




Identifying the Dimensions of Love in Adolescence from the Perspective of Adolescents in Qazvin Province: A Study Based on Grounded Theory

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Article Info

Article type:

Original Research

How to cite this article:

Ghafoori, A., Shariat Bagheri, M. M., & Salehi, K. (2025). Identifying the Dimensions of Love in Adolescence from the Perspective of Adolescents in Qazvin Province: A Study Based on Grounded Theory. *Journal of Adolescent and Youth Psychological Studies*, 6(7), 1-13.

<http://dx.doi.org/10.61838/kman.jayps.4247>



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ABSTRACT

Objective: This study aimed to identify and analyze the dimensions of adolescent love from the perspective of teenagers in Qazvin Province using grounded theory and Schatzman's dimensional analysis.

Methods and Materials: A qualitative research design based on grounded theory was employed to explore adolescents' lived experiences of love. Thirty adolescents (aged 13–18) were selected through purposive sampling, and semi-structured interviews were conducted along with the collection of ten written letters. The interviews and texts were analyzed using Schatzman's dimensional analysis, encompassing five key dimensions: perspective, context, conditions, process, and outcomes. Theoretical saturation guided the termination point of data collection. The core category that emerged—"navigating the season of adolescence"—served as the theoretical lens through which the other categories were integrated. Credibility was ensured through member checking, peer debriefing, and prolonged engagement with participants.

Findings: The study identified 36 primary categories grouped under nine major subdimensions. Adolescents described their romantic experiences as beginning with attraction and emotional curiosity, progressing through stages of affection, connection, conflict, and either resolution or dissolution. The findings highlighted both positive outcomes—such as increased self-confidence, emotional growth, and improved social skills—and negative consequences including emotional instability, academic decline, and psychological distress following breakups. Trust and perceived similarity emerged as critical preconditions for forming and sustaining romantic connections. The family's communication style and emotional support level played significant roles in shaping relational behavior and coping mechanisms.

Conclusion: Adolescent love is a complex, multifaceted phenomenon influenced by emotional, social, and contextual variables. It serves as both a developmental challenge and a transformative opportunity. Understanding its structure and consequences can inform educational, psychological, and familial interventions aimed at promoting healthy relational development during adolescence.

Keywords: Adolescents; Romantic Love; Grounded Theory; Emotional Development; Family Communication

1. Introduction

Adolescence is a crucial transitional period marked by profound psychological, emotional, and social transformations that significantly shape an individual's identity and relational patterns. Among the many developmental tasks during this life stage, romantic love emerges as both a formative and destabilizing experience. The nature, meaning, and implications of love in adolescence have drawn considerable scholarly interest, with studies seeking to elucidate how adolescents perceive, experience, and construct love within their evolving sociocultural contexts (Collins, 2003; Tienda et al., 2023).

In Iranian culture, love has traditionally occupied a central position in literature and philosophical discourse. Persian poets such as Saeb Tabrizi have depicted love as both a divine and existential pursuit, emphasizing its transformative power (Saeb Tabrizi, 2024). Such cultural narratives deeply influence adolescents' understanding of love, weaving together idealized visions with contemporary experiences shaped by media, peer interactions, and evolving family structures (Abbasi Shovazi & Delavar, 2019; Hosseini et al., 2022).

From a psychological standpoint, love in adolescence is often characterized by intensity, idealization, and emotional volatility, driven in part by neurodevelopmental and hormonal changes that enhance novelty-seeking behavior and emotional reactivity (Dahl, 2004; Reyna & Farley, 2006). These tendencies intersect with sociocultural expectations and digital influences to create a multifaceted landscape of adolescent love experiences. The developmental significance of these experiences is underscored by their potential to either support or disrupt identity formation, emotional regulation, and interpersonal competence (Collins, 2003; Rubenzadeh et al., 2016).

Recent empirical studies have highlighted the growing complexity of adolescent romantic experiences, particularly in the age of social media. Clayton et al. (2013) demonstrate how digital platforms such as Facebook can blur the boundaries between intimacy, privacy, and surveillance, leading to both enhanced connectivity and heightened relational insecurity (Clayton et al., 2013). Similarly, Crosnoe and Muller (2004) point to the dual role of adolescent friendships in shaping both academic outcomes and romantic development, revealing the intricate interplay between social networks and personal choices (Crosnoe & Muller, 2004).

The theoretical foundation for the study draws upon multiple perspectives. From an evolutionary standpoint, Bode et al. (2025) argue that sex differences in romantic love are rooted in adaptive strategies, with implications for understanding gendered experiences in adolescence (Bode et al., 2025). Meanwhile, Fisher (2004) explores the neurochemical substrates of romantic attachment, linking adolescent infatuation to hormonal surges and brain reward systems (Fisher, 2004). These insights are further elaborated by Reyna and Farley (2006), who highlight adolescents' susceptibility to irrational decision-making due to immature prefrontal cortex development (Reyna & Farley, 2006).

