It is commonly assumed that kissing is a standard part of serious courtship among all humans and that it also accompanies genital sexuality. Freud's first stage of psychosexual development, the oral phase, was always considered a basic or fundamental accompaniment of human sexual interests because the mouth and lips are typified by Freud as the earliest used zone of gratification. As an anthropologist trained in psychoanalysis, the author has always been suspicious of a wholesale application of Freudian zonal therapy simply because cultures modify our human notions of erogenous zones.

No doubt, we are led astray in the assumption that kissing is a universal courtship and lovemaking practice because it is a western European emphasis which was rather widely advertised in the final clinch of the Hollywood movie. But, until recently, when nudity and a franker exposure of sexuality began to be allowed in Hollywood (probably to compete with Swedish, French, Czech, Polish and Italian films), this mass medium along with the theater and TV kept green the illusion that kissing was the one way humans expressed sexual attachments.

There is further basis for the erroneous assumption that kissing is a universal form of behavior. For one thing, it is a common mannerism of courtship and foreplay among birds and many other mammals. Furthermore, the mouth and the lips are heavily endowed with sensitive nerve endings. Indeed, as the Kinsey researchers put it, 'the lips, the tongue, and the whole interior of the mouth constitute or could constitute for most individuals an erogenous area of nearly as great significance as the genitalia.'

Yet their exhaustive studies showed that kissing was not a universal expression of intimacy even in our own culture, being less common among the less educated segments of the population. At lower levels there are taboos on oral contacts and a lower class male may have had intercourse with very many girls and possibly kissed only a few. While the rationalization of uncleanliness is often used, there may be no inhibition about drinking from a common cup or using another's eating utensils. On the other hand, a college male may have kissed dozens of girls and had intercourse with none. However, to at least some extent kissing does enter into the life histories of almost all individuals in our culture.

Cross-cultural distributions of kissing behavior

In general, the custom and practice of kissing is primarily centered in two major areas of the world, namely the Indo-European and American regions. Anthropologists have often pointed out that even such high civilizations as those of China and Japan in classical times did not practice kissing as a gesture in the lover's art. In Japan, until recently when this culture became profoundly influenced by the west, the Japanese male regarded the nape of the lady's neck as a more provocative stimulus than the fullness of her lips. More recently, when Japanese coastal cities became world ports, a thriving trade in blatant forms of pornography, including drawings, suggestive phallic objects, and crude depictions of coitus flooded the market. The embraces had little to do with mouth-to-mouth contact. While this aversion to mouth contacts is now disappearing due to increased familiarity with the west, the Japanese are still known for their tendency to consider mouth contact as being 'bad form'.

A wide variety of customs, such as the sucking in of breath politely when one is speaking, and also the use of gauze masks over the mouth when one has a cold, elaborate the same cultural theme. It will be remembered in this connection that Japanese marriages were arranged by an intermediary, or marriage-broker, and that one of the major hazards in spoiling a marital prospect was the taint of tuberculosis either in the prospective partner or in his family line. This particular danger, as serious barrier as insanity or venereal disease, was connected with prophylactic measures involving the mouth and upper respiratory tract.

In America, also, lip activities played a much more minor part in lovemaking among Indians and Eskimos than they did for the European Americans. The Eskimo, for example, are famous in regard to their custom of pressing or rubbing noses together. This is courtship behavior and also may occur during sexual contacts. Kissing is not referred to except among very acculturated groups.

Going south on the North American continent, John Honigmann has described Kaska Indian behavior in northern British Columbia and the southern Yukon. As with many Indian groups, a public display of affection is discouraged. There may be conventional signs proposing sexual contact (or even teasing without touching) and these are followed by rough and tumble grabbing leading to genital sexuality. Or wrinkling and hand pressing may be the preliminaries which lead to pinching the face and thighs as manifestations of direct sexual interest. Honigmann adds that during coitus in the common vento-ventral position some kissing may occur. This may also happen in the final emption but the kiss is not used as a mouth of approach, and this is also evident during dances when hand pressing is used as the erotic overture. Of course such behavior changes among youth attending boarding school and those exposed to the Hollywood movie.

Farther south, in California, the folkways of the Pomo Indians were described in the 1920's by E.M. Loeb who noted that generally kissing as a habit was foreign to most primitive peoples. Among the Pomo, ordinarily a man did not kiss, his partner in any courting procedure although during actual sexual intercourse this sometimes did occur. The eastern Pomo limited their reference in the word for kissing only to the notion of a mother with her child. This act between married adults referred to the wife taking the initiative with her husband and required an additional phrase to indicate that the kiss was given in that direction.

The Crow Indians of southeastern Montana were described by R.H. Lowie about the same time. The Crow had certain minor dances during which two couples went face to face center of the group and danced the "hand-presser", followed by kissing in public. Lowie regarded this as being a courtship procedure which was publicly known and hence openly symbolized in this fashion.

