

11. Physical Contact and Self-Disclosure*

If contemporary Western man lives alienated from his fellows, his body, and nature, it behooves psychologists to investigate alienation in any of its manifestations, including its opposite—encounter. To encounter another person means, among other things, to confirm him as a being who *experiences*. This means seeking to experience his experience. I can experience your experience most directly if you disclose it to me. You can, if you wish, conceal or misrepresent your self, in which case my experience of you will be autistic. I will then believe things about your being that you know are untrue. But if you wish me to know you as you know yourself, you will have disclosed your experiencing authentically to me, in dialogue, throughout the duration of our relationship.

A more direct, even literal, way for us to encounter one another, is for us to touch—my hand on some part of your body, and yours on mine. In touching you, I perceive you “haptically,” as Gibson puts it (1966, pp. 132–133). I know that you *exist* in a way that hearing you or seeing you cannot confirm. I may not know much about you and your experiencing in touching you, but I surely know that you *are*, that you are there in the flesh, so to speak. Indeed, Professor John Macmurray (1957, pp. 107–126) has provided an astute analysis of the way in which we of the West, since Descartes’ time, have come to use the visual field as a model for knowing, while neglecting the kind of knowing that comes from direct touching. Visual knowing is contact

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at a distance. You have to be near to touch, taste, or smell another person. It would probably be appropriate to change the old saw, “Seeing is believing,” into the more fundamental source of truth about existence: “Touching is believing.”

Indeed, if it is true that modern man lives out of his body, in a state of relative “unembodiment”—as Laing (1960) insists—then I can surely awaken your experience of your body by touching you. And if being discloses itself to our consciousnesses via our several sensory channels, then I can inquire into the means by which you disclose your being to me. How do you let me perceive you? Via my eyes? Ears? My touch receptors? Truly, for you to let me know you by touching you, you have let me get “closer” to you than if you limit yourself to verbal disclosure. When you let me touch you, you are disclosing your embodied being to my consciousness, by means of my tactual sense.

Yet, verbal self-disclosure is also a very direct means of decreasing distance between us, at least in a metaphoric sense. And much evidence attests that authentic verbal disclosure of experience to another person is or can be threatening. I have argued (1963, pp. 341–354) that full, reciprocal disclosure of self is the essence of relationships of love or deep friendship. If self-disclosure is a means of reducing distance between persons, and establishing or sustaining contact, we should expect that measures of self-disclosure and of physical contact will be related.

Such a prediction must be qualified, however, in view of the fact that there are strong societal norms that regulate who will touch whom and under what conditions. Most probably, these norms have arisen because of the intimate connection between physical contact and sexuality. In American society, it appears that touching is maximal among young adults in the heterosexual dyad. In same-sex pairs, or in relationships between young adults and their parents, physical contact is drastically curtailed (Jourard, 1966). We might predict, then, that in a sample of unmarried college-age men and women, correlations would be found between amount of self-disclosure to the closest friend of the opposite sex, and the amount of physical contact that is exchanged; and lower or nonsignificant correlations between self-disclosure and physical contact would be found in the relationships of college students to their parents and closest same-sex friend.

The present investigation was undertaken, in part, to explore these relationships. Additional aims of the research were to replicate and extend the earlier study of sheer frequency and locus of physical contact (Jourard, 1966). Thus, we shall report data comparing college men and women on such factors as the number of regions of their bodies on which they have been touched; the amount of touching exchanged

in the different relationships; and the correlations between touching and self-disclosure.

METHOD

A questionnaire for measuring body contact, and the 40-item self-disclosure questionnaire (Appendix 4) were administered to 54 male and 84 female students enrolled in the author's class in Personality Development at the University of Florida. The purpose of the study was explained to the students, and the importance of frankness in reporting their experience was emphasized. Since participation in psychological research is a course requirement, and credit is given for such participation, those students who did not wish to disclose their experience to the researchers were given the option of receiving credit for participation while returning a blank questionnaire. Only about a dozen students out of the entire class chose this alternative.

