

LET'S TALK ABOUT INTIMACY!



Post Views 12,088

Is kizomba too close?

I have been teaching kizomba since the fall of 2012, and one of the main concerns I have always encountered is a fear of how close kizomba is danced.

“I just don’t feel comfortable dancing right up on someone.”

“My spouse would NOT be okay with that.”

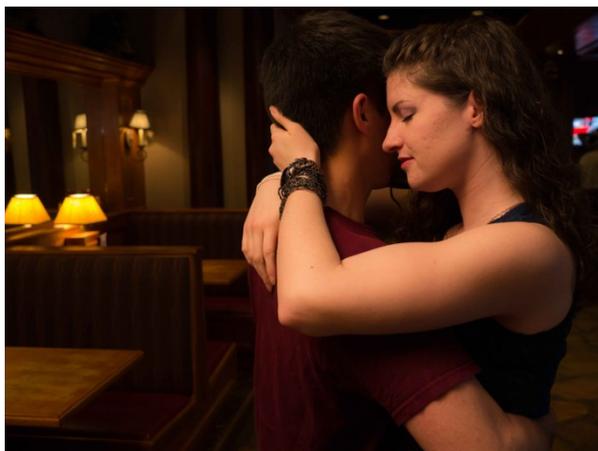
“It’s so blatantly sexual.”

“I don’t want people to get the wrong idea.”

“Kizomba is way too intimate.”

(<http://socialdancecommunity.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/Lindy-Focus-Rachel-044.jpg>).

On the other hand, those who have become kizomba enthusiasts explain that they love aspects of the dance that stem from that very closeness.



“I just love the feeling you have in kizomba.”

“It’s so amazing to move completely together with your partner, two as one.”

“It’s all about the feeling.”

“You can just let yourself go with the music.”

“I tell people we dance heart to heart.”

The same state of closeness produces powerfully different reactions. So how can we explain it? I think it’s largely a conflict between our social hang-ups around intimacy, and the powerful benefits it offers.

Defining intimacy

So let’s talk about intimacy. A Google search will quickly give you three primary definitions, which I quote in abbreviated form here:

- “1. close familiarity or friendship; closeness
2. a private cozy atmosphere.
3. an intimate act, especially sexual intercourse.”

Clearly the third definition is the one making people worry, as they stand on the outside looking in. They imagine unwanted sexual contact, or the judgmental view of others. Are these concerns justified?



Dancing kizomba does not involve any contact between erogenous zones. I joke about “Health and Safety Space” in my beginner classes, a line I took from my mentor Nelson Campos. It doesn’t take much effort to keep your intimate space non-sexual – if you’re a normal-shaped human being, your torso will be bigger around than your pelvis. That

means that when you stand torso to torso, there’s no contact between genitals. As you move forward and back, both partners should have their torsos over the ball of their feet, ensuring that no objectionable contact could possibly occur.

Blame the creepers

So maybe the problem is the “creepers,” the people who deliberately exploit a dance venue to touch others inappropriately. The men who lean back, bringing their belt buckle forward, or who bend their head down to stare into cleavage. The women who rub against their partners, caress their necks, or breathe into their ears. If my first experience with kizomba had been with one of their ilk, I'd be turned off too!

But every dance has these people. The men who catch a breast as they turn the follower in swing or salsa. The women who wear low-cut tops and shimmy wildly or bounce. The men who put the followers into dips that bring their faces close or require the follower to clutch them closely in fear. The women whose shines borrow from strip-tease. Every dance can and has been sexualized. Kizomba's just the new kid on the block.

Personal space

Others may protest that it's the nature of the dance that offends them – you shouldn't be so close to someone else! What about personal space?!

It's true that Americans prefer more personal space than almost any other culture. We speak to each other at arm's length. We sit across the table from each other on a dinner date. We can easily point to American-born dances like swing, lindy hop, contra dancing, and line dancing, where close contact is the exception.

Yet, at the same time, we are a culture of people who HUG when we see each other, and even when we meet friends of friends for the first time. Hugging involves more close contact than any other greeting. In the realm of dance, other American-born forms involve plenty of closeness. Balboa maintains chest-to-chest contact for the majority of the dance. American ballroom dancing has plenty of close contact. Even dances where people lean away from one another – like competitive waltz or quickstep – require lower abdomen contact!

Today we think of the waltz as something older people do, or maybe something done at weddings. It's elegant or staid, depending who you ask. However, in the 1800s, dancing the waltz was considered scandalous! So it seems we come back once again to an objection that seems to come from kizomba's newness in America.



Fear of the unknown

Let's say the main problem then is that people haven't had time to get used to kizomba; they're still afraid of what they don't know. That fear turns to avoidance and scorn. I saw the same exact thing happen as blues dancing started to be introduced in the swing scenes ten years ago. I even felt it! I was sure people were humping in

the dark in the blues room. Today the modern blues movement has won a certain measure of respect.

Maybe only time can resolve this problem for kizomba, but I'd like to offer some facts to help persuade the uncertain.

Returning to the definition of intimacy, we had the first two meanings that offered a wonderful picture of closeness. Friendship and coziness are socially acceptable concepts, right? Even positive ideas?



Plus, the intimacy of kizomba also means that the dance is about you and your partner. It's not about making a display of your body or being exhibitionist, like some dances we could name... Instead, it's about feeling the music with your partner, and interpreting that together.

Science says...

Let's go a step further, though. What do scientific and medical research have to say on the benefits of non-sexual contact between people:? Believe it or not, studies say that touch:

- boosts the immune system
- improves emotional well-being
- reduces stress
- stimulates cognitive function
- lifts mood
- improves communication
- helps create social bonds

A couple of great articles that skim the surface of this topic can be found at:
[Psychology Today](https://www.psychologytoday.com/articles/201302/the-power-touch)(<https://www.psychologytoday.com/articles/201302/the-power-touch>)
[The New Yorker](http://www.newyorker.com/science/maria-konnikova/power-touch)(<http://www.newyorker.com/science/maria-konnikova/power-touch>)

What now?

If there are so many benefits to touch, why don't we engage in more contact? Many believe that it goes back to our upbringing. Most of us Americans grew up with adults afraid to touch us or each other. Think of the trials for pedophilia, still causing men to think twice before applying to work in an elementary school. Consider sexual harassment suits and sex scandals, preventing touch in the workplace. Homophobia has created a culture where most men fear not only contact with other men, but any contact that could show weakness or emotion rather than sexual hunger. Girls, in turn, have been taught that too much contact entices men and compromises their own character.

I'm not saying that dancing kizomba is going to fix our touch-averse, fearful society. I certainly don't think it can hurt, though! Kizomba may not be for everyone, but it's worth a try. Go take a lesson from someone legitimate and get on the dance floor. Reap all the health and social benefits of close contact with other human beings.

Lets create communities that shine as examples of friendly, cozy intimacy.
