Research Article

The Triphasic Model of Love: A Developmental Architecture of Attraction, Immersion, and Union

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Love is one of the most extensively studied yet theoretically fragmented constructs in the behavioral sciences. Existing frameworks have clarified its components, motivational systems, attachment dynamics, and experiential qualities; however, the temporal architecture through which love reorganizes attention, valuation, and identity across development remains comparatively underarticulated. This manuscript proposes the Triphasic Model of Love (TML), conceptualizing love as a sequential yet continuous progression through three structurally distinct phases: Attraction, Immersion, and Union. Attraction represents evaluative motivational activation under rational regulatory dominance. Immersion marks a qualitative reorganization characterized by attentional narrowing, reduced evaluative inhibition, valuation amplification, and accelerated identity integration. Union consolidates these processes into stabilized reciprocal attachment embedded within relational structure.

Unlike component-based or categorical models, TML delineates a developmental architecture in which passion, commitment, and attachment emerge as phase-dependent structural transformations rather than static dimensions. The model is situated in relation to major theoretical frameworks, including Sternberg's triangular theory, attachment theory, Fisher's neurobiological model, self-expansion theory, the Investment Model, Hatfield's passionate–companionate distinction, Baumeister and Bratslavsky's temporal model of passion, and the experiential construct of Flow.

To address methodological challenges, the manuscript proposes operational markers distinguishing phases based on regulatory dominance, attentional exclusivity, and identity integration, and articulates falsifiable predictions regarding nonlinear attentional trajectories, phase-sensitive modulation of cognitive regulation, accelerated identity restructuring during immersion, and

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stabilization dynamics in union. By integrating theoretical synthesis with operational criteria and empirical implications, the Triphasic Model provides a temporally grounded framework for understanding how love develops, transforms the self, and stabilizes into attachment.

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1. Introduction

Love remains one of the most extensively studied yet theoretically fragmented constructs in the behavioral sciences. Across psychology, neuroscience, sociology, and evolutionary biology, love has been conceptualized as an emotion, a motivational system, an attachment process, and a relational bond. Its manifestations range from romantic attraction and pair bonding to parental investment, altruistic devotion, and collective affiliation. From an evolutionary perspective, love-related behaviors facilitate mate selection, reproductive success, parental care, and social cohesion, thereby enhancing survival and fitness[1].

Foundational theories have substantially advanced understanding of love's structure and function. Sternberg's triangular theory conceptualizes love as varying combinations of intimacy, passion, and commitment[2]. Attachment theory situates adult romantic bonding within internal working models shaped by early caregiver relationships[3][4]. Hatfield distinguished passionate from companionate love to capture differences in emotional intensity and relational stability[5]. Fisher's neurobiological model differentiates lust, romantic attraction, and attachment as partially separable motivational systems supported by distinct neural substrates[1]. Self-expansion theory emphasizes identity growth through inclusion of the other in the self[6], while the Investment Model explains commitment in terms of satisfaction, alternatives, and accumulated relational investments[7]. Empirical studies further demonstrate activation of dopaminergic reward circuitry during early romantic involvement[8].

Collectively, these frameworks illuminate components, motivational systems, experiential qualities, and maintenance dynamics of love. However, most are compositional, categorical, or regulatory in orientation. They describe what love consists of, how it is maintained, or how it differs across relational styles. Fewer accounts explicitly articulate the sequential psychological architecture through which love unfolds and reconfigures the agent's phenomenological field across time. In particular, the progressive shifts in attention allocation, valuation intensity, cognitive regulation, risk tolerance, and identity

organization that accompany relational development remain insufficiently systematized within a unified developmental framework.

The present manuscript proposes the Triphasic Model of Love (TML), which conceptualizes love as a dynamic developmental progression through three continuous yet structurally distinct phases: Attraction, Immersion, and Union. Rather than treating passion, attachment, and commitment as parallel components, the model frames them as emergent properties of sequential transformations in motivational focus, experiential intensity, and identity integration directed toward a valued subject, supplying a regulatory bridge that many motivational accounts leave underspecified."

In addition to positioning the model within established theories of love, this manuscript examines its structural relationship to the psychological state of Flow[9]. Although Flow is not a theory of love, its phenomenological features of deep absorption and autotelic engagement[10] closely resemble the Immersion phase described in TML. By clarifying both the parallels and the divergences between immersive love and optimal experience, the model situates relational transformation within a broader framework of human motivational engagement.

By presenting love as a developmental architecture, the Triphasic Model seeks to integrate motivational activation, immersive transformation, and attachment stabilization within a coherent temporal structure, offering a systematic account of how love progresses, consolidates, and reorganizes identity across contexts.

2. The Triphasic Model of Love

TML conceptualizes relational development as a progression through three sequential but continuous phases: Attraction, Immersion, and Union (Figure 1).

2.1. Phase I: Attraction

The process begins with Attraction, defined as the evaluative and motivational activation phase in which a potential subject of love becomes salient and valued. Attraction originates in desire, which may arise from physical appeal, emotional resonance, intellectual admiration, shared values, or perceived meaning. At this stage, attention becomes selectively oriented toward the subject of love.

Although attraction may initially emerge as an instinct-driven response, it remains embedded within active cognitive evaluation. The individual engages in appraisal processes that assess relational viability,

anticipated reward, social appropriateness, ethical alignment, and potential risk. This phase is therefore characterized by the coexistence of motivational activation and rational regulation.

During Attraction, the individual weighs anticipated benefits against possible costs, evaluates compatibility, and considers personal readiness for relational investment. Self-assessment plays a central role, including appraisal of emotional capacity, practical feasibility, and tolerance for vulnerability. Attraction thus represents not merely an emotional spark but a structured decision space in which desire is filtered through cognitive, social, and ethical frameworks within a risk–benefit assessment.

The outcome of the Attraction phase is a threshold decision. The individual either advances toward deeper emotional engagement or disengages before immersive bonding occurs. Many attractions terminate at this stage. Social norms, logistical constraints, perceived incompatibility, fear of rejection, or misalignment with long-term goals may inhibit progression. As a result, a substantial proportion of attractions remain transient and never evolve into deeper relational states.

Attraction, regardless of duration, is a necessary precursor to Immersion but does not itself constitute transformative love. Even when intense or preoccupying, critical evaluation remains active and self-boundaries are preserved. The individual maintains psychological distance and regulatory oversight. Only when evaluative resistance diminishes and risk appraisal permits further investment does emotional intensification accelerate, allowing transition into the second phase: Immersion.

