

Vera Rabben Teigen

# *“Touch is everything”*

A Focusing-oriented phenomenological study of three health workers' felt  
senses of physical touch and its underlying dimensions

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Supervisor

Eleanor Allgood

Department of Adult Learning and Counselling

Norwegian University of Science and Technology

Trondheim

Photo on the front page by Kari Holten: “La gå”

(See appendix J)

5 rytmer Trondheim

[www.facebook.com/Kari Holten](http://www.facebook.com/KariHolten)

e-post: [karianamika@gmail.com](mailto:karianamika@gmail.com)

## **Abstract**

This study has its starting point in physical touch, and I interviewed three health workers; an osteopath, a nurse, and a midwife, about their sense of touch. The data collection method used is the qualitative research interview, with its main emphasis on Eugene Gendlin's Focusing (1981), to capture the informant's embodied sense of touch.

The Constant Comparative Method from Grounded Theory by Strauss and Corbin (1990) is employed to analyse the data, supplied by the descriptive phenomenological method as developed by Giorgi (2009), and inspired by Gendlin's Focusing (1968; 1970; 1981).

Two main themes and a core theme emerged from the data: 1) "Touch is everything" – The toucher and the touched, 2) "Touch is an art" – The space between and, 3) "It takes courage to be close" – Touch as a meeting between selves.

Philosophical theory and humanistic existential counselling psychology theories are at the base of the discussion. This includes Merleau-Ponty (1945), Gendlin (1962; 1996), Buber (1970/1996), Rogers (1961/2004) and Josselson (1996). Theories on body, space, and touch, also in counselling, are represented by Gendlin (1993; 1992), Montagu (1986), Hall (1966/1990), Hunter and Struve (1998), Tune (2001) among others.

The study shows that positive touch is important to the person, how touch is more than physical, that the body is more than a physiological machine, and how touch both happens within different types of space and creates a meeting between the selves that reside inside the bodies. It also shows how through providing certain empathic conditions; warmth, acceptance, listening and caring, a health worker or counsellor can ensure a good meeting that can potentially lead to a dialogical I-You meeting. This meeting, based on the empathic conditions provided by a counsellor who is also in tune with him or herself, may also lead to change in the both the counsellor's and the client's selves.



## Foreword

The starting point for this thesis is my own longing and love for touch and physical closeness – which can sometimes be scarce commodities in the Norwegian culture – as well as my curiosity about whether they could be assets in my own future work as a counsellor. Because touch and the space between human beings are intimate and vulnerable topics, it has become clear that they are challenging to put into words, and the topic is far from exhausted as interesting both for me personally and, I think, for its relevance for counsellors and other helpers.

As I am now at the end of this exciting and scary journey with its possibilities for growth on many levels, I would like to give my thanks to the people around me that have been part of the journey and made this study what it is. The most important persons I want to thank are my informants, Simon, Ania and Milana: Thank you all for letting me do the Focusing experiment with you and for being willing to be touched and to touch me so that this work was made possible.

A big thank you also go to my supervisor, Eleanor Allgood, for good hours of supervision and important conversations, for encouraging me and believing in me and giving me space in an attempt to make me independent as a researcher.

Most people have something to say about touch, and I have a lot of more or less random individuals to thank for their contributions to my study. I would like to thank everyone that I have mentioned my research question to who have shared with me their thoughts, theories and personal experiences with touch. In case you don't find your names here, know that you have been mentioned and acknowledged in my thoughts.

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# 1. Introduction

*“Yet we grow only with and through others” (Josselson p 13)*

Touch, through the laying on of hands, has been used as a way of healing for centuries (Syme, 2003) and is used as a therapy form in many different ways today, e.g. massage, osteopathy, touch therapy (Field, 2000), body psychotherapy (Rothschild, 2003; Macnaughton, Bentzen, & Jarlneas, 2004) therapeutic touch (Krieger, 1979) and more. Even so, touch in counselling is a taboo in certain circles (Miller, 2001; Orbach, 2006; Syme, 2003; Tune, 2001) because of ethical issues when entering the client’s sense of personal space (Macnaughton, Bentzen, & Jarlneas, 2004), such as the possible sexual innuendoes connected to the act of touching (Burgoon & Bauce, 2003; Fagan, 1998; Rutter, 1989).

Since Descartes there has been a split between mind and body (Damasio, 1995; Todres, 2007), and the body and its ‘uncontrollable’ and ‘frustrating’ emotions and habits, has been looked down upon as something which we need to distance ourselves from and control (Shusterman, 2008). Attempts have been made to mend this split (Damasio, 1995) in later years by for instance Gendlin (1962; 1992; 1993) and Merleau-Ponty (1945), who show us that the mind and the body are closely interconnected. Similarly, when I read the vast literature on touch, there seems to be an awakening awareness of the importance of the link between the body and the mind (Damasio, 1995) and on the importance of touch (Hunter & Struve, 1998) also for adults (Fyrand, 2005).

## 1.1. The research question

I myself, in addition to having worked with massage before, grew up in a family where hugging and touching was natural, and I usually touch and hug people that I like. In everyday life I use touch while talking, hugging when meeting a friend, and both of those to convey my feelings of love and appreciation in various situations where I feel it is appropriate. I also experience that many people shy away from touch and quickly withdraw from a hug, even when it is “expected” as a part of the Norwegian culture when meeting someone you know.

Being in the process of becoming a counsellor, and being a “fan” of touching and of the body, I am curious about the importance of the body and of touching for human beings, and in the therapeutic context. There is quite a bit of research on the importance of touch to the infant and child (Montagu, 1986) and not so much on its significance for the adult. Since I feel strongly for the act of touching and for being in contact with my physical and non-physical body, my working title from the very start of this work was: “Touch – a meeting with yourself?” because I wondered whether the meeting of two bodies that happens when touching another could also entail a “meeting” with one’s one self.

Hence my research question is: “*How does touch influence the self?*” To find this out, I have interviewed three “health workers” who use touch in their work every day: an osteopath, a nurse, and a midwife, about how they experience touch in their lives and in their work with their clients<sup>2</sup>. Because of my humanistic existential (Rogers, 1961/2004; 1980) and Focusing (Gendlin, 1996; 1981; Purton, 2007) background I chose to conduct an ‘experiment’ and lead the informants through a Focusing session (Appendix E, Gendlin, 1981) as part of the interview.

Throughout the analysis of the data, and later in the discussion, it became clear to me that I needed to convey the importance that the informants of my study are placing on touch straight away and hence I changed the title to: “Touch is everything”, which is a direct quote from the interview with Simon, the osteopath. This quote conveys how the informants can’t really imagine a world without touch, how colourless and cold that would be, and also how they find touch to be an everyday part of life. In addition it says something about how touch is *in* everything in a non-physical way because, as this study shows, being human is to stand in relation (Buber, 1947/2002; 1965/1998; 1970/1996; Josselson, 1996) and to touch and be touched is relation.

## **1.2. The structure of the thesis**

The thesis is divided into 5 parts. In the Theoretical Framework, I present the theories on touch, space and relation. The Methodological Choices chapter presents the qualitative method and Focusing<sup>3</sup> that is used in this study. In the Findings chapter I describe the informants’ experience of the Focusing part of the interviews and the findings after the analysis of the transcribed material. The fifth chapter is the discussion of the main elements from the findings seen in light of some of the presented theories, and also includes a discussion of Focusing as a data collection method. The last chapter offers some concluding comments and an outlook towards the future, including implications for further research.

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<sup>1</sup> Self and person are used interchangeably in this thesis.

<sup>2</sup> I will partly be using the word ‘client’ to simplify, even though it is natural for the nurse, and maybe for the osteopath, to talk about ‘patients’, and for the midwife to talk about ‘the women’.

<sup>3</sup> To distinguish between technique/method of Focusing and the general term to focus on something, I write Focusing with a capital F.

## 2. Theoretical Framework

This part contains the theoretical framework for the question of how touch may impact the self. The theories on touch have been chosen to give a background into touch as such, whereas the theories about space, meeting and boundaries have been chosen based on the analysis of the data and what I felt came up there. Montagu is a classic in research on touch, and Hall on boundaries, and the other theories on touch are newer research on touch in counselling, and on the taboo of touch. Because it became clear through the data that meeting and relation are central as opposed to the individual isolated from other individuals, Josselson and Buber became natural representatives for counselling related theories about what goes on *between* two separate beings. The philosophical theory, represented by Merleau-Ponty, Shusterman and Gendlin, reflects my personal interest in philosophy.

### 2.1. Touch

*“Touch is a primary process by which humans gather information about the world”*

(Hunter & Struve, 1998, p. 3)

The expression “the sense of touch” usually means to be feeling with our hand or our fingers, and hence the hand might be said to be the instrument of touch (Montagu, 1986). The sense of touch can also be seen as crucial for the human being to feel “*in touch with reality*” (Hall, 1973). Several expressions in the English language refer to the sense of touch, such as being “touchy” which means to be overly sensitive, or “keeping in touch” with someone, which means to stay in communication despite there being a physical distance between us, “handling someone with care” and “rubbing someone the wrong way” and so on (Montagu, 1986; Hunter & Struve, 1998).

Touch can be described as a form of language (Fagan, 1998) that is more emotionally powerful than words (Syme, 2003), and holds both personal and idiosyncratic meanings that verbal language doesn't. Syme also claims that it “*increases intimacy and therefore vulnerability*” (p. 61), and Fagan (1998) describes touch as coming closer to someone than in usual respectful encounters.

Even though touch isn't really a feeling (Montagu, 1986), it has some similarities with emotion, and the expression “being touched” describes a feeling of being emotionally moved, by something beautiful or by sympathy for or from someone else. Therefore Montagu claims that the use of the verb “to touch” can be said to mean being sensitive to human feeling. He also claims that it is through our senses that we enter into what makes us human and that “*It is our senses that frame the body of reality*” (Montagu & Matson, 1979, p. 88).

### **2.1.1. The body and the skin**

*“The body is our general medium for having a world”* (Merleau-Ponty, 1945, p. 169)

Merleau-Ponty (1945) argues that the body is not an object like other objects in the world. Because at the same time as we can see the body, we are part of it; it can give us “double sensations” through having the ability to touch and be touched at the same time. The body doesn’t merely present itself to the world, it also perceives and has consciousness, and it is not an object we need to search for – it is already there with us when we move about in the world.

The skin is the body’s largest organ (Montagu, 1986; Hunter & Struve, 1998; Fyrand, 2005) and it can be seen as *“the external nervous system of the organism”* (Montagu & Matson, 1979, p. 88). The skin extends to the inside of the ears and genitals, and even the eyeballs are covered in a type of skin, and through looking into extensive reviews of animal and human research Montagu (1986) shows the significance of the skin to the development of babies. Cutaneous stimulation, or skin stimulation, is considered to be crucial to new-borns, for the development of important physiological functions as well as emotional and behavioural development (Montagu, 1986; Hunter & Struve, 1998)

Montague and Matson (1979) propose that through thinking of the skin as being the exposed part of the human nervous system, we can have a better understanding of its significance. The skin enables us to learn about our surroundings, through its cells it is a communication system that both brings us information about the environment and shows to the surroundings what is going on inside the body (blushing, paleness and so on). When we are touched the skin will signal to the body as well as the mind, interpret the touch and then send a response back.

In much the same way, Bentzen, Jarlneas and Levine (2004) suggest that because *“The first reality is the reality of the body”* (s. 61), the body is the primary instrument of perception, organisation and understanding of the world and surroundings. Levine (2010) holds that: *“All human experience is incarnate, that is to say, ‘of the body.’”* (p. 272), and the body reacts to the environment and to psychological experiences through retraction or relaxation of muscles (Bentzen, Jarlneas, & Levine, 2004). Hence, the information that we obtain from our surroundings is perceived through both external and internal sense organs, and maybe mainly from the internal ones, described as bodily senses picked up by *“muscles, joints, gravity receptors and visceral organs”* (Levine, 2010, pp. 271 -272). This means that our thinking is guided by emotions and sensations, and that all such experiences change our bodies throughout our lives with results such as stiffness patterns, tension, or more subtle patterns in the body (Levine, 2010). In addition to enabling us to walk on and be in the world, this

information is crucial for knowing others and ourselves, how we feel and what we want, and Levine calls this embodiment.

### **2.1.2. Touch and the child**

To the infant, touch is the first form of communication and contact (Josselson, 1996) through touching the mother with lips, fingertips and eyes in the breastfeeding situation (Montagu & Matson, 1979). A particularly important factor in an infant's development is the growth of affection for others and the ability to express such affection. In this process the sense of touch may be the most crucial instrument, such as when the child receives and sends messages, e.g. patting the mother's breast. Tactile stimulation is fundamentally significant for emotional and affectional relationships (Montagu & Matson, 1979; Montagu, 1986; Hunter & Struve, 1998); skin contact is a means by which we try to make the one we love a part of us (Josselson, 1996) and one cannot separate touch from love: "*one learns to love not by instruction but by being loved*" (Montagu, 1986, p. 38)

It is also through the act of touching that the child learns the first lessons of identity and of knowing and communicating with the world (Montagu & Matson, 1979; Hunter & Struve, 1998). This happens by - "*(...) reaching out to something that is not himself and touching it*" (Montagu & Matson, 1979, pp. 96-97) and exploring everything he can see with the hands. This communication is later replaced by words, or language, which later becomes the instrument that "keeps us in touch" with each other.

### **2.1.3. Types and meanings of touch**

There are different types and meanings of touch (Fagan, 1998; Dindia & Timmerman, 2003; Wilson & Sabee, 2003; Macnaughton, Bentzen, & Jarlneas, Ethical Consideration in Somatic Therapies, 2004; Marcher & Fich, 2010), of which Fagan (1998) has described a few. There is the athletic touch which is the kind that is used to display skill, as in sports, handshake touch and punishing touch, as in physical abuse etc, which is used to intrude into someone else's space to teach them a lesson. He also describes nurturing touch, as in massage or different forms of treatment done benevolently by someone skilful, intimacy evoking touch which is both for pleasure and increased intimacy, and sexual touch, which can also be used to affirm intimacy and caring attention.

Another distinction is between erotic, sexualised touch and the more neutral touch (Macnaughton, Bentzen, & Jarlneas, 2004) that doesn't entail anything sexual. In addition Macnaughton et.al distinguish between boundaried and merging touch, where boundaried touch is firm and definite, while the merging touch lasts for an extended period of time and tends to evoke a feeling that the difference between two dissolves and they become as one.

Touch can be used to show that one likes someone (Dindia & Timmerman, 2003), and “(...) *withholding of touch generally gives an unpleasant feeling of distance and conveys hostility or anger*” (Syme, 2003). I will come back to the use of touch in the section about space, distance and touch.

#### **2.1.4. Touch in the Western world**

Montagu and Matson (1979) claim that the Western modern world has “*produced a new race of untouchables*” (p. 87); that we have become estranged from one another when it comes to touching: we consider it unnecessary physical contact. We have come to communicate through the distance of computers and machines, reaching for the universe and walking on the moon, instead of reaching out to each other; because it seems that our “*personal frontiers seldom permit the trespass of a deeply felt communication across them*” (p. 88). One reason for this is the introduction of things and toys to the child at a certain age; following which the child focuses more on toys than on other people and hence develops property rights about things rather than an involvement in people. Slowly we come to perceive people as things and treat them as such, which leads to social and emotional distance becoming the same thing: “*As the individual grows out of touch with others, he can no longer be ‘touched’ by their suffering or their needs*” (p. 99).

## **2.2. Touch, body and space**

*“We put thirty spokes together and call it a wheel, and it is where there is nothing that the usefulness of the wheel depends. We turn clay to make a vessel, and it is on the space where there is nothing that the usefulness of the vessel depends. We pierce doors and windows to make a house, and it is on these spaces, where there is nothing, that the usefulness of the house depends, therefore, just as we take advantage of what is, we should recognise the usefulness of what is not...” – Opening Dao (lifeartsmedia, 2010) –*

This chapter is divided into different sections that describe the relationship between body and space, what happens in the space between us, different categories of space, relatedness and mutuality, and the relationship between space, distance and touch.

### **2.2.1. Body and space**

In a philosophical manner, Shusterman (2008) says that the body helps create “*a sense of common space*”, because in seeing each other’s bodies we focus on an object that is also the focus of the others’ experience. Thus, the body also provides a common meeting place for minds “*whose intentions, beliefs, desires, and feelings are expressed in bodily demeanor and behavior*” (p. 145). At the same time the body unifies space in the sense that it connects the inner self with the surroundings; the physical with the mental events. We see our bodies as simultaneously what we are and what we have, and as something that is “*distinct from the ‘I’ that regards it*” (p. 145).

### 2.2.2. Categories of space

Hall (Hall, 1966/1990; 1973) has found four categories of space; namely intimate, personal, social and public space, where **intimate** space (0-45 cm) is the space of “*love-making, wrestling, comforting and protection*” (Hall, 1966/1990, p. 117). There is muscle and skin communication here; e.g. arms can embrace. **Personal** space (50-80 cm) can be imagined as a protective bubble around the individual, maintained to keep a distance between oneself and others, yet it is still possible to touch the other person by reaching out.

In the sphere of **social** space (1.30-2.25 m) there is no touch or any expectation of it, and this is the space in which one takes care of impersonal business. **Public** space (3.75-8 m) is the space appropriate to public ceremonies.

Violation of personal space is considered a violation of the expectations of society whereas invading the intimate space is considered intrusion into someone’s self-boundaries. The best way of checking where another’s boundaries are, is to willingly “intrude” upon them, because at some point signs will occur, such as stress, avoidance or flight (Montagu & Matson, 1979).

### 2.2.3. Space, distance and touch

Burgoon and Bauce (2003) argue that through approach and avoidance we use touch, distance and space to signify our power, status and dominance, or liking and love, and that hence we can see how the use of touch and the use of space work together.

The most extreme ways of obtaining dominance over someone else is by invasions of personal space through aggressiveness such as hitting, slapping and kicking, and so on, because they induce fight or flight modes. More common, however, are symbolic forms of dominance, which can be seen through how individuals of higher status, more dominance and power “*are afforded more personal space than lower status and nondominant individuals*” (p. 202), e.g. through the taking up of more space with body and possessions.

