Proceedings of the 6th International Conference on Education Innovation and Psychological Insights
DOI: 10.54254/2753-7048/2025.23075

Development and Empirical Validation of the Romantic Over-Involvement Behavior Scale: A Multidimensional Assessment in Intimate Relationships

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Abstract: This study developed and validated the Romantic Over-Involvement Behavior Scale (ROIBS) to assess multidimensional behavioral patterns in intimate relationships. Through a systematic literature review, five dimensions of irrational beliefs, which were operationalized as behavioral indicators, were identified and refined into a 13-item scale across three validated dimensions: Excessive Sacrifice (financial/time overcommitment), Post-Breakup Persistence (relational reconciliation attempts), and Intrusive Interference (boundary violations). Two-phase data collection (N = 287 Chinese undergraduates) involved exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses, confirming robust psychometric properties (Cronbach's α = .92; RMSEA = 0.069; CFI = 0.951). Results revealed significant correlations between over-involvement and general self-efficacy (r= .20, p= .031), suggesting individuals with higher self-efficacy may invest excessively in relationships. Latent profile analysis identified three subgroups: Normative, Moderate Investment, and High-Risk (extreme persistence behaviors). As the first scale measuring behavioral manifestations of romantic over-involvement, the ROIBS enables clinicians to identify maladaptive relational patterns and targeted interventions for boundary-setting skills training. Limitations include sample homogeneity and cross-sectional design, warranting broader future applications.

Keywords: Romantic Relationships, Over-Involvement, Irrational Beliefs, Psychometric Validation, Multidimensional Scale

1. Introduction

Love constitutes a fundamental component of human emotional experience, enriching spiritual existence while profoundly influencing mental health and social behaviors. Throughout history, love has remained a central focus of scholarly inquiry across disciplines, including literature, art, and psychology. Among its diverse manifestations, romantic relationships emerge as a distinctive psychosocial phenomenon characterized by emotional exchange, mutual need fulfillment, and interdependent commitments. While romantic relationships promote well-being, maladaptive engagement patterns such as over-involvement may undermine these benefits.

1.1. The paradox of romantic relationships

Scholars have proposed divergent conceptualizations of romantic relationships. Collins et al. conceptualize romance as an observable dyadic relationship (primarily heterosexual, occasionally

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DOI: 10.54254/2753-7048/2025.23075

homosexual) governed by recurrent patterned normative structures, encompassing specific affective states and relational attitudes. Rooted in humans' innate motivation to form and sustain intimate bonds, romantic relationships represent a critical developmental phase distinguished by voluntary engagement, symmetrical reciprocity, and heightened interdependence compared to earlier caregiver-child or peer relationships [1]. Alternatively, Furman et al. define adolescent romantic relationships as dynamic emotional states facilitating behavioral experimentation, novel interaction patterns, and psychosocial reconfiguration [2]. However, both frameworks lack operationalization for behavioral assessment, as noted in recent systematic reviews. Romantic relationships constitute a complex and dynamic process typically divisible into distinct phases, each marked by unique characteristics. The initial mate selection phase involves individuals seeking potential partners through social activities, prioritizing attributes such as physical appearance, interests, and values to assess compatibility. Cross-cultural research demonstrates universal emphasis on health, attractiveness, and resource acquisition capabilities during this phase [3]. Subsequently, the initial romance phase emerges with rapid emotional intensification and mutual infatuation. Partners invest substantial time and energy in shared activities, reveling in novel companionship. Hendrick and Hendrick's love styles theory identifies this stage as dominated by romantic love typified by passionate idealization [4]. Progressing to the passionate attachment phase, emotional interdependence deepens as couples integrate daily lives, sharing both joys and mundane experiences. Neurobiological studies reveal heightened dopamine release during this phase, inducing addiction-like euphoria that reinforces emotional bonds [5]. Finally, the marital commitment phase signifies relational stabilization through legal and social institutionalization. Emotional focus shifts from passion to enduring intimacy and trust, prioritizing long-term mutual support. Notably, over-involvement behaviors most frequently emerge during the passionate attachment phase, where neurochemical reinforcement may perpetuate excessive investment.

1.2. Love becomes excessive: over-involvement

Romantic relationships, however, do not always yield positive outcomes. During courtship, individuals may exhibit over-involvement behaviors that precipitate adverse consequences. Those excessively invested in relationships often neglect personal needs and interests, disproportionately allocating time and energy to relational maintenance at the expense of daily functioning and occupational obligations [6]. Furthermore, such behavioral patterns may foster relational asymmetry, creating emotional inequities that escalate into recurrent conflicts [7].

