

CONNECTIONS

First You See, Then You Do

No need to be original. Being a copycat has benefits

■ Imitation often gets a bad rap—take imitation leather (not breathable) and imitation crabmeat (not enjoyable). But in relationships, imitation can be good—it can make you seem more appealing. In experiments at Radboud University of Nijmegen in the Netherlands, subjects interviewed by someone who subtly mirrored their postures gave bigger donations to a charity and were more likely to help an interviewer. And in research published in the *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, students rated interactions with mimickers as smoother than those with nonmimickers;



they also considered mimickers more likable. But while imitation may seem simple, it can be tricky, warns Robert Epstein, Ph.D., lecturer and former editor of *Psychology Today*. If people notice what you're doing, they may find you manipulative. Epstein's

advice: "Think smaller: If someone crosses his or her legs, wait 5 to 10 seconds, then cross your ankles." If subtlety's not your strong suit, make note of a person's mannerisms. Then try a few mini-versions the next time you're together. —Melissa Gotthardt



Go for the Big O

This sexy hormone can also improve your social life

many areas of the brain, including the amygdala, a region responsible for emotions such as fear, anxiety, and distrust. "By calming the activity of the amygdala, oxytocin triggers feelings of safety, comfort, and empathy," says Paul J. Zak, Ph.D., founder and director of the Center for Neuroeconomics Studies at Claremont Graduate University. That's a boon for romance, but oxytocin also enhances social interactions, including those among family, friends, and acquaintances. So how can you spark a surge? Human touch is one method, but other activities work, too. Studies show that pursuits such as playing with a pet can make oxytocin climb. Zak also recommends walking with a neighbor or calling a loved one. Plus, oxytocin increases your motivation to interact with others, so the more you produce, the more social opportunities you'll seek. —M.G.

■ **Oxytocin, dubbed the "hormone of love," may also be the hormone of like.** Though associated with romantic and maternal relationships—it soars during sex and is plentiful in women who are in labor—new evidence is establishing the hormone as an all-around relationship enhancer. Here's why: Oxytocin acts on