

Kisses Are A Barometer Of A Couple's Intimacy

Perhaps it's because I'm a die-hard romantic, but I'm convinced that few things connect us more deeply than a soul-stirring kiss. Byron called them "heart-quakes." Others refer to them as "the very autograph of love." Kisses are magical — transforming frogs into



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princes, awakening Sleeping Beauty, sealing the promise of forever love. They can be sultry, rapturous or stolen under the mistletoe. They are even healing (remember how you had your "boo-boo" kissed so many years ago?) and youth enhancing — giving you "rosy" skin and

naturally plumping your lips. But sweet or passionate, kisses between lovers can rock your core. In the words of Agnes de Mille, "Then I did the simplest thing in the world. I leaned down . . . and kissed him. And the world cracked open."

For some, the first kiss is a make it or break it moment.

There are those who believe that you either have chemistry or don't, right from the start. Kisses can be remarkably revealing. As the old Betty Everett song goes, "If you want to know if he loves you so, it's in his kiss." Then there are those who sadly report they had it once but don't know where it went: "I love

him/her, but I'm not sure that I'm in love with him/her anymore. . . . I feel nothing when we kiss."

But whether kisses fuse or fracture, certain ones are etched in time. Many of us can recall a particularly moving kiss as if it were yesterday — where you were, the smell of his cologne or the feel of your lips pressing softly or lustfully against one another.

So if kissing is such a potentially uniting experience, why do so many couples spend so little time enjoying "quality" kissing — just for the sake of kissing (like in the "old" days)? Why do so many kisses last about a millisecond as one of you hurries out the door? And why do so many couples only kiss in their bedroom as a prelude to the "real" thing?

What happens to the kisses that used to send shivers up and down our spines?

Based on my clinical experience, kissing satisfaction is a pretty accurate barometer of a couple's overall satisfaction with intimacy. Actually, enjoyable kissing can be one of the most challenging parts of lovemaking. It is the first expression of love to arrive, and the first to leave.

When we slide from the dizzying rush of first attraction into long-term attachment, there are a different set of skills required.

Kisses that move the earth (or at least nudge it a bit) require a special kind of yielding, vulnerability and surrender —

eyes open or eyes closed, sharing breaths and tastes, mutually giving and receiving, mind, body and spirit. In fact, kissing can be more intimate than intercourse. (Remember the scene in "Pretty Woman" when the Julia Roberts character would have intercourse as a paid sex worker but wouldn't kiss?)

More than an expression of transitory mood, there's a certain immutability to kissing "styles" that exposes our essence — spontaneous, reserved, playful or impulsive. Some kissers take more than they give when they kiss. I've had partners describe this kind of lover as "self-centered" or "needy" — longing for reassurance that they're loved. They kiss hungrily and seem never to be satiated.

Then there are kissers on the other side of the spectrum, accommodatingly cautious "people pleasers" who have difficulty taking in pleasure. These lovers have difficulty trusting that they can let their needs show.

Their pleasing propensity is experienced as distancing, not permitting themselves to be emotionally penetrated, leaving the other partner feeling pushed away or abandoned. These are less connected to their own eroticism than the eroticism of others. Not curiously, these pairs initially gravitate toward each other, but the chemistry may be short-lived.

Yes, I know, it all seemed so easy at first. Maybe it was. . . and maybe it

wasn't. Sometimes we're so caught up in the early excitement of the moment that we're less attentive to the details. After the dust settles, we start to notice all those little annoying things (like how he licks his lips before he "puckers up," or how she slips her tongue into your mouth "serpent-like" at the most inopportune times during lovemaking). This is really no different than the other habits we love to hate in our partners (like how he pushes his dish away when he finishes his meal).

And yet, when couples first contact me to discuss their sexual concerns, they rarely mention kissing problems at the top of their list.

I hear about erectile concerns or desire problems long before I hear that they don't like the other person's kissing style. Oddly, it's a more sensitive subject. They are unsure how to delicately phrase the fact that their partner "slobbers too much" or that they'd like them to part their lips a bit more or less.

I've found couples more willing to suggest a different position for penetration before trying a different kissing approach. When it comes to intercourse, they can just point to an illustration and say, "Let's try this one."

Clinicians have diagnostic labels for virtually every sort of genital uncooperativeness and desire-phase disorder, from erections that are too soft to vaginas that are too dry. But there are

no categories for "uninspiring" or "asynchronous" kissing. Not that I'm lobbying for more labels, mind you; I just find it interesting that sensuous kissing, something that has been immortalized across the ages in the arts and sciences, tends to not garner the interest of the medical community, and I doubt you'll find an insurance company to reimburse for its treatment.

So, let's return kissing to its rightful place in lovemaking. Dare to be as intimate now as you were then, and hopefully even more. Don't confuse sex with intimacy, and never underestimate the power of the kiss.

"Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth: for thy love is better than wine."
— Song of Solomon

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