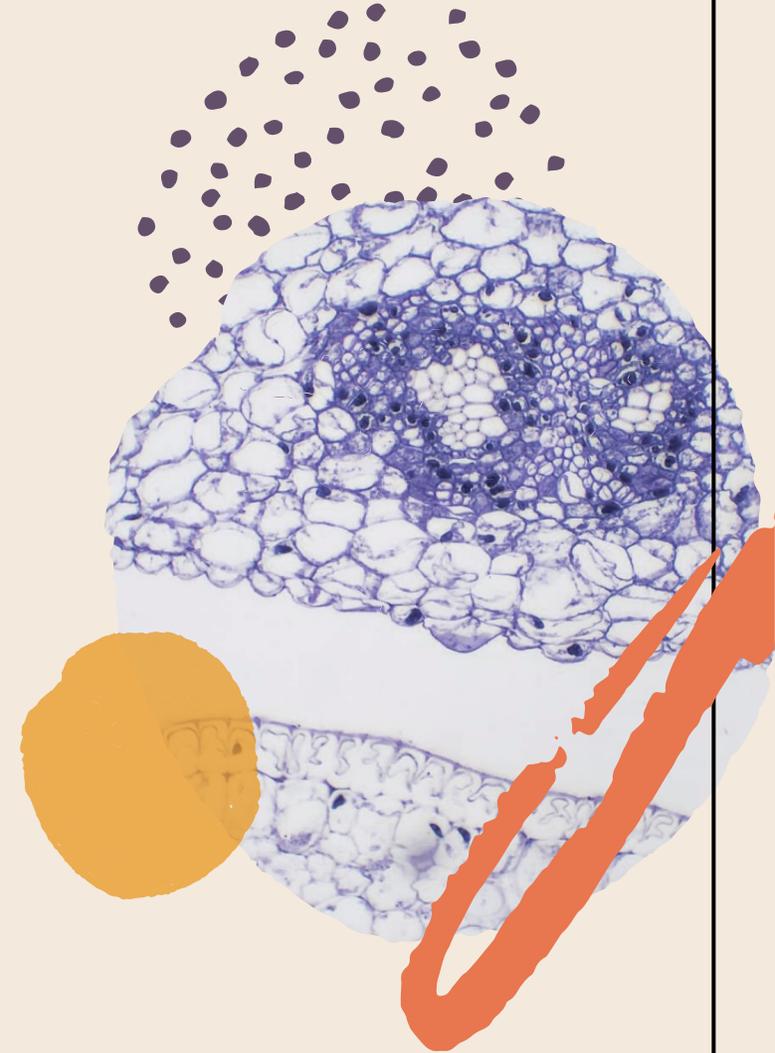


Limerence

Marios Georgiou

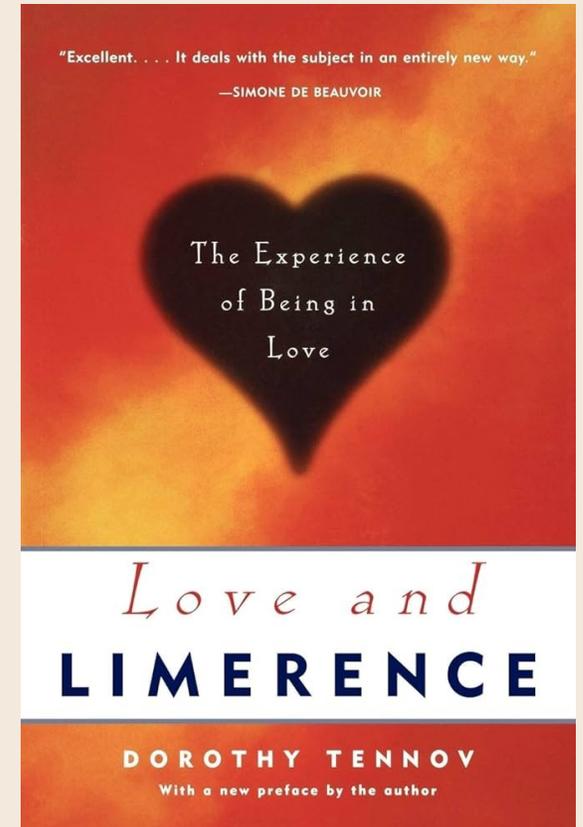


Definition and characteristics

- **Limerence (noun)**
- **Limerent (adjective)**
- **Limerent Object (“LO”)**

Defining “limerence”

- **Book by Dr. Dorothy Tennov (1979)** *Love and Limerence: The Experience of Being in Love* **Coined the term “limerence”**
 - To describe a distinct, involuntary state of intense romantic attraction
- **Research foundation**
 - ~800 questionnaire respondents
 - 300+ in-depth interviews
 - Thousands of personal accounts (letters, diaries, volunteers)



Defining “limerence”

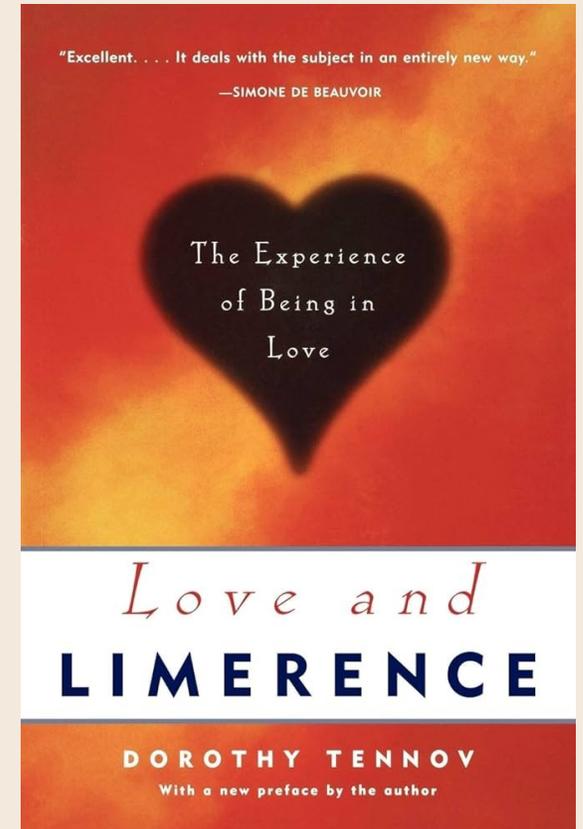
- **How Tennov discovered it**

- Began with student stories in the mid-1960s → realised a common pattern no one had properly named

