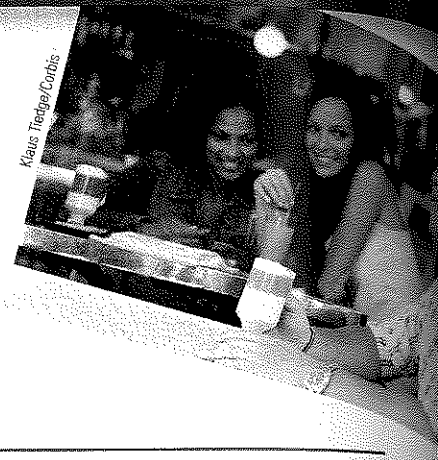


Module 79

Attraction

Module Learning Objectives

- 79-1** Explain why we befriend or fall in love with some people but not others.
- 79-2** Describe how romantic love typically changes as time passes.

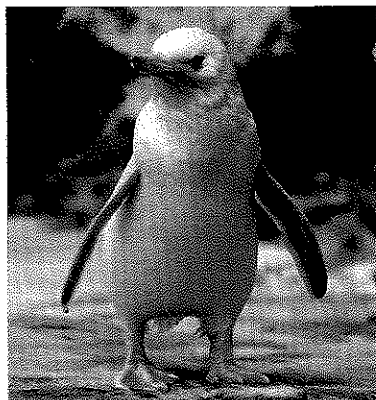


mere exposure effect

the phenomenon that repeated exposure to novel stimuli increases liking of them.

AP® Exam Tip

Can you remember the other use of the term *proximity* earlier in the course? It's one of the Gestalt principles from Unit IV, Sensation and Perception.



Familiarity breeds acceptance

When this rare white penguin was born in the Sydney, Australia, zoo, his tuxedoed peers ostracized him. Zookeepers thought they would need to dye him black to gain acceptance. But after three weeks of contact, the other penguins came to accept him.

Pause a moment and think about your relationships with two people—a close friend, and someone who has stirred your feelings of romantic love. What psychological chemistry binds us together in these special sorts of attachments that help us cope with all other relationships? Social psychology suggests some answers.

The Psychology of Attraction

79-1 Why do we befriend or fall in love with some people but not others?

We endlessly wonder how we can win others' affection and what makes our own affections flourish or fade. Does familiarity breed contempt, or does it intensify affection? Do birds of a feather flock together, or do opposites attract? Is beauty only skin deep, or does attractiveness matter greatly? To explore these questions, let's consider three ingredients of our liking for one another: proximity, attractiveness, and similarity.

Proximity

Before friendships become close, they must begin. *Proximity*—geographic nearness—is friendship's most powerful predictor. Proximity provides opportunities for aggression, but much more often it breeds liking. Study after study reveals that people are most inclined to like, and even to marry, those who live in the same neighborhood, who sit nearby in class, who work in the same office, who share the same parking lot, who eat in the same cafeteria. Look around. Mating starts with meeting. (For more on modern ways to connect people, see Close-up: Online Matchmaking and Speed Dating.)

Proximity breeds liking partly because of the **mere exposure effect**. Repeated exposure to novel stimuli increases our liking for them. This applies to nonsense syllables, musical selections, geometric figures, Chinese characters, human faces, and the letters of our own name (Moreland & Zajonc, 1982; Nuttin, 1987; Zajonc, 2001). We are even somewhat more likely to marry someone whose first or last name resembles our own (Jones et al., 2004).

So, within certain limits, familiarity breeds fondness (Bornstein, 1989, 1999). Researchers demonstrated this by having four equally attractive women silently attend a

Close-up

Online Matchmaking and Speed Dating

Those who have not found a romantic partner in their immediate proximity may cast a wider net by joining the estimated 30 million people who each year try one of the some 1500 online dating services (Ellin, 2009). Online matchmaking works mostly by expanding the pool of potential mates (Finkel et al., 2012a,b).

