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Scouting Your Inner Terrain

(From Chapter One of *The Touch Crisis: Navigating the Tricky Terrain of Bringing Healthy Touch Back To Our Culture* by Dawn Bennett)

Most of us need more touch, and the science shows us why. The challenge is that, like me before the Hoffman Process and the shaming incident, most of us don't really take the time to think about our experience with touch. We operate on those patterns that have been conditioned, and we are rarely forced to evaluate them.

So, let's do that now.

Answer the following questions and, as you do, notice your emotional and physical reactions. Name any emotions you are feeling (i.e. shame, grief, joy, fear, sadness, disgust, amusement.) Be playful and curious with your self-investigation. This is about exploring yourself so you can learn, not comparing or judging.

Remember, take care of yourself how you need and when you need! Give yourself freedom to take a break, breathe, get angry, get sad, or reach out to someone in your support circle or the Touch Remedies group. This is about you and your learning and growth process, so be gentle with yourself as well as your life experiences.

In Public

1. How do you feel watching intimate touch on a movie screen? In real life? Does it change if you are around kids or family?
2. How do you feel in a crowd when people are naturally touching you?
3. What is your visceral response to a woman not wanting to help a child in need on the playground?
4. How would you feel at a park if a couple was being really touchy? Is that different if you are on public transportation? In a nice restaurant?
5. What is the "right kind of touch" for public? How far is too far? (Between friends, family, partners, etc.)

At Work



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1. What are the written and unwritten rules around touch in your working environment?
2. How do those serve the environment?
3. How do those hurt the environment?
4. How would you like to express touch in your work environment?
5. If people are on equal levels in the organization (no power dynamics involved), do you think consensual touch should be allowed? Why or why not?

Friend & Partnership Touch

Answer these questions twice. Once for your good/close friends in general, and once for your ideal partner.

1. How do you touch each other? (Where on the body? How often? How intentionally? How is it reciprocated or not?)
2. How would you like to touch and be touched?
3. Is that desire met?
4. What would need to change for you to give and receive what you want and need?
5. How do you currently communicate your touch needs and aversions?

Touch with Children

1. How do you touch children in the community? (Your friends' children, your child's friends, a lost child looking for his/her parents, etc.)
2. How do you touch your children? (Think about how often, how intentionally, and how it is received by them.)
3. How do your children touch you? (Think about how often, how intentionally, and how it is received by you.)
4. Would you like more or less? Why?
5. What makes it currently dissatisfactory for you?

Family of Origin

1. What was touch like in your family? Was it attentive? Lacking? Abusive? A reward?
2. What were the beliefs around touching others? Who was "okay" to touch and who was not? Was that based upon relationship, culture, closeness, values, etc?



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3. Were you forced to give and/or receive hugs or touch when you didn't want to, including friends, family members, or other people in your community?
4. What were you taught about the relationship between touch and sex?
5. Where do your beliefs and desires around touch not resonate with your Family of Origin or your upbringing?

Beginning to Understand Your Inner Terrain and Personal Touch Boundaries

Body-Emotion Awareness & Knowledge

1. What emotions came up while you were answering the questions?
2. How did you perceive the 'positive' versus "negative" emotions in your body?
3. Look at the similarities and differences between your answers in the various sections. What about touch is comfortable and uncomfortable for you? Why do you think that is?
4. How do your beliefs/actions impact your interaction with touch (ex: keep you safe, prevent you from keeping boundaries, inspire fear, restrict or enhance your ability to ask for what you want/need, etc.)?

Root Understanding

Explore the roots of your answers. Are your beliefs, feelings, reactions and understandings cultural? Religious? Social? Experiential? From childhood? Adulthood? Are your answers different depending on who is initiating the touch? Are there any arenas in which you were surprised by your reaction?

Deeper Contemplation

Go back to each of the above environments and identify one or two people from each culture/situation that you are familiar with.

1. What does it feel like when you think about reaching out and touching that person on the arm or giving them a hug? Where does that reaction come from?
2. What does it feel like when you think about that person touching you on the arm or giving you a hug? Where does that reaction come from?
3. Is there a dissonance between the two answers? If so, why?



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4. Considering individuals in any culture, does the age of the person matter? If so, what is the upper and lower limit? Does gender matter?
 5. What patterns around touch were created for you that no longer suit you?