

Lesson 3

Consent

Reading 1

Excerpt from Leonore Tiefer's (1998) lecture on kissing, delivered at the Kinsey Institute.

Tiefer, L. (1998). The kiss. A 50th anniversary lecture for the Kinsey Institute, in conjunction with The Kiss Exhibit, School of Fine Arts Gallery. October 24th.

Kissing means attachment and feels good, and can be elaborated into social situations far removed from its origins.

Our experience of security and sensuality begins in infancy as we are held while we nurse. The sucking experience, the use of tongue and lips, the aroma of body and skin, the touch on the face - the theory suggest that every kiss from infancy on reverberates with deeply felt echoes of attachment, pleasure, feeling good, and gives kissing its emotional power. The lips and tongue have large representation in the brain - every infant must suckle to survive. As we suckle, we feel, and we don't forget.

Humans' vertical posture and the emotional power of eye contact for all primates brings other elements into the kiss. Even in cultures where mouth-to-mouth tongue kissing is disapproved of, reverberations of attachment and security produce the eros of cheeks rubbing together, or the power of inhaling the aroma of a beloved's face. There may be biting, nibbling, nipping or blowing on the lips and face as part of the sexual script of lovers. What Margaret Mead called the "oceanic kiss" involves the lips only as a minor feature, but if we want to generalize the attachment and pleasure theory, the kissing reverberates even when it's only one mouth doing the work. After all, in infancy, it's only one mouth.

Because kissing can arouse powerful regressive longings for intimacy, the power of kissing can be dangerous, which becomes an important theme in Western legend and literature. Where people cannot choose their own mates, or where the free expression of sexuality is considered a religious sin, kisses come to symbolize social chaos. Thus, in Western lore and Hollywood movies, we have endless stories of dangerous love kisses - the ones that mortally bond the wrong pair (Romeo and Juliet, Tristan and Isolde).

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