

Relationship Satisfaction Through the Love Languages

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### Abstract

The current study will examine the relationship between Dr. Gary Chapman's Five Love Languages and relationship satisfaction. The possible implications of this study including help solve relationship/marriage problems, providing resources to express wants/needs to partner, allowing for better communication of needs to partner and applications to couple's therapy/marriage counseling. The participants in this study will complete a Qualtrics survey consisting of 8 questions. My hypothesis is that the failure to provide your partner with their most desired Love Language will result in decreased overall happiness. My second hypothesis is that the least desired Love Language will not result in overall satisfaction in the relationship. After collecting data from a self-reported survey this study found significant results for both hypotheses. The results indicated that overall relationship satisfaction might be predicted by fulfillment of a person's Love Language by their partner.

### Relationship Satisfaction Through the Love Languages

People often have a hard time expressing their wants and needs to their partner in a relationship. Many relationships end due to a lack of their needs getting met by their partner. In the United States, around half of all first marriages and 60% of second marriages end in divorce (Amato, 2010). Dr. Gary Chapman (1992), a very well-known marriage counselor, published a book known as the *The Five Love Languages*. This book is based upon observations Dr. Chapman concluded from his clinical practice of counseling married couples. It is hypothesized that couples will experience overall dissatisfaction in their relationship when their partner does not fulfill their most desired love language.

The book, *The Five Love Languages*, includes ways people express and communicate their love (Chapman, 1992). According to Chapman (1992), each person has a “primary” love language, which is their preferred way of being loved. However, that person may express their love to their partner in a different way. Chapman (1992) explains that each person has a “love tank” similar to that of a gas tank in a vehicle. In order to keep this “tank” full, our partner must communicate our primary love language to us in order for the person to be satisfied in the relationship. The Five Love Languages includes Words of Affirmation, Quality Time, Physical Touch, Acts of Service and Giving Gifts. According to Chapman (1992), each person “speaks” and “receives” the love languages to their partner. Each person in the relationships desires the love languages in a certain hierarchy (Chapman, 1992). Whenever their primary love language is

not fulfilled, they may experience dissatisfaction in the relationship. The importance of this topic is giving couples a method of understanding each other's wants and needs in a relationship. A potential application of the research conducted in this study is to apply it to couple's therapy.

Stafford, Dainton and Haas (2000) conducted a study by collecting data from 520 married couples. Through their study, they were researching routine and strategic maintenance behavior in each partner. Stafford et al. (2000) defined "strategic maintenance behavior" as behaviors that an individual has the intent of improving the relationship. The researchers defined routine behavior as behaviors that "foster relational maintenance in the manner of a by-product" (Stafford et al., 2000). The researchers used a factor analysis and through their findings were able to identify 7 maintenance items. The 7 maintenance items included: advice, assurance, conflict management, openness, positivity, sharing tasks and social networks (Stafford et al., 2000). The results found that femininity was the main predictor of all seven of the maintenance items, although biological gender was a very weak predictor of two of the maintenance behaviors and did not appear in the other five and it was also found that assurance was a primary predictor of relational characteristics, which was supported by previous research (Stafford et al., 2000).

Egbert and Polk (2006) examined the validity of Dr. Chapman's Love Languages through their study. The researchers set out to test the factor structure and construct validity of Dr. Chapman's Love Languages. Through their research they planned to compare Dr. Chapman's theory to other factors including relationship satisfaction. The results concluded that Chapman's (1992) love languages may have some validity to them. Through the study, the Love Languages were significantly related to Stafford's (2000) shared tasks theory and Chapman's (1992) theory. The difference between the two was that Safford's (2000) theory reflected the intentions of the communicator whereas Dr. Chapman's (1992) theory reflected the behaviors of people in the

relationship. The results of this study showed that Chapman's (1992) Love Languages could possibly reflect behaviors that are performed in order to provide relational satisfaction, but it was not completely evident and would need to be tested in a larger sample (Egbert & Polk, 2006).

