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How Is Love Recognised? A Theoretical Model of Love Confirmation Mechanisms in Romantic Relationships

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Abstract:

This theoretical study develops a comprehensive model of the Love Confirmation Mechanism (LCM) to explain how individuals in romantic relationships perceive, interpret, and confirm expressions of love. Integrating six foundational psychological theories—Sternberg's Triangular Theory, Aron's Self-Expansion Model, Attribution Theory, Emotional Validation Theory, Attachment Theory, and Expectation Confirmation Theory—the model delineates a four-module process: (1) love expression, (2) individual perceptual structure, (3) interpretive attribution, and (4) confirmation judgement and relational outcomes. Special attention is given to gender-based perceptual filters, revealing how men and women may differentially interpret verbal, behavioral, and non-verbal signals of love. This gendered lens underscores the role of expressive alignment in minimizing "confirmation gaps" and enhancing relationship satisfaction. The model has theoretical and practical significance for understanding emotional cognition in intimate dynamics, offering new directions for relationship counseling, communication education, and psychological research.

Keywords: *love confirmation, romantic relationships, gender differences, emotional perception, attribution, psychological model*

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Introduction

Problem Statement: The Subjectivity of 'Being Loved' in Intimate Relationships

In intimate relationships, an individual's perception of whether "my partner loves me" lies at the heart of relational maintenance. While love is universally valued and regarded as a cornerstone of long-term commitment and partnership, its inherently subjective nature means that expressions of love do not always guarantee accurate recognition or confirmation by the recipient. This potential discrepancy between the expression and perception of love can result in significant relational distress and a decline in overall relationship satisfaction. Consequently, the core issue is not merely how love is expressed, but how it is cognitively and emotionally processed by the recipient so that it is recognised as love.

This gap between expression and recognition may be conceptualised as a *confirmation gap*—the psychological space between the partner's demonstration of love and the subjective acknowledgment of its presence by the other. This gap represents a critical and often overlooked source of relational challenge, as it directly influences trust, communication, and overall satisfaction within the relationship. The research focus thus shifts from the traditional question of "What is love?" to the more nuanced inquiry: "How is love perceived, felt, and known by the recipient?"

Theoretical and Practical Significance: Addressing Gaps in Love Psychology and Guiding Relationship Practice

The theoretical model proposed herein aims to enrich the existing body of research in the psychology of love by focusing on the subjective perception and interpretation of love expressions. While prevailing theories often describe the components or dynamics of love—such as Sternberg's triangular theory, Aron's model, or attachment theory—a comprehensive framework detailing the mechanisms of *confirmation* remains relatively underdeveloped.

The construction of such a model holds both theoretical and practical relevance. Theoretically, it offers deeper insight into subfields such as emotional perception, trust formation, and self-worth validation in close relationships. By synthesising multiple theoretical perspectives, this model seeks to provide a more robust explanatory framework that reveals how individuals perceive and interpret expressions of love. Although existing theories have laid an essential foundation, they predominantly address the nature or expression of love, or focus on individual tendencies in loving. They often do not explicitly articulate the precise process by which external expressions are transformed into internal confirmation. This study therefore aims to bridge this gap by proposing a perceptual filtering framework that maps the transformation from external cues to internal affirmation.

Practically, understanding this confirmation mechanism offers valuable guidance for relationship counselling, romantic education, and attachment-based interventions. For

instance, it may help individuals and couples identify barriers in the confirmation process, improve communication patterns, and enhance relational security and well-being. By clarifying how love is decoded and internalised, practitioners can develop more effective interventions to foster healthier and more satisfying intimate relationships.

Research Objective: Developing a Theoretical Model of the 'Love Confirmation Mechanism' in Romantic Relationships

The principal objective of this study is to develop a theoretical model that systematically explores how individuals perceive, interpret, and ultimately confirm or disconfirm the existence of love within romantic relationships. This involves the integration of diverse psychological theories to elucidate the multilayered process by which expressions of love are subjectively recognised.

Literature Review: Foundational Theories of Love Perception

This section delves into six core psychological theories, outlining their foundational principles and articulating their direct relevance to the proposed model of love confirmation mechanisms.

Sternberg's Triangular Theory of Love: Dimensions of Expression

Robert Sternberg's Triangular Theory of Love posits that love comprises three fundamental components: **intimacy**, **passion**, and **commitment**.

- **Intimacy** refers to the feelings of closeness, connection, and belonging experienced in romantic relationships, arising from emotional investment. It is essential across all forms of love, romantic or otherwise, and entails emotional synchrony and comfort. In adolescence, intimacy often develops through self-disclosure, although identity security is critical for mature intimacy.
- **Passion** involves the drives that lead to physical attraction and romantic desire. Often associated with the concept of "love at first sight", it is characterised by intense emotions and a desire for immediate gratification. In younger individuals, passion is closely linked to the emotional-limbic system.
- **Commitment** involves both the short-term decision to love someone and the long-term intention to maintain that love. It is grounded in cognitive reasoning and dedication, and is essential for the longevity of love.

