Understanding Limerence

A visual, research-informed analysis of a personal experience

Purpose

This report interprets a personal account of an intense attachment to a married colleague through research on **limerence**. It is for understanding and recovery—not diagnosis, blame, or excuse. Numbers in square brackets refer to the References section.

Limerence is not a formal psychiatric diagnosis, and the research base is still developing [2][4]. Tennov's work was qualitative, and the concept has had limited influence on mainstream academic psychology, so this is an informed framework rather than a clinical assessment.

Definition at a glance

Limerence was named by psychologist Dorothy Tennov in *Love and Limerence* (1979) [1]. It is an involuntary, intense and often obsessive romantic infatuation with another person—the "limerent object"—marked by intrusive thoughts and an overwhelming longing for that person's attention and reciprocation [1][2][4].

Feature	Plain-English meaning	Source
Intense	Feelings are unusually powerful and emotionally consuming.	[1][2]
Involuntary	The person cannot simply decide to stop the thoughts or attachment.	[1]
Romantic infatuation	The focus is a specific person, often idealised.	[1][4]
Obsessive preoccupation	The mind repeatedly returns to the person and analyses every cue.	[2][4]
Need for reciprocation	Being wanted back becomes the central emotional goal.	[1][3]

The original account

The account is reproduced in full, in the writer's own words, divided into paragraphs. "LO" refers to the "limerent object".

I was struggling with both the overwhelming love and need for this other woman

I had never expected that out of the blue I would feel obsessive about one of my women colleagues. She is happily married with kids as old as 10 years.

That I felt I had a special link, that time spent away from her was time wasted.

I also loved and valued my family, did not want to hurt them, did not want to "upset the boat" .

I was struggling with both the overwhelming love and need for this other woman (LO) and the inability to think about the consequences. My rational mind knew I was being a "fool" but I also knew that LO was my soul mate, they were meant to be, LO was truly my significant other. I couldn't stop thinking about her, I didn't want to stop. Everything reminded me of our unique bond.

As time went on I frequently wept to lessen my emotional pain.I had gotten to the point where I was desperate to move on and get back to being what I call "normal" again, to feel on an even level and not on an insane roller-coaster of emotions and thoughts. In my case, the humiliation I felt when I overheard some nasty comments from LO, and my sudden fear my behavior was making me notorious and a butt for unflattering jokes were helpful in supporting my desire to be free of LO and limerence. In fact, I felt deeply ashamed, appalled at what I might have done and might have gone on to do, desperate to escape from the whole situation, and very afraid that my family and friends might have gotten an idea of what went on.

Actually, very little had gone on in one sense. I had smartened up, taken to spending more time in Whatsapp as LO seemed to be there more frequently.I had started sending messages to her through Wapp.I described how beautiful and glamorous she was, and how I have never felt anything like this before.The girl was seeming to like these things.I was in euphoric stage for quite few days.Life's major problems did not matter for me at all during those seven days .In fact they were pushed to the back ground.I had a new found energy within me.

Only her and thoughts about her preoccupied my whole being.I was in the cloud nine- the walking in the air stage.

The otherwise recluse LO Began to send me letter, sometimes praising my English and sometimes praising my pranks and lively jokes.I thought the limerence was mutual.She visited my room frequently.

Then what happened -

Then the girl begun avoiding me like a leper.I was now alternating between seeming paralyzed with fear and being hysterically afraid of being exposed, all the time with the limerent thoughts darting in like arrows of fire to sear my being with false hopes. Slowly,I tried to regain my emotional composure. I made myself avoid places and situations where LO was likely to be, and while this seemed impossible initially, it did, over many months, become easier.

Still not fully recovered yet.I couldn't believe what I had experienced. I felt humiliated, felt deeply bereaved and angry that she had not been the soul mate I had believed. I had tried to bargain with a god in whom I did not believe that LO and me could become true friends, with no limerence. Then I felt apathetic: what was the point of working, talking, being alive when I had lost the most significant person in my life? I struggled for a year and half ?Then I felt I am beginning to get relief.That relief does not last, but it returns and as time went on, the relief lasted longer and occurred more frequently.

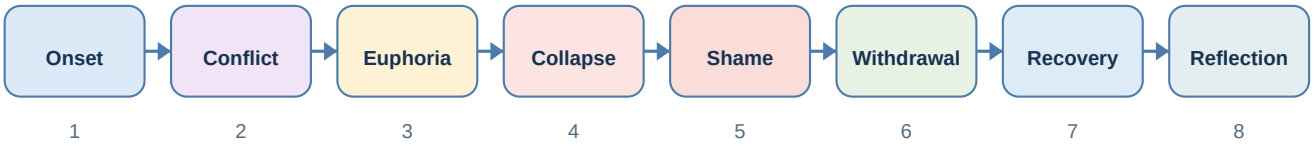
Two years on from our first meeting, I seem to back to being in balance with my world—family, work and leisure. But problem still persists.I get mad if I don't see her for once in 2 or 3 days.Though I am recovering,I see my LO- still not ex-LO -as the embers of a small fire, just enough warmth left to give an occasional tiny bit of discomfort, and even this will probably fade more with time.

