediatric dentistry. Guo, Katila, and Streeck show that caregivers perform tactile and haptic actions of comfort and control in response to the child's pain or noncompliance. Examination of various forms of touch and touch responses show the fluctuation of agency and motor control, or, in other words, distributed agency. Agency, understood as volitional control over a body's movements, can be distributed in many different ways: at times, child recipients of touch were in control of their own movements; at other times, they were "objects of manipulation by others." Similar to Mondada and Burak, this study shows how participants do not treat the entire body as "an integral, coherent center of action, but an assemblage of body-parts" with some parts controlled by the other, and others by the recipient of touch.

A significant contribution of the present collection is the investigation of touch involving children beyond infancy. A considerable portion of research on touch and children largely concerns mother-infant interaction, where touch patterns are examined primarily in relation to the forming of attachment (Bowlby, 1962) as an indicator of a child's well-being. However, physical contact between teachers, educators, caregivers, and children is a pertinent feature of everyday life in various kinds of educational settings. As Routarinne, Heinonen, Karvonen, Tainio, and Ahlholm show in their study on touch in primary classrooms, physical contact was used as a routine practice in achieving a pedagogically relevant focus. Directing attention is seemingly a simple and invisible task, but it is important for any kind of concerted action, especially for learning activities (de Leon, 2012; Tomasello, 2019). Touch practices were used to direct and manage students' attention to a pedagogical task. Notably, such attention-getting and directive actions were not limited to the use of a single touch modality. Rather, they were designed as complex multimodal gestalts (Mondada, 2014), consisting of touch followed by a deictic pointing gesture that occurred within an ongoing pedagogical activity (see also Mondada & Burak; Nishizaka on the entanglement of touch and vision).

Affection and affiliation in institutional teacher-child encounters is examined in Burdelski's study on teacher compassionate touch in a Japanese preschool.

Similar to other contributions in the special issue, the study shows a routine professional caregiving practice that is fully embodied and affective. Emotion regulation through soothing involved touch in coordination with verbal and other communicative resources such as affect words and response cries that, taken together, indexed caregivers' heightened affective stances. This contribution brings forward the importance of the sequential and situational positioning of touch practices. By demonstrating that educators' comforting touch is usually used as part of conflict management situations, Burdelski shows how particular touch practices are located within an activity context and the larger projects of care and sociality. Yet another practice of affectionate, amicable touches in institutional encounters is demonstrated in a study of participant status in a residential home for people with acquired brain injury (Raudaskoski). Short taps on the shoulder were used by professional caretakers as a type of fleeting haptic sociality that often occurred during verbal teasing. The configuration of verbal practices and momentary touches show how affect and agency are entangled in mundane ways of being together as embodied subjects (i.e., living and lived bodies).

A novel site of exploration concerns how children manage participation and turn-taking in digital activities related to play. Studies on haptics and screens - how touchscreens are managed - constitute a significant area of design research that explores the affordances and user features of technology. Instead, Jakonen and Niemi, in their close analysis of how participation and turn-taking are managed by children in their digital activities, examine the social and moral aspects of participants' haptic actions. Touch was routinely used to block a peer's hand action in a socio-material setting that foregrounded haptic resources and required coordination of talk and hand movements on and around the screen. In this activity context, children blocked other children's turn-taking with their hands but treated these actions as morally not problematic (in contrast to verbal layering of adult touch, see Cekaite, 2015). The study provides support for further exploration concerning the normativity of touch by tentatively suggesting that the "moral underpinning of blocking actions is different depending on the age of participants and the type of the digital device activity."

Physical contact is an integral part of success in various sports, and, as demonstrated by Meyer and v. Wedelstaedt in their study of handball competition, it is prepared for in joint corporeal practices prior to the game and during the competition as such. Analysis of multiple practices within larger temporal units allowed them to reveal that, through collective verbal and corporeal practices, touching changed “its character from avoidance (preference for non-touch) to its active pursuit (preference for touch), ending in a normative standard of hard touch.” Handball athletes achieved competitive hardness and the preference for hard touch by slowly maneuvering themselves before the match “into a state of body and mind that allows for the required hardness” that is successful in competition. The study highlights the importance of temporality, longitudinal trajectories, and context.

Altogether, the contributions to the special issue have examined institutional touch that escapes analytical attention in conventional studies of haptics, institutions, and social interaction. Notably, the analytical perspective on touch utilizes video-recorded materials that document touch conduct as it occurs in everyday institutional and professional practices that clearly extend beyond the use of language. Future exploration of touch in institutional encounters can direct attention to how professional touch practices, knowledge, and physical affinity are developed, and what the learning and teaching processes are through which professionals develop particular “techniques of the body” (Mauss, 1973 [1935], p. 71) and *cultures of touch*.

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