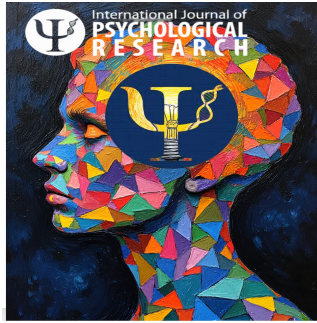




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The Role of Personality in the Capacity to Love

El papel de la personalidad en la capacidad de amar

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Abstract.

Introduction. The main objective of this study was to analyze the role of the Big Five personality traits (extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, neuroticism, and openness to experience) in the capacity to love. The capacity to love involves the ability to engage in, invest in, and sustain a committed romantic relationship, arising from complex developmental processes beginning in childhood and evolving throughout life. Although it may appear as a dispositional attribute, limited evidence exists regarding its association with personality traits. **Method.** A total of 839 participants aged 18 to 74 were included. Data were gathered using a Sociodemographic Questionnaire, the Big Five Inventory (BFI), and the Capacity to Love Inventory (CTL-I). These instruments were adapted for digital formats and disseminated online. **Results.** A positive association was found between the personality traits and the CTL dimensions. Four traits —agreeableness, openness to experience, extraversion, and emotional stability— showed a modest contribution to predicting the CTL, with agreeableness emerging as the strongest predictor and most correlated trait. Statistically significant differences also appeared in all the sociodemographic variables examined. **Conclusions.** These findings indicate a relationship between personality and the capacity to love, thereby enhancing our understanding of personal functioning systems and certain individual difficulties. The results underscore practical implications for tailoring personalized interventions in relationship counseling, emotional regulation, and the development of social skills and empathy, ultimately promoting individual mental health and healthier relationships.

Resumen.

Introducción. El objetivo principal de este estudio fue analizar el papel de los cinco grandes rasgos de personalidad (extraversión; agradabilidad; concienciación; neuroticismo; apertura a la experiencia) en la capacidad de amar. La capacidad de amar abarca la capacidad de entablar, dedicar y mantener una relación romántica dedicada, que surge de intrincados procesos de desarrollo que comienzan en la infancia y evolucionan a lo largo de la vida. A pesar de parecer una característica disposicional, existe evidencia limitada de su conexión con los rasgos de personalidad. **Método.** 839 participantes de entre 18 y 74 años. La recogida de datos se realizó mediante un cuestionario sociodemográfico, Big Five Inventory (BFI), e Capacity to Love Inventory (CTL-I). Los cuestionarios utilizados en este estudio se adaptaron para el soporte digital y se difundieron en línea. **Resultados.** Se encontró una asociación positiva entre los rasgos de personalidad y las dimensiones del ctl. Cuatro de los rasgos de personalidad (amabilidad, apertura a la experiencia, extraversión y estabilidad emocional) parecen tener una modesta contribución en la predicción del ctl, siendo la amabilidad el predictor más fuerte y el más correlacionado. También se encontraron diferencias estadísticamente significativas en todas las variables sociodemográficas estudiadas. **Conclusiones.** Estos resultados indicaron una conexión entre la personalidad y la capacidad de amar, contribuyendo a una mejor comprensión de los sistemas de funcionamiento y las dificultades de algunos individuos, lo que sugiere implicaciones prácticas para adaptar las intervenciones personalizadas en el asesoramiento de relaciones, la regulación emocional, la mejora de las habilidades sociales y la empatía para promover la salud mental y las relaciones individuales.

Keywords.

Personality, Big Five Inventory, Capacity to Love, Ctl-Inventory, Romantic Relationships.

Palabras Clave.

Personalidad, inventario de los cinco grandes, capacidad de amar, ctl-inventario, relaciones románticas.

1. Introduction

Personality is a big part of who we are, shaping how we think, behave, and react to everyday situations (Allport, 1961). Regarding the analysis of human nature, love is one of the most urgent dimensions and has been a source of inspiration and hope since the beginning of time (Kapusta et al., 2018). It is known that humans have a basic need for interpersonal relationships, but for some, it is not easy to engage in and maintain committed, intimate relationships, and they seem not to have this individual capacity to love (Hazan & Brennan, 1987; Kernberg, 2011).

1.1 Personality

The trait theory defends that personality is a combination of individual traits that remain stable over time and can vary among individuals, influencing their behavior and impacting an individual's response to daily situations, habits, humor, and thoughts (Suldo et al., 2014). These traits are the essential components of personality that hold one's defining characteristics (Czerniawska & Szydło, 2021).

McCrae and Costa (1987) created the Big Five model, a descriptive hierarchical theory proposing that personality should be divided into five broad traits, each consisting of six facets: **extraversion** (1. warmth; 2. assertiveness; 3. gregariousness; 4. positive emotions; 5. activity; 6. excitement seeking), **agreeableness** (1. modesty; 2. altruism; 3. compliance; 4. trust; 5. tendermindedness; 6. straightforwardness), **conscientiousness** (1. order; 2. self-discipline; 3. achievement striving; 4. competence; 5. deliberation; 6. dutifulness), **neuroticism** (1. depression; 2. anxiety; 3. hostility; 4. vulnerability; 5. impulsiveness; 6. self-consciousness), and **openness to experience** (1. fantasy; 2. values; 3. ideas; 4. aesthetics; 5. feelings; 6. actions) (McCrae & Costa, 1987).

The Big Five model has been used to predict individual differences in varied contexts and is considered the principal approach for explaining the structure of personality traits (Roccas et al., 2002).

As an endogenous theory, it defends that biological factors shape personality development and that the maturation of these predispositions influences an individual's likelihood of experiencing certain significant events, such as romantic relationships (McCrae & Costa, 2008). According to the literature, personality plays a vital role in romantic relationships, as some traits and facets are proven to influence relationship variables like outcomes, satisfaction, and duration (Apostolou & Tsangari, 2022; Asselmann & Specht, 2020; Biesen et al., 2022; Chapman et al., 2007; McCrae & Costa, 1987; Costa et al., 2001; Cotter & Kerschner, 2018; Donnellan et al., 2004; White et al., 2004; Gibson et al., 2016; Holland & Roisman, 2008; Jokela et al., 2011; Kernberg, 2011; Malouff et al., 2010; Nofle & Shaver, 2006; Schwaba et al., 2019; Robins

et al., 2002; Watson et al., 2000; Weisberg et al., 2011; Winterheld & Simpson, 2018; Safdar & Dasti, 2015).