Although published research on the effectiveness of Internet matchmaking services is sparse, this much seems well established: Some people, including occasional predators, dishonestly represent their age, attractiveness, occupation, or other details, and thus are not who they seem to be. Nevertheless, Katelyn McKenna and John Bargh and their colleagues have offered a surprising finding: Compared with relationships formed in person, Internet-formed friendships and romantic relationships have been, on average, more likely to last beyond two years (Bargh et al. 2002, 2004; McKenna & Bargh, 1998, 2000; McKenna et al., 2002). In one of their studies, people disclosed more, with less posturing, to those whom they met online. When conversing online with someone for 20 minutes, they felt more liking for that person than they did for someone they had met and talked with face to face. This was true even when (unknown to them) it was the same person! Internet friendships often feel as real and important to people as in-person relationships. That helps explain why one-third of American marriages occur among partners who met online, and why those marriages are slightly more stable and satisfying than marriages that began offline (Cacioppo et al., 2013).

Speed dating pushes the search for romance into high gear. In a process pioneered by a matchmaking Jewish rabbi,



people meet a succession of prospective partners, either in person or via webcam (Bower, 2009). After a 3- to 8-minute conversation, people move on to the next person. (In an in-person meeting, one partner—usually the woman—remains seated and the other circulates.) Those who want to meet again can arrange for future contacts. For many participants, 4 minutes is enough time to form a feeling about a conversational partner and to register whether the partner likes them (Eastwick & Finkel, 2008a,b).

Researchers have quickly realized that speed dating offers a unique opportunity for studying influences on our first impressions of potential romantic partners. Among recent findings are these:

- Men are more transparent. Observers (male or female) watching videos of speed-dating encounters can read a man's level of romantic interest more accurately than a woman's (Place et al., 2009).
- Given more options, people's choices become more superficial. Meeting lots of potential partners leads people to focus on more easily assessed characteristics, such as height and weight (Lenton & Francesconi, 2010). This was true even when researchers controlled for time spent with each partner.
- Men wish for future contact with more of their speed dates; women tend to be more choosy. But this gender difference disappears if the conventional roles are reversed, so that men stay seated while women circulate (Finkel & Eastwick, 2009).

200-student class for zero, 5, 10, or 15 class sessions (Moreland & Beach, 1992). At the end of the course, students were shown slides of each woman and asked to rate her attractiveness. The most attractive? The ones they'd seen most often. The phenomenon would come as no surprise to the young Taiwanese man who wrote more than 700 letters to his girlfriend, urging her to marry him. She did marry—the mail carrier (Steinberg, 1993).

No face is more familiar than your own. And that helps explain an interesting finding by Lisa DeBruine (2004): We like other people when their faces incorporate some morphed features of our own. When DeBruine (2002) had



The mere exposure effect applies even to ourselves. Because the human face is not perfectly symmetrical, the face we see in the mirror is not the same face our friends see. Most of us prefer the familiar mirror image, while our friends like the reverse (Mita et al., 1977). The Maggie Smith (actor) known to her fans is at left. The person she sees in the mirror each morning is shown at right, and that's the photo she would probably prefer.



AP Photo/Herman Miller

Beauty grows with mere exposure Herman Miller, Inc.'s famed Aeron chair initially received high comfort ratings but abysmal beauty ratings. To some it looked like "lawn furniture" or "a giant prehistoric insect" (Gladwell, 2005). But then, with design awards, media visibility, and imitators, the ugly duckling came to be the company's best-selling chair ever and to be seen as beautiful. With people, too, beauty lies partly in the beholder's eye and can grow with exposure.

"Personal beauty is a greater recommendation than any letter of introduction." -ARISTOTLE, *APOTHEGEMS*, 330 B.C.E.

FYI

Percentage of Men and Women Who "Constantly Think About Their Looks"

	Men	Women
Canada	18%	20%
United States	17	27
Mexico	40	45
Venezuela	47	65

From Roper Starch survey, reported by McCool (1999).

McMaster University students (both men and women) play a game with a supposed other player, they were more trusting and cooperative when the other person's image had some of their own facial features morphed into it. In me I trust.

For our ancestors, the mere exposure effect had survival value. What was familiar was generally safe and approachable. What was unfamiliar was more often dangerous and threatening. Evolution may therefore have hard-wired into us the tendency to bond with those who are familiar and to be wary of those who are unfamiliar (Zajonc, 1998). If so, gut-level prejudice against those who are culturally different could be a primitive, automatic emotional response (Devine, 1995). It's what we do with our knee-jerk prejudice that matters, say researchers. Do we let those feelings control our behavior? Or do we monitor our feelings and act in ways that reflect our conscious valuing of human equality?

