



Aalto University  
School of Science

# Cultural Universalism in Social Touch

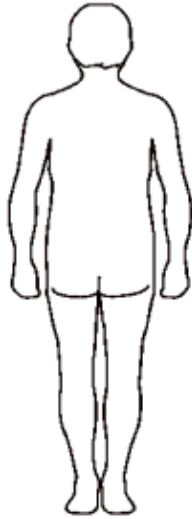
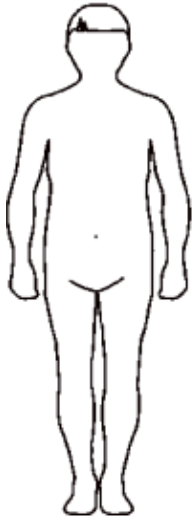
*Julia Suvilehto, Ryo Kitada, Robin Dunbar, Robert  
Turner, Sadato Norihiro, Lauri Nummenmaa*



Photo by Richald Renaldi  
from the Touching Strangers series  
Used with permission

# Collecting data using the emBODY tool

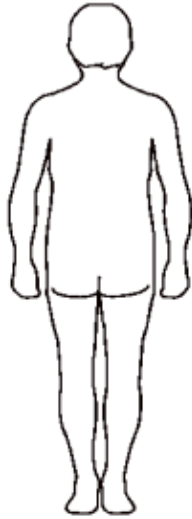
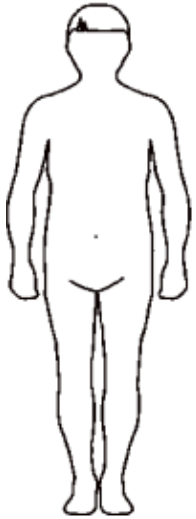
a Colour in the areas where  
**your sister**  
could touch you



click here when ready

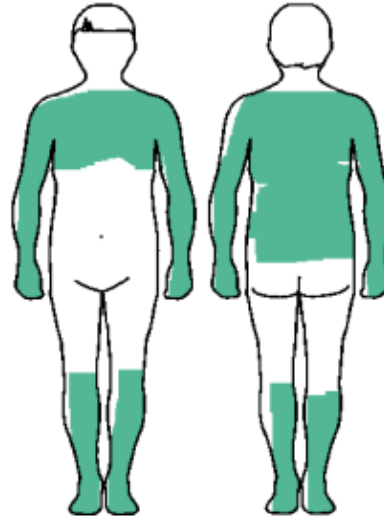
# Collecting data using the emBODY tool

a Colour in the areas where  
**your sister**  
could touch you



click here when ready

b



# Collecting data using the emBODY tool

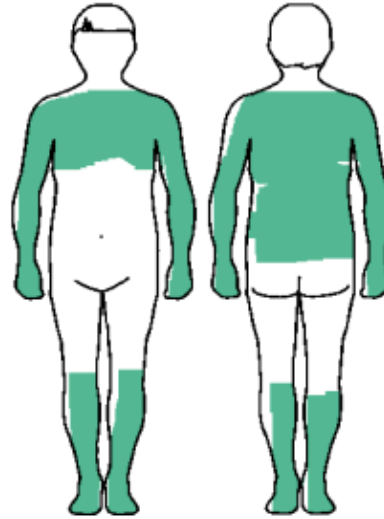
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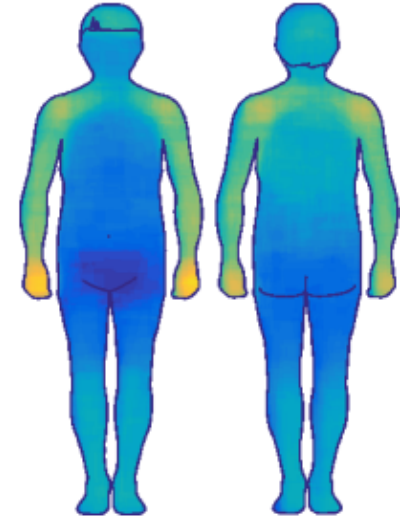
click here when ready