1.2 The Capacity to Love

The capacity to love is described as a concept involving a multi-component approach and is the “ability to engage in, invest in, and sustain a committed romantic love relationship” (Kapusta et al., 2018, p. 2). From Kernberg's approach (2011), ten different dimensions compose the capacity to love construct: 1. **Falling in love**—described as an enchantment for the other, an admiration for their physical, sexual, and emotional characteristics; the general feeling is passion; 2. **Interest in the life project of the other**—a genuine interest in the other's life project, their history, values, ideas, aspirations, and feelings; 3. **Basic trust**—the capacity to trust, be empathic, and feel comfortable expressing vulnerabilities and depending on another; 4. **Capacity for authentic forgiveness**—the ability to forgive, ask for forgiveness, and start over under adversities; 5. **Humility and gratitude**—appreciation for the other, the love shared, and the experiences lived together; 6. **A common ego ideal as a joint life project**—a genuine interest in the other's personality, values, and life, plus the commitment necessary for a joint life Project; 7. **Mature dependency as opposed to power dynamics**—representing the capacity to be comfortable relying on someone else, excluding feelings of insecurity and inferiority when asking for help; 8. **The permanence of sexual passion**—sexual desire and sexual activity throughout the relationship; 9. **Acceptance of loss, jealousy, and boundary protection**—understanding that mature love should be reciprocal and accepting that the other is free and that the relationship can end at any time; 10. **Loss and mourning**—the mourning process expected with the death or separation of the loved one.

All components of this concept are essential for successful romantic relationships, as they reflect key aspects of psychological development. It is believed that early developmental experiences—marked by the successful resolution of Erikson's psychosocial stages and the formation of a secure attachment style—equip a child with the necessary foundations to shape their personality. These experiences foster specific beliefs, emotions, and behaviours that enhance their capacity to love, ultimately leading to healthier and more stable relationships in adulthood (Bowlby, 1973a, 1973b, 1973c; Collins & Srouffe, 1999; Erikson, 1963; Fraley & Roisman, 2015; Hazan & Shaver, 1987; Kapusta et al., 2018; Kernberg, 1974, 1977, 2011; Zayas et al., 2010).

2. The Present Study

A deeper understanding of one's capacity to love is crucial for gaining insight into personal functioning systems, thus serving as a valuable tool for enhancing both indi-

vidual psychological well-being and the health of relationships. Given the significant role of love and relationships in overall well-being (Fernandes et al., 2023; Feeney & Collins, 2015), the Capacity to Love (CTL) framework can be instrumental in examining romantic relationships more closely, identifying challenges, and managing potential difficulties.

The lack of research exploring the connection between these two constructs was the primary motivation for this study. The main objective was to examine the role of personality in shaping an individual's capacity to love.

This study adopts a quantitative-correlational design, aiming to determine how personality influences one's capacity to love. The specific objectives are:

1. Characterize the sample in terms of the Big Five traits and the capacity to love dimensions,
2. Analyze differences in socio-demographic variables concerning the Big Five traits and the capacity to love dimensions,
3. Examine the relationship between the Big Five traits and the capacity to love dimensions, and
4. Identify the personality traits that predict the capacity to love.

3. Method

3.1 Participants

The sample for this study was collected online and consisted of 839 participants (21.3% men and 78.7% women) aged 18 to 74 ($M = 34.47$, $SD = 13.65$). Regarding marital status, 58.4% were single, 32.2% were married, 8.5% were divorced, and 1.0% were widowed. Most participants had no children (60.5%).

At the time of data collection, the majority of the sample (76.6%) was in an intimate relationship, while 23.4% were not. Regarding relationship length, the sample mean was 10.87 years ($SD = 11.40$), and the average age for the first relationship was 16.25 ($SD = 3.03$). On a scale from 1 to 5, the mean level of relationship satisfaction was 4.11 ($SD = 1.00$).

3.2 Measures and Materials

3.2.1 Sociodemographic Questionnaire

Demographic information was collected using a two-part questionnaire containing questions aimed at characterizing individuals (e.g., gender, age, socioeconomic status, educational background, residential setting, marital status, and sexual orientation) and their current/past relationships (current relationship status, type and duration of the relationship, presence of children and shared children, and relationship satisfaction on a scale from 1 to 5). This information was subsequently used for differential statistical analyses.

3.2.2 Big Five Inventory (BFI) Portuguese Version

Personality was measured using the Big Five Inventory (BFI – Portuguese version) (Brito-Costa et al., 2015) to assess the five major dimensions of personality according to the Big Five model (McCrae & Costa, 1987). This instrument comprises 44 items, answered on a Likert-type scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree), assessing the personality traits in each of the five dimensions. In a psychometric study involving Portuguese athletes (Brito-Costa et al., 2015), internal consistency, factor structure, temporal stability, and criterion validity were confirmed. For the Portuguese version, Cronbach's alpha values for the subscales were .64 (extraversion), .52 (agreeableness), .70 (conscientiousness), .69 (neuroticism/emotional stability), and .61 (openness to experience). These alpha coefficients are lower than those reported in the original validation.

3.2.3 Capacity to Love Inventory (CTL-I) Portuguese Version

The capacity to love was assessed using the Portuguese version (Fonte et al., 2022) of the CTL-I (Kapusta et al., 2018), a 41-item questionnaire divided into six subscales, answered on a 4-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree to 4 = strongly agree). The inventory evaluates the following dimensions:

- Interest in the partner's life projects (items 1–7),
- Basic trust (items 8–16),
- Gratitude (items 17–23),
- Common ego ideal (items 24–31),
- Permanence of sexual passion (items 32–33),
- Acceptance of loss, mourning, and jealousy (items 34–41).