Physical Attractiveness

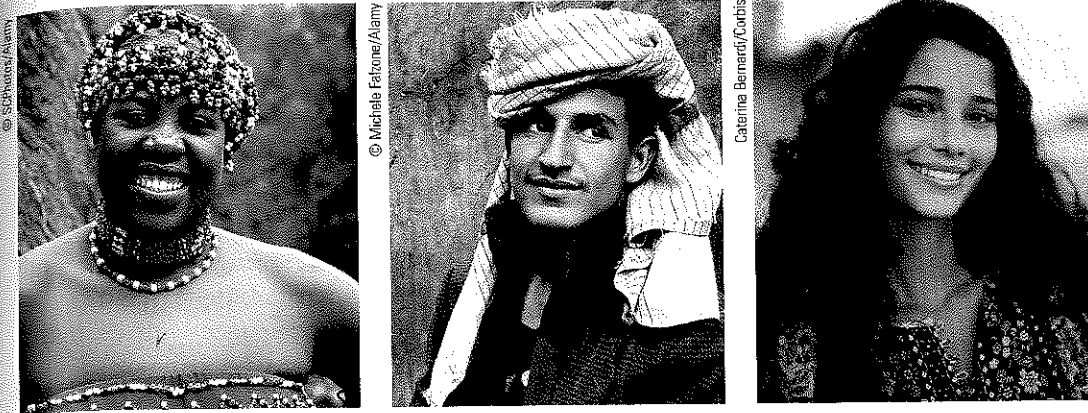
Once proximity affords us contact, what most affects our first impressions? The person's sincerity? Intelligence? Personality? Hundreds of experiments reveal that it is something far more superficial: physical appearance. This finding is unnerving for most of us who were taught that "beauty is only skin deep" and that "appearances can be deceiving."

In one early study, researchers randomly matched new University of Minnesota students for a Welcome Week dance (Walster et al., 1966). Before the dance, the researchers gave each student a battery of personality and aptitude tests, and they rated each student's level of physical attractiveness. On the night of the blind date, the couples danced and talked for more than two hours and then took a brief intermission to rate their dates. What determined whether they liked each other? Only one thing seemed to matter: appearance. Both the men and the women liked good-looking dates best. Women are more likely than men to say that another's looks don't affect them (Lippa, 2007). But studies show that a man's looks do affect women's behavior (Feingold, 1990; Sprecher, 1989; Woll, 1986). Speed-dating experiments confirm that attractiveness influences first impressions for both sexes (Belot & Francesconi, 2006; Finkel & Eastwick, 2008).

Physical attractiveness also predicts how often people date and how popular they feel. It affects initial impressions of people's personalities. We don't assume that attractive people are more compassionate, but we do perceive them as healthier, happier, more sensitive, more successful, and more socially skilled (Eagly et al., 1991; Feingold, 1992; Hatfield & Sprecher, 1986). Attractive, well-dressed people are more likely to make a favorable impression on potential employers, and they tend to be more successful in their jobs (Cash & Janda, 1984; Langlois et al., 2000; Solomon, 1987). Income analyses show a penalty for plainness or obesity and a premium for beauty (Engemann & Owyang, 2005).

An analysis of 100 top-grossing films since 1940 found that attractive characters were portrayed as morally superior to unattractive characters (Smith et al., 1999). But Hollywood modeling doesn't explain why, to judge from their gazing times, even babies prefer attractive over unattractive faces (Langlois et al., 1987). So do some blind people, as University of Birmingham professor John Hull (1990, p. 23) discovered after going blind. A colleague's remarks on a woman's beauty would strangely affect his feelings. He found this "deplorable. . . What can it matter to me what sighted men think of women . . . yet I do care what sighted men think, and I do not seem able to throw off this prejudice."

For those who find importance of looks unfair and unenlightened, two attractiveness findings may be reassuring. First, people's attractiveness is surprisingly unrelated to their self-esteem and happiness (Diener et al., 1995; Major et al., 1984). Unless we have just compared ourselves with superattractive people, few of us (thanks, perhaps, to the mere exposure effect) view ourselves as unattractive (Thornton & Moore, 1993). Second, strikingly attractive people are sometimes suspicious that praise for their work may simply be a reaction to their looks. Less attractive people are more likely to accept praise as sincere (Berscheid, 1981).



