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CONTACT COMFORT INITIATED BY THE NURSERY

SCHOOL CHILD

by

Lana Kay Spencer

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree

of

MASTER OF SCIENCE

in

Child Development

Approved:

\_\_\_\_\_  
Major Professor

\_\_\_\_\_  
Committee Member

\_\_\_\_\_  
Committee Member

\_\_\_\_\_  
Dean of Graduate Studies

UTAH STATE UNIVERSITY  
Logan, Utah

1969

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## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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Lana Kay Spencer

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ABSTRACT

Contact Comfort Initiated by the Nursery School Child

by

Lana Kay Spencer, Master of Science

Utah State University, 1969

Major Professor: Carroll Lambert  
Department: Family and Child Development

The study focused upon three aspects of child-initiated contact comfort situations; how often the contact was sought, with whom or why did the child seek comfort, and what incident seemed to stimulate the child's action. Data were collected from two Utah State University Nursery School Laboratories.

It was found that children respond as children in that similarity is greater than differences in utilization of contact comfort.

Contact comfort is an important part of a child's functioning in social situations. The number of episodes to indicate this was substantial.

The objects and persons to whom he turns for contact comfort vary within age and nature of the situation in which the child functions.

(51 pages)

## INTRODUCTION

Children seek many kinds of contact, from strong to mild forms, each having its own purpose. Spitz (1965) maintains that children who lose their love object make attempts to regain what is lost through acts of clinging, weeping, and demanding. Contact may be a child's way of asking for reciprocal behavior as Sears, Rau, and Alpert (1965) elaborate. Sears, Levin, and Levin (1957) feel that children seek contact for the purpose of securing nurturance and attention.

Age seems to be a determining factor in the decline of contactual and more intimate forms of behavior. But Heathers (1955) feels inhibitions increase with age, not necessarily the need to be dependent. It is likewise important to note that Sears, Rau, and Alpert (1965) support the hypothesis that child rearing variables are more important than age in determining frequency of dependent behavior. It then follows that children's contact with whom, and how they seek it is important.

In studying the types of contact sought by children many implications might be discovered. Both the type of contact comfort a child continually seeks and the object of that contact could be relevant in understanding his behavior.

### Statement of thesis problem

Of the general area of contact comfort, that aspect which has been selected for investigation in this study is a selected variety of contacts

initiated by the child with teachers, peers, self, and objects in a nursery school setting.

The study will focus upon three aspects of child-initiated contact comfort situations; how often contact was sought, with whom or why did the child seek comfort, and what incident seemed to stimulate the child's action.

### Hypotheses

The following hypotheses will be tested:

1. There will be no meaningful difference in the child's utilization of self, teacher, peer, and object contact.
2. There will be no meaningful difference in the type of events that precede the contact comfort activity or incident.
3. There will be no meaningful difference in the frequency of body, hand, and oral contact.

### Definition of terms

Contact comfort is defined in this thesis as any type of physical contact the child seeks for security reasons--so interpreted by the investigator.

Teacher was either the head teacher or any of the four student teachers in the nursery school.

Peers were any of the other children in the child development laboratory.

Object could consist of anything inanimate that the child came in contact with to gain security.

Self was the child himself including the clothes he was wearing.

Body contact would be any act where the child's body is the point of contact.

Hand is defined as contact sought by the child's hands. An example would be a child rubbing his leg or some other part of his body.

Oral was when the child sought contact through his mouth. Thumb-sucking would be in this category.

Of the categories preceding contact, physical discomfort would be defined as the outward signs of physical hurt. A child being hit by his peer or hurting his finger while playing with the blocks would fit in this category.

Rejection of peers consisted of verbal rejection because physical rejection was recorded under physical discomfort.

Limits or discipline on the child by the teacher was either verbal or physical. A child running might be physically stopped by a teacher with or without verbal guidance. Either type of action was classified under this category.

Spontaneous affection--moment of happiness--everything fine are self explanatory.

Approval or reward from an effort or accomplishment was any type of positive gesture given to the child by teachers, peers, or visitors. A child successfully completing a puzzle, receiving verbal praise from a teacher, might start rubbing his hands on his legs.

Unknown category was necessary in that often the observer would

be unable to determine accurately the episode preceding the contact. An effort was made to be aware of the different areas and what was going on in general, but still there were times when the observer could not define a preceding situation.

Intensity of contact was more difficult to determine. In most cases the contact was moderate, intense being more emphatic. A child vigorously sucking her thumb and withdrawing from the group would be listed as intense contact.

## REVIEW OF LITERATURE

In the following review of literature three major areas were included: (1) dependent behavior and contact comfort, (2) maternal separation and deprivation, and (3) children of working mothers.

The above areas are important ones to be considered. Dependent behavior and contact comfort is directly related to the topic of investigation. Maternal separation and deprivation is briefly reviewed because of the possible implications it may or may not have on the child's reach for contact. Children of working mothers generate concern to many since the trends are changing. More young mothers are joining the working force; thus increasing interest is focused on the child at home. A closer look at these areas may constitute further studies.

### Dependent behavior and contact comfort

There have been several studies of dependent behavior in children, maternal deprivation, and effects of working mothers on their children. However, in the area of contact comfort, as such, little has been done. Exploratory studies are needed to determine the types of contact comfort sought by children in relation to age and sex. Application of this knowledge could be valuable in defining the curricula of our schools, especially in the preschool and primary grades.

Harlow's (1960) unique study of the affectional patterns in primates has added considerable knowledge in the area of contact comfort. The

importance of contact is emphasized by his findings that the source from which the monkey receives food is not necessarily the source he seeks for comfort. The determining variable seems to lie in the "contact comfort" of the cloth surrogate mother. It must be remembered that the study was done with primates and not human beings. However, Harlow states that the monkey baby differs from the human baby in two basic developmental characteristics: (1) the monkey is more mature at birth and develops four times as fast as the human infant, and (2) the monkey is unable to develop a smiling response and a symbolic language.