2.2. Phase II: Immersion

Immersion represents the second phase of TML and marks a qualitative transition from evaluative attraction to sustained emotional centrality. As motivational investment intensifies and the threshold beyond Attraction is crossed, cognitive appraisal loses regulatory dominance and affective commitment becomes primary. Desire no longer functions as an object of evaluation but as an organizing force shaping attention, valuation, and identity orientation.

Immersion is defined not merely by increased intensity, but by structural reorganization in cognitive and emotional processing. Rational cost–benefit analysis recedes in influence, attentional focus narrows toward the subject of love, and self-referential boundaries begin to soften. The experience shifts from conditional interest to lived emotional centrality. This phase corresponds to what is phenomenologically recognized as immersive love.

According to TML, Immersion unfolds through three interrelated and progressively integrative sub-stages: Belonging, Ignorace, and Creation. These are not isolated categories but additive expressions of

deepening psychological integration.

2.2.1. Belonging

Belonging represents the initial consolidation of immersive love. It is characterized by voluntary psychological alignment with the subject of love and the emergence of a meaningful sense of connection and attachment. At this stage, attachment is primarily a mental and emotional construct rather than a formalized relational bond, which is reserved for the Union phase.

The attachment formed through Belonging is not transactional and does not arise from negotiated reciprocity or mutual obligation. It is unilateral and voluntary, emerging as identification rather than contract. The individual adopts an internal commitment to the subject of love independent of reciprocity, external confirmation, or formal agreement.

During Belonging, the subject of love becomes central within the individual's motivational hierarchy, influencing priorities, emotional salience, and future orientation. Importantly, this alignment does not imply submission or loss of agency. Rather, it reflects a shift in value organization in which relational connection becomes intrinsically meaningful. Emotional stability during this stage is often preserved precisely because the bond is not yet governed by expectations of reciprocity. When demands for symmetrical commitment arise prematurely, vulnerability increases and stability of the immersive phase may weaken.

2.2.2. Ignorace

Ignorace (a portmanteau of *ignorance* with *grace*) denotes intentional recalibration of cognitive filtering that is a selective attenuation of critical scrutiny in favor of preserving emotional continuity and motivational coherence.

During Ignorace, imperfections, risks, or inconsistencies associated with the subject of love are deprioritized within the valuation system. Attention becomes biased toward affirming attributes, and hope is privileged over doubt. The individual may consciously accept asymmetry in effort, uncertainty of outcome, or lack of reciprocity. Rational risk assessment remains accessible but no longer governs behavior.

This stage provides an explanatory framework for the well-documented reduction in critical evaluation observed during intense romantic involvement. Neuroimaging studies of early-stage romantic love

suggest altered engagement of neural systems involved in reward and social evaluation, consistent with altered reward/social evaluation circuitry during intense bonding[8].

2.2.3. Creation

Creation represents the culmination of Immersion and marks the generative transformation of love. At this stage, emotional investment reorganizes identity, behavior, and long-term goals. The subject of love no longer functions solely as the recipient of emotional engagement but becomes a catalyst for self-transformation.

Creation manifests across domains. In romantic contexts, individuals often experience profound personal change and emerging relational identity. In creative or intellectual devotion, immersion may produce artistic expression, scientific exploration, or philosophical insight. In spiritual contexts, it may catalyze enduring ideological or transcendental transformation.

The defining feature of Creation is transformative identity modification. The individual's self-concept expands or reorganizes around the immersive bond. Love transitions from being primarily experienced to being transformative. It becomes embodied in sustained commitments, behavioral change, and expressive output.

2.3. Phase III: Union

Union represents the third phase of TML and marks the transition from immersive internal devotion to stabilized attachment. Whereas Immersion is primarily intrapersonal and affect-driven, Union introduces relational structure, reciprocity, and sustained interdependence. It signifies the beginning of attachment as an organized bond embedded within a relational framework. The character of this framework, however, is shaped by personal values, cultural norms, social expectations, and contextual constraints. Once union occurs in interpersonal love, the unilateral characteristics of immersive devotion reorganize into bilateral dynamics. This transition does not necessarily occur abruptly; rather, it unfolds progressively as the relational structure consolidates.

Belonging, initially experienced as voluntary and unilateral identification, evolves into reciprocal commitment. Internal alignment becomes shared responsibility.

Ignorace, defined as selective attenuation of critical filtering, recalibrates as rational evaluation re-enters the relational system. Idealization moderates, and expectations of reciprocity, fairness, and emotional

balance emerge. This shift does not necessarily represent a decline in love, but rather a structural adaptation required for relational sustainability.

Creation, the transformative dimension of Immersion, persists in Union but changes in tempo. Identity transformation may stabilize once relational equilibrium is established. In some cases, growth continues dynamically; in others, stabilization leads to reduced transformation and potential stagnation. The durability of Union therefore depends on whether relational engagement remains generative or erodes into disengagement.

The meaning of union varies according to the subject of love, personal belief systems, and cultural norms. In interpersonal contexts, union may be expressed through physical intimacy, sexual interaction, psychological alignment, verbal commitment, legal partnership, or socially recognized relational status. In some traditional societies, legal or sexual formalization marks union explicitly. In contemporary contexts, where relational norms are more fluid, union may involve multiple relational milestones rather than a single defining event. Regardless of sociocultural expression, within TML, union is defined structurally as the formalization of attachment through mutual commitment, respect, and engagement.

Commitment reflects a conscious decision to sustain the bond over time. Respect acknowledges individuality and autonomy within relational interdependence. Engagement involves active participation in maintaining and evolving the connection. Together, these components transform immersive intensity and unilateral internal investment into organized relational architecture.

Although Union is most visibly expressed in reciprocal romantic relationships, it is not limited to interpersonal bonds. When the subject of love extends to art, science, vocation, or transcendent ideals, Union assumes a different configuration. In these contexts, commitment, respect, and engagement take the form of sustained dedication and identity integration rather than bilateral exchange. Union is not marked by a singular moment of discovery or creative achievement, but by the enduring integration of the subject of love into long-term orientation, identity, and behavioral structure. Such forms of union may appear renewable and enduring precisely because they lack a fixed interpersonal endpoint.

Across both interpersonal and non-interpersonal forms, Union represents stabilization rather than culmination. It does not mark the endpoint of love but a structured state of attachment shaped by reciprocity, commitment, and identity integration.

3. Variations and Structural Deviations from the Canonical Triphasic Sequence

Although TML proposes a canonical progression from Attraction to Immersion to Union, not all experiences of love follow this linear sequence. Variations may occur due to contextual, cultural, psychological, or situational factors (Table 1). These deviations do not invalidate the model but illustrate its adaptive range.