The empirical validation of the CTL-I demonstrated its construct validity via internal consistency, stability, and test-retest reliability. Cronbach's alpha ranged from .67 to .90. Factor analysis indicated positive associations between CTL-I scores and the quality of love relationships, as well as negative correlations with depressive symptomatology, promiscuity, and pathological narcissism. The questionnaire provides both a total score and mean values for each subscale.

In the first pilot validation study conducted in Portugal, Cronbach's alpha for the total scale was .93, and the subscale values ranged from .72 to .88, suggesting a valid construct.

3.3 Procedure

This study was conducted as part of the research project “we.love.life.challenges – The Role of the Capacity to Love and the Autotelic Personality in Promoting Well-Being and Mental Health”, which received approval from the Ethics Committee of Fernando Pessoa University. To

Table 1

Characterization of the Big Five Traits and the CTL Inventory Dimensions in the Sample

Sample N = 839			
	Min	Max	Mean (SD)
Big Five Traits			
Extraversion	1.00	7.00	4.94 (1.60)
Agreeableness	1.50	7.00	6.06 (.93)
Conscientiousness	1.00	7.00	5.61 (1.20)
Emotional stability	1.00	7.00	3.84 (1.49)
Openness to Experience	1.00	7.00	5.55 (1.15)
Capacity to love inventory dimensions			
Interest in the other	1.29	4.00	3.53 (0.37)
Basic Trust	1.22	4.00	3.32 (0.50)
Gratitude	1.00	4.00	3.47 (0.48)
Common ego ideal	1.38	4.00	3.40 (0.48)
Permanence of sexual passion	1.00	4.00	2.86 (.76)
Loss and mourning	1.00	4.00	2.73 (.44)
CTL- total	8.63	24.00	19.34 (2.20)

maximize data collection, the study employed digitally adapted questionnaires, which were disseminated online. Participants were provided with detailed information about the study's objectives, along with assurances regarding the anonymity and confidentiality of their responses.

Informed consent was obtained before participation, with individuals selecting one of two options: (1) "I accept participating in this study and have been informed of its characteristics", or (2) "I do not wish to participate in this study". Concerning the sample selection criteria, participants had to be 18 years or older, fluent in the questionnaire's language, and willing to provide informed consent. No restrictions were placed on gender, nationality, or relationship status to ensure a diverse sample. Finally, the questionnaire was made available via a dedicated Google Forms link, allowing participants to complete it at their convenience.

3.4 Statistical Analysis

Data collection was carried out informatively and non-randomly using the Snowball method. Data analysis was performed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (version 27). Considering the objectives of this study, multiple tests were employed: descriptive analyses, difference analyses (t-test and ANOVA), association analyses (Pearson correlation), and regression analyses (Multiple Regression).

4. Results

4.1 Big Five Traits and the CTL Dimensions

Regarding the characterization of the sample in terms of the Big Five traits, kindness has the highest minimum and average, while emotional stability shows the lowest average. Concerning CTL-I levels, the sample exhibits a high capacity to love, with all six dimensions displaying high values. Notably, the dimension of interest in others

has the highest values, whereas the dimension of loss and mourning presents the lowest values (Table 1).

4.2 Differences in Socio-Demographic Variables in Relation to the Big Five Traits and the CTL Dimensions

The results showed significant differences based on the Gender variable (men vs. women) in several Big Five traits, including agreeableness, $t(837) = -3.94, p < .001$; conscientiousness, $t(837) = -3.46, p < .001$; and emotional stability, $t(837) = 3.91, p < .001$. There were also differences for the CTL dimension of interest in the other, $t(837) = -2.19, p = .02$. Women exhibited higher levels of agreeableness, conscientiousness, and interest in the other, whereas men showed higher emotional stability (Table 2).

Regarding differences between being in or not being in an intimate relationship, significant discrepancies were found in extraversion, $t(837) = -2.55, p = .011$; conscientiousness, $t(837) = -2.87, p = .004$; interest in the other, $t(837) = -6.53, p < .001$; basic trust, $t(837) = -9.35, p < .001$; gratitude, $t(837) = -9.11, p < .001$; permanence of sexual passion, $t(837) = -2.35, p = .019$; loss and mourning, $t(837) = -2.34, p = .020$; and CTL-total, $t(837) = -8.62, p < .001$. Participants who were in an intimate relationship had higher values in these Big Five traits and Capacity to Love dimensions than those not in an intimate relationship (Table 2).

Further, significant differences emerged between those with or without children in the Big Five traits extraversion, $t(837) = -2.87, p = .004$; conscientiousness, $t(837) = -4.86, p < .001$; and emotional stability, $t(837) = -5.18, p < .001$; and in the Capacity to Love dimensions interest in the other, $t(837) = 4.51, p < .001$; basic trust, $t(837) = 4.16, p < .001$; gratitude, $t(837) = 2.97, p = .003$; common ego ideal, $t(837) = 4.67, p < .001$; permanence of sexual passion, $t(837) = 5.72, p < .001$; loss and mourning, $t(837) = -2.01, p = .045$; and CTL-total, $t(837) = 4.96,$

Table 2

Differences between some Sociodemographic Variables in the Big Five and the CTL Dimensions

