EXAMINING THE LINK BETWEEN ATTACHMENT STYLE AND PREFERRED LOVE LANGUAGE

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Abstract: Romantic love is a complex emotion that involves the formation of an interpersonal relationship between two individuals. While philosophers, writers, and artists have long explored this emotion, it was only in the last century that the scientific study of romantic love gained interest. One aspect of this emotion is the concept of love languages, which was introduced by Chapman. His theory outlines how we express and experience love through five principal love languages: words of affirmation, quality time, receiving gifts, acts of service, and physical touch. Recognizing these differences in communication can have a significant impact on a relationship. However, to gain a deeper understanding of the individual needs of partners and their current or past behaviors in relationships, it is essential to consider attachment styles. Research on adult attachment is grounded in the belief that the same motivational system responsible for creating the close emotional bond between parents and children is also responsible for the bond that forms between adults in emotionally intimate relationships. Despite the acceptance of Chapman's love language theory by professionals, little research has been done to explore its connections with other constructs, such as attachment style. Further exploration of these connections may contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of romantic love and ultimately enhance our ability to navigate intimate relationships. The aim of this study is to explore the relationship between the love language and attachment style. According to it we conducted the research among 108 participants, all women, ranging in age from 20 to 68, who were in committed relationships with a permanent partner. The participants' average age was 38.47 years. The duration of the relationships varied among the participants, with the majority (43.5%) having been together for over ten years, followed by 20.4% in relationships for less than ten years, 19.4% for less than one year, and 16.7% for less than five years. In terms of education, the majority (56.5%) had an undergraduate degree, while 23.1% held a master's degree, 9.3% had a doctorate, and 11.1% had completed high school. All participants identified as Macedonian and practiced the Orthodox religion. The results show that individuals with a secure attachment style mostly preferred quality time, physical touch, and words of affirmation, while those with an avoidant attachment style were more likely to prefer acts of service and receiving gifts. People with an anxious attachment style showed a higher preference for quality time and receiving gifts, and dismissive attachment style individuals showed the lowest preference for all love languages. However, the chi-square test did not support the hypothesis that there is a significant association between attachment styles and preferred love languages. Nonetheless, the findings provide insights into the complex relationship between attachment styles and love languages, highlighting the importance of understanding individual differences in the ways that people express and receive love in relationships.
Keywords: love language, attachment style, interpersonal relationships

1. INTRODUCTION

Attachment style and love languages are two important factors that can influence how individuals express and receive love in romantic relationships. Attachment style refers to the way individuals form emotional bonds and attachment patterns with their caregivers in childhood, which can then shape their adult relationships. Love languages, on the other hand, refer to the specific ways individuals express and receive love, such as through physical touch, words of affirmation, quality time, acts of service, or receiving gifts.

Attachment is a term used to describe the deep emotional bond that develops between an infant and their primary caregiver. This bond is crucial to a child's development and can have a profound impact on their future relationships and overall well-being. Attachment theory was first introduced by British psychologist John Bowlby in the 1950s and has since become a widely accepted framework for understanding human relationships. In this theory, Bowlby proposed that a child's attachment style is largely determined by the quality of care they receive from their caregiver during their early years.

The experiences that an individual has in their early life can significantly impact their personality development and behavior as an adult. Attachment styles that are created during childhood influence relationships in general and also romantic relationships in adulthood. (Theodore T., 2021). Attachment behaviors, which are influenced by various factors such as cognition, affect, and interaction with caregivers, shape an individual's stress responses and exploratory activities. These early attachment experiences lead to the development of an internal working model that shapes an individual's relational behavior and expectations in romantic relationships as an adult. These cognitive and affective representations of the self and others provide continuity and stability of attachment patterns throughout

life, affecting personality development, psychological functioning, behavior, and affect regulation in future relational contexts. Contemporary research on close relationships heavily emphasizes the idea that romantic relationships share characteristics with attachment relationships, highlighting the importance of attachment theory in understanding human relationships.

