

TOUCH, AWARENESS OF TOUCH, AND COMPLIANCE WITH A REQUEST¹

NICOLAS GUÉGUEN

Université de Bretagne-Sud

Summary.—In certain situations it has been shown that touch has a positive effect on the compliance with a request expressed by a stranger. However, the difference between the effect of touch on request compliance between people who had noticed and those who had not noticed this contact has never been taken into account. In this experiment a female confederate asked 227 women to answer a questionnaire. When asking for their collaboration the forearm was or was not touched for a brief period of 1 to 2 seconds. Analysis showed that touch was associated with significantly higher compliance to the request but no difference was found between subjects who had noticed the tactual contact and subjects who had not noticed.

Briefly touching the arm or shoulder of a person for 1 or 2 seconds when asking for a favor seems trivial; however, this brief nonverbal contact significantly influences compliance. Brockner, Pressman, Cabitt, and Moran (1982) have shown in an experiment with a request to return a dime left in a telephone box that a light touch on the arm made during the request increased compliance from 63% (no-touch control situation) to 96%. When asking for a dime, passers-by who were touched agreed in 51% of the cases and 29% without contact (Kleinke, 1977). In the same way, the rate of signing a petition increased from 55% (no-touch control condition) to 81% when a slight touch was made during the request (Willis & Hamm, 1980). Hornik (1987) observed that touching increased the number of persons responding to a street survey and increased the compliance in answering a subsequent questionnaire. When touched, people were more persistent when executing a difficult task consisting of answering a long questionnaire on very provocative topics (Nannberg & Hansen, 1994). A simple touch of a client by a waiter or waitress in a restaurant has increased the tip (Crusco & Wetzel, 1984; Stephen & Zweigenhaft, 1986; Hornik, 1992b; Lynn, Le, & Sherwyn, 1998). Willingness to taste or test products increased when an employee touched shoppers when making the request; touching also increased the selling rate of the product (Smith, Gier, & Willis, 1982; Hornik, 1992a). In the same way, a recent study conducted by Kaufman and Mahoney (1999) showed that when touched by a waitress, patrons of a public tavern consumed more alcohol than patrons who were not touched.

¹Please address correspondence to Nicolas Guéguen, Laboratoire GRESICO, Université de Bretagne-Sud, IUT de Vannes-Département TC, 8 rue Montaigne, BP 561 - 56017 Vannes, France or e-mail (Nicolas.Gueguen@iu-vannes.fr).

The question arises of whether these effects remain even if the person is aware of being touched. Previous studies have found that reports of awareness of a touch varies depending on the study and on the methodological differences among studies.

Patterson, Powell, and Lenihan (1986) showed that, when subjects were touched 1 sec. on the shoulder by an experimenter who asked them to help him in analyzing questionnaire data, only 3% were aware of the tactual contact. Silverthorne, Norren, Hunt, and Rota (1972) showed that 12% of the subjects were conscious that the experimenter had touched them on the shoulder while they carried out a task. However, in this experiment, the contact lasted 3 sec. The last research in which awareness of touch was evaluated was conducted by Fisher, Rytting, and Heslin (1976); here, 57% of the subjects remembered having been touched, a contact of 1 sec. However, this tactual contact was less trivial because it was made by an employee of a university library who touched the hand of the subject (a student) when presenting a card of loan. In this latter study, the authors showed no difference in the behavior of the subjects who were aware of the touch and those who were not. But the generality of such findings on compliance could not be made because in the Fisher, *et al.* (1976) study, the dependent variable was based on an evaluation of the affective and evaluative consequences of receiving an interpersonal touch. In Silverthorne, *et al.*'s study, subjects had to judge the aesthetic value of geometrical figures. No comparison was made between the subjects who were aware or unaware of the tactual contact because only six subjects were aware of such contact. In Patterson, *et al.*'s study, compliance with a request made by the experimenter-toucher was the dependent variable but no comparison on compliance was made between the subjects who were aware or not of the touch because only two subjects reported being aware of the tactual contact. So the influence of awareness on compliance still remains in question.

On multiple occasions, touch led the subject to perceive the toucher more positively (Alagna, Witcher, Fisher, & Wicas, 1979; Stockwell & Dye, 1980; Hubble, Noble, & Robinson, 1981; Wycoff & Holley, 1990; Hornik, 1992b). Research on altruism had shown that a positive perception of the solicitor is a facilitator of helping behavior (Takemura, 1993). So, probably, if the subject is aware of the contact, this would induce a more positive perception of the toucher which would affect, in return, compliance to a request. An evaluation of that was carried out in the experiment presented below where women were solicited on the street to answer to a questionnaire. They were or not touched briefly on the arm when the request was made. In all cases, consciousness of tactual contact was evaluated. If touch is associated with a more positive perception of the toucher, we expected that tactual contact would increase compliance to the request. We also expected

that subjects aware of the tactual contact would be more compliant with the request than those who were not aware.

METHOD

Subjects

Two hundred and forty-one women (between 18 and 50 years old), walking alone, were chosen at random on a pedestrian walk of a medium-sized (approximately 100,000 inhabitants) provincial tourist town in France. The place is called Vannes, a seaside town situated on the Atlantic coast in the west of France. The women were chosen as participants because the theme of the survey was feminine, i.e., evaluation of a jewel for women. Data of 14 subjects were eliminated because they refused to answer whether they were aware of the touch.

