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Why are we still scared of seeing two men kissing?

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Why are we still scared of seeing two men kissing?

Abstract

Although details remain uncertain, the father of Omar Mateen has claimed that his son's murderous acts in Orlando's Pulse nightclub last Saturday may have been inspired by the sight of two men kissing. In response, a twitter campaign with the hashtag #TwoMenKissing has encouraged men to tweet photographs of themselves kissing another man. This is an act of pride and defiance in the face of violent oppression. It also reveals the ongoing politics of men kissing in public.

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THE CONVERSATION

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Why are we still scared of seeing two men kissing?

June 16, 2016 1.42pm AEST

Gay men are sharing pictures of themselves kissing in an act of defiance in the wake of the Orlando shooting. Twitter/@barbarosansalfn

Although details remain uncertain, the father of Omar Mateen has claimed that his son's murderous acts in Orlando's Pulse nightclub last Saturday may have been inspired by the sight of two men kissing.

In response, a twitter campaign with the hashtag #TwoMenKissing has encouraged men to tweet photographs of themselves kissing another man. This is an act of pride and defiance in the face of violent oppression. It also reveals the ongoing politics of men kissing in public.

In countries like the United States and Australia, where variant sexualities are increasingly accepted, showing affection in public continues to carry risk. A long history of censorship and erasure has weighted the gay kiss with meaning and often excluded it from view.

Those of us who grew up watching TV and going to the movies were fed a constant diet of heterosexual fare, in which the sight of straight couples kissing was so common as to go unmentioned.

Author



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Kevin Riddle

@riddler59

Father of Orlando murderer says son was angry seeing 2 men kissing. I say flood the world with pics: [#twomenkissing](#)

7:47 AM - Jun 16, 2016

6 See Kevin Riddle's other Tweets

The entire premise of stories that became films like Snow White and The Little Mermaid is that a kiss from a man will save a woman (or girl). This is accepted as appropriate children's entertainment because the desire these kisses convey is heterosexual. But similar acts between two men continue to be framed as something from which audiences must be shielded.

The growing presence of gay characters on television has not necessarily indicated growing comfort

with displays of same-sex affection. Popular 1990s soap *Melrose Place* (1992-1999) was known for its steamy romances, but gay character Matt only ever participated in an occasional manly hug.

Whenever it looked like he might be about to kiss, the camera panned away discreetly. Sit-com *Will and Grace* (1998-2006) went several seasons before gay character Will ever kissed a male partner. *Modern Family*'s Cam and Mitchell live together and have adopted a child, but it wasn't until season two that they exchanged even the most innocent of kisses. Australian television has been equally reticent. Long-running soap opera *Neighbours* (1987-) waited 27 years before showing two of its male characters kissing.



Cam and Mitchell kiss for the first time on *Modern Family*, in the second episode of the second season. 20th Century Fox

In cinemas, the first gay kiss seen in Australia may well have been in the British film *Sunday, Bloody Sunday* (1971), released locally in 1972. But the arrival of that first gay screen kiss didn't mean that things had changed forever.

As late as 1993, the film *Philadelphia* focussed on a gay male couple, one of whom was dying of AIDS. The lovers dance together and hug, but they never kiss. Director Jonathan Demme argued that a kiss might have repelled audiences, telling *Rolling Stone* in 1994:

It's just shocking imagery and I didn't want to shoe-horn it in.

In light of the horror of Orlando, discussing *Will and Grace* seems trivial. I certainly don't mean to suggest some causal link between American sitcoms and the acts of a mass murderer.

Rather, my point is that a long history of excluding same-sex affection from public view and the refusal to see or reveal queer lives has had specific effects on lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer (LGBTQ) people.



Johan van Berkel

@JohanvanBerkel

OH NO! TWO MEN KISSING! Get used to it. [#twomenkissing](#)

7:24 AM - Jun 13, 2016

598 196 people are talking about this

If queer acts of affection on screen have been positioned as unseeable perversions from which children must be protected, what are the consequences when those acts are attempted in real life? What lessons have we taught queer kids about themselves?

Whatever drove the violence of Mateen – twisted fundamentalist beliefs, the fear of his own desires or something else entirely – his acts have brought to light on an horrific scale the bigotry which, in much smaller ways, continues to shape the lives of LGBTQ people.

A study by the Australian Human Rights Commission found that, through the year 2012, verbal abuse had been experienced by a quarter of all gay men and lesbians, 47% of trans men and 37% of trans women.



Terrance Heath

@TerranceDC

Replying to @shadipetosky

Happiest day of my life! [#twomenkissing](#)

5:51 AM - Jun 14, 2016

475

96 people are talking about this

In response to the threat of abuse, almost half of LGBTQ people had chosen to hide their identity when in public. This requires constant awareness of one's behaviour. It means living your life like you're in a 1990s soap opera, having to wait for the camera to pan away before you can kiss someone hello.

The point of homophobic, biphobic and transphobic violence is to enforce the continued invisibility of LGBTQ people. It is the rejection of our right to equal participation in public space. The #TwoMenKissing twitter campaign has responded with a refusal to hide.

LGBTQ people continue to fight against stigmatisation, demonisation and bigotry. We'll know we're winning when the sight of two men sharing a simple kiss no longer looks like a political act.

Perhaps one day, a Disney prince will kiss his prince and they'll live happily ever after.

 [Homosexuality](#) [Gay panic](#) [Gay Pride](#) [Orlando shooting 2016](#) 

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