3.1. Accelerated Transition from Attraction to Immersion ("Love at First Sight")

The phenomenon commonly described as "love at first sight" reflects an accelerated transition from Attraction to Immersion. In such cases, the evaluative processes characteristic of Attraction are abbreviated rather than absent. Rational appraisal and risk assessment may occur rapidly or subconsciously, creating the impression that Immersion has bypassed Attraction altogether.

Within TML, Attraction remains structurally necessary; however, its duration and intensity may vary. The rapid onset of Immersion in these cases demonstrates compression of the evaluative phase rather than elimination of it.

3.2. Direct Transition from Attraction to Union without Immersion

In some contemporary relational contexts, individuals transition from Attraction directly into Union, bypassing the immersive transformation characterized by Belonging, Ignorace, and Creation. In such trajectories, Union precedes immersive love rather than emerging from it.

Here, commitment, respect, and engagement form the structural foundation of the relationship, while Immersion may develop later, remain partial, or never fully emerge. Examples include arranged marriages, friendships evolving into partnership, or relational bonds formed primarily through social, practical, or institutional frameworks.

In these cases, attachment precedes immersive transformation. Love may subsequently deepen within the relational structure, but the developmental order differs from the canonical sequence. The resulting bond may be stable and enduring, yet qualitatively distinct from relationships initiated through immersive love.

3.3. Immersion without Union

Immersion does not always culminate in Union. When union remains unattained, Immersion may persist as an unresolved internal state.

In some cases, unattained union intensifies desire and sustains emotional engagement. This may generate creative, intellectual, or spiritual transformation, as the energy of Immersion is redirected into productive domains. Here, Creation persists without relational stabilization.

In other cases, prolonged absence of Union may result in fixation rather than growth. When Ignorace remains unchecked by structural commitment or reciprocal grounding, emotional investment may evolve into obsessive preoccupation. The distinction between generative transformation and maladaptive fixation depends on the individual's capacity to reorganize identity without reciprocal attachment.

3.4. Longing as Psychological Pain

Love is often idealized as a journey culminating in fulfillment, yet obstacles along this trajectory frequently introduce psychological pain. Within TML, such pain is not incidental but structurally linked to blocked or delayed transitions between phases. Psychological pain may arise at any stage, but it becomes particularly pronounced during Immersion when progression toward Union is delayed, obstructed, or rendered impractical.

During Attraction, obstacles may initially function as motivational amplifiers, intensifying focus and accelerating movement toward Immersion. However, because rational appraisal and risk assessment remain active, individuals retain the capacity to recalibrate when pursuit appears impractical or unattainable. In such cases, the attraction may be terminated before deeper emotional restructuring occurs, limiting the magnitude of psychological distress.

In contrast, during Immersion, rational regulation is attenuated and emotional investment is amplified. Obstacles encountered at this stage are less likely to be interpreted through evaluative recalibration and more likely to be experienced as longing. Because Belonging is initially unilateral and does not require reciprocity, early challenges may not immediately produce pain. However, when expectations of engagement, attention, or the emergence of the Union remain unmet, psychological vulnerability intensifies.

As evaluative safeguards recede and identity becomes reorganized around the subject of love, failure of Union to materialize may generate escalating longing. This unresolved state may follow divergent trajectories. In some individuals, longing becomes sublimated into creative, intellectual, or spiritual transformation, consistent with the Creation dimension of Immersion. In others, persistent obstruction may produce fixation, destabilization, or emotional dysregulation.

Within TML, psychological pain is therefore conceptualized not as an anomaly but as a byproduct of heightened motivational intensity combined with identity restructuring. Its developmental outcome depends on whether emotional energy is adaptively integrated or remains unresolved within the immersive state.

3.5. Pathological Immersion: Dysregulation and Addiction-Like Processes

Within the Triphasic Model, the *Ignorace* component of Immersion reflects a selective, adaptive attenuation of evaluative oversight to facilitate identity integration. In normative immersion, this attenuation remains flexible; regulatory capacity can be reactivated or **"re-coupled"** in response to accumulating evidence of harm or profound incompatibility.

Pathological immersion emerges when this regulatory flexibility collapses. Evaluative processes remain chronically suppressed despite clear and escalating negative consequences. Individuals may tolerate emotional harm, financial exploitation, or repeated boundary violations. The defining feature is not the intensity of the emotion, but the failure of the appropriation loop or to re-engage critical appraisal.

In extreme forms, pathological immersion parallels behavioral addiction. Persistent preoccupation, compulsive pursuit despite adverse consequences, and withdrawal-like distress parallel mechanisms observed in substance dependence. Neurobiological studies demonstrate that early-stage romantic love recruits dopaminergic reward pathways (e.g., the ventral tegmental area) overlapping with those implicated in addiction[11].

However, TML distinguishes love from addiction through the lens of generative growth. Normative immersion involves identity integration and reciprocal development, whereas addictive patterns are characterized by compulsive reinforcement-seeking without adaptive restructuring. Within TML, addiction-like processes represent a dysregulated deviation in which immersive reinforcement becomes self-perpetuating and resistant to corrective feedback.

Thus, pathological immersion may be understood as a failure of transition or recalibration, in which reward salience overrides regulatory control and obstructs progression toward adaptive Union or disengagement. Future research may examine persistence under escalating negative feedback, heightened cue reactivity to the love subject, and impaired decision flexibility as markers distinguishing transformative immersion from addictive fixation.

4. Objective Assessment of Phase Transitions in the Triphasic Model of Love

A central methodological challenge for any developmental theory of love concerns objective assessment. Love is a complex subjective experience that integrates affective intensity, cognitive evaluation, motivational prioritization, and identity restructuring. Translating such a multidimensional phenomenon into measurable components is inherently difficult. Moreover, determining how these components combine to produce lived experience presents an additional conceptual challenge.

Empirical investigation of love faces structural limitations. The phases proposed in the Triphasic Model of Love (TML) cannot be ethically induced in controlled laboratory conditions, nor can they be reliably simulated in animal models. Romantic love is not a frequently recurring state that can be experimentally scheduled or manipulated with precision. Longitudinal tracking of relational development is methodologically demanding, and observational intrusion may itself alter relational dynamics. As a result, much of the empirical literature relies on proxy measures, retrospective self-report, neuroimaging paradigms, or behavioral tasks capturing selected aspects of romantic experience rather than its full developmental progression.

Seminal experimental paradigms illustrate this methodological landscape. Neuroimaging studies have assessed romantic attachment by contrasting neural responses to images of romantic partners and familiar acquaintances[8], and have examined persistent longing following romantic rejection[12]. Identity expansion has been measured using self–other overlap instruments[13]. Temporal dynamics of passion have been studied in relation to increasing intimacy rather than static closeness[14]. Commitment has been operationalized through satisfaction, investment, and alternatives[7][15]. Attentional narrowing has been examined by exposing committed individuals to attractive alternatives[16]. Neural persistence of reward activation in long-term romantic love has been documented[17]. Experimental arousal paradigms have demonstrated misattribution effects in early

attraction[18]. Attachment styles have been assessed through validated questionnaires[4], and relational sacrifice has been measured behaviorally[19]. Outside romantic research, immersive absorption has been operationalized through experience-sampling methods in studies of Flow[9].