Dominance, power and status can be consciously or unconsciously communicated through nonreciprocal touch, and also through body placement; such as standing instead of sitting, and standing in front of and preceding rather than standing behind or following. Wilson and Sabe (2003) describe how touch by someone considered to be of high status may result in enhanced credibility and may be considered a positive form of violation, while touch by someone of low status may be perceived as negatively violating. People of equal status touch each other mutually, in similar ways, and in similar regions of the body (Burgoon & Bauce, 2003).

A sender can increase the probability of getting one’s way through touching the receiver while making a request. Hence one might also say that closer interpersonal space and touch can be associated with increased persuasiveness because it evokes positive feelings toward the



toucher, and the touch may suggest an implicit sense of relationship. Brief, non-intimate touch can lead to more favourable evaluations of a person, and on the other hand, proximity and touch can also “*evoke strong emotional arousal,[and] may risk negative consequences if they are interpreted as disregard for another’s physical and psychological autonomy or grab for another’s valuable territory and time*” (p. 203). One can also intensify messages with adding more cues such as a strong gaze combined with touch and close proximity.

The use of proximity and touch to convey messages such as liking and love towards a receiver (Burgoon & Bauce, 2003; Dindia & Timmerman, 2003) can be seen in how there is less use of personal space (distance) between friends and intimate partners i.e. more use of intimate space, and in how interactions with people perceived as friendly or attractive usually happen at closer distances. Dindia and Timmerman (2003) also point to how touch, particularly in an early stage of a relationship, can show liking where it might be considered too confronting to express it verbally.

The link between the psychological and physical space is, according to Josselson (1996), both metaphorical and linguistic: “*Thus, when we feel deeply the experience of another, we say that we feel ‘touched.’*” (p. 5)

### **2.3. The space between you and me**

“*On the far side of the subjective, on this side of the objective, on the narrow ridge, where I and Thou meet, there is the realm of ‘between’.*” – (Buber, 1947/2002, p. 243)

According to Buber (1947/2002), it is a characteristic of being human that something happens between us; and this ‘realm of between’ exists on a narrow edge where the *I* and the *Thou* meet. This sphere “*is established with the existence of a man as man*” (p. 241) and it is this “between” that is the circle drawn around a dialogic happening, as opposed to the social or the individual: the context of a meeting, the place where we meet, is not constituted by social or individual factors (page 243), but by, in fact, this realm of “between”

This space between us is what makes us human (man), and occurs when one person turns “to another as another” as who that particular person is, as opposed to relating to another as an object, and It (Buber, 1970/1996). This turning to another is done as an attempt to communicate within this space that makes us human, and which is both common to us and “*reaches out beyond the special sphere of each*” (Buber, 1947/2002, p. 241). This space, that he calls “*the sphere of ‘between’*” (p. 241) is “*the real place and bearer of what happens between men*” (p. 241), and it is re-established every time two people meet; so the particular “between” that occurs when two people meet, is only accessible to those particular two.

### **2.3.1. Relatedness and connection**

*“Relatedness involves other people as objects of desire (...), but relatedness also serves as a context for the experience of the self”* (Josselson, 1996, p. 5).

In her book about the space between us, Josselson (1996) talks about physical and psychological space that separates human beings and how this space is something that we need to overcome through being in relationship with others. She argues this through the cutting of the umbilical cord at birth, which she sees as a being *“thrust into separateness, physically bound within the confines of our body”* (p. 4) and says that we can never be physically one with anyone after birth. On the psychological level she argues that because no one else can think the exact thoughts of another or feel exactly the same way, the only way of overcoming this feeling of physical and psychological separateness is through relationship.

According to Josselson speech is used as a means to try to describe how we feel, share our needs and our lives in various ways, trying to get physically as close as possible to another and so on, to feel that there is something between us. Therefore she sees interpersonal life as an attempt to connect across the physical and psychological space, in different ways and *“The ‘between’ – the way the space is filled or reverberates – becomes all-important”* (p. 5).

Josselson describes eight ways of overcoming this space between us: Holding, attachment, passionate experience, eye-to-eye validation, idealisation, mutuality, embeddedness, and tending and care. These eight ways of overcoming space involve a transcending of space to be in contact via being reached or reaching through the space, and her descriptions of these ways are as follows: Her term “holding” is described as security and basic trust in someone providing the essential; or experience of being contained by another. “Attachment”, which is seen as the centre of our existence, is a form of clinging or holding on to another. “Passionate experience” she describes as seeking pleasure; such as touch and sexual union. “Eye-to-eye validation” is communication through eye contact; *“finding ourselves in the other’s eyes”* (p. 7), connection through existing for or in someone else – the other is a mirror. “Idealisation” she describes as idealising others for knowing and being more capable than ourselves, linking to others more powerful to become like them, or to attempt to control them. “Mutuality” is companionship through creating a bond with someone and becoming an emerging “we”. “Embeddedness” is described as having a place in society; differentiating and simultaneously experiencing communality, such as being a part of and having a feeling of belonging. “Tending and care” is to take care of others and their needs – now being able to hold someone else.

According to Buber (1970/1996) humans have a twofold attitude and believe that we are separated, and this spell of separation that we are under needs to be broken. Simultaneously, because “*The world is twofold for man*” (p. 53) being human is inherently being a relation(ship), i.e. relation is already there: “*In the beginning is the relation*” (p. 69). This happens within three spheres of relation: life with nature, with other humans, and with spiritual beings. It is through entering into true relationship that the actualized human being has to evolve.

The I-It meeting is related to confirming the other’s “its”, such as perceptions, opinions, imaginations, feelings, needs, sense experiences and thoughts and so on (Buber, 1970/1996), whereas the I-You meeting entails a confirmation of the other as a human being and as a self. The I-You meeting (Buber, 1947/2002; 1970/1996; 1965/1998) is a genuine dialogical meeting where “I” do not see “You” as an “It” any longer. As soon as we say You, we stand in relation, because there are no borders to You, and “*Whoever says You does not have something; he has nothing. But he stands in relation*” (Buber, 1970/1996, p. 55). By this, Buber means that the You is not an object to the I, because “*Relation is reciprocity. My You acts on me as I act on it*” (p. 67). I am not using you as a means to get to know myself better, or as a way of discovering who I am, or to show you liking or affection, or to have you show these to me as a confirmation that I exist as an “it” in the world either.

The lived relationship, which is “*genuine original unity*” (p. 70), is what counts, Buber says, and this is where we are confronted as human beings. Just as there is no self without the world, there is no You without the I, and vice versa. The prerequisite for genuine conversation, or genuine meeting, which Buber calls “*fulfilment of relation between men*” (1965/1998, p. 59) is acceptance of otherness. This otherness is not just a necessary starting point; it is also something that is affirmed in connection with another being in e.g. a conversation where two people state different views about something.

Buber also says that we human beings have a drive for contact; a tactile and visual contact with each other; and this drive is what brings forth the You which aims for reciprocity and tenderness. When relation happens, the It may become a You, and after this course of events the You must become an It again. So, to be human is to be in relation, as opposed to just experiencing and using the other, which would be the same as seeing another as an It.

### 3. Methodological Choices

According to Kvale and Brinkmann (2009), the word method may be translated, from the original Greek meaning of the term, as “*the way to a goal*” (p. 99). This may then, be seen as the gathering of theory and collection of data, the analysis of the data and the reporting of the findings. Hence, this chapter presents my way to the goal in 6 parts, describing the background of this study through qualitative research, epistemology and phenomenology, the data collection method; interview with Focusing, the analysis of the data, quality in the study, ethical considerations, and finally a section about me as the researcher.

#### 3.1. Qualitative research

*“Every bit of human experience has a possible further movement implicit in it.  
Human experience is never complete (Gendlin, 1996, p. 13)”*

An important goal in qualitative research is to gain awareness of social phenomena, e.g. through conducting interviews with individuals (Merriam, 2009; Thagaard, 2009; Stake, 2010). As opposed to quantifiable data that gives overviews with numbers and statistics, qualitative research has its emphasis on studying something in depth, such as understanding people’s experiences of their everyday life and how they make or give meaning to these.

Qualitative inquiry (Stake, 2010) can be described as *interpretive* because it focuses on meanings of human affairs, respects intuition and is based on interaction between researcher and subject in collecting data. It is *experiential* in the sense that it is empirical, constructivistic and naturalistic; it strives not to intervene with something already existing, and believes that reality is constructed by the human being. It is also *situational* in the sense that it is holistic, doesn’t reduce, but rather describes situations in detail. There is a *personal* element to qualitative research, meaning that it is empathic, and works toward an understanding of individual perceptions and uniqueness, rather than commonality, and the researcher is often the instrument of the research.

Since the subject of my curiosity is obtaining some in-depth knowledge on how the social phenomenon of touch and touching may be experienced by a person or a self, I have chosen a qualitative approach.

##### 3.1.1. Epistemology and ontology

The central, underlying assumption in this piece of research is that human beings ‘know’ things through their bodies because the body is inherently situational (Gendlin, 1962). At the centre is the body; the knowing body, the feeling body, the felt body, and the meaning making body. Whereas the mind, on its own, can only think one thought at a time, the body (which the mind of course is a part of) has the ability to hold a complex array of information at once.

This assumption is closely connected to a constructionist and emotionalist epistemology (Silverman, 2001) in the sense that the research participants are seen as “*experiencing subjects who actively construct their social worlds*” (p. 87), and that the goal is to gain authentic insight into someone’s experience of a phenomenon. Ontologically it is connected to the notion of how we know something about our existence (Grbich, 2007; Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009), and through the thought that existence (van Manen, 1997) is being a body (Gendlin, 1962). Because of this assumption it was natural for me to make use of Focusing as a part of my data collection method. It has also played a part in the analysis of the data, in the collection of theories, in addition to serving as a tool when I encountered challenges throughout the process of writing this thesis.

### **3.1.2. Phenomenology**

In phenomenological inquiry the inner world of the participants is more interesting than their outer world (Thagaard, 2009). Phenomenology seeks to clarify essences of experience or to understand ‘givens’ that can be experienced through consciousness (Giorgi, 2009) through exploring these in depth, and aims to “*(...) describe what is given to us in immediate experience without being obstructed by pre-conceptions and theoretical notions*” (van Manen, 1997, p. 184). The researcher can get to know these essences and experiences through using imaginative intuition by involving interaction between researcher and respondents (Grbich, 2007). Hence, rather than producing theoretical or empirical observations of occurrences, phenomenology “*(...) offers accounts of experienced space, time, body, and human relation as we live them*” (van Manen, 1997, p. 184). Because my interest in this particular study was to gain an insight into how three health professionals experienced the *phenomenon* of touch, the phenomenological thought is an underlying framework in the methodology.

### **3.2. Interview with Focusing**

*“Deep listening is a way of reconnecting with our inner life and of becoming more available to others at a deeper level”. (Rome, 2010, p. 31)*

I collected my data based on the semi-structured qualitative research interview (appendix C) as described by Kvale and Brinkmann (2009), which is partly inspired by phenomenology and the Rogerian therapeutic interview. Despite the fact that it may seem as if there is a recipe that one can follow from A to Z, there are no obligatory rules in conducting the interview. This leaves more freedom for the researcher in using creativity, intuition and personal skills. The interview can have its emphasis on the interviewees sharing their own opinions on a matter. It can also have its emphasis on the interview as a creative exchange of ideas – a process of acknowledgment – the latter meaning that the interviewees might discover

something during the interview as well. Because I wanted to capture more than just the participants' opinions, and because of the underlying assumptions described about the body, I also made use of Focusing as an experiment to inquire more into their bodily felt experience of the phenomenon of touch.

### **3.2.1. Focusing**

Focusing is a natural ability that was discovered by Eugene Gendlin through research into what leads to change in a client (Gendlin, 1962; 1996; (Gendlin, Beebe, Cassens, Klein, & Oberlander, 1968), and has been developed over the years into Focusing-Oriented Psychotherapy (Gendlin, 1996), which Gendlin calls "The Experiential Method". It is "a *reflective practice*" (Afford, 2011) and a way of listening, both to oneself and to others, "*to get in touch with your deep inner experiencing*" (BFTA, 2010).

Focusing is seen as "*a method of inner awareness and personal growth*" (Cornell, 2005 n.p.) and Gendlin (1996) describes it as a way of bodily sensing into how something is felt in the middle of the body; a sensing into "*the edge of awareness*" or "*the zone between the conscious and the unconscious, (...) where therapeutic movement arises*" (p. 1).

Three key aspects or qualities of Focusing distinguish it from other methods (Cornell, 2005). This section about Focusing contains these three, of which the first is what Gendlin called "the felt sense". The second aspect is a particular way of attending inwards in an engaged and accepting way, and the third "*is a radical philosophy of what facilitates change*" (Cornell, 2005 n.p.) related to felt sense, felt shift and the philosophy of the body.

#### **3.2.1.1. The body in Focusing**

In Focusing, the body is not only a physiological machine or just what we can see when we look at someone (Gendlin, 1996). Neither is it a container that stores memories (Gendlin et.al. 1968); rather it is seen as a process, constantly in interaction with its environment. The body constantly perceives, and because it is inherently situational, it cannot be separated from its environment, it *is* its environment (Gendlin, 1992)

"*A situation always involves some living thing that is in the process of organizing its further living*" (Gendlin, 1993, p. 25). Sitting on a chair, breathing, the other person in the room and so on are all perceived by the body without us having to think about it. Thus, the body can 'know' more about a situation than we can understand as long as we only attend to what we find when assuming that the world is "*constructed entirely of space, time and the five senses*" (p. 26), or can be perceived through the body as a physiological machine. This bodily knowing is closely connected to what Gendlin coined as the "felt sense" (Gendlin, 1981; 1996; Gendlin et.al. 1968), which is also called "felt meaning" (Gendlin & Tavis, 1970).

### **3.2.1.2. *Felt sense and felt shift***

A felt sense is not a feeling or an emotion, a body sense or a thought, but can be described as a bodily felt sensation that somehow feels meaningful (Gendlin, 1981; 1996). A felt sense also differs from imagery in that an image appears before you in your mind's eye, whereas a felt sense is a bodily sensation anchored *in* the body. An image may *lead to* a felt sense, and an image may also appear *from* the felt sense.

The felt sense is experienced as an intricate and multifaceted whole, and it is open to new possibilities in a way that thoughts and feelings are not. While emotions and thoughts come in separate units (Gendlin, 1996), and are usually recognisable and already there, a felt sense has layers than emotions and thoughts, is more subtle and hence needs time to form and emerge (Gendlin, 1993).

The felt sense has a bodily quality (Gendlin, 1996) that may often be described with words such as heavy, tight, jumpy, murky and so on, it might contain both feelings and thoughts, and sometimes the names of emotions or feelings might also be descriptive. It also often has an “aboutness” – it is *about* something, and even it may seem subtle and at first indescribable, it is very distinctly felt, concretely and physically, and very real (Cornell, 2005; Gendlin, 1981; 1996).

A felt shift (Gendlin, 1981; 1996) is a little step of inner change, characterised by a feeling that something inside moves or shifts. It comes as a result of the inner attention of acceptance; maybe a surprising insight comes in the body, usually before the cognitive understanding.

#### **3.2.1.2.1. *Felt sense and self***

Through having a felt sense and discovering that it is a self-enclosed whole (Gendlin, 1996), the person becomes bigger than usual, as opposed to emotions, that sweep the person along and leave the self temporarily diminished. “*When one has a felt sense, one becomes more deeply oneself*” (p. 21) and the felt sense frees the self in a particular way because it allows for the discovery that the self *is* not the felt sense, or the part that one comes into contact with; the self *has* the felt sense and what senses it – one becomes disidentified. Because “*The self is not any specific content*” (p. 35), the self is what *has* feelings, emotions, images, and felt senses, felt sensing can bring one closer to oneself, and allow for growth for the self, and for becoming oneself more deeply.

### **3.2.1.3. *How to attend in Focusing***

To let a bodily felt sense form and reveal some of its knowing both the counsellor and the Focuser need to attend in a particular way. Research has shown that clients who either intellectualise or externalise when they talk about their issues in therapy, are not successful (Gendlin et. al., 1968; Gendlin & Tavis, 1970). To be successful, the willingness to feel rather than just talk about feelings, to stay with the felt experience or felt meaning, to focus on and attend to that which is directly felt, yet not yet conceptualised, is crucial.

Since the Focusing-Oriented Counselling is “*deeply imbued in the spirit of the person-centred approach*” (Purton, 2007, p. 6), the Rogerian core conditions of being non-judgmental, and genuinely and empathetically present with the client, are very relevant when listening. Because Focusing is a process that cannot be forced, the counsellor’s task will be to provide a space of trust and safety (Cornell, 1996), with a *friendly* (Gendlin, 1981) “Focusing attitude”.

To help the Focuser to focus on what is “there”, the felt meaning of an event or situation (Gendlin & Tavis, 1970), the counsellor will reflect feeling rather than the outer content that the client expresses (Gendlin et. al, 1968). Feeling in this context does not mean just emotions, but also the more complex *feeling of*, for instance: “I feel like I should do something about this, but I don’t know how”; i.e. the felt sense or felt meaning.

For the Focuser it is important to engage in a curious and friendly inward attention (Cornell, 1996; Gendlin, 1996), a “staying with” the nameless sense, tapping it, touching it and tasting it (Gendlin, 1993). This also means not to be overwhelmed by feelings or thoughts, because if we are overwhelmed by something, we cannot have a relationship with it, and a goal of Focusing may be described as creating an inner relationship with what is bodily felt (Cornell, 1996; 2005). The counsellor or listener will be helpful through providing the mentioned core conditions, hence providing an example of this nonjudgmental, curious, trusting, and friendly listening attitude, for the Focuser to adopt and internalise.

#### **3.2.1.4. The six steps for teaching and learning Focusing**

In the interviews I used a version of the original “Gendlinian” Focusing steps (see appendix E), developed to teach the Focusing process, as described by Gendlin (1981):

The first step, “**clearing a space**” consists of taking a minute to see what stands between us and feeling fine, letting the body answer this question, greeting each thing and then setting them to the side for now. In the second step one lets a “**felt sense**” of a particular problem form in the body. The third step, “**getting a handle**”, entails looking for a quality-word, phrase, or image that describes the crux, or the essence of the felt sense. In the fourth step, “**resonate**”, the Focuser checks with the felt sense whether that particular handle really



matches, and this might lead to a change to be followed with one's attention. The fifth step is "ask", and consists of asking what about the problem is so... [the handle], and waiting for the body to answer this instead of answering it "logically". In the sixth and final step, "receive", one welcomes what has come and is glad that it has spoken, really feeling what has arisen from the whole sequence. The sequence can be repeated from the start, or ended here.