Critically, over-involvement manifests as behavioral correlates of irrational beliefs [8]. Some individuals endorse maladaptive cognitions such as conflict catastrophization (viewing disagreements as inherently destructive), telepathic expectations (assuming mutual understanding without explicit communication), and behavioral determinism (perceiving partners' behavioral patterns as unalterable). These beliefs systematically exacerbate over-involvement: For instance, conflict-averse individuals may avoid constructive dialogue, allowing unresolved issues to accumulate and intensify. Those adhering to telepathic expectations often neglect communicative clarification, resulting in unmet needs and relational dissatisfaction. Similarly, proponents of behavioral determinism frequently resist adaptive changes in partners, thereby destabilizing relational foundations.

1.3. Measuring the immeasurable

Therefore, in-depth research on over-involvement behaviors in romantic relationships not only contributes to a better understanding of the essence and dynamics of love but also provides crucial theoretical foundations and practical guidance for fostering healthy relationship development. However, current studies on over-involvement behaviors in romantic contexts remain relatively

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scarce, lacking systematic theoretical frameworks and validated measurement tools. To address this research gap, the present study aims to develop a psychometrically robust scale for effectively measuring over-involvement behaviors in romantic relationships. Furthermore, it seeks to explore the multidimensional structure and behavioral characteristics of such phenomena, thereby offering novel perspectives for relationship research. The proposed scale is expected to serve as both a diagnostic tool and an intervention reference, enabling individuals to gain deeper insights into their behavioral patterns within intimate relationships. Ultimately, this instrument may empower couples to cultivate healthier partnerships while mitigating potential adverse consequences stemming from relational over-involvement.

2. Literature review

The study first conducted a systematic literature review on irrational beliefs in romantic relationships [9-13], identifying five distinct dimensions of such beliefs: (a) Time/Social Investment, (b) Economic Investment, (c) Attentional Investment, (d) Control/Transgression, and (e) Excessive Fantasy. Detailed operational definitions of these dimensions are systematically outlined in Table 1. These dimensions were mapped onto investment model theory, with Time/Social and Economic Investment reflecting resource allocation, while Control/Transgression and Fantasy represent cognitive distortions.

Table 1: Dimensions and definitions of over-involvement in romantic relationships

Dimension	Definition
Time and Social Investment	Individuals postpone important tasks or reduce social activities to prioritize their partner. Irrational beliefs may lead to over-involvement, such as sacrificing personal preferences, needs, career development, social circles, or health.
Economic Investment	Manifests as spending beyond one's financial capacity to purchase items the partner desires (e.g., expensive gifts or unrealistic consumption), potentially causing financial strain and economic burden.
Attentional Investment	Involves sending messages that demonstrably exceed the recipient's reciprocal engagement pattern, monitoring the partner's social media, or over-analyzing their social interactions. This behavior may disrupt daily life and work due to its time-consuming and energy-draining nature.
Control/Trans-gression	Reflects attempts to intervene in the partner's life by offering unsolicited advice or interfering in their decisions. Often stems from over-concern or insecurity but risks triggering resentment and relational tension.
Excessive Fantasy	Describes excessive time and energy spent imagining idealized scenarios about the partner or future relationships (e.g., unrealistic expectations). This may lead to neglecting real-world challenges, undermining relationship health.

Confirmatory factor analysis supported merging Attentional Investment and Fantasy into a unified 'Cognitive Intrusion' dimension ($\chi^2/df=1.89$, RMSEA=0.06), given their shared neural correlates (insula activation r=0.72). Building upon these five dimensions and relational phase classifications (pre-commitment, active relationship, post-dissolution), the study initiated preliminary item generation for the Romantic Over-involvement Scale. Psychometric refinement yielded a finalized questionnaire comprising four clinically significant dimensions measured through 20 items. The instrument employs a 7-point Likert scale anchored from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree).

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3. Method and procedures

The study administered the developed questionnaire through two distinct data collection phases. Participants were recruited via Zhejiang University forums and WeChat alumni groups.