Culturally, love in Iranian society is not only a personal experience but also a moral and social construct, often informed by poetic, religious, and philosophical traditions. As Hosseini et al. (2022) demonstrate in their analysis of Persian poetry, the "beginning of love" is framed as a spiritual and existential awakening, echoing both Sufi mysticism and classical literary tropes (Hosseini et al., 2022). Such symbolic representations can influence adolescents' romantic scripts, encouraging idealization and emotional intensity, particularly in early encounters.

On the psychosocial level, love in adolescence functions as a platform for identity exploration and emotional expression. Collins (2003) emphasizes the importance of interpersonal relationships in shaping adolescents' coping mechanisms and psychological adjustment (Collins, 2003), while Rose et al. (2022) identify school connectedness as a buffer against health-risk behaviors, including those related to romantic distress (Rose et al., 2022). These findings suggest that adolescent love, while potentially enriching, also carries vulnerabilities that require supportive contexts and skill-building interventions.

Yet, despite the growing interest in adolescent love, much of the existing literature is rooted in Western contexts. There is a critical need for culturally grounded studies that capture the nuances of love as understood and experienced by adolescents in non-Western societies such as Iran. As Steen et al. (2024) note in their global review of love scholarship, the meanings and implications of love are profoundly shaped by local sociocultural paradigms and must be examined through context-specific frameworks (Steen et al., 2024).

The current study seeks to identify the dimensions of love in adolescence as perceived by adolescents themselves in Qazvin Province. It utilizes grounded theory methodology informed by Schatzman's dimensional analysis to investigate how adolescents conceptualize, experience, and navigate romantic love within their specific cultural and

developmental milieu. This inquiry is particularly relevant in light of contemporary shifts in Iranian family dynamics, educational pressures, and digital communication patterns, all of which shape adolescents' romantic behaviors and expectations (Behrbigi et al., 2022; Qamari, 2009; Ugalde et al., 2022).

The rationale for focusing on Qazvin lies in its unique sociocultural composition, which blends traditional values with exposure to urban modernization. Prior studies indicate that adolescents in such hybrid settings often experience heightened tension between cultural expectations and personal desires in romantic relationships (Baniasadi & Salehi, 2019; Farnam et al., 2018). Moreover, adolescent love in Iran is often influenced by religious and familial discourses that frame it either as a moral transgression or a preparatory stage for marriage, depending on context (Alam Al-Huda & Tahmasbzadeh Sheikhlar, 2008; Das & Rao, 2022).

This study addresses several key questions: How do adolescents in Qazvin define and interpret the experience of love? What are the psychological and social processes involved in their romantic engagements? What outcomes—positive or negative—do they associate with love in their developmental stage? And finally, how do environmental factors such as peer norms, family structure, and digital media mediate their romantic behaviors?

2. Methods and Materials

2.1. Study Design and Participants

This qualitative study was conducted using the grounded theory method with an emphasis on Schatzman's dimensional analysis approach. The study aimed to explore and conceptualize the complex phenomenon of love in adolescence through systematic theory generation derived directly from empirical data. The research was carried out in Qazvin Province, Iran, targeting adolescents who had experienced romantic feelings during their teenage years. Participants were selected using purposive sampling, a widely accepted strategy in qualitative research that ensures the inclusion of individuals with rich, relevant, and diverse experiences related to the research topic. In this study, the researcher selected 30 adolescents (aged 12 to 18) who had personally encountered adolescent love. Additionally, 10 written letters authored by adolescents reflecting on their romantic experiences were collected. The sampling process was continued until theoretical saturation was achieved—

that is, when additional data no longer contributed new insights. To complement purposive sampling, theoretical sampling was also employed throughout the data collection and theory development process. This involved continuously deciding which data to collect next and from whom, based on the emerging categories and theoretical needs. To maintain comfort and rapport, interviews were conducted by a same-gender interviewer. Ethical considerations were strictly observed, including obtaining informed consent, assuring participants of their right to withdraw, maintaining confidentiality, and respecting their autonomy in choosing not to answer specific questions.

2.2. Measures

Two types of interviews were used in the data collection phase: semi-structured and unstructured. The semi-structured interviews were based on a predesigned protocol adapted from established qualitative interviewing guidelines. These interviews included predetermined yet flexible questions, allowing the interviewer to probe deeper based on participant responses. Unstructured interviews provided even more freedom, allowing participants to narrate their experiences in their own words. Before starting the interviews, each participant was briefed on the study's purpose and the voluntary nature of their participation. In addition to oral narratives, adolescents were invited to write anonymous letters and deposit them in a secure box, expressing their thoughts and feelings about love during adolescence. This method was intended to reduce self-censorship and allow for deeper emotional expression. The researcher ensured that data triangulation was achieved by integrating interview data with the textual content of the letters, thereby enhancing the credibility of the findings. The interview and letter data together provided a comprehensive picture of adolescent experiences with love. To ensure the reliability of the process, texts were coded repeatedly to confirm consistency in categorization. Member checking was also employed: participants were consulted after their interviews to validate the extracted codes. MAXQDA software was utilized to manage and code the qualitative data, allowing for detailed analysis and tracking of thematic patterns.