	Gender		<i>t</i> (837)
	Man (<i>n</i> = 179)	Women (<i>n</i> = 660)	
	M (SD)	M (SD)	
Big Five Traits			
Extraversion	4.90 (1.62)	4.96 (1.61)	-.42
Agreeableness	5.80 (1.02)	6.13 (.90)	-3.94***
Conscientiousness	5.30 (1.40)	5.69 (1.13)	-3.46***
Emotional Stability	4.23 (1.42)	3.74 (1.49)	3.91***
Openness to Experience	5.54 (1.10)	5.55 (1.17)	-.09
Capacity to Love			
Interest in the other	3.48 (.38)	3.55 (.37)	-2.19*
Basic Trust	3.30 (.49)	3.34 (.50)	-.84
Gratitude	3.45 (.50)	3.48 (.48)	-.72
Common ego ideal	3.38 (.47)	3.41 (.49)	-.76
Permanence of Sexual Passion	2.86 (.74)	2.87 (.77)	-.24
Loss and mourning	2.77 (.45)	2.72 (.45)	1.20
CTL-total	19.24 (2.05)	19.38 (2.24)	-.76
I am currently involved in an intimate relationship			
	No (N=196)	Yes(N=643)	
Big Five Traits			
Extraversion	4.69 (1.59)	5.02 (1.61)	-2.55*
Agreeableness	6.08 (.88)	6.06 (.95)	.38
Conscientiousness	5.40 (1.23)	5.68 (1.19)	-2.87**
Emotional Stability	3.78 (1.51)	3.86 (1.48)	-.67
Openness to Experience	5.47 (1.13)	5.58 (1.17)	-1.14
Capacity to Love			
Interest in the other	3.39 (.41)	3.58 (.35)	-6.53***
Basic Trust	3.05 (.50)	3.41 (.47)	-9.35***
Gratitude	3.18 (.55)	3.57 (.43)	-9.11***
Common ego ideal	3.17 (.49)	3.47 (.46)	-8.11
Permanence of Sexual Passion	2.76 (.71)	2.90 (.78)	-2.35*
Loss and mourning	2.67 (.44)	2.75 (.45)	-2.34*
CTL-total	18.21 (2.10)	19.69 (2.12)	-8.62***
Children			
	No (N=508)	Yes (N=331)	
Big five Traits			
Extraversion	4.82 (1.67)	5.14 (1.50)	-2.87**
Agreeableness	6.04 (.93)	6.09 (.93)	-.72
Conscientiousness	5.45 (1.23)	5.86 (1.13)	-4.86***
Emotional Stability	3.63 (1.44)	4.17 (1.51)	-5.18***
Openness to Experience	5.53 (1.14)	5.59 (1.19)	-.72
Capacity to Love			
hline Interest in the other	3.59 (.32)	3.46 (.43)	4.51***
Basic Trust	3.39 (.48)	3.24 (.48)	4.16***
Gratitude	3.52 (.48)	3.41 (.48)	2.97**
Common ego ideal	3.47 (.48)	3.30 (.48)	4.67***
Permanence of Sexual Passion	2.99 (.48)	2.69 (.48)	5.72***
Loss and mourning	2.71 (.48)	2.77 (.48)	-2.01*
CTL-total	19.65 (.48)	18.88 (.48)	4.96***

Note. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

$p < .001$. Participants with children showed higher levels of extraversion, conscientiousness, emotional stability, and loss and mourning, while those without children showed higher levels of interest in the other, basic trust, gratitude, common ego ideal, permanence of sexual passion, and overall Capacity to Love (CTL-total) (Table 2).

Regarding marital status, there were significant differences in conscientiousness, $F(3,835) = 6.27$, $p < .001$, and emotional stability, $F(3,835) = 12.41$, $p < .001$, as well as in the CTL dimensions of interest in the other, $F(3,835) = 8.97$, $p < .001$; basic trust, $F(3,835) = 7.46$, $p < .001$; gratitude, $F(3,835) = 5.85$, $p < .001$; common

ego ideal, $F(3, 835) = 8.13, p < .001$; permanence of sexual passion, $F(3, 835) = 10.09, p < .001$; and CTL-total, $F(3, 835) = 8.55, p < .001$ (Table 3). Gabriel's post hoc test indicated that conscientiousness was significantly lower among single participants compared to those who were married or divorced, and single participants were less emotionally stable than married or divorced participants (Table 3). For the Capacity to Love dimensions, Gabriel's post hoc results showed that divorced individuals had significantly less interest in the other and lower levels of gratitude compared to those who were married or single. Single participants presented higher levels of basic trust, common ego ideal, permanence of sexual passion, and total Capacity to Love (CTL-total) compared to divorced or married individuals (Table 3).

Differences were found between relationship length and the Big Five traits—conscientiousness, $F(3, 766) = 3.40, p = .018$, and $F(3, 766) = 8.25, p < .001$ to emotional stability—as well as the CTL dimensions: interest in the other, $F(3, 766) = 3.56, p = .004$; basic trust, $F(3, 766) = 5.15, p = .002$; gratitude, $F(3, 766) = 3.57, p = .014$; common ego ideal, $F(3, 766) = 7.50, p < .001$; permanence of sexual passion, $F(3, 766) = 6.34, p < .001$; and CTL-total, $F(3, 766) = 5.78, p < .001$ (Table 3). Gabriel's post hoc test demonstrated that extraversion and conscientiousness levels are higher among those who rated their relationship satisfaction as 5 than among those who rated it as 3. Conversely, agreeableness is lower among participants who rated their relationship satisfaction as 2 compared to those rating it as 4 or 5. Participants who rated their relationship satisfaction as 3 showed lower emotional stability than those who rated it as 4 or 5 (Table 3). Moreover, Gabriel's post hoc test indicated that participants rating their relationship satisfaction as 5 tended to report higher levels of interest in the other, basic trust, gratitude, common ego ideal, permanence of sexual passion, and an overall capacity to love (CTL-total) than those who rated their satisfaction as 1, 2, 3, or 4. As for loss and mourning, participants who rated their relationship satisfaction as 3 showed lower levels than those who rated it as 4 or 5 (Table 3).

In analyzing the results, significant differences emerged in **relationship satisfaction** levels for the Big Five traits—extraversion, $F(4, 834) = 7.50, p < .001$; agreeableness, $F(4, 834) = 7.50, p < .001$; conscientiousness, $F(4, 834) = 7.50, p < .001$; emotional stability, $F(4, 834) = 7.50, p < .001$ —and for all of the Capacity to Love dimensions: interest in the other, $F(4, 834) = 7.50, p < .001$; basic trust, $F(4, 834) = 7.50, p < .001$; gratitude, $F(4, 834) = 7.50, p < .001$; common ego ideal, $F(4, 834) = 7.50, p < .001$; permanence of sexual passion, $F(4, 834) = 7.50, p < .001$; loss and mourning, $F(4, 834) = 7.50, p < .001$; and CTL-total, $F(4, 834) = 7.50, p < .001$ (Table 3). Gabriel's post hoc test showed that extraversion and conscientiousness are higher in participants rating their relationship satisfaction as 5 than in those rating it as 3. Meanwhile, agree-

ableness is lower in participants rating their satisfaction as 2, relative to those rating it as 4 or 5. Participants rating their relationship satisfaction as 3 demonstrated lower emotional stability than those rating it as 4 or 5 (Table 3). In the Capacity to Love dimensions, Gabriel's post hoc test revealed that participants rating satisfaction as 5 displayed higher levels of interest in the other, basic trust, gratitude, common ego ideal, permanence of sexual passion, and a general Capacity to Love (CTL-total) than those rating it as 1, 2, 3, or 4. As for loss and mourning, participants rating their relationship satisfaction as 3 showed lower levels than those rating it as 4 or 5 (Table 3).

