



TESTING LOVE LANGUAGES: DEFINITIONS, FREQUENCY, VALIDITY, AND SATISFACTION WITHIN MARRIAGES

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Abstract

This literature review looks at the question: is there a relationship between love languages and marital happiness? Love languages are a very popular cultural theme, and many people depend on love languages for the satisfaction of love between partners. Although there has been an emphasis on love languages, in recent cultures, there have also been very high divorce rates, therefore the question if love languages prove to produce love remains prominent. Fifteen articles that I have found take this question and extract themes regarding this question that fall under the subject of the description of love languages, the validity of love languages, and satisfaction and love languages. This literature review looks at each of the five most popular love languages and assesses what they are, how often they occur within relationships, and if they produce satisfaction within couples. It has been found that most love languages individually do produce marital satisfaction. In the later part of this literature review, I assess the validity of love languages and their satisfaction as a whole, I have found that the love languages themselves do not prove to be valid with empirical research, and it was also found that there are many other ways of showing love that are not one of the five love languages. Therefore, these findings prove that love languages do not fully lead to marital happiness, instead, simply showing affection leads to marital happiness, which could include showing love languages. This information was found by looking at studies that would measure satisfaction between married couples and related it to love languages.

Keywords

Love Languages, Physical Touch, Words of Affirmation, Receiving Gifts, Quality Time, Acts of Service, Differentiation of Self, Marital Happiness

Introduction

Physical touch, words of affirmation, receiving gifts, quality time, and acts of service, these five love languages have changed the world. Gary Chapman, the author of *The 5 Love Languages* (1992) has come up with these terms in the hope that couples will use and apply these terms to their relationship. Chapman did not build his claims on empirical support, instead, he built it on his personal experience. Because of a lack of empirical support, there may be a lack of effectiveness and satisfaction that the love languages could provide. My research question for this literature review is: is there a relationship between using love languages and marital happiness? This literature review specifically looks at the relationship between love languages and marital happiness. Therefore, this literature review goes over each of the love languages, the validity of love languages, and satisfaction within love languages.

Defining Each Love Language

It is important to start by defining acts of service, one of the five love languages, and what the importance of it is. Righetti and Impett (2017) categorize acts of service into two categories: an approach method and an avoidance motive, they define acts of service approach method as the act of sacrificing for an individual for the benefit of their relationship, and they define the acts of service avoidance method as the act of sacrificing to try to make up for something in a relationship or to avoid conflict. Bunt & Hazelwood (2017) define acts of service as a time when a partner tries to help out the other partner by performing a specific behavior.

Within the acts of service love language commonality is important to look at when assessing if there is a relationship between acts of service and marital happiness. Mostova and colleagues (2022) concluded in a study that measured the most common love language and satisfaction among partners, that acts of service is the third most popular love language. But Bahtiar and colleagues (2023) have concluded through their study that measured the length of marriage, either newlywed or long-married couples, and their most common love language, that acts of service is the most common love language for couples who have been married for a long time. Although both of these studies have two different conclusions, they studied two populations and therefore, came up with two different answers, but it can be concluded that both of these studies show that acts of service are one of the more popular love languages compared to the others.

When looking at love languages and their satisfaction, understanding just the acts of service love language and its levels of satisfaction is important too. İnce & Işık (2022) studied the relationship between love languages and the differentiation of self within relationships, and they found that acts of service do not lead to marital satisfaction. Bland & McQueen (2018) studied love languages within couples, they focused on differences between each individual regarding love languages; they found that acts of service had the greatest differences among individuals, so if one individual in a relationship had acts of service as their top love language, their partner most likely would not have acts of service as their top love language, which brings less satisfaction within the relationship. Hughes & Camden (2020) studied couples who were showing their partner's love language well to their partner and if that would lead to higher satisfaction; they found that for those who had the preferred love language of acts of service, when their partner did well at performing acts of service, it predicted greater love. Although two different results showed up within these studies, it can be concluded that having the acts of service love language does not bring satisfaction within couples, but doing acts of service for your partner does produce satisfaction.

Another love language, physical touch, has a distinct definition. Bunt & Hazelwood (2017) have found that physical touch means the enjoyment of physical affection and attention. Mantova (2023) found that physical touch refers to when someone prefers to feel love through physical contact, whether sexual or nonsexual. Throughout these two articles, physical touch is the act of giving and/or receiving love through physical contact.

When trying to determine if physical touch leads to satisfaction, commonality within this love language must be looked at first. When studying the most common love language between partners, Mostova and colleagues (2022) concluded that physical touch is the second highest used love language. But when looking at different lengths of marriages and the most common love language, Bahtiar and colleagues (2023) concluded that physical touch was the most common top love language for couples who are newlywed. Therefore, it can be concluded that physical touch is a very common love language in relationships, specifically among newlyweds.

