

The Kissing Experiment

On Thursday November 22, 2017, I was invited to a homecoming party in Brooklyn. At this party, I decided to conduct an experiment where I went up to 2 girls and tried to get them to kiss my friend in exchange for 5 dollars. Both girls at first thought that I was joking and gave me a wry laugh, and then when they realized that I was not joking, they looked at me and declined the proposition in an indirect way. One girl looked at me and said that she had a boyfriend and the other girl said that she would kiss him, but that she wouldn't accept the money because it would make her feel like a prostitute.

This breaching experiment shows that money is not a socially acceptable exchange for intimacy. In Zelizer's "The Social Meaning of Money" (Zelizer, 1994), Zelizer uses a famous magazine at the time, *Etiquette*, to show that it is not socially acceptable for women to receive gifts from men in exchange for intimacy, by stating how the magazine strongly cautioned women to not accept gift from men in order to preserve their self-respect. Even though this magazine was written in 1922, my experiment shows that the same social sentiments still exists today since the second girl declined the money solely just to maintain her self-respect. From an economic perspective, this is purely irrational since the girl would have kissed the guy anyway and this was an easy way for her to acquire 5 dollars, but what the economic perspective fails to take into account is the social meaning of money. Money is not a fungible thing, or in other words, not all money is equal. If the girl were to accept those 5 dollars, she most likely would have considered those 5 dollars as dirty, dishonest money even though from a purely economic perspective, those 5 dollars would have been just 5 regular dollars. By declining those 5 dollars, the girl must have categorized the earning of that money as a dishonest way to make money, which shows that money does indeed have a social aspect.

Sources

Zelizer, V. A., & Dodd, N. (2017). *The social meaning of money*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.