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LOOK INTO MY EYES ...

MEET BEDROS AKKELIAN, master seducer. When Akkelian isn't teaching his course, the Art of Attraction, the 24-year-old Montrealer is hypnotizing his way out of traffic tickets. Yes, traffic tickets.



STAN HONDA AFP/GETTY IMAGES FILE PHOTO Couples gaze into each other's eyes by candlelight during an eye-gazing party in a Manhattan nightclub. "Mutual staring" is normally a threat, says psychologist Robert Epstein, but when it's peaceful, it's relieving and enticing.

Somewhere near Montreal, a few months back, Akkelian deliberately drove his car at twice the speed limit through a stop sign right in front of a police cruiser. Naturally, he was swiftly pulled over. Confronted by the police, Akkelian applied mind control. "I can go," he would tell the police officer. He snapped his fingers and drove away, leaving the policeman dazed and standing in the road.

The event is recorded on a video with witnesses and is now on Youtube. Akkelian, whose stage name is Spidey, uses the power of suggestion and a series of persuasion tactics to extricate himself without a fine. He said he did so with caution and without malice – just to demonstrate it could be done. Akkelian quickly explains on the video that he's not successful every time, offering a recent \$151 ticket as proof.

"I would say I can do it one out of four times," he said in an interview. That is still impressive or alarming, or both.

When he's not mesmerizing his way out of traffic tickets, Akkelian uses similar techniques to teach men how to seduce women in bars, in a course called the Art of Attraction. The mentalist's ticket escape is intriguing proof that techniques of persuasion and seduction have come a long way. In fact, the old adage that no one can be hypnotized against their will rings a little false these days.

Last week, another mentalist, Messmer, caused a sensation on Radio Canada's *Tout le monde en parle* by putting reluctant actor Claude Legault to sleep, dropping him to the floor. Former Canadiens strongman Georges Laraque created a scene when he turned away, started looking for the exit, and plugged his ears for fear he was being hypnotized, too.

Today hypnotists, seduction "experts" and scientists claim to be getting close to cracking the codes of persuasion, seduction and maybe even love.

The last decade has seen the rise of the so-called Seduction Movement, a controversial, loose-knit subculture based mainly in major North American cities, where men gather in often expensive workshops to learn the skills of persuasion and seduction. Once seen as scams preying on the desperate, today the workshops teach thousands of people surprisingly scientific-sounding techniques, allegedly based on "evolutionary biology," "**neurolinguistic programming**" and "**Ericksonian hypnosis**." The participants graduate to nightclubs where they try to meet women.

The movement works from the belief that attracting people is an actual science, which just about anyone can learn and apply, regardless of physical appearance. The teachers, like Akkelian, often claim their techniques are so effective, they can turn the unsexiest nerd into a chick magnet. The most conspicuous example is Neil Strauss, the author of a book on the phenomenon, **The Game**. The balding and diminutive Strauss opens his story with the line, "I am far from attractive." But Strauss is motivated and goes from dweeb to master pickup artist by systematically applying the techniques. He even writes one of the chapters of *The Game* while receiving oral sex from one of his conquests.

The **Seduction Movement** has been controversial, often branded as backward, sexist and cruel because women are often the unwitting victims of potent hypnotic and psychological techniques. They are the ones being played in this game. Seducers, tend to disagree. "It's not about screwing women

over," says Akkelian. "It's about teaching men effective ways to approach women. Everyone wants to be seduced. Why not do it well?"

Akkelian says successful seduction is about learning the principles of the unconscious mind. He describes as "subconscious suggestion" women's use of eye shadow, makeup, lipstick and perfume to make themselves more alluring. The seduction techniques just allow men to even the playing field by practising another kind of subconscious manipulation, Akkelian says. The difference here, of course, is generally people know when women are wearing makeup and perfume.

But what if both partners in this game knew it was happening and consented? I stumbled on a possible answer while working on a TV documentary about the Seduction Movement. The production had hired a group of actors to demonstrate the techniques in question. They included subconscious suggestion, behavioural techniques and eye-contact tricks.

As most usually people do, the actors scoffed at the concept of "seduction methods," but as they enacted them something happened.

"It works!" one actress suddenly exclaimed as she stared into eyes of another actor.

To our surprise, the exercises worked so well, two Toronto actors hit it off and within weeks were inseparable and are now likely headed for marriage. The difference here is that everyone knew what they were doing, and the techniques were still effective, perhaps more effective as a result.

While the Seduction Movement is still underground, formal research into love has some parallels that may be even more profound. Psychologist Robert Epstein, former editor-in-chief for Psychology Today and professor at the University of California San Diego, is causing a stir with intriguing fresh theories about what he calls "the technology of love."

Epstein has even developed a series of techniques or love games that will be featured in his forthcoming book, Making Love. His techniques, he says, can culture love in just about any relationship. Unlike seduction techniques, the beauty of his exercises is both partners know very well what's going on.

"Give me 10 couples and I can get six of them to fall deeply in love," says Epstein who expects his success rate to increase with further study. "We take virtually any two people, and we strengthen the emotional bond between them."

Epstein says he developed the technology of love in an unlikely way – by studying arranged marriages.

"I positively do not endorse arranged marriage," he said. "But it's great way to learn about love."

Epstein says arranged marriages are intriguing because generally people start off loveless, and by definition have to work at it. This flies in the face of the Western concept of finding our one true love then magically living happily ever after.

Epstein believes many popular assumptions about love are flat wrong.

They've helped create the false and often tragic idea we all have one true soulmate waiting for us, when in fact we have the capacity to fall in love with a stunning array of people. Based on researched principles of compatibility, Epstein has even come up with the number of potential soulmates the average person might have: 350,000.

So how do you fall in love with one of them? That's actually surprisingly easy, says Epstein, due to our natural drives to bond with those around us: Take two compatible people, put them through some basic situations, apply his behavioural exercises and presto – love!

Some of these exercises seem simplistic and theatrical but Epstein insists they work. For example, in his university class on love, he has pairs of students race up huge stairways blindfolded holding hands. The principle here is that mild amounts of shared danger, combined with a journey, romantically bond people. Then he has them do a series of love exercises, some with startling similarity to seduction tactics.

What the seducers sometimes call eye-gazing, Epstein calls soul-gazing. Two people sit staring deep into each other eyes, often breathing together and sometimes synchronizing movements. Eye-gazing has caught on and there are now eye-gazing parties around North America where groups of strangers stare deeply in each other's eyes looking for love. People report feeling powerful sensations and often feel they "travel" into each other's eyes. Practise soul-gazing regularly, Epstein says, and love often follows. Why?

"Mutual staring" is normally a threat, says Epstein, and when it's peaceful, it's relieving and enticing. Beyond that, he doesn't yet know.

The Seduction Movement offers an explanation.



Researchers have observed that people in love mirror each other's behaviours. Think of a couple on a smoldering date sitting face to face. This mirroring principle may explain why over the years, lovers often begin to resemble each other. As a seduction tactic, the seducers will mirror a women's behaviour hoping to trigger her sense that love is in the air. This is trickery, but it may point to

something more profound. We are powerfully driven to bond. When we open ourselves to it, it seems to just take care of itself. And, Epstein says, with some openmindedness, vulnerability and a little work, the untold wonders of love potentially await us all.