2.3. Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using Schatzman's dimensional analysis method, which is rooted in symbolic interactionism and emphasizes the researcher's cognitive engagement with

the data. This approach allows for multidimensional understanding of social phenomena by exploring various contextual and processual elements. The analysis proceeded in three stages: dimensioning, differentiation, and integration. In the dimensioning phase, the researcher reviewed all the collected data and expanded the conceptual vocabulary by identifying initial dimensions through questions such as "What does this data include?" These dimensions were further broken down into sub-dimensions or conceptual categories. During the differentiation stage, the researcher narrowed the focus by selecting a central perspective or core dimension to guide the rest of the analysis. Competing interpretations and alternative dimensions were also considered to ensure analytical depth. In this study, the core perspective—"navigating the season of adolescence"—was identified as the dominant interpretive lens. Finally, in the integration phase, the previously identified and differentiated elements were reassembled into a coherent theoretical framework. The explanatory matrix, a key tool in this method, helped to systematically organize dimensions such as context, conditions, processes, and outcomes. Throughout all phases, the researcher continuously returned to the raw data,

engaged in memo-writing and discussions with peer analysts, and ensured that the emerging theory reflected both analytical rigor and the authentic voices of the participants. Triangulation, member validation, and peer debriefing were employed to ensure the trustworthiness and validity of the findings. The use of MAXQDA software supported this process by enabling the organization, coding, and retrieval of large volumes of qualitative data.

3. Findings and Results

Phase One: Dimensioning/Design

In this phase, the researchers repeatedly reviewed the data and, with the objective of dimensioning, identified and categorized emerging categories into overarching dimensions. Specifically, based on the perspectives of adolescents in Qazvin Province, 36 categories were identified and classified into 9 dimensions. These 9 extracted dimensions were further broken down into sub-dimensions based on the 36 identified categories. The dimensions and related categories reflecting the adolescent experience are presented in [Table 1](#).

Table 1

Identified Dimensions and Associated Categories Among Adolescents in Qazvin Province

Dimension	Subdimensions (Categories)
Navigating the Season of Adolescence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Appeal of novelty and unfamiliarity - Anticipation of meeting - Emotional excitement and intensity - Identity formation and self-awareness - Social influences and imitation
Family Communication Pattern	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Accepting - Rejecting
Expression of Love	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Being influenced by being loved by the other person - Loving the other person - Occurring suddenly and mutually
Perceived Trust	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Full and uncensored presence of the self - Behaviors during emotional arousal - Sense of security
Perceived Similarity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Similarity in thoughts - Physical similarity - Moral similarity
Social Context	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Physical environment - Virtual space
From Initiation to Outcome	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Attention - Infatuation - Longing - Love - Increased interaction - Conflict - Successful conflict resolution / relationship termination - Complete love if prior stage succeeds

Positive Outcomes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Goal orientation - Movement toward change - Increased self-confidence - Enhanced social skills - Emotional growth
Negative Outcomes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Shift in priorities - Mood swings - Academic decline - Psychological harm following romantic failure - Irrational decision-making

Phase Two: Differentiation

In this phase, the researchers moved toward narrowing and focusing the identified dimensions. Schatzman's explanatory matrix was used to facilitate this objective. The identified dimensions were situated within the explanatory matrix across five positional domains: perspective, context, conditions, processes, and outcomes. In Schatzman's dimensional analysis, the "perspective" (core dimension) holds the highest importance in theoretical development and provides one of the richest interpretive understandings of a phenomenon for the researcher (Kools et al., 1996). In the theory developed in this study, "navigating the season of adolescence" was identified as the core dimension or perspective based on the adolescents' views. This core dimension emerged during the analysis of the twenty-fifth interview. The subsequent data collection process was shaped and guided by this core dimension, continuing until theoretical saturation was achieved.

In the adolescent group, the dimension and sub-dimensions of "social context" (physical environment, virtual space) were placed in the "context" position within the explanatory matrix. The dimensions and sub-dimensions

of "family communication pattern" (accepting, rejecting), "expression of love" (being influenced by being loved by the other person, loving the other person, occurring suddenly and mutually), "perceived trust" (full and uncensored presence of the self, behaviors during emotional arousal, sense of security), and "perceived similarity" (similarity in thoughts, physical similarity, moral similarity) were positioned under "conditions."

The dimension and sub-dimensions of "from initiation to outcome" (attention, infatuation, longing, love, increased interaction, conflict, successful resolution of conflict/termination at this stage, complete love in case of prior success) were placed in the "processes" category. The dimensions and sub-dimensions of "positive outcomes" (goal orientation, movement toward change, increased self-confidence, enhanced social skills, emotional growth) and "negative outcomes" (shift in priorities, mood swings, academic decline, psychological harm following romantic failure, irrational decision-making) were classified under "outcomes." These placements are summarized in Table 2, and Figure 1 visually presents the explanatory matrix of adolescent dimensions.