There are three primary dimensions that characterize attachment styles and patterns: closeness, which refers to the level of comfort a person has in being emotionally close and intimate with others; dependence/avoidance, which is the degree to which people feel comfortable depending on others and having partners depend on them; and anxiety, which is the extent to which people worry their partners will abandon and reject them.

The four attachment styles, secure, anxious, avoidant, and dismissive demonstrate significant differences in how individuals relate to the three primary dimensions of attachment. Namely, a secure attachment style is characterized by an individual's comfort with closeness, dependence, and low levels of anxiety. In contrast, individuals with an avoidant attachment style are comfortable with independence and low levels of dependence, but they often experience discomfort with closeness and higher levels of anxiety. Individuals with an anxious attachment style tend to be comfortable with closeness and dependence but may feel uncomfortable with independence and experience high levels of anxiety. Lastly, a disorganized attachment style is characterized by individuals who feel uncomfortable with closeness, dependence, and independence, and exhibit high levels of anxiety. Understanding attachment styles and their associated dimensions can provide valuable insight into the ways individuals form and maintain relationships. It can also aid in identifying patterns of behavior that may interfere with forming healthy relationships. In order to provide a brief overview of each attachment style and its associated behavior in romantic relationships, we can state that those individuals with a secure attachment style are able to handle conflicts well, have healthy interdependent relationships with their partner, are more trusting and forgiving, communicate their needs well and listen to their partner's needs, and are more empathetic and attuned to their partners and respond appropriately. For example, both partners can hang out with friends separately without it being a problem.

The ones with an avoidant attachment style often prioritize their autonomy over their relationship, pull away and do not depend on their partner, are not comfortable expressing their emotions, but do well with communicating intellectually, are often good in crisis situations, avoid conflicts, and prefer to be alone. They are often disengaged, detached, and not attuned to their partner or children. For instance, a avoidant partner may spend so much time alone that they neglect their relationship. Avoidant attachment individuals are maintaining a strategic distance from anything that's associated with emotions and do not know how to bargain with circumstances that incorporate thick emotions (Gonsalves & Hallett, 2021; Buescher, 2022).

Those with an anxious preoccupied attachment style are often preoccupied with their partners and fear rejection and abandonment, express needy behaviors and desire reassurance, have high conflict and take their partner's actions personally, become codependent, have poor boundaries, are unwilling to take accountability for their actions, are moody, unpredictable, and not attuned to their partner's or children's needs. For example, an anxious partner may constantly ask their significant other if they love them for reassurance.

Individuals with a disorganized attachment style often come from a place of unresolved trauma and may exhibit substance abuse behaviors, anger, aggression, criminality, abusive behaviors, and narcissism. They may script past trauma into their current relationships and how they parent, and do not handle conflict well. For example, disorganized partners may gaslight their partner where the partner questions their reality/feelings.

As mentioned earlier, both attachment style and love languages are significant factors that can affect how individuals express and receive love in romantic relationships.

Drawing from his extensive clinical experience, Gary Chapman a renowned relationship counselor, identified and described the Five Love Languages (LLs), which represent an individual's principal value systems for communicating and anticipating the expression of affection. These include Words of Affirmation, Quality Time, Receiving Gifts, Acts of Service, and Physical Touch. Chapman (2015a) postulated that even though all five LLs are potential modes of expression within individuals, the thing that makes one person feel emotionally loved may differ from what makes another person feel loved. Therefore, each person has a primary LL through which they prefer to receive affection, emphasizing the importance of understanding and identifying one's own and their partner's primary LL for effective communication and emotional satisfaction.

Chapman outlines five distinct love languages, which include: Words of affirmation, where individuals feel loved and appreciated through kind and affirming words, such as compliments, encouragement, and expressions of love and gratitude. Acts of service, where individuals feel loved when their partner performs helpful actions for them, such as doing chores, running errands, or preparing a meal. Receiving gifts, where individuals feel loved through thoughtful gifts, regardless of the cost or extravagance, as it's more about the thought and effort behind it. Quality time, where individuals feel loved when their partner dedicates undivided, focused time with them, such as engaging

in meaningful conversations, going on a date, or spending time together without distractions. Finally, physical touch, where individuals feel loved through physical expressions of affection, such as hugging, holding hands, or kissing.

