KMAN PUBLISHING INSTITUTE
Journal Website

Article history:
Received 08 January 2024
Revised 03 March 2024
Accepted 08 March 2024
Published online 10 March 2024

Journal of Adolescent and Youth Psychological Studies

Volume 5, Issue 3, pp 159-169

E-ISSN: 2981-2526

Exploring the Indicators of Self-Silencing in Adolescent Romantic Relationships

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Article type:
Original Research

How to cite this article:
Petrov, G., & Dimitrov, I. (2024). Exploring the Indicators of Self-Silencing in Adolescent Romantic Relationships. *Journal of Adolescent and Youth Psychological Studies*, *5*(3), 159-169.
http://dx.doi.org/10.61838/kman.jayps.6.3.17

A B S T R A C T

Objective: This study aimed to explore the psychological, relational, and sociocultural indicators of self-silencing in adolescent romantic relationships.

Methods and Materials: This qualitative research employed an exploratory-descriptive design and included 25 adolescents aged 15 to 19 from Bulgaria who had been involved in at least one romantic relationship. Participants were selected through purposive sampling and data collection continued until theoretical saturation was reached. Semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted in private settings, recorded with consent, and transcribed verbatim. Data were analyzed thematically using NVivo software, involving open, axial, and selective coding to identify categories, subcategories, and underlying concepts. Trustworthiness was ensured through member checking, peer debriefing, and maintenance of an audit trail.

Findings: Three main categories were identified: emotional inhibition, power imbalance and control, and relational expectations and social norms. Subcategories under emotional inhibition included fear of rejection, shame, internalized gender norms, low emotional literacy, and discomfort with intimacy. Power imbalance and control were reflected in dominant partner behavior, fear of escalation, and emotional dependency. Relational expectations and social norms encompassed idealized views of relationships, peer influence, and cultural values promoting harmony and silence. Participants frequently described self-silencing as a strategy to maintain relationships, avoid conflict, or protect their emotional vulnerability. Gendered expectations, lack of emotional skills, and fear of judgment emerged as central factors.

Conclusion: Self-silencing in adolescent romantic relationships is a multifaceted phenomenon shaped by emotional vulnerability, relational dynamics, and cultural expectations.

Keywords: *self-silencing, adolescence, romantic relationships, emotional expression, qualitative research, gender norms, relational dynamics*

1. Introduction

Self-silencing is generally understood as a defensive communication strategy employed to preserve relationships or prevent anticipated conflict, rejection, or emotional vulnerability (Cole & Higgins, 2023). While initially conceptualized within the context of adult female experiences, recent studies have expanded its relevance across genders and developmental stages, including adolescence (Bosacki, 2022). In adolescents, self-silencing often intersects with identity exploration, emotional regulation challenges, and normative concerns about peer acceptance, rendering it especially complex and psychologically impactful (Bosacki, 2024). It is during adolescence that individuals become increasingly concerned with social approval and are more likely to internalize relational expectations, including those that may demand emotional restraint or compliance to maintain harmony within a romantic partnership (MÜRtezaoĞLu & Çıkrıkçı, 2022).

The act of silencing oneself is often rooted in broader sociocultural narratives. Adolescents are socialized into gendered expectations from an early age, with girls often encouraged to prioritize relational harmony and boys socialized to avoid emotional vulnerability (Puzio & Best, 2020). These norms can contribute to deeply internalized beliefs about the appropriateness of emotional expression, particularly in the context of romantic intimacy. For instance, girls may fear being labeled as overly emotional, while boys may avoid disclosures perceived as weakening their masculine identity (Shrivastava, 2021). Such internalized scripts contribute to a pattern of emotional withholding that can become habitual and unconscious over time (LeBlanc, 2024).

