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A kiss is just a kiss? No way! Devotee makes study of one of life's sweetest pleasures

By KATE ARTHUR - Lee News Service

Andrea Demirjian likes to kiss.

So much so that she started doing a little spreadsheet analysis of the men she'd kissed.

With a 14-year-old's mentality, she jotted down hair color, eyes, athletic or couch potato and who made the first move. Then she started rating them.

What she found only deepened her preoccupation with kissing, something that started when she was 6 and thought only married people kissed.

The 42-year-old single New York native wondered if kissing really leads to plumper, poutier lips and whether it's possible to improve your technique with exercises, like rolling a wrapped mint around your mouth with your tongue.

The answers to both are yes, she said.

After surveying nearly 200 single and married men and women, the self-proclaimed kissing connoisseur bundled the results into a breezy cocktail party book, "Kissing: Everything You Ever Wanted to Know About One of Life's Sweetest Pleasures" (\$9.95 Penguin Group, 2006).

She tells what makes a great kiss and what doesn't (beard burns and lipstick), whether women would choose kissing over sex (63 percent would) and if kissing is considered cheating (66 percent say yes, but half have done it).

Sprinkled throughout is trivia, such as: Did you know your brain has a function that allows you to find someone's lips in the dark?

Most of us remember our first kiss, in every awkward, possibly slobbery, detail.

"It's a watershed moment in our lives," she said. "Men remember it in the same type of detail as women do. It may be more memorable than first lovemaking."

Matt Formeller of Bloomington shakes his head when he recalls the girl who surprised him at 12 with a peck on the lips.

"I had no idea what I was doing," he said.

Ten years later, he doesn't mind when a woman makes the first move. In fact, his last three dates have.

"It shows a lot of confidence. And it seems like girls always know what to do first."

Two out of three guys like it when women take the initiative, according to the survey of those in their 20s through 50s.

Nineteen-year-old Christine Friedrichs of Bloomington wouldn't hesitate to kiss first but hates it when she catches a guy looking. (Ninety-two percent keep their eyes closed.)

A month into a relationship, she forgave her guy for doing something nearly half admitted to - kissing someone else while involved in an exclusive relationship.

Kissing doesn't necessarily wane as a relationship progresses, although it can be tougher to find couch time once the dog and kids come along. Make the effort, Demirjian urges. Women really like to kiss. So much that they told her if they had to give up kissing or sex, 63 percent would give up sex.

Before she wrote the book, the marketing consultant hit a kissing dry spell, which ended after a dinner party when she invited a guy to share a cab ride home and got up the nerve to ask him out for a drink. Somewhere between sips of wine and deeply personal questions, the kissing began.

Men and women told her they want the same things in a kiss: hold back a bit before contact, a light, tender touch, slightly parted lips and a little tongue.

Oh, and be spontaneous.

"A kiss in the kitchen can be a wonderful moment," she said.

Chemistry and rhythm have everything to do with how it turns out. If the connection's not there, the relationship will sag. Move on.

"We've all had those really horrible kiss experiences. But a guy who could be a bad kisser for you could be a good kisser for someone else."

Sixty percent of women think they're pretty good at it, and so does Demirjian, although one date surprised her by giving her some pointers.

"I was open to some of his suggestions," she said. "We're still good friends, but we're not making out anymore."

What kills a kiss seems obvious - poor hygiene, razor stubble, gum or tobacco, wooden lips and a flickering or serpentlike tongue. But so will too much or too little passion, along with head bobbing and weaving.

Formeller qualified a statistic that 92 percent of men would kiss a woman back, and then some, if she interrupted him while he was watching a game.

"It depends on what game," he said. "If it's a White Sox game, I'd keep watching."

If you're out with someone new and want to be kissed, look your date in the eye and smile, Demirjian suggests. Lightly brushing your date's arm or shoulder doesn't hurt either.

Although she likes to kiss on a first date, sometimes she holds back.

"I like the first kiss to be held off as long as possible. It's the waiting, the slow build to something that makes it wonderful."

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Smooching stats

A man who kisses you goodbye every morning before leaving for work will average a higher income than guys who don't, according to Andrea Demirjian, author of "Kissing: Everything You Ever Wanted to Know About One of Life's Sweetest Pleasures." She also found the following statistics:

- 92 percent keep their eyes closed.
- 50 percent of men just winged it when they learned how to kiss. About one third gave the credit to an older woman.
- 48 percent of women make the first move when they're in the mood to kiss.
- 66 percent of men like it when she does.
- 60 percent of women feel confident about their kissing; 40 percent rate themselves as red hot, even unforgettable.
- 82 percent of men will kiss a woman back if she kisses him while he's watching a game on TV.
- 47 percent of men say a certain vibe/look is what makes a woman kissable.
- Nearly 50 percent have kissed someone else while in an exclusive relationship.
- 68 percent of men consider kissing cheating
- 66 percent of women consider kissing cheating.
- 44 percent of men have kissed a friend's girlfriend or significant other.
- 46 percent of men would end a relationship if their woman kissed another guy; 23 percent would be forgiving; 23 percent would try harder so she wouldn't do it again; and 8 percent would kiss someone else out of spite.
- 56 percent of men say they don't always want kissing to lead to sex; 44 percent do, but age was a determining factor. Older men were less likely to believe every kiss needs to be consummated.
- 63 percent of women would give up sex over kissing; 21 percent would give up kissing first, and 16 percent thought the question was too difficult to answer.
- 75 percent of men prefer kissing a woman without lipstick.