

ARE THERE SOCIETIES WHERE LOVERS DO NOT KISS?

Is any society devoid of osculation?

compiled by Ernest Ersatz, Improbable Research staff

People who live in a society where lovers kiss might assume that romantic kissing happens everywhere—in all societies. But is romantic kissing really universal? Three scholars, realizing that the assumption is just an assumption, looked for evidence to answer the question.

“Is the Romantic–Sexual Kiss a Near Human Universal?” William R. Jankowiak, Shelly L. Volsche, and Justin R. Garcia, *American Anthropologist*, vol. 117, no. 3, 2015, pp. 535-539. The authors, at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas, and Indiana University, explain:

Employing standard cross-cultural methods, this research report is the first attempt to use a large sample set (eHRAF World Cultures, SCCS, and a selective ethnographer survey) to document the presence or absence of the romantic–sexual kiss (n = 168 cultures). We defined romantic–sexual kissing as lip-to-lip contact that may or may not be prolonged. Despite frequent depictions of kissing in a wide range of material culture, we found no evidence that the romantic–sexual kiss is a human universal or even a near universal. The romantic–sexual kiss was present in a minority of cultures sampled (46%).

Detail from the study.



Universal-kissing researcher Shelly L. Volsche. Drawing by Nan Swift, Improbable Research staff.

TABLE 1. *Presence of Romantic–Sexual Kissing by Cultural Area*

	Present	Not present	Total
North America	18 55%	15 45%	33
Oceania	7 44%	9 56%	16
Middle East	10 100%	0 0%	10
South America	4 19%	17 81%	21
Central America	0 0%	10 100%	10
Europe	7 70%	3 30%	10
Africa	4 13%	27 87%	31
Asia	27 73%	10 27%	37
Total	77	91	168