Psychologically, the consequences of self-silencing are significant. Empirical studies have demonstrated that the suppression of authentic emotional expression is associated with increased emotional distress, diminished self-esteem, and a weakened sense of agency (Fortin et al., 2024). Among adolescent girls, self-silencing has been linked to experiences of sexual dating violence and compromised psychological wellbeing (Fortin et al., 2024). Additionally, long-term silence within close relationships may hinder the development of healthy communication strategies and emotional resilience, leading to maladaptive relational patterns that extend into adulthood (Emran et al., 2022). Furthermore, self-silencing has physiological consequences. For example, studies have found a correlation between long-term emotional suppression and negative cardiovascular health outcomes, indicating that the costs of silence may go beyond emotional well-being (Jakubowski et al., 2021).

The contextual drivers of self-silencing in adolescents are both interpersonal and structural. On the interpersonal level, the presence of emotionally or physically dominant partners, power imbalances, and fear of emotional retaliation often lead to communication withdrawal (Dedahanov et al., 2021). Adolescents who experience coercive dynamics within their romantic relationships may silence themselves to avoid escalation or conflict. On the structural level, socio-cultural norms, peer group influence, and parental models of communication all shape adolescents' perceptions of when and how it is acceptable to speak out (Goldner et al., 2022). In some family systems, particularly those marked by parentification or blurred boundaries, adolescents may learn early that their emotional needs are secondary to others' expectations, thus reinforcing self-silencing as a relational strategy (Goldner et al., 2022).

Emerging research also highlights the intersections of self-silencing with emotional regulation and identity formation. Adolescents who struggle with emotional literacy or lack appropriate models of emotional expression may default to silence as a means of coping with relational stressors (Zimmermann et al., 2021). In therapeutic settings, silence has been noted as both a defense mechanism and a symptom of deeper relational conflicts, particularly among adolescents with borderline personality features or insecure attachment patterns (Zimmermann et al., 2021). Likewise, the experience of being unheard or invalidated in early relationships can reinforce the belief that speaking up is either dangerous or futile (Sheppe, 2023). This belief system, in turn, can interfere with the adolescent's sense of agency, self-concept, and social competence (Abadali et al., 2021).

Importantly, self-silencing is not always perceived negatively by adolescents. In some contexts, it is rationalized as a sign of maturity, loyalty, or emotional strength (O'Grady, 2023). In refugee and marginalized communities, for example, silence may serve as a protective mechanism or an act of self-care in the face of social scrutiny or structural vulnerability (Ruzibiza, 2021). Similarly, in certain cultural contexts, silence is equated with respect, obedience, or emotional discipline (Tchidjo & Mgbwa, 2020). These culturally sanctioned understandings of silence complicate normative assumptions about the pathology of self-silencing and highlight the importance of examining this phenomenon within specific socio-cultural and relational environments.

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E-ISSN: 2981-2526

The role of peer dynamics and digital influences cannot be underestimated in shaping adolescent self-expression. Adolescents frequently compare their relationships to idealized portrayals on social media, which often emphasize perfection, harmony, and performative affection (Abadali et al., 2021). These curated images can create unrealistic expectations and discourage adolescents from expressing dissatisfaction or emotional needs for fear of appearing weak or dramatic. In such environments, silence may serve to maintain the façade of relational success, particularly among girls navigating gendered double standards (Zulkefly et al., 2021). Moreover, adolescents from collectivist or conservative cultures may be especially vulnerable to internalizing norms that discourage emotional disclosure or individual assertiveness (Zuković & Stojadinović, 2022).

Adolescent romantic relationships are inherently fragile, shaped by shifting identities, emotional immaturity, and social experimentation. Self-silencing may therefore function as a strategy to preserve the precarious equilibrium of these early bonds (Marettih et al., 2024). However, while silence may prevent immediate conflict, it often fosters long-term relational dissatisfaction and emotional disconnection. Adolescents who feel unable to express themselves authentically may become emotionally isolated even within their closest relationships, leading to feelings of loneliness, confusion, and low self-worth (Bosacki, 2024). Silence, when habitual and internalized, becomes a barrier to intimacy rather than a bridge to understanding (Cole & Higgins, 2023).

