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# Two cross-cultural studies on affective touch: behavioural, self-report, and neurophysiological data from the United Kingdom, South Africa, and Chile

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## Abstract

Touch is an integral part of interpersonal interactions. Early in life, we rely on our caregivers' touch to meet our basic needs, and across the lifespan, touch signals affiliation, social support, and has beneficial effects on wellbeing. A particular type of slow, gentle, stroking touch ("affective touch") activates unmyelinated c-tactile (CT) afferents. CT-optimal stroking is commonly perceived as pleasant and can communicate prosocial intentions.

While affective touch is generally perceived as pleasant, increasing evidence highlights that its perception is shaped by individual factors, such as exposure to touch or adult attachment style. Furthermore, cultural factors may also influence the perception of affective touch, but most touch research is still being carried out in western, educated, industrialised, rich and demographic (WEIRD) contexts, neglecting cross-cultural differences. How the perception of affective touch varies across contexts is important to study given cultural and social influences on the frequency and types of touch individuals are likely to experience from early childhood through adulthood.

Here, we present data from two cross-cultural studies on affective touch. We collected data on individual touch experiences and attitudes, pleasantness and liking ratings for affective (vs. neutral) touch, and neural correlates of dynamic stroking touch (measured using electroencephalography) in the United Kingdom (UK), South Africa, and Chile. The UK is a relatively low-contact culture, with low allowed touch, while touch is more acceptable in Chile and South Africa (higher-contact cultures). We will present initial findings on individual and cultural influences on affective touch from these exciting datasets.

**Keywords:** affective touch, cross, cultural research, attachment style, electroencephalography

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