Procedure

Because the theme of the survey concerned a typical feminine product, five young women between 20 and 22 years old served as investigators. They were dressed in informal clothes that students of this age usually wear (jeans, basketball shoes, and T-shirt). The study was conducted from 10 am to 17 pm on a pedestrian walk during two particularly sunny days in spring. An investigator walked up to a subject chosen at random after counting a certain number of passersby in a predefined area. If the person was not a woman approximately of 18 years or more, the next person was stopped. While holding in front of the person a bracelet of polished copper clearly visible, the investigator said: "Sorry to disturb you, Madam, I am a student and my marketing teacher asked us to do a survey on jewelry. Will you agree to take a look at this bracelet and tell us what you think about it?" According to a random assignment, 155 of the 227 subjects were touched on the forearm by the investigator during the 1 or 2 seconds of presenting herself. The length and placement of touch was based on most of the prior studies found in the literature. If the subject accepted the request, the investigator handed over the bracelet while saying that it was a creation of a young local jeweler. The subject was asked to look at the product, test it for a few seconds, and to answer a questionnaire afterwards. After about 20 sec. on the average, the subject was given a questionnaire which consisted of four levels of appreciation of the product (e.g., "Do you think this bracelet is esthetic," "Do you consider this a good idea for a present?").

Immediately after answering the questions the investigator took back the bracelet and thanked the subject for answering the questionnaire and asked her to answer a last question which had nothing to do with the subject of the questionnaire. As in the studies mentioned above the awareness of touch was measured (Silverthorne, *et al.*, 1972; Fisher, *et al.*, 1976; Patter-

son, *et al.*, 1986), the following question was asked of the subject: "When I came up to you to ask you to answer the questionnaire, I touched your forearm. Did you notice it?" The investigator wrote down the answer given by the subject and a complete debriefing occurred. Among the persons who refused the initial request of the investigator, a second solicitation was made to answer to a single question concerning the investigator's behavior during the presentation of the request. The question was asked in the same manner as explained above. Fourteen persons (six in the touch condition and eight in the control condition) refused to answer so their data were excluded.

RESULTS

After being touched 67.1% of the persons were willing to answer the questionnaire versus 43.1% who were not touched. This distribution of rates was significant [$\chi_1^2(N=213)=10.17, p < .005$]. Of the 155 persons who were touched, only 27.7% declared having noticed the contact. Percentages of compliance with the request for subjects who noticed the tactual contact and those who did not are presented in Table 1.

TABLE 1
PERCENTAGES OF ACCEPTANCE AND REJECTION OF REQUEST BY AWARENESS OF TOUCH

Awareness of Tactile Contact	Compliance With Request			
	Yes		No	
	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>
Control Group (No Touch <i>n</i> = 72)				
Yes (<i>n</i> = 0)	0.0	0	0.0	0
No (<i>n</i> = 72)	43.1	31	56.9	41
Experimental Group (Touch <i>n</i> = 155)				
Yes (<i>n</i> = 43)	60.4	26	39.6	17
No (<i>n</i> = 112)	69.6	78	30.4	34

In the group who were touched, numbers of subjects who were aware of the tactual contact and those who were not was not significantly different [$\chi_1^2(N=155)=1.19, p > .10$]. Being aware of the tactual contact did not affect compliance compared to a situation in which the subject did not notice the contact. In the control group all the subjects acknowledged the confederate's behavior, and no one stated she had been touched during the interaction. Therefore, no additional comparisons were possible among the groups.

DISCUSSION

Touch appeared to be effective in increasing compliance to a request as is consistent with numerous earlier findings (Kleinke, 1977; Willis & Hamm, 1980; Brockner, *et al.*, 1982; Smith, *et al.*, 1982; Goldman & Fordyce, 1983;

Paulsell & Goldman, 1984; Goldman, Kiyohara, & Pfannensteil, 1985; Hornik, 1987; Hornik & Ellis, 1988).

Being or not being aware of the tactual contact does not influence its efficacy. This supports the study performed by Fisher, *et al.* (1976) who found no difference in the perception and judgment of the touching person depending on whether the touch was noticed or not.

The absence of difference in the evaluation of the toucher observed between the subjects who were aware of the tactual contact and those who were unaware reported by Fisher, *et al.* (1976) seems to be generalizable to compliance behavior. This factor was not evaluated in the one study wherein the evaluation of awareness of touch was made during a request for help by the toucher (Patterson, *et al.*, 1986). Several studies have indicated that touch facilitates positive evaluation of the toucher (Fisher, *et al.*, 1976; Wycoff & Holley, 1990; Hornik, 1992b). Researches connecting the perception of the solicitor and helping behavior have indicated that positive perception of the solicitor increases compliance behavior (Takemura, 1993). It seems that the awareness of touch does not lead the subject to perceive the toucher more positively than would lead her, in return, to accept the request more favorably. In the same way, it seems that the awareness of touch does not lead the subject to perceive that the solicitor had greater need. Again, numerous studies of altruism have shown that this perception of a higher need for help facilitates helping behavior (Bickman & Kamzan, 1973). Naturally, such aspects of the perception of the solicitor or of the request were not estimated here. Their implication for compliance to a request when the solicitation is accompanied with tactual contact remains to be demonstrated. It seems, however, that if the awareness of touch affects these perceptions, compliance to the request is not influenced. Numerous studies have shown a positive effect of touch on helping behavior but the factor mediating such effect remains still unknown. Researchers should thus try to investigate this aspect.

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