### **3.2.2. Participants, interviews and context**

My criteria (McLeod, 2003) for selecting research participants were that they were working with physical touch on a daily basis, and that they would be used to reflecting and putting their thoughts and feelings into words. I interviewed three health workers: a nurse, an osteopath and a midwife, and they were contacted on the phone and through a letter of introduction to my study via email.

Milana is a nurse that works in palliative care at a hospital, and hence she works with young and old men and women, in a job where she has colleagues. The essence (Giorgi, 2009) of this interview seems to be centred around the "sensing" of when to touch and when not to, and of being accepting, because it isn't "natural" to everyone to touch and to be touched, and hence she describes touch as "an art". I interviewed Milana in a group room at the university.

Simon is an osteopath and his job consists of touching people of all ages and genders. He works independently in his private office, where I also interviewed him. This interview seemed to revolve around the energetic or non-physical side to touch, how touch can be a source of information because the body speaks through movements, and the importance of listening and of touch; "*Touch is everything*".

Ania is a midwife who mainly works with women, and she has colleagues that she works with daily. In this interview the essence seems to revolve around how her relation to touch is about the closeness/intimacy or the "mental touch" as she calls it, and feeling compassion or caring towards the other person, more than the physical touch, and how being mentally close to someone takes courage. Ania came to my house for the interview.

#### **3.2.2.1. The interviews**

With consent from the informants, the interviews were recorded on an mp3-player, and they lasted between 2 and 2.5 hours. I started the recording after an initial introduction, (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009) where they signed the consent form (appendix B), and a relaxation part where I was the only one talking.

The Focusing session (appendix C) was done in 5 parts: 1) a relaxation part where I led the informants through their bodies as an attempt to make them relaxed and present, including "clearing a space"; 2) I presented them with the topic of touch and being touched, to see

where this landed in the body and what kind of images, feelings or felt senses they experienced in their bodies; following which I asked them to find a handle to describe the essence of what this felt like in the body, before they were asked to place this “whole thing” outside of the body to prepare for the next step; 3) Next they were presented with the idea of non-touch, with the same procedure as in part 2, except they kept their felt sense of non-touch in the body; 4) Then I asked them to bring the felt sense of touch back into the body to see what would happen and describe how this felt in the body, and find a handle for this felt sense too; 5) The last thing I asked of them was to imagine an everyday situation and see how it felt to carry the felt sense from part 4 with them into such a situation.

The interview conversations following the Focusing sessions, lasted between 15 to 30 minutes, and consisted of open-ended questions based on a table of the topics I wanted to touch upon in our conversation (see appendix C).

### **3.3. Analysis and data**

*“Because each qualitative study is unique, the analytical approach will be unique”*  
(Patton, 2002, p. 433)

Since there are many ways of making sense of and transforming raw data into findings, (Patton, 2002) and few methods are agreed upon, the analysis process “(...) *remains unique for each inquirer*” (p. 432) and can only be guided. I am basing my analysis skills (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009) on my years of studies at the university (Patton, 2002), and on creativity and intuition (Fossey, Harvey, McDermott, & Davidson, 2002; Mearns & Thorne, 2007; Stake, 2010) through e.g. Focusing (Gendlin, 1981).

As a tool to analyse the data from the conversation part of the interview I have mainly used the Constant Comparative Method (CCM) as described by Strauss and Corbin (1990). I have also been inspired to use parts of the descriptive phenomenological method (Giorgi, 2009).

#### **3.3.1. Transcription and language issues**

I transcribed the interviews myself as soon as possible after each interview, as step on the way towards getting to know my data (Dalen, 2004; Merriam, 2009). While transcribing, I took notes as a step towards starting to analyse the data (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

The interviews were done in Norwegian, and so were the transcriptions and analysis. The translations into English were done for the presentation of the findings, and I have translated the quotes from the informants directly. There is a possibility that some meanings have got lost in translation (Merriam, 2009), and as an attempt to address this, I have explained or replaced some expressions with words that have approximately the same meaning in English (see appendix D).

### **3.3.2. Challenges**

Analysing the interview was a challenging and interesting process, constantly ongoing, more or less intensely and intently, throughout the course of the research (Thagaard, 2009) and up until the point where the whole thesis was done.

Because I based a lot of my data collection on the Focusing part, I was left with a very short conversational interview parts with the informants. In the initial part of the analysis I discovered that the Focusing part had yielded very personal and unique images and “handles” that I could not interpret or analyse in the same way I did the conversational part, without the informants’ explicit explanations. Therefore, I have separated the Focusing part from the interview part in the initial analysis, and have used the images or handles from the Focusing part in the findings presentation as a supplement where they seemed to be directly linked to what was said in the following conversation part.

I was worried that the shortness of the conversation part of the interviews I would not have enough data on which to base the thesis. In retrospect, maybe because the conversation part was so short, and because the Focusing acted as a way of bringing touch into focus, there was not much irrelevant talk; because what was said in the conversation part of the interview turned out to be substantial enough to work with. Throughout the work with the discussion it became evident that I could not ignore the potent powerfulness of the handles from the Focusing sessions (see section 4.2.2.), their importance slowly emerged through felt sensing (see section 4.5.2.), and hence have become an important part and even at the core of the discussion.

I treated everything as equally important (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009) and was open to both differences and similarities in the analysis (Fossey et.al. 2002): some of the topics were found in all the interviews while others were unique to one informant or were mentioned by only two of them. The intuitive and Focusing-oriented analysis went on in the meeting between theory and data, as my understanding of the material deepened, throughout the work with the discussion, and only ended when the thesis was finally done (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In the following I will describe the main analysis of the transcriptions.

### **3.3.3. Analysis**

Grounded theory is a discovery-focused method of analysis (Fossey et. al 2002), and a comparative and inductive process, which is mostly used when new theory is needed in a field that hasn’t been extensively researched (Strauss & Corbin, 1990; Moustakas, 1994; Grbich, 2007). The constant comparative method of analysis, as it is also called (Strauss & Corbin, 1990; Merriam, 2009), or CCM (Boeije, 2002) can also be used “(...) *without building a*

*grounded theory*” (Merriam, 2009, p. 175) Since I have a small sample of only three informants, and because I am not aiming to generate new theory in this study, I have only used some of the elements of open CCM’s, axial and selective coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) to help me structure and analyse my data.

In accordance with my Focusing epistemology I also made use of the step that involves getting a sense of the whole from the descriptive phenomenological method (Giorgi, 2009) in different ways, and I use the word *theme* instead of *category* in the description of the findings.

After having read through the transcriptions repeatedly to get a sense of the whole (Giorgi, 2009) I separated the Focusing part from the interview conversation, and wrote a description of the Focusing and the informants’ experiences of it. Then I wrote a summary of what seemed to be the essence of each interview.

I then started to break the transcribed text from the conversation part down into pieces in an open coding process (Strauss & Corbin, 1990), which lead to a grouping of the statements, words, and phrases, into 14 different codes (see appendix H).

In accordance with what Strauss and Corbin say: “*This is where most names come from – YOU!*” (p. 67), I subsequently conceptualised the codes using Focusing, intuition (Merriam, 2009; Stake, 2010) and logic to find names for the phenomena or themes that occurred in the data. I then grouped these sub-themes under two main themes: what the informants had said about themselves and about others became one main theme, and what seemed to be happening between them and others became the second one. As a part of the axial coding process (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) I then looked at the relationships between the main themes and their sub-themes.

Because my feeling of the whole of the material (Giorgi, 2009) was that everything was closely interlinked, and that dividing it into themes and sub-themes almost felt a bit artificial, I did some Focusing (Gendlin, 1996): I “held” the “whole of this” to get a “handle” on it all together. I then used the process of selective coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) to look at the relationship between all the themes to tell the story of my data, and together, these processes helped me form a core theme.

The final names of the themes include words from the informants that I felt were at the core of their “message” about how they experience touch, and also descriptive of the content of the themes; the two main themes: “**Touch is everything – The toucher and the touched**”, and “**Touch is an art – The space between**”, and the core theme: “**It takes courage to be close – Touch as a meeting between selves**”.

### **3.4. Ethical considerations and quality in the study**

*“(...) each place and time has uniqueness that works against generalization” (Stake, 2010, p. 15).*

This project has been reported (see Appendix G) to the Norwegian Social Science Data Services (NSD, 2011) and has followed their ethical guidelines as well as those given by The National Committee for Research Ethics in the Social Sciences and the Humanities (NESH, 2011). From these guidelines I have emphasised two main points, namely confidentiality and informed consent.

The participants' confidentiality has been maintained by keeping them anonymous, by giving them new names, and keeping sensitive and recognisable information out of the thesis (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009; Thagaard, 2009; NSD, 2011).

I made sure I had the informants' informed consent (see Appendix A and B) before starting the interviews (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009; Thagaard, 2009; NESH, 2011), in order to inform them of what it would entail to be part of this research project, to let them know they could withdraw at any time, that the interviews were to be recorded and that records and transcriptions would be destroyed at the closure of the project.

As a part of maintaining the ethics I have written a section about me as the researcher, where among other things I address the ethical question of the power structure between interviewer and interviewee (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009).

#### **3.4.1. Quality in the study**

Closely linked to the ethical considerations, is the question of quality and rigour in the research, which is often discussed in terms of validity and reliability from the quantitative tradition (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). However, these concepts cannot be applied in the same way in qualitative research (McLeod, 2003), partly because they belong within a positivist paradigm. Hence, many authors have discussed these terms (Seale, 1999; Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009) and tried to replace them with ones more suitable to qualitative research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) and as I understand it, one key concept is *transparency* about how the study has been conducted from beginning to end. This is to provide the reader with insight into the whole process of the study so that they can decide whether or not the study is trustworthy and dependable. Such transparency can be maintained through the concept of “thick descriptions” which is borrowed from Clifford Geertz's (1973) classic “The Interpretation of Cultures”, developed when he was urged by the book editor to “*write an extended analytical introduction stating [his] general position*” (p. v).

Such thick descriptions in my study, in accordance with McLeod (2003), include the description of criteria for selection of informants; description of data collection and the

interview situation; and clarifying the conceptualising of the data through the data analysis, in the method chapter.

In addition I have contextualised the study in the introduction chapter and through describing the interview contexts and the informants' backgrounds. In being reflexive as a researcher and stating my general position I have written a section about myself as a researcher, which includes, among others, the relationship between the informants and myself, and how I have dealt with mistakes, surprises and challenges throughout the study.

Conceptualisation of the data has been made transparent in the analysis, and coherence between the theory and the data should emerge through the theory and discussion chapters.

In addition to transparency, McLeod recommends member checking and addressing the question of replicability as points to address as part of quality in the study. Member checking is a triangulation technique and an important way of securing the authenticity of the material, and hence I have sent each findings section as well as the transcriptions of the interviews to each respective informant, for them to comment on. The feedback I received was positive, and the informants seemed to feel that I had understood what they wanted to say.

According to Seale (1999) we enhance replicability through the transparency of procedures, and reflexively accounting the methodology. Lincoln and Guba (1985) see replicability linked to reliability, and claim that replicability is based “*upon an assumption of naive realism*” (p. 299) that predicts an unchanging “reality”. This is a criterion that cannot be met, because human beings, both researcher and informants, and contexts, are changeable and succumbed to ‘nature’ in the sense of the possibility of tiredness, mistakes and carelessness. Therefore the researcher should take into account both “*instability and factors of phenomenal or design induced change*” (p. 299). I have taken a position in between in the sense that I hope to accomplish a certain extent of replicability through transparency as described over, and at the same time, for the reasons listed by Lincoln and Guba, and on a more detailed level – because one Focusing session can never be repeated – I will claim that the content of the data material can very unlikely be replicated, whereas the methods of data collection, analysis and so on, more likely can be, at least attempted to be, repeated.

### **3.5. Me – the researcher**

*“Each project (...) depend(s) on the data available, the interpretations and experience of the researcher, and the contingencies that influence and guide the research, both personally and professionally” (Moustakas, 1994 p 5)*

Since the researcher is the instrument in qualitative research (Dalen, 2004; Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009; Thagaard, 2009; Stake, 2010), I, as the researcher, have influenced this piece of research from beginning to end with my personal background, thoughts, premade assumptions and horizon of understanding and so on. Some of my background thinking I have already touched upon in the section about epistemology and ontology, and also a little bit in the introduction chapter and in the chapter about quality in the study. I will now attempt to make my position as researcher more explicit, as a part of securing quality in the study and to make it easier for you as a reader to see what you think of my work.

Through my studies of counselling at University of Ulster in Northern Ireland and at NTNU in Norway I have gained a view that is likely compatible with the humanistic psychology (Rogers, 1980). With Focusing and the humanistic approach to counselling underpinning my theoretical understanding, the changing body and the implicit human need, will, and willingness to change and grow are all at the core of my theoretical starting point. My years of studying counselling have also deepened my interest for human relations, which is why I have been interested in looking deeper into touch as a happening between adults and how it influences us on the journey of our lives.

Touching is very natural to me, I use it quite a lot in my everyday life, and I come into this research experience with the assumption that touch is a good thing; that it is a necessity of life; that it may lead to confrontations with oneself where one's own feelings and ideas are made clearer, both negatively and positively, and that there should be more of the positive kinds of touch.

Focusing is an approach that I immediately fell for when I found it “by chance” while writing an assignment for my studies at University of Ulster in Northern Ireland. The non-directive providing of space to spend some time with what can be sensed inside and contact the inner knowing, was like coming home for me; it was as if I had been searching for it all my life, trying to do it and half succeeded. Therefore, I have been doing my Focusing trainer training at the same time as studying Counselling at NTNU. I am also using Focusing to meet the challenges of the work of this thesis when I feel stuck (see appendix F).

I came into the interview situation with a feeling of entering into a field of tension between openness and directiveness (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009); I had to be directive in the sense of guiding the informants through Focusing because it was a new experience for them, and at the same time keep the open and welcoming attitude that Focusing demands of the listener

(Cornell, 1996; Gendlin, 1996). I can see that the openness that Focusing brings with it from the listener influenced my way of meeting the informants in the semi structured conversational part of the interviews in such a way that I trusted the Focusing process so much I didn't realise until later that it mostly yields very personal images and metaphors that cannot be treated the same way as statements in a conversation can. Therefore I didn't really ask enough questions and follow-up questions, and the conversational part of the interview hence became more an open interview than a semi structured one.

The openness and the lack of familiarity with Focusing may also have been factors in making the situation both uncomfortable and comfortable to the informants. There is likely already an imbalance in power between the informant and the researcher in the interview situation (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009) for several reasons, such as the one way quality of the dialogue, and how the researcher sets the premises and has monopoly when it comes to interpretations, and I can only hope that I was able to make an open and comfortable space for the informants to open up in via the Focusing listener attitude (Cornell, 1996; Gendlin, 1996).





## 4. Findings

In this empirical part I will present my findings from the interviews with my three informants, starting with a description of what happened in the individual Focusing sessions and how the informants experienced it. Then I will present the sub-themes that came from the analysis of the conversation part of the interview, placed under the two main themes: “Touch is everything” – The toucher and the touched, and “Touch is an art” – The space between, and last, I present the core theme “It takes courage to be close” – Touch as a meeting between selves. Some of the topics discussed are represented by all the informants, while others are represented only by two, and on occasion one informant has more to say about a topic than the others do. Because of the shortness of the conversation part, there will be some repetitions throughout the descriptions of the data material.

### 4.1. Description and experience of the Focusing sessions

In this first part I will describe what happened for Milana, Ania and Simon during the Focusing sessions, their images and their handles, and what they said about how they experienced the Focusing.

#### 4.1.1. Milana – the nurse

To Milana, the image of ‘touch’ was like a white rolled up towel or blanket in the heart area, followed by warm, soft feelings. She also associated her husband, and her “handle” was “*warm hands – because he has that*”. The senses that came up with the thought of ‘non-touch’ were connected to discomfort and tightness, and manifested as a small, black, knobby and unfeeling lump in her throat. Her “handle” was: *‘not meeting, not letting in’*. When she was asked to hold both of these images in her body together, there was a sense that “the black one” grew weaker, was made impotent, and the sense moved toward the coming of a nice and warm feeling, where strings attached the two and she ended up with the “handle” “*to accept*”.

Since Milana had never done anything like this before, she found the Focusing to be weird, and also quite nice. She says she had to concentrate and that images that emerged were puzzling: “*I thought that was so weird, that it was going to be something rolled up, almost like I could see how long it was, and wide, and, yes, that was very... puzzling*”. The Focusing became a way of acknowledging herself, she says, and a way of getting to know something that was completely new to her.

#### 4.1.2. Simon – the osteopath

The images and body senses that Simon experienced seem to move a lot, being rich and plentiful. Connected to ‘touch’, there were bodily senses that moved between his stomach and

upper body and his chest. These were tightness, discomfort, flow, tenseness, pressure, movement, and a calm flow. Images that came up for him were: parachute, circle, flat board, whirling ball, and waves, and the “handle” was “*to listen*”.

Related to non-touch he experienced senses like having a tight claw around his heart, the presence of a dark cloud, an old army helmet, and a kind of protection and powerfulness, ending up with a sense of the necessity of touch. The “handle” was “*being privileged*”. In bringing both these senses together there was a flow of openness like a cool, fresh and clean river, which he associated with “*Having storages of energy*”.

Simon described the experience of the Focusing as “*a journey through the body*”, and said that he had to concentrate and ‘check in’ with himself, which he finds to be a good thing. He also described it as a way of “*listening to the body*”, and it wasn’t the first time he had done something like this.

#### **4.1.3. Ania – the midwife**

When taking in the image of ‘touch’ Ania had a sense of a warm, close, and intimate ‘something’ in her chest; like a downwards weight that influenced the breathing. The “handle” was “*compassion/caring*”. At ‘non-touch’ there was at first a cottony, cold and diffuse sense that became like an icicle in the back of her head, and the “handle” was “*icicle*”. Sensing the two together, the non-touch was small and an increasing awareness came in her head, stomach, chest and arms, of spaciousness and wholeness, and it felt good. An image of the Greek goddess Artemis and her duality also came up and the “handle” was “*balance*”.

