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HOW EMOTION REGULATION AND EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT SHAPE VULNERABILITY TO LOVE ADDICTION IN A ROMANIAN SAMPLE

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Abstract

This research aims to examine how difficulties in emotion regulation can predict love addiction. Another central objective of this study is to identify differences in love addiction across levels of educational attainment. The present study was conducted on a convenience sample of 302 participants aged between 18 and 64 years ($M = 25.23$, $SD = 8.49$). Participants completed a battery of instruments that included questionnaires assessing difficulties in emotion regulation, love addiction, along with a set of socio-demographic questions, including educational level. Our main findings indicated that difficulties in emotion regulation positively predict love addiction, and that individuals with higher educational attainment (i.e., postgraduate studies) exhibit lower levels of love addiction compared to individuals with lower levels of education. The present results contribute, from a theoretical standpoint, to the development of a deeper understanding of the concept of love addiction, a construct that has gained increasing attention in recent years. From a practical standpoint, the current findings may be particularly useful for psychotherapists who encounter issues related to romantic relationships and love addiction in their clinical practice. We also discuss a series of ethical recommendations regarding the study and treatment of love addiction in psychological research.

Keywords: love addiction; difficulties in emotion regulation; level of education; Romanian

Introduction

Romantic love is widely regarded as a universal—or nearly universal—human phenomenon (Jankowiak & Fischer, 1992), encompassing a distinct set of motivational, emotional, and behavioral patterns that drive individuals to initiate or preserve a bond with a particular partner (Aron et al., 2006). This state is often marked by intensified attention toward the loved person (Aron et al., 2005), positive affect (Langeslag & Van Strien, 2016), and physiological arousal (Mercado & Hibel, 2017) such as rapid heartbeat (Fisher et al., 2002). Conversely, periods of separation may evoke craving-like responses, including emotional volatility, heightened anxiety, and recurrent, intrusive thoughts about the partner (Fisher et al., 2005).

Within this landscape, love typically supports emotional enrichment and psychological growth; however, in some cases, it may escalate into compulsive relational patterns characterized by loss of control, persistent preoccupation, and dependence on a romantic partner (Cavalli & Velotti, 2025; Earp et al., 2017; Fisher, 2017). This phenomenon—conceptualized as love addiction (LA)—is viewed as a form of behavioral addiction (Karner-Huțuleac & Huțul, 2023) involving an overwhelming, repetitive drive to seek closeness, validation, and emotional reassurance from a partner, even in the presence of clear negative consequences (Costa et al., 2021; Reynaud, 2010). Despite growing research interest, LA is not officially classified in the “*The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fifth Edition*” (DSM-V; APA, 2013) or “*The Eleventh Edition of International Classification of Diseases*” (ICD-11; WHO, 2022). LA aligns closely with established theoretical models of

behavioral addictions, including components such as salience, mood modification, tolerance, withdrawal, conflict, and relapse (Griffiths, 2005, 2020). Individuals exhibiting such tendencies frequently report intrusive thoughts about the partner, heightened abandonment fears, and difficulty disengaging from unhealthy romantic bonds (Reynaud, 2010). Among various socio-demographic factors, only educational attainment has, to date, been consistently associated with love-addictive behaviors, whereas other variables, such as age or place of residence, have not demonstrated a clear role in LA. Moreover, research suggests that higher educational attainment may confer broader cognitive, reflective, and socio-relational resources that function as protective factors across diverse domains. For example, education has been linked to enhanced neural and functional resilience (Kotagal et al., 2015), more advanced reflective and metacognitive abilities (Alt et al., 2022), and enhanced relational resources and identity development opportunities (Jensen & Jetten, 2015), all of which may indirectly reduce vulnerability to maladaptive relational patterns such as LA.

One of the core psychological mechanisms implicated in the emergence and persistence of love-addictive behaviors is difficulties in emotion regulation. These refer to a reduced capacity to modify intense emotional reactions into manageable, organized, and personally tolerable emotional experiences (Powers et al., 2022). Empirical research has demonstrated that difficulties in emotion regulation are associated with a broad spectrum of negative correlates, including vulnerability to mental health problems (Gross & Muñoz, 1995), disruptions in physical health (Sapolsky, 2007), and reduced satisfaction within intimate relationships (Murray, 2005). According to Gratz and Roemer (2004), emotion dysregulation encompasses multiple facets, including limited attentiveness to one's emotional states, inadequate clarity and acceptance of emotional experiences, problems maintaining goal-oriented behavior when distressed, reduced ability to inhibit impulsive reactions during intense negative affect, and difficulties retrieving or applying effective regulatory strategies to cope with emerging negative emotions.

