

# THE JOY KISSING BRINGS

PRIMITIVE CULTURES FIND IT UNPLEASANT

WORDS: JOANNE WILSON

**K**issing is awesome (according to me) and there are so many reasons to talk about it:

- Christmas is on the way (and the accompanying mistletoe).
- It's an exciting extension to all the reasons to hug in my tantalizing article last week.
- It could change your life in a moment (like that movie, *Sliding Doors!*).

Let's start with the basics. Why do we kiss each other? The short un-scientific answer is, we have no idea! The long answer is that we have no idea because not every culture and society on Earth does it. Nobody has a definitive answer about why it's something we'd even start doing to begin with.

We do have a lot of ideas about why we kiss people and I'm sure you're thinking of a few. It's important to note that some cultures, particularly more 'primitive' ones, find the practice strange and, in some cases, downright unpleasant. We can assume therefore that kissing isn't something ingrained in human behaviour; it's very much a social construct and different between different cultures.

From what I've researched about kissing, here are some of the top reasons scientists think we kiss:

- Data collection: Your face and mouth are just full of sensory information. And I'm not just talking about tastebuds. Our mouths carry all sorts of data about our health and hygiene. During the act of kissing, we share genetic and immunological information and measure up our potential partners on a deeply biological level. How ... sexy?
- Psychological signalling: Kissing does



add the extra senses of taste and smell that contribute to physical intimacy. Not only does it increase closeness but establishes openness and trust. It's a physical signal saying, "I really, really like you, let's do this". (Alternatively, it can hint at quite the opposite and you'll save yourself a few wasted years if you ignore it!)

■ Preserving the relationship: the kiss is an expression of intimacy and a means of sustaining and enhancing feelings.

■ Seduction: It would be fairly obvious to say that the more penetrative tongue-kiss simulates potential activity down the track and... you get the idea.

No wonder that kid was so worried about seeing "Mommy Kissing Santa Claus Underneath The Christmas Tree".

As I outlined in last week's article on hugging, it releases a whole heap of chemicals related to making us feel good and encourage bonding. Kissing has much the same effect, releasing such love drugs as oxytocin and producing the same reactions.

Where does this (non-Australian) mistletoe come into it? It's actually an old tradition dating back to Celt and Norse mythology. In one Norse tale, the son of the goddess Frigga was killed by an arrow made out of mistletoe. Frigga was so distraught, her tears turned into white berries that coated the plant, symbolizing her love for her lost son.

She was so impressed by her white tear-berries that she blessed the plant and promised a kiss to anyone who passed under

the plant from that day on.

We kiss under mistletoe because a goddess was so happy that she cried tear-berries after her son died that she promised everyone a kiss? Ancient mythological tales are... interesting.

There are other Norse stories about a guy called Loki who deceived a blind god into murdering another god with an arrow made of mistletoe, being the only plant to which he was vulnerable. Somehow then mistletoe became a symbol of peace and friendship to appease for its part in the murder.







Some traditions then developed into men being allowed to kiss any woman standing underneath mistletoe, and that bad luck would befall any woman who refused the kiss.

Mistletoe is a terrifying, parasitic plant that murders trees and produces poisonous white berries (that look red in all the pictures) and should not be eaten under any circumstances. How anyone decided this was a plant to symbolise love and affection is anyone's guess.

No - it's not native to Australia. We have enough petrifying flora and fauna without having to worry about poisonous parasitic tree-killing weeds.

For a truly enjoyable Aussie Christmas, I suggest substituting the mistletoe for gum leaves. At least they're more therapeutic and friendly.

Joanne is a neuro-psychotherapist and relationship specialist at The Confidante Counselling. Email [jo@theconfidantecounselling.com](mailto:jo@theconfidantecounselling.com) or visit [www.sunshinecoastcounselling.com](http://www.sunshinecoastcounselling.com).

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