Different combinations of these components produce various forms of love, from *liking* (intimacy alone) to *consummate love* (all three elements combined). Sternberg famously stated, *"Even the greatest love fades without expression"*, underscoring the importance of observable manifestations of love. These components constitute the **dimensions of love expression** in the proposed model, serving as raw data for the recipient's perceptual processes.

As expressions of love evolve over time—such as passion waning while commitment strengthens—perceptions and confirmations of love must also adapt accordingly. For instance, a partner in a long-term relationship who continues to seek expressions of passion may misinterpret a shift towards *companionate love* (intimacy + commitment) as a decline in affection rather than a natural developmental trajectory. This presents a significant challenge for ongoing love confirmation, requiring flexibility in interpretation and communication.

Adolescents, for example, may perceive "true love" primarily through infatuation, as their capacity for deep intimacy and long-term commitment has not yet matured. Consequently, their mechanisms for confirming love may rely disproportionately on physiological arousal, potentially leading to unstable relationships and misinterpretations of more grounded, enduring forms of love.

Table 1: Sternberg's Triangular Theory of Love – Components and Types

Type of Love	Intimacy	Passion	Commitment	Description
Liking/Friendship	✓			Emotional closeness without passion or long-term commitment
Infatuated Love		✓		"Love at first sight"; often fleeting
Empty Love			✓	Lacks intimacy and passion, but commitment remains
Romantic Love	✓	✓		Combines emotional connection and arousal
Companionate Love	✓		✓	Deep affection and commitment without intense passion
Fatuous Love		✓	✓	Commitment driven by passion, without emotional depth

Consummate Love	✓	✓	✓	Complete form of love; ideal but difficult to sustain

Aron's Self-Expansion Model: Love as a Catalyst for Growth

Arthur Aron and Elaine Aron's **Self-Expansion Model** posits that individuals possess a fundamental motivation to expand the self through the acquisition of new resources, perspectives, and identities. Intimate relationships serve as primary vehicles for this self-expansion, wherein partners integrate aspects of one another into their own self-concept, forming what is referred to as an "enlarged self".

Love, under this model, is perceived as a resource for personal growth and fulfilment. Relationships that facilitate self-expansion are experienced as more satisfying and fulfilling, increasing relational investment and emotional well-being. The rapid self-expansion that occurs in new relationships accounts for the so-called "honeymoon phase". Over time, however, as familiarity sets in, the rate of self-expansion naturally slows.

If self-expansion is key to satisfaction, yet its pace inevitably declines, then relational satisfaction—and, by extension, the confirmation of love—may also diminish. The early peak experiences of growth cannot be indefinitely sustained. This suggests that feeling *loved* is closely tied to perceived novelty and personal development within the relationship. When novelty fades, partners may interpret the decline as a reduction in affection, even if intimacy and commitment remain intact.

This model necessitates a focus on how individuals regulate the natural deceleration of self-expansion—whether through shared new experiences or reintegrating personal growth into the relationship—to sustain the confirmation of love.

Attribution Theory: Explaining the "Why" Behind Expressions of Love

Attribution Theory explores how individuals interpret the causes of behaviour and events. In romantic contexts, this includes attributing a partner's actions to **internal** traits (e.g., personality), **external** factors (e.g., situational context), or more critically, **interpersonal** motivations (e.g., expressions of love or lack thereof).

Positive attributions—such as viewing forgetfulness as situational—foster empathy and relational harmony, while negative attributions—interpreting it as personal carelessness—can sow discord. Interpersonal attributions are particularly powerful, with stronger predictive value for relationship satisfaction than internal/external ones. Interpreting positive behaviours as motivated by love enhances relational contentment, whereas attributing negative behaviours to a lack of affection is particularly damaging.

The **Fundamental Attribution Error (FAE)** refers to the tendency to overemphasise personality traits while underestimating situational factors in explaining others' behaviours. This bias can significantly distort partner perceptions and interactions. For instance, if a partner is late, the FAE may prompt the interpretation “they don’t care” (internal), rather than “they were caught in traffic” (external).

Attributions thus serve as a crucial **cognitive lens** through which expressions are filtered. If distorted by negative attribution styles or FAE, even sincere expressions of love may be misunderstood or dismissed. Ultimately, confirmation of love hinges not just on the behaviour itself but on perceived *intent*. Recognising love depends on attributing actions to a partner’s affection and care, rather than to general personality traits or external forces.

Emotional Validation Theory: Resonance Through Understanding

Emotional validation involves acknowledging, understanding, and accepting another person’s emotional experience without necessarily agreeing with their viewpoint or offering solutions. It stands in contrast to emotional invalidation—ignoring, dismissing, or undermining feelings.