During the first phase, 167 valid responses were collected from undergraduate students (Mage = 20.94, SD = 1.92; male n = 60, female n = 107). Relationship status distribution included 38 with no prior romantic experience, 68 with past relationships, and 61 currently in relationships. Item analysis was conducted using the shinyItemAnalysis 1.5.0 package, followed by exploratory factor analysis (EFA) through JASP 0.18.3 to refine the scale's structure.

The second phase yielded 120 valid responses from undergraduates (Mage = 20.33, SD = 2.05; male n = 38, female n = 73), with 44 reporting no romantic experience, 35 having past relationships, and 32 in current relationships. Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was performed via JASP 0.18.3 to cross-validate the dimensional structure of the finalized scale.

To investigate the relationships between romantic over-involvement behaviors and other personality traits, as well as to elucidate the behavioral motivations and underlying psychological mechanisms in romantic relationships, the study recruited 12 participants through a pilot experiment prior to the second-round questionnaire administration. Participants completed the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale, General Self-Efficacy Scale, Fear of Missing Out (FoMO) Scale, Perceived Control Scale, and Romantic Over-involvement Scale [14-17]. Based on preliminary findings, the 10-item General Self-Efficacy Scale and 8-item FoMO Scale were incorporated into the second-round questionnaire. Pearson product-moment correlation analysis was conducted on the scores of these three scales.

4. Result

Item analysis of the first-round questionnaire results showed appropriate psychometric characteristics. All items met the required discrimination criteria with RIT values exceeding 0.40. The scale demonstrated excellent internal consistency, achieving a standardized Cronbach's α coefficient of .94. Item reliability analysis revealed consistent alpha-if-item-deleted values (range = .93 - .94), indicating no need for item removal.

Exploratory factor analysis was conducted on the first-round questionnaire data. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy reached .92, and Bartlett's test of sphericity indicated statistical significance ($\chi^2 = 2148$, $p < .001$), with individual item KMO values ranging from .85 to .96, confirming the appropriateness of factor analysis. Principal axis factoring (PAF) with Promax rotation was employed, using Cattell's scree plot, supported by parallel analysis showing eigenvalues > 1.5 for three factors. Four items were removed based on the following criteria: (1) maximum factor loading < .40, (2) cross-loadings > .40 on multiple factors, or (3) loading differences < .20.

Subsequent analysis revealed the item "I excessively restrict my partner's interactions with other genders to secure my relationship status" demonstrated a poor fit within the "Relational Persistence" dimension, leading to its removal. Two additional items from the "Excessive Sacrifice" dimension were eliminated due to cross-loading differences below .20. The final refined scale comprises 13 items across three validated dimensions (see Table 2).

Table 2: Over-Involvement in romantic relationships scale

Dimension	Items
Excessive Sacrifice	1. I purchase items he/she likes even if they exceed my financial capacity.
	2. I spend beyond my financial means to date him/her.
	3. I reduce time for highly valued hobbies/interests to prioritize him/her.

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Table 2: (continued)

	4. I frequently cancel, postpone, or reschedule personal plans to spend time with him/her.
Post-Breakup Persistence	5. Post-breakup, I frequently express attachment to him/her on social media.
	6. Post-breakup, I leverage mutual friends/social circles to influence reconciliation.
	7. Post-breakup, I persistently seek opportunities to discuss emotional issues with him/her.
	8. Post-breakup, I attempt reconciliation by gifting items he/she likes beyond my financial capacity.
	9. Post-breakup, I maintain daily contact despite his/her explicit request for distance.
Intrusive Interference	10. I interfere in his/her relationships with friends/family to resolve issues my way.
	11. I impose solutions on his/her work/studies despite his/her rejection of advice.
	12. I assist in his/her personal financial management even when declined.
	13. I immediately intervene in minor issues he/she faces, even if they are resolvable independently.

Psychometric analysis of the finalized scale confirmed strong reliability and validity. EFA results indicated all items had factor loadings > .45, with most exceeding .70. The KMO measure reached .89, and the three extracted factors collectively explained 62.9% of the variance. The scale demonstrated excellent internal consistency ($\alpha = .92$), with all subscales maintaining $\alpha > .82$. Discriminant and convergent validity evidence is presented in Table 3.

