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# Building a Communication Model amongst the Blind: An Ethnographic Study in the Blind Rehabilitation Center 'Wyata Guna', Bandung, Indonesia

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## Abstract

The reality of blindness is a unique phenomenon rarely studied in the discipline of communication. It is consequential in the absence of a special communication model for the blind. This research reveals the phenomenon and constructs a communication model amongst the blind. The qualitative research with this ethnographic tradition was conducted at the Blind Rehabilitation Center (it will hereafter be abbreviated as BRC) Wyata Guna, Bandung, West Java, Indonesia. The results show that the blind people only rely on verbal or vocal communication and nonverbal communication in the form of touch, both in sending and in receiving messages to and from their other visually challenged. The blind's touch communication is determined by three goals, i.e. touch for mobility, touch as a friendship expression and a romantic touch for those who are dating their fellows. This research results in the communication model that exists amongst the blind as an effort to fill the void of communication models that are dominated by models with the perspective of communication of physically normal people. The model shows the dynamic of communication amongst the blind by maximising their sense organs of hearing, touch, smell and taste.

## Keywords

The blind, communication, disabilities, touch communication

## Introduction

Eyes have an important role in human communication. Wenburg and Wilmot (1973, p. 108) refer to the eye as the sense regulator in interpersonal communication. DeVito (2011, p. 191) considers it the most

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important nonverbal messaging system. Aristotle (Synnott, 2003, p. 19) calls the eye the most esteemed sense and part in the human body because the eye is the reflection of one's soul. According to Somantri (2006, p. 67), the symbolic signals captured by the eyes become the source of everyone's perception because through the eyes, most of the stimulation and information will be accepted and then forwarded to the brain, resulting in a certain impression or perception and particular understanding of the stimulus. Vision (eyes) delivers nonverbal messages to the brain for interpretation. With these functions, the eyes have an important role and contribute greatly to ongoing human communication. Moreover, two-thirds of messages interpreted by the brain are derived from visual stimuli (Mulyana, 2017, p. 168).

Assuming eyes have an imperative role in human communication, how do blind people communicate with their visually challenged? This study aims to address such a question by exploring communication amongst blind people in the BRC Wyata Guna in Bandung, in the Province of West Java, Indonesia. This focus of study differs from other studies about blind people that do not highlight communication aspects. Bhagoetra et al. (2008, pp. 48–51), for instance, explored the strategy and the types of adaptation used by the blind people in the process of their rehabilitation, while Atmaja (2015) investigated interaction between blind students and general physically normal students in an inclusive educational institution.

Blind people constitute a reality of life who to some extent possess a distinctive communication tradition compared and contrasted with communication traditions of sighted communities. However, their unique communication nature is rarely studied. Much of the research sees blind people and blindness as a problem that requires a solution. A study conducted by Pratama et al. (2016), for instance, designed a technological device to help the needs of blind people in accessing information related to current communication technology such as android-based smartphones. Similarly, a study conducted by Crudden et al. (2017) revealed an unfavourable transportation system causing blind people to face mobility obstacles that make them anxious and discouraged to travel and to involve themselves in social interaction. Thus, this study focuses on a community with its unique communication culture that is different from communication amongst sighted people; it is also different from communication between blind people and sighted people. Such a unique communication culture can be found in the rehabilitation centre for blind people under this study.

Although social communication amongst blind people is common in the BRC Wyata Guna and in other rehabilitation centres for blind people in Indonesia, so far there has never been a study on such a phenomenon in Indonesia. Such studies have also been scarce anywhere else outside the country. Since the vast majority of studies have taken sighted people as their subjects, consequently more communication models are based on sighted people's perspective, one of which is indicated in the Berlo's SMCR (sender-message-channel-receiver) communication model (Burgoon, 1974, p. 16) which still puts eyes as a channel of communication. So, to reiterate, this study is different from previous studies, as it attempts to construct a model of blind people's communication amongst themselves to compare and contrast with models of physically sighted people's communication constructed by scholars.