Love addiction and difficulties in emotion regulation

Across contemporary psychological research, difficulties in emotion regulation (DERS) are identified as a fundamental mechanism underlying the emergence and persistence of LA (Antoniac et al., 2025). Difficulties in emotion regulation refers to the processes through which individuals modulate the intensity and quality of their emotional experiences (Thompson, 2019), whereas deficits in clarity, acceptance, or control of emotions constitute emotion dysregulation (Gratz & Roemer, 2004). In the Romanian context, empirical work remains scarce, yet emerging evidence highlights culturally specific dynamics that may shape vulnerability to love-addictive behaviors. Antoniac et al. (2025), examining a Romanian community sample, found that emotional dysregulation significantly predicted love addiction, and that loneliness amplified this association—suggesting that relational dependence may be intensified by the social and emotional pressures characteristic of contemporary Romanian life. These findings indicate that, within Romania's cultural backdrop of idealized romantic commitment and shifting relational norms, individuals with limited regulatory resources may be particularly prone to developing compulsive relational patterns. These difficulties extend beyond intrapersonal functioning and often unfold within relational contexts, where romantic partners become salient targets of regulatory needs, a dynamic particularly relevant for LA (Cavalli & Velotti, 2025).

Previous research indicates that individuals with pronounced tendencies toward LA frequently present heightened emotional instability and are more susceptible to anxiety and depressive symptoms (Bell et al., 2022; Urbiola et al., 2017). When internal regulatory mechanisms are insufficient, romantic involvement may be used as a compensatory strategy to manage distress. This pattern aligns with broader theoretical accounts suggesting that self-

defeating behaviors—such as substance use—can serve as maladaptive attempts to downregulate negative affect (Estévez et al., 2017). Within LA, the overreliance on a romantic partner for emotional soothing reflects a reduced capacity for adaptive self-regulation, reinforcing dependence on the relationship.

Research further demonstrates that emotion dysregulation—expressed through intense emotional reactivity, difficulties returning to baseline, and challenges in identifying or communicating emotional states—significantly increases vulnerability to LA (D’Agostino et al., 2017; Fisher, 2017). Individuals with elevated dysregulation often seek external sources of emotional stabilization, and romantic partners may become a primary regulatory resource. This tendency can temporarily mitigate emotional instability but ultimately fosters patterns of excessive reassurance seeking and dependency (Gori et al., 2023). Over time, such reliance may progress into compulsive relational behaviors closely resembling addictive processes (Earp et al., 2017).

Overall, the literature provides evidence for a potential link between difficulties in regulating emotions and LA, indicating that impairments in managing emotional responses directly facilitate the emergence of maladaptive relational dependence. Such difficulties function not only as a predisposing factor but also as a sustaining mechanism that perpetuates the repetitive and compulsive patterns characteristic of love-addictive behaviors.

Education level and love addiction

A study conducted by Maggi and colleagues (2025) investigated socio-demographic and clinical correlates of predisposition to LA in a large cross-sectional sample. Participants were categorized into three groups according to their level of predisposition: noLA (individuals with no predisposition to LA), mLA (individuals with a moderate predisposition), and sLA (individuals with a severe predisposition). This finding indicates that, within this sample, lower educational attainment is associated with greater severity of LA symptoms. According to the authors, this relationship may reflect broader psychological and socio-economic mechanisms: individuals with lower educational attainment often have fewer emotional, cognitive, and social resources, reduced resilience, and greater vulnerability to distress, making them more likely to engage in patterns of LA as a primary strategy for emotion regulation. Conversely, higher education is typically associated with greater socio-economic stability, stronger coping capacities, and broader support networks, which may buffer against maladaptive relational dependence. These findings support the expectation that individuals with higher educational attainment are likely to exhibit lower levels of LA, highlighting education as a potential protective factor. However, given the cross-sectional design and the fact that education was analyzed as a descriptive demographic variable rather than as a tested predictor or mediator, this association should be interpreted cautiously and does not imply a causal relationship.