I see myself as “older, a bit wiser, a lot more aware and careful”, but also not totally regretting the amazing emotional highs and inspiration I have experienced.

Summary of the account

The account falls into nine stages. Each heading is linked to the part of this document that explains it.

The account as a sequence

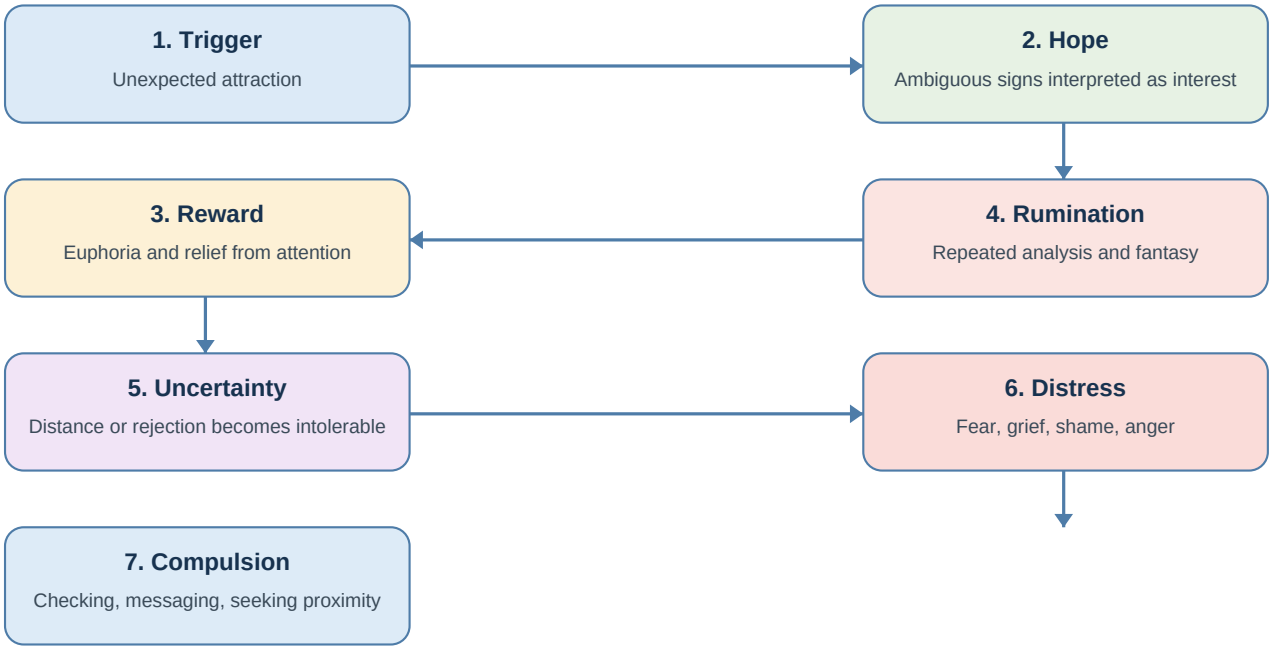


Heading	What the account says	Where it connects
1. Unexpected onset	Obsessive feelings arose “out of the blue” for a married colleague; time away felt wasted.	**Definition** [1][2]; research map: sudden onset, limerent object.
2. Love versus consequences	Love for family sat beside overwhelming need for her; reason said “fool”, feeling said “soul mate”.	**Why it felt like destiny**; research map: idealisation, neglect of self and others [2].
3. Euphoria and perceived reciprocation	WhatsApp praise, her letters and visits; seven euphoric days; “cloud nine”.	**Cycle stages 2–4** [1][3]; intermittent reward.
4. Rejection and collapse	She began avoiding him; paralysis, fear, hope “darting in like arrows of fire”.	**Cycle stages 5–6** [1][3]; emotional dysregulation [2].
5. Shame and fear of exposure	Overheard comments, fear of being notorious, appalled at what might have happened.	Research map: shame; **Balanced conclusion**.
6. Withdrawal and avoidance	Avoided places where she was likely to be; became easier over months.	**Recovery direction**; practical boundaries [6].
7. Grief and slow recovery	Humiliation, bereavement, anger, bargaining, apathy; ~18 months, then lengthening relief.	Research map: non-linear recovery [5].
8. Remaining attachment	Balanced at two years, but “mad” if she is unseen for 2–3 days; “embers of a small fire”.	**What may still maintain it** [6].
9. Reflection and meaning	“Older, a bit wiser, more aware and careful”; not totally regretting the highs.	**Balanced conclusion** [5].