These paradigms collectively demonstrate that aspects of love can be operationalized; however, they typically isolate components rather than capture structural transitions between developmental phases. The challenge for TML is therefore not simply measuring love, but identifying objective markers that delineate phase boundaries.

Within the TML framework, phases are distinguished not by intensity alone but by structural shifts in regulatory dominance, attentional allocation, and identity integration. Union often presents observable relational consolidation and reciprocal commitment. By contrast, differentiating Attraction from Immersion requires more precise psychological criteria grounded in measurable reorganization of cognition and self-structure. The following sections propose structural markers that may serve as objective indicators of these transitions.

4.1. Structural Criteria Distinguishing Attraction from Immersion

Three structural dimensions may serve as objective indicators of phase transition: regulatory dominance, attentional exclusivity, and identity integration.

4.1.1. Regulatory Dominance

During Attraction, rational appraisal remains functionally dominant. Individuals actively evaluate relational viability, compatibility, anticipated reward, and social or ethical considerations. Decision-making remains guided by cost–benefit assessment, social norms, and long-term planning, consistent with dual-process models of cognition distinguishing deliberative and affective processing systems.

In Immersion, regulatory dominance shifts from evaluative oversight to affective centrality. Cognitive appraisal does not disappear; however, it no longer functions as the primary gatekeeper of behavior. This transition may be assessed empirically through structured partner evaluation tasks, willingness-to-sacrifice paradigms, and measures of sensitivity to relational alternatives, similar to those used in investment-model research[7][15]. A key demarcation criterion is reduction in evaluative veto power rather than mere escalation of emotional intensity.

4.1.2. Attentional Exclusivity

Attraction involves selective attention toward a valued target, yet cognitive resources remain broadly distributed and disengagement remains possible without significant distress. In contrast, Immersion is marked by sustained attentional narrowing and persistent salience of the love subject.

Empirical indicators may include elevated intrusive thought frequency, preferential memory encoding for partner-related stimuli, and measurable attentional bias in paradigms such as dot-probe or reaction-time tasks. Such approaches have been widely used in social cognition research to detect attentional prioritization of emotionally salient stimuli. The transition from Attraction to Immersion may therefore be operationalized as the point at which attentional bias becomes persistent and cross-contextual rather than situationally triggered.

4.1.3. Identity Integration

The most decisive marker separating Attraction from Immersion is identity-level restructuring. During Attraction, the subject of love is desired, yet the self remains structurally independent and future orientation remains primarily self-referenced. In Immersion, however, the subject of love becomes incorporated into self-definition, and personal goals reorganize around relational significance.

This transition may be assessed through established measures of self–other overlap, such as the Inclusion of Other in the Self scale[13], narrative identity analysis, goal reprioritization assessments, and behavioral sacrifice paradigms. Self-expansion research[6] provides empirical tools for detecting incorporation of relational identity into self-concept. Within the TML framework, Immersion begins when identity restructuring becomes evident rather than when desire intensifies alone.

4.2. Temporal and Behavioral Indicators of Transition

The Attraction–Immersion boundary may be empirically inferred when attentional narrowing, reduced evaluative inhibition, and measurable identity integration co-occur. The isolated presence of one dimension may reflect strong attraction, but convergence of all three suggests structural immersion. Longitudinal designs employing latent growth modeling could identify inflection points at which regulatory dominance decreases and identity integration accelerates, providing statistical evidence of phase transition rather than relying on retrospective self-report.

4.3. Objective Markers of Union

Union is comparatively more accessible to objective assessment because it is dyadic rather than solely intrapersonal. Whereas Immersion reflects internal restructuring, Union involves reciprocal acknowledgment and structural consolidation within relational architecture.

Observable indicators may include mutual commitment declarations, coordinated future planning, shared decision-making patterns, and stability across time. These markers may be assessed through commitment scales derived from investment-model research[15], dyadic interaction coding, and attachment security inventories[20]. Unlike Immersion, which may occur unilaterally, Union requires reciprocal validation and relational embedding.

4.4. Toward a Multimodal Assessment Framework

Future empirical research may benefit from integrating behavioral tasks, cognitive attention measures, self-report identity mapping, and longitudinal relational metrics. Multimodal assessment would allow researchers to determine whether the proposed phases reflect discrete psychological reorganizations rather than arbitrary descriptive categories. Such triangulation would also permit examination of whether transitions are gradual shifts along continuous dimensions or represent identifiable structural inflection points.

5. Theoretical Comparison with Established Models of Love

5.1. Sternberg's Triangular Theory

Sternberg's triangular theory conceptualizes love as the interaction of three core components: intimacy, passion, and commitment[2]. Intimacy refers to emotional closeness and connectedness, passion to motivational and physiological arousal, and commitment to the decision to maintain a relationship over time. Different combinations of these components yield distinct relational forms, including romantic love (intimacy and passion), companionate love (intimacy and commitment), fatuous love (passion and commitment), and consummate love, in which all three components are present. The model's principal strength lies in its dimensional clarity and its capacity to categorize relational states based on the relative balance among these components.

Empirically, Sternberg's framework has supported the development of measurement instruments and has contributed substantially to relational research by offering a parsimonious structure for analyzing relationship quality and type. It provides a descriptive taxonomy that allows researchers to distinguish among varieties of love within ongoing relationships.

Sternberg's model therefore offers a dimensional taxonomy of love, whereas TML proposes a developmental architecture. While the triangular theory identifies what love consists of at a given moment, it does not systematically articulate how individuals progress from initial attraction to immersive bonding and eventual stabilization. Although Sternberg acknowledges that intimacy, passion, and commitment may change over time[2], the model does not specify phase-based structural transitions in attention, valuation, or identity organization.

In contrast, TML conceptualizes love as a sequential transformation. Attraction represents evaluative activation; Immersion reflects affective amplification and identity expansion; and Union marks structural stabilization through reciprocal attachment. Within TML, passion and intimacy are not treated as static dimensions but as dynamic expressions that intensify during Immersion and reorganize during Union. Commitment, rather than existing as a coequal dimension from the outset, emerges structurally in Union following the immersive phase.

Thus, whereas Sternberg's theory categorizes relational configurations, TML seeks to explain the psychological progression that generates and reorganizes those configurations across time.

