

**Tag:**

This is Psychological Frontiers: Exploring Human Behavior. I'm Dawn Albertson.

**Lead:**

Kissing as a mating ritual. Is my partner thinking what I'm thinking?

**Content:**

Kissing is common across cultures. If an alien came to Earth from a planet where there was no kissing, the alien might think that kissing is a very strange behavior. Psychologists are often required to take the perspective of an alien. Some psychologists have asked the question: why do people kiss? Does kissing someone tell us about his or her commitment, or is kissing just a prelude to sex? Is it possible that kissing serves a different purpose for males and females?

Susan Hughes and her colleagues surveyed over 1,000 college students who completed questionnaires measuring kissing preferences, attitudes, and styles. Her results show that men and women view kissing very differently.

Females reported that they would not have sex without kissing their partner first, and they would find a mate who is a "bad kisser" to be less desirable than a partner who is a good kisser. In contrast, males are more willing to have sex without kissing, and would have sex with someone they considered to be a "bad kisser."

Evolutionary psychologists, researchers who study genetic influences on behavior, suggest that kissing differences between men and women reflect very different mating goals. Women are more likely than men to look for a partner who is committed and will help support her offspring. Men are more likely than women to look for a partner who will reproduce. In other words, females utilize kissing behaviors predominately as a mate assessment technique. For women, kissing provides insight into a partner's level of commitment. Males tend to use kissing as a means of increasing sexual receptivity and gaining sexual access.

The evolutionary perspective on kissing may be informative, irritating or confirming depending on one's perspective. However, kissing is a curious behavior and plays an interesting role in mating.

Content contributed by Susan Drevo.

Psychological Frontiers is produced by the Psychology Department at Minnesota State University, Mankato. I'm Dr. Dawn Albertson.

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Resources: Hughes, S.M., Harrison, M.A., & Gallup, G.G. (2007). Sex differences in romantic kissing among college students: An evolutionary perspective. *Evolutionary Psychology*, 5, 612-631.