Table 2

Placement of Dimensions in Schatzman's Explanatory Matrix

Matrix Position	Dimension	Subdimensions (Categories)
Perspective	Navigating the Season of Adolescence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Appeal of novelty and unfamiliarity - Anticipation of meeting - Emotional excitement and intensity - Identity formation and self-awareness - Social influences and imitation
Context	Social Context	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Physical environment - Virtual space
Conditions	Family Communication Pattern	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Accepting - Rejecting
	Expression of Love	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Being influenced by being loved by the other person - Loving the other person - Occurring suddenly and mutually
	Perceived Trust	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Full and uncensored presence of the self - Behaviors during emotional arousal - Sense of security
	Perceived Similarity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Similarity in thoughts

Processes	From Initiation to Outcome	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Physical similarity - Moral similarity - Attention - Infatuation - Longing - Love - Increased interaction - Conflict - Successful conflict resolution / relationship termination
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Complete love if prior stage succeeds
Outcomes	Positive Outcomes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Goal orientation - Movement toward change - Increased self-confidence - Enhanced social skills
	Negative Outcomes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Emotional growth - Shift in priorities - Mood swings - Academic decline - Psychological harm following romantic failure - Irrational decision-making

Explaining the Dimensions of Adolescents' Experiences

1. Perspective

In grounded theory, the *perspective* plays a central role and refers to the dimension with the highest significance for the development of the theory. It provides one of the most insightful explanations of the phenomenon under investigation. In this study, the core dimension was conceptualized as "Navigating the Season of Adolescence" and was elaborated based on its underlying categories and the narratives of the participants.

1.1. Navigating the Season of Adolescence

Navigating the season of adolescence refers to the quest for new, exciting, and unfamiliar experiences that characterize the early stages of teenage life. This personality trait is linked to reactivity toward novelty and potential rewards. During adolescence, due to biological, cognitive, and social changes, the drive for novelty-seeking reaches its peak and plays a crucial role in the emergence of adolescent love. This dimension includes categories such as: the appeal of novelty and unfamiliarity, anticipation of meeting, emotional excitement and intensity, identity formation and self-awareness, social influences, and imitation.

According to the participants, the intensity and eruption of feelings in adolescent love are typically very strong and sudden. Adolescents experience significant hormonal and emotional changes during this period, and love often represents their first profound emotional connection outside the family context. These feelings can develop rapidly, be overwhelming, and be accompanied by noticeable mood and behavioral fluctuations. This is due to the novelty of the

experience, idealization of the beloved, and a lack of sufficient experience in managing emotional relationships.

Adolescents in love tend to focus more on the romantic aspects of love. Influenced by hormonal and emotional changes, they seek new and exciting experiences. Romantic love during this phase is often accompanied by imaginations of physical attraction, passion, and fantasies of an ideal relationship. Media, popular culture, and peer pressure play significant roles in highlighting these aspects. Because of limited experience in deep and stable relationships, adolescents are more drawn to these superficial and emotional features that make them feel special and noticed.

This romantic focus helps adolescents define their identity as someone in love and search for emotional and social needs within that framework. In their encounters, they may focus on symbolic and performative behaviors typical of romantic love—such as complimenting the other's appearance or personality, expressing intense emotions, doing seemingly romantic things (e.g., giving small gifts or holding hands), creating private and intimate moments, and fantasizing about a shared future. These behaviors stem from efforts to build attraction, express affection and belonging, and experience the excitement and pleasure arising from romantic interaction, which is especially important at this age.

Fantasizing and daydreaming in love-struck adolescents are intertwined with the anticipation of meeting. Adolescents construct idealized images of their beloved and dreamlike encounters in their imagination, which in turn fuels their enthusiasm for real-life meetings. This blend of imagination and the desire to realize it in reality creates a powerful

motivation to pursue in-person romantic experiences and amplifies the emotions associated with love. Adolescents may form idealized concepts of love under the influence of movies, TV series, music, and other media, and seek to experience that novelty and excitement themselves.

"A feeling you don't notice coming—it can burn like fire. You laugh more, cry more." (Participant 7)

"It takes over your whole day and night, and you're always thinking about what to say, how to be, just to show that you love them—it's so beautiful and unreachable." (Participant 15)

"Sometimes when you buy a gift you think they'll like, or even write a letter or say how much you love them, when we're together, we talk about how beautiful our future could be." (Participant 10)

"Going to a café with someone when you used to go there alone—it feels completely different. A new, unknown feeling as if it came from another planet." (Participant 23)

2. Context

In grounded theory, the *context* dimension functions as a boundary-setting element, defining the situational or environmental location in which the identified dimensions are embedded. In this study, this dimension was explained using its foundational categories, namely "physical environment" and "virtual space," as well as participant narratives.

2.1. Social Environment

The physical and virtual environments are two core categories within the *social environment* dimension. Both exert considerable influence on adolescent romantic experiences. The *physical environment*, including parties, neighborhoods, friend groups, and face-to-face social activities, provides opportunities for in-person encounters. These interactions can spark initial attractions and foster emotional connections based on real-time engagement, body language, and mutual understanding.

In contrast, the *virtual space* offers a wide-reaching and accessible platform for communication, allowing adolescents to meet new people with shared interests while eliminating geographic barriers. However, this environment can also lead to more superficial relationships, the idealization of others based on limited online information, and risks such as deception and emotional manipulation.