It's worth emphasizing that while everyone typically has a primary love language, they may also value other love languages to different extents. Furthermore, it's not uncommon for partners to have different primary love languages, which can sometimes lead to miscommunication or misunderstandings. Therefore, by comprehending both individual and partner's love language, person can enhance its ability to communicate its love more effectively and cultivate a stronger, more satisfying relationship.

Although love languages have gained significant attention in the popular press, the scholarly investigation of this construct remains relatively limited. Furthermore, there is a dearth of research examining the possible connections between love languages and the extensive body of literature exploring adult attachment and relationship maintenance strategies.

In a 2020 study conducted by Jubileen L. Kombe and Jayson Nowak from Wittenberg University, it was found that individuals with high levels of attachment anxiety tend to express affection less through acts of service and have a preference for partners who show affection through touch, quality time, and gifts. On the other hand, those with avoidant attachment styles were less likely to express affection through any of the love languages and were also less interested in partners who wanted to express affection, but preferred receiving affection from them instead.

This study seeks to make a novel contribution to the existing body of research on love languages and attachment styles by examining their potential relationship in adults. Drawing upon our theoretical understanding of these constructs, we have developed a set of hypotheses regarding their potential associations.

Our research hypothesis is that individuals with a secure attachment style, characterized by a healthy balance of intimacy and independence, are more likely to express and receive love through various love languages. In contrast, individuals with an anxious attachment style may prefer love languages such as words of affirmation or quality time, seeking reassurance and validation from their partner. Lastly, individuals with an avoidant attachment style may prefer love languages such as physical touch or acts of service, due to difficulty expressing their emotions verbally and a preference for emotional distance in their relationships. These theoretical expectations are based on our understanding of attachment and love language theory and will be examined through empirical investigation in this study.

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS
Participants
The research involved 108 women who are in a committed relationship with a permanent partner, ranging in age from 20 to 68 years old. On average, the participants were 38.47 years old. The duration of their relationships varied, with 19.4% being together for less than 1 year, 16.7% for less than 5 years, 20.4% for less than 10 years, and 43.5% for more than 10 years. In terms of education, 11.1% completed high school, 56.5% have an undergraduate degree, 23.1% have a master's degree, and 9.3% have a doctorate. All participants were of Macedonian nationality and practiced the Orthodox religion.

Instruments
To assess participants' attachment styles, we utilized The Relationships Questionnaire (RQ), a concise questionnaire that consists of four items designed to measure adult attachment style. The RQ is an extension of the original Three-Category Measure created by Hazan and Shaver (1987), which has been modified by Bartholomew and Horowitz (1991) to include a fourth style - dismissing-avoidant - characterized by individuals who avoid closeness, value independence, and self-sufficiency. The RQ involves two parts, where participants first select the paragraph that best reflects their attachment style, followed by rating their agreement with a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Disagree Strongly) to 7 (Agree Strongly). The highest rating assigned to each attachment style by the participants determines their prototype attachment style classification (Wongpakaran et al., 2021).

To determine the participants' preferred methods of expressing affection, we employed the Love Languages Profile, a validated instrument developed by Chapman (2015). The Profile comprises of 30 statement pairs, each representing one of the five love languages: words of affirmation, quality time, receiving gifts, acts of service, and physical touch. Participants were instructed to choose one statement from each pair, and were assigned one point for each response that aligned with a particular love language. The language with the highest point total for each participant was considered their preferred mode of demonstrating affection.

Procedure
The present study employed an online survey to collect data from a convenience sample of participants. The survey encompassed several domains including love languages, attachment style, and demographic information such as age, gender, relationship status, and education. After data collection, it was determined that the number of male participants was limited, with only 18 respondents. Consequently, their responses were excluded from the analysis

to ensure data integrity. Similarly, the small number of participants who were not in a relationship (12 individuals) were also excluded from the final analysis. Ultimately, the study included data from 108 participants for the final analysis.