Educational and preventive efforts aimed at promoting healthy relationship skills in adolescents must therefore address the nuanced role of self-silencing. Programs that encourage emotional literacy, assertive communication, and boundary setting are critical in helping adolescents navigate the challenges of romantic relationships (Monthuy-Blanc et al., 2020). These programs should also account for the cultural, familial, and gendered scripts that adolescents internalize regarding emotional expression and relational harmony (Иванова et al., 2020). Furthermore, interventions should be tailored to include both verbal and non-verbal communication styles, recognizing that silence is not merely the absence of speech but often a deeply meaningful form of self-expression (Sheppe, 2023).

Despite growing academic interest, most existing research on self-silencing has focused on adult populations or clinical settings. There remains a significant gap in our understanding of how self-silencing manifests in non-clinical adolescent populations, especially within the unique context of romantic relationships. This study addresses that gap by exploring the indicators and underlying mechanisms of self-silencing among adolescents in romantic relationships.

2. Methods and Materials

2.1. Study Design and Participants

This qualitative study employed an exploratory-descriptive design to investigate the indicators of self-silencing in adolescent romantic relationships. The research sample consisted of 25 adolescents residing in Bulgaria who had experienced at least one romantic relationship during adolescence. Participants were selected through purposive sampling to ensure relevance and diversity in age, gender, and relationship background. Sampling continued until theoretical saturation was reached, where no new themes or indicators emerged from the interviews. Inclusion criteria included being between the ages of 15 and 19, having been involved in a romantic relationship lasting at least one month, and willingness to share personal experiences. Informed consent was obtained from all participants and, where necessary, from legal guardians.

2.2. Data Collection

Data collection was conducted through semi-structured, in-depth interviews that allowed participants to express their perceptions, thoughts, and experiences regarding communication and self-expression within their romantic relationships. The interview guide included open-ended questions designed to elicit narratives about situations in which participants chose not to express thoughts or emotions, as well as the perceived reasons and emotional consequences of such silencing. All interviews were conducted in private settings to ensure confidentiality and psychological comfort. Each session lasted between 45 and 60 minutes and was audio-recorded with participants' permission. Interviews were transcribed verbatim for analysis.

2.3. Data analysis

Data analysis followed a thematic approach using NVivo software to manage and code the qualitative data systematically. After initial familiarization with the data, the transcripts were analyzed through open coding, allowing for the identification of preliminary concepts related to self-silencing behaviors. Axial coding was then conducted to

establish connections between emerging categories and subcategories. The final stage involved selective coding to integrate the categories into overarching themes that captured the indicators of self-silencing. Credibility and trustworthiness were enhanced through peer debriefing, member checking, and maintaining an audit trail throughout the analytical process.

3. Findings and Results

The study sample consisted of 25 adolescents from Bulgaria, including 13 females and 12 males, aged between 15 and 19 years (M = 17.2). All participants had been involved in at least one romantic relationship lasting a minimum of one month. The participants were selected to ensure a diversity of experiences in terms of relationship duration, emotional involvement, and social background. Most were high school students, while a few had recently graduated. The majority lived in urban areas, though some participants came from smaller towns. All participants were fluent in Bulgarian, and interviews were conducted in their native language to ensure comfort and authenticity in responses. The sample included individuals from different socioeconomic backgrounds, and participants voluntarily took part in the study with full informed consent.