In the eye of the beholder Conceptions of attractiveness vary by culture. Yet some adult physical features, such as a youthful form and face, seem attractive everywhere.

Beauty is in the eye of the culture. Hoping to look attractive, people across the globe have pierced their noses, lengthened their necks, bound their feet, and dyed or painted their skin and hair. They have gorged themselves to achieve a full figure or liposuctioned fat to achieve a slim one, applied chemicals hoping to rid themselves of unwanted hair or to regrow wanted hair, strapped on leather garments to make their breasts seem smaller or surgically filled their breasts with silicone and put on Wonderbras to make them look bigger. Cultural ideals also change over time. For women in North America, the ultra-thin ideal of the Roaring Twenties gave way to the soft, voluptuous Marilyn Monroe ideal of the 1950s, only to be replaced by today's lean yet busty ideal.

If we're not born attractive, we may try to buy beauty. Americans now spend more on beauty supplies than on education and social services combined. Still not satisfied, millions undergo plastic surgery, teeth capping and whitening, Botox skin smoothing, and laser hair removal (ASPS, 2010).

Some aspects of attractiveness, however, do cross place and time (Cunningham et al., 2005; Langlois et al., 2000). By providing reproductive clues, bodies influence sexual attraction. As evolutionary psychologists explain (Module 15), men in many cultures, from Australia to Zambia, judge women as more attractive if they have a youthful, fertile appearance, suggested by a low waist-to-hip ratio (Karremans et al., 2010; Perilloux et al., 2010; Platek & Singh, 2010). Women feel attracted to healthy-looking men, but especially—and the more so when ovulating—to those who seem mature, dominant, masculine, and affluent (Gallup & Frederick, 2010; Gangestad et al., 2010). But faces matter, too. When people separately rate opposite-sex faces and bodies, the face tends to be the better predictor of overall physical attractiveness (Currie & Little, 2009; Peters et al., 2007).

People everywhere also seem to prefer physical features—noses, legs, physiques—that are neither unusually large nor small. An averaged face is attractive (FIGURE 79.1). In one clever demonstration, researchers digitized the faces of up to 32 college students and used a computer to average them (Langlois & Roggman, 1990). Students



David Perrett/University of St. Andrews

Figure 79.1 Average is attractive Which of these faces offered by University of St. Andrews psychologist David Perrett (2002, 2010) is most attractive? Most people say it's the face on the right—of a nonexistent person that is the average composite of these 3 plus 57 other actual faces.

FYI *New York Times* columnist Maureen Dowd on liposuction (January 19, 2000): "Women in the 50's vacuumed. Women in the 00's are vacuumed. Our Hoovers have turned on us!"

FYI Women have 91 percent of cosmetic procedures (ASPS, 2010). Women also recall others' appearance better than do men (Mast & Hall, 2006).

Extreme makeover Greater wealth and concerns about appearance in China have led to increasing numbers of women seeking to alter their appearance. This woman underwent six months of grueling plastic surgery to transform her eyes, nose, chin, breasts, abdomen, bottom, legs, and skin in hopes of obtaining a career in film.

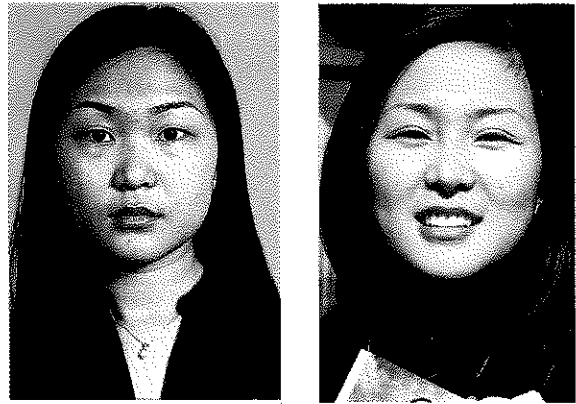


Photo: iev/EyePress; EyePress/Newscom

judged the averaged, composite faces as more attractive than 96 percent of the individual faces. One reason is that averaged faces are symmetrical, and people with symmetrical faces and bodies are more sexually attractive (Rhodes et al., 1999; Singh, 1995; Thornhill & Gangestad, 1994). Merge either half of your face with its mirror image and your symmetrical new face would boost your attractiveness a notch.