## **Methods**

This article is the result of qualitative research over the years with the ethnographic tradition of the BRC Wyata Guna, Bandung, Indonesia. BRC Wyata Guna was initially founded by Dr. C. A. Westhoff, an ophthalmologist from the Netherlands on 6 August 1901. Its management was then taken over by the Indonesian government in 1945 and it has remained so until now. Located in Bandung, the capital city of West Java, as the biggest rehabilitation centre for blind people in the country BRC provides education, skills, mental, physical and social development for blind people based on a dormitory system and

consultation by appointment. This oldest blind rehabilitation centre in Indonesia is considered appropriate for collecting data related to the communication amongst the blind because blind people here come from the different backgrounds of region, history of blindness and age, so comprehensive data can be obtained. This study was conducted in the period of January and February 2018 although data about the informants and the BRC Wyata Guna had been collected prior to the study as part of a larger project.

The data come from 40 blind people (9 females and 31 males) as informants. In-depth interviews, observation and documentation were employed as research techniques. The researchers observed the phenomenon of communication amongst the blind, either in public spaces or private ones with the agreement from the informants. The researchers also documented their activities related to the nature of their communication. This study utilises the **9** stages of data analysis as put forward by Creswell (2016, p. 277), namely: preparing data, reading **data**, coding data, developing themes and interpreting the themes emerging from the data. So basically the study is qualitative and inductive in its approach. The process of analysis involves the identification of interconnected significant sets of data (narratives) emerging from interviews and observation to develop concepts, themes or model as the results of the study. In order to maintain informants' privacy, the writing of their names in this research uses initials. All research results have been confirmed and informed to the informants so that the accuracy of the data in this study is accountable.

## Research Findings

The communication amongst the blind in some aspects is different from the communication of people in general. These differences are caused by the dysfunction of visual (eye) sense that is normally the dominant channel in human communication. With this visual dysfunction, the communication amongst the blind practically relies on hearing, smelling, touching and tasting. However, of the four-sense devices that are still functioning, the most dominant use is the sense of touching and listening. The phenomenon of communication amongst the blind can be described in two types of communication, i.e. verbal communication and nonverbal communication.

### *Vocal-Verbal Communication amongst the Blind*

In addition to the sense of touch, the sense of hearing in the blind is also very sharp and serves as the main channel in communication, especially to capture vocal-verbal communication messages from their communication partners or other message sources. Most of the messages are received by the blind through the sense of hearing (ears). Hearing for the blind is much more important than the hearing for people in general because vision (eyes) as a communication channel cannot be utilised due to the blindness.

In the learning process for example, blind people often use the tape recorder facility to document subject materials provided by the instructor. Furthermore, the recording is played or heard in the dormitory. In the researchers' observation, the tradition of learning like this is more often applied by blind people who experience blindness in adulthood because Braille-writing culture is not too familiar to them.

In addition to utilising the sense of hearing as a communication channel to capture messages, the blind people also use their ears to capture verbal (voice) instructions as a guide to their mobility orientation. The researchers often witnessed the phenomenon of communication amongst the blind that uses sound cues such as clapping, tapping thighs, whistling, singing, clicking the tongue, hitting spoons onto plates while in the dining room, and ringing whatever can be sounded. This is done as a gesture to



state and show their position so that they can avoid body collision. This way of communication is usually done by the blind when they are in a place with other blind people, such as walking from the ablution to the mosque, while walking in the dining room, while having an activity in the hall, or while walking on a street in the complex of BRC Wyata Guna.

Body collision amongst the blind often occurs if they do not use sound cues while walking in public facilities, such as in the mosque, especially when some blind people who have performed their prayers are leaving the mosque and some other blind people who come late (*masbuq*) for prayers continue their prayers at the rearmost 'shaf' (row). Because the blind people who are praying cannot sound the typical cues, those who want to exit from the mosque often bump into the blind who are praying. Body collision also often occurs on the street in the complex of BRC Wyata Guna, when the blind do not use any cues while walking.

Sound cues are also used for the blind to recognise time. Because of the visual dysfunction experienced by the blind, they are unable to see a watch as is normally done by people in general. They have a particular watch that when the button is pressed it will automatically tell the time. When the researchers first mingled with them, the researchers were surprised and amazed by this sudden sound telling the time. Out of curiosity, one of the researchers asked one of them. 'This is what sounds, Sir. This is a special watch for the blind, Sir. So if this button is pressed, we are directly informed the exact time'. That was how one of them responded to the researcher's question.

In addition to being the cues and guidance of mobility orientation as well as the time teller, the sound received by the blind is also a reference for them to conceptualise and define the meaning of something. Even the concept of beauty (beautiful women) for the blind is not based on the face and appearance or performance like the standard of people in general. Beautiful women for the blind are those who have a melodious, pampered and sensual voice.