Ania said that even if she didn’t find it difficult to do the Focusing and though she got into it fairly quickly, it was a bit tiring. That was something she recognised from other, similar exercises she had done before. The Focusing also yielded something new or different for her: “*New things come up, that I haven’t reflected upon, in a different way, maybe? You become aware of things, and that’s only positive, anyway.*” She also mentions that she reflects upon what she is doing in her job, and that now the Focusing has given her a different way to think about her own relation to touch.

#### **4.2. “Touch is everything” – The toucher and the touched**

This theme describes the relation to and evaluation of touch by the one who touches and the receiver of the touch. This includes finding touch to be natural or not, which may be seen as the basis for whether touch is evaluated as positive or not. The theme also describes the touchers’ intention behind touch, and how touch may be perceived based on the evaluation. Since I don’t have access to the recipients of touch in this particular study, the information about the other person is filtered through the informant’s perceptions.

### 4.2.1. Relation to and evaluation of touch

All the informants mention implicitly, and sometimes explicitly, both their own relation and evaluation of touch, and thoughts about how they think others evaluate and relate to it.

#### 4.2.1.1. *The toucher*

In the jobs that these three care workers have, it is necessary to touch other people for different reasons, and they all seem to value touch as positive, which may be seen connected to the fact that they also seem to find it quite natural to touch. As we saw in the Focusing part, their felt senses around touch seemed to be quite positive: “warm hands”, “compassion/caring”, “listening” and so on, and they all had seemingly negative images of non-touch: “black knot”, “icicle” and “claw around the heart” et cetera.

Milana describes touch as something good, and says that: “*Yes, I am a hugger*”. Being ‘a hugger’ makes it easier to be close to other people; it becomes natural to touch others, also in her job, she says. She also describes herself as being curious when it comes to knowing how a body feels to the touch, which she describes by a meeting a patient after a bad injury and exploring the muscles and tissue to find out how they feel.

Ania also seems to value touch positively: “*(...) you have to touch people!*”, and says that she utilises it actively as a tool in her work, e.g. through massage. She also says that touch is natural to her and seems to think that is important when touching someone: “*(...) for me it is very natural to touch people, so that... uhm... for someone to whom it isn't natural maybe one shouldn't be doing it.*”

Simon says in his Focusing session that it is impossible to imagine a world without touch because: “*Touch is everything, really*”. In the interview conversation he repeats how important touch is and how “*I don't really think that things can go round if touch isn't an important part of everyday life*”. Touch is so important to Simon that it is possibly why he has chosen his line of work: “*I don't think I would be working with it if it [touch] wasn't important to me*”, and he says it is a privilege to be allowed to work with the body.

It seems that touching might not have been natural in Simon's family, though, and says he missed touch when he was younger: “*when you started to talk about touch I thought about, that we [his family], between us, weren't so good at it*”. He also explains some of this with the Norwegian culture that he describes as “cold”. However, through encounters with other cultures in later life he has become used to touch: “*So for me it has, at least, become quite natural to shake someone's hand and that, you know*”.

#### **4.2.1.2. “The touched”**

In contemplations over others, Milana says that most people find it ok to be touched by someone and even find touch to be pleasant. On the other hand not everyone likes it or finds it natural: *“Some people say that, I am not a ‘hugger’, for instance, so, it simply doesn’t feel natural”*. Milana thinks that the reasons why some people don’t like it might be that they have not been touched much in their lives: *“What the reasons for that are, that could be, you could say that the black knot [an image from her Focusing on non-touch], not being seen, not being heard, that it has been more powerful all the time, maybe that one never had that good warmth, or never wanted to receive or something.”*

In talking about her students and colleagues Ania says that not everyone necessarily finds it natural to touch: *“It might be difficult, you know, to touch a stranger, who is naked”*. As mentioned above, she thinks that to use touch it is important to find it to be natural.

Simon describes, as seen above, how in his family touch was not used so much. He says about his father that: *“He wasn’t the person who was hugging a lot and showing much, at least not between father and son, if you understand”*. As shown in the previous section Simon explains the lack of touch with Norwegian culture and society: *“So it’s a bit, this society is quite cold. (...) it almost has to be... a funeral or something, you know.”*

#### **4.2.2. Intention and perception**

The relation that the person has to touch, as described above, seems to be connected to the intention that the toucher puts behind the touching, and to the perception of touch by the one who is touched. When the toucher touches someone, the positive evaluation of touch will probably be embedded in his/her intention, and the perception of the touch by the touched will be closely linked to his/her evaluation of touch as positive or negative. This sub-theme describes how the three informants think about the intention of touch and how Milana also considers the touched’s perception of touch.

Simon’s intention behind touch, as he describes it, seems to be to become aware of things that are going on in the body, to communicate with and register information from the body. *“By touch, energetically or physically, one registers it - what happens in the body.”* This will be described more detailed in the sub-themes the Body and its Signals, and Perceptiveness.

Ania talks about the intention of touch quite explicitly and how important it is to “mean it” by which she means that the intention should be to show compassion toward all kinds of people. She says she cares for the women she is working with and mentions the importance of this quality in health care work: *“In all caring professions one talks a lot about, empathy and, trust, and, yes, creating that space”*. Ania says she uses touch consciously and intentionally,

as a way of creating closeness and showing compassion and care: *“There is no point in massaging, touching people with my hands, if I don’t care for them, or... (...) [Compassion] is more important, I think, than, the hands.”* In her observations about her students when she tells them they need to touch people, she says that: *“but, that doesn’t help, if they don’t intend to be close, is what I’m thinking now [after the Focusing].”*

Milana describes how the intention might be misinterpreted when opposite genders are involved: *“One has to make sure it isn’t misunderstood, because that can happen, that the other one, a man may think that we women, show a bit of extra attention and that the touch is given a different intention in a way”* In the situation with the patient who had been in a severe car accident, Milana’s intention when she touched this woman was based in a curiosity to find out something about the body: *“She had a lot of wounds, and I touched her, touched her body because it was interesting to see, and feel how the body felt, and the muscles.”* It may seem as if the patient in this particular situation perceived the touching as positive, and that she had missed it: *“And then she said I was the first to have touched her since she came to the hospital, and she found that strange, that nobody had touched her”*.

### **4.3. “Touch is an art” – The space between**

As the first main theme described, there may be differences in evaluation of touch by the toucher and the touched, and there is a possibility that the touch isn’t perceived the way it is intended. This means that there are some challenges following work with touch, and as Milana says: *“So it’s a, an art, it is...”*

This theme describes what happens in the space between the toucher and the touched. This entails different aspects, such as the exchange of signals from between bodies and the perceptiveness and experience needed to pick those up, as a means to decide whether to touch or not, and to gain information about someone. It also entails the body as a tool in physical touch and in picking up non-physical signals from another body. In addition we will see different physical can non-physical aspects and potential effects of touch, and how the body is something to get to know.

#### **4.3.1. Body and signals**

There are some signals given through the body that need to be picked up; the body can contain information, it can signal information, and it can be used as a tool through touch.

Milana says that one can signal something through a handshake and with body language: *“(...) if you are not a ‘hugger’ maybe, then you signal distance yourself as well with, handshake and that sort of thing”*.

Ania talks about using touch as a tool, as we have seen, through massage and using her hands in working with the women.

Simon says that bodies are different and unique, and that each body has its own history and story to tell: *“Because no one is the same, we each have our story/history. I have my story/history. And it cannot be compared to anything you know”*. This history and story can be picked up by someone, because *“(…) [movement] is what tells us what is actually going on in a body”*. Through touch as a tool one can find out things about the other person through their handshake, like self-confidence and so on: *“(…) the body communicates through movements, and through touch, energetically... uhmm... physically... one registers these things... what is happening in the body. It says quite a lot about a person if you shake someone’s hand.”*

#### **4.3.2. Touch – not merely a non-physical endeavour**

Touch in their jobs has its basis in the physical touch of hands on someone’s body, whether it is massaging, holding of hands, stroking, touch for pain relief and so on. In this sub-theme Simon, Milana and Ania’ comments show aspects and effects of touch, and how those can be both physical and non-physical. The non-physical aspects and potential effects of touch seem to be closely linked to the intention and the perception of touch as described earlier.

Milana talks about touch as pain relieving: *“and otherwise we touch our patients a lot and hold their hand for instance, and, stroke their backs, and... because there is a lot of pain”*. On the other hand, touch can lead to aggression in patients who are in a lot of pain.

Simon talks about non-physical touch as energy. *“Energy is a tremendously strong force, you know, so energy is very important (...) it isn’t easy to explain always, what I mean when I say energy, but energy is something that is around us all the time, something we just have to... can make use of.”* He goes on to explain that this means that the body needs to be more relaxed than usual, as if in a different kind of state or level: *“I guess it can be experienced in different ways, but energetic touch might feel even stronger. It is when you work on a different level, a level bordering on sleep, maybe. Not sleep, but in that direction”*. There is more of a chance that we feel this if we are relaxed and lying down, and we are on this level, he says we can register things, feel and become aware of things in our bodies and send energies to each other in daily life. An example is when one person thinks about another and this other person is aware they can feel it.

Simon says he does not believe that energy is something that one takes from oneself and gives to another person, because *“(…) there is energy in everything.”* This kind of body awareness takes practice and one needs to be less ‘in the head’ and more aware of what goes

on in the body, which also takes courage: *“Not everyone dares to feel what is going on in the body”*. Because Simon works with this every day it is easier for him to feel it, and he says that in his daily life there is a mixture of physical and non-physical touch.

When Simon describes his relation to his father and how he missed touch in his family, it may seem like he feels that more hugging and touching in the family would have had the effect on him of feeling more loved. *“I knew he [his father] loved me and all. But I think he had some problems with saying just that, and then it came about that maybe I found it hard to express that I loved him, so I do think it [touch] matters”*.

The possible non-physical effects of touch as described by Milana can be the nice feelings that may come with it: *“Most people think it is nice, and it is contact-creating (...) it is inclusive (...) and it can create a nice and light atmosphere”*. Hence the effect that touch has may be linked to the perception of touch.

Ania talks about touch as something to do with the intention of being close and feeling compassion towards someone. She describes this as mental touch: *“Feeling compassion (...) maybe closeness... is... the larger part of it, a mental form of touch”*.

#### **4.3.3. Perceptiveness and experience**

Simon: *“Communicating with different bodies, it is a challenge, and very interesting, because no one is the same”*.

As it may seem, working with touch may be quite challenging: to be picking up on the signals from the body, to know when to touch and not, to know the possible effects touch may have, based on whether the other person might like it or find it natural or not. Hence there is a call for perceptiveness and experience from the one who is touching someone. Ania, Milana and Simon talk about experience and perceptiveness in relation to picking up signals, in relation to being someone who touches, and in relation to daring to touch someone.

Milana describes how it takes a bit of consideration to decide whether to touch someone or not: *“Well, it is a bit of... sensing, somehow, whether they are sceptical or... (...) one is a bit on edge and senses a bit and... You don't throw yourself around someone's neck who doesn't find it to be nice, you know”*.

Related to it how the body communicates its story through movements, Simon talks about listening to the body and working on the body's terms: *“The body is like an open book, if one works on its terms. And of course, then an important factor is how that touch is, you know? It can't be on my terms, then. It is about listening, and that goes for touch too, listening”*. As we saw in the Focusing part, *listening* was his handle related to touch as well, and Simon also



says that he has learned a lot about himself through touch, and that with body awareness we can feel things and become aware of things about ourselves too.

About listening to the body, Simon describes certain skills: *“If you are to learn to listen to the body, you eh, you have to learn to ‘come down’ a bit”*. By this he means that we have to come more down from our heads and be more present in the body. This has become easier for him because of the experience he gets through his job: *“I have become, gradually at least, better at sensing, and I’m learning to know my own body”*

Milana also describes how it is important to sense how the other person feels because it is important that touch doesn’t feel unnatural: *“It shouldn’t be that way, that it doesn’t feel natural, (...) because then they can find it a bit intrusive or they think it’s too close”*. Being a “hugger” makes Milana more perceptive to other people because and she also mentions the importance of the experience that comes with age: *“Maybe in the meeting with other people, there is something that is alike, that others have things that we need to ... accept and, maybe it is easier then, to understand. It might have something to do with age, too, because one experiences a lot as time goes by”*.

As we have seen, Ania thinks it might be difficult to touch a naked stranger, and particularly if one is insecure, and she says one has to be *“(…) in tune with oneself (...) and it is maybe to do with experience as well, being self-confident, and daring to be close to different types of people, because you have to.”*

#### **4.4. “It takes courage to be close” – Touch as a meeting between selves**

This is what became the core theme through the analysis and which explicates what I see as underlying in the two main themes; that the informants have all mentioned closeness, distance, and relation or communication connected to touch in one way or another. Following this explication I describe more in detail how I see touch as a meeting between selves in a space between toucher and touched, as emerging from the findings, concluded in a figure.

##### **4.4.1. Closeness and distance, and relation**

Milana aligns touch with closeness or intimacy in saying that: *“(…) most people want closeness”*, while also saying that some people don’t like touch because for instance they find it to be too close/intimate. In her Focusing session Milana associates touch with her husband, and non-touch with not being met and not taking in. As we have seen she also mentions how similarities between people may be a factor that makes it easier to connect in meeting others. The perceptiveness that one needs to have is related to whether one achieves contact with another person: *“Some people you connect with straight away, and others, in a way, express*

*distance*". As seen before she also describes how touch can create contact and be inclusive, and how a person may signal distance through a handshake or other body language.

In describing Norwegian culture as a bit 'cold' and lacking touch as a natural part of the culture, Simon also compares with other cultures: *"I think that is quite general, that we Trøndere, or Norwegians maybe, even are quite bad at it [touch]. I am quite often in [a European country], and it's very different there. Over there, first of all, you at least shake someone's hand, and maybe you get a kiss on both sides, you know? Whether you are a man or a woman doesn't matter, in a way. So... as a Norwegian, you know, you become all like: 'what's this, then?'"* Simon also emphasises communication with different bodies, which is what he does through touch in his job, and we have seen how he regards touching and hugging in everyday life as important to express love and caring.

Ania talks about touch as something that leads to closeness or intimacy: *"(...) because it was more this intimacy, mentally, that you are... close to someone"*, and she also describes how this isn't easy, that it takes courage and self-confidence to be close to someone. In addition she emphasises closeness, compassion and caring as related to touching, and how it is important in her line of work to create a space of empathy, relation and trust: *"(...) you have to feel compassion, whoever you are with."*

#### **4.4.2. "Compassion, listening and acceptance" – Meeting between selves in space**

When I take in the "whole" of my data material and as described so far through the two main themes and the sub-themes, including the Closeness, distance and relation sub-theme, I find that everything seems interlinked by one particular phenomenon: namely touch as a meeting between selves.

When in situations where physical touch is, or might be, involved, these three health workers assess the situation as to whether touch is natural to others as well as having thoughts about their own intention of the touching. When they step into that space they need to be perceptive of the other person to know whether to touch or not, and to the body that gives information through its signals. This leads to them entering into the space between people, or to not enter into that space, and even if they don't, there will be a sense of being touched even non-physically through closeness or distance, which also entails the meeting between two selves, i.e. relation.

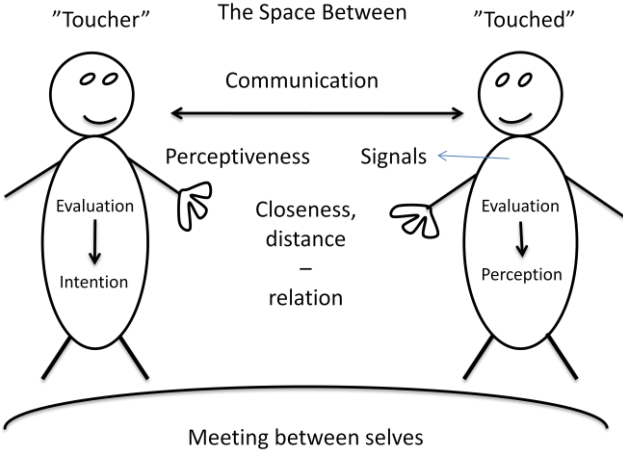
When talking about touch Milana, Ania and Simon have thoughts about themselves and about others, including the persons' relation to touch, which is pertinent to how touch is evaluated by the person, including whether it is natural or not to touch and being touched. In

touching there is intention from one self to a perceiving ‘other’ and it takes experience and courage from the self who touches, as to whether to touch or not, and what kind of touch is being employed, linked to being perceptive to others. The question of whether to touch or not brings forth insecurities in the self in relation to all of those above, and the described aspects and potential effects of touch are very much linked to how touch can create a connection and closeness or intimacy between selves, and how distance can be expressed through the body.

Insecurity in relation to touch is what Ania calls not being in tune with your-‘self’ and Milana talks about getting to know one-‘self’ through experience. When Simon talks about the body as having a history and a story to tell, and how one can get to know one’s own body, I find it natural to relate the body to the self that resides inside it.

In this encounter with another person, through touch, the three informants seem to emphasise some needed qualities: Simon finds that touch is about listening, also to the body, Milana finds acceptance to be important in the meeting with others that are different from herself, and Ania emphasises the necessity of feeling compassion and caring towards the other person, which to her is closely linked mental touch, i.e. closeness or intimacy.

To illustrate and summarise the description of what is happening between the toucher and the touched in the space between them – the meeting between selves – I have made this figure:



**Figure 1: Touch as a meeting between selves in space**

## 5. Discussion

The starting point of this thesis is physical touch, and since the sense of touch usually means to feel something with ones fingers or hand (Montagu, 1986) there can be no physical touch without a body, and hence, the physical body is at the centre of the act of touching. The interesting thing, however, is that most of what emerges from the data, and as summarised in the core theme from the findings, is connected to non-physical effects or elements connected to the act of touching, e.g. intentions behind touch, perception of touch, and what happens in the space that one steps into when about to touch someone. Hence, touch becomes more of an approach toward “the meeting between selves in space” – and this meeting, with what happens there and what it needs to be a good one, becomes the core theme in the discussion.