To decide if love languages lead to high satisfaction within marriages physical touch and levels of satisfaction must be discussed. İnce & Işık (2022) discovered in their study, which looked at the relationship between love languages and differentiation of self within relationships, that physical touch does lead to higher levels of marital satisfaction. Hughes & Camden (2020) researched couples' relationship satisfaction regarding how effective showing your partner's love language is, they concluded that those who had the preferred love language of physical touch predicted greater love among couples. These results show that physical touch does lead to satisfaction within couples, either through expressing it.

Words of affirmation are an important love language, and it is important to understand what words of affirmation mean. Impett and colleagues (2024) have found that words of affirmation describe verbal expressions of encouragement, appreciation, or love. Whereas Bunt & Hazelwood (2017) have found that words of affirmation describe acknowledging your partner with words of thanksgiving and encouragement. Therefore, it can be concluded that words of affirmation can be defined as using your words to express your love, usually through words of encouragement.

Defining words of affirmation is important but to understand words of affirmation, it has to be understood how common words of affirmation are within couples. Mostova and colleagues (2022) ranked the popularity of each of the love languages within relationships, they found that words of affirmation are the fourth most used love language. When Suriaj & Septiarly (2016) studied if the five love languages are effective in producing love or not, when ranking the most popular love languages of their subjects, they found that words of affirmation were deemed to be the highest used love language within both males and females. These results are drastically different and could be due to the location of these studies: Mostova's study primarily had Ukrainian subjects, whereas Suriaj & Septiarly's study had Indonesian participants.

When looking at love languages and the satisfaction levels between married couples, determining the satisfaction levels for words of affirmation is necessary. İnce & Işık, have concluded that words of affirmation do lead to higher levels of marital satisfaction when comparing love languages and differentiation of self to relationship satisfaction. Kaynak Malatyalı & van Koningsbruggen (2024) studied self-affirmation and whether it is connected with relationship satisfaction; they concluded that there is a positive relationship between self-affirmation and relationship satisfaction, meaning that affirming words is an important factor when it comes to relationship satisfaction. Hughes & Camden (2020) looked at expressing love languages between individuals in

relationships, and they confirmed that those whose highest ranking of love language was words of affirmation had a positive relationship with their significant other when their partners did a good job at expressing that love language. Words of affirmation have a positive effect on relationship satisfaction within married couples.

Quality time, one of the five love languages can be defined through studies that relate to love languages and their satisfaction. Hughes & Camden (2020) in their study on love languages and satisfaction define quality time as doing something together with your partner, but you must be completely focused on them. They also included having quality conversations as quality time. Bunt & Hazelwood (2107) define quality time as spending undivided intentional action with their partner. Intentional time with your partner seems to be a recurring theme in quality time in these articles.

The relationship between quality time and commonality is important when looking at satisfaction within relationships. When looking at the differences between love languages among individuals and their partners in relationships, Bland & McQueen (2018) found that quality time is the primary love language among all individuals. Mostova and colleagues (2022) measured the relationship between love languages and satisfaction between couples, and they found that quality time is also the most common love language among couples. Mantova also researched satisfaction within couples and love languages and concluded that the number one love language for the majority of women in their study was Quality Time, which led to the most satisfaction within relationships. Across the board, quality time is a very common love language.

Quality time and satisfaction is an important relationship to look at when finding the overall satisfaction of love languages. İnce & Işık (2022) found that in their participants, quality time does lead to higher levels of marital satisfaction. Carlson and colleagues (2022) measured the influence of quality time and the outcome of satisfaction within relationships, they found that quality time and marital satisfaction have a positive effect on relationship satisfaction, but it must be meaningful time. Hughes & Camden (2020) also found that if you have the preferred love language of quality time when a partner shows it, it creates a higher relationship satisfaction. All of these articles prove that quality time does lead to satisfaction within relationships.

Receiving gifts is the last of the five love languages to define. Brunt & Hazelwood (2017) defined receiving gifts as receiving a gift giving that has thought and meaning behind it. Righetti & Impett (2017) studied sacrificing and giving within relationships, and how that can lead to a positive relationship. Relating to giving, they found that the motive behind the act is important for how the act is being perceived; if the act is selfish and for the benefit of others, it won't be received well, whereas, if the act is not for oneself, but for one's partner, it is received better. Therefore, receiving gifts is a love language that can be defined as feeling love when someone gives you something with meaning behind it.

Within the receiving gifts love language commonality is important to look at when assessing if there is a relationship between acts of service and marital happiness. Mostova and colleagues (2022) have concluded in their research that receiving gifts is the least common love language among couples. Similarly, Mantova (2023) discovered that receiving gifts had the lowest level of preference within their subjects. Both of these articles describe receiving gifts as the least common love language within couples.

When looking at love languages and their satisfaction, understanding just the receiving gifts love language and its levels of satisfaction is important too. İnce & Işık (2022) concluded as they were studying love languages and relationship satisfaction that receiving gifts does lead to higher levels of marital satisfaction. Hughes & Camden (2020) also discovered that when those who had the preferred love language of receiving gifts, when their significant other expressed it, it would lead to higher levels of marital satisfaction. It can be inferred through this information that receiving gifts, although unpopular, does lead to higher levels of satisfaction within marriages.