Body-Contact Questionnaire

The body-contact questionnaire developed for this project was a modification of one employed in an earlier study (Jourard, 1966). An outline of the human figure, in front and rear view (see Figure 16), was marked off into 18 regions. Below the diagram the following instructions were printed:

In the diagram above, the human figure has been marked off into 18 areas. We want you to map out which regions of the body are touched, and which are not touched, in one's relationships with parents and closest friends of each sex. In the spaces below, you will make entries as follows: If the area is never touched meaningfully and purposefully (e.g., to express affection, anger, or to attract attention, etc.) enter the letter A. If contact occurs, but only rarely—not as a regular part of your relationship—enter a B. If contact is a regular part of your relationship with the person, enter the letter C. Note that for each person, you are asked to indicate, in the left-hand column, if that person touches you; in the right-hand column, you are asked to indicate if you touch that person.

For "opposite-sex friend," please indicate whether this person is someone whom you only date or see occasionally (less than once a month), frequently (up to once a week), or more frequently, as in "going steady" or "being engaged" (a space was given for this information).

Below these instructions, four sets of columns each with 18 rows were provided, one row for each of the numbered body regions. The subjects were to indicate, then, whether or how frequently touches were ex-

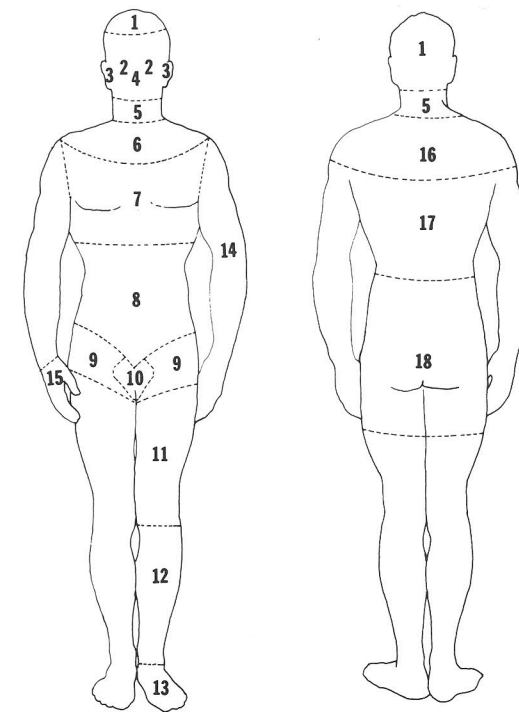


Figure 16. Diagram of front and rear view of the body as demarcated for the body-contact questionnaire.

changed with mother, father, closest same-sex friend, and closest opposite-sex friend.

The questionnaire was scored by counting A as zero, B as 1, and C as 2. The entries were then summed to yield totals that were employed in the various statistical analyses reported below. Odd-even reliability coefficients were calculated for the responses of 50 of the male and 50 of the female students, in order to ascertain the internal consistency of the questionnaire. Since the scores for touching and for being touched were correlated around .98 for each of the four target-persons, it was deemed adequate to compute r 's only for the being-touched scores. The odd-even r 's were .81 and .80 for males and females, respectively, for being touched by mother. For being touched by father, same-sex friend, and opposite-sex friend, the respective r 's were (the r in parentheses is for the female students): .84 (.80); .87 (.91); and .89 (.89). It was concluded that the questionnaire, like the one developed for the earlier study, had adequate reliability to warrant its being used.

RESULTS

In order to facilitate the several statistical analyses that were performed, the scores from 50 of the males and 50 of the females were considered—the same subjects for whom the reliability coefficients had been calculated. All subjects were unmarried, and ranged in age from 19 to 22 years.

Body Contact

Means and *SD*'s for the touching and being-touched scores are shown in Table 11. Analysis of variance of each of these sets of scores yielded the following: for being touched, an *F*-ratio of 3.87 ($P = .07$) was obtained for the between-sexes comparison (df 1/98); an *F* of 345.69 for between-targets ($P < .001$, df 3/294); and an *F* of 3.19 for the sex-by-target interaction ($P < .025$, df 3/294). For the touching scores, the *F*-ratios were of comparable magnitude, save for the between-sexes comparison, where the *F*-ratio fell short of the .10 level. Below Table 11, "critical difference" values are indicated, so that one can make comparisons between pairs of means by inspection, in order to ascertain which of the various differences reach statistical significance at the .05 and .01 levels.