This tendency is understandable considering they have this visual limitation. This limitation is what makes the blind utilise more their audio potential or capabilities. Audio utilisation is also applicable in the selection of lovers for them. A melodious, indulgent, lovable and seductive voice is the voice that 'stimulates' the feeling of love and caring of the blind. They do not care whether the owner of the melodious and indulgent voice has flat or sharp nose, dark or fair skin, straight or curly hair.

One day, one of them was pouring his heart out to the researchers and said that he desired to love another blind girl. This blind man was asking the researchers for help to be introduced to one of the girls. Using the standard of beauty for people in general, the researchers 'promoted' a blind girl from Aceh who is beautiful to him. He quickly refused, and said 'Oh Sir, that girl is quiet and seldom talks, Sir. How do we know if she is beautiful and not'. Apparently, the phrase in Indonesian 'Dari mana datangnya cinta, dari mata turun ke hati' ( it is coming from the eyes down to the heart; Where does love come from;) does not apply to the blind. Without the eyes the blind can directly feel that love comes down to their heart through their ears. Therefore, the phrase can be changed into the blind version; 'Where does love comes from, from the ears coming down to heart'.

When the researchers were talking with five blind men in a relaxed and intimate atmosphere, in a friendly intonation and expression the researchers asked them about the criteria of women they want. The five blind men replied that the melodious voice, lively nature and clever ways of speaking are the criteria of the blind women that they desired. At that time the researchers were informed about the presence of a new blind girl in BRC Wyata Guna, suddenly one of the blind who knew this woman immediately cut the researchers's talk by saying 'Yes Sir, she is beautiful, her voice is very melodious, and she is very enthusiastic when she speaks'.

The story of beauty criteria according to the blind version above at least shows how valuable messages or verbal gestures are for them in communicating. The above experience also implies that the meaning

and definition of things are subjective and related to the capacity and experience of the person who gives the meaning. So it is quite possible that the same object is interpreted differently by people from different backgrounds or experiences, including the difference of experiences and physical capacities.

Voice (verbal messages) becomes one of the main types of message sources in blind communication. In communicating with their blind fellows, voice becomes their communication guide. The blind communication in some games/sports competitions such as football, table tennis and volleyball obviously shows the importance of verbal messages (voice) for their communication. In football games, for example, although there are rules of the same game for people in general, in the blind football there are certain sounds that become the guide for the players, such as the ball filled with pebbles so that they know where they have to chase the ball. Behind the goal is also placed something that can sound, like a drum or tin so that they know which way the ball should be aimed. The same way (in order to complete the rules of the game with the sound) is also applied in other games such as table tennis and volleyball.

The limitation of the blind to know their own performance and ages minimises the gap between the old and young blind in socialising and communicating. Socialisation (communication) across the different ages amongst the blind is the view that is commonly seen in their daily activities. To use Hall's (1976) concepts, Indonesians embrace high-context culture and therefore high-context communication which contains messages mostly inherent in the physical context, so that the message can only be understood in that context. In addition, as Mulyana (2016, p. 69) suggests, in high-context culture like Indonesia, more nonverbal messages are used and emphasised. So here people usually use more polite expressions when talking to elder partners. However, interestingly, this high-context communication sometimes does not apply in BRC Wyata Guna. For example, young blind people do not show a more polite attitude and call to the elder blind people, as is commonly done by people in general.

Most blind people greet their friends by first name. RK, for example, whose age is still 20 years old and not married simply calls 'Wir' to Wirya who is 30 years old and a widower with one child. Although it sounds more egalitarian, that call contrasts with the culture of the Indonesian people who used to call 'Kak' (elder brother), 'Akang' (elder brother in *Sundanese*) or 'Pak' (Sir) to the elder.

The atmosphere of the blind communication in the complex of BRC Wyata Guna is like a 'blind village', which is full of life dynamics. As the life of people in general in a village, the daily communication of the blind goes on in a varied atmosphere; occasionally the communication between them takes place in a tense atmosphere, sometimes in a cheerful mood with a variety of blind humour, and also often features the romantic atmosphere in their lives.

