

When is PDA in restaurants too much?

By Julie DeVito

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Public display of affection --or PDA -- can be embarrassing or annoying, especially in the intimate atmosphere of a restaurant. But when is it too much?

Recently, a lesbian couple who out to celebrate their anniversary at an Arizona restaurant found themselves tossed out by a manager who said their display of affection was bothering other customers.

The couple, 38 year olds Kenyata White and Aeimee Diaz, suspect it was not a kiss or two, but homophobia that got them bounced from District American Kitchen & Wine Bar in Phoenix.

"I had my arm around her neck, and she had her hand around my waist," White told The Republic newspaper. "I gave her a hug for about a minute, pulled myself away to give her a quick kiss, and then we continued talking. My goal through this whole thing is really education and awareness. I think there are probably a lot of people who encounter situations like this and don't know how to handle them."

But while the pair claims a heterosexual couple would have been treated differently, others say restaurants are no place for public displays of affection, period.

"The only appropriate display of affection—if one could call it that—in a restaurant is when we greet a friend or colleague; and this is with either a handshake, a kiss on the cheek, or a quick hug," said Patricia Napier-Fitzpatrick, of the Etiquette School of New York. "A passionate display of affection is not appropriate and it can be embarrassing, as well as annoying for those who have to observe it."

Diane Pineiro-Zucker, a New York journalist who is also a lesbian, didn't disagree with Napier-Fitzpatrick's point, but said even if public displays of affection in restaurants are in equally bad taste, gay couples pay a heavier price.

"Because of the fear of comments or even violence, it is not at all uncommon for lesbians to refrain from public displays of affection," Pineiro-Zucker said. "We certainly have to be much more aware of our situation and surroundings at all times."

In July 2009, two gay men were allegedly asked to leave a Chico's Tacos restaurant in El Paso, Tex. after kissing. The men left after receiving a police threat for a "homosexual behavior" citation, a law which had been ruled unconstitutional in 2003.

Ross Highley, general manager of Jimmy G's restaurant in Cincinnati, said in a business where the customer is always right, the majority rules. If diners are grossed out, an amorous couple should leave the table and get a room. But the rules, he said, should be applied by the same standard.

"A heterosexual couple shouldn't be affected by a display of affection from a homosexual couple any more than a homosexual couple is affected by the display of affection by heterosexual couple," Highley said. "When it comes to expressing emotions there shouldn't be a double standard."

New York-based etiquette consultant Melissa Leonard said some will always disapprove of same sex displays while not batting an eyelash over straight couples doing the same thing. In the end, she said, it is up to a couple to show discretion.

"In both cases, homosexual or heterosexual, the couple should be cognizant of their surroundings," Leonard said. "Are there young children around, are there unsavory characters present, are you in a private, discreet corner of the restaurant, or center stage for all to see?"

Unless couples – gay or straight – show a little restraint while dining out, romance could be ruined for everyone, said Lorne Caplan, of Couples Company in New Rochelle, N.Y. She moved to the U.S. in 1993 from Montreal, where couples are more inclined to share a smooch before dipping into the fondu pot.

“What was once acceptable, light kissing, is even frowned upon,” Caplan said. “I lament the loss of romance here in the U.S. where any intimacy is becoming rare because there are so many boo birds and the threat of being jailed for tight hugging in public places.”

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