- **Typical duration** 1.5–3 years (some last much longer; others fade sooner)

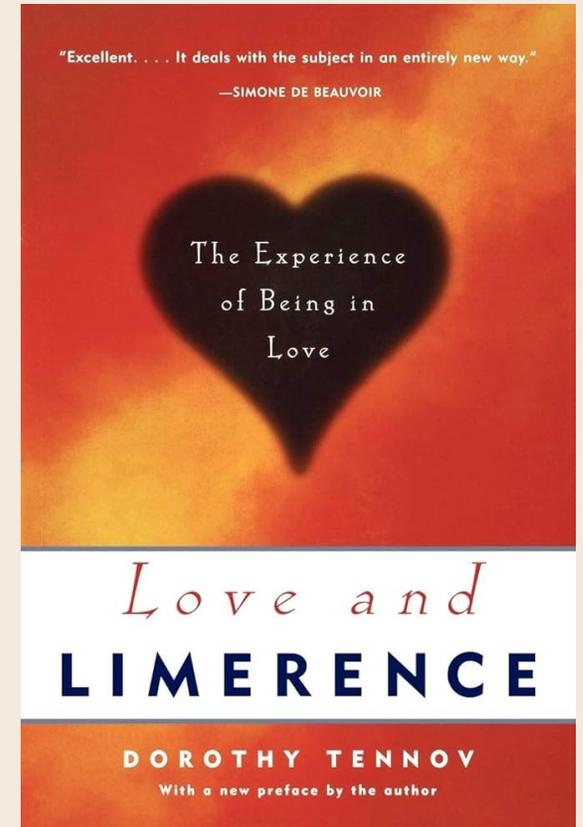
- **Core nature**

- Involuntary, obsessive, and often all-consuming
- Combines hope, fear, and longing for emotional reciprocation



How does it happen?

- Tennyson adopts and explains Stendhal's famous 1822 metaphor from *De l'Amour*. She describes crystallization as:
- “The process by which the attractive characteristics of the limerent object (LO) are **exaggerated and amplified** in the limerent person's mind, while unattractive characteristics are **given little or no attention** or are emotionally reframed as charming or even graceful.”
- “The original naked branch is no longer recognizable by indifferent eyes, because it now sparkles with perfections, or diamonds, which [others] do not see...”



Current state of research

- Mentioned in around 200 papers (incl. grey literature)
- Literature
 - psychodynamic literature, CBT and qualitative using the actual word
 - some scales but quite specific (e.g. sexual behaviour, developed through self-reports)
 - studied as other concepts such as “*manic love*”, “*early romantic attraction*”, and “*eros*”

Romantic and/or platonic?

- Most frame in the context of romance (i.e. pursuit of sexual exclusivity)
- However it can more purely be about reciprocation & 'unity'
 - being seen as uniquely important to this person,
 - returning the feelings you have for them,
 - Recognition
- Tennov does state in her book it is...

Romantic and/or platonic?

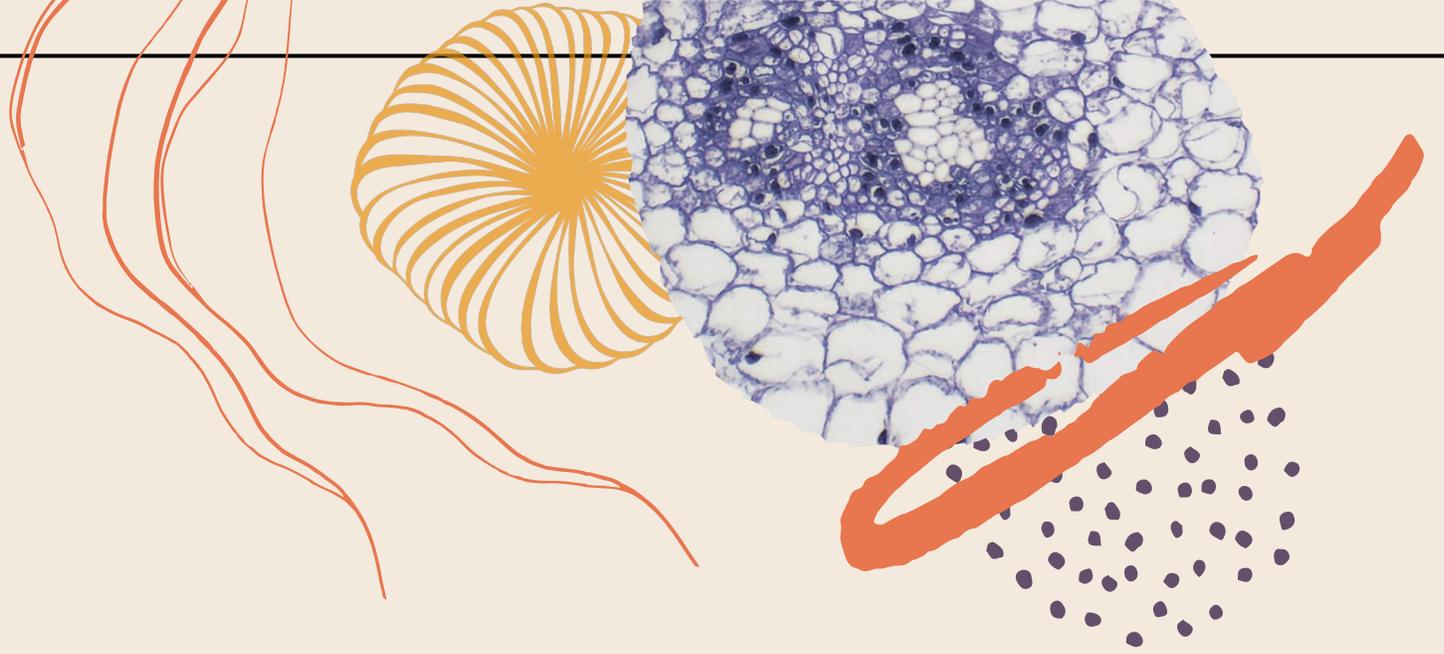
- “Despite those few exceptions, **I am inclined toward the generalization that sexual attraction is an essential component of limerence.** This sexual feeling may be combined with shyness, impotence or some form of sexual dysfunction or disinclination, or with some social unsuitability. But LO, in order to become LO, must stand in relation to the limerent as one for whom the limerent is a potential sex partner.”