The tension in the blind relationship is not particularly prominent. If it happens, it is normally only a small conflict involving few blind people. Before entering the institution or when they were visually normal, they were familiar with the life style of 'thugs' that were often in conflict. Although the researchers did not see the fight directly, the researchers were told by some blind people about the fight between RK and one of the other blind people. RK also confirmed when the researchers asked about it. Starting from the story of this fight, the researchers know that the life of RK in the past was full of dark record such as his habit of fighting and getting drunk.

The atmosphere of communication and relationships amongst the blind takes place in a more cheerful nature with the typical jokes of the blind. The existence of the institution for the blind is very helpful to build confidence because they are in a quarantine type of atmosphere and able to meet people who suffer from the same fate (they do not feel that they are on their own). The happiness phenomenon seen in their daily activities cannot be separated from their psychological condition that they feel the pleasure and peace in BRC Wyata Guna.

The blind's pleasure is visible as they gather and exchange experiences in a cheerful atmosphere interspersed with their typical jokes. Their joking content is sometimes associated with their identity/



perception of the blindness that befalls them. When walking past in front of one of their dormitories in BRC Wyata Guna, the researchers 'over heard' a conversation involving four blind people. Although the researchers did not follow their conversation from the beginning, from the content of the conversation that researchers had heard they were listening to a new blind person who entered the BRC Wyata Guna (FZ) talking about the story of his blindness. In front of his three new friends, the new resident told them that he suffered from blindness because of an accident (falling from a motorcycle). 'So it is your motorcycle that made you blind?' said ND. Before being answered by FZ, ND went on to say, 'What made me blind was not a motorcycle, but a cock'. 'What does that mean?' Asked FZ in surprise. 'Yes, a shuttlecock hit me when I was playing badminton' ND explained. 'What made me blind was a ball too, but it was a football', said AB who tried to join the conversation. 'But we are still better. We become blind because of a bike, a ball and a shuttlecock. *Kang Wawan* in Cerdrawasih has become blind because he was hit by a Metro Mini (public minibus)', said YS who tried to continue the talk that was paused for a few seconds. 'Oh! That is more exciting, indeed', FZ commented, which made the four of them laugh together.

### *Nonverbal Communication amongst the Blind*

The sense of touch is one of the five senses that are often used by the blind in communicating, especially when communicating amongst themselves. The sense of touch helps many of them to identify each object or to capture nonverbal messages (other than voice). With the malfunction of the visual sense and due to the factor of habit, the blind touch senses are very sharp when compared to the sense of touch of human beings in general. The sharpness of palpability can be seen from the activities and everyday communication of the blind who rely heavily on palpability techniques.

Some forms of the blind nonverbal communication can be seen from their daily activities in the rehabilitation of the blind. When blind people walk alone in public space, they show some body language (nonverbal communication) as their habit to reach forward when walking, as a buffer to avoid body collision with the other blind or with objects in front of them.

In the context of education or learning, the blind touch communication is used to read Braille language books because all textbooks used by the blind are always printed in Braille. The ability to read the Braille texts is the requirement or basic ability that must be owned by the blind who attend education and rehabilitation in BRC Wyata Guna. With that condition, then there is no option for them not to learn and master the writing and reading of Braille. In addition to reading general lessons, palpability is also used to recite the Qur'an because the Braille Qur'an has been provided for them.

In their daily activities in the complex of BRC Wyata Guna, touch communication is always used. Therefore, in the early days of their presence in BRC Wyata Guna, blind people are taught the orientation of mobility (OM) by making the technique of touch as a directional guide for the blind. The construction of buildings and other facilities in BRC Wyata Guna was designed in a particular way to facilitate the orientation of the blind mobility. The existing road in the complex of BRC Wyata Guna for example always has a left and the right borders in the form of concrete that can serve them as a walk guide.

One of the main forms of communication amongst the blind is the sense of touch. There are three types and purposes of touch in communication amongst the blind, i.e. touch of mobility, touch of friendship and romantic touch. The differences between the three types of touch can be explained as follows. *First, the touch of mobility* is the touch of the blind while walking by holding hands or shoulders, with the aim of maintaining direction and orientation so they do not get lost (misdirected). Normally, the one who is walking in front is the one who still has a little vision (low vision) or a total

blind person but has already become familiar with the dormitory environment as the direction guide. The touch of mobility usually involves two to seven blind men and women in one group. This mobility touch is more often conducted by the blind when performing mobility from one place to another within the rehabilitation institution.