The cloth mother is more than a convenient nest but a bond develops between infant and cloth-mother surrogate that is almost unbelievably similar to the bond between human mother and child. (Harlow and Zimmermann, 1959, p. 421)

The infant monkey cannot form adequate affectional patterns for other monkey infants unless it can break the contact bond which has been established between it and the mother. (Harlow, 1960, p. 676)

His open field fear test has measured the long term retention of the affectional responses. The monkey, being larger than the cloth surrogate mother, still runs to her for comfort before exploring the strange room. He found that:

None of the infants raised with single wire mothers displayed the persistent and aggressive play behavior that was typical of many of the infants that were raised with cloth mothers. Results also indicate that, without the factor of contact comfort, only a weak attachment if any is formed . . . nursing or feeding played either no role or a subordinate role in the development of affection as measured by contact time, responsiveness to fear, responsiveness to strangers, and motivation to seek and see. The soft body contact that characterized the cloth mother, was the important

variable for the appearance, development, and maintenance of the infant-surrogate-mother tie. Clinging, as well as contact is an affectional variable of considerable importance. (Harlow and Zimmermann, 1959, p. 428)

Arsenian (1943) made observational assessments of the reactions of young children, 11 to 30 months of age, to a strange playroom with and without a familiar adult present. These observations revealed 10 different patterns of behavior. The patterns served to define positions for the development of a security scale. She reports:

In the light of these findings, insecurity is formulated as a function of the unfamiliarity, or unstructuredness, of the environment in relation to the child's feeling of power in it. The most certain provision that can be made for the security of young children faced with unstructured environments appears to be the presence of a familiar adult whose protective power is known. (Arsenian, 1943, p. 248)

For the dependent child a variety of situations where the adult is not present will be disadvantageous to him. Rejection by an adult may prolong their feelings of insecurity and an avoidance reaction towards the adult may be set up.

Harlow, Harlow, and Hansen (1963) also state that three sequential stages characterize maternal behavior in the rhesus monkey. They are: (1) attachment and protection, (2) ambivalence, and (3) separation or rejection. During the first phase the mother has close physical contact with the infant, then gradually appearing are negative responses until finally physical separation takes place.

Ribble (1943, 1944) and Spitz (1965) are two of the most enthusiastic proponents of the theory that the psychological tie between a mother

and child is the key to sound emotional development from birth. The continuous flow of mother-love to a child is thought to guarantee healthy development and to be the essential stabilizing force in his life.

Mothers create the emotional climate in the mother-child relation, favorable in every respect for the development of the child. The mother's emotional attitude, her affects will serve to orient the infant's affects and confer the quality of life on the infant's experience. The mother is the representative of the environment. (Spitz, 1965, p. 122)

Spitz also maintains that separated infants look as though they are trying to regain the lost object with the help of their oppressive drive in that they become weepy, demanding, and cling to everybody who approaches them. Later on, signs of aggression decrease followed by the development of somatic symptoms of sleeplessness, loss of appetite, and loss of weight.

Ribble (1943) uses the term "mothering" in reference to the care of the child during daily routine activities. This results in the satisfaction of sucking activities, cuddling, adequate sleep, and care in the form of bathing and elimination. Regarding this, Ribble states,

The art as well as the science of mothering is to initiate and give momentum to the first functions of the child as they develop in sequence, but two situations must never be allowed to come about--the overdevelopment of the child's emotional attachment for his mother, or a ruthless weaning from her. (Ribble, 1943, p. 184)

The mother is the basic factor in early emotional, social, and mental development. Any distortion of the mother relationship makes a baby anxious, and later on in his life he will have difficulty in building up his first

relationship with other members of the family group and is thus unable to find the emotional outlet he needs.

In a study of the development of social attachments in infancy, Schaffer and Emerson (1964) indicate that the age at onset of specific attachments is generally found in the third quarter of the first year, with fluctuations occurring in individual cases.

Social isolation and sensory restriction may be important variables to consider. Schultz (1965) reported an interesting investigation by Gibby, Adams, and Carrera. They investigated therapeutic changes in a group of psychiatric patients who underwent up to six hours of sensory restriction. This experiment seemed to bring about a "stimulus hunger" manifested by effort to relate and communicate with others. Thus, the subjects displayed an increased need for contact with other people.

In Schultz's own investigations, he stated that an emotional deterioration occurred when the individual was placed in social isolation. There is some indication that certain intellectual functions may be impaired under social isolation. However, not all individuals showed adverse affects. Spitz (1965) likewise adds an interesting note. Emotional starvation results in progressive deterioration engulfing the child's whole person.

Sears, Rau, and Alpert (1965) define dependency as the principle source of reinforcement of the imitative behavior that leads to adult role adoption.

When the maturing but still dependent child suffers gradual withdrawal of parental nurturance and love, he is stimulated to role practice by his need to regain control of the parental resources,

especially the expression of love. Dependency is considered to be an action system in which another person's nurturant, helping, and caretaking activities are the rewarding environmental events. (Sears, Rau, and Alpert, 1965, p. 27)

Both members of mother-baby interaction develop expectancies from each. Soon the child learns to "ask" for the mother's reciprocal behavior. Sears, Rau, and Alpert (1965) measured these asking movements as acts of dependency. This resulted in the measurement of the dependency trait. Amount of reinforcements seemed a less important determinant of ultimate response strength than the frequency and timing of these reinforcements.

The conditions under which dependent behavior is presumed to be established in a child are described in detail by Sears, Levin, and Levin (1957). Mainly involved is the child's interaction with his original caretaker. This behavior provides what is required for the child's responses into a stable pattern of dependent behavior.

