

Associations Between Attachment Styles and Preferred Love Languages

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Background

There is a large literature examining adult attachment and relationship maintenance strategies, but relatively little academic research has examined the construct of love languages despite its success in popular press (cf. Egbert & Polk, 2006; Surijah & Septiary, 2016). Even less research has considered how these constructs may be related.

This study assessed attachment style, love languages, and preferences for hypothetical partners who prefer to receive or express affection using different love languages to determine how these constructs might be related.

Method

150 people (97 male, 51 female; Age $M=37.8$, $SD=10.0$) recruited via Amazon MTurk completed an online survey with the following measures:

ECR-S Measure of Adult Attachment (Wei et al. 2007)

Produced scores for **attachment anxiety** (fear of rejection or abandonment, excessive need for approval, distress when partner is unavailable) and for **attachment avoidance** (fear of dependence and intimacy, excessive need for self-reliance, reluctance to self-disclose).

Love Languages (Egbert & Polk, 2006)

Measured participant's preferred means of expressing affection: touch, words of affirmation, quality time, acts of service, giving gifts

Potential Partner Ratings

Participants also rated how interested they would be in potential partners who desired to receive, or preferred to express, affection through each love language.

Results

Table 1. Correlations between participants' adult attachment and preferred love language for expressing feelings to their partner.

	Touch	Words of Affirmation	Quality Time	Acts of Services	Receiving Gifts
Attachment Anxiety	-.060	-.141	-.143	-.213**	-.068
Attachment Avoidance	-.570**	-.450**	-.500**	-.411**	-.213**

Note: * $p<.05$, ** $p<.01$

Table 2. Correlations between participants' adult attachment and desire to be in a relationship with a partner who prefers to express affection with each love language.

	Touch	Words of Affirmation	Quality Time	Acts of Services	Receiving Gifts
Attachment Anxiety	.222*	.060	.180*	-.029	.220**
Attachment Avoidance	-.367*	-.344*	-.223**	-.287**	-.216**

Note: * $p<.05$, ** $p<.01$

Table 3. Correlations between participants' adult attachment and desire to be in a relationship with a partner who prefers to receive affection through each love language.

	Touch	Words of Affirmation	Quality Time	Acts of Services	Receiving Gifts
Attachment Anxiety	.217*	.130	.010	.048	.128
Attachment Avoidance	-.145	-.285**	-.246**	.014	.084

Note: * $p<.05$, ** $p<.01$

Conclusions

Participants high in **attachment anxiety** were less likely to express affection through acts of service, but attachment anxiety was unrelated to the other love languages. Participants high in **attachment avoidance** were less likely to express affection through any of the love languages. See Table 1.

Attachment anxiety was associated with **greater interest** in partners who preferred **expressing affection** through touch, quality time, and gifts, and partners who preferred **receiving affection** through touch. See Tables 2 and 3.

Attachment avoidance was associated with **less interest** in all partners who expressed a preference for expressing affection through one of the love languages, and partners who preferred **receiving affection** through words of affirmation and quality time. See Tables 2 and 3.

These findings provide initial evidence that adult attachment relates to love languages in meaningful ways. People high in attachment avoidance being less interested in most situations that involve expressing affection is consistent with previous research, as is the relationship between attachment anxiety and preferences for partners who prefer touch.

References

- Egbert, N., & Polk, D. (2006). Speaking the language of relational maintenance: A validity test of Chapman's (1992) Five Love Languages. *Communication Research Reports*, 23(1), 19-26. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17464090500535822>
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