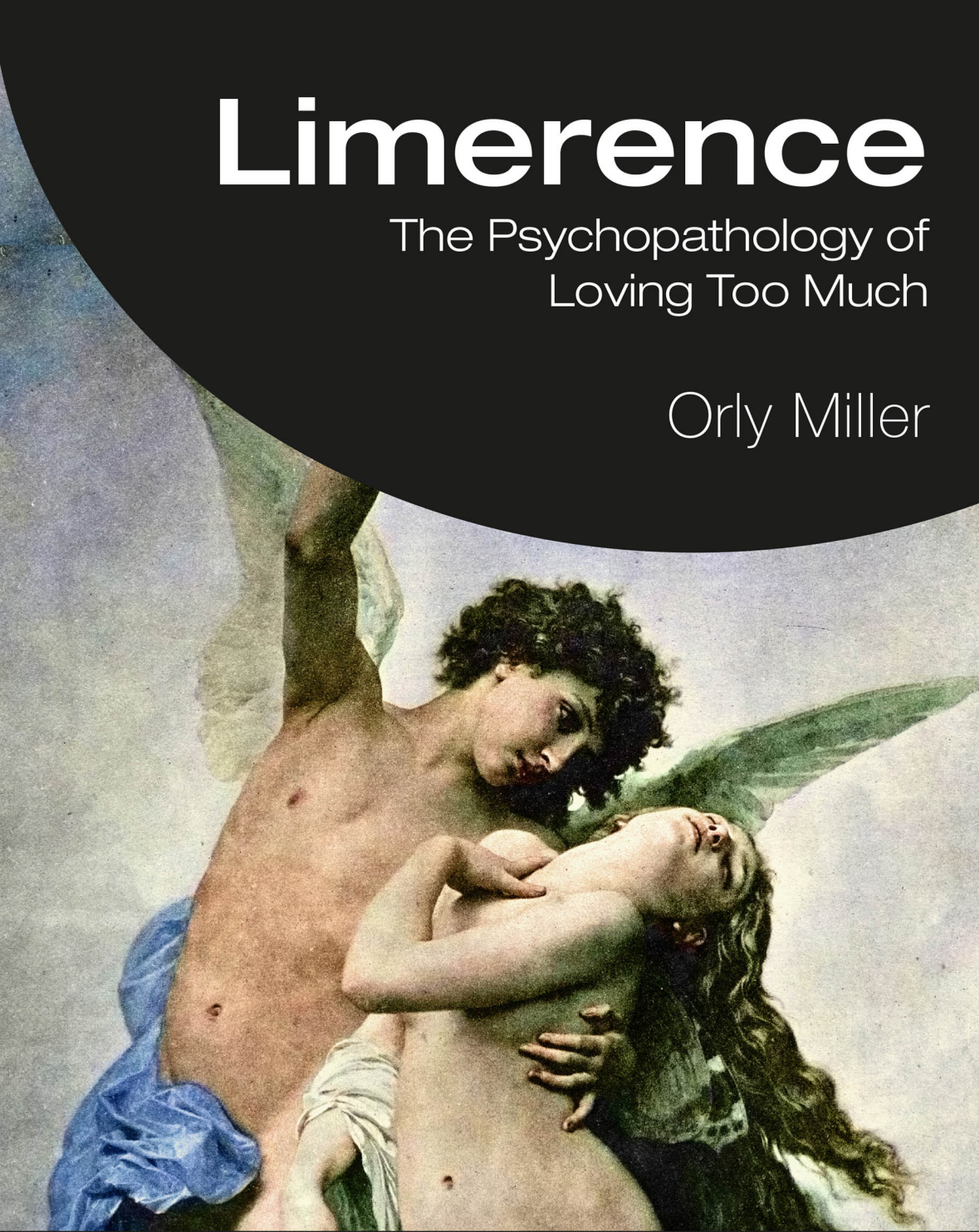


# Limerence

The Psychopathology of  
Loving Too Much

Orly Miller



‘This adventurous, compassionate book wakes us up to the experience of limerence. With myths, real-life cases, and timely insight into digital limerence, Orly Miller offers practical guidance for both clinicians and individuals, and beautifully shows that healing is possible.’