In relation to dependent behavior and age, Sears, Levin, and Levin (1957) along with Heathers (1955) conclude that there is rather strong evidence that clinging and affection-seeking decline with age relative to affection or approval-seeking. Sears, Levin, and Levin (1957) state that a child's activities for securing nurturance and attention not only change as he grows older, but also develop to some degree independently of one another. Another interesting hypothesis by Sears, Rau, and Alpert (1965) is that certain child rearing variables are more important than age in determining frequency of dependent behavior. Gradually declining during the preschool years are the contactual and more

intimate forms of behavior. The reason for this tendency could be a result of the socialization process being invoked. Seeking attention through verbal means is tolerated longer in society (beginning with the mother) than the physical clinging kind of dependency behavior. By the age of five, a child has lost much of his tendency to demand close intimacy.

In Heathers' (1955) study of emotional dependence and independence in nursery school play, the data suggested that emotional dependence on an adult declines with age relative to dependence on other children. So that in the process of socialization, emotional dependence tends to shift away from a passive, infantile dependence on adults toward a more active and assertive dependence on one's peers. The need to depend on adults does not necessarily decrease with age, but it may be that inhibitions against expressing such need increase with age. Stith and Connor (1962) also found that while age increased, dependent contacts with adults decreased in both frequency and proportion. In studying helpfulness in young children, helpful acts increased significantly with increase in age. Sears, Rau, and Alpert (1965) found that being near and touching and holding are significantly related to age, the younger girls showing the behavior more frequently. Being near was not related to age with boys.

Some interesting findings were discussed by Walters, Pearce, and Dahms (1957). They studied affectional and aggressive behavior of pre-school children. Their major findings are as follows: (1) At the three-, four-, and five-year levels the children were more verbally than physically

affectionate. At the two-year level the difference was not statistically significant. (2) Generally, there was little difference in the frequency with which physical and verbal aggression was evidenced. (3) Aggression tended to increase with age from two years through four years of age, and boys were more aggressive than girls. (4) At all age levels the children were more affectionate than aggressive in their response to others and more frequently employed affection than aggression in initiating contacts. (5) At the two-, three-, and four-year levels the boys initiated significantly more affectional contacts with boys than did the girls, while the two-year-old girls initiated significantly more affectional contacts with the girls than did the boys. (6) There was a tendency for the boys to choose boys or adults rather than girls as recipients of their affectional contacts. (7) The boys were more likely to choose boys rather than adults as recipients of their aggressive initiations.

Kagan and Moss (1963) suggest that environmental disapproval and punishment of dependent behavior in young males led to inhibition and conflict over dependency in the growing boy. Sears, Rau, and Alpert (1965) found that boys displayed more negative attention seeking in the open nursery school situation than girls did. They suggest that this is the product not only of general permissiveness of the mother, but also severe infant socialization by her. Another factor being a neglectfully permissive attitude toward the boy by the father is an attitude resulting in a low affectional attachment to him by his son.

Sears, Levin, and Levin (1957) believe that children whose mothers

express their affection openly, but repeatedly threaten the affectional bond by withdrawing love for discipline, should be the most dependent children.

Goldfarb (1965) maintains that in our society it is more the rule than the exception that people select and delegate "strong" persons to act as parental surrogates, helpers, friends, or confidants. In dependent behavior or dependency, a target is required: the delegated powerful or "parental" figure.

The preponderant number of persons socialized by our culture, and probably by all cultures, manifest dependent behavior overtly, either intermittently or continuously over their entire life span. The dependent relationship which gives rise to dependency as a psychodynamic constellation has its origin in infancy. (Goldfarb, 1965, p. 17)

He goes further in defining some characteristics of dependent relationships:

The dependent persons "developing social orientation as a child will be more apt to play so as to be with someone else; he will tend to learn more to please others than for the pleasure of learning and being able to do; he will work for approval or admiration rather than because of interest in the work and pleasures from achievement . . ." (Goldfarb, 1965, p. 25)

Because of children's inquisitiveness, activity, and desire for independence, they remain highly dependent and are in need of considerable protection against the many hazards of our own society. The parent's views of their preschool child seem to be extremely important to him.

#### Maternal separation and deprivation

It is important to understand the way children experience their

surroundings and their daily life when the mother is not present. Another question seems to be how they can receive what they need from the surroundings, whether or not the mother is with them. In the last 12 to 14 years, the problem of maternal deprivation has been strongly researched. There are many questions that have been raised concerning the factors resulting in, and effects of, maternal deprivation. Although much investigation has been done, most of these questions have not been fully answered.

Skard (1965) maintains that age and the developmental level of the child are important factors when measuring the effects of maternal separation. Likewise, Yarrow (1964) expects that each developmental period has its own sensitivities and vulnerabilities. Spitz and Wolf (Yarrow, 1964) conclude that the quality of the relationship with the mother prior to separation is a very important factor. Yarrow points out that the kind of separation makes a great deal of difference on the severity of effects. Spitz believes that babies who have not developed strong ties to their mother, or parents, are less afraid of strangers than babies with these ties. The importance of a strong bond in mother-child relationships has been discussed by several investigators. Goldfarb (Yarrow, 1964) did a series of follow-up studies of older children who had spent the first three years of their lives in an institution. He found that the most significant disturbance was the inability to form close inter-personal relationships with others. Yarrow (1961) reports that several retrospective studies found an inability in older children and adolescents to establish close,

warm, personal relationships.

In later investigations, Harlow (Skard, 1965) found that more is needed than fur and food. The experimental monkeys were unable to develop relationships with other monkeys and, as a consequence, did not care for their young. It seems to be necessary that both monkey and human mothers gradually dissolve the intense physical bonds which characterize the early mother-child relations. The cloth surrogate mother did not push her young away; as a result, they were never forced to the peer group to build relationships. We need to look at the kinds of relationships children have with peers and adults.

#### Children of working mothers

A woman has her own value as a human being; therefore, the problem of children of working mothers must be viewed not only from the child's viewpoint but also considering what may serve the mother's interests and development. More and more women are wanting to be mothers, but not only mothers.