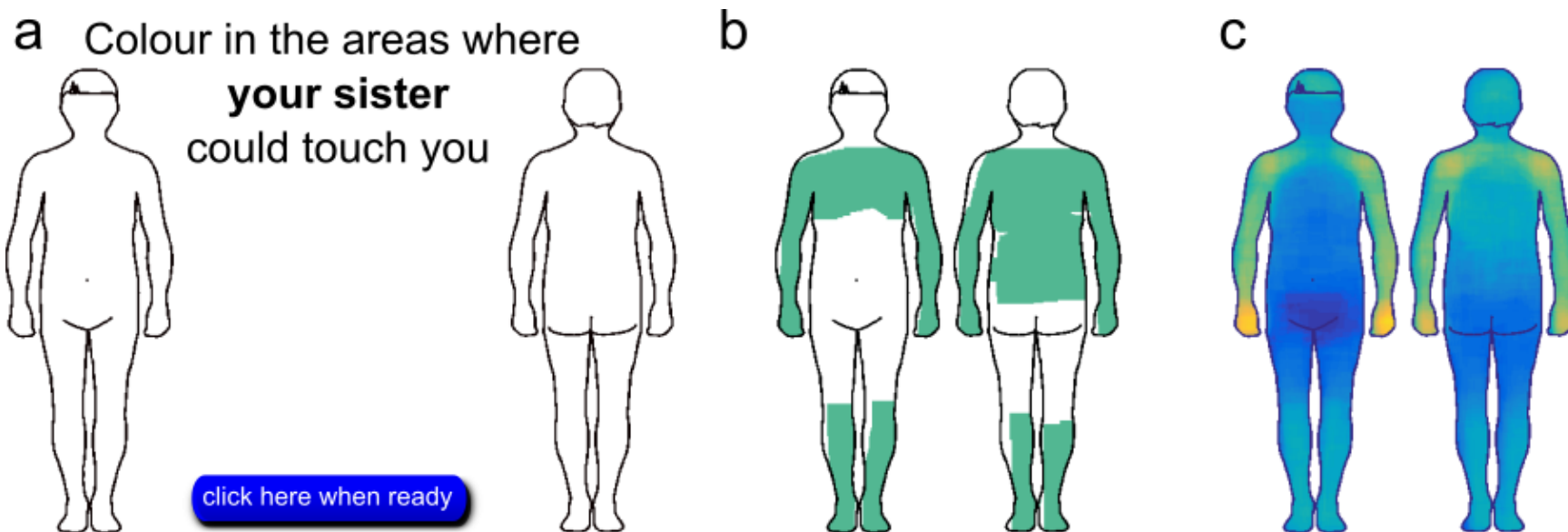
b



c



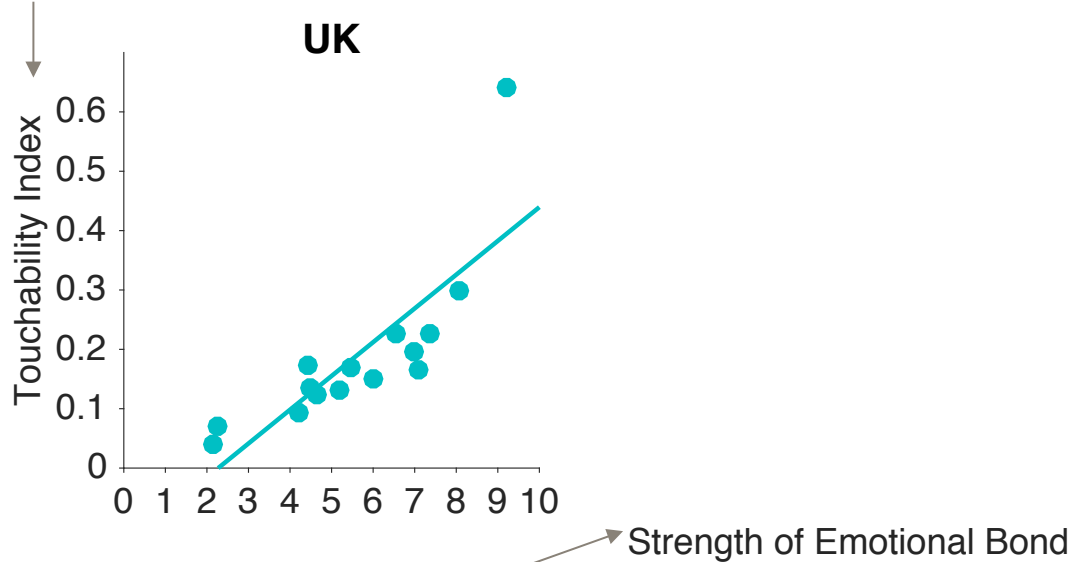
# Collecting data using the emBODY tool



**255 Japanese subjects, 125 male, mean age 40 years (SD 14.6)**  
**384 British subjects, 209 male, mean age 46 years (SD 12.6)**

# Correlation