Differences were also found between Age Classes—1 (18–24), 2 (25–29), 3 (30–34), 4 (35–39), 5 (40–44), 6 (45–49), 7 (50–54), 8 (55–59), 9 (60–74)—and the Big Five traits conscientiousness, $F(8, 828) = 4.09, p < .001$, emotional stability, $F(8, 828) = 7.95, p < .001$, and the CTL dimensions: interest in the other, $F(8, 828) = 9.21, p < .001$; basic trust, $F(8, 828) = 8.46, p < .001$; gratitude, $F(8, 828) = 5.88, p < .001$; common ego ideal, $F(8, 828) = 7.05, p < .001$; permanence of sexual passion, $F(8, 828) = 8.54, p < .001$; and CTL-total, $F(8, 828) = 8.80, p < .001$ (Table 4). Gabriel's post hoc test indicated that Class 7 showed higher conscientiousness than Classes 1 and 3, while Class 9 presented higher emotional stability than Classes 1, 2, 3, and 8 (Table 4). The results also revealed that Class 9 showed less interest in the other than Classes 1, 2, 3, and 6. For gratitude, Class 7 showed lower levels than Classes 1, 2, 3, and 6. Class 1 demonstrated higher basic trust than Classes 7, 8, and 9, as well as higher common ego ideal and permanence of sexual passion than Classes 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, and 9. Finally, Class 1 displayed a greater overall Capacity to Love than Classes 3, 4, 5, 7, 8, and 9 (Table 4).

4.3 Relationship between the Big Five Traits and the CTL Dimensions

In examining the relationship between the Capacity to Love (CTL) dimensions and the Big Five traits, statistically significant positive correlations emerged between extraversion and interest in the other ($r = .14, p < .001$), basic trust ($r = .16, p < .001$), gratitude ($r = .14, p < .001$), common ego ideal ($r = .13, p < .001$), loss and mourning ($r = .13, p < .001$), and CTL-total ($r = .14, p < .001$).

Significant positive correlations were also found between agreeableness and all CTL dimensions: interest in the other ($r = .20, p < .001$), basic trust ($r = .17, p < .001$), gratitude ($r = .14, p < .001$), common ego ideal ($r = .22, p < .001$), permanence of sexual passion ($r = .16, p < .001$), loss and mourning ($r = .15, p < .001$), and CTL-total ($r = .24, p < .001$).

Further, openness to experience correlated positively with all CTL dimensions: interest in the other ($r = .14, p < .001$), basic trust ($r = .14, p < .001$), gratitude ($r = .11, p < .001$), common ego ideal ($r = .15, p < .001$), permanence of sexual passion ($r = .13, p < .001$), loss

Table 3

Differences between some Sociodemographic Variables in the Big Five and the CTL Dimensions

	Marital Status					
	Single	Married	Divorced	Widow		
	M (SD)	M (SD)	M (SD)	M (SD)	F	
Big Five Traits						
Extraversion	4.86 (1.67)	5.08 (1.56)	5.01 (1.38)	4.88 (1.36)	1.13	
Agreeableness	6.05 (.94)	6.06 (.94)	6.15 (.90)	6.19 (.84)	.28	
Conscientiousness	5.47 (1.23)	5.78 (1.16)	5.96 (1.06)	5.69 (1.31)	6.27***	
Emotional Stability	3.60 (1.44)	4.08(1.47)	4.51 (1.60)	4.63 (1.41)	12.41***	
Openness to Experience	5.51 (1.15)	5.59 (1.17)	5.71 (1.24)	5.25 (.71)	.90	
Capacity to Love						
Interest in the other	3.59 (.34)	3.50 (.38)	3.37 (.46)	3.45 (.42)	8.97***	
Basic Trust	3.39 (.49)	3.27 (.50)	3.14 (3.14)	3.39 (.23)	7.46***	
Gratitude	3.52 (.47)	3.46 (.47)	3.27 (.61)	3.46 (.36)	5.85***	
Common ego ideal	3.46 (.47)	3.33 (.48)	3.22 (.50)	3.53 (.39)	8.13***	
Permanence of Sexual Passion	2.99 (.77)	2.69 (.74)	2.75 (.72)	2.94 (.42)	10.09***	
Loss and mourning	2.70 (.47)	2.78 (.41)	2.77 (.43)	2.83 (.49)	2.48	
CTL-total	19.64 (2.15)	19.02 (2.19)	18.51 (2.31)	19.60(1.73)	8.55***	
Relationship Length						
Years	0-1	2-5	6-10	+10		
	(n = 128)	(n = 249)	(n = 124)	(n = 269)		
	M (SD)	M (SD)	M (SD)	M (SD)	F(3,766)	
Big Five Traits						
Extraversion	4.89 (1.61)	4.89 (1.66)	4.88 (1.74)	5.08 (1.47)	.83	
Agreeableness	5.96 (.97)	6.00 (1.00)	6.06 (.89)	6.15 (.87)	1.57	
Conscientiousness	5.47 (1.22)	5.52 (1.26)	5.67 (1.05)	5.80 (1.17)	3.40*	
Emotional Stability	3.55 (1.55)	3.66 (1.45)	3.79 (1.40)	4.20 (1.53)	8.25***	
Openness to Experience	5.50 (1.15)	5.45 (1.21)	5.58 (1.11)	5.63 (1.15)	1.12	
Capacity to Love						
Interest in the other	3.57 (.33)	3.57 (.35)	3.56 (.35)	3.47 (.42)	4.44**	
Basic Trust	3.33 (.49)	3.40 (.49)	3.39 (.51)	3.24 (.52)	5.15**	
Gratitude	3.46 (.47)	3.53 (.47)	3.52 (.46)	3.40 (.52)	3.57*	
Common ego ideal	3.41 (.45)	3.50 (.47)	3.43 (.48)	3.30 (.50)	7.50***	
Permanence of Sexual Passion	3.01 (.74)	2.95 (.78)	2.88 (.78)	2.71 (.75)	6.34***	
Loss and mourning	2.70 (.48)	2.70 (.48)	2.77 (.43)	2.78 (.40)	1.92	
CTL-total	19.48 (2.00)	19.65 (2.24)	19.54 (2.18)	18.89 (2.30)	5.78***	
Relationship Satisfaction						
	1 (n = 18)	2 (n = 40)	3 (n = 153)	4 (n = 251)	5 (n = 377)	
	M (SD)	M (SD)	M (SD)	M (SD)	M (SD)	
					F(4,834)	
Big Five Traits						
Extraversion	4.89 (1.80)	4.74 (1.75)	4.62 (1.55)	4.98 (1.58)	5.08 (1.61)	2.46*
Agreeableness	5.75 (1.00)	5.59 (1.13)	5.94 (1.01)	6.08 (.88)	6.16 (.89)	4.98***
Conscientiousness	5.61 (.92)	5.39 (1.11)	5.41 (1.18)	5.55 (1.27)	5.76 (1.18)	3.10*
Emotional Stability	3.78 (1.20)	3.43 (1.69)	3.47 (1.53)	3.97 (1.41)	3.96 (1.49)	4.19**
Openness to Experience	5.53 (1.05)	5.45 (1.09)	5.40 (1.24)	5.58 (1.17)	5.60 (1.13)	.95
Capacity to Love Dimensions						
Interest in the other	3.29 (.45)	3.24 (.44)	3.29 (.40)	3.51 (.30)	3.70 (.30)	54.67***
Basic Trust	2.81 (.57)	2.76 (.54)	2.91 (.44)	3.28 (.41)	3.62 (.34)	120.33***
Gratitude	2.98 (.48)	2.93 (.59)	3.09 (.47)	3.43 (.41)	3.74 (.33)	103.78***
Common ego ideal	2.83 (.57)	2.88 (.59)	3.04 (.44)	3.36 (.39)	3.66 (.35)	97.54***
Permanence of Sexual Passion	2.33 (.79)	2.48 (.96)	2.58 (.74)	2.78 (.66)	3.12 (.73)	23.28***
Loss and mourning	2.73 (.44)	2.79 (.52)	2.62 (.44)	2.76 (.43)	2.75 (.45)	2.93*
CTL-Total	16.97 (2.49)	17.08 (2.14)	17.52 (1.94)	19.13 (1.70)	20.58 (1.70)	109.87***