It may be seen that, for the being-touched scores, the women's mean total score is higher ($P < .10 > .05$). In further comparisons between the sexes, the women are seen to be touched significantly more than the men by their fathers, but not by any of the other target-persons. Among the men, it is the mother who does the most touching, followed

Table 11 Means for Touching and Being Touched

Subjects	Target-Persons									
	Mother		Father		Same-Sex Friend		Opposite-Sex Friend		Total	
	Touch	Touched by	Touch	Touched by	Touch	Touched by	Touch	Touched by	Touch	Touched by
Males	8.90	9.99	5.96	6.34	6.44	6.36	26.16	24.72	47.47	47.30
Females	10.58	10.96	9.78	10.62	7.16	7.22	25.26	25.86	52.78	54.66

* Critical difference for comparing mean scores in this table is 2.40, for $P = .05$, and 3.50, for $P = .01$ ($N = 50$ males, 50 females).

in rank order by same-sex friend and father. The latter two targets both touch the male subject less than do the subjects' mothers. For the women: opposite-sex friend is the one who touches them most. They are touched by each parent in comparable amount, which is significantly more than they are touched by their girl friends.

The touching scores follow a nearly identical pattern, which is not surprising, since touching is almost necessarily a reciprocal phenomenon comparable to the "dyadic effect" noted in self-disclosure (Jourard, 1964, p. 179). Thus, both men and women touch their opposite-sex friend nearly three times as much as they do the other target-persons; the men touch their mothers to the next highest degree, followed by same-sex friend and father—but the differences between scores for father and same-sex friend are not significant. The women touch their parents about equally, and their girl friends significantly less. The women touch their fathers more than do the men.

Touchability by Bodily Regions

Table 12 shows the extent to which the men and women were touched by the respective target-persons on each of the 18 body regions. The percentages were calculated as follows: the total possible score was determined, and of this total, for each body region, the actual entries for being touched were expressed as a percentage. It may be seen that the men and women reported being touched over most of their bodies, in their heterosexual friendships. In the other relationships, it is primarily the hands, arms, the face, and the upper region of the back which are most often contacted. These findings are comparable to those obtained in the earlier study (Jourard, 1966).

Correlations among Being-Touched Scores

Table 13 shows intercorrelations among the scores from being touched by the four target-persons. Among the men, it is apparent that the degree to which they are touched by their mothers predicts the degree to which they will allow their fathers and men friends to touch them, but that the extent to which they are touched by their girl friends is relatively independent of these other touching relationships. The same pattern holds for the women subjects. From these data, it may be said that a clear differentiation is made by unmarried college students in their receptivity to being touched; the relationship within which sexuality is possible is special. In nonsexual relationships, accessibility to touch, or receptivity to another's touch, appears to be a general personality

Table 12 Percentage Entries Showing Frequency with Which the Regions of the Body Are Touched by the Various Target-Persons

Body Regions*	Target-Persons							
	Mother		Father		Same-Sex Friend		Opposite-Sex Friend	
	Males	Females	Males	Females	Males	Females	Males	Females
1	43	46	23	42	16	34	72	76
2	62	56	16	64	5	25	84	88
3	18	18	10	15	6	9	68	73
4	56	40	12	43	5	7	94	97
5	20	21	15	21	12	13	75	80
6	27	26	23	25	27	21	72	78
7	12	2	7	0	10	2	62	55
8	11	13	9	9	15	8	68	64
9	2	2	2	2	3	2	53	47
10	1	1	2	0	1	0	48	42
11	14	13	9	12	11	12	61	66
12	9	12	7	9	6	13	31	43
13	10	15	7	14	8	13	36	41
14	50	59	40	53	44	46	80	89
15	55	58	68	57	65	46	95	95
16	49	52	43	51	43	40	79	89
17	37	50	23	37	26	33	75	87
18	7	22	7	17	6	10	43	74

* See Figure 16 for the body regions designated by the numbers.

characteristic. Since the touching and being-touched scores were well-nigh identical, and roughly correlated, it is reasonable to state that the same observations could be made about the subjects' touching practices in relation to the target-persons.