Romantic and/or platonic?

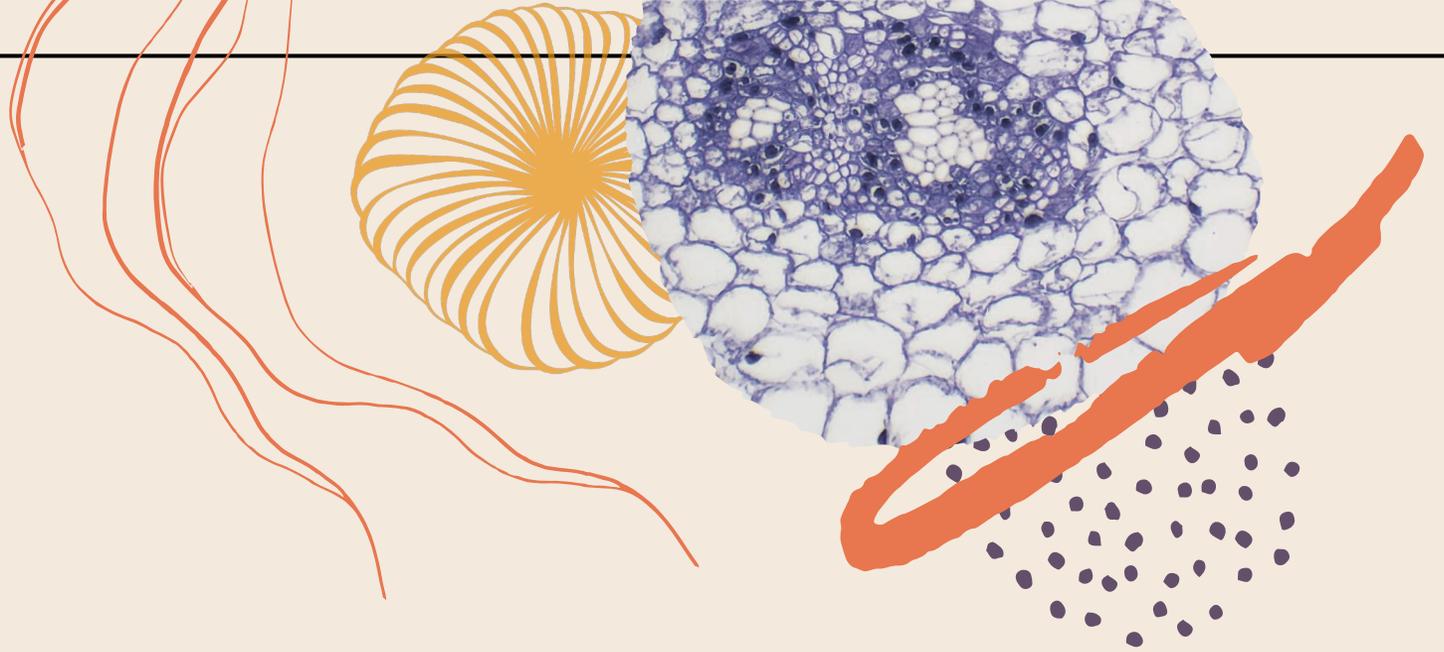
- “**Limerence is not mere sexual attraction** ... Sex is neither essential nor, in itself, adequate to satisfy the limerent need. **But sex is never entirely excluded in the limerent passion, either.** Limerence is a desire for more than sex, and a desire in which the sexual act may represent the symbol of its highest achievement: reciprocation. Reciprocation expressed through physical union creates the ecstatic and blissful condition called ‘the greatest happiness’ ...”

The problems

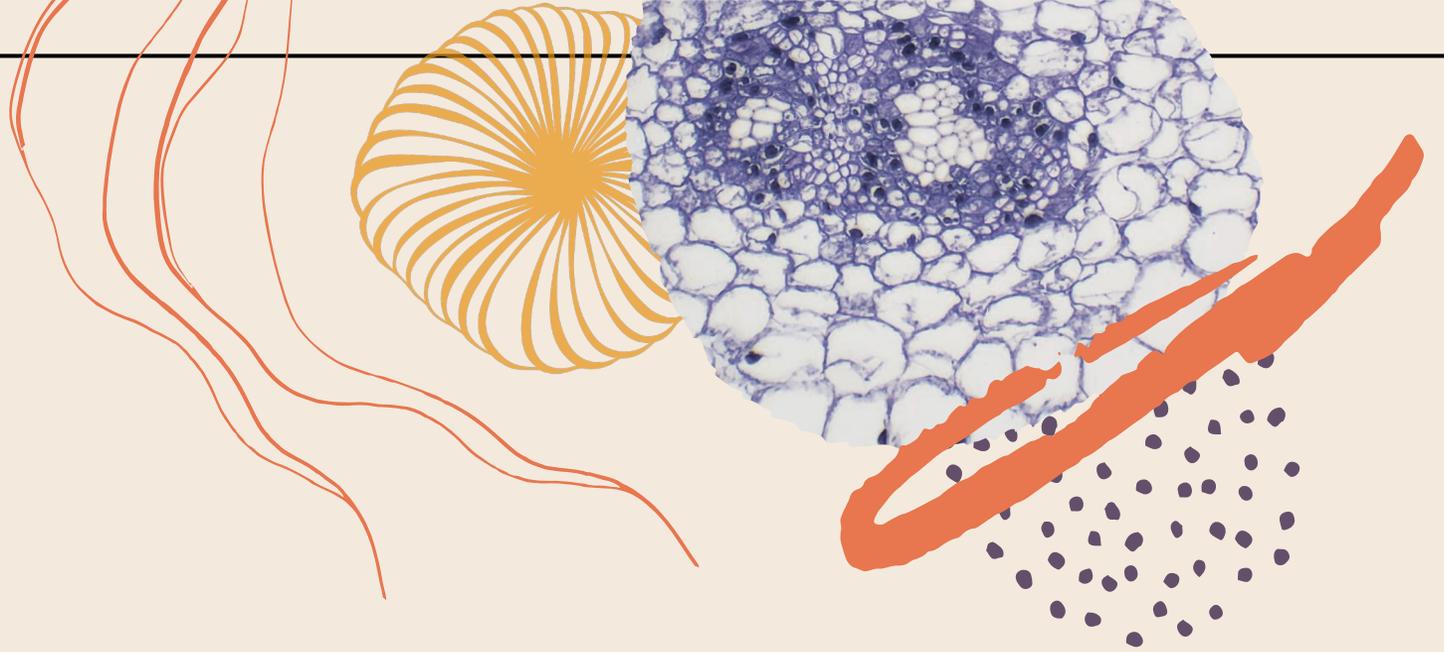
“[re-order] the motivational hierarchy, with consequent disruption or neglect of other interests, relationships, and responsibilities” (Tennov, 2005)