Note. Likert scale: 5 - Very satisfied; 4 - Somewhat satisfied; 3 - Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied; 2 -Somewhat dissatisfied; 1 - Very dissatisfied. Gabriel's Post Hoc test - The mean difference is significant at $< .05$, * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

and mourning ($r = .22$, $p < .001$), and CTL-total ($r = .21$, $p < .001$).

Conscientiousness showed significant positive correlations with interest in the other ($r = .10$, $p = .002$), ba-

sic trust ($r = .13$, $p < .001$), gratitude ($r = .08$, $p = .011$), common ego ideal ($r = .13$, $p < .001$), loss and mourning ($r = .15$, $p < .001$), and CTL-total ($r = .14$, $p < .001$).

Table 4

Differences between Age Classes in the Big Five and the CTL Dimensions

Age Classes	1 (n = 322)	2 (n = 89)	3 (n = 70)	4 (n = 59)	5 (n = 60)	6 (n = 85)	7 (n = 68)	8 (n = 41)	9 (n = 43)	F(8, 828)
	M (SD)	M (SD)	M (SD)	M (SD)	M (SD)	M (SD)	M (SD)	M (SD)	M (SD)	
Big Five Traits										
Extraversion	4.77 (1.68)	4.87 (1.76)	5.24 (1.58)	4.82 (1.57)	5.03 (1.59)	5.15 (1.57)	5.16 (1.47)	4.99 (1.33)	5.23 (1.37)	1.34
Agreeableness	4.77 (1.68)	4.87 (1.76)	5.24 (1.58)	4.82 (1.57)	5.03 (1.59)	5.15 (1.57)	5.16 (1.47)	4.99 (1.33)	5.23 (1.37)	1.34
Conscientiousness	6.08 (.92)	6.08 (.79)	5.96 (.98)	5.93 (.99)	5.81 (1.07)	6.21 (.94)	6.18 (.84)	6.01 (1.02)	6.27 (.83)	1.49
Emotional Stability	5.45 (1.21)	5.63 (1.17)	5.39 (1.14)	5.50 (1.32)	5.47 (1.36)	5.79 (1.21)	6.10 (.92)	6.01 (.97)	6.00 (1.24)	4.09***
Openness to Experience	3.44 (1.35)	3.88 (1.50)	3.80 (1.33)	4.03 (1.54)	4.08 (1.68)	4.26 (1.54)	4.20 (1.51)	3.78 (1.41)	4.94 (1.43)	7.95***
	5.47 (1.14)	5.57 (1.19)	5.55 (1.07)	5.38 (1.32)	5.76 (1.06)	5.59 (1.25)	5.82 (1.16)	5.52 (1.10)	5.70 (1.12)	1.19
Capacity to Love Dimensions										
Interest in the other	3.63 (.28)	3.55 (.36)	3.56 (.35)	3.43 (.45)	3.51 (.36)	3.57 (.37)	3.34 (.51)	3.43 (.37)	3.29 (.40)	9.21***
Basic Trust	3.46 (.44)	3.35 (.53)	3.27 (.57)	3.31 (.49)	3.29 (.50)	3.31 (.47)	3.04 (.59)	3.20 (.35)	3.05 (.50)	8.46***
Gratitude	3.58 (.43)	3.48 (.46)	3.48 (.54)	3.42 (.49)	3.45 (.45)	3.47 (.45)	3.19 (.62)	3.43 (.47)	3.29 (.52)	5.88***
Common ego ideal	3.53 (.44)	3.45 (.48)	3.34 (.49)	3.31 (.52)	3.32 (.47)	3.34 (.46)	3.17 (.57)	3.29 (.47)	3.25 (.46)	7.05***
Permanence of Sexual Passion	3.11 (.74)	2.96 (.75)	2.65 (.73)	2.64 (.78)	2.67 (.83)	2.77 (.70)	2.64 (.76)	2.63 (.68)	2.60 (.61)	8.54***
Loss and mourning	2.69 (.48)	2.71 (.44)	2.71 (.43)	2.80 (.48)	2.77 (.44)	2.76 (.42)	2.78 (.42)	2.81 (.35)	2.86 (.42)	1.43
CTL-Total	19.99 (1.90)	19.50 (2.28)	19.01 (2.28)	18.91 (2.32)	19.01 (2.33)	19.22 (2.13)	18.15 (2.50)	18.79 (1.99)	18.34 (2.02)	8.80***