5.2. Attachment Theory

Attachment theory, originally developed by Bowlby[3] and later extended to adult romantic relationships by Hazan and Shaver[4], conceptualizes love as an attachment process rooted in early caregiver–infant bonding patterns. According to this framework, individuals develop internal working models of self and others that shape expectations of intimacy, security, and responsiveness in adult relationships. Adult romantic love is therefore understood as the activation of attachment systems that regulate proximity seeking, separation distress, and emotional security. Subsequent developments in attachment research have further refined distinctions among secure, anxious, and avoidant attachment styles[20].

The strength of attachment theory lies in its developmental depth and empirical grounding. It provides a robust explanatory framework for relational stability, emotional regulation within partnerships, conflict dynamics, and vulnerability to relational distress. By linking adult love to early relational experiences,

attachment theory accounts for individual differences in how love is experienced, expressed, and maintained.

However, attachment theory primarily explains relational style rather than phase progression. It addresses how individuals bond and maintain emotional security but does not explicitly model the structural transformation from Attraction to Immersion to Union. While attachment activation may intensify during romantic involvement, the theory does not delineate distinct experiential phases characterized by shifts in valuation intensity, attentional narrowing, or identity reorganization.

In contrast, TML focuses on the structural evolution of love as a psychological process. Within TML, attachment most closely corresponds to the Union phase, where reciprocal commitment and relational interdependence consolidate. Attraction and Immersion, however, precede formal attachment and may involve unilateral devotion, identity expansion, and even self-sacrificial behavior that cannot be fully reduced to attachment-seeking mechanisms alone. In this sense, attachment may function as an outcome of love's progression rather than its sole organizing principle.

Thus, whereas attachment theory explains patterns of relational security and insecurity within established bonds, TML seeks to explain the developmental architecture through which love unfolds, intensifies, and either culminates in or diverges from attachment.

5.3. Fisher's Neurobiological Model

Fisher's neurobiological model conceptualizes love as three partially distinct but interacting motivational systems: lust, romantic attraction, and attachment[21][12]. Lust is associated with sexual drive and reproductive motivation, romantic attraction with focused courtship energy and dopaminergic reward activation, and attachment with long-term bonding mediated by oxytocin and vasopressin systems. Neuroimaging studies have supported the differentiation of these systems, particularly highlighting activation of dopaminergic reward circuitry during early romantic attraction.

The strength of Fisher's model lies in its biological grounding. By distinguishing neurochemical pathways associated with mating, romantic focus, and long-term bonding, the framework integrates evolutionary theory with affective neuroscience. It provides an empirically supported account of how distinct motivational systems contribute to different aspects of romantic experience.

At first glance, Fisher's tripartite distinction may appear structurally aligned with TML. However, the two frameworks differ fundamentally in orientation. Fisher's model describes parallel neurobiological

systems that may operate simultaneously or interactively. It does not propose a sequential psychological progression with defined structural transitions. Lust, attraction, and attachment are functional systems rather than developmental phases.

In contrast, TML conceptualizes love as a staged transformation in attentional focus, valuation intensity, and identity organization. Attraction in TML refers to evaluative salience and motivational activation, not merely dopaminergic reward pursuit. Immersion involves structural reorganization of cognition and identity, extending beyond neurochemical activation. Union corresponds to stabilized attachment, but attachment in TML is framed as the outcome of prior immersive transformation rather than as an independent biological system operating in parallel.

Thus, whereas Fisher's model explains the neurobiological substrates underlying romantic behavior, TML seeks to describe the psychological architecture through which love unfolds and reorganizes the self across time.

5.4. Self-Expansion Theory

Self-expansion theory proposes that individuals are motivated to enter and maintain close relationships in order to expand their sense of self[6]. According to this framework, romantic attraction arises from the opportunity to acquire new perspectives, identities, resources, and experiences through inclusion of the other in the self. The degree of relational closeness can be conceptualized as increasing overlap between self and partner representations, a construct operationalized through measures such as the Inclusion of Other in the Self scale[13].

The primary strength of self-expansion theory lies in its clear articulation of identity growth as a central motivational force in love. It provides an empirically grounded explanation for why novelty, challenge, and shared exploration enhance relational satisfaction. The theory also offers measurable constructs for assessing perceived closeness and self–other integration.

However, self-expansion theory primarily addresses motivational drivers and outcomes rather than phase-based transformation. It explains why individuals are drawn toward relationships that foster growth, but it does not specify the structural progression through which attraction intensifies into immersive identity reorganization and subsequently stabilizes into attachment.

In contrast, TML incorporates identity expansion as a core mechanism within the Immersion phase. The Creation dimension of Immersion explicitly describes transformation of self-concept and behavioral

orientation. Yet TML situates identity expansion within a broader developmental architecture that includes evaluative activation in Attraction and structural consolidation in Union. Identity overlap, in this model, is not the initial driver of love but an emergent property of immersive transformation.

Thus, whereas self-expansion theory emphasizes identity growth as the motivation for relational involvement, TML describes the sequential psychological processes through which identity expansion occurs and is later stabilized within attachment.

5.5. Rusbult's Investment Model

Rusbult's Investment Model conceptualizes commitment in romantic relationships as a function of three primary determinants: satisfaction level, quality of alternatives, and investment size[7]. Commitment increases when individuals experience high relational satisfaction, perceive few desirable alternatives, and have invested substantial resources into the relationship. The model has been empirically validated across diverse relational contexts and has become central to research on relationship stability and persistence[15].

The strength of the Investment Model lies in its predictive power regarding relationship continuation and dissolution. It provides a structured framework for understanding why individuals remain in or leave relationships, even when emotional intensity fluctuates. By focusing on cognitive evaluation and resource allocation, the model offers measurable constructs for commitment dynamics.

However, the Investment Model primarily addresses the maintenance of established relationships rather than the developmental transformation of love itself. Commitment is treated as the outcome of satisfaction and investment calculations rather than as the structural culmination of immersive identity reorganization. The model does not delineate phase-based transitions from evaluative attraction to immersive bonding and subsequent attachment.

In contrast, within TML, a unilateral commitment emerges during the Immersion phase of love which then transforms to mutual commitment during the Union phase. Rather than being solely a function of satisfaction and alternatives, commitment in TML is rooted in identity integration and reciprocal relational consolidation. While cognitive evaluation may re-enter the relational system in Union, the foundation of commitment is not exclusively calculative but identity related.

Thus, whereas the Investment Model explains relational stability through evaluative determinants, TML explains how commitment arises through the sequential transformation of attention, valuation, and

identity across phases of love.