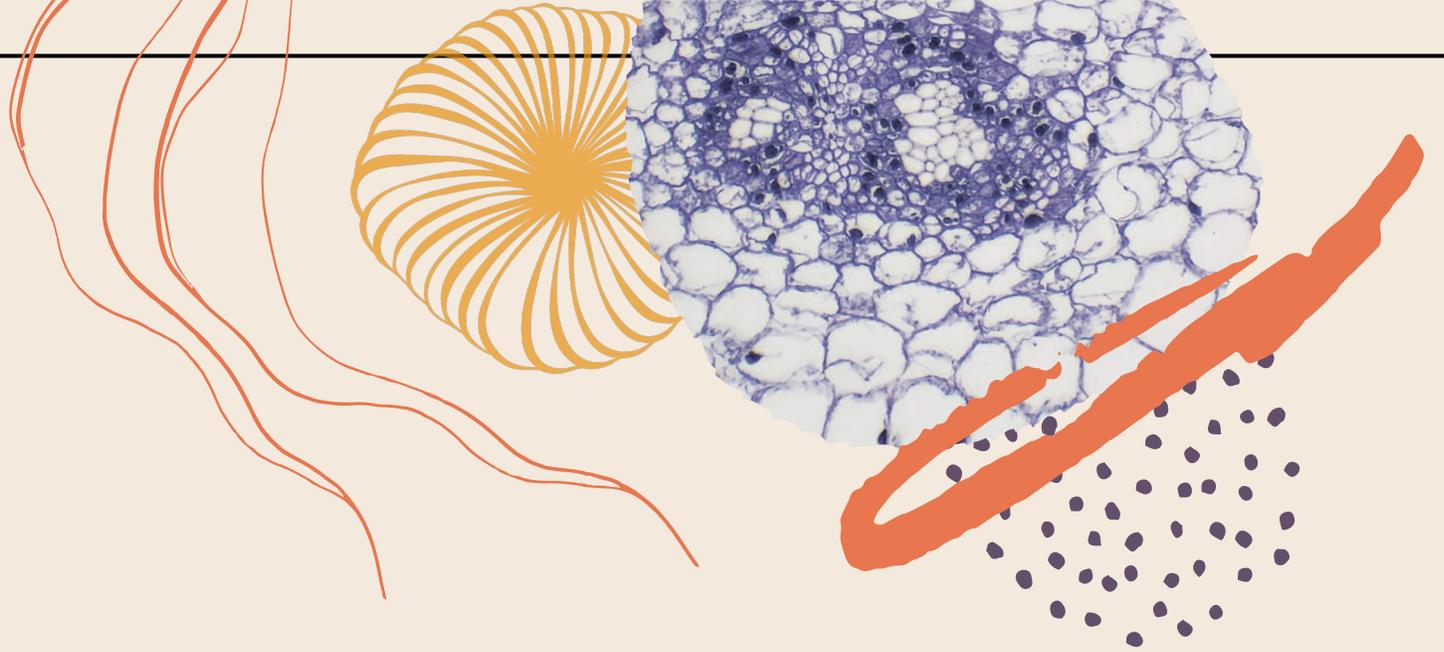
Features



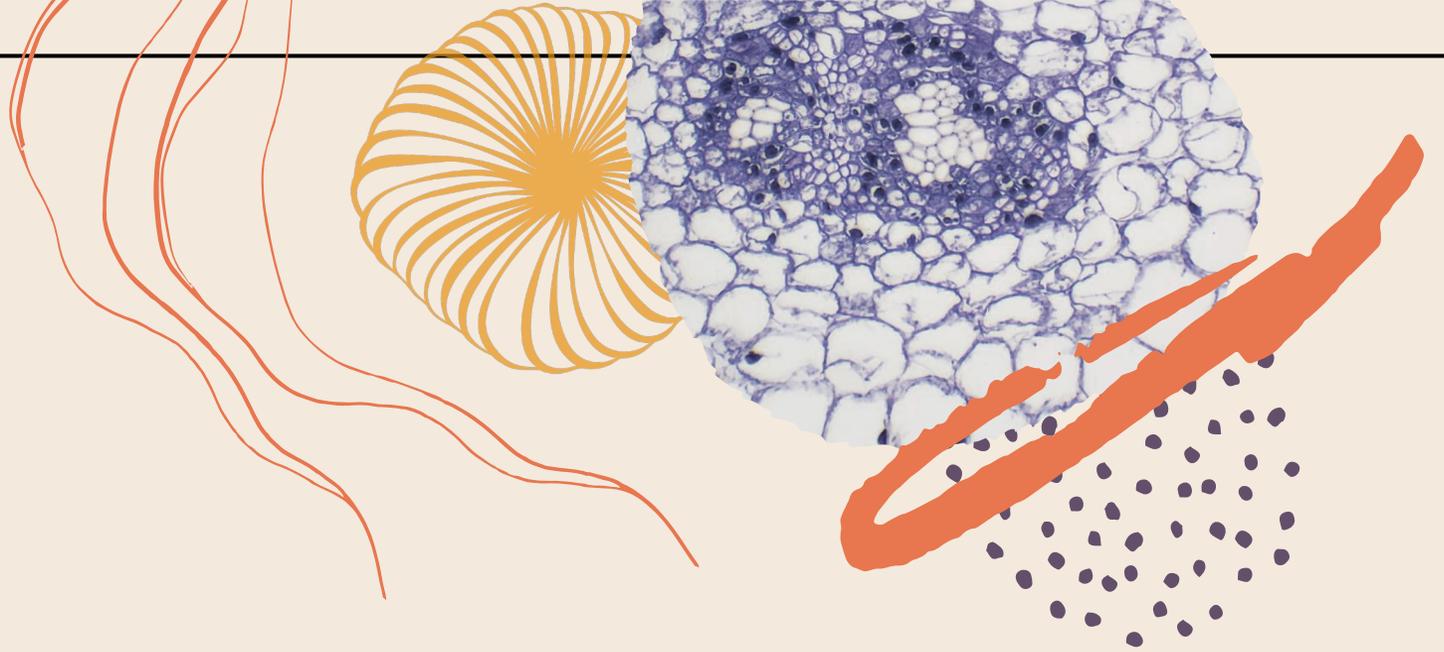
Exclusivity (reciprocation)