"This feeling can start at a party or on the way home. Like, you're at a party and suddenly realize how well your conversations match." (Participant 1)

"I first met him online, and then we met in person. But if you stay online for too long, it can be harmful. Still, the

virtual space is a new way for people to connect." (Participant 20)

4. Process

In grounded theory, the *process* refers to intentional or unintentional actions or interactions that occur as a result of specific conditions. In this study, the process dimension was explained through the underlying category "*From Initiation to Outcome*" and the narratives of the participants.

4.1. From Initiation to Outcome

The categories within this dimension include: attention, infatuation, longing, love, increased interaction, conflict, successful resolution of conflict/relationship termination at this stage, and complete love in the case of a successful resolution. The process of adolescent love begins with initial attention toward an individual perceived as attractive. Gradually, feelings of emotional attachment and infatuation develop. At this stage, the adolescent experiences a strong desire for proximity and deeper connection with the person of interest. Over time, and with more frequent interactions, these feelings may evolve into deeper love, which necessitates more sustained communication, emotional sharing, and mutual experiences.

Within these interactions, the emergence of conflict and disagreement is natural. How adolescents manage these challenges determines whether the relationship advances toward complete love with greater mutual understanding and commitment. However, if conflicts are not effectively managed and lead to dissatisfaction or emotional distancing, the relationship may dissolve, marking the final outcome of the process.

"At first it was just a glance, a simple smile, but that was enough to give me a flutter in my stomach. Then I started thinking about him more—I wanted to see him and hear his voice all the time. It became a kind of longing for me. When we talked more and I realized how cool he was, I was sure it was something special. We started meeting up and spending more time together. Everything was going great until we argued over something silly. I got really upset and thought it was over. But later, we talked it out, realized we were both wrong, and fixed things. Now I understand what real love is—something that doesn't end with a small fight but grows stronger over time. If we had broken up then, I would've never realized how deep this feeling could be." (Participant 1)

5. Outcomes

Outcomes refer to the results or consequences that emerge after the process has taken place. In this study, outcomes were explained through the foundational categories of

positive outcomes (goal orientation, movement toward change, increased self-confidence, enhanced social skills, emotional growth) and *negative outcomes* (loss of priorities, mood swings, academic decline, psychological distress following romantic failure, irrational decision-making), as well as participant narratives.

5.1. Positive Outcomes

The positive consequences of adolescent love include goal orientation, motivation for personal development, greater self-confidence, the strengthening of social skills, and emotional maturity. Experiencing love places adolescents in diverse emotional and social contexts, which offer opportunities to enhance interpersonal competencies. In order to effectively engage with a romantic partner, adolescents must learn and practice skills such as active listening, empathy, appropriate emotional expression, conflict resolution, negotiation, and perspective-taking. Their efforts to maintain the relationship and navigate its challenges push them to interact more constructively with others, thereby expanding their social network and improving their relational abilities.

"Loving someone else helps me plan my studies better to reach my goals—feeling valued, and sharing life and emotions with someone." (Participant 26)