Those who feel emotionally validated experience being seen, heard, and valued. This strengthens self-identity, supports emotional regulation, enhances trust, and deepens intimacy. In romantic relationships, validating communication is linked to greater satisfaction and emotional resilience.

The core of feeling *loved* often involves feeling deeply understood and accepted. Validation thus contributes directly to love confirmation—not just as an act of love, but as a felt resonance with a partner’s inner world. Even when a partner's mode of expressing love does not align with one’s preferred "love language" (as per Chapman's theory), validation alone can serve as a powerful and encompassing signal of love. This is because it communicates genuine care and respect for the partner’s emotional experience—a central component of being loved.

Moreover, effective validation depends on **self-differentiation**—the capacity to engage empathetically without being overwhelmed or attempting to "fix" the other. Validation as a confirming mechanism thus hinges on emotional presence and attunement.

Attachment Theory: The Internal Blueprint for Love Perception

Derived from early bonds between infants and caregivers, **Attachment Theory** explains how these patterns continue into adulthood, shaping emotional connection, relational dynamics, and perceptions of love. Four primary adult attachment styles are:

- **Secure Attachment**: Arising from consistently responsive caregiving. Secure individuals are trusting, empathetic, and comfortable with intimacy, showing low levels of avoidance and anxiety. They experience greater relationship satisfaction, communicate openly, and possess a positive view of love and self-worth.
- **Anxious/Preoccupied Attachment**: Resulting from inconsistent caregiving. Individuals fear abandonment, seek constant reassurance, and may exhibit clinginess, jealousy, or controlling behaviour. They often struggle to confirm love, despite its presence.
- **Avoidant/Dismissive Attachment**: Emerging from emotionally distant caregiving. These individuals value independence, avoid intimacy, and often suppress emotions. They may dismiss or misinterpret expressions of love, even when genuine.
- **Disorganised/Fearful-Avoidant Attachment**: Arising from hostile or abusive caregiving. Individuals exhibit ambivalence, mistrust, and "push-pull" dynamics in relationships. They struggle to interpret love signals and doubt relational security.

Attachment style significantly influences how love signals are interpreted, the need for confirmation, and responses to perceived affection or neglect. These styles act as internal **perceptual filters**: a secure person may readily affirm love through consistent expressions; an anxious person may seek endless reassurance yet remain uncertain; an avoidant individual might reject or misconstrue signs of affection. This means that identical expressions of love may be confirmed by one person but rejected—or even perceived as threatening—by another.

Any model of love confirmation must account for the moderating role of attachment style across the perceptual and emotional processing continuum.

Table 2: Adult Attachment Styles and Their Impact on Relationship Dynamics and Love Perception

Attachment Style	Caregiver Response	Adult Characteristics	Impact on Love Perception
Secure	Consistent, responsive	Trusting, empathetic, comfortable with closeness	Easily confirms love; open communication
Anxious/Preoccupied	Inconsistent	Fearful of abandonment, needy, emotionally intense	Struggles to confirm love; constant reassurance-seeking
Avoidant/Dismissive	Emotionally	Independent, intimacy-averse, emotionally	Misinterprets or ignores expressions of

	distant	detached	love
Disorganised/Fearful-Avoidant	Hostile, abusive	Ambivalent, mistrusting, conflicted relational behaviour	Conflicted about love; uncertainty about commitment

Expectation Confirmation Theory: The Role of Preconceptions in Love Judgement

Expectation Confirmation Theory posits that pre-existing expectations significantly shape individuals' perceptions and evaluations of relational experiences.

Perceptual confirmation occurs when expectations bias subsequent assessments to align with those expectations—people tend to "see what they expect to see".

If Ash expects Jesse to behave in loving and supportive ways, Ash is more likely to perceive Jesse as meeting those needs, regardless of objective behaviour. While this can enhance satisfaction through "rose-tinted" perceptions, it is a double-edged sword: negative expectations may lead individuals to overlook or misinterpret genuine expressions of love. Expectation violations—particularly negative ones—are associated with reduced relationship satisfaction.

This creates a critical dynamic in love confirmation. On the one hand, positive expectations can buffer against temporary inconsistencies in loving behaviour. On the other hand, sustained negative expectations can generate self-fulfilling prophecies where love signals are repeatedly ignored or misread. This highlights the powerful influence of **cognitive bias** in the love confirmation process, underscoring the importance of expectation management and the cultivation of positive perceptual tendencies.

