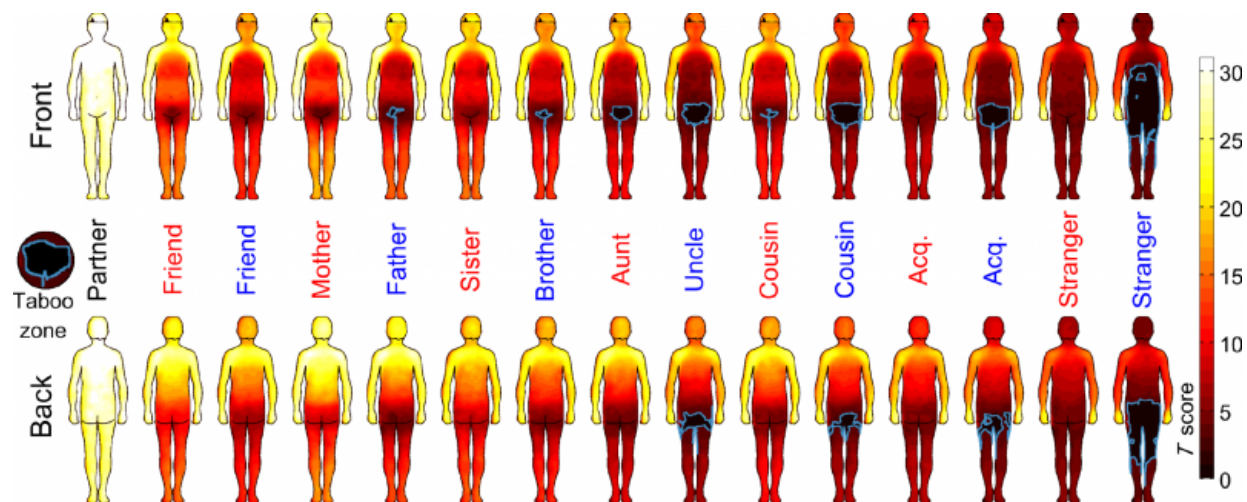


Bodily maps of touch and social relationships are tightly linked

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Bodily maps of touch are closely linked to social relationships. The brighter the colour of the body area, the more likely the person concerned is allowed to touch it. Any touching of the ‘taboo zones’ marked with black colour and blue borders is entirely forbidden.

A study conducted by Aalto University and the University of Oxford shows that the bodily maps of touch are consistent across a wide range of European cultures.

The recent results obtained by a Finnish–English research group show that the human [body](#) has a precisely defined touch maps that are tightly linked to social touch that is allowed in different kinds of [human](#)

[relationships](#).

The closer the person in social relationship, the larger the body area this person is allowed to touch. The bodily maps of touch were similar in all five cultures studied. Social touching thus seems to be a biologically determined and evolutionarily developed way to form [social relationships](#). The results were recently published in Proceedings of the National Academy of the United States of America.

'Our findings indicate that touching is an important means of maintaining social relationships. The bodily maps of touch were closely associated with the pleasure caused by touching. The greater the pleasure caused by touching a specific area of the body, the more selectively we allow others to touch it,' says researcher Juulia Suvilehto from Aalto University.

'The results emphasise the importance of non-verbal communication in social relationships. Social relationships are important for well-being throughout peoples' life, and their lack poses a significant psychological and somatic health risk. Our results help to understand the mechanisms related to maintaining social relationships and the associated disorders,' says Professor Lauri Nummenmaa.

The study was conducted in the form of an online questionnaire in which more than 1300 people from Finland, England, Italy, France and Russia participated. The study commenced with the mapping of the participants' social network. The participants were then asked to colour the areas of [human body](#) shown on a computer where different members of the social network could [touch](#) them.

More information: Juulia T. Suvilehto et al. Topography of social touching depends on emotional bonds between humans, *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* (2015). [DOI:](#)

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