Our feelings also influence our attractiveness judgments. Imagine two people. The first is honest, humorous, and polite. The second is rude, unfair, and abusive. Which one is more attractive? Most people perceive the person with the appealing traits as also more physically attractive (Lewandowski et al., 2007). Those we like we find attractive. In a Rodgers and Hammerstein musical, Prince Charming asks Cinderella, "Do I love you because you're beautiful, or are you beautiful because I love you?" Chances are it's both. As we see our loved ones again and again, their physical imperfections grow less noticeable and their attractiveness grows more apparent (Beaman & Klentz, 1983; Gross & Crofton, 1977). Shakespeare said it in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*: "Love looks not with the eyes, but with the mind." Come to love someone and watch beauty grow.

Similarity

So proximity has brought you into contact with someone, and your appearance has made an acceptable first impression. What now influences whether you will become friends? As you get to know each other better, will the chemistry be better if you are opposites or if you are alike?

It makes a good story—extremely different types living in harmonious union: Rat, Mole, and Badger in *The Wind in the Willows*, Frog and Toad in Arnold Lobel's books. The stories delight us by expressing what we seldom experience, for in real life, opposites *retract* (Rosenbaum, 1986). Compared with randomly paired people, friends and couples are far more likely to share common attitudes, beliefs, and interests (and, for that matter, age, religion, race, education, intelligence, smoking behavior, and economic status).

Moreover, the more alike people are, the more their liking endures (Byrne, 1971). Journalist Walter Lippmann was right to suppose that love lasts "when the lovers love many things together, and not merely each other." Similarity breeds content. Dissimilarity often fosters disfavor, which helps explain many straight men's disapproval of gay men who are doubly dissimilar from themselves in sexual orientation and gender roles (Lehavot & Lambert, 2007).

Proximity, attractiveness, and similarity are not the only determinants of attraction. We also like those who like us. This is especially so when our self-image is low. When we believe someone likes us, we feel good and respond to them warmly, which leads them to like us even more (Curtis & Miller, 1986). To be liked is powerfully rewarding.

Indeed, all the findings we have considered so far can be explained by a simple *reward theory of attraction*: We will like those whose behavior is rewarding to us, and we will continue relationships that offer more rewards than costs. When people live or work in close proximity with us, it costs less time and effort to develop the friendship and enjoy its benefits. When people are attractive, they are aesthetically pleasing, and associating with them can be socially rewarding. When people share our views, they reward us by validating our own.

Romantic Love

79-2 How does romantic love typically change as time passes?

Sometimes people move quickly from initial impressions, to friendship, to the more intense, complex, and mysterious state of romantic love. If love endures, temporary passionate love will mellow into a lingering companionate love (Hatfield, 1988).

Passionate Love

A key ingredient of **passionate love** is arousal. The two-factor theory of emotion (Module 41) can help us understand this intense positive absorption in another (Hatfield, 1988). That theory assumes that:

- Emotions have two ingredients—*physical arousal plus cognitive appraisal*.
- Arousal from any source can enhance one emotion or another, depending on how we interpret and label the arousal.

In tests of the two-factor theory, college men have been aroused by fright, by running in place, by viewing erotic materials, or by listening to humorous or repulsive monologues. They were then introduced to an attractive woman and asked to rate her (or their girlfriend). Unlike unaroused men, the stirred-up men attributed some of their arousal to the woman or girlfriend, and felt more attracted to her (Carducci et al., 1978; Dermer & Pyszczynski, 1978; White & Kight, 1984).

A sample experiment: Researchers studied people crossing two bridges above British Columbia's rocky Capilano River (Dutton & Aron, 1974, 1989). One, a swaying footbridge, was 230 feet above the rocks; the other was low and solid. The researchers had an attractive young woman intercept men coming off each bridge, and ask their help in filling out a short questionnaire. She then offered her phone number in case they wanted to hear more about her project. Far more of those who had just crossed the high bridge—which left their hearts pounding—accepted the number and later called the woman. To be revved up and to associate some of that arousal with a desirable person is to feel the pull of passion. Adrenaline makes the heart grow fonder. And when sexual desire is supplemented by a growing attachment, the result is the passion of romantic love (Berscheid, 2010).