Theoretical Integration: Towards a Unified Understanding of Love Confirmation

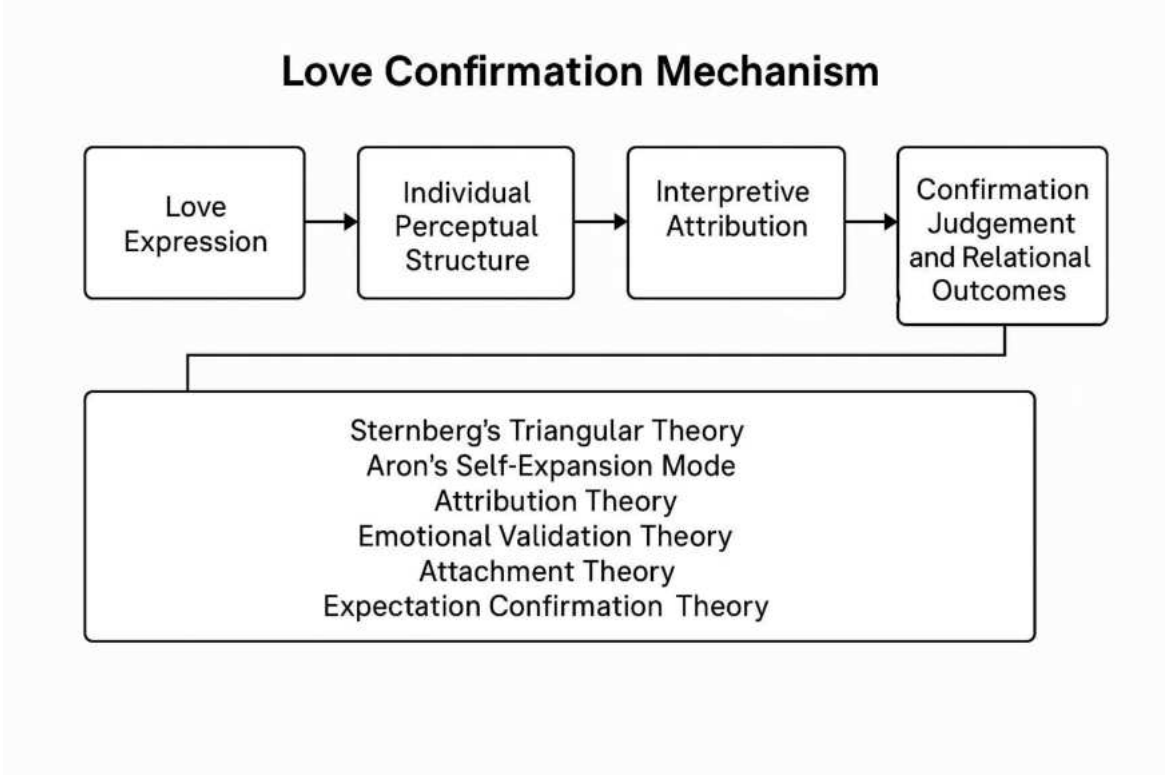
Although each theory stands alone, they collectively offer complementary insights into the mechanisms of love confirmation. Sternberg's theory provides the **dimensions of expression**; Aron's model highlights the **motivational and growth-oriented** nature of love perception; Attribution Theory explains the **cognitive processing** of love behaviours; Emotional Validation Theory addresses the **felt resonance** of love; Attachment Theory reveals the **individual filtering tendencies** based on relational history; and Expectation Confirmation Theory outlines how **preconceptions shape interpretation**.

Together, they form a robust theoretical foundation for understanding the complex, multilayered nature of love confirmation—moving beyond a simplistic "expression–reception" paradigm towards a nuanced "expression–perception–interpretation–confirmation" framework.

Theoretical Model Construction: The Love Confirmation Mechanism

The proposed **Love Confirmation Mechanism (LCM)** presents a systematic framework for understanding how individuals in romantic relationships perceive and interpret their partner's behaviours and signals as expressions of love, subsequently forming a judgement of love confirmation and experiencing relational outcomes. This model comprises four interrelated modules: **love expression**, **individual perceptual structure**, **interpretive attribution**, and **confirmation judgement with relational outcomes**.

Figure 1. Theoretical Structure of the Love Confirmation Mechanism (LCM).



This diagram visualises the four-module framework—Love Expression, Individual Perceptual Structure, Interpretive Attribution, and Confirmation Judgement with Relational Outcomes—supported by six foundational psychological theories.

Conceptual Framework: Components and Interrelations

The model assumes a sequential yet iterative process. Love is first expressed by one partner through various modes. This expression is then filtered through the recipient's **individual perceptual structure**, which includes their cognitive schemas, emotional needs, and attachment style. The filtered perception gives rise to **interpretive attributions**, in which the recipient attempts to infer the underlying causes and motivations of the partner's behaviour. These attributions then lead to a **confirmation judgement**, influencing relational security and behavioural responses. This creates a feedback loop that may reinforce or alter future expressions and perceptions of love.

Module 1: Love Expression

This module refers to the observable behaviours and cues through which love is expressed by the partner. These signals constitute the raw data processed by the recipient.

Behavioural Layer

This includes concrete actions indicating care, acceptance, and support. Examples include **acts of service** (e.g., helping with tasks, offering practical or protective support), **shared activities**, and **engagement in mutual interests**.