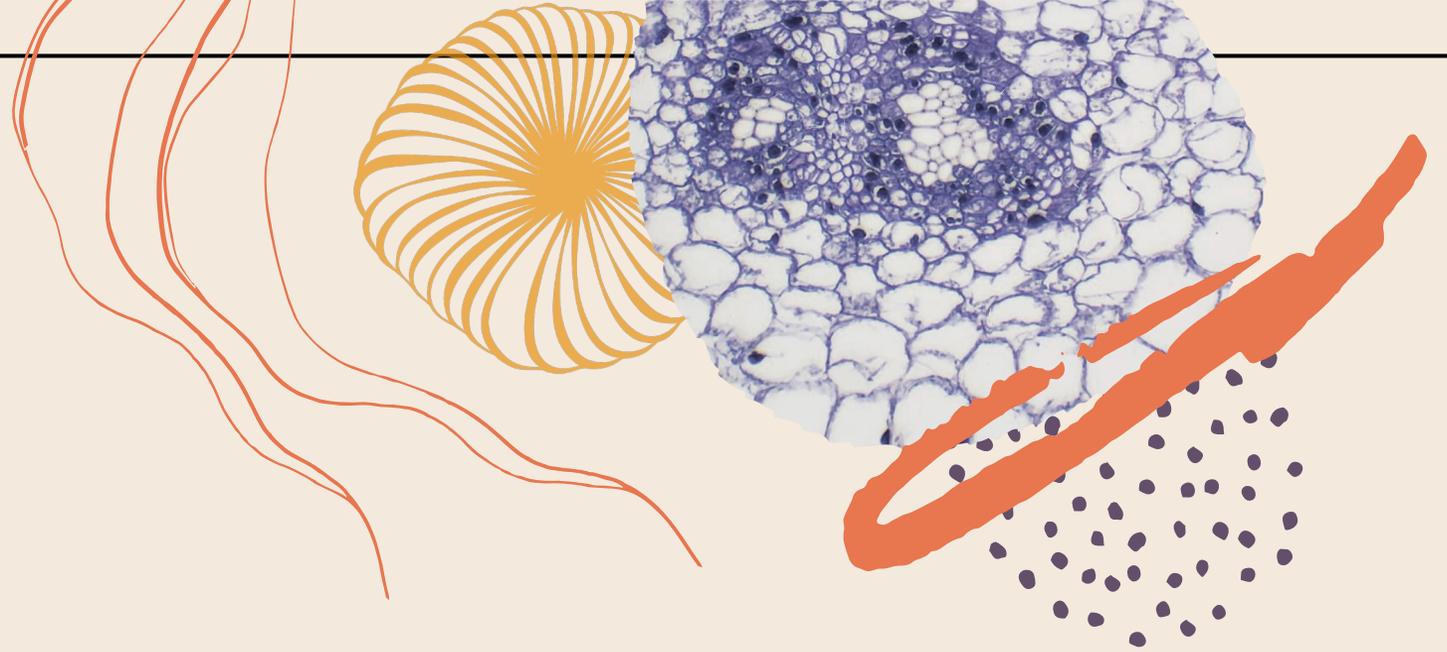
Relief through fantasy



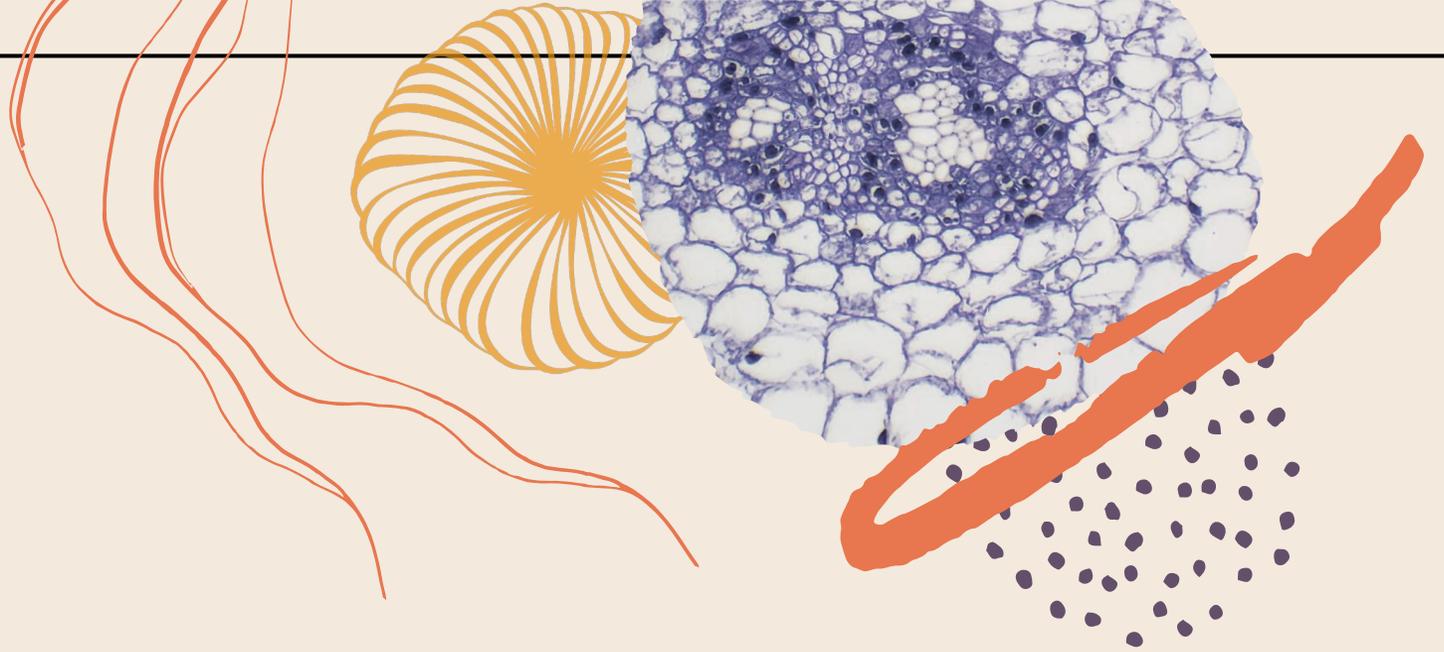
Intensification through adversity