between TI and emotional bond

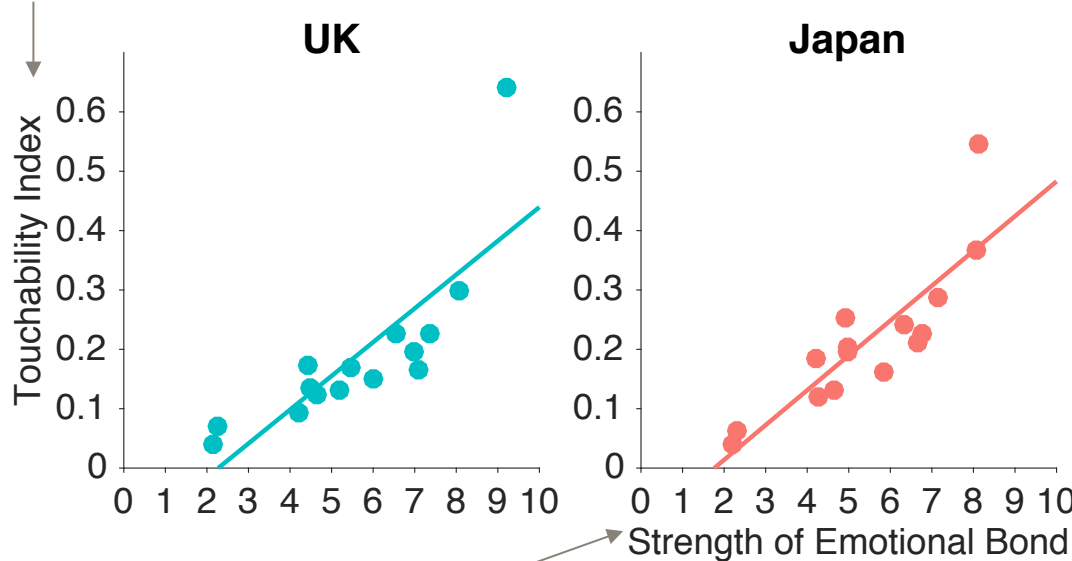
How large proportion of the subject's body a person is allowed to touch



The self-reported emotional bond between a subject and toucher (1 = no emotional bond at all, 10 = strongest possible emotional bond)