Validity of Love Languages

It is believed that there are only five love languages: physical touch, words of affirmation, acts of service, giving gifts, and quality time, but there is evidence that does not support this, but claims there are more than five love languages. Pett (2023) and colleagues argue that an additional sixth love language is very common in many relationships, this sixth theme is check-ins. Impett and colleagues (2024) have found that there are more than just five love languages, but they believe that support of a partner's autonomy and personal goals act as a 'love language' that is not listed as one of the five. Both of these studies prove that there are more than five love languages, and many other characteristics can act as love languages.

Differentiation of self, or self-confidence, is also known to be a love language not included in the five, but acts as one. Brunt and Hazelwood (2017) study love languages but also self-regulation in their study of relationship satisfaction; they have found in general that women have significantly higher self-regulation scores than men, and when there is a misalignment in love languages between the individuals in a relationship, men have a happier relationship when both the male and female are self-regulated. Bland & McQueen (2018) studied love language combinations within relationships, and even in this study solely about love languages, they mention that differentiation of self is important for successful relationships and that personal growth is valuable within a relationship. İnce & Işık (2022) studied love languages and differentiation of self in relationship satisfaction, and

they found that differentiation of self has proved to lead to higher levels of marital satisfaction. Differentiation of self may not be one of the five love languages, but it is important in relationships, and it leads to higher levels of satisfaction, therefore, it is not only love languages that bring satisfaction within marital relationships.

Each person has a giving and receiving love language and therefore can express and feel in two different ways. Mostova and colleagues (2022) have found from their study on love languages that each individual has a receiving love language and a giving love language, the higher the discrepancy is between the two the less satisfied individuals felt. Polk (2013) studies this idea that if a person in a relationship does not have the same giving or receiving as their partner, then they won't be satisfied, but instead, found that 73.5% of the couples measured included a partial or total mismatch of giving and receiving the same love language, whereas, only 26.5% reported a match. Therefore, if one does not give or receive the same love language as their partner, then their relationship may not be as satisfactory, but realistically there is only a small portion of individuals who have the same giving and receiving love language as their partner.

Not only do people have a giving and a receiving love language, but individuals tend to feel more than their top love language. Surijah & Septiarly (2016) studied in Indonesia if the five love languages were valid, including feeling more than one love language, and they discovered that because people are growing human beings who change often, a person can have more than one love language. Bahtiar and colleagues (2023) also did a study in Indonesia trying to research love languages and interpersonal communication, ultimately encouraging healthy communication regarding love languages; they discovered that a lot of newlywed couples had two top love languages, not just one, and there was one couple who they studied who had four main love languages. Ultimately, these Indonesian studies prove that having more than one love language is not a bad thing.

Having more than one love language is not only a bad thing but also a really common theme among individuals in relationships. Impett and colleagues (2024) conducted an American research study to understand if these love languages are accurate or not, they found through their research that people tend to feel all five love languages as meaningful ways of expressing love and feeling loved, therefore, there isn't only one love language per person. Hughes & Camden (2020) also conducted an American study trying to understand the relationship between love languages and satisfaction; they found that some people may score the same score on two of the love languages, therefore people can have more than one love language. These American studies prove that people can feel more than one love language, and even all of them, and it is a very common theme among individuals in relationships.

One partner having the same love language as another love language seems to create an environment where one can freely express their love with their partner, but this may not be true in all relationships. When Bland & McQueen (2018) studied having a different love language than a partner, they discovered that individuals who have the same love language seem to produce more marital happiness, but this is mainly because people choose each other based on similar interests. İnce & Işık (2022) claim that through their study they determined that saying that both individuals in a relationship have to have the same love language brings difficulty to the relationship. Not having the same love language as your partner is not a bad thing, but many choose someone with the same interests because of having similar interests.

Satisfaction and Relationships

The relationship between love languages and marital happiness can be shown through levels of satisfaction within a couple. Givertz and colleagues (2009) determined through their study that looked at satisfaction and commitment across different marital types that satisfaction in couples is most prominent when couples have a traditional marriage, but satisfaction is related to how much effort and commitment one puts in a relationship. Polk (2013) understood that as long as the people in their relationship are showing some type of love, then there will be satisfaction within their relationship. Mantova (2023) found that there is no correlation between love languages and satisfaction within couples. All in all, satisfaction depends on the level of commitment and giving love in general.

Conclusion

In conclusion, these results show that love languages do not directly correlate with relationship satisfaction. This is a complicated conclusion because many of the themes do not agree with one another. Most of the individual love languages do correlate with higher levels of satisfaction, but together, satisfaction is not found solely in love languages. Showing love in general and showing commitment leads to more satisfaction than love languages do. There are more than five love languages, you can have more than one love language, and giving and receiving love languages do not have to correlate with your partners, therefore the validity of love languages is faulty too.

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