

THE EFFECT OF A WOMAN'S INCIDENTAL TACTILE CONTACT ON MEN'S LATER BEHAVIOR

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Previous research has indicated that a light tactile contact is associated with a positive response towards the person who is touching. The effect of touch on courtship was investigated in this experiment, which was conducted in a field setting. A female confederate either slightly touched or did not touch a man in a bar when asking him for some help. It was found that men who were touched showed more interest toward the female confederate than when no touch occurred. It was also found that touch was associated with stronger courtship intentions by men. The importance of women's nonverbal patterns in the courtship context and the trend of men to misinterpret women's intent are proposed to explain these results.

Keywords: tactile contact, women, men, courtship intention.

Touching the arm or shoulder of a person for one or two seconds when asking for a favor may seem trivial. However, numerous researchers have found that such brief nonverbal contact significantly increases compliance. Brockner, Pressman, Cabitt, and Moran (1982) found that when making a request to give back a dime left in a phone booth, compliance increased from 63% in the no-touch control situation, to 96% when the request was accompanied by a light touch on the arm. Similarly, when asked for a dime, passers-by agreed in 51% of the cases when touched but only 29% of the time when no contact was made (Kleinke, 1977). In the same way, the percentage of petition signers for the renovation of a town's railroad station to be used as a science museum increased from 55% in the no-touch control condition, to 81% when a light touch was made during the request (Willis & Hamm, 1980). Hornik and Ellis (1988) found

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that touch increased compliance for a mall intercept interview about television and advertising. Hornik (1987) observed that touch increased the number of individuals willing to respond to a street survey and increased compliance in answering a follow-up questionnaire.

Some studies have shown that people, when lightly touched, are more persistent in executing a difficult task consisting of answering a long questionnaire on very provocative subjects (Nannberg & Hansen, 1994). Likewise, a waiter or a waitress in a restaurant can increase the amount of a tip by simply touching a client (Crusco & Wetzel, 1984; Guéguen & Jacob, 2005; Hornik, 1992b; Lynn, Le, & Sherwyn, 1998; Stephen & Zweigenhaft, 1986). In the same way, it has been found that tactile contact increases compliance to commercial requests and positively affects consumer behavior. Willingness to taste products increases when shoppers are touched by the employees making the request, and leads to an increase in the selling rate of the product (Guéguen & Jacob, 2006; Hornik, 1992a; Smith, Gier, & Willis, 1982). Similarly, Kaufman and Mahoney (1999) found that when touched by a waitress, bar patrons consumed more alcohol than patrons who were not touched. Helping behavior is also influenced by touch. Goldman and Fordyce (1983) found that when people were touched by a confederate during an interview, greater helping behavior was observed toward the confederate who dropped several questionnaires on the ground. People who were touched were more agreeable about answering telephones for a charity telethon to benefit physically disabled children (Goldman, Kiyohara, & Pfannensteil, 1985). In the same way, light tactile contact encourages positive behavior in an educational context. Guéguen (2004) found that a light touch encouraged students to come to the blackboard more willingly when asked to present a statistical demonstration to the class.

Several researchers have explained this positive effect on compliance by arguing that touch facilitates a positive evaluation of the toucher. Fisher, Rytting, and Heslin (1976) have tested the affective and evaluative consequences of receiving an interpersonal touch in a situation where students at a university library were touched by the library clerks when they checked out their books. After the librarian-student interaction, the experimenter approached the student and asked him/her to answer a questionnaire intended to evaluate the personnel and the facilities of the library. The evaluation of the librarian clerks was done by using four 7-point bipolar adjective items (*positive/negative*, *helpful/not helpful*, *friendly/unfriendly*, *good/bad*). The results indicated that the participants who were touched rated the clerk significantly more favorably than those who were not touched. Such results were replicated in various studies. Steward and Lupfer (1987) found that college students who were touched by their instructor during their individual tutorials/meetings rated the instructor more positively on the dimension of patience and understanding. Hornik (1992b) found that waiters

or waitresses who touched patrons in a restaurant received higher evaluations (*good/poor*) than when no contact occurred. The studies mentioned above were conducted in the United States but the positive effect of touch on evaluation of the toucher was recently found in a study carried out in France (Erceau & Guéguen, in press). These scientists conducted an experiment in a second-hand car selling context where a male seller confederate was instructed to slightly touch (or not) a man who was interested in the car. Once the participant had left the seller, he was approached by a female confederate who asked him to evaluate the car seller on various dimensions. The results showed that for each dimension evaluated (*friendly, sincere, honest, agreeable, kind*), and for two propositions (one to evaluate the commercial interaction with the seller: “I feel there will be little risk in negotiating with this seller”, and the other to evaluate the seller: “This seller is someone that I could appreciate in my circle of friends”), the touch, compared to the no-touch control condition, was associated with statistically higher positive evaluation of the toucher.