Self-Disclosure

The means for self-disclosure to the four target-persons, classified by sex of the subjects, are shown in Table 14. No significance tests were made, and it will be noted here that the trend was for the women to disclose more than men to mother, father, and same-sex friend, and slightly less than males to opposite-sex friend. For total scores, the

Table 13 Intercorrelations among Scores for Being Touched by the Four Target-Persons (Scores for Females in Parentheses)

	Target-Persons			
	Mother	Father	Same-Sex Friend	Opposite-Sex Friend
Mother	—	.69† (.79)†	.67† (.68)†	.31* (.23)
Father		—	.59† (.92)†	.16 (.20)
Same-sex friend			—	.23 (.41)†

* $P < .05$

† $P < .01$

women appear to be the higher disclosers, a finding that is consistent with those reported elsewhere (Jourard, 1964).

Relation of Body-Contact to Self-Disclosure

Table 15 shows correlations between the scores for being touched by each of the target-persons, and the amount that the men and women disclose to those people. For the men, the only significant correlation found was between the contact and disclosure scores to same-sex friend. This r of .31, while statistically significant, is quite low, showing only a slight tendency for the men to have physical contact with their male friends in proportion to the amount they disclose themselves to them. It is interesting to note that being touched by girl friend, and disclosing

Table 14 Means for Self-Disclosure to the Four Target-Persons

Subjects	Target-Persons				Total
	Mother	Father	Same-Sex Friend	Opposite-Sex Friend	
Male	45.88	42.32	51.70	51.42	191.12
Female	48.60	42.50	53.40	50.72	195.22

Table 15 Correlations between Self-Disclosure and Being Touched

Subjects	Target-Persons			
	Mother	Father	Same-Sex Friend	Opposite-Sex Friend
Males	-.01	.12	.31*	.18
Females	.07	.11	.24	.38†

* $P < .05$ † $P < .01$

to girl friend, are clearly independent among the men, the r being only .18.

For the women, the only significant r (.38) is for the male friend: they indicate a low but significant tendency to equate the two kinds of intimacy: they allow a man to touch them in the context of a verbally disclosing relationship.

Again, it should be repeated that it does not matter whether we correlate the touching or the being-touched scores with the self-disclosure scores. Since they are virtually interchangeable, it can as well be said, for example, that the men may touch a girl whom they have not disclosed to, and they may disclose themselves to a girl whom they have not touched. The women, in the heterosexual dyad, appear to show more inclination to touch the fellow they disclose themselves to. Perhaps this empirical difference confirms the woman's oft-repeated lament: "You men are all alike."

Another curious sex difference appeared when the total self-disclosure score was correlated with the total being-touched score: for the men, the obtained r was only .12. For the women, by contrast, a low but statistically significant r of $-.34$ ($P .05$) was found. This latter result implies that, as a general trait, the women tend to establish contact with others verbally or physically. It is likely that this is an artifact, however, since a positive correlation of similar magnitude was found for the opposite-sex friend among the women.

DISCUSSION

The present results support, in the main, the findings obtained in the earlier investigation of body accessibility (Jourard, 1966). Women show a slightly greater accessibility to physical contact than men, but

this is accounted for by their relationship with their fathers. The men and women touch and are touched by their mothers, same-sex friends, and opposite-sex friends in equivalent degree, differing in their relationships to their fathers.

The fact that the greatest amount of physical contact occurs in the subjects' relationships with opposite-sex friend attests to the equation of physical contact and sexuality in our culture. It further implies that, unless a young person has an intimate friend of the opposite sex, he is unlikely to experience his body as it feels when it is touched or caressed. If it is true that touching and being touched are ways of acknowledging one's embodied being, then the present data tend to support our earlier findings and the impressions of Laing (1960) that we tend to be somewhat unembodied in our usual, nonsexual interpersonal relationships.