Overall pattern: an unexpected attachment, a surge of hope and euphoria, a painful collapse, shame-driven withdrawal, and a slow, non-linear recovery that is not yet complete.

The limerence cycle

Wakin and Vo's model describes limerence through initiating forces (longing for reciprocation), driving forces (obsessive thinking) and resultant forces (mood fluctuation) [3]. Tennov likewise tied the state to uncertainty about whether feelings will be returned [1].



The cycle can repeat: each small sign of interest may restart hope, reward, and rumination.

Figure 1. The repeating limerence cycle (author's synthesis based on [1][2][3]). In the account, praise, visits and messages created hope; avoidance then triggered fear, grief and rumination.

Why it felt like destiny

Limerence is characterised by idealisation of the limerent object and intense emotional dependence on reciprocation [1][2]. A strong feeling can be real without proving that a relationship would be healthy, mutual, appropriate, or sustainable.

> "I felt she was my soul mate" may be better understood as: **"My mind assigned extraordinary meaning to an intense emotional state."**

How the account maps to research

The LQ-11 identifies two broad dimensions—intense need for attachment and neglect of self and others [2]—both visible in the account. This does not prove a diagnosis; it offers a way to understand the pattern.

Research construct	How it appeared in the account	Source
Sudden onset; limerent object	Feelings began “out of the blue”; she became “my soul mate”.	[1][4]
Intrusive rumination	“Everything reminded me of our unique bond”; could not stop thinking.	[2][4][5]
Need for reciprocation	Praise, visits and messages were read as mutual feeling.	[1][2][3]
Intermittent reinforcement	Euphoria after attention; collapse after avoidance.	[1][3]
Idealisation	A destined bond was believed despite workplace and marital realities.	[1][5]
Emotional dysregulation	Euphoria, fear, paralysis, grief, anger, shame, apathy.	[2][3][5]
Neglect of self and others	Major problems receded; family concerns pushed aside.	[2]
Shame and self-reproach	Fear of exposure, humiliation, being a target of jokes.	[5]
Non-linear recovery	Relief lasted longer over time; seeing her still caused discomfort.	[5][6]

What fuels limerence

No single cause has been established. Research points to uncertainty, attachment insecurity, rumination and emotional vulnerability, but these are associations rather than proven causes [4][7].

Possible factor	How it may contribute	Source
Uncertainty	Ambiguity about reciprocation intensifies hope and rumination.	[1][3]
Intermittent reward	Occasional attention becomes unusually powerful.	[1][3]
Attachment insecurity	Anxious attachment shares a focus on desire for intimacy and preoccupation with rejection.	[4][8]
Trauma and relational insecurity	Associated with limerence; maintained by obsessive-compulsive traits and maladaptive daydreaming.	[7]
Rumination and fantasy	Replaying events and imagining futures can sustain the fixation.	[4][7]

What may still maintain it

Two years later, the person is broadly back in balance, but anger when not seeing her for two or three days suggests the attachment is reduced rather than fully resolved. Workplace exposure can keep the emotional association partly active.

Recovery improves when optional contact, fantasy, checking and meaning-making are reduced. A cognitive-behavioural case study reported reduced compulsive rituals and dysfunctional limerence-related thoughts at follow-up, supporting a focus on the behaviours that feed the fixation [6]. Lived-experience research describes recovery as a gradual movement from rumination and distress toward reintegration [5].

The recovery direction

Because complete no-contact may be impossible at work, the aim is a “low-contact, low-meaning” pattern: necessary contact remains professional, brief, predictable and emotionally neutral.

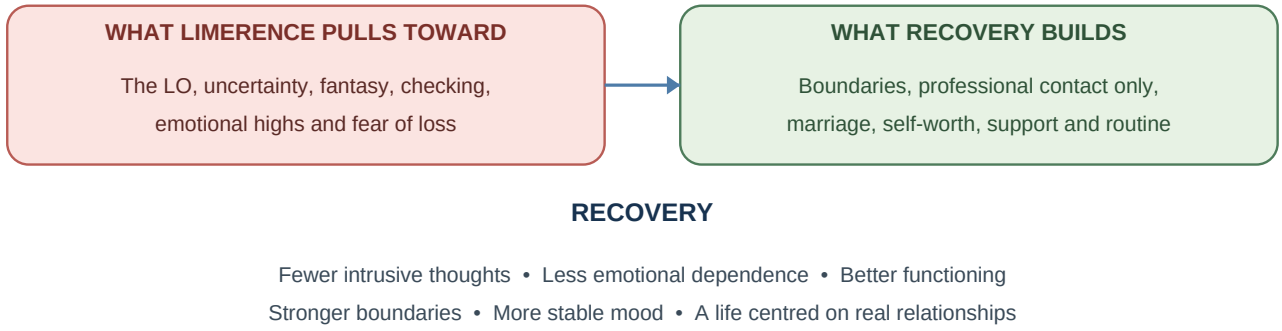


Figure 2. Recovery means shifting emotional investment from the limerent object toward stable relationships, boundaries and daily life (practical synthesis informed by [5][6]).