In short, research indicates that touch enhances the attractiveness of the toucher. It would therefore be interesting for social psychologists to evaluate the effect of touch in a new context where this nonverbal variable on compliance has never been explored: courtship behaviors. Numerous researchers have found that nonverbal behaviors serve as courtship signals (Moore, 2002). Moore (1985) found that in a mate-relevant context, women who were approached by men had previously exhibited higher than average frequencies of nonverbal displays toward these men such as smiling, tossing their head, caressing an object, flinging back their hair, and so on. Moore and Butler (1989) found that the exhibition versus nonexhibition of such nonverbal behaviors could predict the likelihood of men approaching women. If female nonverbal solicitation signals exert a positive effect on male approach, the reverse effect is also observed. Renninger, Wade, and Grammer (2004) found that some nonverbal behaviors displayed by men led them to be more favorably accepted by women. In their research, using unobtrusive observation, the authors found that male nonverbal behaviors in singles bars such as open-body positions, automanipulations (rubbing one’s face, scratching), gesticulation patterns (talking with one’s hands), and glancing behavior were statistically more frequent among the group of men who successfully made contact (that is, the woman accepted a drink from the man, and was willing to converse with him) than among the group who failed to make contact. These results indicate that a woman’s initial courtship decision is influenced by the nonverbal signals exhibited by men. Tactile contact is associated with greater compliance to a courtship request addressed by males. Guéguen (2007) asked a young male confederate in a nightclub to approach young women with a request to dance with him when slow songs were being played. When formulating his request, the confederate touched (or not) the young woman on

her forearm for one or two seconds. In the second experiment, the confederate approached a young woman in the street and asked her for her phone number. The request was again accompanied by a light touch (or not) on the young woman's forearm. In both experiments, it was found that touch increased compliance to the man's request; young women who were touched were more likely to agree to dance with the male confederate and to give him their phone number.

The purpose in this study was to test the effect of a slight incidental touch by a woman towards a man on his later interest towards the female toucher. Given the positive effect of touch on perception of the toucher and the effect of touch on courtship behavior, it was hypothesized that tactile contact by a woman occurring during a brief social interaction with a man would be associated with later greater interest by the male and higher chance of engaging in courtship behaviors.

METHOD

PARTICIPANTS

The participants were 64 young men (ranging in age from 18 to 25), all of whom were single, and were chosen at random while they were seated at a pavement area of a bar in the center of a medium-sized town (more than 70,000 inhabitants) located in the west of France on the Atlantic coast of Brittany, which is popular with young tourist crowds. The experiment was conducted continuously in July, 2006 for a period of two weeks.

PROCEDURE

A 20-year-old female volunteered to participate as the confederate in this experiment. She dressed typically for a young woman of her age (clean jeans, a tight-fitting tee-shirt, and red sneakers). The physical attractiveness of potential confederates was rated by 18 young men who were instructed to evaluate the attractiveness of a group of seven young women volunteers. The evaluation was made based on a photo of the full face of each target. The potential confederates were chosen by the experimenter because they had received an average score of attractiveness with the smallest standard deviation.

The female confederate was instructed to wait until a young man arrived alone and sat down in a chair on the pavement area of the bar. Then the confederate moved nearer to the participant's table and sat at a table close to his. One minute later, the confederate was instructed to do something with her bunch of keys for one minute and to sigh while doing this task. Then she was instructed to stand and to say to the participant "Excuse me but I cannot put this key (she showed a key in her left hand) in my bunch because it's very hard to open the keyring. Would you please help me?" If the participant accepted then the accomplice gave her key and the bunch of keys to the participant. None of the participants