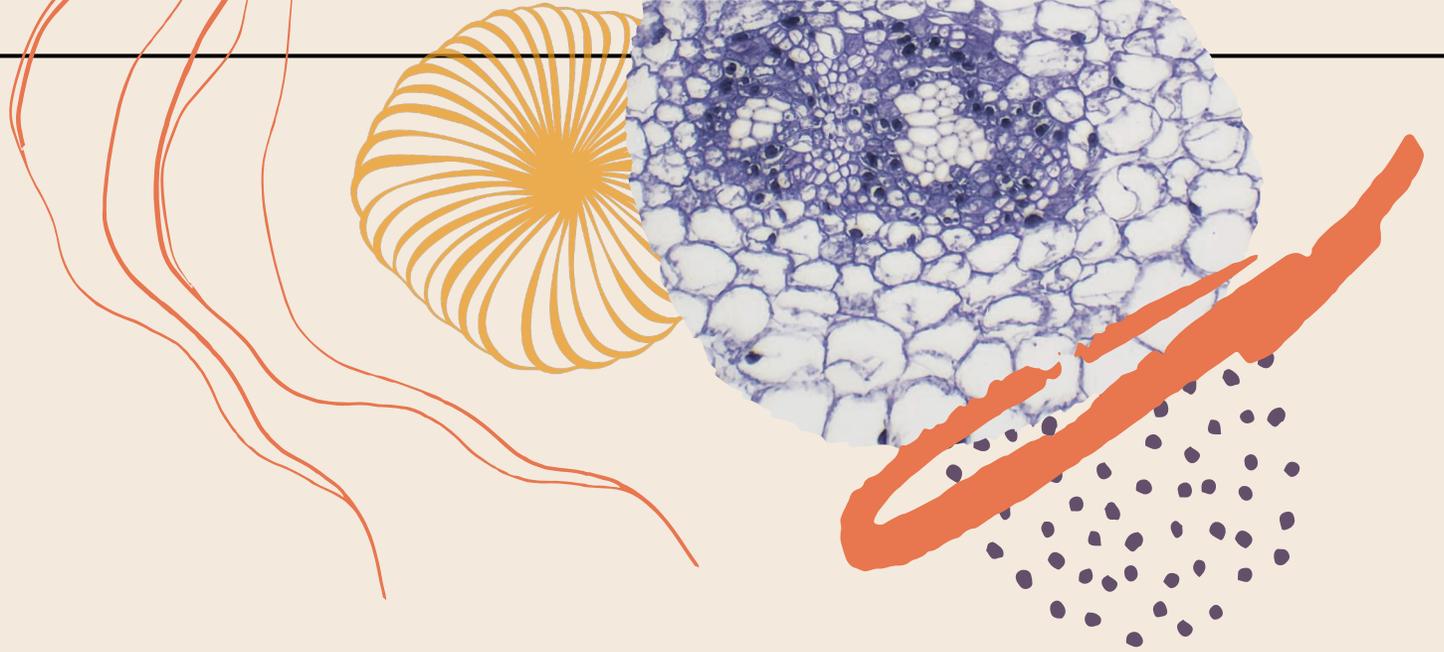
Fear of rejection & shyness



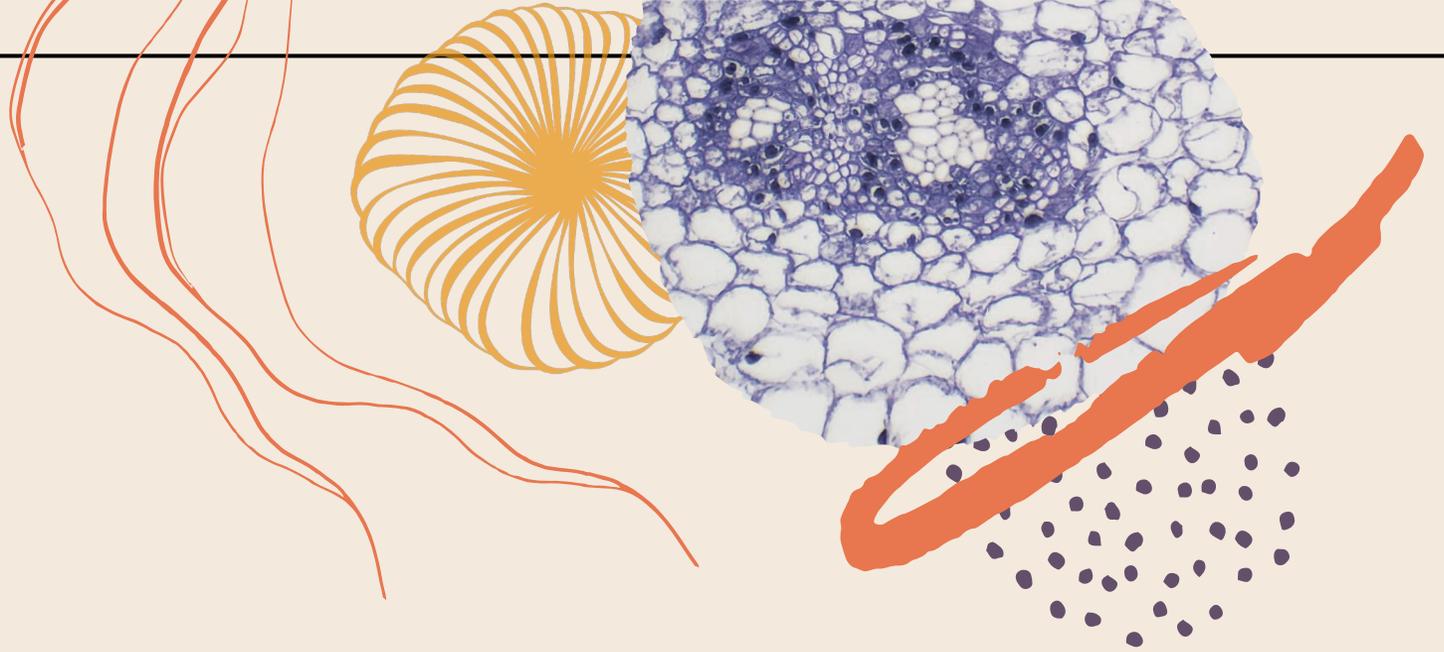
Sensitivity to and rationalisation of behaviours