**Lucy L. Brown, PhD, Neuroscientist, Albert Einstein  
College of Medicine**

‘Orly Miller offers a fresh new perspective on the commonly occurring but often misunderstood experience of limerence. Her work is both incisive and holistic, making it a powerful read for therapists and laypeople alike. If you are looking for an analytic deep dive into the world of intense longing, this book is for you.’

**Alexandra H. Solomon, PhD, Adjunct Professor at Northwestern  
University, bestselling author of Love Every Day,  
and Host of the Podcast, Reimagining Love**



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# Limerence

What happens when longing takes hold and won't let go? When the need for connection becomes obsession, and fantasy begins to blur with reality?

This book explores limerence, a complex and often misunderstood psychological state marked by intrusive thoughts, emotional dependency, and an intense longing for reciprocation. What begins as attraction can quickly spiral into fixation, projection, and the gradual unravelling of the self.

The author weaves together insights from psychology, neuroscience, mythology, and cultural analysis to examine limerence through clinical, emotional, symbolic, digital, spiritual, and relational lenses. Drawing on case studies, archetypal patterns, and original diagnostic frameworks, it reveals limerence as both a source of profound suffering and a window into deeper psychological truths.

For therapists, clinicians, and curious readers alike, this is a nuanced exploration of obsessive love and the psychological complexities that shape it.

**Orly Miller** is a psychologist and writer whose work explores the terrain of obsessive love, emotional attachment, and longing. Drawing on clinical practice, mythology, and cultural critique, she brings a unique lens to limerence, blending therapeutic insight with literary and symbolic analysis.



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# Limerence

The Psychopathology of Loving Too Much

Orly Miller

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**For my family.**



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# Preface

There are kinds of love that nourish, and kinds that consume. This book is about the latter.

Limerence is a psychic fire. An ache that moves like obsession but disguises itself as devotion. It is a hunger, a haunting, a beautiful torment. It arrives without warning and resists all logic. You do not choose it. You are chosen.

I did not set out to write this book. It gathered slowly, like smoke rising through my clinical work, my conversations, my own reflections.

Over time, it became clear that this experience needed language and recognition. Because it hurts. Because it matters. Because it reveals something about the soul of longing.

This book is my offering. Burning, I place it on the altar of Love. For the psyche, for the soul, for the sanctity of human connection. Let it burn. Let something true be revealed.

# Acknowledgments

This book did not come into being alone, though solitude played its part.

Thank you to Hugh Kingsley, Elli Tamir, Dr. Gil Korman, Cherie Levie, Dion Kagan, and Louise Merrington for your conversations, critical eyes, and for pointing me toward doors I did not know how to find, let alone open.

To Jaye Huxley, Helen Wolfers, Maya Lester, and David Michael, thank you for your support and presence.

To my mother, Debbie Masel. May her memory be a blessing. Thank you for the blueprint of the writing life and for appearing when invoked.

To my clients and to those who shared your stories of obsessive love, thank you for entrusting me with your secrets. All names and identifying details have been changed to preserve confidentiality, but the essence and insight remain.

# Acronyms and Abbreviations

AI	artificial intelligence
BPD	borderline personality disorder
CBT	cognitive behavioral therapy
DBT	dialectical behavior therapy
DSM	diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders
DSM-5-TR	diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders, fifth edition, text revision
fMRI	functional magnetic resonance imaging
GAD	generalized anxiety disorder
LAS	limerence assessment scale
OCD	obsessive–compulsive disorder
OLD	obsessive love disorder
PET	positron emission tomography
RAIN	recognize, allow, investigate, and nurture
SAD	separation anxiety disorder

# Introduction

## Limerence in Context: A Passionate Madness

Limerence is an acute, disruptive, and enduring state of intense longing for a specific person that is characterized by intrusive and obsessive thoughts, fantasies, emotional volatility, and a powerful desire for emotional reciprocation. Limerence is not the same as a crush, nor is it part of healthy love. While limerence may resemble the early stages of a healthy love relationship, it is distinctly different. The distinction lies in what happens next. In a healthy love relationship, the initial infatuation period will give way to another phase. Either the couple will bond successfully and enter a tangible relationship, or they will not, perhaps grieve the romantic attachment, and move on, maintaining a platonic friendship or going their separate ways.

