Kissing Behavior among Japanese

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ABSTRACT

Objective: I bring to focus a notable lack of reported studies on the kissing behavior among Japanese population.

Methods: The databases PubMed, Thomson Reuters' Web of Knowledge (apps.webofknowledge.com), JSTOR (www.jstor.org), project MUSE (muse.jhu.edu), and those of commercial publishers Elsevier (www.sciencedirect.com), SAGE publications (www.sagepublication.com) and Springer Verlag (www.springerlink.com) were used to collect the published literature.

Results: Only a handful of studies exist on the kissing behavior among Japanese. The bias in the methodology (questionnaire and interviews) used by researchers deserve scrutiny. H. Kimata in 2003 and 2006 had published data that kissing reduces allergic conditions. But, these two studies deserve independent confirmation.

Conclusion: It becomes necessary for medical researchers in Japan to investigate the influence of kissing on disease transmission such as allergies, Epstein-Barr virus induced mononucleosis (colloquially known as 'kissing disease') and AIDS.

KEY WORDS

allergy, Japanese, kissing, 2nd World War, sex behavior

INTRODUCTION

Kissing behavior is defined by Corson14 as 'the activity of making contact with the lips, usually as a sign of friendship or affection. The kiss may involve lip contact with any part of the body and with varying degrees of pressure. Possibly related to licking behavior manifested by other animals. Not observed in all cultures.' One of the earliest observers, Albert Ashmead (1850-1911) 15 who was invited to Japan in 1873 to attend to Prince Azumo, a brother of Meiji, after his return to USA in 1876, had recorded, "There is in Japan no kissing, not even in the nursery. All the dangers, which have been so eloquently described in newspapers some time ago, arising from the touch of lips, in human love directly, and at the communion table indirectly, are avoided by the national aversion for libantal contact." However, social behavior of Japanese had evolved with time and what was true to Meiji Period had not remained a constant.

I have collected the available literature on kissing behavior of Japanese that remains scattered to trace the evolving dimensions of sexual behavior among Japanese who came to be influenced by visual images of Hollywood movies (since 1920s), American service personnel residing in Japan and Okinawa (since August 1945), television (since 1953), availability of regular/ porno videos (since 1980s) and internet (since 1995).

METHODS

I used the search terms 'kissing behavior', 'dating' and 'Japanese' for published scientific reports in databases such as PubMed (www.pubmed.gov), Thomson Reuters' Web of Knowledge (apps.webofknowledge.com), JSTOR (www.jstor.org), project MUSE (muse.jhu.edu) and those of commercial publishers Elsevier (www.sciencedirect.com), SAGE publications (www.sagepublication.com) and Springer Verlag (www.springerlink.com).

RESULTS

Two among the late Meiji period (1868-1912) records on the kissing behavior in Japan, as presented in the New York Times daily, follows: "Strange as it may appear," says M. de Guerverille in his account of Japanese women, 'a kiss is an unknown thing in Japan - not unknown to the gay maidens of Yokohama, Kobe or Nagasaki, who have so much to do for the amusement of foreigners, but unknown to the Japanese in general. A lover never kisses his sweetheart, a mother never kisses her child. He made a great mistake, the man who wrote that 'a kiss is nature's Volupuk, the universal language of love.' You can kiss any Japanese girl. She will not object, for she cannot possibly understand what you mean. She will only think 'what queer people these foreigners are.'"

"Mine Kuroda explained that demonstrations of affection were unknown in Japan, and added that 'kissing was imported, you know; we have only recently learned it from foreigners.'"

During the Taisho period (1912-1926), two more records on the kissing behavior of Japanese while confirming the similar records of the Meiji period observers, also includes an observation that kissing has been introduced into Japanese silent films intended for foreign markets. Yoshi Kuno (then an instructor of Japanese at the University of California) wrote the following:

"Every member of the family is either the superior or the inferior of another; therefore the element of comradeship is lacking in the Japanese home. Such being the case, kissing is an entirely unknown custom. Husbands and wives, parents and children, and young lovers have never known anything of the process of osculation. Even though kissing has never been indulged in by the Japanese, match-making has progressed without it as there is no courtship in Japan."