In the observation of the researchers throughout the day (from waking up to going back to bed), generally, there are some moments that allow touch of mobility performed by the blind, such as when the blind go to and return from the mosque to perform congregational prayers (from dawn prayers to evening prayers). On the way from the dorm to the dining room for breakfast, lunch and dinner they also perform this touch of mobility. The same touch is also done by the blind as they go to the field to follow the morning ceremony, and then proceed as they head to their own classes, until they return to the dorm. At night before the blind sleep, they usually interact across dormitories with the touch of mobility to walk from one dormitory to the other.

*Second, the touch of friendship* is the blind touch that takes place in an atmosphere of intimacy with the aim of strengthening the friendship between them. The touch of friendship is usually done by blind fellows with the same sex, and is usually done by hugging, holding hands while sitting and chatting in the dorm or in the classroom.

The touch of friendship done by the blind can indicate a level of intimacy between them. Like people, in general, blind people also have close friends from the same sex. In the researchers' observation, the touch (grip) of a person with his close friend is different from the touch he does to the blind who is not a close friend. The touch with intimate friends is not only limited to a firm hand grip, but also hugging or holding each other's shoulders. However, the touch with the blind who is not a close friend is done casually.

*Third, the touch of romance* is a touch that is done by the blind couples in order to express the affection between them. This touch is usually done by couples who are dating each other by holding hands or shoulders with intimacy. Being blind does not make people unemotional. They still want to feel and give love.

Many touches of romance occurred, and the researchers could observe while they are dating, especially on Saturday night. Some dating couples who chose the dorm living room as a place to chat also did this touch of romance, by holding hands. A more intimate romantic touch is usually shown by the blind couples who choose a place on the corners of the classroom or dormitory. Besides sitting in the dormitory and other spots outside the dorm, the blind dating is also done by walking hand in hand around the dormitory area. In the observation of the researchers, each couple walks around the area of BRC Wyata Guna for three to seven rotations, while chatting, teasing and joking.

The eye dysfunction of the blind makes the world dark for them, so they also do not know that there are other people watching their courtship behaviour. This limitation is also what makes them feel free to do romantic touches anywhere and anytime. The phenomenon of courtship and romantic touches as described above is done by most of the blind who have grown up.

The age factor is not an obstacle in blind dating. Sometimes the women are older than the men are or vice versa. The blind's dating does not recognise the time and place. They can do it in the morning, at noon or night, and it can be in places like dormitory, classroom, dining room, dormitory terrace, garden, classroom terrace and other areas in BRC Wyata Guna. However, the Saturday night is a special date for them. They (especially the blind men) normally prepare themselves since afternoon in order to spend their long night with their girlfriends.

The constraint of the blind to know and understand the surrounding phenomena makes blind couples less concerned with how other people respond to what they do, so that observers (like the researchers)



often witness a unique moment, like one moment at the dormitory porch lined several blind pairs who are dating without feeling bothered with the other couples around them. This is because they do not really know there are other couples sitting around them. While some couples were dating, other blind people who happened to have no partners casually passed around. Again, the existence of other blind people does not make the blind couples feel awkward or worried.

## Discussion

The communication of the blind in a certain way is different from the one of people in general. The awareness of the blind of their eye dysfunction makes them optimise other remaining senses. This reality indicates the blind's level of awareness in communication guided by their subjective desires and motives. For Weber (Thompson & Tunstall, 1971, p. 128), human action is essentially meaningful, involving interpretation, thinking and deliberation. Social action is a deliberate act for others and for the actor himself, where his thoughts actively interact with each other's behaviour, communicate and interact with one another. In general, eye defects experienced by the blind do not cause the other parts of the body (other senses) not to function so that the blind c<sup>3</sup> still feel and interpret the presence of others. It satisfies another criterion of social action that is 'when the individual orients his or her acts to others besides self' (Charon, 1979, p. 127).

In the middle of the impediment of the eyes, the blind can build a distinctive communication tradition of the consciousness they have. Blind people have their own tradition of dating, games and sports that are in some ways different from what people do in general. It can be interpreted as the blind's effort to build a typical world of daily life, or in the social construction theory of Berger and Luckmann it is referred to as an attempt to form a social world of the reality. According to Berger and Luckmann (Poloma, 2000, p. 299), the objective social reality exists, but its meaning comes from and by the subjective relations of the individuals with the objective world.