3. RESULTS

Table 1: Frequency of Attachment Styles

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
secure	46	42.6	42.6	42.6
anxious	26	24.1	24.1	66.7
avoidant	22	20.4	20.4	87.0
dismissive	14	13.0	13.0	100.0
Total	108	100.0	100.0	

According to the data presented in Table 1, it is evident that the majority of the participants, comprising 42.6%, possess a secure attachment style. Following this group, 24.1% exhibit an anxious attachment style, while 20.4% display an avoidant attachment style. The smallest proportion of the participants, comprising 13.0%, demonstrate a dismissive attachment style.

Table 2: Frequency of Love Languages

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
words of affirmation	2	1.9	1.9	1.9
quality time	91	84.3	84.3	86.1
receiving gifts	2	1.9	1.9	88.0
acts of service	8	7.4	7.4	95.4
physical touch	5	4.6	4.6	100.0
Total	108	100.0	100.0	

Table 2 presents an overview of the distribution of participants' preferred love languages. The results indicate that a substantial proportion of participants (84.3%) favored quality time as their preferred mode of expressing and receiving affection. In comparison, the remaining love languages exhibited relatively lower levels of preference, with acts of service and physical touch being preferred by 7.4% and 4.6% of participants, respectively. Words of affirmation and receiving gifts had the lowest level of preference, with each being preferred by only 1.9% of participants.

Table 3: Results from Chi Square Test for Love Language and Attachment Styles

			attachment style				Total
			secure	anxious	avoidant	dismissive	
love language	words of affirmation	Count	1	1	0	0	2
		Expected Count	.9	.5	.4	.3	2.0
		% of Total	0.9%	0.9%	0.0%	0.0%	1.9%
	quality time	Count	39	23	17	12	91
		Expected Count	38.8	21.9	18.5	11.8	91.0
		% of Total	36.1%	21.3%	15.7%	11.1%	84.3%
	receiving gifts	Count	0	0	2	0	2
		Expected Count	.9	.5	.4	.3	2.0
		% of Total	0.0%	0.0%	1.9%	0.0%	1.9%
	acts of service	Count	2	2	3	1	8
		Expected Count	3.4	1.9	1.6	1.0	8.0
		% of Total	1.9%	1.9%	2.8%	0.9%	7.4%
	physical touch	Count	4	0	0	1	5
		Expected Count	2.1	1.2	1.0	.6	5.0
		% of Total	3.7%	0.0%	0.0%	0.9%	4.6%
Total		Count	46	26	22	14	108
		Expected Count	46.0	26.0	22.0	14.0	108.0
		% of Total	42.6%	24.1%	20.4%	13.0%	100.0%

Chart 1: Graphic presentation of the relationship for love language and attachment styles
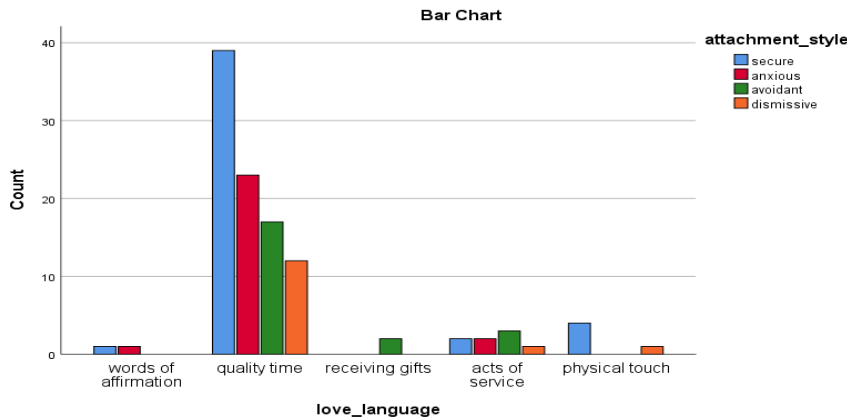
The data presented in Table 2 and Graphic 1 demonstrate the distribution of participants' preferred love languages across different attachment styles. The findings indicate that the majority of participants who preferred quality time as their love language had a secure attachment style (36.1%), followed by those with an anxious attachment style (21.3%), avoidant attachment style (15.7%), and dismissive attachment style (11.1%). Among participants who preferred acts of service as their love language, most had an avoidant attachment style (2.8%), while the same percentage of participants with secure and anxious attachment styles preferred this language (1.9%). The love language of physical touch was mostly preferred by those with secure attachment style (0.9%), followed by those with dismissive attachment style (0.9%), and was not preferred at all by those with anxious and avoidant attachment styles. Words of affirmation were preferred by 0.9% of participants with a secure attachment style and the same percentage of participants with an anxious attachment style, while participants with avoidant and dismissive attachment styles did not prefer this language. Finally, receiving gifts as a preferred love language was chosen only by 1.9% of participants with an avoidant attachment style.