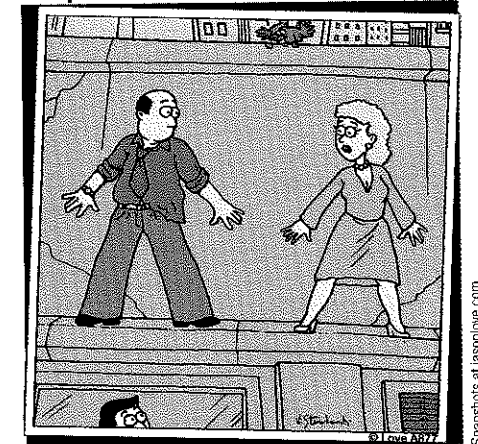
Companionate Love

Although the desire and attachment of romantic love often endure, the intense absorption in the other, the thrill of the romance, the giddy "floating on a cloud" feelings typically fade. Does this mean the French are correct in saying that "love makes the time pass and time makes love pass"? Or can friendship and commitment keep a relationship going after the passion cools?

The evidence indicates that, as love matures, it becomes a steadier **companionate love**—a deep, affectionate attachment (Hatfield, 1988). The flood of passion-facilitating hormones (testosterone, dopamine, adrenaline) subsides and another hormone, oxytocin, supports feelings of trust, calmness, and bonding with the mate. In the most satisfying of marriages, attraction and sexual desire endure, minus the obsession of early stage romance (Acevedo & Aron, 2009).

There may be adaptive wisdom to the shift from passion to attachment (Reis & Aron, 2008). Passionate love often produces children, whose survival is aided by the parents' waning obsession with each other. Failure to appreciate passionate love's limited half-life can doom a relationship (Berscheid et al., 1984). Indeed, recognizing the short duration of obsessive passionate love, some societies deem such feelings to be an irrational reason for marrying. Better, they say, to choose (or have someone choose for you) a partner with a compatible background and interests. Non-Western cultures, where people rate love less important for marriage, do have lower divorce rates (Levine et al., 1995).

Snapshots at jasonlove.com



Bill looked at Susan, Susan at Bill. Suddenly death didn't seem like an option. This was love at first sight.

FYI

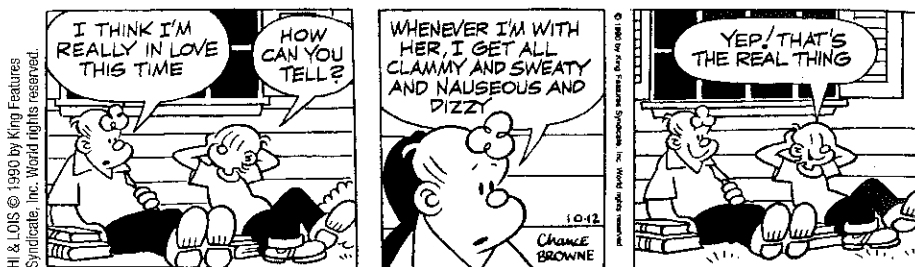
Note the difference between lust (immediate desire) and romantic love (desire + attachment).

passionate love an aroused state of intense positive absorption in another, usually present at the beginning of a love relationship.

companionate love the deep affectionate attachment we feel for those with whom our lives are intertwined.

"When two people are under the influence of the most violent, most insane, most delusive, and most transient of passions, they are required to swear that they will remain in that excited, abnormal, and exhausting condition continuously until death do them part." —GEORGE BERNARD SHAW, "GETTING MARRIED," 1908

HI & LOIS



One key to a gratifying and enduring relationship is **equity**. When equity exists—when both partners receive in proportion to what they give—their chances for sustained and satisfying companionate love are good (Gray-Little & Burks, 1983; Van Yperen & Buunk, 1990). In one national survey, “sharing household chores” ranked third, after “faithfulness” and a “happy sexual relationship,” on a list of nine things people associated with successful marriages. “I like hugs. I like kisses. But what I really love is help with the dishes,” summarized the Pew Research Center (2007).