5.2. Negative Outcomes

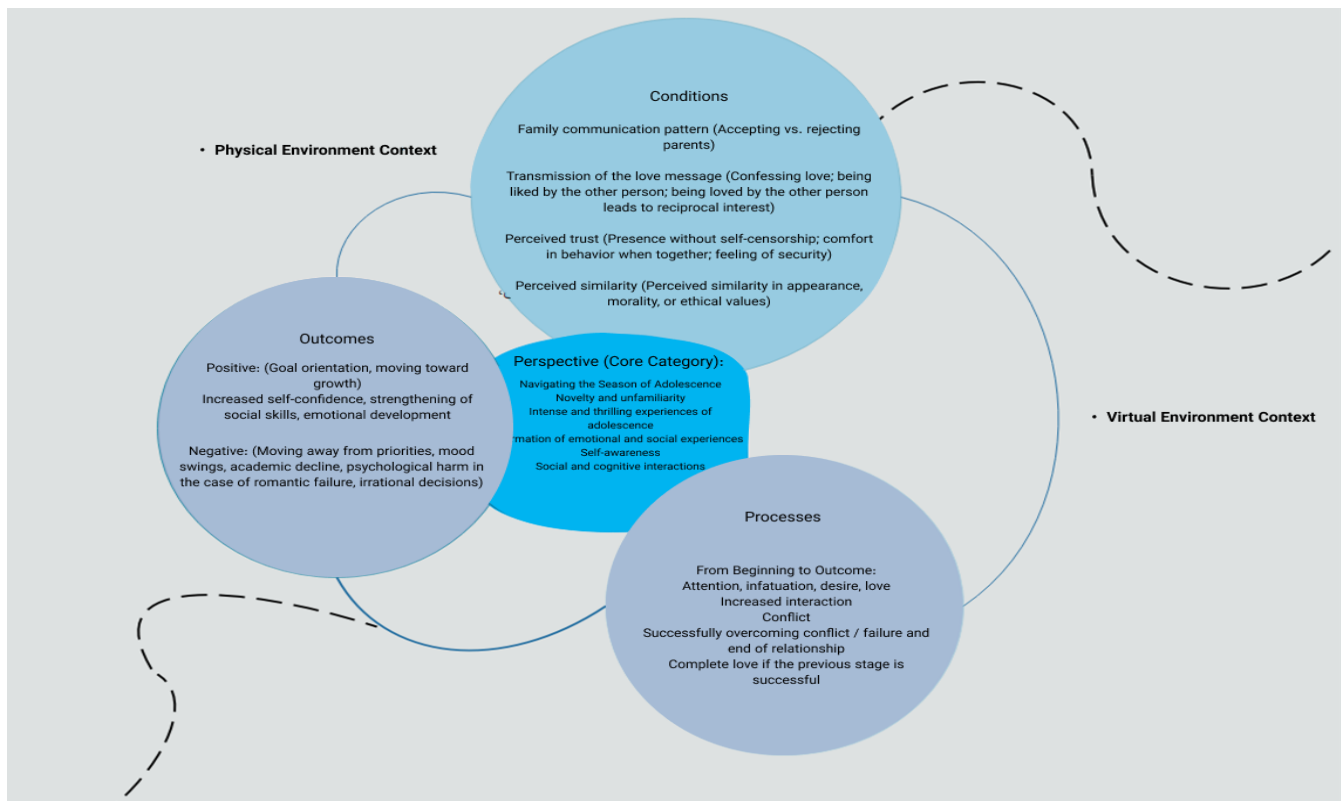
The negative outcomes include disengagement from personal priorities, mood instability, academic decline, psychological harm resulting from romantic failure, and irrational decisions. Due to the emotional intensity, lack of emotional maturity, and limited relational experience, adolescent love can lead to emotional dependency, fear of loss, jealousy, and anxiety about relationship instability. These can cause psychological harm such as diminished self-esteem, depression, and social anxiety. Romantic failure during adolescence can result in profound grief, hopelessness, anger, guilt, disturbances in sleep and appetite, and even suicidal ideation. Such cases often require emotional support and, in some instances, professional intervention.

"Sometimes, even when we were so happy, everything would suddenly fall apart and turn into tears." (Participant 2)

"The fear of losing him tormented me. Even now, that sorrow hasn't left me." (Participant 19)

Figure 1

Explanatory Matrix of Adolescent Dimensions in the Phenomenon of Love During Adolescence



Phase Three: Integration/Reintegration

At this level, the discovered perspective and dimensions are integrated and then reintegrated into the structure of the developing theory, through propositions as presented below.

The pursuit of novel and exciting experiences is a defining characteristic of adolescence. Adolescents, due to the drive for novelty-seeking during this period, enter into the process of falling in love and forming emotional attachments with others.

1. Adolescent love develops through interpersonal interactions and is shaped by the surrounding physical and virtual environments. (Adolescents find opportunities for face-to-face or online engagement, which may lead to initial attraction.)
2. Trust and perceived similarity are key conditions for experiencing adolescent love. (Feeling secure with and similar to the romantic interest facilitates the expression and reception of romantic feelings.)
3. The family communication pattern plays a significant role in managing adolescent love.

(Accepting families provide opportunities for adolescents to better understand themselves, whereas rejecting families may lead to confusion and irrational behaviors.)

4. The success of adolescent love depends on managing its process. (Managing emotions and conflicts effectively during the course of the relationship can lead to complete and successful love.)
5. The outcomes of adolescent love are serious and significant. (While positive outcomes include goal orientation, personal growth, improved self-confidence, and social-emotional development, the negative consequences—such as emotional instability, academic decline, and psychological harm following romantic failure—require critical attention.)