Area	Practical action
Contact	Communicate only about necessary work matters; use normal professional channels.
Proximity	Do not seek her out, linger after meetings, or create optional one-to-one situations.
Digital behaviour	Do not check whether she is online, reread old messages, or monitor social media.
Thoughts	Label the thought: “This is a limerent thought, not a fact.”
Meaning-making	Do not interpret her behaviour as a message about you or evidence of destiny.
Marriage	Invest directly in communication, affection, shared activities and unmet needs.
Support	Consider individual therapy for rumination, boundaries, shame and emotional regulation [6].
Self-care	Rebuild vitality through sleep, exercise, meaningful work, friendships and enjoyable activities.

Strength of the evidence

The academic literature on limerence is small, and much of it is qualitative, conceptual or based on case studies. The table shows which sources support each major assertion, and the limits of that support.

Assertion in this document	Supporting source	Strength and caution
Limerence is an involuntary state of intense infatuation with need for reciprocation, centred on a limerent object	Tennov (1979) [1]; Marshall et al. (2025) [2]; scoping review (2024) [4]	Foundational concept; Tennov's work was qualitative and early reception was mixed.
Limerence has measurable features, including intense need for attachment and neglect of self and others	Marshall et al. (2025) [2]	Newly validated scale; limerence is still not a formal diagnosis.
Limerence is driven by longing for reciprocation, obsessive thinking and mood swings tied to uncertainty	Wakin and Vo (2008) model [3]	Conceptual model; limited empirical testing.
Anxious attachment and rumination may increase vulnerability	Scoping review (2024) [4]; Feeney and Noller (1990) and Wolf (2017), as cited in [4]; Acta Psychologica (2026) [7]	Associations, not proof of cause.
Recovery can be gradual, non-linear and involve rumination, distress and reintegration	Lived-experience study (2015) [5]	Qualitative; small samples limit generalisation.
Behavioural and cognitive-behavioural strategies can reduce compulsive behaviours and limerent thoughts	CBT case study (2021) [6]	Single case study; not evidence of effectiveness for everyone.

When to seek help

Consider professional support if intrusive thoughts, emotional distress, anger, or boundary difficulties continue to affect sleep, work, relationships, or wellbeing. CBT-based approaches have preliminary support in case-study evidence [6].

If there is hopelessness, inability to stay safe, or thoughts of self-harm, seek urgent help immediately. In Australia, call Lifeline on **13 11 14** or **000** in an emergency.

Balanced conclusion

This was not simply ordinary love. It was a severe, workplace-based limerent episode: one person became the centre of meaning, while rational awareness of consequences struggled against emotional reward and fear of loss.

The healthiest conclusion is not “I was a fool.” It is: **“I experienced an intense limerent attachment, I made choices that created risk, I stopped and repaired much of the harm, and I still need firm boundaries and support to complete recovery.”**

References

[1] Tennov, D. (1979). *Love and Limerence: The Experience of Being in Love*. New York: Stein and Day.

[2] Marshall, L., Waldeck, D., Pancani, L., Churchill, S., & Tyndall, I. (2025). Development and validation of the Limerence Questionnaire (LQ-11). *Psychological Reports*. doi:10.1177/00332941251394980.

[3] Wakin, A. H., & Vo, D. B. (2008). *Love-variant: The Wakin-Vo I.D.R. model of limerence*.

[4] Limerence, hidden obsession, fixation, and rumination: A scoping review of human behaviour (2024). *Journal of Police and Criminal Psychology*. doi:10.1007/s11896-024-09674-x.

[5] Willmott, L., & Bentley, E. (2015). Exploring the lived-experience of limerence: A journey toward authenticity. *The Qualitative Report*.

[6] Treatment of limerence using a cognitive behavioral approach: A case study (2021). PubMed Central, PMC8641115.

[7] Love, longing and obsession: Features, correlates, comorbidities, and real-time characteristics of limerence (2026). *Acta Psychologica*.

[8] Feeney, J., & Noller, P. (1990), and Wolf (2017): links between limerence and anxious attachment, as discussed in reference [4]. Primary details should be verified before formal citation.

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