

Kissing around the world: How do different cultures show intimacy?

Not all people express love and adoration through their lips. In fact, [new research](#) published in *American Anthropologist* reports that only 46 percent of cultures kiss mouth-to-mouth as most of us would recognise a romantic kiss today. The study contradicts previous anthropologists who claimed the behaviour was near universal. Still, while it's clear we're not all connecting this way, it's important to consider how we define a kiss before jumping to any broad conclusions.

The anthropologist Donald Marshall memorably described the people living on the Pacific island of Mangaia as the most sexually active culture on record. Men spent their late teens and 20s having an average of 21 orgasms a week (more than 1,000 times a year) without a single mouth-to-mouth kiss before Europeans arrived. Clearly human beings do fine with or without locking lips.

However, after an exhaustive exploration of the scientific literature and research, I am convinced the kiss is a wonderful example of a human behaviour where “nature” complements “nurture”. We seem to have an inborn drive to connect with another individual this way, but the shape it takes is influenced by our cultural mores and social norms. Just as Darwin observed nearly 150 years ago, kissing-like behaviours appear to be part of our evolutionary heritage, but the way we express them at any given time and place is heavily influenced by what's familiar in our own societies.

As the anthropologist Helen Fisher points out, even in societies in which kissing wasn't done, people “patted, licked, rubbed, sucked, nipped, or blew on each other's faces prior to copulation”.

The GLP aggregated and excerpted this blog/article to reflect the diversity of news, opinion and analysis. Read full, original post: [What's in a kiss? Nothing less than the very essence of what it is to be human](#)