had too much difficulty with performing the task because we had tested before that it was hard to open the bunch but not impossible for the majority of men. When the participants had completed the task and returned the bunch of keys to the confederate, she was instructed to smile openly and to say "Many thanks, it was too hard for me". According to a random distribution, the confederate, when saying this, was instructed to slightly touch (or not in the control condition) the forearm of the male participant for one to two seconds. Then she was instructed to take her keys from the participant, to smile and to say "Thank you again" to the participant. Then she was instructed to return to her table and to look at the street. As soon as she was seated, a male observer who was seated on a public bench in front of the pavement area of the bar where the experiment was carried out started a chronometer (specifically, an Oregon Scientific chronometer, model C510). He was instructed to note if the male participant started up a conversation with the female confederate and, if he did so, to note the delay between the beginning of the conversation and the moment when the confederate sat down for the second time. If no verbal contact occurred, then the observer was instructed to note the number of glances directed at the confederate and the duration of each glance. For the latter evaluation, the observer had a metronome in his pocket with a light vibrator that was set on 60 beats per minute. The observer then counted in his head the duration of each glance and then reported it on a form. When 10 minutes had passed, the chronometer beeped and the observer stood up. The confederate also stood up and, if she was in conversation with the participant, she was instructed to pretend that she had an important appointment.

RESULTS

The first dependent variable used in this experiment was evaluated based on the number of participants who engaged the female confederate in a verbal interaction until she sat down after their first interaction. The results obtained in the two experimental conditions are presented in Table 1 below.

TABLE 1
FREQUENCIES OF MEN'S SOLICITATION TOWARDS THE FEMALE CONFEDERATE

	Touch <i>n</i> = 32	No touch <i>n</i> = 25
Contact	11 (34.4%)	5 (15.6%)
No contact	21 (65.6%)	27 (84.4%)

A 2 (touch/no touch) \times 2 (contact/no contact) chi-square test was used to analyze the data in the two conditions. Despite the difference, a significant result was not obtained ($\chi^2(1, 64) = 3.00, p < .09, r = .21$). Furthermore, examination of

the effect size shows that the effect of the experimental condition was moderate (Cohen, 1988).

The second dependent variable was the latency of the contact by the male participant until the female confederate sat down. Among the 11 participants who made contact with the female confederate, the mean latency of the contact was 0.53 minutes ($SD = 0.29$) whereas for the five participants who did not make contact with her, the mean latency was 1.17 minutes ($SD = 0.42$). The difference between the two means was significantly different ($t(14, \text{two-tailed}) = 3.57, p < .002, d = 1.91$). Therefore, a slight tactile contact was found to be associated with a decrease in men's latency to approach the confederate.

For the participants who made no verbal contact with the female confederate during the ten minutes that the observation lasted, the researcher measured the number of glances addressed toward the confederate and the duration of each glance. The means of these two dependent variables are presented in Table 2.

TABLE 2
MEANS OF THE NUMBER OF GLANCE ADDRESSED BY THE PARTICIPANT TO THE FEMALE CONFEDERATE AND THE DURATION OF EACH GLANCE

	Touch <i>n</i> = 21	No touch <i>n</i> = 27	Comparison
Number of glances in 10 minutes	13.41 (3.14)	10.87 (5.32)	$t(46) = 1.94$ $p < .06, d = 0.57$
Average duration of the glance	6.28 (4.73)	3.96 (2.40)	$t(46) = 2.21$ $p < .04, d = 0.67$

Note: Standard deviation in brackets.

As we can see, touch is associated with an increased number of glances at the confederate ($p = .057$) but is also associated with a significant difference in the duration of each glance. It also appeared that there were some differences in the dispersion between the two conditions. With the number of glances, a significant difference was found between the two groups ($F(26, 20) = 2.92, p < .01$). There was more homogeneity in the touch condition than in the control (no-touch) condition. The same difference in the dispersion of the duration of each glance was also found between the two groups ($F(20, 26) = 3.88, p < .005$). A greater heterogeneity was observed in the touch condition than in the control no-touch condition.

DISCUSSION

As hypothesized, our results showed that a slight tactile contact made by a female confederate toward a man during a very commonplace social interaction

increased the later interest expressed by the man after this interaction. Such results are in accordance with a recent study showing that a slight tactile contact is associated with greater attractiveness of the toucher in courtship context. Guéguen (2007) found that a female participant in a nightclub was more likely to agree to dance with a male confederate when slightly touched by the confederate. Female participants asked in the street for their phone number were more likely to agree when touched by the male confederate. The data gained in this study are also in accordance with those in previous studies that showed that nonverbal behavioral cues are important in courtship interaction. Lockard, McVittie, and Isaac (1977) found that a female's smile in direction of a male when entering an elevator was associated later on with a decrease in the physical distance of the man from the female confederate. Walsh and Hewitt (1985) also found that eye contact by a female is associated with an increased likelihood of a male approaching her in a bar. All together these studies indicate that nonverbal contact has a high level of importance in courtship behavior and it seems to be important for females to express this nonverbal behavior in order to encourage men to approach them.