5.6. Hatfield's Passionate and Companionate Love Distinction

Hatfield and Walster[5] distinguished between two primary forms of love: passionate love and companionate love. Passionate love is characterized by intense emotional arousal, longing, idealization, and strong physiological activation. Companionate love, by contrast, is marked by deep affection, emotional intimacy, trust, and stable attachment. This distinction has been empirically supported through measurement scales assessing passionate intensity and long-term bonding dynamics[22].

The strength of this framework lies in its phenomenological clarity. It captures the experiential contrast between the heightened emotional intensity of early romantic involvement and the calmer, enduring quality of long-term relational attachment. The distinction has proven particularly useful in describing shifts in emotional tone across the lifespan of relationships.

However, Hatfield's model categorizes types of love rather than explaining the structural mechanisms underlying their transformation. Although it acknowledges that passionate love may evolve into companionate love, it does not delineate the psychological processes governing this transition. The framework identifies qualitative differences but does not specify the developmental architecture connecting them.

In contrast, TML offers a sequential explanation of this transformation. The combined phases of Attraction and Immersion correspond broadly to what Hatfield describes as passionate love. However, TML differentiates between evaluative attraction and immersive transformation, distinguishing shifts in cognitive appraisal, rational regulation, risk tolerance, and identity expansion that are not separately articulated in the passionate–companionate framework. Union, in turn, aligns with aspects of companionate love, characterized by stabilization, reciprocal commitment, and relational interdependence.

Thus, whereas Hatfield's distinction describes experiential categories of love, TML explains the developmental progression through which passionate intensity unfolds, restructures cognition and identity, and potentially evolves into stabilized relational attachment.

5.7. Baumeister and Bratslavsky: Passion as a Function of Change in Intimacy

Baumeister and Bratslavsky[14] proposed that passionate love is not primarily a function of the absolute level of intimacy within a relationship but rather of the rate of increase in intimacy over time. According

to their model, passion peaks when closeness is rapidly expanding and declines once intimacy stabilizes. This framework emphasizes temporal dynamics and highlights the psychological importance of perceived relational growth rather than static emotional states.

The strength of this model lies in its temporal sensitivity. By linking passion to change rather than equilibrium, the theory explains why early romantic phases are often marked by heightened emotional intensity, and why passion may diminish even when affection and commitment remain strong. It provides empirical support for the observation that relational stabilization alters the experiential quality of love.

However, while Baumeister and Bratslavsky successfully describe the relationship between intimacy change and passionate intensity, their framework does not fully articulate the broader structural transformation occurring within the individual. The model accounts for fluctuations in passion but does not delineate shifts in cognitive regulation, identity reorganization, or attentional restructuring across phases of love.

TML incorporates and extends this temporal insight. Within TML, the Immersion phase corresponds to the period of rapid expansion in emotional centrality, attentional narrowing, and identity integration. Passion intensifies precisely because valuation and relational significance are actively reorganizing. Union, by contrast, represents stabilization. As relational structures consolidate and growth slows, emotional intensity may recalibrate, not necessarily due to loss of love but due to structural transition from transformative immersion to organized attachment.

Thus, whereas Baumeister and Bratslavsky explain passion as a function of increasing intimacy, TML situates that increase within a broader developmental architecture that accounts for cognitive, emotional, and identity-level transformation.

5.8. TML in Relation to the State of Flow

Although the state of Flow is not a theory of love, its inclusion is warranted due to the close phenomenological resemblance between Flow and the Immersion phase of TML. The psychological state of Flow, as described by Csikszentmihalyi[9], refers to an optimal experiential condition characterized by intense absorption, diminished self-consciousness, altered temporal perception, and intrinsically rewarding engagement. Flow emerges when perceived challenge and skill are balanced, allowing focused immersion in an activity without excessive cognitive self-monitoring.

At the level of preconditions, the Attraction phase of TML bears partial resemblance to the preparatory conditions of Flow. In Flow theory, optimal experience arises when individuals assess and engage in tasks that match their capacities and motivations. Similarly, during Attraction, individuals evaluate relational viability, personal readiness, and anticipated reward. Rational appraisal remains active, and motivational orientation is selectively directed toward a valued target. Both frameworks therefore recognize an initial evaluative alignment between individual capacity and desired engagement.

The strongest parallel emerges between the Immersion phase of TML and the Flow state itself. Immersion is characterized by attentional narrowing, valuation amplification, reduced critical filtering, and identity-level integration. These features closely resemble the defining properties of Flow, including deep absorption, loss of self-conscious control, and experiential autotelicity. In both states, engagement becomes intrinsically rewarding, and action unfolds with perceived effortlessness. Self-monitoring recedes, and the individual experiences a merging of attention and activity.

Despite this structural similarity, Flow and immersive love diverge in important ways. Flow is typically episodic and activity-bound. It dissipates when task demands change or when the challenge–skill balance is disrupted. Immersion in love, by contrast, is relational and identity-transformative. It does not merely involve temporary absorption in an activity but reorganizes motivational hierarchies and self-concept around the subject of love.

The divergence becomes more pronounced at stabilization. In Flow, completion of the task often results in disengagement and return to baseline experience. The state must be renewed through new challenges. In TML, Union represents consolidation rather than dissolution. Emotional intensity may recalibrate, yet attachment becomes structurally embedded within relational architecture. Rather than ending, love transitions into sustained interdependence.

Thus, while Flow provides a useful experiential analogue for Immersion, the Triphasic Model extends beyond optimal experience by incorporating developmental progression and attachment stabilization. Flow explains the phenomenology of deep engagement; TML explains how such engagement emerges, transforms identity, and reorganizes into durable relational structure.

5.9. Integrative Synthesis: The Distinct Contribution of TML

Theoretical approaches to love have generated substantial insights into its structure, function, and experiential qualities. Sternberg's triangular theory provides a dimensional taxonomy of intimacy, passion, and commitment. Attachment theory explains patterns of relational security and insecurity

grounded in early developmental experience. Fisher's neurobiological framework differentiates motivational systems underlying lust, attraction, and attachment. Self-expansion theory emphasizes identity growth as a central driver of romantic involvement. Rusbult's Investment Model clarifies determinants of commitment and relational persistence. Hatfield's distinction between passionate and companionate love captures phenomenological differences across relational stages. Baumeister and Bratslavsky demonstrate that passionate intensity is linked to increases in intimacy rather than stable closeness. The theory of Flow, although not a theory of love, illuminates the experiential properties of deep absorption and autotelic engagement that closely resemble immersive love.

Collectively, these frameworks describe essential components, motivational systems, regulatory processes, biological substrates, experiential states, and maintenance dynamics of love. However, most are compositional, categorical, motivational, or state-based in orientation. They identify what love consists of, how it is maintained, or how it feels during peak engagement. Fewer models explicitly articulate the sequential psychological architecture through which love unfolds and reorganizes across time.