Note. Age was separated by classes following the WHO guidelines: 1 (18–24); 2 (25–29); 3 (30–34); 4 (35–39); 5 (40–44); 6 (45–49); 7 (50–54); 8 (55–59); 9 (60–74). *** $p < .001$. Gabriel's Post Hoc test – The mean difference is significant at $p < .05$.

Finally, emotional stability showed statistically significant positive correlations with basic trust ($r = .14$, $p < .001$), gratitude ($r = .07$, $p = .026$), common ego ideal ($r = .11$, $p = .001$), permanence of sexual passion ($r = .10$, $p = .003$), loss and mourning ($r = .35$, $p < .001$), and CTL-total ($r = .18$, $p < .001$) (Table 5).

4.4 Personality Traits That Predict the Capacity to Love

A multiple regression analysis was conducted to assess the predictive potential of the Big Five personality traits for the dependent variable CTL. Results were examined using the stepwise method, revealing that “Conscientiousness” did not significantly contribute to the model and was consequently removed.

When evaluating the predictive potential of personality traits for CTL, four of the five traits displayed a significant effect: “Agreeableness”, “Openness to experience”, “Emotional stability”, and “Extraversion”, with $r = .318$ and $r^2 = .101$, $F(4, 834) = 23.459$, $p < .001$.

Although these results are statistically significant, the r value indicates that the overall contribution of the four traits to predicting the capacity to love is modest (Table 6).

“Agreeableness” emerged as the strongest predictor of the capacity to love, explaining 19.1% ($p < .001$). Following that, “Emotional stability” and “Openness to experience” contributed 10.3% ($p = .003$) and 9.9% ($p = .010$), respectively. “Extraversion” accounted for 8.9% ($p = .016$) (Table 6).

5. Discussion and Conclusions

Considering the characterization of the sample in terms of the Big Five traits and the CTL dimensions, the sample showed high levels of agreeableness and conscientiousness, followed by openness to experience, extraversion, and emotional stability. It also exhibited high levels of capacity to love, with particularly elevated scores for interest in the other and lower scores for loss and mourning. These results can be explained, in part, by the gender distribution of the study sample, in which women predominated. The findings indicate that women showed higher levels of agreeableness and conscientiousness, while men presented higher levels of emotional stability. These observations align with research suggesting that women tend to be more agreeable and sometimes exhibit higher scores in selected conscientiousness facets, whereas men tend to show higher emotional stability (Chapman et al., 2007; Costa et al., 2001; Weisberg et al., 2011). Women also displayed higher levels of the CTL dimension “interest in the other”, which may be associated with empathy, altruism, dedication, and concern for the other’s well-being. These qualities are often found in highly agreeable individuals, potentially explaining why women scored higher on this dimension.

Furthermore, individuals in intimate relationships demonstrated higher conscientiousness, extraversion, and total capacity to love. Conscientiousness has been associated with greater relationship commitment (Cotter & Kerschner, 2018). On the other hand, extraversion’s association with being in a relationship does not entirely match certain literature findings that portray extraverted individuals as more likely to remain single (Apostolou & Tsangari, 2022). Participants in intimate relationships reported higher levels across CTL dimensions—interest in the other, basic trust, gratitude, permanence of sexual passion, loss and mourning, and CTL-total—suggesting that people who are not currently in an intimate relationship may possess a lower capacity to love. This outcome is congruent with Busch and Kapusta (2017), who found that women in intimate relationships exhibited a greater capacity to love than those not in a relationship.

Those who have children appear to be more extraverted, conscientious, and emotionally stable, with greater capacity for loss and mourning, whereas participants without children presented higher levels of interest in the other, basic trust, gratitude, common ego ideal, permanence of sexual passion, and total capacity to love (CTL-total). These findings imply that having children may negatively affect CTL. On the other hand, previous evidence indicates that age is negatively associated with nearly all CTL dimensions (Fernandes et al., 2023), and given that parenthood is more common among older individuals, this factor could also help clarify the results.

Regarding marital status, the data show that single participants tend to have lower scores in conscientiousness and emotional stability. However, in terms of CTL, single individuals appear to demonstrate a higher capacity to love compared to those who are married, widowed, or divorced. This may be partly influenced by age, as well as by the tendency for people lower in conscientiousness and emotional stability to have shorter relationships and exhibit reduced reliability and commitment, which might lead to a greater likelihood of remaining single. Literature also indicates that people who are less conscientious are prone to infidelity, while conscientious individuals tend to develop more enduring relationships (Biesen et al., 2022; Cotter & Kerschner, 2018; Gibson et al., 2016; Holland & Roisman, 2008; Malouff et al., 2010; Watson et al., 2000). Individuals scoring high in neuroticism often have shorter relationships (Holland & Roisman, 2008; White et al., 2004) and, according to Kernberg (2011), may encounter difficulties in sustaining loving relationships.