Bunt and Hazelwood (2017) set out to find if couples with aligned love languages would report higher relationship satisfaction. In the researcher's study, they tested 3 variables: love language preference, self-regulation and relationship satisfaction. The researchers used The Love Language scale developed by Egbert and Polk (2006) in order to test the couples' primary love languages. After the initial survey, the participants also completed the survey from their partner's perspective. Relationship satisfaction was tested using a seven-item version of Spanier's (1976) Dyadic Adjustment Scale (DAS) in which the participants rated their level of satisfaction. They also related their overall happiness in the relationship. The scores ranged from 0 to 36, in which any score less than 21 meant the relationship was in distress. The last questionnaire completed was Wilson's (2005) 16 item Behavioral Self-Regulation for Effective Relationships Scale (BSRERS). This scale was used to rate their own behavior in the relationship. **RESULTS**

Along with the love languages having a factor in relationship satisfaction, Bland and McQueen (2018) conducted a study to find out if there is a difference in primary Love Language in males and females. In the researcher's study, the participants were first given Chapman's Love Language Personal Profile (LLPP) which consisted of a forced choice question with the option representing 2 different love languages. The participants then used the Revised Marital Satisfaction Scale (RKMS) to rate relationship satisfaction (Akagi, Schumm, & Bergen, 2003). Their study found through a paired samples *t*-test that there was not a significant difference in satisfaction between men and women within each couple. The researchers also used a cluster analysis in order to group different love languages together to find differences between the love

languages. Cluster 1 found that Quality Time appeared to be the primary love language in most men and women. Cluster 1 also found that Acts of Service was more important to women than men (Bland & McQueen, 2018). Cluster 2 found that Acts of Service was the primary love language for most men and Quality Time for women. Cluster 3 found that both women and men valued Quality Time the most. Lastly, Cluster 4 had an incongruity. However, Acts of Service showed the biggest difference in mean and Physical Touch had the largest effect size (Bland & McQueen, 2018). The Five Love Languages theory developed by Chapman (1992) has gone under researched, although Bland and McQueen (2018) found that couples were less likely to report distress in their relationship if their love languages were congruent. Bland and McQueen (2018) found that couples who had more similarly aligned love languages were overall happier in their relationships. This could be caused from an understanding from each partner of how and why their partner desires to be loved in that matter. Understanding each other's desire to be loved in a certain way makes it easier to convey their desires to their partner, which is one of the main reasons for hypothesizing that if a person's love language is not fulfilled by their partner, they will experience overall dissatisfaction in their relationship.

According to Stolarski, Wojtkowska, Kwiecińska (2015), individual differences in the view of time spent together may to a certain degree influence relationship quality. Couples in relationships sometimes have different perceptions of what quality time is. This can become an issue because one partner may believe they are spending quality time together, but the other may have a completely different view of quality time and believe that it was not quality time. A potential hypothesis could be that if the person's primary love language is quality time, they will have a much harder time getting that need fulfilled if their partner does not understand their individual need for quality time.

Flora and Segrin (2000) conducted a study to find out if compliments and praise from your partner influence relationship satisfaction. This study also researched how complaining about your partner affects relationship satisfaction. This research study shows how important words of affirmation are in a relationship. Through this study they found compliments increased overall relationship satisfaction, while complaining decreased overall relationship satisfaction. For someone with a primary love language of words of affirmation, compliments and praise are extremely important. This study shows that even for someone who might not have a primary love language of words of affirmation, it is still a very important factor in a relationship.

The current study examined the relationship between Dr. Chapman's (1992) theory of Love Languages and relationship satisfaction to add to the previous studies conducted. Past studies have studied gender differences within the Love Languages as well as how other relational tests relate to Chapman's (1992) theory. The purpose of this study was to allow people to understand how to have a better relationship through relationship satisfaction. Dr. Gary Chapman (1992) found through his marriage counseling practice that there were 5 things unhappy married couples constantly expressed was an issue. Those 5 things were found to be the love languages. With that being said, it was hypothesized that couples will experience overall dissatisfaction in their relationship when their partner does not fulfill their most desired love language. It was also hypothesized that the least desired Love Language will not contribute to overall relationship satisfaction.

## **Method**

### **Participants**

The current study had 94 participants at the Indiana University Southeast campus. The age range of the participants was 18 years old to 71 years old. Although, majority of the participants ranged between the ages of 20 and 30 years old due to the population being social media users. There were 82 females and 12 males who participated in the study. Majority of the participants being female could also be because more females use social media than males. The participants were asked to participate in the study on a voluntary basis recruited through social media (e.g., Facebook, Instagram).

### **Materials**

The participants answered demographic information on a Qualtrics survey including their age and sex. They were also asked if they have ever been in a committed romantic relationship or not. If they had never been in a committed romantic relationship, the survey skipped to the end because they could not answer the questions. The participant first ranked each love language on a rating scale of 1-5 (1 = MOST desired, 5 = LEAST desired). This allowed them to see what their primary (MOST desired) love language was. Next, the participant answered the questions regarding the extent that their partner fulfills each of the 5 love languages. For example, the questions will ask “Regarding the #1 ranked love language, how often does you partner fulfill that need?” For each of their ranking, they will rate the extent that their partner fulfills that need using a Likert scale of 1-5 (1= never, 5 = always).