Table 1

Themes, Subthemes, and Concepts Related to Self-Silencing in Adolescent Romantic Relationships

Category (Main Theme)	Subcategory (Subtheme)	Concepts (Open Codes)
Emotional Inhibition	Fear of Rejection	Avoiding emotional honesty, hiding true feelings, pretending to agree, downplaying issues, suppressing affection
	Need for Acceptance	Seeking validation, prioritizing partner's opinion, imitating partner's views, silencing disagreement, avoiding conflict
	Shame and Embarrassment	Feeling judged, reluctance to cry, fear of appearing weak, hesitance to admit mistakes, avoiding vulnerability, self-criticism
	Low Emotional Literacy	Difficulty naming emotions, confusion over feelings, lack of expression skills, emotional numbness, general avoidance of affective talk
	Internalized Gender Norms	Belief that emotions are weakness (for boys), emotional modesty (for girls), expectations to remain composed, fear of being seen as "too sensitive"
	Discomfort with Intimacy	Fear of being known too well, withdrawing during closeness, resisting deeper conversations, emotional distancing
	Learned Avoidance from Family Context	Modeling silence from parents, family taboo on feelings, past invalidation at home, emotional neglect, non-communicative upbringing
Power Imbalance and Control	Dominant Partner Behavior	Being interrupted, feeling overruled, discouraged from speaking up, emotional manipulation, dominance in decisions
	Fear of Escalation	Avoiding partner's anger, previous punishment for speaking out, fear of violence, learned helplessness
	Emotional Dependency	Feeling unable to exist without partner, suppressing self for love, prioritizing relationship over self, clinging despite harm
	Unequal Decision-Making	Letting partner decide, ignoring personal needs, hiding desires, over-accommodating, surrendering autonomy
	Coercive Communication Patterns	Subtle threats, passive-aggression, guilt-tripping, verbal pressure, controlling the narrative
Relational Expectations and Social Norms	Idealized Relationship Expectations	Belief that true love requires sacrifice, romanticizing silence, seeing conflict as failure, equating silence with maturity
	Peer Influence and Comparison	Pressure to appear "perfect," comparing relationships on social media, fear of judgment, hiding problems from peers
	Cultural and Social Values	Emphasis on harmony, discouraging open conflict, belief in obedience, traditional relationship roles, collective over individual focus
	Desire to Maintain Relationship Harmony	Avoiding "drama," keeping peace, pretending everything is fine, self-censorship to protect relationship, downplaying issues
	Misinterpretation of Emotional Closeness	Thinking silence equals trust, believing emotions should be private, expecting partner to "just know," associating silence with strength

The findings of this study revealed three central themes related to self-silencing in adolescent romantic relationships: emotional inhibition, power imbalance and control, and relational expectations and social norms. These categories reflect the underlying emotional, relational, and sociocultural processes that contribute to adolescents' tendency to withhold their thoughts, needs, and emotions within romantic contexts.

Within the category of emotional inhibition, the subtheme fear of rejection was prominently expressed. Participants

frequently described concealing their true feelings due to anxiety over being abandoned or disliked. One participant stated, "I didn't tell him that I was upset because I thought he'd think I'm too sensitive and just leave me." Others mentioned pretending to agree or hiding their frustration to maintain closeness.

The subcategory need for acceptance also emerged as a significant factor in self-silencing. Adolescents reported changing their opinions or staying silent to be accepted and loved. A 17-year-old girl shared, "Sometimes I just go along with what he says, even if I don't agree, because I want him to like me more." These behaviors were motivated by a strong desire for validation and connection.

The theme of shame and embarrassment influenced participants' reluctance to express emotional needs. Many feared appearing weak or dramatic, especially when vulnerable. One participant said, "I feel embarrassed when I cry in front of my girlfriend... like it's not okay to show that." This emotional self-monitoring often led to suppression of distress.

Another relevant subcategory was low emotional literacy, as several adolescents struggled to identify or communicate their emotional states. Participants described feeling "numb" or "confused" when asked about their emotions, with one noting, "I didn't really know what I was feeling, so I just said nothing." This limited emotional vocabulary hindered open dialogue.

Internalized gender norms also influenced emotional inhibition. Male participants, in particular, mentioned societal expectations to remain emotionally strong. A 16-year-old boy explained, "Boys don't really talk about feelings. You're just supposed to be tough." Female participants mentioned being careful not to appear too emotional or needy.