Chi-square statistics were used to examine association between categorical variables (attachment styles and love languages). There is an insignificant association at 5% significance level between attachment styles and love languages of respondents (Chi-Square = 15.050, df = 12, p = .239). Hence, our hypothesis was not supported.

3. DISCUSSION

According to the results, the majority of participants who preferred quality time as their love language, which refers to feeling loved through undivided, focused time with their partner, such as meaningful conversations, dates, or uninterrupted time together, had a secure attachment style (36.1%). These individuals exhibit healthy and interdependent relationships with their partners, possess effective conflict resolution skills, are trusting and forgiving, communicate their needs well, and listen to their partner's needs. Moreover, they demonstrate empathy and attunement to their partner's feelings and respond appropriately.

In addition, these individuals also showed a preference for physical touch, acts of service, and words of affirmation as their love language, but to a significantly lesser extent.

The second most preferred love language among the participants was acts of service, with 7.4% of participants indicating a preference for it. This love language involves feeling loved when one's partner performs helpful actions, such as completing household chores, running errands, or preparing meals. Interestingly, individuals with an avoidant attachment style, who prioritize autonomy over their relationships and often distance themselves emotionally from their partner, were found to have a greater preference for this love language. Avoidant individuals are typically not comfortable expressing their emotions, but they excel in intellectual communication, crisis situations, and conflict avoidance. As a result, they may neglect their relationships by spending excessive time alone. Those with a secure or anxious attachment style also indicated a moderate preference for acts of service, while those with a dismissive attachment style indicated the least preference for it.

The third most preferred love language among participants was physical touch, which involves feeling loved through physical expressions of affection, such as hugging, holding hands, or kissing. This love language was mostly preferred by those with a secure attachment style and to a lesser extent by those with a dismissive attachment style. However, it was not preferred at all by participants with an anxious or avoidant attachment style.

The love languages of words of affirmation and receiving gifts were found to be preferred to a similar extent. However, there were some differences in preferences among attachment styles. Words of affirmation were mostly preferred by those with secure and anxious attachment styles, while receiving gifts were preferred only by participants with avoidant attachment style. Words of affirmation involve expressing love and appreciation through kind words, compliments, and encouragement, while receiving gifts is about feeling loved through thoughtful gifts that don't necessarily have to be expensive or extravagant, as it's more about the thought and effort behind it. All of these indicates that that there is a relationship between the attachment styles and love language but results from preforming a chi square test indicate that these relationships are not statistically significant.

4. CONCLUSIONS
The data presented in Table 2 and Graphic 1 provide insights into the distribution of participants' preferred love languages and attachment styles. The results suggest that there is a relationship between attachment style and preferred love language, with some variations. Individuals with a secure attachment style mostly preferred quality time, physical touch, and words of affirmation, while those with an avoidant attachment style were more likely to prefer acts of service and receiving gifts. People with an anxious attachment style also showed a higher preference for quality time, but they were more likely to prefer receiving gifts as well. Dismissive attachment style individuals showed the lowest preference for all love languages. However, the chi-square test did not support the hypothesis that there is a significant association between attachment styles and preferred love languages. Despite this, the findings provide insights into the complex relationship between attachment styles and love languages, highlighting the importance of understanding individual differences in the ways that people express and receive love in relationships.

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