# Correlation between TI and emotional bond

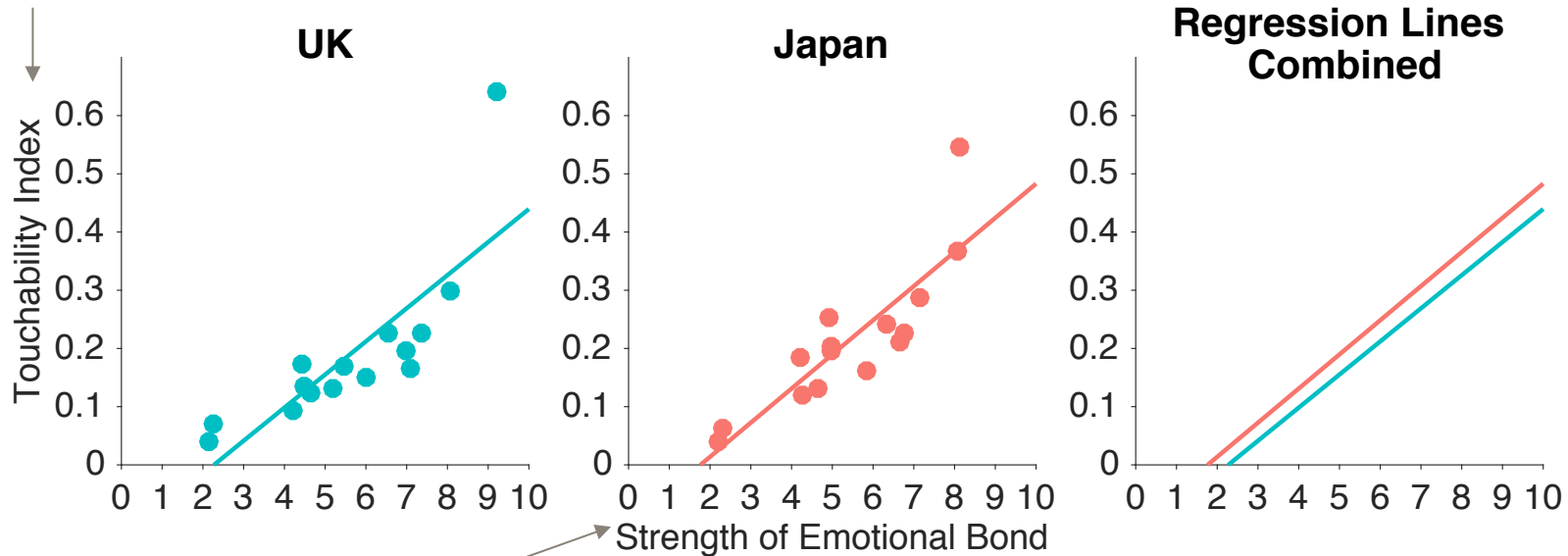
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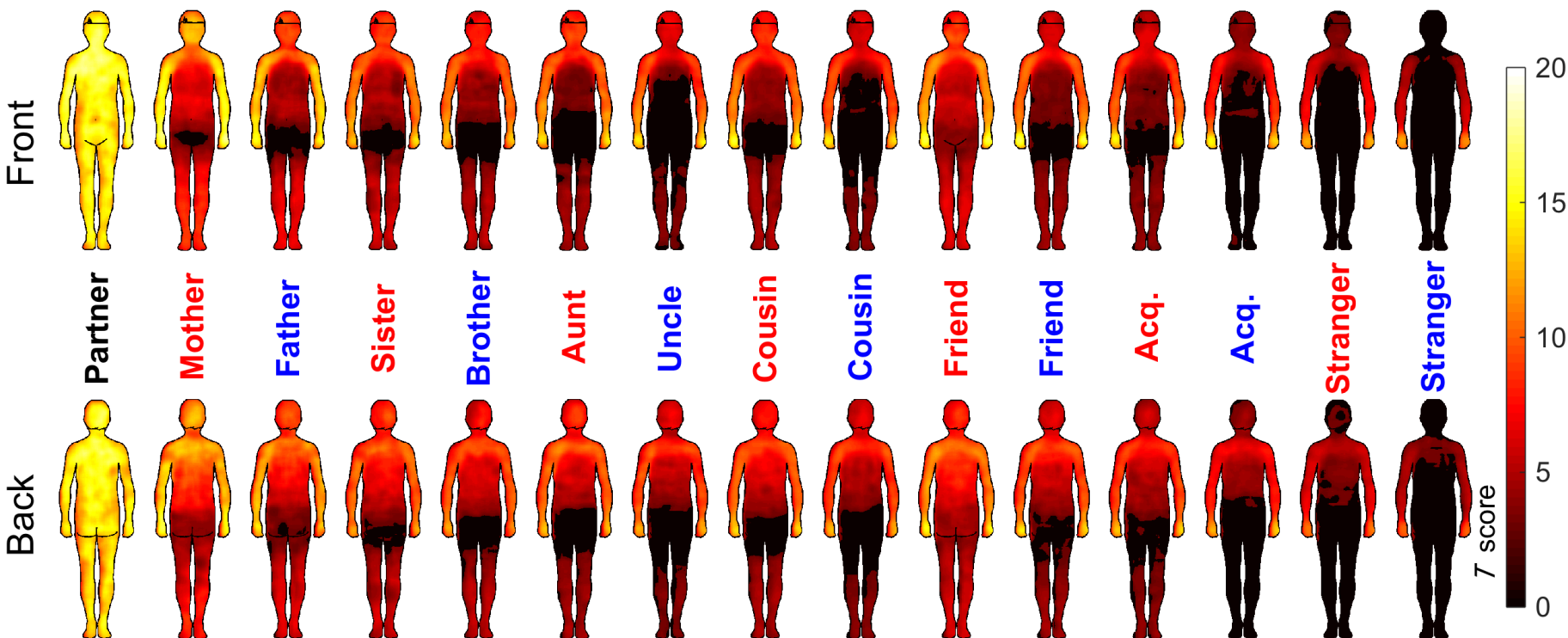
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How large proportion of the subject's body a person is allowed to touch