The final subcategory under emotional inhibition was discomfort with intimacy. Some adolescents feared the vulnerability that emotional closeness requires. One girl described, "He was getting too close, emotionally, and that scared me. So I just stopped talking about my feelings altogether." These fears often led to withdrawal during emotional moments.

The second main category, power imbalance and control, included the subtheme dominant partner behavior, in which participants felt overruled or disregarded. Several recounted experiences of being talked over or dismissed, such as one who said, "Whenever I tried to explain how I felt, he just told me I was overreacting." These dynamics reduced their willingness to voice concerns.

The subcategory fear of escalation was evident in accounts where adolescents anticipated negative reactions from their partner. A participant noted, "I didn't tell him I was unhappy because last time I did, he got really mad and stopped texting me for days." This fear of anger or withdrawal served as a silencing mechanism.

Emotional dependency was another key factor, as some adolescents believed they couldn't function without their partner. This dependency discouraged honest expression. One girl said, "I felt like if I told him the truth, he might leave. And I couldn't handle that." Self-silencing was thus a strategy to preserve the relationship at any cost.

Unequal decision-making was another theme, where adolescents allowed their partner to control important aspects of the relationship. Participants recounted letting their partner decide everything "to avoid arguments" or "because it's just easier that way." One boy mentioned, "I never said what I wanted... it didn't really matter."

The final subtheme in this category was coercive communication patterns, where subtle emotional control led to silence. Some participants described feeling guilt-tripped or manipulated into compliance. "She'd act upset for hours if I said no, so eventually I just stopped saying anything she wouldn't like," shared one respondent.

The third major category, relational expectations and social norms, began with the subtheme idealized relationship expectations. Adolescents believed that silence and sacrifice were signs of mature love. "I thought if I really loved him, I wouldn't complain," said a participant. This romantic ideal often discouraged open communication.

Peer influence and comparison also contributed to self-silencing. Some adolescents concealed problems to present an ideal image to friends. One girl stated, "Everyone online looks so happy in their relationships. I didn't want people to think mine was messed up." Social comparison thus led to emotional concealment.

The influence of cultural and social values was also significant. Participants from more traditional family backgrounds spoke of pressure to avoid conflict or obey their partner. A participant remarked, "In my culture, girls shouldn't question their boyfriend. So I just stayed quiet." These beliefs normalized silence.

Another subtheme was desire to maintain relationship harmony, where adolescents avoided discussions that might "create drama." One boy said, "I just wanted things to stay calm, so I didn't bring up stuff that bothered me." The fear of confrontation led to emotional suppression.

Finally, the subcategory misinterpretation of emotional closeness emerged when adolescents equated silence with strength or trust. A participant noted, "I thought if we really loved each other, we wouldn't need to say everything out loud." This belief fostered a culture of unspoken needs and assumptions.

4. Discussion and Conclusion

This study explored the indicators of self-silencing in adolescent romantic relationships among Bulgarian youth using a qualitative approach grounded in participants' narratives. Through thematic analysis, three major categories emerged: emotional inhibition, power imbalance and control, and relational expectations and social norms. These categories revealed a complex interplay of internal psychological processes, interpersonal dynamics, and cultural scripts that contribute to adolescents' decisions to withhold emotional expression in romantic contexts.

The first major theme, emotional inhibition, was characterized by subthemes such as fear of rejection, need for acceptance, shame and embarrassment, low emotional literacy, internalized gender norms, discomfort with intimacy, and learned emotional avoidance. Adolescents described silencing themselves out of fear of being judged, rejected, or misunderstood, often associating emotional expression with weakness. This supports earlier findings that emotional suppression in adolescence can be driven by perceived threats to self-worth and relational security (Cole & Higgins, 2023). The fear of rejection, in particular, has been identified as a central motivator for emotional self-restraint in adolescent romantic and peer relationships (Emran et al., 2022). Girls in the present study were more likely to describe their silence in terms of avoiding emotional burden on the relationship, whereas boys linked silence to expectations of emotional stoicism, echoing prior research on gendered norms of expression (Puzio & Best, 2020; Shrivastava, 2021).