Why does this effect occur with tactile contact as was found in our experiment? Based on an examination of the previous literature, two theoretical explanations are proposed for the effect of touch on male approach and interest a few minutes later towards a female toucher (Erceau & Guéguen, 2007; Fisher et al., 1976; Hornik, 1992b; Steward & Lupfer, 1987). Several researchers found that touch facilitates a positive evaluation of the toucher. Considering these previous studies, it is possible that in the present experiment touch was associated with a positive evaluation of the female confederate that in turn led men to express greater interest toward the confederate.

Another possible explanation for the effect of a woman's tactile contact on men's behavior lies in the interpretation by men of this nonverbal behavior in cross-gender relationships. Several researchers have found that women and men differ in their perceptions of sexual intent. Results suggest that males are more likely than females to view interactions in sexual terms and to make sexual judgments. Abbey (1987) conducted a laboratory experiment in which a male and female participated in a conversation for five minutes while a hidden male and female observed this interaction. It was found that male actors and observers rated the female actor as being more promiscuous and seductive than did the female actors and observers. In the same way, Shotland and Craig (1988) asked male and female undergraduates to watch videotapes of couples, each showing a male and a female behaving in either a friendly or a sexually interested fashion. Results of participants' ratings of the actors indicate that males perceived females as having more sexual interest than did females. These results were recently confirmed in a study by Levesque, Nave, and Lowe (2006), who found that a

very brief interaction is sufficient for men to oversexualize women. In relation to the present experiment, the tactile contact of the confederate was interpreted by the man as an indication of sexual interest by the confederate towards the participant: interest that in turn led men to pay more attention to the confederate or to approach her more frequently and more promptly. Men are more eager for sexual intercourse than are women according to Hatfield (1983). Sadalla, Kenrick, and Versure (1987) found that females are usually slower to move the relationship to sexual intimacy. This effect was confirmed by experimental studies on sexual offers. Kenrick, Stringfield, Wagenhals, Dahl, and Ransdall (1980) asked male and female college students to make a choice between a hard-core, "lustful" film and a soft-core, "loving" film. Consistent with predictions, fewer females chose the lustful film. In a second experiment, college students were contacted by telephone and asked to volunteer for an experiment involving erotica or one involving perception of geometric figures. Females were less likely than were males to volunteer for a study involving erotica, regardless of whether it was described as hard- or soft-core in nature. When direct solicitation for sex is proposed, the difference between males and females reaction is also clearly observed. In 1978 and 1982, Clark and Hatfield (1989) conducted a series of experiments where male and female confederates of average attractiveness levels approached potential partners of the opposite sex with one of three requests "Would you go out with me tonight", "Will you come over to my apartment", or "Would you go to bed with me". The scientists found that the majority of men were willing to have a sexual liaison with the woman who had made the request whereas not one woman agreed to a sexual liaison proposed by the male. This finding was confirmed by the same evaluation conducted ten years later (Clark, 1990). All of these previous studies showed that men are more eager to engage in sexual interaction and to misinterpret the sexual intent of the women with whom they interact. In our experiment, it is possible that the tactile contact was misinterpreted as sexual interest from the female. With men who had a greater propensity to engage in such behaviors, it was then logical that tactile contact increased their likelihood of approaching as well as the number or duration of glances towards the confederate.

Of course such theoretical explanations are hypothetical because sexual intentions toward or evaluation of the female confederate were not evaluated in this experiment, therefore this merits further investigation. In this study the intent was only to evaluate the behavioral consequences of a slight touch by a woman on men's behavior. The results of this experiment cannot be extended to other cultures because it has been found that tactile contact is more frequent in French culture than in North American culture (Field, 1999; Jourard, 1966). It is possible that in a noncontact culture, the effect of touch in a courtship relationship would be perceived differently. Nevertheless, it was confirmed in this study

that courtship behaviors and female attractiveness are positively associated with touch and that nonverbal cues seem to be good communication factors that regulate male and female relationships in courtship contexts. Therefore, the association of touch in the context of courtship solicitations could be valuable as a future area of research.

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