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AGE-RELATED CHARACTERISTICS OF THE FEELING OF LOVE

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Abstract: This article examines the role of the feeling of love in human life and its psychological characteristics at different ages. The formation of love during childhood, adolescence, youth, adulthood, and old age is analyzed, along with aspects related to emotional maturity and their impact on the mental development of the individual. The article draws on contemporary psychological approaches and theories on the phenomenon of love, including those of Erikson, Maslow, and Fromm. The findings indicate that the feeling of love is a crucial factor in the socialization of the individual, self-awareness, and the formation of life values.

Keywords: love, emotions, age-related characteristics, psychology, emotional maturity, personality development

Love is one of the deepest and most complex emotions in human life. It is not only an emotional experience but also an integral part of an individual's social, moral, and psychological life. In psychology, the concept of love is multifaceted, and it is interpreted not merely as a romantic feeling but also as a combination of mental states, including self- and other-awareness, affection, loyalty, empathy, and compassion.

The meaning of love varies across different stages of human life. In childhood, it manifests as affection for parents and close ones; during adolescence, it appears as idealized romantic feelings. In youth, love is more closely connected with personal choice, emotional attachment, and the processes of self-discovery. In adulthood and old age, this feeling deepens further, integrating stability, trust, and life experience.

From a psychological perspective, the feeling of love is an important indicator of socialization, self-esteem, communication skills, and mental stability. Therefore, studying the age-related characteristics of love is not only theoretically significant but also practically relevant for psychology. The concept of love has been interpreted differently by various scholars. For example, E. Fromm (1956) considered love as the highest form of human creative energy, describing it as "the power that drives a person to realize their true nature." A. Maslow viewed the need for love as a crucial stage in the process of self-actualization. Additionally, Z. Freud associated the feeling of love with sexual energy (libido), while C. Jung defined it as a process ensuring psychological integration and inner harmony of the individual.

Overall, love is a deep sense of affection, attention, loyalty, care, and closeness that a person feels toward another individual, society, or an idea. It consists of cognitive (thought), affective (emotion), and conative (behavioral) components. Therefore, love is not merely an emotional state but a complex psychological system.

Childhood is the stage in which the earliest forms of love emerge. For a child, the first source of love is the mother or the primary caregiver. According to J. Bowlby's "attachment theory," a child's emotional bond with the mother forms the foundation for all future emotional relationships. When a child receives care, trust, and affection from the mother, an internal model is formed in which "the world is a safe place." This, in turn, provides a stable emotional background for future experiences of love, friendship, and social relationships. Conversely, neglect or cold treatment may lead to feelings of insecurity, fear, and emotional instability. Thus, love in childhood is primarily associated with affection toward parents and close ones,

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the need for safety, and attachment. At this stage, love has not yet taken on a romantic form; instead, it is rooted in biological and social protection instincts.

Adolescence (approximately ages 12–17) is a period of emotional instability, identity formation, and sexual maturation. During this stage, adolescents begin to understand their "self," reflect on their attractiveness, and consider how they are perceived by others. It is also during this period that the first romantic feelings and idealized notions of love begin to appear. According to E. Erikson's theory of psychosocial development, the main task of adolescence is to achieve "identity," that is, to understand who one is. In this process, love often becomes a means of self-affirmation. Adolescents tend to emphasize idealism, loyalty, and intensity of emotions in their perception of love. However, because love at this age is not yet based on emotional stability or life experience, it is often changeable, emotionally intense, and logically unstable. Psychological studies (A. Rean, D. Feldshtein, N. K. Radina) show that love in adolescence is often platonic in nature and plays an important role in the development of self-esteem and personal values.

Youth (ages 18–30) is a period in which an individual strives toward emotional and social maturity. At this stage, love is not merely an emotion but also a conscious choice associated with responsibility, loyalty, and long-term life decisions. Erikson's stage of "intimacy vs. isolation" corresponds precisely to this period. Once a person achieves a clear sense of self, they become ready to form deep emotional relationships with others. Therefore, love in youth is characterized by mutual trust, shared goals, and emotional harmony.

According to Maslow's theory, the need for love during this period becomes a major motivational force on the path toward self-actualization. An individual feels complete through setting life goals, forming family relationships, and establishing stable emotional bonds. Love in youth is shaped largely by personal values, independent decisions, and individual experiences. For this reason, love during this stage becomes not only an emotional experience but also a system of social responsibility, trust, and mutual support.

Adulthood (approximately ages 30–55) is a stage in which a person accumulates life experience, and emotional stability, responsibility, and self-confidence reach their highest levels. During this period, the feeling of love becomes more realistic, deeper, and more stable. While love in youth is often associated with passion and romantic excitement, in adulthood it manifests as partnership, trust, friendship, and mutual support. At this stage, individuals perceive love not only as an emotional experience but as a form of life companionship.

According to D. Sternberg's "triangular theory," mature love is the harmony of passion, intimacy, and commitment. In adulthood, the balance of these three components ensures the stability of love. As a person's life becomes connected with specific values, family, children, and professional achievements, love turns into a central emotional element of life. Moreover, love in this period supports psychological well-being: close relationships reduce stress, enhance self-esteem, and strengthen emotional balance. Therefore, psychologists emphasize a direct connection between love and the emotional climate during the stage of maturity.

Old age (after the age of 60) represents a reflective and philosophical stage of human life. During this period, the experience of love is expressed mainly through gratitude, respect, and affection. Although the romantic component tends to decline, love continues to serve as a source of psychological support, life satisfaction, and inner peace. Erikson's stage of "integrity vs. despair" corresponds to this phase of life. As individuals reflect on their past, they often find meaning through the love they have given and received. Emotional connections with family, children, grandchildren, and close friends become an important source of psychological support. Research (C. Carstensen, 2006) demonstrates that older adults experience love as "calm, sincere,

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and filled with warmth." They value peace and mutual respect more than passion. In this sense, love in late adulthood becomes a key factor in maintaining psychological stability.

The feeling of love holds significant psychological importance across all stages of human life, manifesting in distinct ways at each age period. In childhood, it serves as a source of safety and attachment; in adolescence, it becomes a mechanism for self-understanding and identity formation. In youth, love is associated with conscious choice, loyalty, and trust, whereas in adulthood it symbolizes life partnership, family, and emotional maturity. In old age, love emerges as a source of spiritual fulfillment and inner tranquility, enriching the final stage of life with meaning. Thus, the emotion of love occupies a central role in an individual's psychological development, self-awareness, socialization, and system of life values. It is the highest emotional energy that guides a person toward maturity, compassion, and life harmony.

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