Taken together, the extant literature supports cautious inferences: lower educational attainment may co-occur with higher LA severity in some samples (Maggi et al., 2025), rather than as a primary causal mechanism, given that psychological predictors usually account for the largest share of variance in LA.

Ethical aspects in the research of love addiction

When conducting research LA, it is essential to address the ethical implications associated with exploring highly sensitive relational and emotional experiences. Prior research indicates that individuals exhibiting love-addictive or emotionally dependent relational patterns often experience heightened anxiety, fear of abandonment, and obsessive preoccupation in their romantic bonds, suggesting that reflecting on such experiences may activate emotionally distressing material (Fisher, 2017). Thus, researchers have a responsibility to anticipate and minimize potential harm to participants.

- (I) Anxiety or stress — when participants reflect on romantic relationships marked by longing, rejection, or obsessive preoccupation, they may experience heightened anxiety or stress. Recalling emotionally charged moments—such as intense attachment, conflict, or abandonment fears—can trigger psychological tension, rumination, and physiological arousal, paralleling responses observed in other behavioral addictions (Reynaud, 2010);
- (II) Sadness or depressive affect – exploring one’s own patterns of dependency or maladaptive attachment may intensify feelings of sadness, hopelessness, or despair, particularly in participants who recognize problematic relational behaviors yet feel unable to alter them. Such reflections can activate rumination and negative affect, increasing vulnerability to depressive states (Maggi et al., 2025);
- (III) Shame, or guilt – reflecting on dysfunctional romantic experiences may provoke self-blame, shame, or guilt, especially when individuals perceive their emotional dependency as inadequate or socially unacceptable. Recalling past attachment failures or compulsive relational dynamics may reactivate self-evaluative distress, such as shame and guilt. Empirical research demonstrates that recalling attachment-related relational lapses is significantly associated with shame, particularly among individuals with high attachment anxiety (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2005);
- (IV) Cultural adaptation – the notion of LA may carry culturally specific connotations in Romania, often overlapping with idealized views of intense romantic passion. Such interpretations may shape how participants understand and respond to questionnaire items. Therefore, instruments should undergo appropriate cultural adaptation (translation, back-translation, cognitive debriefing), and findings should be interpreted cautiously in light of these contextual nuances.

In light of the ethical considerations outlined above, it is crucial to acknowledge that participants in research on LA may experience anxiety, heightened stress, depressive affect, or self-evaluative distress when reflecting on their relational histories and patterns of dependency. Accordingly, researchers bear a responsibility to minimize potential psychological harm by implementing rigorous safeguards. First, obtaining approval from an institutional ethics committee is essential, as it ensures that the research design is methodologically sound and ethically appropriate for participants. Second, comprehensive informed consent should clearly communicate the possibility of emotional discomfort and provide participants with guidance on how to seek support. Finally, collaboration with mental health professionals, such as psychotherapists or counselors, is recommended, with accessible contact information included in study materials to assist participants should distress arise. This approach prioritizes participant well-being while enabling the responsible investigation of the psychological mechanisms underlying love addiction, including the developmental, emotional, and relational factors that contribute to its emergence and maintenance.

The present study

Building on extant research, the present study seeks to advance understanding of LA by examining the role of difficulties in emotion regulation and the contextual contribution of educational attainment. By testing the predictive relationship between difficulties in emotion regulation and LA while simultaneously exploring differences across levels of education, the study aims to contribute both theoretically—by clarifying the psychological processes that underlie compulsive romantic involvement—and practically—by informing prevention and intervention strategies that take socio-educational context into account. The novelty of this

research lies in two features: (1) an integrated focus on emotion-regulatory difficulties as prospective psychological predictors of love-addictive symptoms, and (2) the systematic examination of educational level as a contextual variable that may account for between-person variability in susceptibility to addictive relational dynamics. Focusing on a Romanian sample further provides culturally situated evidence that can enhance cross-national generalizability and offer insights relevant for locally tailored clinical and psychoeducational applications.

Hypotheses

To address our aims, we have formulated the following hypotheses:

H1. Difficulties in emotion regulation positively predict love addiction.

H2. There are significant differences in love addiction across levels of education. We hypothesize that individuals with higher level of educational (i.e., post-university studies) will exhibit lower levels of love addiction compared to individuals with lower level of education attainment (i.e., pre-university studies).