Low emotional literacy was also prominent in the narratives, especially among adolescents who described confusion about how they felt or lacked the vocabulary to articulate emotions. This aligns with previous studies indicating that adolescents often experience emotional dysregulation due to underdeveloped reflective capacities and a lack of supportive environments to explore emotions (Zimmermann et al., 2021). The inability to name or share emotional experiences reinforces isolation and diminishes opportunities for relational intimacy. Additionally, discomfort with emotional closeness was a subtle but recurring element, suggesting that emotional distance is sometimes used defensively to manage the vulnerability inherent in romantic bonding (Bosacki, 2024).

The second category, power imbalance and control, included experiences of dominant partner behavior, fear of escalation, emotional dependency, unequal decision-making, and coercive communication. Participants frequently described scenarios in which one partner held more emotional or interpersonal power, leading to suppression of voice by the other. This dynamic has been well-documented in adolescent relationship literature, where patterns of emotional dominance often go unrecognized by adolescents due to limited relational experience and romantic idealism (Fortin et al., 2024). In particular, emotional dependency emerged as a driver of silence, especially among participants who feared abandonment. This fear often led to self-effacing behaviors that prioritized the partner's needs over their own, consistent with findings that self-silencing can be a coping mechanism for adolescents who lack confidence in their relational worth (Goldner et al., 2022).

Some participants described avoiding emotional expression to prevent escalation or retaliation, suggesting a background of coercive or emotionally reactive relational climates. This finding resonates with prior research indicating that adolescents may develop defensive silence in response to abusive or volatile relational dynamics (Dedahanov et al., 2021). Such behaviors were not always recognized as problematic by the adolescents, indicating the need for early relational education that normalizes boundary-setting and mutual emotional exchange. The experience of coercion and over-accommodation also supports theories of relational power asymmetry during adolescence, where limited social or emotional capital can make some teens particularly vulnerable to silencing strategies (Khoza & Mokgatle, 2023).

The third major category, relational expectations and social norms, encompassed themes such as idealized relationship expectations, peer influence and comparison, cultural values, desire for harmony, and misinterpretation of emotional closeness. Many participants equated silence with maturity or strength, believing that true love required sacrifice or emotional control. This belief mirrors cultural narratives that valorize self-denial in relationships and minimize the importance of emotional transparency (LeBlanc, 2024; O'Grady, 2023). Particularly among female participants, silence was portrayed as a sign of devotion or

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emotional resilience, reflecting the gendered ideals of romantic femininity found in earlier studies (Fortin et al., 2024; Puzio & Best, 2020).

Peer comparison, especially through social media, emerged as a significant influence on how adolescents managed their emotional expression. Adolescents frequently noted that publicly idealized portrayals of romantic relationships made them less willing to voice dissatisfaction or show vulnerability. This echoes findings that social media contributes to increased self-monitoring and relational performativity in youth, especially in cultures where appearance and reputation are highly valued (Abadali et al., 2021). In this context, self-silencing is not just a relational act but also a social performance designed to maintain a curated image of relational perfection.

Cultural and familial values also played a vital role. Participants from more conservative or traditional families internalized expectations that discouraged confrontation and encouraged deference, particularly among girls. This aligns with studies emphasizing the socialization of silence in collectivist or patriarchal contexts, where obedience and relational harmony are culturally prioritized (Tchidjo & Mgbwa, 2020; Zuković & Stojadinović, 2022). Furthermore, silence was sometimes misinterpreted as a sign of deep emotional trust or understanding—"if we really loved each other, we wouldn't need to say everything"—a belief also observed in prior literature on adolescent romantic myths and emotional idealism (Bosacki, 2022).