The material consists of many seemingly separate elements simultaneously intertwined, and hence there will be some repetitions throughout the discussion. In the first section I explicate body and space as a framework for touch and self, including the closeness and distance connected to the act of touch, to show how touch is more than a physical act. To clarify these elements and their interrelatedness I have made little models for the main parts of touch, brought together in a larger model in the section summary. In the second section I discuss the main theme following from the non-physical properties of touch: touch as a meeting between selves, and the qualities needed for that meeting to be a good one. Accordingly I have expanded the aforementioned larger model in the summary of this section. In the third section I discuss how touch can possibly change us. Finally, I discuss Focusing as an interview technique and its influence on my research process, and present an outlook on it in terms of using it as a qualitative research technique.

In the discussion I mainly use the theories from the theoretical framework above, and I am adding some new theories where I find it necessary. Since Milana, Simon and Ania seem to be focused on the positive sides of touch; the main emphasis in the discussion will be on its positive properties, though I am aware that there are negative ones as well.

### 5.1. Body and space – framing touch and self

*“(…) we become the space we are in” (van Manen, 1997)*

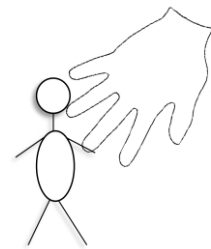
We usually think of space in terms of mathematics or geometry (van Manen, 1997) or as buildings, rooms or office spaces. In this work the term “space” has its starting point in the **sense** that we have of the physical space in which we find ourselves; *lived*, or *felt* space. This space is mainly pre-verbal and therefore much harder to verbalise than geometrical space, though even if we usually don’t really reflect upon it, it does affect how we feel. We can observe lived space through looking at the kind of space that “*people need around themselves*

*to feel comfortable or intimate” (103), or the distance we need to set another person at to feel comfortable, such as the protective bubble that personal space (Hall, 1966/1990) is to us, and whether we let someone close enough to reach past the intimate zone. (In the following I will also be using the word zone when referring to Hall.)*

In Gestalt Therapy (Hostrup, 1999) the human being is seen to always be a part of a space or field by which we are influenced and that we influence. This is much like how Buber (1947/2002; 1965/1998) sees the space between us as a **characteristic** of being human that is also a necessity; there is a space between us in which something happens. Josselson (1996) sees this “space between us” as painfully *separating* us; a void that needs to be overcome and filled with different ways of relating.

### **5.1.1. The body is more than a physiological machine**

Even though touch starts with the physical body; a hand touching another hand or a body (Figure 2), or a child being physically nurtured or fed by the mother (Montagu, 1986), it seems clear from what the informants say that touching carries significance beyond its purely physical effects on the body. The physical effects from the findings are e.g. massage for alleviation of muscle tension (Ania), touch for pain relief (Milana), or using hands to manipulate and heal physical health



**Figure 2: Physical touch**

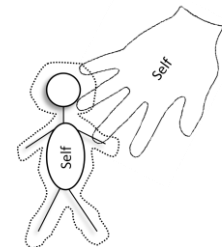
(Simon). On the non-physical side, Simon uses the body as a source of information both about himself and the other, both Milana and Simon pick up information through handshake, and Ania uses her hands to convey a message of caring. Hence there is a close connection between the physical and the psychological (Gendlin, 1992; 1993; Josselson, 1996).

The body has many functions relating it to space, including unifying space (Shusterman, 2008), and according to Merleau-Ponty (1945) the mere fact that we *have* a body places us *in* space. It is the body that moves us through space at the same time as it can be seen *as physical* space, protected by the physical boundary of the skin (Montagu, 1986). It is through being an object on which we focus when trying to experience another person (Shusterman, 2008), and through connecting the person with the environment that the body also unifies space. It connects the space of the person with the space of the environment and creates “*a sense of common space*” for our minds to concentrate on when we meet each other.

This all puts the body at the centre of touching and of being in contact with the world (Montagu & Matson, 1979; Montagu, 1986), which together with the notions that the body frames our reality (Merleau-Ponty, 1945) and that we “have” the world through the body makes the body more than just a physiological machine (Gendlin, 1962; 1992; 1996). Ergo it

is through the body and touch, via the skin and inner and outer sensing, that the child not only gets to know the world and gain information about the world, but she also gets to know herself as a person, separate from the things and persons that she touches (Montagu & Matson, 1979; Bentzent, Jarlneas, & Levine, 2004; Levine, 2010).

Because the first reality is that of the body (Krueger, 2002) relational experiences, through sensory and motor contact given by caregivers to a child, leads to the forming of *the body self*. It is such experiences of sustained contact that form initial experiences of unity of body and mind. Within this container of the body self, the psychological self, or the sense that “*we reside inside our bodies*” (p. 7) (see figure 3), evolves as a means of communicating internal experiences.



**Figure 3: Selves inside the body**

If the body contains the self, frames our reality (Montagu & Matson, 1979), keeps us in touch with the world, and is how we “have” the world (Merleau-Ponty, 1945) this confirms Simon’s use of the body as a source of information: we can get to know ourselves and others through the body. It might also be connected with what Milana’s sensing of whether someone wants or likes to be touched or not – we come into contact with or get a glimpse of the inner self through touching, or being about to touch, another. Sensing and picking up information might also be connected to the bodily ‘felt sense’ (Gendlin, 1981; 1993) (see below).

#### **5.1.1.1. A Focusing perspective on body and self**

*“When one has a felt sense, one becomes more deeply oneself” (Gendlin, 1996, p. 21)*

In Focusing (Gendlin, 1962; 1992; 1993; 1996), because the body is not an object (Merleau-Ponty 1945) but an ongoing process that always interacts with its environment, the body also *is* information. This connects Focusing (Gendlin, 1962; 1992; 1993; 1996) to Shusterman’s (2008) notion that the body connects the inner self with the surroundings i.e. it connects physical with mental events.

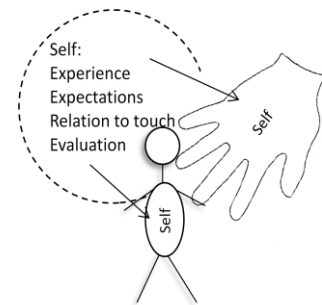
Through giving space to the felt sense and discovering that it is a self-enclosed whole (Gendlin, 1996), the person becomes bigger. This is opposed to giving in to emotions that sweep the person along and leaves the self temporarily diminished. Felt sensing frees the self in a particular way, allowing for the discovery that the self *is* not the content that one comes into contact with. “*The self is not any specific content*” (p. 35), it *has* the felt sense or content and is that which senses or feels, and this discovery that the self is what *has* the feelings, emotions, images, and felt senses, leads to no longer being identified with what one feels. Within such a framework there is a deep connection between body and self, and felt sensing can bring one closer to oneself and allow for growth and for becoming oneself more deeply.

Because the body is information about the space of the situation, such felt sensing can also potentially allow for access to information about another.

### 5.1.2. Touch is more than a physical act

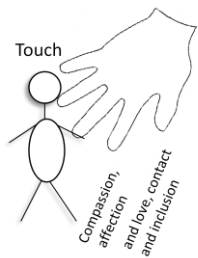
*“In the giving and receiving of touch, the distinctions between donor and recipient are blurred. Kinaesthetic sensations in touching are always mutual” (Josselson, 1996, p. 74).*

Through looking at symbolic meanings of the body, we get a sense of how physical touch, which is done *with* the physical and symbolic body, can also be more than physical. This also emerges from the data. There are two people with selves involved in touching, and the expectations, evaluations, intentions and perceptions about touch in general, combined with thoughts about the setting and the other person, makes touching a complex act where both parties involved influence the experience



**Figure 4: Expectations etc.**

between them (figure 4).



**Figure 5: Touch as non-physical**

Some of the non-physical properties of touch mentioned by the informants are closeness, contact, inclusion, and showing affection (Figure 5). Ania emphasises the importance of “mental touch” which entails intending to be close, and of feeling compassion for the other person. Simon expresses the importance of touch as a way of showing affection and love when he talks about how he missed touch in his childhood; and Milana experiences that touch can create a warm and welcoming atmosphere between people and lead to a feeling of inclusion.

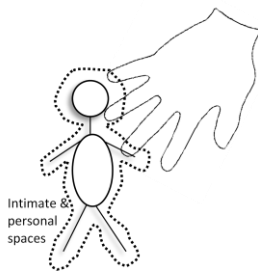
In addition to being a way of expressing affection and love in childhood, touch and tactile stimulation is also how the child communicates with the surroundings and how it discovers that it is a self separate from the world (Montagu, 1986). There are different kinds and meanings of touch also for adults (Fagan, 1998; Macnaughton, Bentzen, & Jarlneas, 2004); all of which have symbolic meanings that can be interpreted by both the toucher and the touched. As Milana and Simon has pointed out, we can learn something about another person through handshake; massaging, or nurturing touch (Fagan, 1998), and since the body or the hand is being touched at the same time as it touches (Merleau-Ponty, 1945), the other person can also learn something about us when we touch them.

Symbolic meanings of touch are also connected to how the word itself can be used to describe emotions and feelings (Fagan, 1998; Syme, 2003), e.g. how being “touchy” means to be overly sensitive (Montagu, 1986). We also see it in how the act of touch can be described

as being sensitive to someone’s feelings, and how to deeply experience another is aligned with being “touched” by that person (Josselson, 1996). Because of its symbolic meanings, physical touch can be a very personal act, and an emotionally powerful “language” (Syme, 2003) that may lead to vulnerability, closeness and intimacy, which I will come back to later.

### 5.1.3. Body and touch, space and signals

According to Hall (1966/1990), a property of intimate space is that this is where most touching happens (figure 6), and even though the personal space can be seen as a protective bubble around the person, this is also a zone in which one is close enough to reach out and touch the other. When I see this connected with distance and closeness (Buber, 1965/1998), avoidance and approach (Hostrup, 1999) it does seem evident that touch and space work



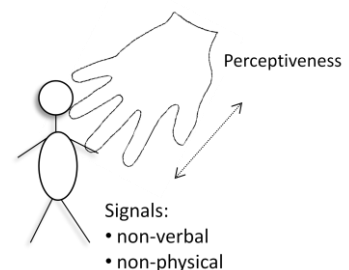
**Figure 6: How touch enters the personal and intimate zones**

together (Burgoon & Bauce, 2003). This can also be seen in the frequent use of intimate space between friends and intimate partners when communicating love and liking (Burgoon & Bauce, 2003; Dindia & Timmerman, 2003). Paired with how in the moment we are about to touch someone we are entering into their personal and

intimate spaces (see 6), the act of touch, as reaching through space, can be said to be of intimate (Syme, 2003) and personal character.

When Simon contemplates the cultural characteristics of Norwegians and Milana emphasises ‘sensing’ to see whether or not to touch the other person, I find that they are implicitly talking about the vulnerability, intimacy and caution connected to what we can learn when entering the intimate or personal spaces (Hall, 1966/1990) of another. The same goes for Ania’s emphasis on the importance of touch being natural to the toucher.

It is claimed that our experiences are “of” the body (Levine, 2010), that the skin is the exposed part of our nervous system (Montagu & Matson, 1979), and that touch is a process of gathering information about the world (Hunter & Struve, 1998) and communicating with the world (Montagu, 1986; Josselson, 1996). If this is so, then it is through our body and our senses, including the sense of touch, that we can pick up the signals sent from the other person (figure 7). Signals, e.g. as body



**Figure 7: Signals and perceptiveness**

placements and body language (Buber, 1970/1996; Fagan, 1998; Dindia & Timmerman, 2003; Wilson & Sabee, 2003; Marcher & Fich, 2010), can be showing dominance, power and status, or intensifying verbal messages



through gaze and standing close, as well as the signalling of feelings (Hostrup, 1999). Also, our evaluation of the other person is important in the determination of whether we like being touched by them or not. This includes perception of the other as attractive and friendly (Burgoon & Bauce, 2003; Dindia & Timmerman, 2003), and what message the touching communicates. As Milana mentions, this can be signalled through e.g. distance.

Both Milana and Simon talk about how we can pick up things about the other person through e.g. handshakes, such as insecurity, distancing et cetera Simon also picks up physical signals and non-physical signals about the body, through what he calls energy, in his job. If the body does provide a common meeting place for our minds (2008) through expressing our intentions, beliefs, desires and feelings, this may mean that these are accessible to us through watching the body and other people's actions.

The toucher needs to be perceptive (Hostrup, 1999) to pick up on these signals. Milana advocates for experience in sensitivity towards the other person and paying attention to the body language to gauge whether the other person finds it ok or not for her to touch them or give them a hug. Simon uses the body being a source of information and finds it important to listen to the body (through touch), so that he is able to work on its terms. Being perceptive takes experience, according to my informants, and can be described as "*being in tune with oneself*" (Ania), and "*coming down*" as in not being in the head (Simon). Milana's "sensing" is an example of how "intrusion" (Montagu, 1986) is the best way of finding out where another's boundaries (Hall, 1966/1990) through picking up on the signals from the body, such as stress, avoidance or flight (Montagu, 1986), and such sensing is a way of gaining experience. *Being in tune* with oneself, *coming down*, and *sensing* may be seen related to being in touch with one's body, and maybe with felt sense (Gendlin, 1992; 1993), and places the body as a source of information and knowledge at the core of touching.

#### **5.1.4. Closeness and distance – the self is relational in the space between us**

*"We know and realize ourselves only in, through, and with others" (p. 19).*

The non-physical properties of touch become evident in the informants' descriptions of it as closeness, intimacy and so on. One example is when Ania and Milana talk about touch as something that most people like and some don't, and say that one should have good intentions when touching someone. Milana also speaks of how people can signal distance, and Simon brings up how the lack of touch can lead to a feeling of not being loved. All three have expressed in different ways the importance of knowing one's self, being in tune with one's self, knowing the body and how the body can be a source of information about the self that resides within it.

Gestalt Therapy (Hostrup, 1999) connects space with being related to the world via the mutual relationship of contact. This process of contact consists of a movement of approaching, being together (contact), and withdrawing. For contact to happen there needs to be two separate persons; a sender and a receiver (e.g. toucher and touched), and Buber (1965/1998) sees the space between us as constituted by the contrast between what he calls two movements of man: “*setting at a distance*” and the “*entering into a relation*” (p. 50). The act of distancing is also “*the will to relation*” (p. 54) and the only way relation can be accomplished is by the fundamental act of setting at a distance. Therefore closeness and distance are reciprocal, recursive (Josselson, 1996) and interpenetrating processes: we need to separate from something or somebody to realise that this ‘other’ is different from us before we can then create a relation to them (Buber, 1965/1998). There is no I without a You or an It, and being in relation is what makes us human (Buber, 1970/1996). Because the self is relational and realised through others (Josselson, 1996), it is through the interaction with others that we become who we are and can become who we want to be.

Connection and separation are also what makes boundaries palpable: through separation from others the self is firmed, and the distinction between self and others becomes clearer. “*The clearer we are about who we ourselves are, the more we are able to risk ourselves with another*” (p. 19). Hence, the intimate and personal zones, or boundaries (Hall, 1966/1990) are conditions for greater responsiveness in relationships (Josselson, 1996), and high certainty about our own boundaries makes us freer to experience interconnection and affect with others. In turn the self gets remoulded in relationships in the sense that we become more responsive and available to others, and because in interpersonal experience we are nudged to revise the inner model of ourselves we get to know ourselves better through contact and relationship. In Allgood and Kvalsund’s words: “*(...) as we act with others, we come to know ourselves; but in those actions, we meet the ‘other’ and are changed*” (2003, s. 74). In Focusing, it is the contact with the body (Gendlin, 1962; 1993) that is the medium for such change.

### 5.1.5. Summary

Via physical touch as a symbolic act, with the affection, compassion and contact it can create, we come across the symbolic body and its importance as a source of information and knowledge about ourselves and others (see figure 8). Within this body we find the person or the self. We also come across

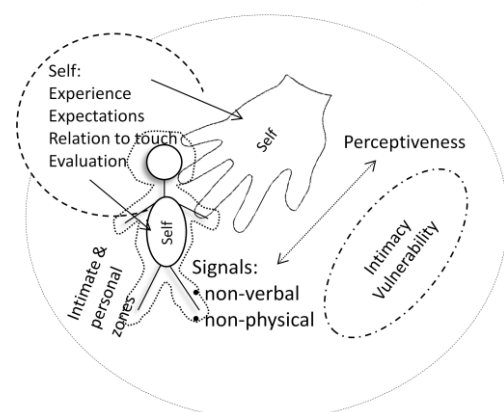


Figure 8: Touch and its elements

the notion of space here because the physical body also serves as a physical space with zones around it that “protect” us. The body and its zones also keeps us in touch with each other through allowing for closeness and relation, because a space occurs when we come physically close to each other, and because the body moves us through felt or lived space. Through closeness and distance, the space between us is relational, and the body may signal different things to others within that space. If perceptive, and through felt sensing into the body, this lets us know something about each other and about ourselves; the selves that reside within the body, and both parties may change in this meeting. Because the acts in the situation are telling something about the acting person or self touch can be very personal and intimate.

## **5.2. Courage to be close - Touch is a meeting between selves**

*“Distance provides the human situation; relation provides man’s becoming in that situation” (Buber, 1965/1998, p. 54).*

Following from the discussion so far, touch and body cannot be separated from relation because of its non-physical properties described by Simon, Ania and Milana as well as by the theory. Hence touch seems to potentially yield a meeting between two people, which in the findings I have chosen to place under the theme “Touch as a meeting between selves”. This meeting can happen whether touch is linked to sports and entertainment (Fagan, 1998), to impress others with ones skills, to communicate punishment, liking, or love (Josselson, 1996; Burgoon & Bauce, 2003; Dindia & Timmerman, 2003), to convey sexual feelings (Marcher & Fich, 2010); or in communicating feelings of hostility through non-touch (Syme, 2003).

The fact that something is happening in the space between people is what makes us human (Buber, 1947/2002), and the realm of between is where two different people or selves can meet through distance and relation. In this thesis the ‘contact’ or relation in question is the physical touch, which is done with the physical body within this space with all that it entails.