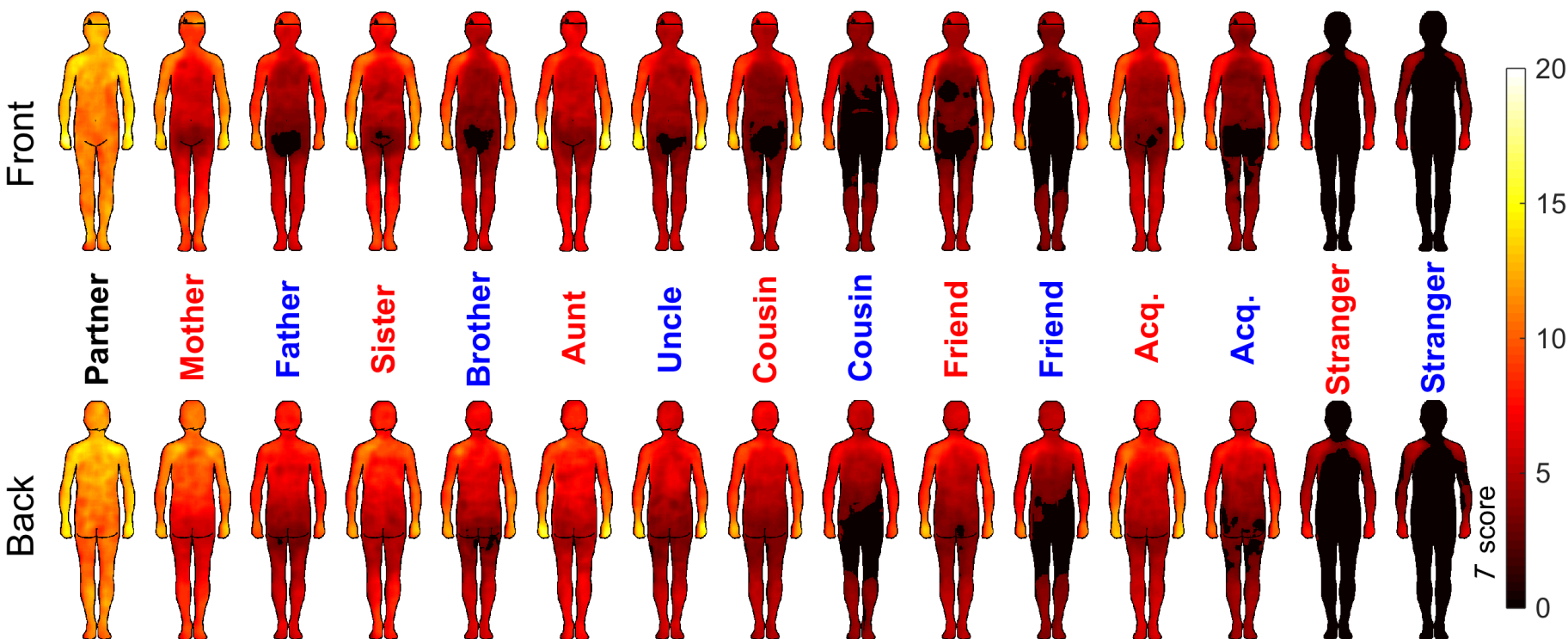
The self-reported emotional bond between a subject and toucher (1 = no emotional bond at all, 10 = strongest possible emotional bond)