TML contributes to this literature by conceptualizing love as a developmental progression characterized by structural transformations in attention, valuation intensity, cognitive regulation, and identity organization. Rather than treating passion, attachment, or commitment as parallel dimensions or independent systems, TML situates them within a phased trajectory. Attraction represents evaluative activation under rational oversight. Immersion marks qualitative transformation, characterized by attentional narrowing, valuation amplification, reduced critical filtering, and identity integration. Union consolidates these processes into stabilized attachment embedded within relational architecture.

Within this framework, passionate intensity is understood as an emergent property of immersive transformation rather than as a static category. Attachment is conceptualized not merely as a regulatory system but as the structural outcome of prior intrapersonal reorganization. Commitment is framed not solely as calculative investment but as identity-level consolidation within a reciprocal relational structure. The experiential features described in Flow theory are incorporated within Immersion, yet extended by embedding them in a broader developmental arc that accounts for stabilization and long-term interdependence.

By distinguishing between evaluative attraction and immersive transformation, TML clarifies mechanisms that are often subsumed under broad constructs such as passion (Table 2). By differentiating immersive devotion from stabilized attachment, it explains why emotional intensity may

recalibrate without implying relational decline. By integrating identity expansion, motivational activation, experiential absorption, and attachment consolidation into a sequential model, it offers a unified developmental architecture.

Thus, the Triphasic Model does not seek to replace established theories but to organize and extend them within a coherent temporal framework. It complements component-based, biological, motivational, and experiential accounts by providing a structural explanation of how love progresses, transforms identity, stabilizes into attachment, or diverges under varying conditions.

6. Testable Predictions and Empirical Implications of the TML

The Triphasic Model of Love (TML) proposes that love unfolds through structurally distinct yet continuous transformations in attention, valuation, and identity organization. Building upon the operational markers outlined in Section 3, the following predictions articulate the developmental dynamics implied by the model. These hypotheses are directional and falsifiable, allowing empirical validation or revision of the proposed architecture.

6.1. Nonlinear Development of Attentional Allocation

TML predicts that attentional allocation toward the love subject follows a nonlinear trajectory across phases. During Attraction, attentional bias is present but remains regulated and context-dependent. During Immersion, attentional narrowing intensifies significantly, becoming persistent, intrusive, and cross-situational. In Union, attentional prioritization remains elevated relative to baseline but decreases in exclusivity compared to Immersion.

Accordingly, Immersion should demonstrate significantly greater attentional exclusivity than both Attraction and Union, controlling for relationship duration. Failure to detect such a curvilinear pattern would challenge the model's claim that Immersion represents a distinct structural phase rather than a linear intensification of attraction.

6.2. Shift in Regulatory Dominance Across Phases

TML proposes that cognitive regulation undergoes phase-specific reconfiguration. Attraction is characterized by dominant evaluative oversight, whereas Immersion reflects reduction in evaluative inhibition and increased affective centrality. Union involves partial re-entry of rational regulation within a stabilized relational structure.

Measures of critical appraisal, sensitivity to relational alternatives, and cost–benefit weighting should decrease significantly during Immersion relative to Attraction and increase again in Union relative to Immersion. Absence of such modulation would weaken the distinction between Attraction and Immersion.

6.3. Acceleration and Stabilization of Identity Integration

The model predicts that identity integration follows a pattern of acceleration during Immersion and stabilization during Union. Attraction involves desire without structural incorporation into self-concept. Immersion initiates measurable expansion of relational identity and reorganization of personal goals. Union consolidates this integration into enduring self-structure.

Longitudinal modeling should reveal increased rates of self–other integration during Immersion compared to Attraction, followed by plateau or consolidation in Union. Linear growth without identifiable inflection would suggest a dimensional continuum rather than a phased structure.

6.4. Passion as a Function of Structural Change

Consistent with temporal models of passion, TML predicts that emotional intensity is more strongly associated with structural change than with static relational closeness. Passion should peak during periods of rapid identity integration and attentional reorganization characteristic of Immersion. As relational structures stabilize in Union, emotional intensity may recalibrate without indicating relational deterioration.

Thus, perceived rate of relational growth should predict passion more strongly than absolute intimacy level. If passion remains stable or increases after structural stabilization, the model's assumption of phase-based recalibration would require modification.

6.5. Sacrifice as a Marker of Immersive Reorganization

TML further predicts that willingness to incur personal cost for the benefit of the love subject may function as a behavioral marker of Immersion. Self-reported and behavioral measures of relational sacrifice[19] should increase significantly during Immersion relative to Attraction, reflecting reduced evaluative inhibition and increased affective centrality.

In Union, sacrifice behavior may remain present but become embedded within reciprocal norms rather than unilateral devotion. If sacrifice does not differ significantly between Attraction and Immersion, or if

it increases linearly without phase differentiation, this would suggest dimensional variation rather than structural transition.

6.6. Absorption and Autotelic Engagement as Markers of Immersion

The immersive phase of love shares phenomenological features with the psychological state of absorption and autotelic engagement described in Flow research[9]. TML predicts that measures of absorption should peak during Immersion relative to Attraction and decline modestly in Union as relational stabilization reduces experiential intensity.

If absorption levels do not differ significantly between Attraction and Immersion, or if they remain constant across phases, the claim that Immersion represents a distinct structural reorganization would require reconsideration.

6.7. Attentional Disengagement from Attractive Alternatives

Research suggests that committed individuals may exhibit reduced attention to attractive alternatives[16]. Within TML, Immersion should be characterized by reduced sensitivity to alternative partners due to attentional exclusivity and identity integration. In Union, disengagement from alternatives may persist but be grounded more in commitment than in immersive preoccupation.

If attention to alternatives does not vary significantly across phases, the proposed differentiation between immersive belonging and stabilized commitment would require revision.

6.8. Divergent Outcomes of Immersion Without Union

TML predicts that Immersion without progression to Union produces divergent developmental trajectories depending on identity integration capacity and regulatory flexibility. When immersive restructuring is adaptively integrated, individuals may demonstrate creative, intellectual, or personal growth. When integration fails, persistent Immersion may manifest as fixation or dysregulated preoccupation.

Empirical differentiation of these outcomes would support the model's claim that Immersion is structurally transformative rather than merely affectively intense.

6.9. Phase Transitions as Structural Inflection Points

Finally, the model predicts that transitions between phases are characterized by identifiable inflection points rather than smooth linear progression. Latent growth analyses should detect shifts in slope for attentional bias, identity integration, and regulatory dominance at transition boundaries.

If relational development instead reflects continuous linear change without statistically detectable transition points, the phased architecture proposed by TML would require reconceptualization as a dimensional continuum.