So far it seems that there are different kinds of meetings happening in the space between us: meeting between bodies and signals, between selves that reside inside the bodies, between zones or boundaries, between expectations connected to evaluations of touch, intentions behind touch and perceptions of touch, and finally there is potentially a meeting between I and You (Buber, 1947/2002; 1965/1998; 1970/1996). In the following sections I attempt to explicate the meeting that happens between us through discussing the challenges of touch and the prerequisites that Ania, Simon and Milana attempt to provide for a ‘good’ meeting to happen in the space between us.

### 5.2.1. Meeting the challenge of touch is an art

Even though touch seems to be positive and natural to all of my informants, it is not a given that it is so for their clients<sup>4</sup>. Several of the described properties of touch show how touch and meeting in the space between us seem to pose a certain challenge, and how stepping into that space can be seen and experienced as entering a field of tension. On the one hand, touch seems to be important and necessary throughout life. “*You have to touch people!*” Ania says; we need touch to feel connected to and loved by others (Josselson, 1996). On the other hand touch is challenging because it makes us vulnerable (Syme, 2003), because we are entering into the personal and intimate zones (Hall, 1966/1990), and because we need relation and connection and cannot control the person who we need them from (Josselson, 1996).

Milana so aptly puts these challenges into words when she says that touch is an art and Ania when she points out that being close takes courage. Simon’s observation of how difficult it seems to be for Norwegians to touch is another hint about the challenges of touching. Milana’s comment that some people find touch to be too intimate, and Ania’s mention of the unease of being close to a stranger’s naked body is telling about the challenge of entering into the personal and intimate zones (Hall, 1966/1990) connected to the physical body, and how it may feel intrusive when someone enters past the protective bubble of the personal space.

What the informants are referring to are probably the challenges of the non-physical properties to touch, including the intimacy of it (Josselson, 1996; Syme, 2003). There is so much to take into consideration within this space, and so much at stake, both for the toucher and for the touched: the toucher doesn’t know whether the other person will like the touch or not, and whether or not they will feel it as an intrusion (Montagu, 1986), or as nurturing (Fagan, 1998), or as an expression of compassion (Josselson, 1996), love, or liking (Burgoon & Bauce, 2003; Dindia & Timmerman, 2003). The touched also cannot know for sure the intention behind the touch, e.g. whether it is meant to be express dominance or power, or intended to be erotic or sexual (Fagan, 1998; Macnaughton, Bentzen, & Jarlneas, 2004), and subsequently touch may not be perceived as it is intended.

With all these possibilities in mind there is also a potential for being rejected (Josselson, 1996) when touching, so there are several challenges attached to the act of touching, which call for a need for courage according to Ania. Courage is something that Rogers (1961/2004) says is important in communication, and he sees this connected to core conditions for personal growth and change in the humanistic tradition. He says that to listen and understand *with*

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<sup>4</sup> In the discussion I have chosen to use the word client as opposed to patient, which is natural for the nurse and women, which is natural for the midwife to signify their “touched”.

someone, as opposed to understanding *about* someone, takes courage. This is because there is a risk that the provider of the therapeutic space and core conditions may be too.

One way of meeting the challenges of touch is offered by Simon, Ania and Milana: self-knowledge and experience. They say there is a need for experience, which is connected to being in tune with oneself and knowing oneself and one's body. This is confirmed by what Josselson says about knowing our own boundaries and being clear about who we are to be freer in interconnecting and in expressing affection with others. Experience may also help building up courage to be close and to enter into relation with others and "(...) *run the risk of being changed yourself*" (Rogers, 1961/2004, p. 333) by such relations. In the following section I will discuss the conditions that the informants attempt to be courageous enough to provide to make touch positive for their clients, mainly in light of Roger's core conditions.

### **5.2.2. Providing an empathic space to ensure a good meeting**

Buber (1970/1996) says that separation is merely a spell that needs to be broken, and that it is only in the field of tension between distancing and closeness that unity can arise as an overcoming of this tension; through "*grace*" (Buber, 1965/1998, p. 54). Hence the pain of being separated that Josselson (1996) describes, the pain of the space that is between us, seems to actually be a necessity for us to be **able** to connect with the other, and maybe when we try to "fill" the "void", we see each other as "Its" rather than "Yous", i.e. we see only the **content** of the self (Gendlin, 1996) rather than the self as a whole.

Whether Simon, Ania or Milana experience I-You or I-It meetings in their jobs, through touch, is not clear from the interviews. It does, however, seem quite clear that there is *some* kind of meeting happening, and if those are I-It meetings, then many of their clients will potentially feel confirmed (Buber, 1970/1996). What also emerges from the interviews, starting in the Focusing part, is that there are some prerequisites or conditions that the informants attempt to provide for the meeting with their clients to be a good one. Because those words came up as the 'essence' (see Focusing instructions in appendix C) of their felt senses of touch I am handling them as being at the core of the informant's experiences of touch. In the following I discuss these linked to the "core conditions" that Rogers and the humanistic movement in counselling and psychotherapy (Rogers, 1961/2004; Mearns & Thorne, 2007) emphasise for personal growth, development and change: unconditional positive regard, empathic understanding and genuineness (Rogers, 1961/2004).

Ania's notion of feeling compassion or caring towards all kinds of people can be linked to the caring, empathy and acceptance that Rogers (1980; 1961/2004) calls 'unconditional positive regard'. Milana also uses the word acceptance, and Rogers' (1980) describes this as

“a warm regard for [the client] as a person of unconditional self-worth” (p. 34), a caring without possessiveness, in which the other person’s behaviour, feelings or conditions don’t really matter. Ania also talks about empathy related to caring, as a way for health workers to create a space of trust for their patients. Rogers holds that through providing such an empathic, caring, and acceptant, climate whatever the client may be or feel, the therapist creates a space of warmth and safety in which the client can become more caring and prizing toward themselves. Such acceptance of otherness is also something that Buber (1965/1998) stresses as a prerequisite for the I-You meeting, and hence, if this is provided, there is a potential for such a meeting happening for these three health workers with their clients.

Milana’s image of warm hands, connected to her husband, I see as warmth and caring. Mearns and Thorne (2007) claim that “*Touching is a natural and literal reaching out of one human being to another*” (p. 109) and explain how touch can be used to show warmth towards another, which both they and Rogers (1980) link to unconditional positive regard.

Listening, and listening on the other persons’ (or on the body’s) terms, which Simon stresses, is something that Rogers (1980) considers to be a very effective way of providing a space in which the other person can feel truly safe. Listening is also closely related to ‘empathic understanding’, and when: “*Being listened to by someone who understands makes it possible for persons to listen more accurately to themselves, with greater empathy*” (p. 159). Rogers says that this kind of understanding is one of the most potent forces for change that he knows. Change of unfavourable patterns in the physical body is precisely a goal of osteopathy, and thus it seems quite apt that understanding and empathic listening can be used as a tool to achieve just that in Simon’s work.

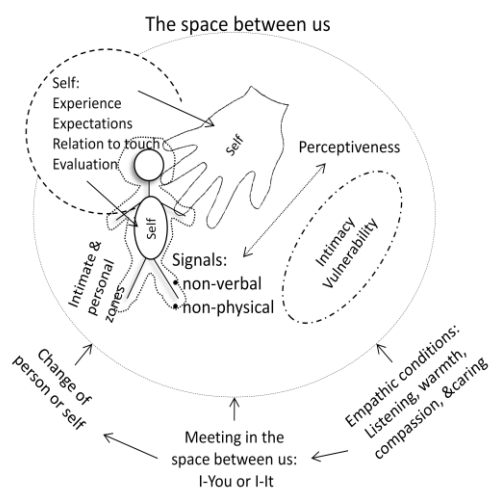
According to Rogers, the therapist’s listening should go both ways, i.e. listening to oneself is also important in the therapeutic meeting. This helps the therapist becoming ‘genuine’ in the meeting with the client. I see this linked to what Ania calls being in tune with yourself, and to what Simon calls listening to the body to get to know both the body and oneself. Whether Simon, Ania and Milana explicitly and consciously use genuineness as a tool in their work I do not know, yet if paired with the intentions behind touch in the findings, and with Rogers’ core conditions, it can be seen as a part of the climate that a health worker should create for the client. Rogers also sees the core conditions as a way of promoting communication between human beings in general, and it seems that the empathic space that Ania talks about creating can be developed through these conditions. I will be referring to this as the empathic space, the empathic qualities, or the conditions of empathy, in the following.

To summarise, the conditions for personal growth and change that I have discussed here are firstly ‘unconditional positive regard’, exemplified by the informants as empathy, caring, compassion, warmth and acceptance. Secondly there is ‘listening empathically’, which is something that mainly Simon stresses. Thirdly there is ‘genuineness’ achieved by listening to oneself. I have linked this to Simon’s listening, Milana’s ‘experience’ and Ania’s ‘being in tune with oneself’. All of those are conditions that help facilitate change in humanistic counselling, and are conditions that the informants stress as important to provide as part of a positive touching experience for their clients. If these can be seen as acknowledgment of the space that separates us (Josselson, 1996) and a form of communication, they can be used to overcome the spell of separation (Buber, 1970/1996), or tension of distancing if leading to the ‘grace’ that Buber (1965/1998) finds so important. Hence there can at least be an I-It meeting, which also carries the potential for an I-You meeting between the informants and their clients.

### 5.2.3. Summary

*“We are always already within interactions” (Gendlin, 1997, p. 405),*

All the elements that touch brings about are closely interrelated (see figure 9): We cannot talk about touch without talking about the physical body, and the conditions of empathy the use of touch works together with use of space (Burgoon & Bauce, 2003). Touch also happens within the intimate and personal zones (Hall, 1966/1990), and within a space between us where selves meet; a meeting seemingly conditioned by closeness and distance (Buber, 1970/1996). The body is related to space through contact and withdrawal (Hostrup, 1999), the act of touch, and the signals given from the body are connected to the self inside it (Krueger, 2002). Hence the self is connected to space via contact and withdrawal (Hostrup, 1999) too.



**Figure 9: Touch in the space between us**

show how there is a possibility of a meeting between the selves, which may be better, and potentially an I-You meeting, if the necessary empathic conditions are provided. Via the space between us, and in being a way for human

beings to connect and meet in the space between us, touch can influence and even change the self, which I will now attempt to explicate.

### **5.3. Touch can change us**

*“Individuals are made for relationship and any individually chosen values that negate or undermine personal relationship are out of touch with the inner reality of the self and with objective reality as such” (Macmurray, 1961/1991, p. xviii)*

Ania, Milana and Simon all stress the importance of touch in different ways through saying that touch is needed to make everyday life go around, that it is good and important to touch others, and that touch brings closeness. Simon’s observation of Norwegian culture lacking touch is an example of the “race of untouchables” (Montagu & Matson, 1979) and how lack of touch becomes a circular problem (Mearns & Thorne, 2007) because touch becomes distrusted and feared when there’s little of it, and the use of it lessens further. Subsequently the *lack of touch* influences the self in such a way that we become fearful of touch as a form of contact and communication, and become isolated. Such isolation can be quite problematic because human beings need tactile contact (Buber, 1970/1996) as a way of reaching through the separation between us (Josselson, 1996; Mearns & Thorne, 2007).

Touch is a mutual act, because when we touch someone we are simultaneously touched by the other (Merleau-Ponty, 1945); we enter into relation with the other (Josselson, 1996) and open up to someone who is also open to us, in an attempt to achieve the union that we yearn for. As we reach out, we cross the personal and intimate zones and the boundaries, and those are necessary for us in the form of distancing (Buber, 1965/1998), in order to realise who we are so that we can reach out and touch a distinct other.

Buber (1965/1998) holds that the twofold attitude of closeness and distance is a human characteristic, and both adults and children have boundaries (Hall, 1966/1990). Thus it is not just the child that discovers herself through touch and connection (Montagu & Matson, 1979; Montagu, 1986), it is a lifelong process, according to Josselson (1996), and so the discovery of self seems to be reoccurring and important to human beings throughout the life span.

Because the body (Merleau-Ponty, 1945; Gendlin, 1962; 1992; 1996) is always a process in interaction with its surroundings it inherently inhabits the possibility of change through acceptance and the presence of felt sensing. For that reason, the self that resides within the body (Krueger, 2002) can be seen as ‘changeable’ in the sense of actualising itself (Rogers, 1961/2004; 1980). At the same time it can be seen as a ‘constant’ both as that which ‘has’ the experiences or the content (Gendlin, 1996), and as long as the content, not being empathically met, stands in the way of the person becoming more deeply him or herself.



Through the language of touch (Syme, 2003) we can learn something about the self that resides within the body if we are perceptive. If this meeting between selves also leads to a firming of boundaries (Josselson, 1996) then the information in the signals from the body may lead us to change our understanding of the other as well as about ourselves.

I see ‘the space between us’ as a *field of tension formed* by several elements: the crossing of boundaries, the yearning for union and the potential for being rejected instead together with the perceptiveness needed to pick up the signals from another, the potential for discovering ourselves etc. If we assume that we become the space that we are in (van Manen, 1997) and if this space *is* a relational meeting in which the self inside the physically touched body is being moulded and formed (Josselson, 1996), then stepping into the space between us e.g. through touch does not only influence, but also potentially changes the self of both parties involved.

Because of this potential mutual change, and because to touch also means to be touched, my hypothesis that touch leads to a meeting with oneself may be seen as connected to the relation, connection and contact that touch may potentially yield. Furthermore, if one is being met by the other and confirmed as an It, or confronted as a You through the empathic conditions, then touch not only influences the touched, but also the toucher. Human connection makes us human (Josselson, 1996); and if touch can lead to connection or relationship, and relationship is how we as human beings evolve, grow and develop, then touch as a type of human connection may also potentially lead to growth and to developing our humanness. The courage to really enter into relation, to care for and accept another, and to dare to be intimate and close, has the potential for changing us, and thus, to touch is to enter into relation, and relation is to risk being changed (Rogers, 1961/2004).

### **5.3.1. The influence of the empathic conditions on change**

The providing of the empathic conditions mentioned by Simon, Ania and Milana, including the person as a whole as opposed to content (Gendlin, 1996) may be seen as the “grace” that Buber (1965/1998) holds to be the way of overcoming the tension between distance and relation to provide the good meeting and potentially meeting the other as a You rather than an It. This “grace”, the meeting between selves, which helps the other person to become more caring toward him or herself (Rogers, 1961/2004), adds another dimension to and increases the possibility of change in the self.

Even though Simon, Ania and Milana don’t explicitly talk about personal change or growth, they do see the empathic space as important for establishing and maintaining contact with another. Furthermore, if touch is a way of conveying warmth, compassion, caring, acceptance and listening (Mearns & Thorne, 2007), and if the toucher is genuine through self-

knowledge and inner listening (Rogers, 1961/2004), then it seems that touch can lead to the touched feeling confirmed and safe to express him or herself for, and increase the chance of an I-You meeting. Focusing also adds to the empathic space in the sense that it lends its attention to the space or zone between the familiar and the unfamiliar (Todres, 2007), e.g. the I and the You, or between awareness and unconscious (Gendlin, 1996). Because Focusing sees change as an always latent element and possibility of the self inside the body, the probability of change in the self in the sense of expanding it is always there. Since change happens in the zone between two different elements the meeting between two selves can be seen as potentially changing the self as such. If the empathic conditions, seen as conditions for personal growth in a therapeutic relationship, are there in the everyday act of touch, then physical touch and being touched by another may potentially lead to personal growth even in non-therapeutic meetings and non-helping relationships.

#### **5.4. Focusing – an interview technique and a way of being**

Focusing runs like a red thread throughout this thesis: it is closely interlinked with the phenomenological starting point through Merleau-Ponty (1945; Gendlin, 1992; van Manen, 1997) and the aim of understanding physical touch as a phenomenon closely connected with the body. Because of its understanding that the body is a process with its environment at its core and that subsequently information can be accessed through paying attention to the body, Focusing was used as an attempt to collect empirical data on how touch is “felt” by the informant. The Focusing focus is also closely connected to the theoretical background for the thesis through keeping the body at the centre and as a source of information on non-physical events rather than physical ones. In addition, Focusing has been an aid to me in the process.

As far as I know, no one has used Focusing as a data collection method before, and hence I don't have much to compare with. Even so, I will attempt to describe some of my experience with using Focusing as a data collection method, and what I would do differently next time.

##### **5.4.1. Using Focusing as data collection method**

Focusing has the potential of providing a meeting between two people and a meeting with one's self (Gendlin, 1996) in that the listening is about giving space to whatever is right now (Gendlin, 1981). Throughout this work I have tried to keep a Focusing attitude toward the findings and the theory, and toward the informants, myself, and my process.

At the time I did the interviews Focusing was fairly new to me, and because of the powerful way in which Focusing seems to yield understanding and new insights for me personally, I thought that leading my informants through a Focusing-session would yield enough data for me to work with. Therefore I put most of my faith in the Focusing-session

and didn't prepare as much for the interview conversation afterwards. What I have now learned is that the more 'tacit' or 'subtle' kind of information or awareness that is gained through Focusing may be a harder to grasp than the explicit information that comes from a conversation. This proved to be a challenge for me as a researcher in the process of analysing, as described in the method chapter.

On the other hand the Focusing part of the interviews turned out to yield some powerful "handles" (Gendlin, 1981) for me to work with (compassion, caring, listening, warmth and acceptance) which it seemed as if Milana, Simon and Ania were "tasting", "touching" and "tapping" (Gendlin, 1993) the meaning of in the conversation afterwards. This proved to become such a valuable and interesting part of the data that I would certainly like to use Focusing again in later research.

#### **5.4.2. Reflecting on the role of Focusing for my process**

Following the phenomenological thought that the body is a process with its environment (Merleau-Ponty, 1945; Gendlin, 1962) any learning that entails experience also entails body, mind, emotions, etc. Focusing provides a space in which all those processes can become integrated, and one can learn more than what is rationally available through 'purely studying' theories, for instance. This, in my fresh experience, also entails a challenge in the sense that there is more to keep track of, and maybe more 'pain' to come across: I discovered that my own emotions, fears, and old thought patterns were standing in the way of my forward movement at several points during the research process. An example is my utter surprise and frustration when I realised that Focusing didn't yield the kind of data I expected it to.