Grace Thomson Seton's 1923 essay on the silent movies produced in Japan has the following facts:

"One outstanding feature should be noted. It is the absence of kissing in Japanese films. The osculatory act is forbidden in any of its portrayals. A Japanese hero, or villain, may beat, drag by the hair, strike or knife the heroine, but he may not kiss her. When this Western custom of
showing affection appears in foreign films it is deleted by the censor. One extraordinary reel exists in Tokio which has been made up of all the 'kissing cuts', one long succession, and it produces a curious effect upon the beholder. The old Japanese drama was sex free, but although kissing is still deleted, the modern movie plot brings in the inevitable triangle and the sex interest, and even kissing has been introduced into Japanese films intended for outside market."

This observation by Seton contradicts the later views of Donald Richie® (a Japanese film historian, who arrived in Japan after the 2nd World War) who noted that kissing scenes were introduced only after the 2nd World War, in the Shochiku movie company's film, *Hatachi no seifuku* (The Twenty Years Old Youth) in 1946. Marc McLelland® excellent review of kissing behavior among Japanese during the American occupation between 1945 and 1952 also reinforces Richie's view. One possible explanation could be that Richie couldn't have access to the reels of many silent movies made in Japan, and stored under unsatisfactory conditions, due to war-related destructions of studios. McLelland's sources were post-war publications in Japanese available to him.

Immediately after the 2nd World War, Shinichi Asayama, an embryologist affiliated to the Osaka City University began his survey on the sexual behavior of young Japanese. Most of his findings were published in Japanese language. As such, his studies did not receive the attention of non-English researchers in the West. Marvin Opler®, unaware of Asayama's findings, restrained himself to an understatement; 'Japanese are still known for their tendency to consider mouth contact as being 'bad form' in his 1969 review 'Cross-cultural Aspects of Kissing'. Only in mid 1970s, Asayama published his findings in two papers in English journals®. In summary, Asayama inferred, "The experience of kissing as an expression of sexual love also shows increases with each generation. The results of the 1953 survey give figures of 1% for both males and females aged 15 years, but in the 1960 survey 3% of the males and 2% of the females had this experience. The cumulative totals for 21 year-old males were 30% in the 1953 survey and 33% in the 1960 survey, and the corresponding figures for females were 18% and 23% respectively. Experience of kissing in females students increased rapidly after 20 years, and the percentage gradually exceeded that for males (23 year-old males 40%; women 50%)".

Asayama also inferred that "motives which brought on kissing show a contrast between the sexes: 50% of the females had their first kiss because of 'love' and 'liking', while the same motives were found for only 32% of males. Males who were motivated by a sexual urge constituted 24%, in contrast to 7% of the females."®

**DISCUSSION**

The kissing and sexual behavior survey data of Japanese teenagers and young adults by Asayama® were based on questionnaire and interview methods. Bias in such self-delivered answers (even if they were confidential) cause a serious problem. Asayama® haven't identified the steps taken to reduce such bias. Another, Japan Sex Education survey in 1988 revealed that "25.5% of female high schoolers say they kiss".® A serious issue with sexual behavior data in Japan collected during the Showa Period (1926-1988) is that they rely heavily on the questionnaire surveys conducted by polling and market research institutes, government offices and print media. The answers of the respondents may vary from the format of the questions asked. Absence of standardization on the questions was a problem.

In the Heisei Period (since 1989) kissing behavior had become firmly established among the younger generations of Japanese® in public places too due to influence of movies and first-hand experience of younger Japanese traveling abroad for studies, business and recreation. Related to this trend, in the past 15 years, quite a number of case reports had appeared in medical journals linking kiss-induced allergy to food items®. These food items (nuts, apple, kiwi fruit, fish, shellfish) are also consumed in Japan.

It becomes a necessity for medical researchers in Japan to investigate the influence of kissing on disease transmission such as allergies, Epstein-Barr virus induced mononucleosis (colloquially known as 'kissing disease') and AIDS®. That research on sex-related behavior among Asian nations with conservative traditions is hardly tolerated by funding agencies, society vigilantes and university administrators is a fact. Japan is not an exception to this trend. Despite such barriers, the efforts of a few academics to study varying themes of sexual behavior and report their findings deserve respect.® I found out that with the rare exception of two solitary papers published by Kimata®,® on allergy reduction due to kissing, there is a paucity of studies on kissing behavior in Japan. I'd infer that even Kimata's findings deserve independent confirmation by other researchers.

**REFERENCES**