For Berger and Luckmann (1990, p. 210), the individual is as the product and simultaneously as the creator of the social order, so that the society is interpreted as the subjective reality that is the result of the construction of individuals through the process of socialisation and the transformation process of the subjective reality. Blind people are social actors who have free will and communicate (do activities) with full of awareness. Blind people have the ability to form and construct their communication reality themselves based on their desires and subjective views.

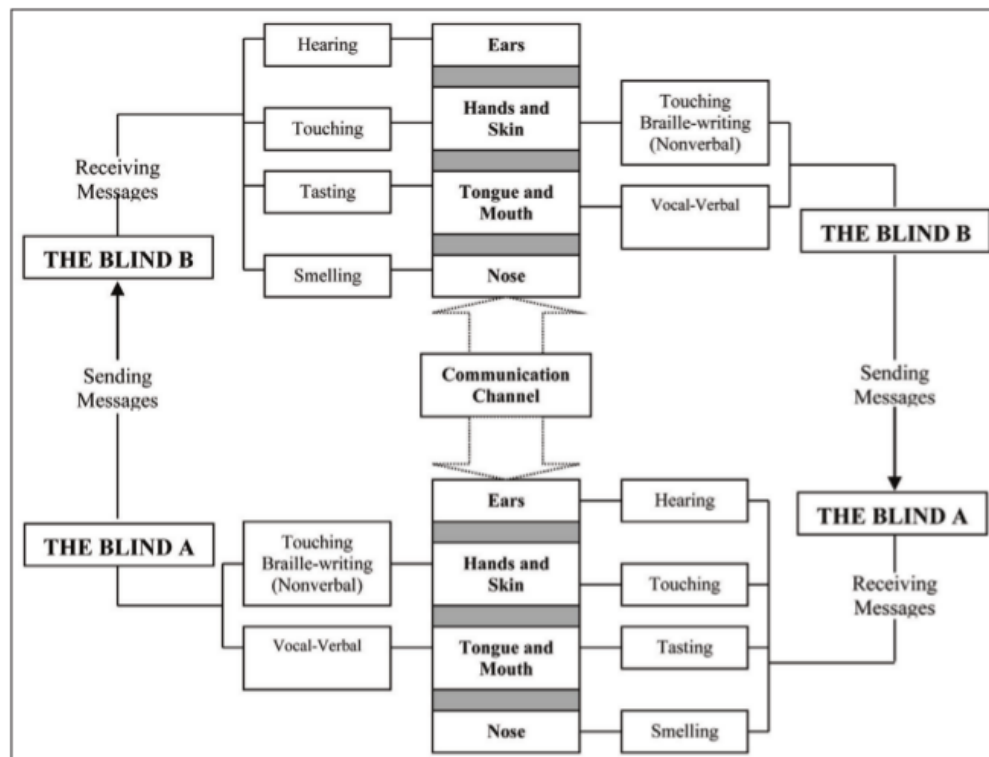
The daily world of blind people is freely constructed by them for their subjective desires. In the group communication they do, it is often found that the topics of typical conversation of the blind are hard to find in the community of people in general. Even in an intimate and joking atmosphere, they discuss the identity of the blindness they have by exchanging information about the history of their blindness. It is common for them to discuss a topic that stimulates the participation of all blind people. This chain of communication messages is associated with the fantasy theme as coined by Ernest Bormann in his Symbolic Convergence Theory. This theory attempts to explicate how people collectively share symbolic awareness by exchanging messages (Bormann, 1985; Suryadi, 2010, p. 428). This social phenomenon also characterises human beings, even blind people, as *Homo Narrans* (storytelling humans).

These exchanges and meanings of symbolic messages of the blind are relevant to the theoretical assumptions of human activity according to the theory of symbolic interaction which views human activities as a distinctive activity of communication or the exchange of meaningful symbols (see Mulyana, 2018, p. 68). Like humans in general, blind people use verbal and nonverbal symbols when communicating. However, the dysfunction of the eyes makes them optimise the tradition of oral and

auditory-verbal communication, and nonverbal communication through touch, or better known as *haptic communication* (see DeVito, 2011, p. 203).

It is in this context that the blind communication is different from that of human communication in general. The typical communication model of the blind is never found in the communication science literature because all the models constructed by communication scientists are always the perspective of people in general. The SMCR communication model of David K. Berlo (Burgoon, 1974, p. 16) for example, explicitly includes the eyes as a communication channel. In the midst of the void of communication models with the blind perspectives, the results of this study serve as a basis for constructing the blind communication model (see Figure 1).