At the same time, the ability of Focusing also gave me the opportunity to hold the important handles that came from my informants (on a practical level I put them on a piece of paper that was on my wall at home, and I saw them and felt them every day over a period of time) in such a way that one day I realised their importance, which I merely sensed at first. The levels of disappointment and fear of failure that were standing in my way could have probably given me more insight if I had dared take them in fully through Focusing as well (Gendlin, 1996). Since it isn't easy to provide such space for oneself when under pressure (Gendlin, 1981), looking back, a good way for me of doing that would be in regular Focusing sessions with an experienced listener to provide the space I needed.

On the other hand, one never knows what will happen with Focusing, one is not 'in control' in the same sense one can imagine being when solely working with one's mind; there is always the element of surprise (or felt shift) (Gendlin, 1981; 1996), which to me makes Focusing both exciting and scary to make use of in any process. Because one meets one's own

self in Focusing in the sense that one discovers that one is not one's content and that the self becomes bigger and more spacious (Gendlin, 1996), then by giving space we become more spacious – we can contain more of our thoughts and emotions without being swept along to becoming smaller than we are. So maybe by using Focusing in this work I have become a little more spacious, and have more to offer to myself in future research.

All in all, Focusing has been important for me on this research journey, both in my attempts at being a researcher, as a data collection method and as a learning tool for me personally on this journey toward my own self, which this study has brought me on to.

### **5.4.3. Outlook on Focusing in research**

In hindsight several different ways of implementing Focusing in the qualitative research interview spring to mind, of which I will mention a few. One is that it would probably be interesting to hear what the informant thought about the topic first then do a Focusing session second, and then third, ask what they thought of the topic after the Focusing. This would also give a deeper insight into the process of Focusing and what it can and cannot yield in terms of data collection method. Another possibility would be to just do a shorter and less extensive Focusing session and relaxation part, and talk about the topic afterwards. This might keep the interview focused as happened in this work, and leave more room for reflection afterwards, which would possibly yield more data in terms of transcribed material.

A series of interviews with Focusing and conversation with someone over time could also be interesting to do to get a sense of how our understanding and felt sense of a phenomenon may change throughout life. In an extension this leads me to think that interviewing someone in a Focusing way and comparing to interviewing with the usual qualitative interview could yield understanding of how Focusing changes someone or not. Also, it would be interesting to implement a longer experiment with Focusing in a helping organisation and see if awareness of touch through felt sensing and “growing a bigger self” would have any impact on both the health workers, the patients and the organisation in general and when it comes to touch, given that it would increase their awareness of touch and its implications, positive and negative.

Within a paradigm that seeks to mend the split between body and mind (Tune, 2001; Todres, 2007), Focusing can be a valuable addition to qualitative research, both for the researcher in his or her process of learning and discovery, and as a way of getting hold of more embodied knowledge from informants in addition or instead of the knowledge that only the mind has access to. This will also entail an even greater risk in influencing the informants in the study (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009), and hence needs to be discussed on an ethical level.



## **6. Touch is everything – Concluding comments and outlook**

The aim of this study was to see if touch can be said to influence the self, and if it can be said that through touching another, you meet yourself. Throughout the study, physical touch has almost become secondary; its function isn't its physical properties such as pain-relief and so on, it is rather the non-physical messages that it conveys and the potential relation, closeness, and meeting it may provide that is important; and all of this happens in the space between us. Because the three health workers I interviewed are in helping relationships, their work can be compared to the work of a counsellor.

In some ways, because touch in this thesis has brought up the space between us, in which we meet others all the time, and because touch seems to have many non-physical properties connected to relation, meeting and contact, one could say that we 'touch' each other even without physically touching as soon as we attempt to be close. In that sense touch seems to influence us through space. On another note, people who are already connected, and who stand in relation to one another seem to make use of touch more than people who are not close, so we might say that there is an unbreakable link between closeness and touch: no physical touch without some kind of closeness and less closeness when there is no touch.

Touch can be said to influence the selves of both the toucher and the touched through the meeting between selves in space: through the closeness of touch we realise who we are, we run the risk of being rejected, and also the risk of entering into a relation that may change and remould us. Through this intimate meeting we get to know our own boundaries and are confirmed as different from the other, which can make us more aware of who we are. Simultaneously, we are influenced by the other person in the meeting that happens through the act of touching. This meeting can be ensured to be a good one if the empathic space of listening, acceptance, warmth and caring is provided. Focusing brings yet another dimension to this empathic space through also providing and holding a space for the distinctly different I and You. Within this space both can explore the felt senses of the body; and subsequently it adds to what the mind can offer about how we enter a meeting with another person.

### **6.1. Concluding comments**

Something happens between human beings, something subtle and underlying, which is hard to put into words (van Manen, 1997). This "something" can be framed by Buber's (1947/2002) expression "the realm of between" or Josselson's (1996) "the space between us". Space has come up in different shapes in this study: space as in distance or feeling out of touch as opposed to closeness, space as in entering into someone's personal and intimate

spaces or zones (Hall, 1966/1990), space as a field of tension because of its subtle non-physical properties and possibility of vulnerability and change, or space as in a field of connection (Hostrup, 1999) that happens between two meeting bodies/selves; i.e. lived or felt space (van Manen, 1997). Entering into this space between us is challenging because it can be filled by negative or positive experiences, and because it may lead to change in the self. Hence it takes courage and experience for a health worker to enter into that space via physical touch to ensure a good meeting filled with compassion, listening and caring for the client.

In this attempt of mine to understand whether touch influences the self, touch became a way of approaching this subtle and often wordless meeting in the space between us. To summarise, it starts with 1) physical touch, done with 2) the body, which through being a process with its surroundings is more than a physiological machine and contains the 3) self. The self and the body have 4) boundaries, such as the protective bubble of the personal space, and convey 5) signals that can be perceived if perceptive, and that reflect back toward the self and come from the body. Such perceptiveness can lead to information and learning about both one's own self and the other. All of these elements are found in a field of tension which I call 6) the space between us, where 7) contact and meeting occur between the selves, and which can also be filled with 8) the empathic qualities to make sure that the meeting is good and positive. If positive, this can become an I-You meeting. The field of tension that touch happens within consists of distance and relation between two separate persons, an I and a You, the toucher and the touched, two individuals with different selves, and as in Focusing: between the conscious and the unconscious. It is in this meeting between distinctly different 'elements' that change may happen.

What happens in the space between comes from a need for contact and union, because human contact is what makes us human, and this union is dependent upon the act of separation. In the longing for union there is a risk of rejection and of intimacy and closeness, and in addition we risk change when meeting another, especially if the conditions of empathy are present. This is, as I now see it, the starting point for the therapeutic relation: the need for union, intimacy and human contact, which is maybe even an unconscious need for change. Those needs, or this human characteristic, paired with the empathic conditions, can be used by a counsellor to achieve change because it is in human nature to change through being 'touched' by another and to touch the other. This is something the body and physical touch can teach the counsellor through their non-physical dimensions, and Focusing can add yet another dimension by creating contact between the two seemingly separate elements of the person (both for counsellor and client): mind and body; conscious and unconscious, to

achieve desired change in the client. This approach to the space between us via touch has led me to a discovery that touch is so much more than physical, and maybe touch really is “everything” because it potentially brings about the most important thing to human beings: relation and feeling connected, which in turn potentially leads to change and growth.

## **6.2. Relevance of this study and implications for further study**

It seems that the main ingredient of touch in the space between us is that there is a potential for being touched in such a way that when stepping into that field of tension we change. This makes the mysterious “realm of between” challenging and interesting in that attention to this realm, zone, or field of tension, in a counselling or helping relationship can lead to desired changes in the person, especially if the empathic conditions and the awareness of Focusing are also present. Being touched with the non-physical properties that touch has, or being touched on a deeper level, may also lead to change in everyday life as we have seen. Therefore, a concluding comment may be that providing that touch is positive and that it provides an empathic space, there should be more touch in life in general, and that the discussion about touch in counselling (Tune, 2001; Orbach, 2006) should not yet be abandoned.

According to Montagu and Matson (1979), research on touch related to counselling has shown that when undergraduate women were touched in an early session, they were more likely to engage in verbal self-disclosure, and young children responded more frequently to a counsellor that they had seen to touch, than to counsellors who hadn't been seen to touch. One study also shows that nurses found it easier to communicate with patients whom they had touched than with patients they did not touch. Hence Montagu and Matson conclude that touch and “*tactile closeness facilitates psychological and interpersonal closeness*” (p. 102), and this may imply that there might be positive effects of using touch in a counselling setting.

If we listen to ourselves, and know ourselves and at the same time are aware of the difference between self and content (Gendlin, 1996) both in ourselves and in the other, then we can more readily be genuine and show unconditional positive regard (Rogers, 1961/2004; 1980) toward the other person, in life and in counselling.

Because the body and the mind seem to be so interlinked, the body could be a possible entrance to the mind and psyche and self, and subsequently touching of the body could be used more, with care, both in everyday life and in counselling and psychotherapy in my opinion. There is a need for more positive physical contact as I see it – to convey feelings of caring and so on, and as a way of providing an empathic space for the client to grow in (Levine, 2010).



Maybe if one has courage, experience and self-knowledge and is genuine, one can meet the challenges of touch more easily and provide the necessary empathic space for a good meeting, which in turn will also heighten the possibility of the I-You meeting. According to this study, such courage can be obtained by listening to one's own body and becoming more in tune with oneself. Hence the closeness of touch seems to work in a positive circle when used – the more we use touch, the more courage we will gain to use it more. A counsellor with experience, courage and self-knowledge, as well as awareness of how we influence each other in meeting and relation, can implement touch as a way of “meeting” a client as well as oneself. Adding the empathic conditions, the counsellor can then increase the experience, courage and self-knowledge of both parties. With this ‘conclusion’ this study may also contribute to the understanding of why the interpersonal relationship in therapy seems to be so important for change in the client (Gendlin, 1962).

Since touch has all these possible positive properties, it could, in my opinion, be employed more in helping relationships and counselling by those to whom it is “natural”. Also, used in the right context and in the right way (Syme, 2003), with awareness of expectations and of what it may bring up, such as boundaries in the form of personal and intimate zones, and with perceptiveness and courage to be changed oneself, touch be an addition to the humanistic core therapeutic conditions in enhancing personal growth.

Because of its probable positive influence on the self, touch likely has negative influences as well, and so there will be much material in a person's life, related to touch, that can be addressed in counselling, both through talk-therapy, and through touch-therapies. Through working with touch and meeting while providing the empathic conditions one can also ensure a positive and reassuring experience of touch and relation in general.

When it comes to the notion that e.g. the interview may be therapeutic and influence and change informants (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009), the knowledge of touch and Focusing in this study and how change happens in the meeting between us, can also be a contribution to increased awareness and finding good ways of taking this into account in qualitative research.

### **6.2.1. Implications for further study**

This study has shown the use of touch within the space of health work where physical touch is a natural part of the work done. Counselling is a setting in which touch has other implications, partly because it often happens in one-on-one situations maybe, and because of the different kinds of touch that may be experienced. Even though some of the results of this study may be transferred to the counselling situation, it would be interesting to look more closely at counsellors employing touch, and also the empathic space, in their work.

I have suggested that the person met by the attitude of listening, acceptance, warmth and empathy, paired with the health workers' ability to listen to themselves, being in tune with oneself, and who has the courage to enter into relation with another, can lead to a change in the person. Even though it seemed as if they had some discoveries in the Focusing, this is not something that I know to be true in for the informants after their meeting with me. Therefore it would be interesting to talk to them again to see if they did feel met, and whether they found that the meeting had changed them in any way. It would also be interesting, yet again, to see if the patients, women and clients of these three health workers experience any of this. Talking to patients about their side of touch would also be interesting to learn about whether they do experience it the way it has been described by these health workers.

As a contribution to multi-cultural counselling it would also be interesting go deeper into body, self (Lupton, 1996) and touch seen in a cultural perspective (Hall, 1966/1990).

The tacit dimension of the knowledge that the body possesses would be interesting to look deeper into through using Polanyi (Polanyi, 1966/2009), and I am also curious about the space between us and the Buber's (1947/2002; 1965/1998; 1970/1996) I-You meeting and how that could add to the counsellor's meeting with his or her clients (Hycner & Jacobs, 1995).

Since this study has focused on the positive sides of touch it would be interesting to look at the negative sides of touch – which might possibly bring about the negative sides of the I-it relation as well. Maybe this could also yield interesting information about how to come to more positive ways of using touch in counselling for someone with negative experiences of it.



### **6.3. Afterword**

The work with this thesis has been a personal journey as well as a research journey – I have “met myself in the door”, as we say in Norwegian, many times, and learned not only about touch, the body, the space between us and Focusing on a theoretical level, but also about myself in the process of writing a more extensive piece of work involving my own data collection and analysis. I have also learned several things about touch on a personal and practical level, the focus on touch has made me more aware of how I use and avoid using it, the inherent vulnerability and intimacy that I simultaneously long for and sometimes fear – and the importance of my own and others’ boundaries in the meeting between selves because of the field of tension that the need for closeness and distance brings about.

I have also become increasingly curious about the space between us and the I-You meeting that may happen there, and I am grateful for the opportunity that this work has given me to become more acquainted with Focusing and its possibilities, since Focusing is what I would like to work with in the future. As I am typing the last punctuation mark, I do hope that someday I will get the chance to go even deeper into the matter of all of the topics that I have touched upon here.



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## 7. Appendices

### 7.1. Appendix A – Invitation for the informants

With this letter I would like to invite you to be an informant for my master's project, which is about touch. I would like to create a dialogue with you about the phenomenon of touch. You have been chosen as an informant because you have a job where you touch others, and because I think that you are used to reflecting about what happens to you in life.

I would like to invite you to let me guide you through an exercise which is called "Focusing", which is all about sensing how an experience is found and felt in the body. In this particular guided exercise we will be Focusing on the word or the concept of "touch". Afterwards I would like us to have a dialogue about how you experienced the exercise, and about how you are thinking about touch after having been through the Focusing.

After the interview I would like to invite you to write a 'diary', where you reflect around how it was for you to be in this conversation and situation. In the diary you are welcome to write down things that might have come up after hand; things that you forgot to say, or things you might have experienced a lack of room for, or things that have appeared in your mind after the interview. You can write a long or a short diary, and I would like you to send it to me via email or in the mail, depending on whether you like writing on the computer or by hand. I would like you to send this to me within a week after our meeting.

I want to assure you that the conversation between us is confidential, which means that when I write my thesis, I will anonymise you through using a fictional name. And I will not give away any personal information like where you work or anything of that kind; I will only mention your occupation.

You can also, at any given time and for any given reason, withdraw from the project. This also means during or after the interview, and at any point before the thesis is being published.

I hope that you find this interesting and that you would like to be a part of my project.

All the best

Vera Rabben Teigen

And if you would like to read more about the "focusing technique", you can find it on [www.focusing.org](http://www.focusing.org)

## 7.2. Appendix B – Consent form

I declare that I am willing to be a research participant in the project about touch, where I will be interviewed and guided through a Focusing exercise, and within a week after meeting with the researcher I will be sending a diary with reflections made subsequently.

I am aware that I can withdraw from this project at any time during the research; either during the interview, right after, after I have read the transcriptions, or at any given point in the process, without that having any consequences for me.

I have been informed, and am aware, that the conversation with the researcher is confidential within the framework of counselling, and that all personal information will be anonymised.

---

Name of informant

---

Vera Rabben Teigen  
Researcher

### 7.3. Appendix C – Outline of the interview with Focusing

- I would just like to once more remind you that that you can, at any time, withdraw from this interview, or ask me to stop the recording temporarily at any point and for any reason during the session. What happens in this room is confidential, and all the recordings and transcriptions will be destroyed as soon as the thesis is in print. I will offer you a copy of the transcription of our meeting, and I can also send you a copy of the recording if you wish.
  - I will now guide you through Focusing, where we will try to get in touch with your bodily felt sense of touch and the lack thereof, so I will now invite you to close your eyes
  - The focusing
    - Relaxation exercise
    - Focusing
- 1) First moving out and creating space/clearing a space. “Counting goods”, “moving out”, and creating a space for yourself inside your body
  - 2)
    - a. Let the word “touch” drop down into your Focusing area (I’m explaining where and what this area is), and notice where it lands in your body
    - b. Ask your body for a felt sense of the word or concept; how does my body carry it, where is it located and how. Describe it to me. Is it heavy, light, warm, cold, large, small, does it have a taste a smell etc?
  - 3) Now ask this felt sense of touch whether it will be willing to give you a key word, a metaphor or an image of itself, which describes its essence.
    - a. Resonate – that is checking that the word is exactly right. Three times.
  - 4)
    - a. Now move this felt sense and its word out of your body like in clearing a space, and start imagining that there is no such thing as touch or being touched. Now let this concept of “no touch exists” or “a lack of touch”, drop down into your body and notice where it lands.
    - b. Ask your body if it will be willing to give you a felt sense of this concept, how does my body carry this, where does it sit and how? Describe it like you did the first one, is it light, heavy, warm, cold, large, small, does it have colour and so on.
  - 5) Now ask this felt sense of no touch whether it has a key word, a metaphor or an image that describes the essence of it.
    - a. Resonate – checking three times that it is the exact right word, image, or metaphor.
  - 6) Now bring in that first felt sense of ... back to where it was before and move your awareness back and forth between those felt senses and their key words. Notice the differences between how they “sit” in your body and how these words/metaphors/images feel, and see if you can find a handle to describe the essence of this felt sense.

7) Now picture an everyday scenario where you see yourself bringing these two felt senses with you out into your everyday life, knowing something about how your body carries “touch” and the possible lack thereof. Imagine a situation from your everyday life, e.g. in relation to your work. Describe to me.

- Now, after the exercise I would like to invite you to share with me what you experienced, thought and felt.
  - How was the exercise for you, how was it to do it and what kind of thoughts and feelings emerged?
- Free association around being touched, the lack of touch and around what touch and no touch is
- Possible interview guide:

The self/person	Touch				Body	Society	Meeting
What happens to you? What are you experiencing?	What is touch? What happens when we are touched? – positive, negative?				Felt sense of the concept of touch	Closeness and distance	Intimacy, boundaries
	Physical touch		Nonphysical touch			The individual	
	Negative	Positive	Negative	Positive			
	How would life be without touch?		Who would you be without touch?				

(Research question: How does touch impact the self?)