Method

Participants and procedure

A convenience sample of 302 participants aged between 18 and 64 years ($M = 25.23$, $SD = 8.49$) were included in this study. The majority of participants were female, with 224 women (74.2%) and 78 men (25.8%). Most respondents reported living in urban areas (65.6%), while the remaining 34.4% resided in rural settings. Regarding monthly income, 35.4% earned the equivalent of under approximately 400 EUR, 27.5% reported earnings between roughly 400 and 1000 EUR, and 17.9% indicated incomes above approximately 1000 EUR; an additional 19.2% chose not to disclose their earnings. In terms of relationship status, all participants reported being in a romantic relationship; among them, 80.8% were in a non-marital relationship, whereas 19.2% were officially married. Additionally, a manual search for miscellaneous responses was conducted, in accordance with recommendations from the literature (Ciobanu et al., 2025; Golds, 2023).

The level of education was also documented, with 182 participants having completed pre-university studies and 120 reporting post-university education. In our study, pre-university education referred exclusively to completed high school, whereas post-university education referred to completed or ongoing university and postgraduate studies.

The present research employed a snowball sampling strategy, relying on a convenience-based pool of respondents from Romania. Data were gathered between October 10 and October 30, 2024. The assessment instruments were compiled into an online questionnaire hosted on Google Forms, and the survey link was circulated across various social media communities (e.g., student groups, resident groups from major Romanian cities, and networks of individuals with an interest in psychology). Following recommendations from prior studies, particular attention was given to distributing the link across heterogeneous social media groups in order to attract volunteers representing a broad spectrum of socio-demographic characteristics (Huțul & Karner-Huțuleac, 2024a, 2024b).

On average, participants required approximately 7 minutes to complete the survey. Eligibility criteria included: (1) being at least 18 years of age at the time of participation and (2) self-reporting that they were experiencing romantic love when completing the set of measures.

All individuals participated voluntarily and were informed beforehand about confidentiality procedures and data protection. In line with the section on ethical considerations in research on LA, our study adhered to the recommended safeguards, addressing potential sources of participant distress—including anxiety or stress, sadness or depressive affect, shame or guilt, and cultural considerations—by obtaining informed consent, ensuring participants'

right to withdraw, providing guidance for seeking support, and using culturally adapted instruments. They were also notified of their right to discontinue participation at any stage without penalty. The study followed the ethical standards of the authors' affiliated institution and adhered to the principles of the Declaration of Helsinki (1995), as amended in 2000 and reaffirmed in 2013. Additionally, the research complied with the American Psychological Association's ethical guidelines for research involving human participants, with the study protocol approved by the university's ethics committee overseeing the authors' work (Approval No. 1493 of October 1st, 2024).

Measures

Difficulties in emotion regulation. This concept was measured using the short form of the original 36-item self-report instrument, the Difficulties in Emotion Regulation Scale (DERS; Gratz & Roemer, 2004). The version applied in this study, the DERS-18 (Victor & Klonsky, 2016), comprises 18 items (e.g., "*When I'm upset, I have difficulty focusing on other things*") rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 ("*almost never*") to 5 ("*almost always*"). Previous research, including studies conducted with Romanian samples (Antonia et al., 2024a; Bostan & Zaharia, 2016; Matei-Mitacu et al., 2024), has demonstrated the strong psychometric properties of this scale. In the current study, the DERS-18 showed excellent internal reliability, with a Cronbach's alpha of .89. Higher scores indicate greater difficulties in emotion regulation.

Love Addiction. Love addiction was assessed using the Love Addiction Inventory (LAI; Costa et al., 2021), a measure developed to capture behaviors and tendencies characteristic of addictive patterns in interpersonal relationships. The instrument contains 24 items, such as "*Spend time with your partner to forget about your suffering*," rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 ("*never*") to 5 ("*very often*"). The LAI has been frequently employed in previous studies to examine manifestations of dependence and has shown solid psychometric qualities across various cultural samples (Dineen & Dinc, 2024; Gori et al., 2023), including Romanian samples (Antoniac et al., 2025). In the current study, the scale demonstrated excellent reliability, with a Cronbach's alpha of .91. Higher scores reflect more pronounced levels of love addiction.