The virtual independence of self-disclosure and body contact in the subject's relationships to parents and peers perhaps reflects the role of body contact in our American society. The authors' view is that touching is equated with sexual intent, either consciously or at a less-conscious level. The fact that it is the opposite-sex friend with whom the most widespread (over the body) physical contact is exchanged points to that interpretation. What is curious to note is the very weak, virtually nonexistent correlation between two modes of interpersonal relatedness: self-disclosure and touching. It appears that we *do* separate the two ways of "being close." The fact that the women show at least a slight tendency toward equating physical contact and self-disclosure suggests they may be better integrated than the men, who show a similar slight tendency in relation to their same-sex friends, but not to their girl friends. Evidently, the men can establish physical intimacy with a girl, yet keep their "selves" (their subjectivity) concealed, and vice versa. The women appear more disposed to "give" themselves physically and in the mode of verbal self-disclosure. Perhaps this integrity likewise makes them more vulnerable to hurt and deception.

Research in physical contact—its frequency, experienced meaning, and its correlation with other aspects of being human, such as health and illness—is yet in its infancy. Frank (1958) reviewed much of the literature on the communicative meanings of touch, and we have made a bare beginning at systematic study of touching as such. Glazer (1967) completed an experiment studying the effect of being touched upon one's performance of a manual dexterity task—it tended to produce decrements in rate of improvement in a complex interaction with the subjects' attitudes toward their own bodies. But it may be hoped that these researches will encourage further work in a much-neglected area.

SUMMARY

A body-contact questionnaire and a self-disclosure questionnaire were administered to 84 female and 54 male college students, all unmarried, and all between the ages of 19 and 22 years.

The main findings were the following:

1. Women and men show similar patterns for the exchange of physical contact except in relation to their fathers, where the women touch and are touched more than the men.
2. Both men and women show nearly three times more physical contact exchange in relation to their closest opposite-sex friends than they do in relation to their parents or their closest same-sex friend.
3. In these latter three relations, it is mainly the hands, arms, face, and shoulders that are touched, perhaps an expression of touch taboos in all relationships save those frankly sexual in their implication.
4. Men and women alike tend to show a consistent trait of "touchability" and readiness to touch in their relationships with parents and same-sex friend—if they touch one target-person a lot or little, they are likely to show the same pattern in relation to the other persons. The amount they touch their opposite-sex friend cannot be predicted from their pattern of touching in the other relationships.
5. The two measures on intimacy, self-disclosure and body contact, are virtually independent in the present samples. A low but significant correlation was found among men in relation to same-sex friend, and among the women in relation to opposite-sex friend, signifying slight tendencies toward equating these two modes of intimacy. But the most striking finding was the fact that these two ways of being are not strongly or markedly correlated.

The Next Chapter

In the study just described, we showed that in the relationships of young men with young women, physical contact and reciprocal self-disclosure are practically independent of one another. The research reported in the next chapter looks, not at self-disclosure per se, but at a young man's reputed *readiness* to disclose information about himself on a first date with a young woman. An additional factor under study is the importance of a young man's physical attractiveness as a factor in a young woman's desire to go on a "date" with him.

12. Self-Disclosure, Physical Appearance, and Interpersonal Attraction

One of my graduate students hit upon an ingenious way of reconciling my interest in self-disclosure with his interest in what women found attractive in men. Mark Lefkowitz (1970) designed an experiment in which it would be possible to compare and contrast a man's physical appearance with his reputation for readiness to be self-disclosing, as factors in a woman's desire for a date with him.

METHOD

Lefkowitz selected facial pictures of male college students from university yearbooks and asked a group of 100 college girls to rate the pictures on a 7-point scale for physical attractiveness. On the basis of the girls' ratings, three pictures were selected upon which there was maximum agreement for degree of attractiveness, namely, a "good-looking," an "average-looking," and a "bad-looking" man.

Next, Lefkowitz asked another group of 87 girls to list topics of self-disclosure which they would consider important for a man to discuss on a first date in order that they might get to know him. They were also asked to list topics of male self-disclosure which they regarded as trivial and unimportant. From these lists, Lefkowitz constructed "disclosure profiles" for different types of hypothetical male "dates." The profiles covered five levels of "disclosingness": high, high-medium, medium, low-medium, and low. Each such profile contained 24 statements of a significant and/or trivial nature, as follows: high: 24 significant