The effects on the child is hard to measure since each child concerned will live in a different situation. Skard (1965) notes that it is important to know what children do while the mother is working and the parent-child relationship when they are home. The mother's emotional experiences with regard to her job and the way the rest of the family reacts to her work are two variables that cannot be ignored. Hoffman's study (1961) of the effects of maternal employment on the child reveals

some fascinating findings. If the mother likes working she rates high on positive affect toward the child--she uses mild discipline and does not burden the child with household duties. The mother who dislikes working seems less involved with the child altogether and obtains the child's help with tasks.

Kligler (Siegel and Haas, 1963) notes that working mothers try harder to be good mothers because they feel anxious and guilty about their children. Siegel summarizes that working mothers do not differ from others in child-rearing attitudes and practices. The families of working mothers differ in size, in age composition, and in intactness from the families of nonworking mothers, as reported by Siegel et al. (1959).

Nye and Hoffman (1963) report that:

We have not found differences between the children of working and nonworking mothers with respect to behavior systems related to dependence and independence. (Nye and Hoffman, 1963, p. 80)

Stolz (1960) states that a child's attitude toward the mother's role may also effect the child's happiness and emotional well-being.

Yarrow et al. (1962) emphasizes the importance of the mother's feelings about her work role and her maternal role. Dissatisfied mothers, both working and nonworking, reported undesirable child-rearing practices and attitudes more frequently than mothers who were satisfied with their role.

The data on educational groups suggest that maternal employment brings different kinds of familial adaptations depending on the value systems of the particular cultured subgroups in which the mother is combining mother and worker roles. (Yarrow et al., 1962, p. 138)

Skard (1965) states that when mother goes to work once in a while, rather than going regularly, the preschool child seems to become more anxious.

Stolz (1960) maintains that almost anything one desires about the children of the employed mother can be supported by some statement from a research study. Nye and Hoffman (1963, p. 80) also state that "Maternal employment per se is less influential in children's lives than some have thought it to be."

Research in this area is not conclusive. A syndrome has not been specifically defined for children of working mothers.

## METHOD OF PROCEDURE

Sample

The sample consisted of the children in two Utah State University Nursery School Laboratories, both in the morning hours of 8:30-11:00, with each having different teachers. The head teacher in each laboratory was experienced in child development and preschool education. Both teachers had four student teachers as assistants; all were females. There were 20 children in each group, 40 children in all, with an equal number of boys and girls. The children ranged from 3 years 2 months to 4 years 11 months at the beginning of the quarter. This sample was selected because the laboratory situation provided an opportunity to observe children in a setting in which they encountered a variety of experiences and were free to respond and behave spontaneously. The data were gathered January 29-March 7, 1968, Monday through Thursday of each week.

Procedure

Data were collected at the beginning of the fifth week of nursery school during Winter Quarter, 1968. It seemed reasonable to assume that by this time the children were sufficiently familiar with the nursery school situation and that the element of prior laboratory experience could be eliminated as a variable.

At the beginning of the observations, age and sex of each child were recorded. The time sampling method was used. The investigator observed

each child 10 times for five minutes in an established order of sequence which was established at the first observation period and continued thereafter. Sequence varied only if a child was absent. In that instance, he would be eliminated until his return. No more than two observations were made on one child per day, and they were not consecutive. All observations were made when the children were inside the laboratory, not on the playground, and were participating in a variety of activities.

Observations were made by the investigator while she was in an observation booth equipped with one-way mirrors. Timing of observations was kept accurate by the use of a stop watch.

Prior to collecting the data, the investigator spent several hours in general observation to determine categories for the study and the block of time that should be used. As a product of this experience, observation units of five minutes each were chosen which provided opportunity to see the child over a reasonable period of time. The long observation period provided the observer with an opportunity to be aware of others. As one child was being observed, the next child on the sequence list was also noticed to enable the observer to be aware of preceding incidents for contact comfort. The observational data were recorded on charts prepared for this purpose by the investigator and approved by committee members (see Appendix).

The four recipients of contact were categorized as teacher, peer, object, and self. All contact recorded was initiated by the child being observed. If a child walked over to a teacher and sat down on her lap,

it would be charted a body-teacher contact, meaning the child had body contact with his teacher. If a teacher took a child and placed him on her lap, this would not be recorded because it would then be contact initiated by the teacher, not the child. Again, if a child held his hands together, rubbing gently, this was recorded as hand-self contact.

In this thesis contact comfort is defined as any type of physical contact the child seeks for security reasons. Therefore, a child rubbing dirt from his hand would not be recorded as being involved in a contact comfort situation.

To increase the utility of the information gathered, categories of incidents that preceded contact were assigned a number which was recorded in the observation. They are: (1) physical discomfort, (2) rejection by peers, (3) limits or discipline set by the teacher, (4) spontaneous affection--moment of happiness--everything fine, (5) approval or reward from others for an effort or accomplishment, and (6) unknown.

Also recorded was the intensity of the contact; slight, moderate, or intense. This was marked on the chart by an "S" for slight, "M" for moderate, and an "I" for intense. These markings followed the number of the category preceding contact as it was placed under the appropriate heading at the top of the chart. For an example, if a child who sat on the teacher's lap had previously been rejected by his peers and remained clinging on the teacher's lap for a considerable period of time, he would be charted as 2-I under body-teacher contact.

Summary scores were established on each general category of teacher, peer, object, and self, according to the six defined areas that precede contact. Ratings were established. Intense contact was given three points; moderate, two; and slight, one. These numerical scores were used to help determine the findings.

## FINDINGS

The findings of the study do not lend support to the hypotheses. There are substantial differences in the extent to which teachers, peers, objects, and self are utilized as sources of contact comfort. Similarly, there are extensive differences in the responses to situations which precede the child's initiating a contact comfort response. It was also found that there are considerable differences in the frequency with which children utilize hand, body, and oral contact for comfort.

