

Individuals adopt unique flirting styles

With a wink and a smile

By Chris Hopfensperger
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*F*lirting, by its technical definition, is not intended to be taken seriously.

It is a dance. A series of steps that are easy to learn but impossible to master.

It is a game. Give and take. Hit or miss. Duck and cover.

It's an everpresent mating ritual that can be invisibly subtle or brutally honest.

Unfortunately for most, flirting seems to evade all technical definitions.

What the actor may consider a genuine hearty laugh, the audience sees as a poorly performed snicker. One person's casual banter is another's persuasive speech.

Many students can't even tell when they're flirting themselves, Mary Bottorff, a senior biology major, said.

"You don't know when you're doing it," Bottorff said. "I guess it's because I always feel like I'm acting like myself."

"But I can see when other girls are bee-bopping around, trying to make a spectacle of themselves."

Other times flirting is more obvious, more direct, Bottorff said. "It could be just talking a lot to them, being extra nice," she said. "You just buy guys drinks. You get to talk to them then."

"It's not always a good thing, but sometimes it works. You just have to take the chance. It doesn't come naturally, but you don't sit there and draw out a map."

At other times, people may misconstrue a completely innocent act as that of a love-hungry barhopper.

Kiran Bahl, a senior elementary education major, said her friendly personality was often misunderstood.

"I probably flirt, not consciously, but I'm sure I do," Bahl said. "It could be defined by some people some other way, but I think that sometimes I'm nice to people, and they take it that I'm flirting with them."

Once, Bahl said, she and her friends started fooling around when they got bored in a bar in Kansas City, Mo.

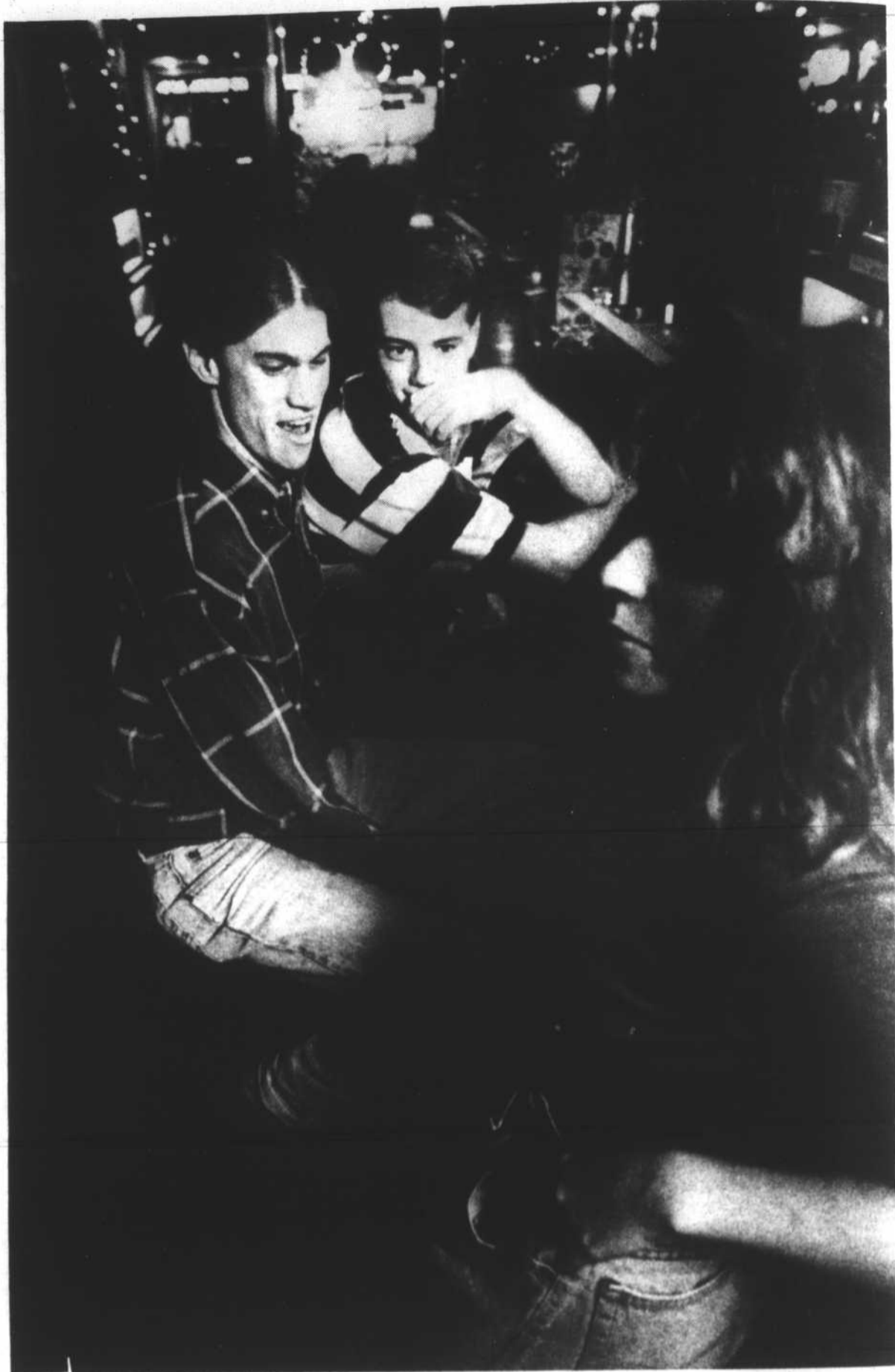
"I was daring them — to talk to guys, and they wouldn't," she said. "There were a bunch of skinheads in the bar, and so they dared me to go talk to them."