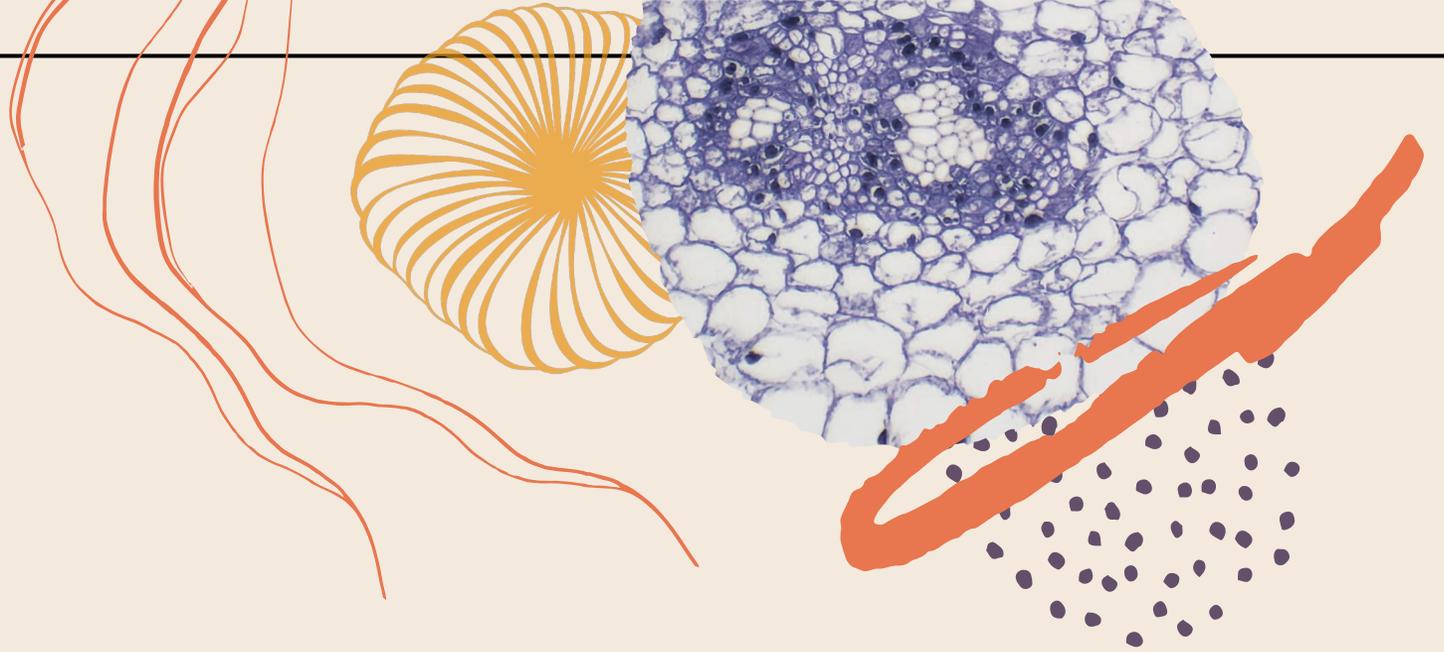
Pain during uncertainty



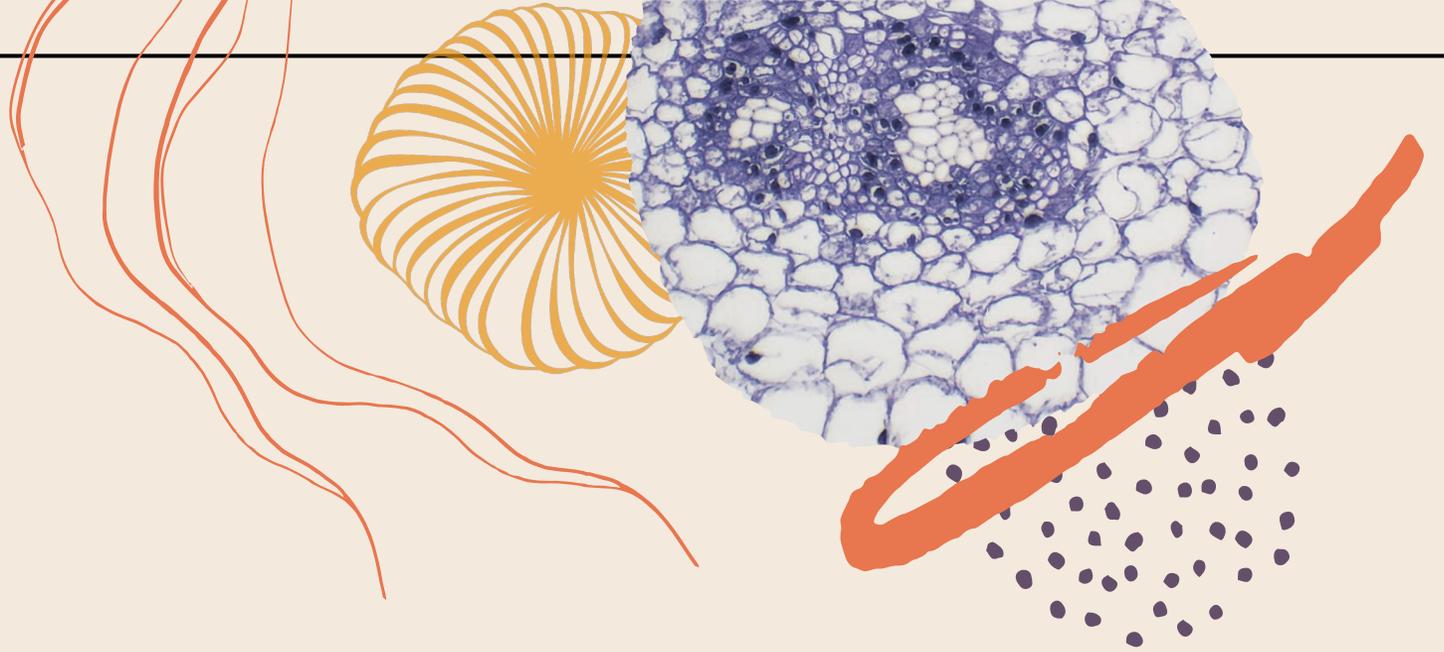
Buoyancy from reciprocity



Overwhelming emotional intensity



Idealisation (emotional calibration)