Gender Differences: Research indicates that men often express love through action and tangible support rather than verbal affirmation. If partners have differing primary "love languages", action-based expressions may not be recognised as love by verbally-oriented recipients, and vice versa. This misalignment significantly increases the risk of love being misunderstood or unconfirmed, even when the underlying sentiment is genuine. This highlights that effective love confirmation requires not only expression, but **expression in a manner congruent with the recipient's perceptual frame**. Understanding a partner's specific preferences and expressive norms is crucial to successful confirmation.

Linguistic Layer

This encompasses verbal affirmations, expressions of appreciation, and declarations of commitment, such as saying *"I love you"* or using affectionate language.

Gender Differences: Women are generally more inclined to express love through verbal communication and emotional openness. Interestingly, studies show that men are more likely to initiate love declarations and experience greater happiness when receiving them—contrary to popular belief. This suggests that the phrase *"I love you"* is not a universal confirmation signal; its interpretation depends heavily on **context**, including timing, gender norms, and relationship stage. An untimely or unsupported declaration may elicit doubt or even rejection—especially if it clashes with behavioural expressions or the recipient's expectations.

Non-verbal Signals

These include **physical touch** (e.g., hugs, kisses, affectionate gestures), **body language** (e.g., leaning in, open posture), **eye contact**, and **subtle cues** such as smiling, laughter, or playful teasing.

Gender Differences: Women are more likely to use physical affection to express intimacy, whereas men may use shared physical activities. Variations in flirting style also influence the use and interpretation of non-verbal cues. While non-verbal communication is powerful, it is **highly subjective** and **prone to misinterpretation**. A well-meaning gesture may be overlooked or misread due to differences in "decoding styles" or relationship ambiguity. The model recognises that interpretation of non-verbal cues is **deeply shaped by individual and cultural decoding frameworks**, making this layer particularly susceptible to confirmation gaps.

Module 2: Individual Perceptual Structure

This module captures the internal filters through which individuals process and interpret expressions of love.

Cognitive Frameworks

These include personal **beliefs, schemas, and relational scripts**. Common frameworks include beliefs such as *"love conquers all"*, *"soulmates exist"*, *"idealised romance"*, or *"love at first sight"*. These cognitive constructs influence how individuals assess relationship satisfaction.

Love Styles: Lee's love typology (Eros, Ludus, Storge, Mania, Pragma, Agape) also reflects diverse cognitive orientations towards love. If a person's framework includes an idealised script (e.g., fate-based love), they may selectively interpret ambiguous signals to confirm that ideal—potentially ignoring red flags. Conversely, a cynical or pragmatic framework may dismiss genuine expressions that do not fit expectations. Thus, love confirmation is not purely objective but **heavily shaped by subjective cognitive templates**.

Emotional Needs

Integrating Maslow's hierarchy of needs, especially **love and belonging**, this layer includes the desire for emotional closeness, group inclusion, and relational safety. Love and being loved are fundamental human needs. Unmet needs may result in loneliness, anxiety, or depression.

Lower-level needs such as **safety** (health, security, emotional stability) are foundational. If these needs are unmet, individuals may struggle to perceive or accept love expressions. They may over-focus on deficits or interpret ambiguous cues through a lens of fear and mistrust. Therefore, **effective love confirmation depends on a baseline of emotional security**, suggesting a tiered structure in perceptual capacity.

Attachment Styles

As explored in Section 2, attachment styles (secure, anxious, avoidant, disorganised) significantly shape **relational expectations, emotional needs**, and **interpretive biases**. They influence how love is both **experienced and confirmed**, acting as ingrained perceptual filters.

Gender-Based Perceptual Filters

In addition to cognitive frameworks, emotional needs, and attachment styles, gendered socialisation plays a critical role in shaping how individuals perceive and decode expressions of love. Studies suggest that men and women are often socialised to prioritise different emotional cues—men are more likely to attend to behavioral acts (e.g., protection, instrumental help), while women may place more value on verbal affirmation or emotional attunement. These gendered perceptual tendencies influence not only how love is expressed, but how it is confirmed.

Consequently, love confirmation is mediated by implicit gender norms and expressive expectations, resulting in potential mismatches when partners employ divergent expressive styles. This sub-module emphasises the need to consider gender-specific interpretive filters as part of the individual's perceptual structure.

Module 3: Interpretive Attribution

This module details the cognitive processes through which individuals assign **meaning and motivation** to their partner's behaviours—moving beyond surface observation.

Internal vs. External Attribution

Is the behaviour a reflection of the partner's internal traits (e.g., "they are careless") or external circumstances (e.g., "they were busy")? Negative internal attributions erode trust, while external attributions promote empathy.

Stability vs. Situational Attribution

Is the cause enduring and consistent, or transient and context-specific? Attributing positive change to stable, partner-driven support can enhance relationship security.