Figure 2

Integration of Adolescent Dimensions in the Study of Adolescent Love

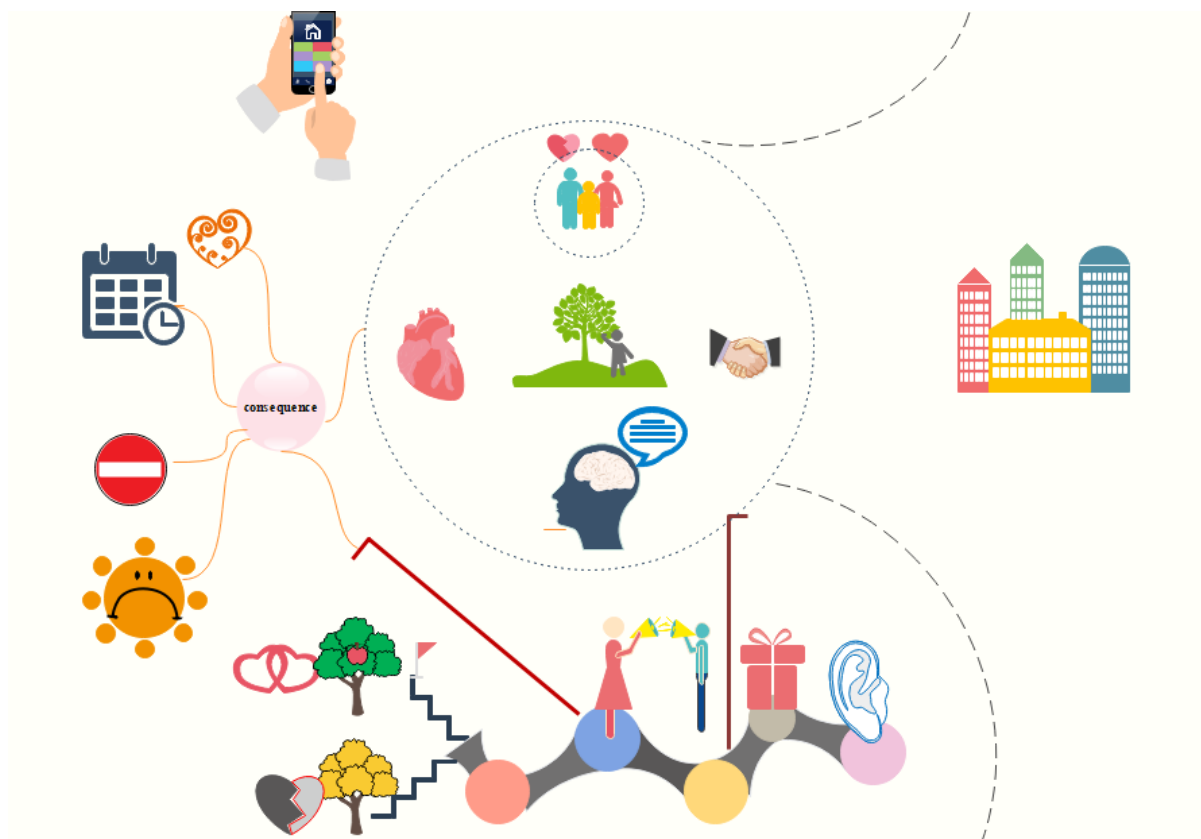


Figure 3

Theoretical Guide



4. Discussion and Conclusion

The current grounded theory study revealed a nuanced and dynamic process model of adolescent romantic love in Qazvin, centering on the core category of “novelty-seeking in the season of adolescence.” This model, encompassing causal conditions, contextual influences, interactional processes, and consequences, reflects a developmentally and socioculturally embedded understanding of love experiences during adolescence. The findings highlight that adolescent love is not merely a fleeting emotional episode but an essential component of psychosocial identity development, entangled with internal emotional needs and external sociocultural structures.

The notion of “novelty-seeking” as the central category aligns with developmental theories that emphasize adolescence as a critical stage of exploration, driven by neurobiological and psychosocial shifts (Dahl, 2004; Reyna & Farley, 2006). Adolescents, fueled by the drive to explore intimacy and individuality, find romantic experiences

particularly salient during this period. The participants’ narratives illustrated how romantic attraction begins with sensory cues and fascination, followed by emotional attachment and cognitive idealization, a pattern consistent with the evolutionary and neurochemical accounts of romantic behavior (Bode et al., 2025; Fisher, 2004).

Participants described digital spaces and physical environments as significant in shaping opportunities for interaction, disclosure, and emotional connection. These findings mirror studies showing how digital platforms extend adolescents’ relational possibilities while simultaneously introducing new complexities such as idealized presentations and cyber jealousy (Clayton et al., 2013; Ugalde et al., 2022). The simultaneous access to online intimacy and offline presence intensifies adolescents’ expectations and emotional investments in romantic relationships (Tienda et al., 2023).

The role of family communication patterns emerged as a foundational factor influencing how adolescents perceive, engage with, and regulate romantic love. Participants from emotionally expressive and supportive families tended to

report greater emotional insight, relational stability, and realistic expectations. This supports existing research emphasizing that parental modeling and emotional climate shape adolescents' internal working models and attachment strategies (Collins, 2003; Crosnoe & Muller, 2004; Qamari, 2009). In contrast, adolescents from emotionally avoidant or critical households often described feelings of insecurity and uncertainty in their romantic encounters.

Another crucial component that emerged was the concept of "perceived emotional similarity," whereby adolescents are drawn to others who reflect similar emotional intensities, coping styles, or values. This dynamic resonates with prior literature emphasizing empathy, mutual affective attunement, and emotional mirroring as foundations of adolescent connection (Rose et al., 2022; Rubenzadeh et al., 2016). Such relational resonance may act as a psychological shortcut for establishing compatibility, especially in emotionally underdeveloped youth seeking validation.

In exploring the relational process from "beginning to outcome," the study found a temporal progression that included initial attraction, emotional bonding, increased interaction, emerging conflicts, and either reconciliation or dissolution. These sequences are consistent with the cyclical models of adolescent romantic development and decision-making, which highlight the interplay of passion, conflict, and cognitive-emotional regulation (Reyna & Farley, 2006; Tienda et al., 2023). Participants' narratives also confirmed that conflict management serves as a critical juncture: successful negotiation of disagreements often led to deeper intimacy, while failed resolution resulted in emotional rupture or relational disengagement.