The first hypothesis was that there would be no meaningful difference in the child's utilization of self, teacher, peer, and object contact. Figure 1 indicates the total scores for teacher, peer, object, and self oriented contact. The most frequently selected contact was the self. The next most popular selection for contact comfort was the category of object, which included anything inanimate that the child came in contact with to gain security. These two categories, self and object, were selected for 89.9 percent of contact comfort episodes recorded in this study. Individually, the self was selected for 47.5 percent and the object category for 42.4 percent. In contrast, only 6.6 percent of contact comforts were with the teacher. Peers were chosen in only 3.5 percent of the comfort situations. These two categories, teacher and peers, account for only 10.1 percent of the total. Consequently, the hypothesis that there will be no meaningful differences in the child's utilization of these

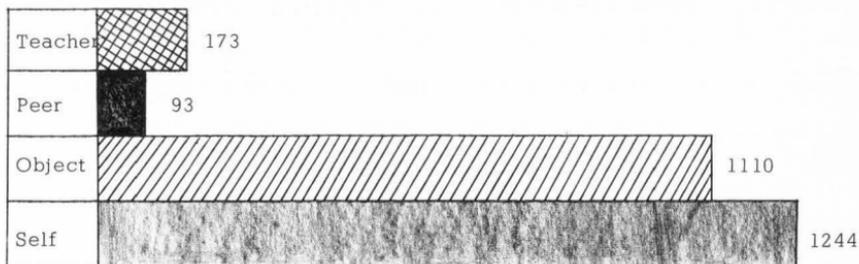


Figure 1. Total teacher, peer, object, and self oriented contact scores .

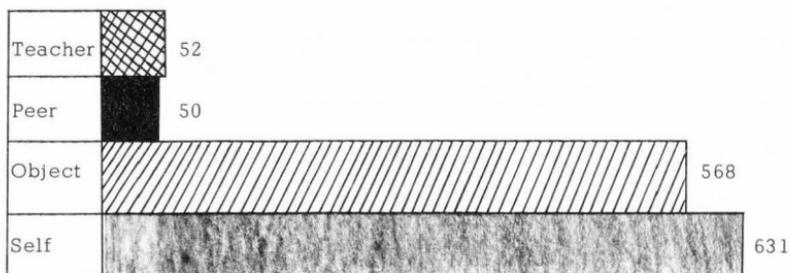


Figure 1a. Teacher, peer, object, and self oriented contact scores for boys .

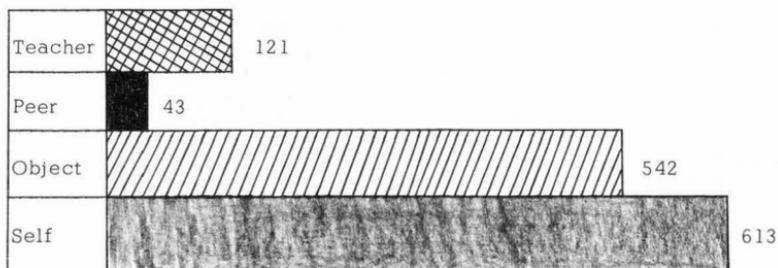


Figure 1b. Teacher, peer, object, and self oriented contact scores for girls .

categories must be rejected. The findings of this study indicate that the child tends to utilize self and object for comfort purposes far more frequently than he turns to his teachers and peers.

The findings for the categories of teacher, peer, object, and self, described above, are basically true when the responses of boys and girls are analyzed separately. Figures 1a and 1b present the findings for boys and for girls. Both boys and girls have selected the self for most of the contact comfort responses; there is almost no difference between the sexes in their utilization of self. The score for boys is 631 and 613 for girls in this category.

Both sexes have selected the category of objects for their second choice, although there is a greater difference between boys and girls in this category. The boys score for selection of objects is 568 in comparison to a score of 542 for the girls. However, the greatest area of difference between the sexes is in their selection of the teacher. The boys score for the teacher is 52; the girls selection of the teacher is 121. There is very little difference in responses of the two sexes to utilization of peers as sources of contact comfort.

Hypothesis number two states that there will be no meaningful difference in the type of event that precedes the contact comfort activity or incident. Figure 2 indicates the total contact scores by situations which occur prior to contact. The most frequent incident occurring prior to contact was spontaneous affection--moment of happiness--everything fine. This incident preceded 46.9 percent of contact comfort episodes recorded.

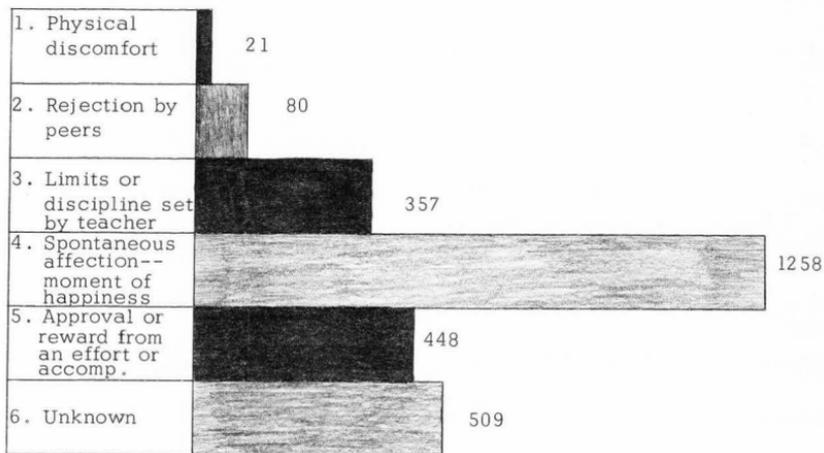


Figure 2. Total contact scores for boys and girls by situations which occur prior to contact.

Approval or reward from an effort or accomplishment as a preceding situation for contact comfort received 16.6 percent. Unknown received 18.9 percent. Limits or discipline set by teacher contrasts slightly, 13.3 percent, with approval or reward from an effort or accomplishment. Here the positive approach of approval exceeded the more negative preceding incident of limits or discipline by 3.3 percent. Physical discomfort and rejection by peers show even greater difference. These two categories preceded only 4.2 percent of the episodes recorded in this study. Individually, rejection by peers caused 3.4 percent and physical discomfort appeared before .8 percent of the contact episodes. Consequently, the hypothesis that there will be no meaningful difference in the type of events that precede the contact comfort activity or incident must also be rejected.