Motivational Inference

This central interpersonal attribution involves discerning the underlying **intention** behind the behaviour: Is it driven by **genuine love and care**, or by **self-interest, obligation, or manipulation**?

When love signals are **ambiguous or strategically vague**, attribution becomes highly vulnerable to bias—especially in insecurely attached individuals. Perceiving behaviours as

lacking commitment or as manipulative undermines love confirmation. This "**motivational ambiguity**" obstructs the confirmation process, fostering distrust and instability.

Communication is the key antidote to attributional ambiguity.

Module 4: Confirmation Judgement and Relational Outcomes

This final module represents the culmination of perception and attribution processes, leading to a **subjective judgement of love confirmation** and its relational consequences.

Love Confirmation

This refers to whether the recipient **perceives and interprets** the partner's expression as genuine love. It is not a binary (yes/no) outcome but exists along a **continuum of certainty and intensity**.

Relational Security: Increase or Decline

The degree of love confirmation directly affects relational trust and emotional security. Strong confirmation fosters **confidence, belonging, and trust**; a lack thereof leads to **insecurity, withdrawal, or loneliness**. Relational security forms the psychological basis for adult attachment.

Behavioural Responses

Perceived (or unperceived) love leads to distinct relational behaviours:

- **Positive Confirmation**: Promotes intimacy, reciprocal loving behaviour, higher satisfaction, and relationship stability. It activates the **neurobiological reward system** (dopamine, oxytocin).
- **Negative or Ambiguous Confirmation**: Can result in avoidance, anxiety, jealousy, possessiveness, or even relationship breakdown. It may also trigger **emotional distress** or psychological strain.

This suggests that love confirmation is **not merely a cognitive process**, but one with **tangible neurobiological correlates**. The felt experience of being loved, when confirmed, triggers the release of pleasurable neurochemicals, reinforcing positive perception and enhancing relational stability. Conversely, a lack of confirmation or perceived threat can trigger **stress hormones** and negative emotional states. This offers compelling biological support for the psychological mechanisms embedded in the model.

Table 3: Theoretical Model of the Love Confirmation Mechanism

Module	Sub-elements	Description
Love Expression	Behavioural Layer	Observable acts of care and service; shared activities
	Linguistic Layer	Verbal affirmations, praise, commitment; "I love you"
	Non-verbal Signals	Physical touch, eye contact, body language, playful gestures
Individual Perceptual Structure	Cognitive Frameworks	Love beliefs, romantic scripts, love styles (e.g., Eros, Pragma)
	Emotional Needs	Security, belongingness, Maslow's hierarchy of needs
	Attachment Styles	Secure/insecure styles that shape perception and interpretation
Interpretive Attribution	Internal vs. External	Is behaviour due to personality or situation?
	Stable vs. Situational	Is the cause enduring or circumstantial?
	Motivational Inference	Is behaviour driven by genuine affection or ulterior motives?
Confirmation Judgement & Outcomes	Love Confirmation	Subjective judgement of whether love has been expressed and confirmed
	Relational Security	Degree of emotional trust and safety derived from confirmation
	Behavioural Responses	Resulting behaviours: intimacy, anxiety, avoidance, satisfaction or conflict

Research Propositions and Theoretical Hypotheses

The following propositions are empirically testable statements derived from the proposed theoretical model. They aim to guide future research in validating and refining the love confirmation mechanism.

Proposition 1: The Greater the Alignment Between the Form of Love Expression and the Individual's Emotional Needs, the More Likely It Is to Be Confirmed as Love.

This proposition posits that the likelihood of love being confirmed increases when the partner's mode of expression (Module 1: behavioural, verbal, non-verbal) closely aligns with the recipient's **specific emotional needs** (Module 2), such as **security or belonging** (per Maslow's hierarchy), and their preferred **"love language"**.

For instance, an individual whose dominant emotional need is for **verbal affirmation** is more likely to perceive statements such as "I love you" as confirming love than acts of service—unless the latter are explicitly explained as expressions of love.

Assuming that individuals have preferred ways of receiving love and foundational emotional needs, expressions that align with these internal structures are more readily recognised as love. This proposition moves beyond the act of **expressing** love to emphasise the importance of **tailoring** such expressions to the **recipient's perceptual structure**. A mismatch, even if rooted in sincere intention, may result in love going unconfirmed. This has direct implications for relational education, highlighting the need to understand a partner's preferred **style of receiving love**.

Proposition 2: Attachment Style Moderates the Attribution of Love Expressions.

This proposition argues that an individual's **attachment style** (Module 2) significantly influences how they attribute meaning and motivation to their partner's behaviours (Module 3).

For example, an **anxiously attached** individual—who fears abandonment—may interpret ambiguous or mildly negative behaviours through **negative internal attributions** (e.g., *"They don't care about me"*), even when situational factors are involved. Conversely, a **securely attached** individual may be more inclined to adopt benign or external attributions, fostering empathy and trust.

