RAW lab
Relationships and Well-Being Lab

POPULAR PSYCHOLOGY THROUGH A SCIENTIFIC LENS: EVALUATING LOVE LANGUAGES FROM A RELATIONSHIP SCIENCE PERSPECTIVE

HISTORY OF THE 5 LOVE LANGUAGES

Dr. Gary Chapman's book *The 5 Love Languages* was published in 1992 and was based on findings from a small sample of married, religious, and mixed-gender couples. With over 20 million copies sold worldwide and translations into 50 languages, *The Five Love Languages* quickly became a global phenomenon.

But how scientifically sound **are** Chapman's five love languages? We aimed to address this question in a thorough empirical review of the latest relationship research.

THE 3 MAIN ASSUMPTIONS OF THE 5 LOVE LANGUAGES ARE AS FOLLOWS:

(a) each person has a **primary** love language that they rely on the most for expressing and feeling love

(b) there are **five** love languages:

- receiving gifts
- acts of service
- physical touch
- words of affirmation
- quality time

(c) couples are more satisfied when partners speak one another's preferred language.

WHAT THE SCIENCE SAYS

People **don't** have a primary love language: When allowed to rate their preference for each love language (rather than being forced to choose one over the other), studies showed that people rated **all five** love languages highly, and these ratings were not associated with their scores on the forced-choice measure.

Analyses from studies that investigated the existence of five distinct love languages yielded **conflicting** results, all of which **deviated** from Chapman's original five love languages. For example, one found three love languages, and another that did find five defined languages had findings that were conceptually **different** from Chapman's five love languages.

Research also demonstrates **other** meaningful ways of expressing love. For example, the degree of a partner's integration into one's broader social network. Such expressions of love were unlikely captured by Chapman due to the lack of diversity in the sample on which he based his book.

Finally, studies showed that partners who **match** on their love languages are not any happier than those whose partners are **mismatched.** Expressions of **all** love languages are positively associated with relationship satisfaction, **regardless** of a person's preference, with some expressions of love being more important to **some** people in **certain** situations.

CONSIDER LOVE TO REQUIRE A NUTRITIONALLY BALANCED DIET!

Given the popularity of short-hands in conceptualizing love, we proposed a **new** short-hand, that is to think about love as requiring the maintenance of a "nutritionally balanced diet".

So, just as people may stay alive while consuming only **some** nutrients (e.g., carbs), people need **multiple** nutrients (e.g., protein, fat, vitamins, minerals) to be in the **best** state of health. Similarly, satisfying relationships will ultimately be ones in which partners express **all** five "love languages", among other important behaviors (e.g., support for personal goals and autonomy).
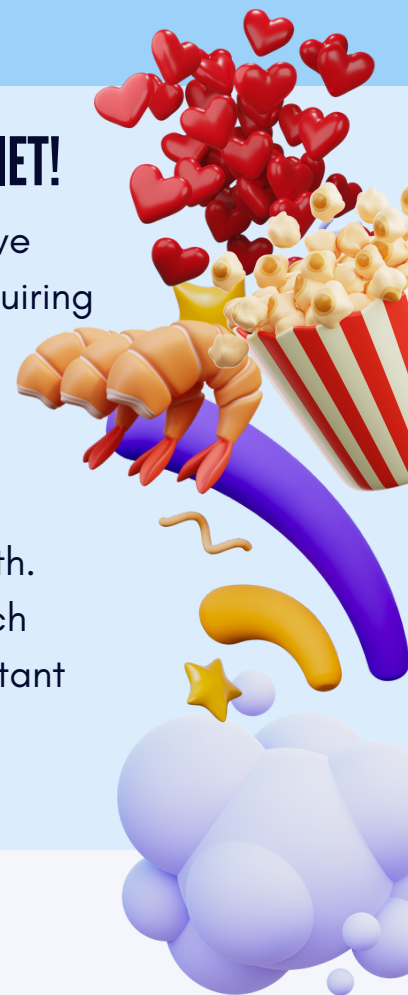
CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

In conclusion, while Chapman's Five Love Languages offers an attractive shorthand for understanding and expressing love, there is no evidence to support the notion that everyone has one preferred love language, or that people are any more satisfied with a partner expressing love in their preferred love language. This limitation can be harmful, potentially leading individuals to overlook many meaningful ways of expressing and feeling love that also exist.