In the blind communication model, it is clear that the four main senses of the blind (Blind A and Blind B) can still function as their communication channels. Each of the remaining sense organs of the blind (hearing, touch, smell and taste) plays an active role in receiving every message from their communication partners (specifically their fellow blind). Due to the dysfunction of the eyes, visual communication messages are not useful in the blind communication. The sources of messages used by the blind are (1) auditory-verbal, vocal-nonverbal, nonvocal-verbal messages like Braille reading. This message is captured by the blind by hearing and using ears; (2) messages that come from non-living or living things that can be palpated by the blind with their hands and skin. Therefore, it can be said that the activities of hearing, touching, feeling and sniffing are ways of the blind capture messages originating from the other blind people.



**Figure 1.** Communication Model amongst the Blind

**Source:** Research findings.

In communicating (especially sending messages) with the blind fellows, only two sensory devices can be used, i.e. the tongue (mouth) and the skin (hands). With these two media to convey the messages to the other blind, practically, there are only two ways that the blind communicate their messages, as follows:

*First*, the message is delivered by touch. This way of delivering messages is a type of nonverbal message delivery (nonverbal communication), or in the term of DeVito (2011, p. 203) this is called haptic communication. The delivery of messages by way of touch in the blind communication can be seen from the way they do when walking in front of the blind crowd by reaching their arms forward as their gestures/messages that seem to say that they are asking for a way or informing that they are walking past. Although this method is not really often done by the blind, the tradition of nonverbal communication becomes a distinctive reality in the blind communication. The delivery of messages by hands in the blind communication is also done through written communication – Braille writing. Therefore, communication with the Braille language becomes one of the typical types of the blind communication. The communication through Braille language can be categorised as haptic communication, because seen from the process of writing until the reading it always involves touching of the blind person's hands.

*Second*, the blind convey their messages to other blind people by verbal means (vocal-verbal communication). The communication in this way is more often done by the blind because the delivery of the information directly by oral means is more effective for blind communication. In every communication of the blind wherever possible, they modify the messages in verbal forms. Sound is very meaningful for the blind communication, so that the hands, thighs and other body parts are sounded as a signal to ask for a way or just to inform their position so that there is no body collision between them.

The typical communication tradition in which blind people (Blind A and Blind B) are engaged as explicated above explicitly indicates a distinctive way and a distinctive function of verbal and nonverbal communication. It is different from the way and the function of verbal and nonverbal communication amongst sighted people in general. Verbal messages are conveyed by blind people not only to give instructions or requests as done by sighted people, but also to indicate the location where they are to avoid body collision.

Vocal-verbal messages are used by blind people as a standard to assess a person's attitude and performance, his or her personality, and even his or her look, something that is not always done by sighted people. In the context of nonverbal communication, blind people can only grasp nonverbal messages through touch, while sighted people use their eyes to capture the meaning of his or her communication partner's nonverbal messages.

Some differences between the people with disabilities (like the blind) and people without impairment within certain limits will sometimes make communication between them hindered. Coleman and DePaulo (1991) say that communication between people with disabilities and people without disabilities has the potential to result in miscommunication. For example, people, in general, have negative stereotypes about people with disabilities. People with disabilities are seen as 'dependent, socially isolated, emotionally unstable, or depressed, highly sensitive, and easy to resist, especially because of their limitations. They also assume that people with disabilities will look at them with suspicion' (Coleman & DePaulo in Gudykunst & Kim, 2003).

## Conclusion

The eye dysfunction of the blind makes the pattern and tradition of their communication different from people in general. Blind people only rely on the senses other than the eyes to communicate within the



environment, especially using the tongue (mouth) and skin to convey messages and take advantage of the senses of skin and ears when receiving messages. The eye dysfunction also makes them communicate only by vocal-verbal and nonverbal touch.

The process and the typical patterns of communication amongst blind people as delineated in this study are condensed into the communication model as illustrated above. This unique model of communication amongst blind people is not only needed for academic purposes to contrast with models of communication amongst sighted people, but also to induce awareness and sensitivity amongst sighted people so that they become more empathetic when communicating with blind people. Hopefully, this possibility will, in turn, lead to the more inclusive and more natural communication between the two parties.

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