Physical symptoms (chest/heart)

Themes from Willmott & Bentley (2015)

- Ruminative Thinking, 🤔
- Free-Floating Anxiety and Depression, 😞
- Disintegration of the Self, 🌀
- Reintegration of Past Life(s) Experiences ⌚ , and
- Toward Authenticity ★

Longer than 3 years?



- Behavioural pattern
- Addiction (e.g. to fantasy, the dynamics)
- Perhaps no explicit attempt to escape
 - Seclusion/Reclusive behaviour
 - Not dating or socialising as much
 - Choices led to any of the above

Two-way limerence?

- Possible? Look at definition
- Maybe in rare circumstances
- Can you tell if someone's limerent towards you?

Comparisons

NAME	SIMILARITIES	DIFFERENCES
Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder (OCD) / rOCD	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - obsessive thoughts - compulsive behaviours 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - not as fantasy based (excl. pure OCD)
Erotomania	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - strong beliefs about another person's feelings towards the individual - Often „higher status” individual in some sense 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - a delusional disorder, false beliefs about another person's love - Usually obsessive behaviour in real world
Borderline Personality Disorder (BPD)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - intense fluctuations - dependency on acceptance - “special person” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - broader issues like emotional regulation, identity disturbances, and impulsivity
Love addiction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - overwhelming preoccupation with a person and relationships 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - dependency on being in relationships, not specifically one person - serial romances - essentially romantic
Infatuation/Crush	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - non-diagnostic - intense feelings of attraction 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - less obsessive, shorter-lived - less disruptive to daily functioning
Attachment disorders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - clingy or needy behaviours towards others 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - attachment disorders stem from early childhood - affect a wide range of social interactions, not just

Psychodynamic

- Defences
 - Splitting/Idealisation
 - Projection (ego ideal)



Person-Centred

- External conditions of worth
- Symbolic obstacle to organismic valuing process



CBT

- Intrusive thoughts – decoupling response/anxiety around them
- Maladaptive beliefs
 - “I am only worthy if they approve of me”
- Magnification
 - Identifying validation or potential rejection in past behaviour
- All-or-nothing thinking

ACT

- **Cognitive defusion:** obsessive thoughts are just thoughts.
- **Acceptance:** embrace feelings without acting on them, reducing stress.
- **Mindfulness:** stay present to reduce ruminations/fantasies.
- **Values Clarification:** core values. Why want to move on from limerence?
- **Committed Action:** Engage in activities that align with personal values.
- **Self-as-Context:** stable sense of self beyond transient emotions.
- **Present moment:** focus on here and now to avoid ruminations/fantasies.

Protective & remedying factors

- No contact (real life, online exposure)
- "Meaningfulness"
- full blown rejection/acceptance
- controllable not curable?

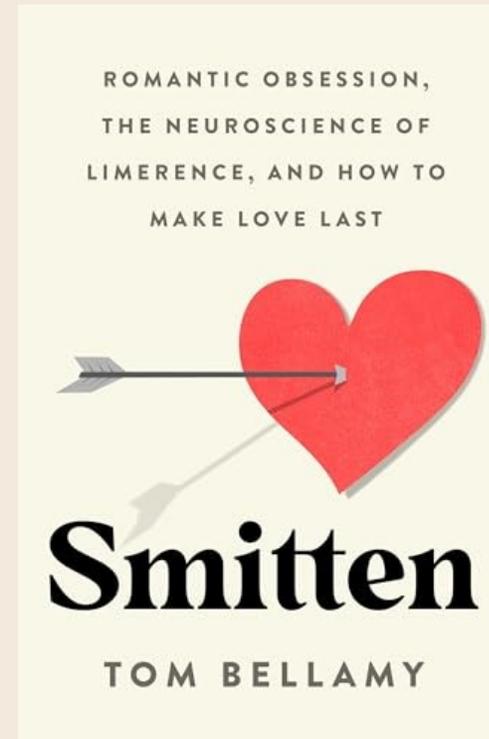
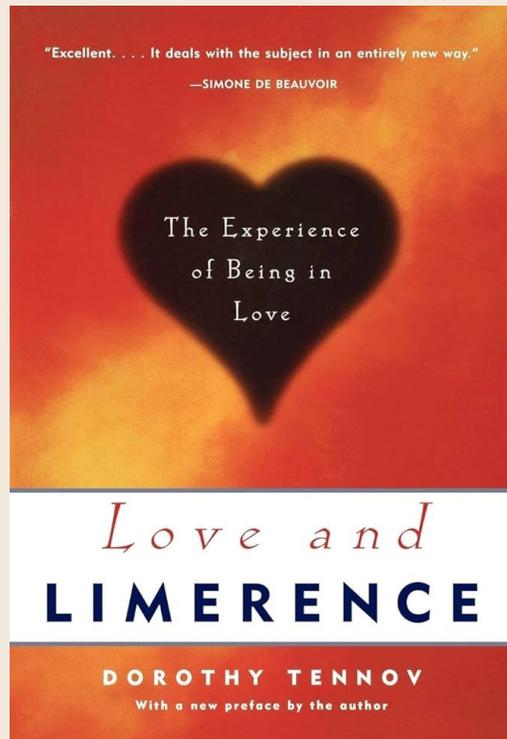
Myths

- Disorder
- 'From childhood trauma'
- Related to attachment style
- It's treatable

Watch out!

- If someone says they are experiencing limerence, go with it
- Stay close to their experiential description of what is going on
- Avoid using other words like crush, obsession, 'fancying them', in love etc

Recommended reading



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