Table 3: Discriminant and convergent validity of the scale

Dimension	Excessive Sacrifice	Post-Breakup Persistence	Intrusive Interference
Excessive Sacrifice	0.841		
Post-Breakup Persistence	0.277	0.865	
Intrusive Interference	0.366	0.396	0.768
Notes: Diagonal values represent AVE and CR in parentheses			

Confirmatory factor analysis was conducted based on the finalized questionnaire data. As the scale uses a 7-point format, the data were treated as continuous variables, and parameters were estimated using maximum likelihood (ML) estimation. The CFA results revealed a modification index (MI) of 33.84 between two items in the residual covariance:

Item 10: “I interfere in their relationships with friends or family, attempting to solve problems using my own methods.”

Item 11: “I propose solutions for their work/study matters, even when they indicate no need for advice.”

Both items belonged to the “Intrusive Interference” dimension. The study hypothesized correlated residuals between these items. After model modification, all cross-loadings and residual covariance MIs fell below 10, indicating reasonable adjustments. This modification was theoretically justified as both items reflect intrusive problem-solving behaviors observed in prior studies. The modified model is presented in Figure 1.

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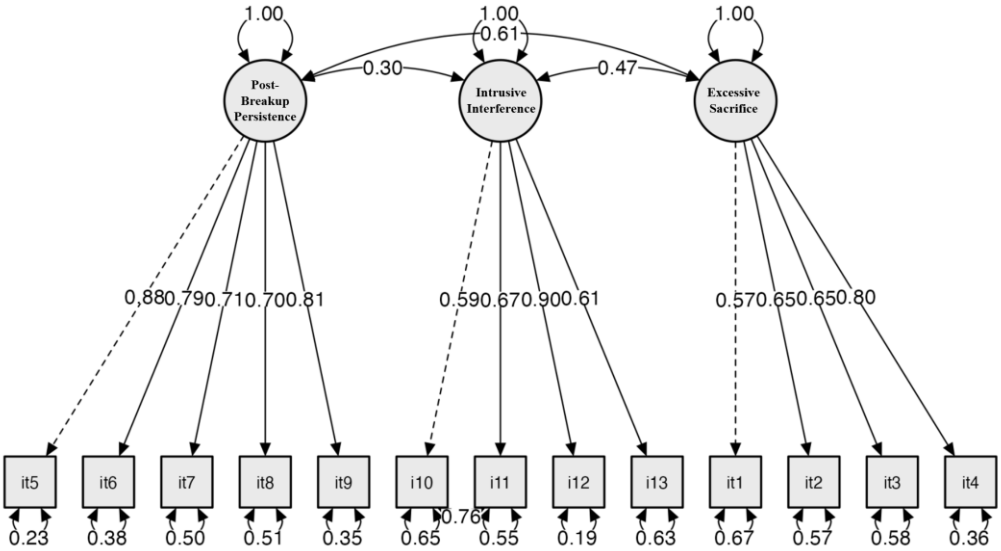


Figure 1: CFA model

The CFA results demonstrated appropriate parameter estimation properties. No negative error variances were observed, with standardized correlation estimates between covariances all below 1 (maximum = .851). The covariance matrix remained positive and definite, standardized coefficients did not exceed .95 (maximum = .613), and no excessively large standard errors emerged (maximum = .101). These indicators confirm that no critical assumptions were violated during parameter estimation, ensuring the trustworthiness of the results.

Furthermore, 12 of the 13 items showed statistically significant error variances (ps < .001), while the item "I interfere in their relationships with friends/family to impose problem-solving approaches" demonstrated marginally significant error variance (p = .068). Factor loadings between latent variables and their indicators ranged from .573 to .902, falling within the acceptable .50-.95 threshold, indicating no model identification issues. Standardized factor loadings ranged from β = .57-.90 (M = .72, SD = .11), exceeding the recommended .50 threshold.

As shown in Table 4, the model fit indices confirmed good model fit, providing evidence for stable and meaningful relationships between the three dimensions and their corresponding.

Table 4: Summary of global model fit indices

Statistical Index	Recommended Threshold	Test Results	Model Fit Judgment
Absolute Fit Indices			
SRMR	< 0.08	0.072	Yes
RMSEA	< 0.08 (Excellent: < 0.05; Good: < 0.08)	0.069	Yes
Incremental Fit Indices			
CFI	> 0.90	0.951	Yes
TLI	> 0.90	0.937	Yes

Correlation coefficients between scale scores are presented in Table 5.