Concerning the Capacity to Love (CTL), divorced participants showed the lowest levels, suggesting that—although many factors cause divorce—a limited capacity to love may be one contributing factor. Notably, people in long-term relationships (over 10 years) displayed lower CTL scores than those in shorter relationships, po-

Table 5

Analysis of the Relationship between the Big Five and the CTL Dimensions in the Sample

Big Five & Capacity to Love					
Sample (<i>n</i> = 839)					
	Extraversion	Agreeableness	Conscientiousness	Emotional Stability	Openness to Experience
	<i>r</i>	<i>r</i>	<i>r</i>	<i>r</i>	<i>R</i>
Interest in the other	.14**	.20**	.10**	.06	.14**
Basic Trust	.16**	.17**	.13**	.14**	.14**
Gratitude	.14**	.14**	.08*	.07*	.11**
Common ego ideal	.13**	.22**	.13**	.11**	.15**
Permanence of sexual passion	.04	.16**	.05	.10*	.13**
Loss and Mourning	.13**	.15**	.15**	.35**	.22**
CTL-Total	.16**	.24**	.14**	.18**	.21**

Note. **The correlation is significant at 0,01 (two-tailed). *The correlation is significant at 0.05 (one-tailed).

Table 6

Personality Traits that predict CTL

Sample (<i>n</i> = 839)						
Effect	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	95% CI
						<i>LB – UB</i>
Constant	14.38	.54		26.56	.000	13.32 – 15.44
Agreeableness	.45	.08	.19	5.56	.000	.29 – .61
Openness to Experience	.19	.07	.10	2.59	.010	.05 – .33
Emotional Stability	.15	.05	.10	2.97	.003	.05 – .25
Extraversion	.12	.05	.09	2.41	.016	.02 – .22

Note. The trait “Conscientiousness” was removed from the model as it is not significant.

tentially explaining difficulties in maintaining long-term stability. Those in relationships lasting one year or less exhibited the highest levels of common ego ideal and permanence of sexual passion. They also showed similar levels of interest in the other compared to participants in relationships of two or five years. These findings align with literature positing that sustaining sexual passion is among the greatest challenges for long-term relationships (Kernberg, 2011). Additionally, they align with the idea that contemporary relationships are often shorter, involve lower commitment, and emphasize personal objectives.

Personality did not appear to affect the age at which participants began their first romantic relationship. In contrast, CTL seemed to be an influencing factor: those who started dating earlier showed higher CTL scores. This suggests that individuals with lower CTL do not possess the foundational trust, confidence, and intimacy needed to feel secure about forming and investing in relationships, resulting in a later onset of romantic relationships.

Individuals with higher extraversion, agreeableness, and emotional stability reported increased satisfaction with their past or current relationships, in agreement with other studies (Malouff et al., 2010; Watson et al., 2000). Regarding the Capacity to Love (CTL), people expressing higher relationship satisfaction—whether in past or present relationships—had elevated scores

across all CTL dimensions except loss and mourning. Since relationship satisfaction depends on multiple factors involving at least two individuals, these findings suggest that CTL may be a strong variable for explaining relationship satisfaction.

As discussed, age influences both personality traits and CTL dimensions, with statistically significant differences found in conscientiousness and emotional stability. Older people tend to be more conscientious and emotionally stable, as also reported by Donnellan and Lucas (2008), Roberts et al. (2006), and Soto et al. (2011). Age also seems negatively associated with nearly all CTL dimensions except loss and mourning. Possibly this indicates that the capacity for dealing with loss and mourning takes time to develop, or that older adults become less affected by such experiences. Once again, maintaining long-term relationships proves difficult over a lifetime, and age may strongly influence CTL scores. During the statistical analysis, it became evident that variables like “having children”, “marital status”, and “relationship length” are intertwined with age. Therefore, further questions arise: “Do participants have lower CTL because they are married or because they are older?”, “Does CTL decrease over time because relationships are longer or because people are aging?” and “Do those with children have lower CTL because they have children or because they are older?”

This study's findings indicate that the Big Five traits and CTL dimensions are correlated, with agreeableness and openness to experience being the most salient, given their association with every dimension of CTL. Regarding the contribution of personality to predicting CTL, results showed that only four traits—agreeableness, openness to experience, emotional stability, and extraversion—had a modest effect on predicting CTL. Among them, agreeableness was the strongest predictor, while conscientiousness showed no contribution. Both the correlations and regressions confirm that agreeableness is the trait most strongly correlated with and predictive of CTL. Since agreeableness positively relates to the three love components of Sternberg's (1986) model—intimacy, passion, and commitment—it can plausibly facilitate the capacity to love (Ahmetoglu et al., 2009). However, the results remain modest, probably because CTL is a multifaceted construct requiring multiple variables, theories, and perspectives to fully explain it.

5.1 Limitations

This study employed an online, self-administered data collection approach, which may have posed challenges such as varied response patterns and potential respondent fatigue due to the questionnaire length. The wide range of responses also complicated forming statistically robust groups. Moreover, data were gathered not only for this specific investigation but also for the broader *we.love.life.challenges* scientific project. As an exploratory study, certain variables—such as attachment styles and the influence of both personality and a partner's capacity to love on participants' CTL scores—were not considered. Future research should further explore the role of age, not only to clarify its impact on variables such as “having or not having children”, “marital status”, and “relationship length”, but also to elucidate why aging might negatively affect one's capacity to love.

5.2 Practical Implications and Future Directions

This study contributes to the scientific literature and highlights the CTL Inventory's potential as a clinical assessment instrument. By incorporating the CTL Inventory into therapeutic settings, clinicians can gain insights into clients' relational difficulties, limitations, and strengths, allowing for more tailored interventions. Though no causal relationships were established, the findings suggest several practical applications for psychological practice. Understanding how personality traits influence an individual's capacity to love helps therapists develop targeted interventions like emotion regulation, attachment-based therapy, and cognitive restructuring of harmful relationship patterns. Additionally, given that early psychosocial development shapes both personality and CTL, childhood or adolescent interventions—such as emotional intelligence training, parental guidance, and social-emotional learning—may help es-

tablish healthier relational patterns in adulthood. Finally, recognizing that personality traits affect love and connection can refine couples therapy, improving mutual understanding, emotional intimacy, and conflict resolution. Future research should build on these insights, potentially broadening the understanding of the capacity to love and advancing more effective clinical practices aimed at enhancing individual well-being and fostering healthier romantic relationships.

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