The findings of this study indicate that spontaneous affection--moment of happiness--everything fine precedes far more reaching for contact than do the other categories; physical discomfort and rejection by peers show the other extreme.

The findings for the six situations occurring prior to contact, as described above, are basically true when the responses of boys and girls are analyzed separately. Figures 2a and 2b indicate the findings for boys and girls. Both boys and girls reach for contact most often following spontaneous affection--moment of happiness--everything fine. This type of situation precedes contact episodes by boys more than it does for girls. The score for boys is 681, while for girls it is 577. This category of

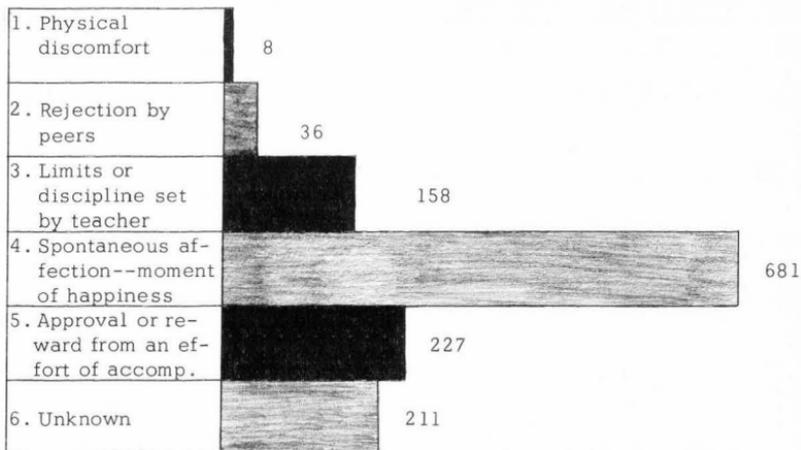


Figure 2a. Total contact scores for boys by situations which occur prior to contact.

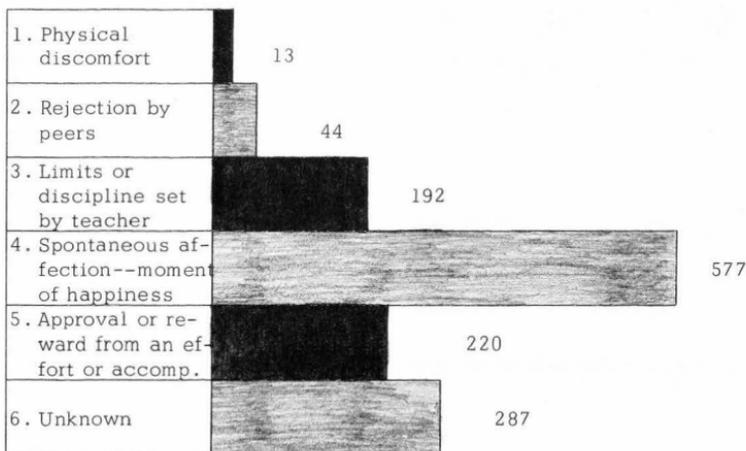


Figure 2b. Total contact score for girls by situations which occur prior to contact.

everything fine also reveals the greatest difference, with physical discomfort showing least difference between the sexes. The score for physical discomfort is 8 for boys and 13 for girls, also preceding fewest contact incidents.

Secondly, girls sought contact following the unknown category, while for boys it was approval or reward for an effort or accomplishment which seemed to precede contact situations. Approval or reward from an effort or accomplishment was third highest for girls, while unknown was third highest for boys. With both sexes, limits or discipline set by the teacher received the fourth highest score, and rejection by peers was fifth, leaving physical discomfort as the most uncommon preceding incident in a child's search for contact comfort.

The final hypothesis was that there will be no meaningful difference in the frequency of body, hand, and oral contact. Figure 3 indicates the total scores for hand, body, and oral contact. The most frequent contact was hand oriented. Body oriented contact appears next most popular, oral being least with a great difference between each. Contact by the child's hands oriented 60.5 percent of the contact comfort incidents recorded in this study. In contrast, only 12.8 percent of the contacts were oral oriented, while the child's body was the area of contact for 26.7 percent. Likewise, the hypothesis that there will be no meaningful difference in the frequency of body, hand, and oral contact must be rejected.

The findings for the categories of hand, body, and oral, described

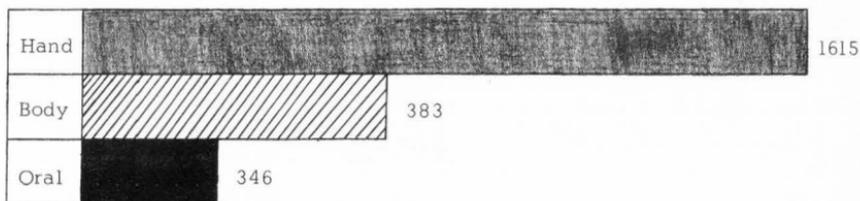


Figure 3. Total scores for hand, body, and oral contact.

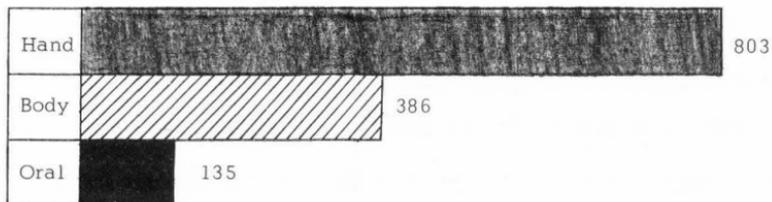


Figure 3a. Total boy scores for hand, body, and oral contact.