If attachment styles function as internal working models of relationships, they predispose individuals to **bias** their interpretation of even clear expressions of love. Anxious individuals may misinterpret a lack of overt signals as a lack of affection, while avoidant individuals may downplay or reframe expressions of intimacy to maintain emotional distance.

Thus, attachment style serves as a **filter of interpretation**. The same behaviour may be attributed to genuine love by a secure person, but to manipulation or detachment by an insecure one. This highlights the powerful, often unconscious, influence of early relational experiences on the capacity to perceive and confirm love in adulthood.

Proposition 3: The Degree of Love Confirmation Predicts Relationship Satisfaction and Stability.

A higher degree of perceived **love confirmation** (Module 4) is positively associated with **greater relationship satisfaction**, **enhanced relational security**, and **increased relationship stability**.

Empirical studies consistently show that perceived intimacy, passion, and commitment—the core components of love—are positively correlated with relationship satisfaction and longevity. Marital satisfaction is strongly linked to perceived love and can buffer declines in well-being. It is also a significant predictor of **overall life satisfaction and psychological health**.

If the perception of love is a **subjective** experience, it is the **felt confirmation** of love—not merely its expression—that directly drives satisfaction and stability. Love that is expressed but not confirmed may fail to enhance well-being. This proposition elevates **love confirmation** from a secondary outcome to a **core mediating variable** in relational science. It implies that interventions aimed at improving satisfaction must not only teach partners how to express love, but must also address how such expressions are perceived, interpreted, and confirmed—highlighting the importance of **perceptual and communicative alignment**.

Additional Propositions

Proposition 4: Ambiguity in Love Signals Reduces Love Confirmation and Undermines Relationship Stability.

High levels of **ambiguity** in expressions of love (Module 1) or in the overall relational context are likely to reduce love confirmation, increase uncertainty, and ultimately diminish relational stability.

Ambiguity—especially when it is **strategically motivated**—impairs clear motivational inference (Module 3) and can be particularly damaging to **anxiously attached** individuals, who are more prone to interpret unclear signals as rejection or disinterest.

Proposition 5: Love Expression and Confirmation Mechanisms Vary Across Cultures.

Cultural norms, particularly the distinction between **individualist and collectivist cultures**, influence preferred forms of love expression (Module 1), as well as the **cognitive schemas** and **emotional needs** that underpin love confirmation (Module 2).

For example, **collectivist cultures** may prioritise **pragmatic** or **companionate** love (Pragma, Storge), often expressed more subtly, whereas **individualist cultures** may favour overt expressions of **romantic love** (Eros). This implies that **confirmation mechanisms**

must be culturally sensitive and contextually adapted, as the same signal may be interpreted differently depending on cultural background.

Proposition 6: Gender Moderates the Effectiveness of Specific Love Expression Forms in Producing Love Confirmation.

This proposition suggests that men and women may systematically differ in how they decode behavioral, verbal, or non-verbal expressions of love, leading to variable confirmation effects across gender lines. For instance, behavioral acts may more readily confirm love for male recipients, whereas verbal affirmations may be more salient for female recipients. Misalignments across gendered expression and perception tendencies may lead to underconfirmation, even when love is genuinely present.

Research Methodology and Pathways: Towards Model Validation

This section outlines the methodological approach for developing and supporting the proposed theoretical model, with a particular emphasis on the iterative nature of theory construction in psychological research.

Theoretical Induction and Conceptual Modelling: A Bottom-Up Approach to Theory Construction

The current research framework adopts a theoretical induction approach—moving from specific observations (derived from existing theories and empirical findings) towards broader generalisations and the development of a novel theoretical model. This bottom-up methodology is particularly suited to cases where existing theories require clarification and where new theoretical perspectives are needed to account for complex phenomena such as love confirmation.

This underscores that the proposed model is not a static or final product, but rather a dynamic conceptual framework that will continue to evolve. The initial phase of theoretical induction provides a preliminary structure, which must be subsequently tested and refined through empirical investigation. This iterative process, in which the model is gradually validated (or revised/rejected) through accumulated empirical evidence, is critical to ensuring its theoretical robustness and scientific credibility.

Case Studies and Thought Experiments: Auxiliary Support for Theory Development

Although primarily theoretical, the model can be substantiated and refined through qualitative case data and thought experiments exploring hypothetical scenarios.

- Case Studies: In-depth qualitative analyses of individuals or couples offer rich insights into the subjective processes of love confirmation. For instance, exploring on-and-off relationships or narratives of "feeling loved" can illuminate how real-world expressions are interpreted and attributed. Qualitative studies of emotional dynamics and expressions of love provide valuable empirical grounding for the love expression module.