To obtain some perspective on the question of why most American Indian tribes did not structure any behavior relating to kissing, either formally or more spontaneously, one could refer to A.R. Holmberg's careful study of the Siriono Indians of eastern Bolivia. A trained anthropologist, Holmberg lived with these nomadic hunting and gathering Indians and closely observed all aspects of their way of life. Because of the exigencies of their food quest he reported in summary that their strongest anxieties and appetites centered in food problems and effective attitudes toward food. Holmberg noted that the Siriono data pointed toward the overwhelming importance of strong anticipatory responses toward food. Consequently, anxiety centered in the hunger drive and fear of actual food deprivation. Noting that a hunter might have to travel as many as 20 miles a day through dangerous jungles, often suffering intensely from heat or rain, the fatigue and pain associated with hunting, fishing and food gathering were associated with the basic biologic needs of hunger and thirst. While much was made of food, romantic love, in the conception of these naked Indians, was an entirely foreign concept. Sex, like hunger, became a drive to be satisfied. There was little inhibition through attitudes of modesty or decorum. Holmberg tells how the term for finding something enjoyable would be applied indiscriminately to food or a necklace or a female partner. Virginity was not valued and a man was permitted to have intercourse not only with his own wife or wives but with their real and classificatory sisters, the same applying to a woman and the classificatory or real brothers of her own husband or even potential ones. An interesting aspect of this courtship behavior in which kissing, as a custom, is not in the least structured was the use of food as a lure for obtaining extramarital sex partners or as a means of seducing another potential wife. The Siriono also have curious fears about eating so that frequently this is done in solitude and at odd hours during the night in order to obtain more nourishment and to avoid the crowds of nonfamily members which always gather to beg for morsels.

Turning from hunting and gathering tribes of the Americas, where the structured form of kissing behavior is certainly rather deficient, we can next consider a South Pacific people whose erotic approaches have been fully described in an entire volume by the great British anthropologist B. Malinowski. In his book, The Sexual Life of Savages, Malinowski states that kissing is not widely practiced outside the Indo-European horizon. The people he describes are the Trobriand Islanders of northwestern Melanesia. This is a gardening culture of people who live in villages and who are therefore more sedentary in their habits than are American hunting tribes. As one might guess, lip and mouth activities are directly involved in sexual approaches. This suggests a principle in cultural evolution, although there may be other elaborations of erotic approach and enticement in other agricultural societies, such as in the Orient.

If one defines kissing more exactly as prolonged pressing of mouth against mouth as in the sexual preliminaries of Europe and the United States, the Trobriand kiss is perhaps more perfunctory and perhaps more directly a genital accompaniment. Malinowski is clear that kissing is never an independ-
ent form of petting nor a necessary stage in lovemaking as is widely presumed in western culture. The real point, as he observed it, was that Trobriand Islanders regarded this as a rather insipid and silly form of physical amuse-
ment. The Trobrianders do not use the kiss as a regular form of greeting nor as an independent expression of affection. With the Eskimo of the far north, the Trobrianders agree that the rubbing of noses is a possible form of greet-
ing, especially between very close relatives. Thus, parents and children or
husbands and wives would signalize reunion by nose-rubbing after long sepa-

rations. It can be added that the Trobrianders are also like many primitive
peoples who, when petting small children, will frequently touch them with
cheeks or lips, more as a tactile gesture than as a kiss.

Thius kissing in the form found in the west does not occur in any valid
sense among Trobriand natives. It may simply occur almost as an accident in
the fuller setting of caressing a child or as a random accompaniment in more
direct forms of sexual intercourse. In the latter sense the Islanders bit each
other's lips, or may suck tongues, or typically scratch or even bite eyelashes in

passionate embraces. Malinowski remarks on the Trobriand Islanders' moun-
tability to kiss, in European practices which they feel are pallid and

formalized – or certainly less emotionally charged – by contrast with their own
expressions of sexual ardor.

It may be added that the Trobriand natives and the Siriono have leisurely
preliminary stages of mutual grooming, including catching each other's lice
eating them as well as touching and feeling bodily surfaces. It was Mali-
nowski's opinion that in the rough phases of passion, the Trobriand woman
was far more active than her European counterpart. There are also terms for
the scratches which are discussed as hallmarks of success in the amorous

life. As to the eyelash biting which is mentioned at the points where westerners
might refer to kissing, Malinowski mentions that he did not see a single youth
or postpubescent girl in the Trobriands who had eyelashes of natural length.

The best data on African tribes are strictly comparable to Malinowski's ela-
borate materials on the Trobriand Islanders. One of the best studies of an
African people is A.J HUDSO,


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