Socio-demographic data. Participants reported several socio-demographic characteristics, including sex, age, marital status, place of residence (urban or rural), and level of education, which was categorized into pre-university and post-university studies.

Results

Overview of the statistical analysis

We first conducted preliminary analyses to examine the descriptive statistics and the distribution of the main variables, including an assessment of normality based on Skewness and Kurtosis values. Next, we performed a simple linear regression analysis to test whether difficulties in emotion regulation predicted LA. Finally, we conducted independent-samples t-tests to investigate differences in LA scores based on educational level, comparing participants with pre-university versus post-university education. All statistical analyses were conducted using IBM SPSS Statistics, Version 26 (George & Mallery, 2019).

Preliminary data analyses

We computed the Skewness and Kurtosis coefficients to assess the normality of the distributions, and all values fell within the ± 2 threshold recommended by the literature (George & Mallery, 2010).

Table 1. Descriptive statistic

Variables	M	SD	Skewness (SE)	Kurtosis (SE)
1. Love addiction	73.40	15.83	.11 (.14)	-.35 (.28)
2. Difficulties in emotion regulation	53.42	13.00	.18 (.14)	-.52 (.28)

Note: * $p < .001$

Testing the regression

The results indicate that difficulties in emotion regulation significantly predict LA ($R^2 = .17$; $R^2_{adj} = .17$; $F_{(1, 300)} = 63.06$; $p < .001$), meaning that difficulties in emotion regulation account for approximately 17% of the variance in love addiction.

Differences based on level of education

To test the second hypothesis, we examined whether LA scores differed between individuals with pre-university education and those with postgraduate education. The results of the independent samples t-test (see Table 2) indicated a significant difference between the two groups $t_{(300)} = 4.16$, $p < .001$.

Specifically, participants with pre-university studies reported significantly higher levels of LA compared to those with postgraduate studies ($p < .001$).

Table 2. Differences based on the level of education in terms of love addiction

	N	Mean	t	df	p
			4.15	300	0.001
Individuals with lower education level	182	76.40			
Individuals with higher education level	120	68.86			

Discussions

The present study examined the relationship between difficulties in emotion regulation and LA, as well as the extent to which love-addictive tendencies differ across levels of educational attainment. Consistent with theoretical models emphasizing the role of emotional vulnerability in the emergence of maladaptive relational patterns (Gratz & Roemer, 2004; Thompson, 2019). Individuals with deficits in emotion regulation may experience heightened emotional reactivity and difficulty managing intense affective states, which can lead them to rely excessively on romantic partners as a primary source of emotional support. From a psychological perspective, these deficits can manifest as impulsivity, poor emotional awareness, and limited capacity for adaptive coping (Gratz & Roemer, 2004), increasing the risk of compulsive relational behaviors. Additionally, individuals with emotion-regulation difficulties may engage in idealization of partners (Momeñe et al., 2024), and fear of abandonment (Brandão et al., 2020) as strategies to alleviate distress, which aligns with patterns described in attachment and addiction frameworks. Our findings indicate that difficulties in emotion regulation are a significant positive predictor of LA. Specifically, emotion-regulation deficits accounted for approximately 17% of the variance in love-addictive behaviors, suggesting that the inability to modulate emotional intensity, understand emotional states, or employ adaptive regulatory strategies meaningfully contributes to the development of compulsive relational dynamics.

Beyond this core mechanism, our study also revealed significant differences in LA scores as a function of educational level. Educational level was operationalized as a two-category variable. The first category (pre-university education) referred exclusively to

completed high school, whereas the second category (post-university education) included completed or ongoing university and postgraduate studies. Participants in the pre-university category reported substantially higher levels of LA compared to those in the post-university category. This result suggests that higher educational attainment may serve as a protective factor (Kotagal et al., 2015), potentially through increased access to psychological literacy, better-developed critical thinking skills, or enhanced socio-emotional competence. One plausible explanation is that higher educational exposure may provide access to environments that facilitate reflective thinking (Alt et al., 2022), broader social interactions (Jensen & Jetten, 2015), and opportunities to develop adaptive coping strategies (Ruiz-Camacho et al., 2025). In such contexts, individuals may have greater resources to manage relational stress or emotional discomfort without relying excessively on their romantic partner as an external regulator of affect. This interpretation aligns with the broader literature suggesting that contextual factors—such as social support networks, cognitive resources, or psychological literacy—may shape the extent to which emotion dysregulation translates into maladaptive relational outcomes (Gratz & Roemer, 2004; Thompson, 2019).