- Thought Experiments: Hypothetical scenarios can be employed to explore the logical implications of the model, test its conceptual boundaries, and generate novel hypotheses. For example, "love experiments" such as Aron's 36 Questions demonstrate how specific forms of interaction may rapidly increase perceived closeness and love. Hypothetical partner dialogues can yield insights into cognitive frameworks and attributional tendencies.

While quantitative methods are essential for generalisability, qualitative case analysis offers the depth needed to capture the subtle, subjective processes underpinning love confirmation. Thought experiments, though not empirical, are powerful tools for conceptual exploration, hypothesis generation, and clarifying complex dynamics that may be difficult to access through traditional empirical means. This highlights the importance of mixed-method approaches in comprehensive model validation.

Data Integration: Combining Qualitative and Quantitative Insights to Refine the Model

Future empirical research is essential for testing and refining the proposed framework. This should involve an integration of qualitative and quantitative methodologies:

- Qualitative Research: In-depth interviews and phenomenological analyses can explore lived experiences of love confirmation, decode perceived "love signals" and "red flags", and offer culturally sensitive insights into expression and perception across relational and cultural contexts.

- Quantitative Research: Survey-based studies will operationalize key constructs within the model. *Love confirmation* may be measured through Likert-scale items such as "I felt truly loved when my partner performed this act," incorporating adapted items from the Triangular Love Scale and newly developed love confirmation inventories. Variables such as *attachment style* (using the ECR scale), *attributional patterns* (using ASQ), and *emotional validation sensitivity* will also be assessed. Confirmatory factor analysis and structural equation modeling (SEM) may be employed to examine the direct and mediated pathways between love expression, perception, and confirmation.

- Sampling Design: To mitigate the overreliance on student samples in existing love research, future studies should employ stratified sampling strategies to ensure demographic diversity across age, gender, sexual orientation, relationship status, and cultural background. This will improve both the generalisability and ecological validity of the model.

Through such a mixed-method and inclusive approach, the Love Confirmation Mechanism can be empirically supported, revised, and culturally adapted—ensuring that it reflects both universal and context-dependent features of romantic interaction.

Theoretical Contributions and Future Directions

Advancing the Psychology of Love: A Nuanced Understanding of Subjective Love Perception

This model transcends simply defining love or identifying its components by offering a **systematic explanation** of the complex perceptual and cognitive processes involved in love confirmation. By integrating multiple psychological theories, it provides a more comprehensive understanding of how individuals **subjectively experience being loved**, highlighting the dynamic interaction between **expressive behaviour**, **individual disposition**, and **interpretative bias**.

Practical Applications: Implications for Relationship Counselling, Education, and Interventions

The model offers a **diagnostic framework** for understanding relational distress arising from confirmation gaps. It can inform **clinical interventions** by helping partners identify misalignments between expression and perception, correct maladaptive attribution styles, and promote **emotional validation**. In educational contexts, it can inform the design of **healthy relationship curricula**, emphasising communication skills, emotional literacy, and awareness of individual differences in love perception.

Future Research Directions

Cross-Cultural Comparisons

Future studies should empirically test the model in **diverse cultural contexts** to investigate how **cultural norms** influence preferred forms of love expression, cognitive frameworks, and confirmation mechanisms. This would elucidate both **universal and culturally specific dimensions** of love confirmation.

Longitudinal Studies

Long-term studies tracking romantic partnerships can examine how expressions of love evolve over time, how perceptual structures adapt, and how confirmation processes influence **relationship satisfaction and stability**. These studies could also investigate the dynamic interplay between **self-expansion** and **perceived love** across the relationship life cycle.

Neuroscientific Correlates

Further research may explore the **neurobiological underpinnings** of each module, using functional MRI (fMRI) and other neuroimaging technologies to identify the **brain regions and neurochemical processes** associated with love expression, perception, attribution, and confirmation. Such research could provide **biological validation** for the model's psychological constructs.

Intervention Studies

Experimental research testing the efficacy of **interventions** designed to improve love confirmation—such as **communication training, attribution retraining**, or **emotional validation techniques**—could offer practical evidence for the model's real-world utility.

Limitations

While the proposed Love Confirmation Mechanism offers a robust and integrative framework, several limitations must be acknowledged. First, the model remains theoretical and conceptual in nature. Its assumptions and pathways have not yet been empirically tested, underscoring the need for systematic validation through qualitative and quantitative research.

Second, this framework primarily addresses heterosexual romantic relationships and draws on binary gender norms when discussing perceptual differences. As such, its generalisability to LGBTQ+ relationships or non-binary gender identities may be limited, given differing relational scripts and emotional cultures.

Third, although culturally adaptable in theory, the model has not yet accounted for contextual factors such as socioeconomic background, religious values, or digital communication environments, all of which may shape love expressions and confirmation processes in contemporary relationships.

These limitations suggest the necessity of future studies that expand the model's scope, enhance its inclusivity, and test its applicability across diverse relational, cultural, and communicative contexts.

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