PUTTING THE 'SOCIAL' IN SOCIAL TOUCH

Juulia Suvilehto
@JSuvilehto
IASAT
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SOCIAL TOUCH THROUGHOUT THE SOCIAL NETWORK

Image by Richard Renaldi, from the "Touching Strangers" series. Used with permission.
SOCIAL NETWORKS

Emotional closeness

EGO
1.5
5
15
50
150
500
1500

people

Trends in Cognitive Sciences

Dunbar 2018 TiCS
Most reasons for social touch do depend on the social relationship.

Proportion of subjects reporting they would touch this person for this reason

- Partner
- Friend
- Friend
- Mother
- Father
- Sister
- Brother
- Aunt
- Uncle
- Cousin
- Cousin
- Acquaintance
- Acquaintance
- Stranger
- Stranger

Suvilehto et al. 2015 PNAS

n = 91
ON-LINE DATA COLLECTION

- Polling 13 potential social network members from romantic partner to acquaintance + male and female stranger
- Altogether 1628 subjects from 6 countries: Finland, France, Italy, Russia, the United Kingdom and Japan
TOPOGRAPHICAL MAPS OF ACCEPTABLE SOCIAL TOUCH

N=1368

British, Finnish, French, Italian, Russian

Suvilehto et al. 2015 PNAS
THE ROLE OF PLEASANTNESS

Image by Richard Renaldi, from the "Touching Strangers" series. Used with permission.
EMOTIONAL BOND AND PLEASANTNESS BOTH CONTRIBUTE TO TI

n = 385 (UK)
n = 255 (JP)

TOUCH IS MOST RELATIONSHIP-SPECIFIC IN AREAS WITH HIGH HEDONIC SENSITIVITY

Standard deviation in Touch Area Maps over the social network

Self-reported sensitivity maps

- a) Hedonic $r = 0.45$
- b) Tactile $r = 0.38$
- c) Nociceptive $r = 0.21$

n = 76 (Finnish)
Suvilehto et al. 2015 PNAS
SENSITIVITY MAPS REPPLICATE ON A MUCH LARGER SAMPLE

n = 2056 (Finnish)
Suvilehto, Ojala, Nummenmaa & Kalso, in prep
ACUTE PAIN INTENSITY CORRELATES WITH SELF-REPORTED SENSITIVITY MAPS

Correlation coefficient

n = 2056 (Finnish)
Suvilehto, Ojala, Nummenmaa & Kalso, in prep
GENDER EFFECTS IN ACCEPTABILITY OF SOCIAL TOUCH

Image by Richard Renaldi, from the ”Touching Strangers” series. Used with permission.
FEMALE – NOT OPPOSITE-SEX – TOUCH IS MOST ACCEPTABLE

Male subjects

- Mother / Father
- Sister / Brother
- Aunt / Uncle
- Cousins
- Friends
- Acquaintances
- Strangers

Female subjects

- Mother / Father
- Sister / Brother
- Aunt / Uncle
- Cousins
- Friends
- Acquaintances
- Strangers

UK, FI, FR, IT, RU

n = 482

n = 886
THE GENDER EFFECTS SHOW CULTURAL VARIATION

United Kingdom

Japan

Mean T1

Sex of subject
- Male
- Female

n = 385
(214 male)

n = 255
(124 male)

Sex of Toucher

Female
Male

TAKE-HOME MESSAGES

• Social relationship between toucher and touch recipient impacts reasons for using touch, acceptability, and perceived pleasantness

• Culture matters less than you would think

• Touch is most relationship-specific in areas with high hedonic sensitivity

• Female touch is more acceptable than male touch

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THANK YOU

Collaborators
Robin Dunbar
Enrico Glerean
Tokiko Harada
Riitta Hari
Eija Kalso
Ryo Kitada
Lauri
Nummenmaa
Juhani Ojala
Norihiro Sadato
Robert Turner

Funders
Emil Aaltosen säåtiö
ALFRED KORDELININ SÄÄTIÖ
erc

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