Equity’s importance extends beyond marriage. Mutually sharing self and possessions, making decisions together, giving and getting emotional support, promoting and caring about each other’s welfare—all of these acts are at the core of every type of loving relationship (Sternberg & Grajek, 1984). It’s true for lovers, for parent and child, and for intimate friends.

Another vital ingredient of loving relationships is **self-disclosure**, the revealing of intimate details about ourselves—our likes and dislikes, our dreams and worries, our proud and shameful moments. “When I am with my friend,” noted the Roman statesman Seneca, “me thinks I am alone, and as much at liberty to speak anything as to think it.” Self-disclosure breeds liking, and liking breeds self-disclosure (Collins & Miller, 1994). As one person reveals a little, the other reciprocates, the first then reveals more, and on and on, as friends or lovers move to deeper and deeper intimacy (Baumeister & Bratslavsky, 1999).

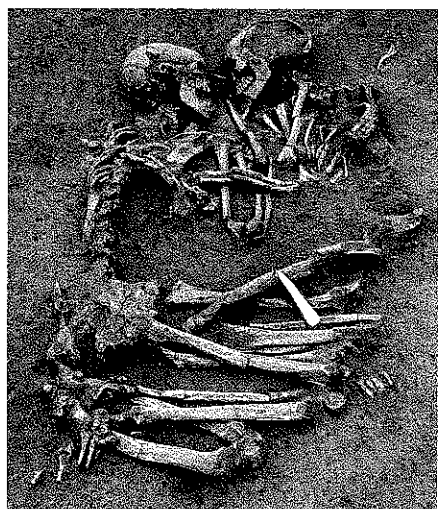
One experiment marched student pairs through 45 minutes of increasingly self-disclosing conversation—from “When did you last sing to yourself?” to “When did you last cry in front of another person? By yourself?” Others spent the time with small-talk questions, such as “What was your high school like?” (Aron et al., 1997). By the experiment’s end, those experiencing the escalating intimacy felt remarkably close to their conversation partner, much closer than did the small-talkers.

Intimacy can also grow from pausing to ponder and write our feelings. In another study, researchers invited one person from each of 86 dating couples to spend 20 minutes a day over three days either writing their deepest thoughts and feelings about the relationship or writing merely about their daily activities (Slatcher & Pennebaker, 2006). Those who had written about their feelings expressed more emotion in their instant messages with their partners in the days following, and 77 percent were still dating three months later (compared with 52 percent of those who had written about their activities).

In addition to equity and self-disclosure, a third key to enduring love is **positive support**. While relationship conflicts are inevitable, we can ask ourselves whether our communications more often express sarcasm or support, scorn or sympathy, sneers or smiles. For unhappy couples,

equity a condition in which people receive from a relationship in proportion to what they give to it.

self-disclosure revealing intimate aspects of oneself to others.



Love is an ancient thing In 2007, a 5000- to 6000-year-old “Romeo and Juliet” young couple was unearthed locked in embrace, near Rome.

disagreements, criticisms, and put downs are routine. For happy couples in enduring relationships, positive interactions (compliments, touches, laughing) outnumber negative interactions (sarcasm, disapproval, insults) by at least 5 to 1 (Gottman, 2007; see also Sullivan et al., 2010).

In the mathematics of love, self-disclosing intimacy + mutually supportive equity = enduring companionate love.

Before You Move On

▶ ASK YOURSELF

When you think of some of the older couples you know, which ones seem to experience companionate love? How do you think they’ve achieved it?

▶ TEST YOURSELF

How does being physically attractive influence others’ perceptions?

Answers to the Test Yourself questions can be found in Appendix E at the end of the book.

Module 79 Review

79-1

Why do we befriend or fall in love with some people but not others?

- Proximity (geographical nearness) increases liking, in part because of the *mere exposure effect*—exposure to novel stimuli increases liking of those stimuli.
- Physical attractiveness increases social opportunities and improves the way we are perceived.
- Similarity of attitudes and interests greatly increases liking, especially as relationships develop. We also like those who like us.

79-2

How does romantic love typically change as time passes?

- Intimate love relationships start with *passionate love*—an intensely aroused state.
- Over time, the strong affection of *companionate love* may develop, especially if enhanced by an *equitable* relationship and by intimate *self-disclosure*.