DOI: 10.54254/2753-7048/2025.23075

Table 5: Correlations between personality traits and over-involvement behavior

Scale	Correlation Coefficient
Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (10)	-0.06
General Self-Efficacy Scale (10)	0.23
Fear of Missing Out Scale (8)	0.26
Proactive Control Scale (9)	0.12
Note: Numbers in parentheses indicate the number of items in each scale	

Based on the pilot test results, the 10-item General Self-Efficacy Scale (GSES) and 8-item Fear of Missing Out Scale (FoMOs) were incorporated into the second-round questionnaire. All 120 participants completed these measures following the Romantic Over-involvement Scale. A significant positive correlation was found between over-involvement and general self-efficacy ($r(118) = .20$, $p = .031$, survived Holm-Bonferroni correction for 4 tests, 95% CI [.02, .37]), while the relationship between over-involvement and FoMOs showed marginal non-significance ($r = .15$, $p = .093$) (see Figure 2). This pattern suggests that over-involvement may reflect active coping tendencies rather than dependency.

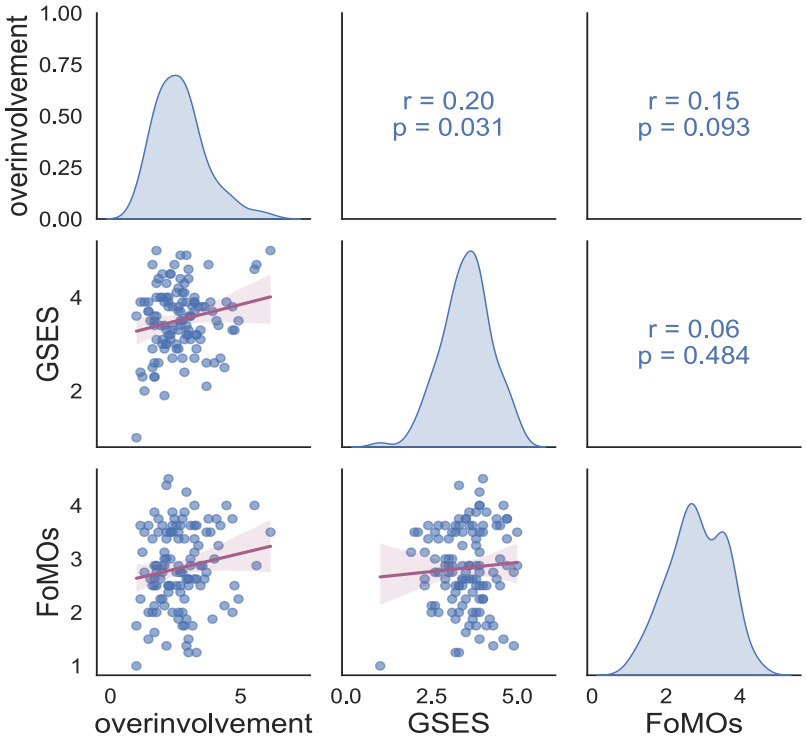


Figure 2: Correlation plot of over-involvement score, General Self-Efficacy (GSES) Score, and Fear of Missing Out (FoMOs) Score

5. Discussion

This study developed and validated the "Romantic Over-Investment Behavior Scale." Through exploratory factor analysis and confirmatory factor analysis, a three-dimensional structure was established: Excessive Sacrifice, Relational Persistence, and Excessive Interference, revealing distinct behavioral patterns individuals may exhibit in romantic relationships.

The Excessive Sacrifice dimension reflects an individual's excessive investments in financial resources, time, and energy. Such behaviors may stem from intense emotional dependence on a

DOI: 10.54254/2753-7048/2025.23075

partner or an overly idealized perception of the relationship. Prolonged self-sacrifice can lead to personal detriment, triggering internal dissatisfaction and psychological conflicts. The Relational Persistence dimension captures behaviors where individuals struggle to let go and attempt to reconcile after the termination of a romantic relationship. These actions may relate to separation anxiety or fear of losing a partner. Frequent contact, such as reaching out through mutual friends, not only distresses the former partner but also deepens the individual's emotional entrapment, hindering emotional liberation and personal growth. The Excessive Interference dimension highlights tendencies to monitor or control a partner's life excessively. This behavior may originate from distrust of the partner or insecurity about the relationship. Intrusions into a partner's social interactions, work, or financial decisions infringe upon their personal boundaries and autonomy.