These findings also resonate with therapeutic and clinical insights. Adolescents who silence themselves often do so not out of passivity but as an active, sometimes strategic, attempt to maintain safety, love, or emotional equilibrium (Sheppe, 2023). For some, silence is a form of agency within constrained relational systems, particularly when direct communication feels unsafe or unrewarded. In this sense, silence becomes a survival mechanism, as observed in populations navigating trauma or marginalization (Ruzibiza, 2021). However, the long-term emotional costs of such strategies are substantial, leading to a decline in authenticity, relational satisfaction, and psychological well-being (Emran et al., 2022; Jakubowski et al., 2021).

This study also found that adolescents' understanding of silence was not always aligned with psychological models. While researchers often frame silence as a sign of repression or dysfunction, adolescents themselves sometimes described it as a source of comfort, identity protection, or emotional clarity. This duality mirrors prior research in psychodynamic and developmental psychology, where silence can carry both protective and pathogenic meanings depending on its context and function (Monthuy-Blanc et al., 2020; Zimmermann et al., 2021).

In sum, the study's results reinforce the notion that self-silencing in adolescence is a multidimensional phenomenon influenced by emotional development, gendered scripts, social comparison, relational power dynamics, and cultural expectations. While silence can be a natural part of relational negotiation, its chronic or defensive use may hinder authentic emotional development and healthy relational functioning. These findings align with and extend existing literature by highlighting how silence functions not merely as absence but as a meaningful, often strategic behavior with social, emotional, and developmental roots.

5. Limitations & Suggestions

While the current study offers valuable insights into the mechanisms and meanings of self-silencing among adolescents, it is not without limitations. First, the sample was limited to adolescents residing in Bulgaria, which may limit the generalizability of findings across different cultural or sociopolitical contexts. The specific cultural norms and familial structures in Bulgaria may shape silence in ways that differ from adolescents in other countries. Second, although gender balance was considered, the qualitative design does not allow for statistical comparisons or general inferences across groups. Third, the reliance on self-reported narratives may have introduced recall bias or social desirability effects, particularly in relation to sensitive topics like emotional vulnerability or relationship conflict. Finally, the use of semi-structured interviews may not have captured more unconscious or embodied aspects of silence that other methods, such as observational or longitudinal studies, might reveal.

Future research should explore self-silencing in adolescent romantic relationships through more diverse samples, including cross-cultural comparisons and the inclusion of LGBTQ+ adolescents, whose relational scripts may differ significantly from heterosexual youth. Longitudinal studies could also investigate how patterns of silence evolve over time and how they relate to long-term relational satisfaction or psychological adjustment. Additionally, mixed-methods research incorporating both qualitative narratives and quantitative measures would provide a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon. Future studies might also examine how digital communication platforms influence self-silencing

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E-ISSN: 2981-2526

behaviors, particularly in relation to public image management, online surveillance, and cyber intimacy.

Educators, school counselors, and mental health practitioners should prioritize the development of emotional literacy and communication skills in adolescents, especially within the context of romantic relationships. Relationship education programs must go beyond physical safety and address the emotional nuances of expression, power, and consent. Practitioners should create safe spaces for adolescents to reflect on and verbalize their emotional needs without judgment. Interventions should also encourage the dismantling of rigid gender roles and promote models of healthy emotional expression for all genders. Lastly, parents and caregivers must be engaged in helping adolescents build secure attachment models where emotional authenticity is valued and modeled.

Acknowledgments

We would like to express our appreciation and gratitude to all those who cooperated in carrying out this study.

Declaration of Interest

The authors of this article declared no conflict of interest.

Ethics Considerations

The study protocol adhered to the principles outlined in the Helsinki Declaration, which provides guidelines for ethical research involving human participants.

Transparency of Data

In accordance with the principles of transparency and open research, we declare that all data and materials used in this study are available upon request.

Funding

This research was carried out independently with personal funding and without the financial support of any governmental or private institution or organization.

Authors' Contributions

All authors significantly contributed.

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JAYPS
Adolescent and Youth Psychological Studies
E-ISSN: 2981-2526