Consequently, therapists and researchers should implement appropriate protective measures to ensure participants' and clients' psychological safety. For instance, when administering questionnaires or requesting reflective emotional work outside of sessions, clinicians should proactively provide clients with grounding or self-care tools (e.g., mindfulness exercises, relaxation strategies) to help them regulate distress if emotionally charged material is activated. Ensuring clear informed consent and offering accessible psychological support resources further contributes to creating a safe environment for individuals exploring emotionally sensitive domains.

Theoretical and practical implications

The present study offers both theoretical and practical contributions to the understanding of LA. From the perspective of theoretical standpoint, our findings highlight the significant role of difficulties in emotion regulation as a predictor of LA, providing empirical evidence for the psychological mechanisms linking emotional dysregulation to maladaptive romantic dependency. Moreover, the observed association between educational attainment and love addiction offers new insights into how socio-demographic factors may influence vulnerability to compulsive relational behaviors, contributing to a more nuanced understanding of individual differences in susceptibility. By focusing on a Romanian sample, this research enriches the literature with data from a context that has been relatively underexplored, supporting cross-cultural comparisons and informing future studies investigating emotional regulation and behavioral addictions in diverse populations.

In practical terms, the results have direct implications for mental health interventions. Psychotherapists, clinical psychologists, and counselors can utilize these findings to identify individuals at heightened risk of developing LA due to emotional regulation difficulties and lower educational resources. Interventions could target the enhancement of adaptive emotion regulation strategies, aiming to reduce dependency patterns and improve relational functioning. Furthermore, awareness of the link between education and LA can inform preventative approaches, psychoeducation programs, and individualized therapeutic planning, ensuring that interventions are tailored to the specific cognitive and emotional profiles of clients.

Ethical implications

In terms of ethical implications, the present study contributes to reinforcing a responsible framework for researching LA and related emotional processes, emphasizing the protection of participants and the promotion of psychological well-being. By drawing attention to the potential emotional discomfort arising from reflecting on one's relational dependencies,

attachment patterns, and maladaptive romantic behaviors, this research underscores the importance of respecting participants' rights and ensuring their psychological safety. Moreover, by systematically considering the ethical risks associated with investigating sensitive relational and emotional experiences, the study promotes the establishment of rigorous ethical standards in behavioral research. Ultimately, these insights can inform mental health professionals—including psychotherapists and clinical psychologists—about the ethical responsibilities inherent in both research and clinical practice, fostering interventions that are sensitive to participants' emotional vulnerability.

Limitations and future directions

Although this study offers valuable insights into how difficulties in emotion regulation and educational attainment relate to vulnerability to LA, several limitations should be noted. First, the sample displayed a clear gender imbalance, with women substantially outnumbering men, which may limit the generalizability of the findings. Future research should aim for more balanced gender distributions or examine potential gender-related differences in love-addictive behaviors. Second, the use of a convenience-based snowball sampling method restricts the representativeness of the sample. Recruiting participants solely through online networks may reduce socio-demographic variability. To enhance external validity, future studies should employ more diverse recruitment strategies and include broader population segments. Third, the cross-sectional design prevents conclusions about causality. Longitudinal approaches would allow researchers to examine how difficulties in emotion regulation and LA develop and interact over time. Additionally, the study did not account for factors such as prior engagement in psychotherapy, which may influence individuals' emotion regulation capacities. Future research could explore differences between participants with and without therapeutic experience to better understand how psychological support shapes relational dependency. Moreover, future works could further explore manifestations of love addiction in online contexts, particularly in light of the growing prevalence and societal impact of internet addiction in contemporary digital life (Antoniac et al., 2024b). Finally, relationship-specific variables—such as relationship duration, attachment anxiety, attachment avoidance, and fear of abandonment—were not assessed. Including such dimensions, ideally within dyadic designs involving both partners, may offer a more comprehensive understanding of the relational context in which LA emerges. Despite these limitations, the present study contributes meaningful evidence to a growing field. Addressing these methodological considerations in future research will strengthen theoretical models of LA and support more targeted interventions.

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