

Flirty or dirty? The difference can be in the blink of an eye.

By Deborah Cameron
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In a flirt's life, success is measured in seconds. Unfortunately, so is failure.

It all comes down to eye contact or the even more fleeting "eyebrow flash".

The authors of a dauntingly forensic survey of flirting describe eyebrow flash as an upward flex of the eyebrows that takes about a sixth of a second.

The best flirts have great success with it.

A well-directed eyebrow flash across a crowded room can lead to a chat and who knows where.

"Assuming your target finds you attractive, an eyebrow-flash with appropriate follow-up could leapfrog you into instant intimacy," said the Social Issues Research Centre in Britain.

Julianna Robertson, the founder of Sydney's Julianna and Friends, a social club for singles, is a dedicated flirt.

"I flirt all the time because it adds joy to life," Ms Robertson said. The difference between a flirt and a sleaze is when a person invades someone else's space."

She agrees that flirting comes more naturally to some and she has recommended remedial flirting courses for really hopeless cases.

The courses are run by Frances Amaroux, a relationships counsellor with Turning Point Communications in Balmain, who said that one of the basic problems was teaching people to make eye contact.

"A lot of people won't hold the gaze of somebody else even for a second," Ms Amaroux said.

The British research puts flirting right up there with Darwinian theory.

"Flirting may even be the foundation of civilisation as we know it," they say, reporting that evolutionary psychologists have argued that the ability to charm may be at the seat of all human achievement.

But the report - *What Social Science Can Tell you About Flirting and How To do It* - also makes earthier observations.

For example, you will have more luck in the pub than in a restaurant, and a person looking to flirt is better off avoiding high-fliers and should seek out clubs full of happy, sociable under-achievers.

"You will generally find a lot of flirting among incompetent tennis players, unfit swimmers, cack-handed potters, but somewhat less among the more proficient, serious, competitive participants in the same activities," the report says.

Men are more apt to misread plain friendliness for sexual flirting, overestimate their own attractiveness, and blunder in with a risqué joke that is "the verbal equivalent of a bum-pinch".

Even worse is taking their eyes off a woman's face to look at her breasts.

Men would do well to note the results of a survey of American women asked to give the three words they would most like to hear from a male partner.

"The most common answer was not 'I love you', but 'you've lost weight!'."

This story was found at: <http://www.smh.com.au/articles/2002/06/09/1022982798637.html>