Lastly, I will follow up with one last question. The last question being, “Regarding this current/most previous relationship, how would you rate your overall satisfaction in the relationship (1= very satisfied and 5 = very dissatisfied). This method measured how important a certain way of being loved by their partner was, how much their partner fulfills that desire and how overall happy they are in the relationship. This will show the participant’s desire of getting

their needs met and how their partner's fulfillment of that need relates to their overall relationship satisfaction.

## **Procedure**

The study was conducted using a within subjects' correlational design to determine if there is a significant correlation in each person between the love languages and relationship satisfaction. The researchers asked the participants to participate in their study. The survey was conducted on Qualtrics. If the individual agreed to participate, the researcher gave the participant the link to the Qualtrics survey. The participant went through the series of questions first ranking how important each Love Language is to them on a 1-5 Likert scale. Secondly, they went through the follow up questions of how much their partner satisfies their fulfillment of each of those needs. Lastly, they rated their overall happiness in their relationship including how satisfied they were/are in their relationship.

## **Results**

Table 1 shows the descriptive statistics for both hypotheses. Using a correlational analysis, the relationship between the Five Love Languages and relationship satisfaction was assessed. The first Love Language correlated significantly and positively ( $r = .352, p < .05$ ). The results showed that the more a person provides their partner with their most desired Love Language, the happier they will be in the relationship. This did support the first hypothesis that failure to provide your partner with their most desired Love Language will result in decreased overall happiness. The relationship between the other four Love Languages and relationship satisfaction were also assessed using a correlational analysis. The second, third and fourth ranked Love Languages correlated significantly and positively; The second ranked Love Language had a

weak correlation as well ( $r = .374, p < .05$ ). The third ranked Love Language had a moderate in strength correlation ( $r = .415, p < .05$ ). The fourth ranked Love Language had a weak correlation ( $r = .250, p < .05$ ). The results showed that although the middle-ranked Love Languages were not as detrimental to overall relationship satisfaction, they still had some contribution. Lastly, the fifth ranked Love Language had a very weak correlation and was not significant ( $r = .105, p > .05$ ). This result did support the second part of the hypothesis that the least desired Love Language will not contribute to overall relationship satisfaction.

## **Discussion**

Learning about relationships always has importance, no matter if it is a romantic relationship or not. Every person has a relationship with someone. Love languages do not just relate to a romantic relationship. Dr. Chapman (1992) has written over 6 different versions of *The Five Love Languages* including a version for couples, singles, men, military (long-distance), children and teens. Everyone can benefit from knowing love languages because it can improve your relationship with the people around you. Knowing how someone likes to be loved is very valuable. With mental health becoming more recognized in today's society, the Love Languages could be a very valuable tool in helping with relationships. This book could also help heal broken marriages and relationships. Through learning that there is a significant correlation between relationship satisfaction and the love languages, the under-researched theory could finally be brought to the light and applied in a counseling setting.

*The Five Love Languages* (1992) could be applied in couple's therapy. Because the divorce rate is so high in the United States, any type of help to keep marriages together is valuable. Dr. Chapman (1992) realized through his marriage counseling that people always complain about the same 5 things. He saw this pattern over and over again. In the book, there are

couples that went to Dr. Chapman (1992) to get marriage counseling and after they talked to him and he explained the love languages, they had a completely different outlook on their marriage and how to love their partner. Not only would this method help with marriages, but also family relationship including teenagers and children. The Love Languages could help explain their needs to their parents. For example, if a child gets a good grade on a test and just wants their parent to say “I am proud of you” but they never do, it could be detrimental to the relationship. Through talking about the love languages, they could both understand why that is so important to the child.

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Table 1

*Descriptive Statistics for Hypothesis 1 and 2*

Variables	N	Mean	Standard Deviation	Range
Love Language #1	94	3.50	1.124	1-5
Love Language #2	94	3.48	1.180	1-5
Love Language #3	94	3.24	1.123	1-5
Love Language #4	94	3.09	1.142	1-5
Love Language #5	94	2.53	1.094	1-5
Relationship Satisfaction	92	3.93	1.087	1-5

*Note:* Love Language #1 is the LL that the participant ranked as their primary LL. Love Language #2 is the second most importantly ranked LL and so on with LL #3-5, with 5 being the LEAST important LL.