The consequences of romantic experiences were bifurcated into positive and negative dimensions. On the positive end, adolescents reported increases in emotional literacy, social competence, confidence, and future orientation. These developmental benefits echo findings by (Farnam et al., 2018) and (Das & Rao, 2022), who underscore that romantic experiences can serve as powerful learning contexts for self-awareness, empathy, and resilience. Particularly, the effort to maintain a relationship, interpret another's emotions, and navigate disagreements fosters critical interpersonal skills that extend beyond romance to broader social functioning (Ghafoori & Salehi, 2023; Rose et al., 2022).

However, the study also revealed serious negative consequences, particularly when relationships ended abruptly or involved emotional manipulation. Participants reported intense emotional dysregulation, academic decline,

diminished self-worth, and in severe cases, depression and suicidal ideation. These results reinforce concerns raised in previous studies about the psychological risks of unmoderated romantic involvement during adolescence (Behrbigi et al., 2022; Lourenço, 2016). When love is idealized and unreciprocated, adolescents—who often lack coping mechanisms—can experience disproportionate psychological distress, particularly in environments lacking adult support and emotional scaffolding.

A unique finding was the deep influence of Persian literary and poetic imagery in shaping adolescents' expectations and emotional expression. Many participants internalized romantic ideals derived from classical literature and modern media, which fostered a blend of idealism and emotional intensity. This confirms findings from cultural studies showing that adolescents in Iranian contexts are deeply influenced by poetic and moral-religious scripts about love, particularly when modern platforms such as social media amplify those narratives (Abbasi Shovazi & Delavar, 2019; Hosseini et al., 2022; Saeb Tabrizi, 2024). These cultural imprints intensified the emotional stakes of romantic experiences and shaped expectations around loyalty, emotional suffering, and personal sacrifice.

The role of schools and peer interactions was also salient in shaping and amplifying romantic dynamics. Participants described peer validation as both a motivator and regulator of their relational engagement. Schools served as sites for both connection and surveillance, where relationships were formed but also subjected to gossip and judgment. These findings are in line with (Rose et al., 2022) and (Ashrafiyan & Salehi, 2021), who demonstrate that institutional and peer environments significantly mediate adolescents' emotional experiences and their capacity to process complex affective events.

Moreover, the emergent grounded theory model resonates with the analytical framework offered by (Morse et al., 2016), which emphasizes the iterative process of coding, theoretical sampling, and conceptual refinement to construct meaningful sociopsychological models. The final model in this study incorporates both macro (family, culture, media) and micro (emotion regulation, self-concept, communication) levels, providing a holistic lens through which adolescent love may be understood in the Iranian context.

The study also affirmed the importance of critical interpretive work in meaning-making among adolescents. Narratives indicated that youth actively reflect on their romantic experiences, extracting lessons, formulating

personal philosophies, and shaping future relational strategies. This supports the perspective that adolescence is not only a phase of emotional turbulence but also of deep cognitive and existential growth (Hoseinpour Tonekaboni et al., 2021; Saidmoradi et al., 2020). Even failed relationships were sometimes seen as transformative events leading to personal growth and clarification of values.

Finally, the integration of multiple cultural, psychological, and educational dimensions in the study underscores the necessity of interdisciplinary engagement when analyzing adolescent romantic experiences. Love during adolescence is not merely an affective episode—it is a multifaceted developmental phenomenon that bridges emotion, cognition, socialization, and culture (Ghafoori & Salehi, 2017; Steen et al., 2024). The findings also validate prior arguments that grounded theory offers a robust methodology for uncovering layered psychosocial processes in culturally rich settings (Baniasadi & Salehi, 2019; Jones & Alony, 2011).

5. Limitations & Suggestions

One major limitation of the present study lies in its regional focus. The cultural, social, and digital contexts of adolescents in Qazvin may not fully represent those in other Iranian provinces or international contexts. As such, while the grounded theory model is robust within this locale, generalizability across broader populations requires caution. Additionally, self-reporting biases in interviews and letters may have skewed responses toward socially acceptable narratives or exaggerated emotional states. The gender distribution and socioeconomic diversity of the sample were also not evenly controlled, potentially influencing thematic salience.

Future studies could benefit from comparative cross-regional or cross-cultural analysis to explore how cultural narratives and family systems affect adolescent love. Longitudinal research would also help track the evolution of romantic experiences from early to late adolescence and into early adulthood. Moreover, integrating quantitative assessments of emotional regulation, identity development, or attachment styles alongside qualitative methods would provide a more comprehensive understanding of the developmental trajectories associated with adolescent romantic involvement.

Practitioners in education, counseling, and mental health should consider adolescent love not merely as a distraction or risk, but as a developmental milestone. School-based

programs focused on emotional literacy, conflict resolution, and healthy relationship building can serve as preventive interventions. Parents should be encouraged to adopt open communication patterns and model emotional regulation, while educators can serve as mediators and guides for youth navigating relational challenges. Finally, digital literacy programs addressing the nuances of online romance and idealization could mitigate risks associated with virtual interactions.

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.

Ethical 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 equally contributed to this article.

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