# Touch allowance in United Kingdom



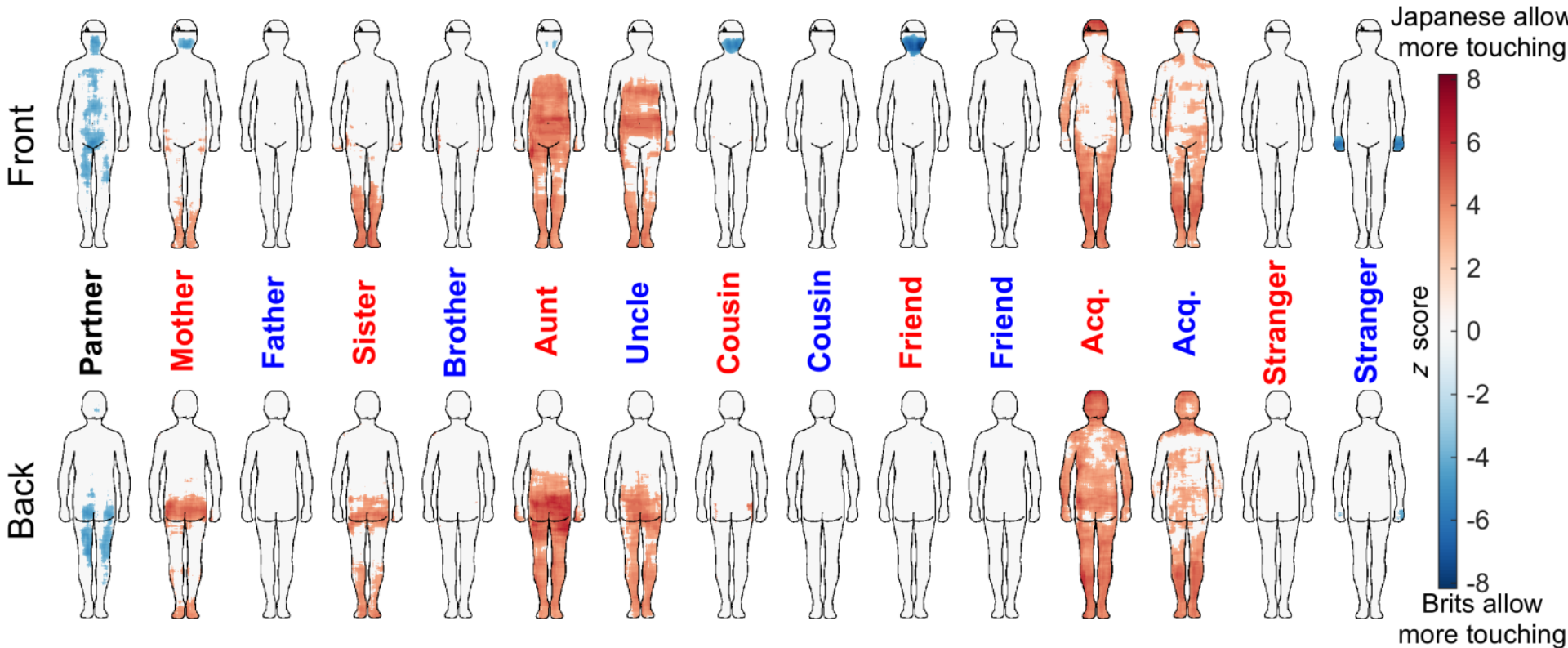
Data are thresholded at  $p=0.05$ , FDR corrected

# Touch allowance in Japan



Data are thresholded at  $p=0.05$ , FDR corrected

# Touch allowance in United Kingdom



Data are thresholded at  $p=0.05$ , FDR corrected

# Conclusions

- **Impact of culture on social touch is relatively small**
- **This suggests biological (rather than cultural) basis for social touching behaviour**
- **Humans might use social touch as a method for establishing and maintaining social relationships**

## Collaborators

Ryo Kitada,  
Robin Dunbar,  
Robert Turner,  
Sadato Norihiro,  
Lauri Nummenmaa

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