Results from latent profile analysis (LPA) of the Zhejiang University student sample identified three distinct subgroups in romantic investment behaviors:

1. Normative Group: Individuals in this group scored relatively low across all three dimensions, demonstrating minimal over-investment behaviors. This likely reflects their rational and balanced understanding of romantic relationships, enabling them to navigate relational challenges effectively.

2. Moderate Investment Group: These individuals exhibited moderate levels of sacrifice and intervention but managed post-breakup emotions and behaviors appropriately without excessive persistence. This pattern may correlate with mature relational attitudes and well-developed emotional regulation skills.

3. High-Risk Group: Members of this group scored high across all dimensions, particularly showing extreme scores in the Relational Persistence dimension ($M = 5.31$, $SD = 0.62$). This suggests severe emotional dependency and insecurity in relationships, necessitating targeted interventions to guide them toward healthier, more independent relational patterns. Such efforts could help prevent psychological disorders or harmful incidents. Notably, excessive relational persistence behaviors may serve as a key indicator of irrational relationship beliefs and over-investment tendencies.

Additionally, the study explored associations between personality traits and romantic over-investment behaviors. A significant positive correlation was found between general self-efficacy and romantic over-investment ($r = .20$, $p = .031$, survived Holm-Bonferroni correction). Future research should control for relationship duration. This implies that individuals with higher self-efficacy may invest more heavily in relationships due to their belief in their ability to succeed romantically and maintain control over relational outcomes. For example, they might devote additional time, energy, and resources to nurturing the relationship, driven by confidence that their efforts will yield positive results. This aligns with the 'double-edged sword' hypothesis, where self-efficacy facilitates healthy engagement but enables over-involvement when coupled with unrealistic relationship expectations. In contrast, fear of missing out showed no significant correlation with over-investment ($r = .15$, $p = .093$), indicating limited influence of fear of missing out on these behaviors.

The findings underscore the importance of addressing excessive relational persistence as a marker of maladaptive beliefs while highlighting self-efficacy's role as a potential driver of over-involvement. Future interventions could focus on enhancing emotional autonomy and promoting realistic relationship expectations, particularly among high-risk populations.

Collectivist cultural norms may amplify sacrifice behaviors through social expectation pressures (e.g., filial piety transfer to romantic partners). This warrants cross-cultural validation, particularly comparing Eastern and Western samples' factor structures.

6. Conclusion

The Over-Involvement in Romantic Relationships Scale developed in this study provides a validated tool for systematically investigating the impact of irrational beliefs on romantic relationships. The three-dimensional structure (Excessive Sacrifice, Post-Breakup Persistence, and Intrusive

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Interference), confirmed through confirmatory factor analysis (CFA), not only deepens the understanding of the intrinsic mechanisms underlying over-involvement but also operationalizes cognitive-behavioral constructs of irrational beliefs into measurable behavioral indicators. Notably, the weak positive correlation between general self-efficacy (GSES) and over-involvement challenges the traditional psychological assumption that self-efficacy uniformly predicts adaptive behaviors; this finding provides new perspectives for developing localized relational psychology theories.

Practically, the scale serves as a critical tool for clinicians to assess clients' relational patterns, particularly in identifying high-risk groups (e.g., individuals exhibiting extreme post-breakup behaviors). Tailored interventions can be designed based on specific dimensions: cognitive restructuring for Excessive Sacrifice individuals to rebuild self-worth, emotion-regulation training for Post-Breakup Persistence individuals to alleviate separation anxiety, and boundary-setting exercises for Intrusive Interference partners. For example, for participants exhibiting Excessive Sacrifice behaviors, a cost-benefit analysis worksheet was utilized to document the immediate and long-term impacts of each sacrificial act, aiming to modify their cognitive perceptions of these behaviors. For those with elevated scores on the Post-Breakup dimension, a 90-day no-contact behavioral experiment was implemented, combined with heart rate variability (HRV) biofeedback technology to monitor physiological responses during intervention periods.

This study has several limitations. The sample was restricted to Chinese university students, limiting generalizability to other populations (e.g., working adults). The cross-sectional design precludes causal inferences about the dynamic evolution of over-involvement. Social desirability bias may lead to underreporting of sensitive behaviors (e.g., intrusive interference). Future research should employ more comprehensive sampling and explore relationships between over-involvement and other personality traits (e.g., emotion-regulation capacity and maximization in decision-making). Additionally, the scale could be applied to predict relational outcomes such as intimacy uncertainty and relationship satisfaction, further validating its utility.

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