"I said, 'What I'm going to do is go down there and ask them for a cig and smoke the whole cig with them.' So I did. I was just having fun, but they didn't seem to think so."

When Bahl actually does flirt, she said, she does it in her very own "weird ways."

"This one time, I was at this party, and I must have been the only

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sober one there," she said. "Anyway, there was this cute guy, and he was hitting on this girl. I heard him talking to his friends about how he was going to take her home."

Later in the evening, Bahl said, she went off on the guy for being a male chauvinist and having such a poor attitude toward women.

"I was teasing him I guess, but I was serious too," she said. "But then he asked me out."

Bahl said no — at first. "The next weekend I knew he was going to be at this party, so I told my friend, 'Just watch me. I'm gonna get this guy to leave with us.'"

"I was just standing there, and I started talking to one of his friends. He saw me, but I ignored him."

"Eventually he came up to me. He went to another party with us. I took him back to his car, then he asked me out again."

Bahl, who says she very rarely plans how to flirt with people, wasn't quite so negative the second time around.

"I don't think about it at all," she said. "That time I did, but that was one of the only times I ever did. Other people are good at it. They can do it without being obvious."

Others aren't quite so adept, she said.

"Girls get all giggly and they touch the guy all over — acting like an airhead," she said. "It works on some people, but I think it's annoying."

For some, flirting is an artform — something beautiful to watch, something that flows from the soul

— heartfelt and honest.

For others it is a science, so stiff and staged it takes all the life — and romance — out of actions considered essential to the process of courting.

"Giggling is annoying I think," Collette Furst, a senior broadcasting major, said. "The whole dumb blonde bit doesn't work for more than a night."

Furst, who works at Barrymore's, said flirting helped her make better tips as well as meet new people. But for the most part, she said, it's all in fun.

"I compliment customers. If they're hitting on me, I just play along — just play," she said. "I'm just doing it for fun."

"Then the next time they see me we start to talk about something normal, and it's not flirting anymore."

The bars and other social situations may be the perfect place for people to lower their inhibitions, a laboratory for amateur amorists to experiment on an unsuspecting audience.

Science may require every action to be answered by an equal and opposite reaction. But the laws of nature don't matter at the bars and parties frequented by college courtiers.

"At the bars you can't really tell what people are like," Bruce Kroese, a senior advertising major, said. "You don't know who they are. You don't know where they're coming from. You don't know if it's genuine, I guess."

Kroese said he was very careful about the impression he was creating and very uncomfortable initiating conversations or flirting with people he didn't know.

"I don't start it," Kroese said. "But if somebody flirts with me first I'll flirt back. Usually you can just tell, they laugh at everything you say, so I talk to them more — show more interest in them than I would."

"Some people touch them or whatever, but I don't do that."

For Pat Specht, however, a social situation — and a little casual flirting — ignited the perfect chemistry between him and his girlfriend. Specht, a senior pre-med major, first met Ann while playing a drinking game at a party.

"I guess I flirted a little bit," Specht said. "I just talked to her. Afterward she wanted to go to Amigo's with us. I guess I could tell she was interested because she smiled and talked and seemed interested."

But flirting doesn't work for everyone. Todd Cox, a senior business major, said he was pretty blunt about meeting new people.

"I don't flirt," Cox said. "I go up and talk to her. Women should be treated with respect and not treated as objects."

Cox said he didn't like the superficial tone of relationships that began with such casual banter.

"I want to get to know the person before I think about a relationship," he said, "because it's her mind I want to get to know."