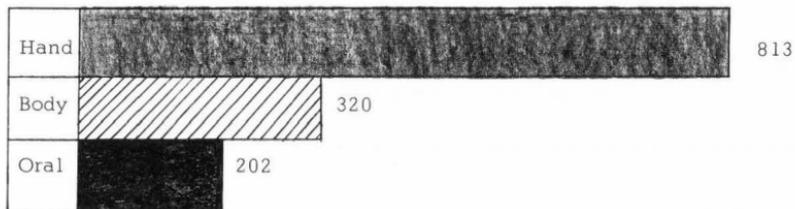


Figure 3b. Total girl scores for hand, body, and oral contact.

above, are basically similar when the responses of boys and girls are analyzed separately. Figures 3a and 3b show the findings for boys and girls. Both sexes most often use hand oriented contact. There is almost no difference between the sexes in this category. The score for boys is 803 and 813 for girls. Body oriented contact also shows little difference. The difference is greater, however, than for hand oriented contact. The body score is 383 for boys and 320 for girls. The greatest difference is indicated in oral oriented contact, 135 for boys and 202 for girls.

The hypotheses of this study are not supported by the findings. Differences are revealed in each of the three categories of the study as indicated in Figures 1, 2, and 3. The greatest difference was shown between self and peer oriented contact. This was likewise true in Figures 1a and 1b showing teacher, peer, object, and self oriented contact scores for boys and girls.

## DISCUSSION

Each of the three figures indicated meaningful differences which resulted in rejection of all three of the hypotheses of this study. Much more contact was directed either toward self or objects rather than being teacher or peer oriented. The greatest difference was shown between self and peer oriented contact. This was likewise true in Figures 1a and 1b revealing teacher, peer, object, and self oriented contact scores for boys and girls. The observer noticed the trend for a greater number of self contact scores. Seemingly a child rubs his own body because his peers often were not conveniently close or because they frown upon such an action. Close personal relationships were noted between only a few of the children. Peer group pressure at the four and five year old level does not have as much strength in shaping children's behavior as it does later. These young children form friendships, but they do not often last over long periods of time. The continual change in close friendships may account for the limited number of peer contact scores.

Hand oriented contact also received a high score, because when a child sought self contact he would often use his hands. This frequent use of hand contact is not surprising because we are, even as children, more reserved or inhibited in touching others with our body or mouth. However, this type of contact tended to be mild or slight as compared to intense and would most often follow a positive preceding incident, such as happiness

or everything fine. This trend introduces an important observation made in this study. The intensity of the contact seemed to be in direct relation with the degree of discomfort or happiness. Following a particularly uncomfortable incident, contact was most often body or oral oriented and tended to be intense. Body contact consisted of any act whereby the child's body was the point of contact. A common example would be when a child stands next to the wall rubbing his body against it. Oftentimes in this incident a child would also suck his thumb. Both body and oral contact were recorded in this case. As revealed in Figures 3a and 3b, boys have more recorded body contact scores, while for girls oral contact scores are greater. Again, social acceptance might be the determining factor. Whatever the answer, the differences may be meaningful in understanding the behavior cues of children.

Contact preceded by happiness or everything fine would most likely be mild, hand oriented contact. Further investigation to explore this hypothesis would be most important to teachers of young children. If this observation could be supported, the way in which a child seeks contact would give us some insight as to the reason he is seeking comfort.

The investigator was surprised at the small percentage of teacher contact, as they were usually warm and friendly. However, Heathers (1955) previously stated that as age increased, dependent acts decreased, not from lack of need but because of social acceptance. This study recorded many contact incidents with most of them occurring with either an object or self as the recipient. The pressures of society do not condemn

this behavior as it does dependent relationships with adults and others. Teacher contact occurred more often with girls than with boys, which also supports the influence of society for boys to be more independent. Verbal contact was not included in this study. Had it been, the scores for teacher contact would be much greater. Boys and girls felt free to use more verbal teacher contact, while girls, being less inhibited by pressure of society, were able to use more physical contact. As indicated in the findings, Figures 1a and 1b, girls did use more physical teacher contact than did boys. Aggressive and overt behavior is attributed more to boys, while girls are to be more submissive. To understand this finding one must consider the discipline and limits used. Teachers are most likely to place limits and use physical guidance on boys. In regard to this and the assumption that most contact occurs after positive situations, it follows that girls would have more teacher contact than boys. Assuming that more limits and guidance are set on boys, they would be confronted with more negative situations with teachers than would the girls, decreasing the number of boy teacher contacts. Then we find in Figures 2a and 2b the category limits or discipline set by the teacher initiated less contact incidents with boys than girls. The finding is opposite of what one might expect. Either boys received fewer limits and less discipline or they are not as likely to reach for contact comfort. The question raised here is an interesting one. Are teachers really disciplining boys more frequently than girls or are boys less free to seek contact? The fact that all teachers were female might make a difference. The implications for teachers in

this area are great. The methods being used with young children may need revision.

The high score for spontaneous affection--moment of happiness--everything fine as an incident preceding contact was not surprising. During the observation periods the investigator was constantly aware of a comfortable, happy atmosphere as it prevailed in the Laboratory School. There were many more positive than negative situations.

In Figure 2, when comparing limits or discipline set by the teacher with approval or reward from an effort or accomplishment, it is found that a greater number of scores fall in the positive category of approval or reward. The investigator feels that this finding indicates the laboratory situation emphasizes positive relationships. It is not known, however, why so many contact incidents were sought during this time. The reach for security through contact would seemingly follow emotional or physical discomfort. As defined in this study, physical discomfort is the outward sign of physical hurt. Items such as temperature of the room was not considered under this category. The smaller percentages in these areas might directly relate to a limited amount of uncomfortable situations. In other words, the fact that but few contact episodes were preceded by physical discomfort may not mean that such discomfort is not usually followed by an effort to seek comfort but may mean only that few such discomfort problems occurred in the laboratory during the time of this study.

The sample of this category was limited since the Laboratory Schools operate under nearly ideal conditions. In this case, physical discomfort

received fewer scores than any of the other categories. The observer feels this finding is not necessarily a valid one because in this school incidents of physical discomfort were extremely limited. Also, the kinds of discipline used were frequently positive and redirective which results in happier children.