6.10. Summary of Empirical Implications

Collectively, these predictions distinguish TML from static component models by proposing that love involves:

- Nonlinear attentional reorganization
- Phase-sensitive modulation of cognitive regulation
- Accelerated identity restructuring followed by stabilization
- Passion linked to structural change rather than equilibrium
- Detectable transition points across developmental progression

The model is therefore empirically vulnerable. Its validity depends on whether these predicted structural patterns can be observed across longitudinal relational development. Failure to detect phase-specific differentiation would necessitate refinement of the proposed architecture.

7. Limitations and Future Directions

While the Triphasic Model of Love (TML) offers a developmental architecture for understanding love, several limitations warrant consideration. These limitations do not invalidate the model but clarify its scope and delineate directions for empirical and theoretical refinement.

7.1. Theoretical Scope and Operationalization

First, TML remains a conceptual framework rather than a fully operationalized empirical model. Although the model generates testable predictions, the phases of Attraction, Immersion, and Union require systematic operational definitions supported by validated measurement instruments. In practice,

phase boundaries are unlikely to be discrete. Transitions may unfold gradually, and individuals may exhibit overlapping features across adjacent phases.

Future research should prioritize the development of multimethod assessment tools capable of capturing attentional allocation, regulatory dominance, identity restructuring, and relational stabilization across time. Longitudinal designs will be particularly important for evaluating whether the proposed progression reflects identifiable structural inflection points rather than continuous dimensional variation.

7.2. Cultural and Sociostructural Variability

Second, relational development is shaped by cultural norms, institutional structures, and sociocultural constraints. In collectivist contexts, Union may precede immersive transformation, as in arranged marriages or institutionally structured partnerships. In highly individualistic contexts, rapid formalization of Union may abbreviate or attenuate Immersion. Under such conditions, the triphasic sequence may appear compressed or biphasic, consisting primarily of Attraction and Union with limited immersive restructuring.

Although TML allows for alternative developmental trajectories, its canonical sequence may not uniformly characterize all cultural environments. Cross-cultural research is therefore necessary to determine whether the structural transitions proposed by TML represent universal psychological processes or culturally moderated patterns of relational organization.

7.3. Boundary Conditions: Non-Romantic Love

Third, although TML extends beyond romantic relationships to include devotion to art, vocation, or ideals, the degree to which interpersonal and non-interpersonal forms of love share identical structural mechanisms remains empirically unresolved. Identity expansion, attentional narrowing, and immersive absorption may generalize across domains; however, reciprocal attachment dynamics are unique to interpersonal Union.

Future studies should directly compare romantic and non-romantic forms of immersive devotion to evaluate structural resemblance, divergence, or partial equivalence. Such comparisons would clarify whether TML represents a general model of directed attachment or a framework specific to relational bonding.

7.4. Individual Differences and Psychopathology

Fourth, the model does not yet integrate individual differences in attachment style, personality traits, emotion regulation capacity, or psychopathology. Individuals high in attachment anxiety may experience prolonged Immersion without stable Union, whereas avoidant individuals may prematurely stabilize Union without deep immersive transformation. Similarly, obsessive relational patterns may mimic immersive features while reflecting dysregulated attachment or compulsive processes rather than normative developmental progression.

Future research should examine how individual difference variables moderate phase duration, intensity, and outcome. Integrating TML with established attachment and personality frameworks would enhance its explanatory precision.

7.5. Neurobiological and Physiological Differentiation

Although the model aligns conceptually with existing neurobiological findings, it does not yet specify precise neural or physiological signatures distinguishing phases. Immersion likely overlaps with dopaminergic reward activation, whereas Union may correspond more strongly to attachment-related bonding systems. However, these assumptions remain inferential.

Future neuroimaging and psychophysiological research should examine whether transitions between Attraction, Immersion, and Union are accompanied by measurable shifts in neural activation patterns or regulatory biomarkers. Such findings would strengthen the biological grounding of the model.

7.6. Temporal Nonlinearity and Dynamic Oscillation

Finally, although TML proposes a sequential developmental structure, relational trajectories are often nonlinear. Regression, cyclical intensification, or partial overlap between phases may occur. The model currently emphasizes structural directionality but does not fully map oscillatory or recursive dynamics.

Future research employing longitudinal growth modeling, network analysis, or dynamical systems approaches may clarify whether phase transitions follow predictable trajectories or fluctuate dynamically across the relational lifespan.

7.7. Theoretical Extensions

Beyond empirical validation, several theoretical extensions merit exploration. Future work may examine whether immersive transformation is necessary for long-term relational resilience, or whether stable Union can emerge without a prior immersive phase. The degree to which reciprocal immersion enhances long-term stability also warrants investigation. Additionally, research may explore whether immersive dynamics can be reactivated within established unions as a strategy for relational renewal. Finally, the dissolution of Union should be examined to determine whether relational breakdown reflects reversal of earlier structural processes or emergence of distinct developmental pathways.

In general, TML provides a developmental architecture integrating motivational activation, immersive transformation, and attachment stabilization. However, its advancement depends on systematic operationalization, cross-cultural examination, integration with individual difference variables, and neurobiological validation. By explicitly acknowledging these limitations, the model invites empirical scrutiny and theoretical refinement rather than presenting itself as a closed explanatory system.

8. Conclusion

Love remains one of the most conceptually rich yet structurally fragmented constructs in the behavioral sciences. Existing theories have clarified its components, motivational systems, attachment patterns, neurobiological substrates, and experiential qualities. However, the temporal architecture through which love reorganizes cognition, valuation, and identity across relational development has received comparatively limited systematic articulation.

The Triphasic Model of Love advances a developmental framework in which love unfolds through sequential transformations in regulatory dominance, attentional allocation, and self-structure. By distinguishing Attraction, Immersion, and Union as structurally distinct yet continuous phases, the model integrates motivational activation, immersive reorganization, and attachment stabilization within a coherent progression. Passion is reframed as an emergent property of structural change rather than a static emotional category, and attachment is conceptualized as the outcome of prior identity integration rather than an independent parallel system.

Through operational markers and falsifiable predictions, the model invites empirical scrutiny rather than descriptive acceptance. It provides a structural account of how attraction intensifies, how immersive devotion reorganizes the self, how attachment stabilizes, and how deviations from this sequence

generate divergent relational outcomes. In doing so, it complements component-based, biological, and regulatory theories by situating them within a temporally grounded developmental architecture.

Love is not merely an emotion or attachment system; it is a process of transformation. By framing love as a dynamic reorganization of attention, valuation, and identity across phases, the Triphasic Model seeks to contribute a structural perspective to one of the most enduring questions in human behavioral science.

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Author's Contribution

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