- Is there anything else you would like to add or ask me about?
- Any other comments on the session?
- I would like to invite you to write a diary of this experience and send it to me within a week. By email or ordinary mail.
- You are welcome to contact me at any point if there is something on your mind, something you are wondering about and so on.
- Thank you for your time

## 7.4. Appendix D – Explanation of Norwegian words used by the informants<sup>5</sup>

**Godhet** (Ania, page 25ff): The word “godhet”, directly translated, means “goodness” or “kindness”. The way that Ania uses it, it may also refer to having warm and accepting feelings toward the other person, and may also be linked to how she says that health workers are supposed to use empathy to provide a welcoming space to patients and others that they work with. The word “compassion”, that I have chosen to use as a translation, has another translation in Norwegian; “medfølelse”, which may also refer to both sympathy and empathy, and the way Ania is using this word in the interview, I think “*compassion*”, “*care*” and “*caring*” are suitable translations to start with.

**Historie** (Simon, page 29ff): The word “historie” in Norwegian can be translated with both “*history*” and “*story*” in English, and because I think Simon does mean both when he talks about the body having its own story, and also its own history, I have chosen to use both words in the translation.

**Kjenne etter** (Simon, page 25ff): The expression “kjenne etter” does not really have a good English translation; it means to spend some time inwards to see how one feels about something inside, and so I have chosen to translate it with “*checking in with oneself*”.

**Kontaktskapende** (Milana, page 30ff): This word means that something one does creates a feeling of connection or contact between people, and since there’s no equivalent expression in English I have translated this directly, to: “*contact-creating*”.

**Nærhet** (Milana, page 31ff, and Ania, page 16ff): The word “nærhet” can be directly translated to “nearness”; it entails closeness and nearness, both in proximity and in feeling, and intimacy, and cannot easily be translated into one English word, so I have used both “*closeness*” and “*intimacy*”.

**På plass i seg selv** (Ania, page 31ff): directly translated this expression means to “be there (in place) in oneself”. I don’t know of a direct translation that works in English, and hence I have translated it to “*being in tune with oneself*”.

**Ta imot** (Milana, page 27ff): these two words together as an expression is equivalent to the word “*receive*” in English, and the way I have used it in the translation may seem a bit strange because of the context – what Milana tries to say that people may not want to receive e.g. compassion from another.

**Være trygg på seg selv** (Ania, page 31ff): “Å være trygg på seg selv” in Norwegian can be translated as having “*self-confidence*”, or directly “being safe or trusting in one self”.

**Være vár** (Milana, page 30ff) – this word is directly translated as being cautious, yet I have a feeling that what Milana means here is the same as when she says there is a need to “*sense*”, as in being sensitive to what the other person signals, and hence that is my translation of the word as well.

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<sup>5</sup> The translations have their starting point in the Norwegian to English “Norsk-engelsk blå ordbok” (Kirkeby, 1989), and is mostly based on my own experience with, and felt senses of, English and Norwegian language

## **7.5. Appendix E – The six Focusing steps short form (Gendlin, 1981 pp. 201-202)**

### **1. Clear a space**

How are you? What's between you and feeling fine?

Don't answer; let what comes in your body do the answering.

Don't go into anything

Greet each concern that comes. Put each aside for a while, next to you

Except for that, are you fine?

### **2. Felt sense**

Pick one problem to focus on.

Don't go into the problem. What do you sense in your body when you recall the whole of that problem?

Sense all of that, the sense of the whole thing, the murky discomfort or the unclear body-sense of it.

### **3. Get a handle**

What is the quality of the felt sense?

What one word, phrase, or image come out of this felt sense?

What quality-word would fit it best?

### **4. Resonate**

Go back and forth between word (or image) and the felt sense. Is that right?

If they match, have the sensation of matching several times.

If the felt sense changes, follow it with your attention.

When you get a perfect match, the words (images) being just right for this feeling, let yourself feel that for a minute.

### **5. Ask**

"What is it, about the whole problem, that makes me so -----?"

When stuck, ask questions:

*What is the worst of this feeling?*

*What's really so bad about this?*

*What does it need?*

*What should happen?*

*Don't answer; wait for the feeling to stir and give you an answer.*

What would it feel like if it was all OK?

*Let the body answer:*

*What is in the way of that?*

### **6. Receive**

Welcome what came. Be glad it spoke.

It is only one step on this problem, not the last.

Now that you know where it is, you can leave it and come back to it later.

Protect it from critical voices that interrupt

Does your body want another round of focusing or is this a good stopping place?

## **7.6. Appendix F – Examples of how I used Focusing through the research process**

Focusing has been followed me through the process of the work with this study and one of the ways in which I have employed it is to give myself an empathic space when feeling stuck and disappointed that I couldn't get on with my work.

### **Using writing as a way of Focusing**

I have been stuck on several occasions during the thesis, not being able to go on for various reasons. Focusing has been of a lot of help to me there, and writing a diary has been a way for me to 'repeat back' to myself what the 'stuckness' (Gendlin, 1981) was about, and a way of giving myself that empathic space, without the pressure of it having to be part of what I was writing on at that moment in time. What I did on those occasions was take a minute to really feel the 'stuckness' I felt in my body, and then start describing it, either in full sentences, by sketching and drawing, or writing key words. Very often when doing this I would get a sense of relief (felt shift) and often ideas would come, or a sense of understanding more clearly what I was struggling with, or the 'stuckness' would untangle a bit, making me able to start working again.

### **Giving space to ideas that seem to be 'in the way'**

I have also used Focusing as a way of giving space to ideas that have been standing in the way of my work because they didn't fit in with the rest. For instance my inner attraction to the I-You meeting that Buber talks about, which at one point was so prevalent for me during the work on the discussion that I had to get an appointment with my Focusing-teacher to help me give space to it. I thought that the outcome of that conversation would be that I would be able to write more extensively about the I-You-meeting, and to my surprise the opposite happened. Something in me was satisfied to have been listened to, and so "it let me go" so that I could go on to working on the more relevant bits of the discussion chapter. I have also done this with other, less demanding ideas that seemed to stand in the way, with similar results, or discovering how I could fit them in, in a good way.

### **Giving space to feelings that become overwhelming**

In many ways, this work has been just as much about my own feelings, both towards being disciplined in writing, towards the text, towards the time and effort it takes, or towards the topic of the thesis and so on. Sometimes during the process I have been stuck on some of those feelings, like sadness, fear of failure, frustration, fear of not getting it done, fear of what comes after the thesis and more, and Focusing has been invaluable to me in these processes as well. The option of giving myself and those feelings some acceptance, warmth and caring



through Focusing, instead of pushing them away, or telling myself it will be all right when I don't believe it will, or analysing why it might be like this and so on, has been relieving and indeed given me a feeling of becoming more myself (Gendlin, 1996) throughout the process when I was able to use felt sensing.

### **Felt sensing as a guide to expression**

Felt sensing has also been a guide for me when making headlines and writing some sentences, to try and make sure what I am writing is consistent with my felt sense of an element or topic so that the reader may get an insight into me as a researcher (Todres, 2007).

## 7.7. Appendix G – NSD approval

Norsk samfunnsvitenskapelig datatjeneste AS  
NORWEGIAN SOCIAL SCIENCE DATA SERVICES



Postboks 1047 Blindern  
0316 Oslo  
Norge  
Tlf: +47 55 58 21 17  
Fak: +47 55 58 56 50  
nsd@nsd.uib.no  
www.nsd.uib.no  
Org nr: 985 321 884

Eleanor Allgood  
Pedagogisk institutt  
NTNU  
Dragvoll  
7491 TRONDHEIM

Vår dato: 26.08.2009

Vår ref: 21436/2/REH

Deres dato:

Deres ref:

### KVITTERING PÅ MELDING OM BEHANDLING AV PERSONOPPLYSNINGER

Vi viser til melding om behandling av personopplysninger, mottatt 19.08.2009. All nødvendig informasjon om prosjektet forelå i sin helhet 25.08.2009. Meldingen gjelder prosjektet:

21436	<i>Touch - a meeting with yourself?</i>
Behandlingsansvarlig	NTNU, ved veritetsjansens øverste leder
Daglig ansvarlig	Eleanor Allgood
Student	Vera Rabben Teigen

Personvernombudet har vurdert prosjektet og finner at behandlingen av personopplysninger er meldepliktig i henhold til personopplysningsloven § 31. Behandlingen tilfredsstiller kravene i personopplysningsloven.

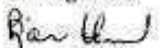
Personvernombudets vurdering forutsetter at prosjektet gjennomføres i tråd med opplysningene gitt i meldeskjemaet, korrespondanse med ombudet, vedlagte prosjektvurdering - kommentarer samt personopplysningsloven/ helseregisterloven med forskrifter. Behandlingen av personopplysninger kan settes i gang.

Det gjøres oppmerksom på at det skal gis ny melding dersom behandlingen endres i forhold til de opplysninger som ligger til grunn for personvernombudets vurdering. Endringsmeldinger gis via et eget skjema, [http://www.nsd.uib.no/personvern/forsk\\_stud/skjema.html](http://www.nsd.uib.no/personvern/forsk_stud/skjema.html). Det skal også gis melding etter tre år, dersom prosjektet fortsatt pågår. Meldinger skal skje skriftlig til ombudet.

Personvernombudet har lagt ut opplysninger om prosjektet i en offentlig database, <http://www.nsd.uib.no/personvern/prosjektoversikt.jsp>.

Personvernombudet vil ved prosjektets avslutning, 31.03.2010, rette en henvendelse angående status for behandlingen av personopplysninger.

Vennlig hilsen

  
Bjørn Hentichsen

  
Ragnhild Kise Haugland

Kontaktperson: Ragnhild Kise Haugland tlf: 55 58 83 34  
Vedlegg: Prosjektvurdering  
Kopi: Vera Rabben Teigen, Åsvangveien 27 A, 7048 TRONDHEIM

Publikasjons- / Datasenter

OSLO: NSD, Universitetet i Oslo, Postboks 1045 Blindern, 0316 Oslo, Tlf: +47 22 85 52 11, [nsd@uio.no](mailto:nsd@uio.no)  
TRONDHEIM: NSD, Norges teknisk-naturvitenskapelige universitet, 2450 Trondheim, Tlf: +47 73 55 19 07, [nsd@ntnu.no](mailto:nsd@ntnu.no)  
TRONDHØJ: NSD, Sytt, Universitetet i Trondheim, 9037 Trondheim, Tlf: +47 77 54 43 50, [nsd@sthu.uib.no](mailto:nsd@sthu.uib.no)

## Personvernombudet for forskning



### Prosjektvurdering - Kommentar

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22436

Utvalget omfatter 3-4 helsearbeidere. Studenten tar selv kontakt med aktuelle deltakere.

Opplysningene samles inn gjennom personlig intervju, og det gjøres lydopptak under intervjuene.

Det gis skriftlig informasjon og innhentes skriftlig samtykke til deltakelse. Personvernombudet mottok revidert informasjonsskriv 25. august 2009 og finner skrivet tilfredsstillende.

Innsamlende opplysninger registreres på privat PC. Personvernombudet legger til grunn at bruk av privat PC er i tråd med NTNU sine rutiner for datasikkerhet.

Navn eller andre direkte identifiserende personopplysninger vil ikke bli oppbevart sammen med det øvrige datamaterialet under arbeidet med prosjektet (jf. e-post fra Vera Rabben Teigen 25. august 2009).

Senest innen prosjektslutt 31. mars 2010 vil datamaterialet anonymiseres ved at lydopptak slettes og eventuelle indirekte identifiserende bakgrunnsopplysninger slettes eller omskrives slik at det ikke lenger er mulig å føre opplysningene tilbake til enkeltpersoner.

## **7.8. Appendix H – Excerpts from the analysis process**

### **The codes**

I chose to use the word coding to distinguish between working with the smaller units and the larger units under which the smaller ones have been grouped: the sub-themes.

- 1 Effects of touch - what touch does
- 2 Closeness/distance – the field of tension when approaching another
- 3 Experience/insecurity
- 4 Myself – relation to touch and the job
- 5 Courage
- 6 Relation/communication
- 7 Others – relation to touch – colleagues or clients/patients and so on.
- 8 Importance of/evaluation of touch
- 9 Experience of the Focusing
- 10 Non-physical touch
- 11 Physical touch and the body
- 12 Insight/discovery/something new
- 13 Natural/not natural
- 14 Intention

### Excerpts from transcription with examples of analysis using the codes

Informant 1	Informant 3	Informant 2
<p><i>1: but (...) most people want closeness and think it's nice (2 &amp; 7)</i></p> <p><i>1: Yes... because it shouldn't be that way, that it doesn't feel natural (13 &amp; 7), oh no, it shouldn't be... because then they can find it a bit intrusive or they think it's <b>too close</b> (2) or... <b>that they have... that they have a lot of black in them</b></i></p> <p><i>1: Because <b>not everyone likes being touched</b> (8) (34:12) Yes.. uhuh... <b>med most people think it's ok</b> that one touches them</i></p>	<p><i>3:yes, that one should... <b>create that space</b>, you know. But I haven't really thought of that as <b>a type of touch</b> before (32:45)... but they coincide a lot, at least that's how it became for me right no (2) – (6) – (8) – (11) (12)</i></p> <p><i>3: because it has always been that way...(29:52) that I have said to students that <b>you have to touch people!</b> (4) (8) but... that doesn't really help, you know, if they don't have an <b>intention of being close</b> (6) (14), is what I'm thinking now. <u>That touching isn't what one needs to work on... but rather with one's... intention if you know what I mean, than the job as such...</u> (7)</i></p>	<p><i>2: mostly every day. Communicating with different (6) bodies(11), it is a challenge, and very <b>interesting</b>(4), because no one is the same.</i></p> <p><i>2: "Oh, yes. (46:55) The body is like an open book, if one works on its terms (11). And of course, then an important factor is how that touch is (8), you know? It can't be on my terms, then. It is about listening, and that goes for touch too, listening".</i></p>
<p>Researcher's notes: I am wondering whether there is something about the field of tension of touch? She says that it is an art – that there might be problems connected to gender – that one has to sense whether the other person wants touch...</p>	<p>Researcher's notes: "having to be close" – as the importance of touch? Also this sentence: "you have to touch people" and as she said before about how it takes courage to be close... Closeness is important somehow...</p>	<p>Researcher's notes: To listen (1) the field of tension again – approaching another person's body. Can the intension, for the osteopath, be to collect information? He only discusses that indirectly...</p>

**The themes and their codes before they became 2 themes and a core theme**

<b>Themes</b>		
<p><b>The toucher</b></p> <p>This theme describes the informants' thoughts on being someone who works with touch and their own relation to touch.</p> <p>This entails the intention behind touch, how they evaluate the value of touch, related to whether <u>touch is natural</u> to the informant or not, and so on.</p>	<p><b>The touched</b></p> <p>Since I don't have direct access to the receivers of touch in this particular study, this theme describes the informants' thoughts on others in relation to touch, e.g. their patients/clients, family colleagues and so on.</p> <p>This entails <u>how touch can be perceived</u>, how the informants think others value touch, i.e. whether the receiver has a <u>natural relation to touch</u>, and so on.</p>	<p><b>The space between</b></p> <p>This theme describes what happens in the space between. The other two themes have touched upon some of those already</p> <p><u>The physical and the non-physical dimensions to touch</u>; or <u>what happens between</u> the toucher and the touched – it entails <u>intention</u> of touching, <u>effects</u> of touch, <u>the body</u> and so on.</p> <p>Also what kind of <u>challenges touch entails</u> in the job and <u>what it takes</u> of someone to be touching others.</p>
<b>Related codes</b>		
Intention	Vs perception	Touch as a field of tension
Evaluation of touch	Evaluation of touch	Being experienced or self-assured/confident, "in tune"
Natural or not	Natural or not natural	Physical and non-physical
		Effects of touch
		Being perceptive

Core theme: Touch as a meeting between selves

## 7.9. Appendix I – Notes for the selective coding of the core theme

<i>Property</i>	<i>Dimensional range</i>	
Touch as an intimate encounter between selves	Intimate (high)	Non-intimate (low)
	Or	Or
	Received	Not received
	Or	Or
	Revealing	Non-revealing

(Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 123)

So: touch between two people + intimacy/non-intimacy → leads to a meeting between selves... How this meeting between selves is carried out: based on experience: assessing whether touch is natural to others, assessing the relation between intention and perception, executing physical touch or not, which leads to an entering into the space between us, which leads to being touched non-physically, and which leads to feeling close or feeling distance, and to a relation.

I am now wondering whether intention should be under the toucher and the touched, actually, because it has to do with assessing and deciding whether touch should be done or not, and also to discovery of the other person...

So, storyline in my study: When faced with situations where physical touch might be involved, health workers assess the situation as to whether touch is natural to others as well as their own intention of the touching. When they step into that space they need to be perceptive to the other person to know whether to touch or not and to the body that gives information. This leads to them entering into a space that occurs between people, or to not enter into that space, and even if they don't there will be a sense of being touched even non-physically, and this leads to a feeling of closeness or of distance, which also entails the meeting between two selves, i.e. relation.

## **7.1. Appendix J – “Let go” – picking a photo for the front page**

The photo on the front page is taken by Kari Holten and is called “Let go”. It is inspired by “chaos” in 5 rhythms (Roth, 1997). Chaos, according to the photographer, is a quality of movement that we all have inside – it is bodily felt as an intense, chaotic and unpredictable energy. In chaos we open up to let go of the old things we carry around, what does not give us anything anymore – things that keep us away from being alive in the present. We let go of old thinking patterns and attitudes toward life and toward ourselves, and through this movement we give ourselves space to receive what is new

My felt sense of the photo is that there is an openness and a welcoming that comes from the heart, and I feel touched by it in a way that borders on leading to tears. At the same time as it compels me to come closer, it reminds me of a sort of loneliness at not being a part of the closeness that seems to be in the photo. I was attracted to the photo because it has hands, and because my felt sense of hands as instruments of touch is linked to a presence toward the other person through the empathic qualities of compassion, warmth and listening, which is also at the core of this study of touch as a meeting between selves. I have chosen this photo to represent the space that we open up for ourselves and others when letting go of premade assumptions and just be with whatever is there in the moment, through those empathic qualities and in Focusing and listening.