A crush typically involves attraction, curiosity, or admiration, but remains light and manageable. It does not take hold of the psyche in the same way as limerence, nor does it cause the same level of psychological disruption. If the feelings are unrequited or the circumstances are unfavorable, the person with a crush is generally able to accept this and let go. In this way, the trajectory of a crush is closer to that of healthy love: it either progresses or fades.

Limerence doesn't move beyond infatuation, but rather keeps the individual transfixed and obsessed by another, regardless of the relationship's viability or progress. Limerence thrives in uncertainty, flourishing when a person is unsure about their standing with the one they desire or when a barrier prevents the connection from developing into a real, reciprocal, and fulfilling relationship. It can be agonizing and last for months, years, or even decades, sustained by a potent mix of hope and doubt.

Limerence encompasses a wide spectrum of intense emotions, ranging from ecstatic highs to profound lows. On the darker side, it involves depressed moods, irritability, anxiety, low self-esteem, obsessive thoughts, and suicidal ideation. However, limerence is not all darkness and gloom. The highs can be euphoric, invoking feelings of love, connection, energy, heightened self-esteem, joy, enhanced sensory awareness, increased libido, and an experience of spiritual connection and bliss.

Due to the powerfully intense and volatile emotional landscape of limerence, it also serves as a powerful muse. It has imbued human expression with sensual and creative energy, fueling many great works of art, literature, music,

## 2 Limerence

and film throughout the ages. The emotional intensity of limerence has also stoked the flames of many passionate relationships and affairs of the heart, both real and imagined, condoned and condemned.

While the direction of emotions fluctuates during limerence, the intensity remains constant. People experiencing limerence swing wildly between euphoria and depression, sometimes within a single day or night. The direction of the intense emotions depends on the perceived level of emotional reciprocity or rejection from the desired other, determined by interactions, both real and imagined.

Each interaction is imbued with so much meaning that it is replayed repeatedly, almost religiously, with every detail scrutinized for signs of reciprocity or rejection. The conclusions drawn from these interactions, however speculative, dictate the emotional direction the limerent individual experiences. This process, almost mystical, involves gleaning insight through symbols, subtle cues, choice of words, gestures, a change in breath, or a prolonged gaze. It is like interpreting a poem or deciphering a dream, grasping for glimmers of meaning and hope. It involves relentless self-torment, analyzing everything, and searching for invisible clues that might provide insight into the heart and mind of the other, resembling an intense and dangerous game of “she loves me, she loves me not.”

This intense and prolonged obsession with another person severely disrupts important areas of life, impairing the individual’s ability to work, focus, function, and maintain healthy relationships. The lack of awareness within the mental health community about limerence and its symptoms exacerbates its debilitating and isolating effects.

Given its psychological intensity and potential for harm, it is surprising that limerence has not been researched more extensively. Further investigation is needed to better understand limerence, including why it occurs in some individuals and not others, as well as the biological and environmental factors that contribute to its development and maintenance.

Since its initial conceptualization by psychologist Dorothy Tennov in the 1970s (Tennov, 1979), limerence has not received much research attention. Recently, however, it has reemerged in pop psychology as a topic of discussion on online forums and social media platforms. Articles in a range of media have featured limerence, attempting, and often failing, to clear up misconceptions and define what it actually is.

One has only to type the word “limerence” into a Google search to be confronted with questions like: “What is the difference between limerence and love?” “What are the signs and stages of limerence?” “Is limerence a sign of mental health issues?” “How is limerence treated?” “What are the causes and symptoms of limerence?” and “How can I overcome limerence?” While little is currently known about limerence, it is clear that many people are seeking information and support for it.

Limerence is not recognized as a psychological disorder in the current (fifth) edition of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*