Rejection by peers received a greater percentage than did physical discomfort. The reason, that physical discomfort can be better controlled than rejection by peers, is that children say and do what they feel inside.

The limitations of the observer would account for many incidents in the unknown category. If the five-minute observation began with the child orienting contact, one could not discern what preceded this action. An effort was made to be aware of the total room and especially what was happening with the next child to be observed. The responsibility of defining the event rested wholly on one person. More observers would have strengthened the study.

Other factors not considered in this study were physical features and changes in the rooms. As part of their requirements, the student teachers were responsible for different room arrangements and changing the rotating equipment. This may or may not have made a difference in the results.

Occasionally the investigator felt a need for other categories preceding contact. One area could be frustration--inability to accomplish a task or get attention. Rarely, however, did contact occur that would

not fit into a category; in this case unknown would receive the score.

As a general observation, the children were in a stimulating environment with their needs being met which results in happy, well-adjusted children. A study using a different group of children in a different type of setting might affect the findings considerably.

## SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of this study was to investigate a variety of contacts initiated by the child with teachers, peers, self, and objects in a nursery school setting. The study focused upon were three aspects of child-initiated contact comfort situations; how often contact was sought, with whom or why the child reached for contact, and what incident seemed to stimulate the child's action. The hypotheses were that there would be no meaningful difference within the three aspects of the study.

The sample consisted of the children in two Utah State University Nursery School Laboratories with 20 children in each group, a total sample of 40 children.

The time sampling method of observation was used in collecting data. Observations were five minutes each, with the observer in booths equipped with one-way mirrors. Timing of observations were kept accurate by the use of a stop watch. In the beginning, the children's age and sex were recorded. The children were then observed in a predetermined sequence.

Each observation was recorded on a prepared chart with a key to include all three areas to be explored in the study.

Summary scores were established, and from these Figures 1, 1a, 1b, 2, 2a, 2b, 3, 3a, and 3b were drawn. The findings were then interpreted.

Analysis of the data allows the investigator to reject all three hypotheses. There were meaningful differences in the child's utilization of self, teacher, peer, and object contact. The child's self or an object in the nursery school were far more important as recipients of the contact than teacher or peer. A meaningful difference was found in the type of events that preceded the contact comfort activity or incident. Spontaneous affection--moment of happiness--everything fine preceded a greater percentage of all contacts recorded in this study. Also determined was a meaningful difference in the frequency of body, hand, and oral contact, with hand oriented contact found to be most frequent.

#### Conclusions

1. Children respond as children in that similarity is greater than differences in utilization of contact comfort.
2. Contact comfort is an important part of a child's functioning in social situations, but he seeks comfort in contact with himself more frequently than in contact with others.
3. The objects and persons to whom he turns for contact comfort vary within age and nature of the situation in which the child functions.

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## APPENDIX

Child \_\_\_\_\_

Age \_\_\_\_\_

Sex \_\_\_\_\_

TYPES OF CONTACT

Observation  
Date

	TEACHER			PEER			OBJECT			SELF		
	Body	Hand	Oral	Body	Hand	Oral	Body	Hand	Oral	Body	Hand	Oral
1. _____												
2. _____												
3. _____												
4. _____												
5. _____												
6. _____												
7. _____												
8. _____												
9. _____												
10. _____												

<sup>a</sup>Key

1. Physical discomfort

2. Rejection of peers

3. Limits or discipline set on the child by the teacher

4. Spontaneous affection--moment of happiness--everything fine

5. Approval or reward from an effort or accomplishment

6. Unknown

I - Intense contact

M - Moderate contact

S - Slight contact

<sup>a</sup>Contact tends to follow one of the six categories

## SUMMARY SCORE SHEET FOR BOYS

No. 20

What precedes contact	TYPES OF CONTACT											
	Teacher			Peer			Object			Self		
	frequency			frequency			frequency			frequency		
	body	hand	oral	body	hand	oral	body	hand	oral	body	hand	oral
1. Physical discomfort												
	intense											
	moderate						1	1			2	
	slight											
2. Rejection of peers												
	intense											
	moderate	1	1				4	5		1	4	1
	slight									1	1	1
3. Limits or discipline set on child by teacher												
	intense						2	1				
	moderate	4			1		17	12	2	3	19	4
	slight				2		4	5			9	5
4. Spontaneous affection -- moment of happiness												
	intense				1	2	8	7		1	2	
	moderate	4	4		2	8	61	49	2	13	102	25
	slight	1	2		2	14	6	13	4	1	23	11
5. Approval or reward from an effort or accomplishment												
	intense						2	2			1	
	moderate	6					15	32	1	4	38	3
	slight	3	2					2			5	2
6. Unknown												
	intense											
	moderate	1	1				19	3		1	1	1
	slight				1			16	2	4	35	15

## SUMMARY SCORE SHEET FOR GIRLS

No. 40

What precedes contact	TYPES OF CONTACT											
	Teacher			Peer			Object			Self		
	frequency			frequency			frequency			frequency		
	body	hand	oral	body	hand	oral	body	hand	oral	body	hand	oral
1. Physical discomfort												
intense												
moderate	2						1	1			2	
slight											1	
2. Rejection of peers												
intense								2				1
moderate							7	3			3	2
slight							1				1	1
3. Limits or discipline set on child by teacher												
intense							1	1				2
moderate	1			1	1		15	15	2	2	26	12
slight	2	3			1			4			7	4
4. Spontaneous affection --moment of happiness												
intense							3	5	2		2	2
moderate	7	9		3	8		35	48	7	7	90	18
slight		8			10		2	9	6	3	21	11
5. Approval or reward from an effort or accomplishment												
intense												
moderate	1						18	26		1	1	1
slight	7	2			1		3	2	1		22	5
6. Unknown												
intense							3	4			3	5
moderate	6	4			2		21	24	1	6	32	21
slight								1	2		3	2

## VITA

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