



Intentionality, Love Languages, and Relationship Quality

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INTRODUCTION

There have been very few studies on Gary Chapman's concept of the Five Love Languages. Chapman argues that for the highest relationship satisfaction, partners should have a congruence of love languages (2015). In the few notable studies that touch on this, results vary. Various instances of research argue for the validity of Chapman's typology (Pett et al., 2022), and some for the congruence of the Love Languages within a relationship (Bland & McQueen, 2018). Others counter with the idea that the partnership requires no alignment of Love Languages, but consistent effort from one to the other with communication of each of their styles of receiving affection (Bunt & Hazelwood, 2017; Hughes and Camden, 2020), also acknowledging that a partner that cares to meet the other's needs can accomplish the same goal as a matched Love Language (Mostova et al., 2022). One of the earliest studies, one that remains relevant to and cited within newer work, considers the use of the Love Languages as a vehicle for communicating an intention of relational maintenance (Egbert and Polk, 2006).

The present study hypothesizes that the matching of the Love Languages doesn't particularly matter for the quality of a romantic relationship, but that the intentionality behind the actions within the partnership takes precedence over any categorization. As mentioned by Bunt and Hazelwood (2017), "...the effectiveness of Chapman's model to improve relationship satisfaction resides...in the ability to catalyze self-regulated appropriate interactions" (p. 289). Contributing to the efforts to bridge the gap in information surrounding the validity of the Love Languages and clarify the definition of intentionality as a potential mediator of its function would contribute to public understanding of relationship satisfaction and assist with maintenance of relationship quality.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Question 1: What is intentionality?

Question 2: How does intentionality impact romantic relationships?

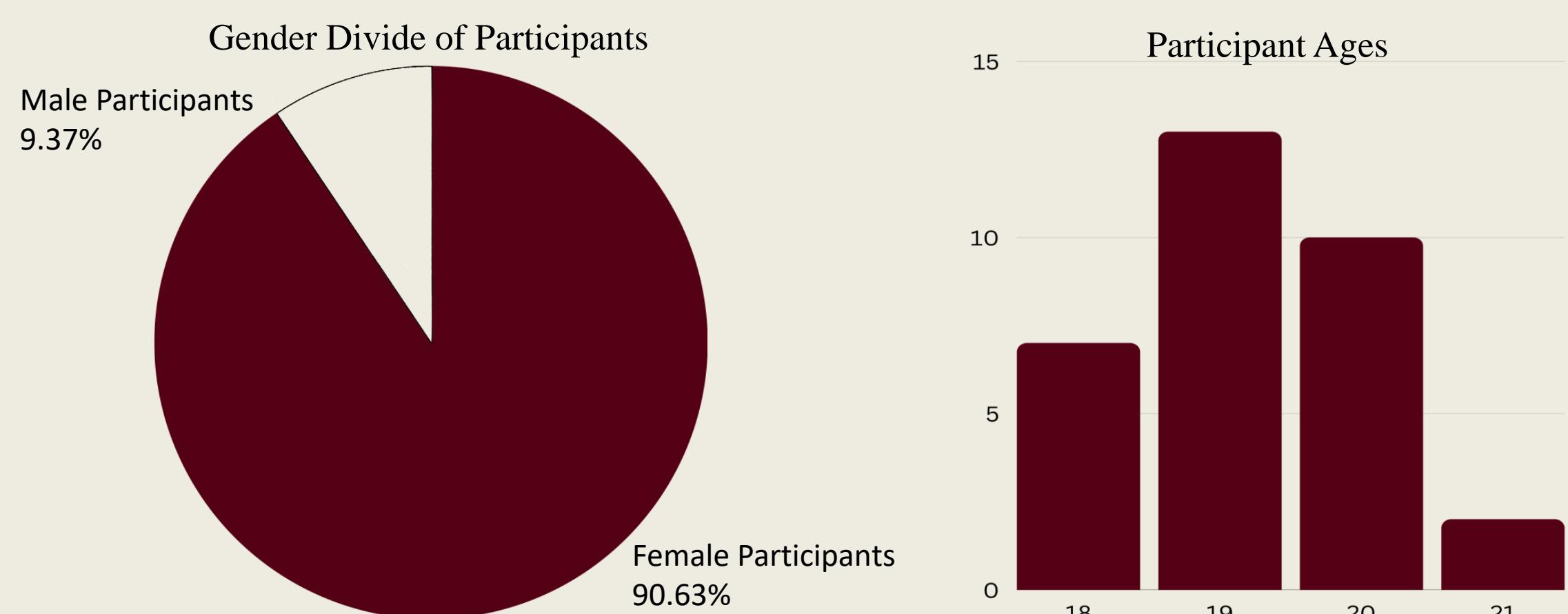
Question 3: What is the relationship between intentionality in romantic relationships and the five Love Languages?

METHODS

This qualitative study involved completing individual one-on-one interviews via Zoom. Students eligible to participate were instructed to contact the undergraduate research assistant associated with this study via email, and that assistant would then match their availability to the availability of other research assistants and schedule an interview via Zoom. The primary research assistant also personally recruited individuals for participation. All participants were asked to review an informed consent document prior to the interview and ask questions where necessary. All participants were required to give verbal consent before answering any questions from the interviewer, and were not required to answer every question, nor stay upon experiencing discomfort. All participants were aware that the interview was being audio recorded. Verbal consent was acquired prior to every recording, as well as at the start of every recording. A team of interviewers met one-on-one with participants and asked the first question as soon as the audio-recorded verbal consent was given. Interviews were recorded and transcribed over Zoom. All aspects of this study were approved by the appropriate institutional review board. Data was analyzed using thematic analyses via axial coding. Four research assistants reviewed the qualitative data, identifying themes in participants' responses; these themes were then verified by the principal investigators.

PARTICIPANTS

Participants were recruited from volunteering through undergraduate courses in the department of Human Development and Family Sciences. All participants were at least 18 years of age and students of Florida State University.



RESULTS

Table 1
List of themes from thematic analyses (N = 27)

Research Question	Theme	Example
What is intentionality?	Consideration	Intentional actions are performed with an idea of the partner's wants and needs in mind, as well as the probable impact of the event
	Consistency	Intentionality includes consistent, repeated efforts
	Purposefulness	Purposeful actions are necessary for the eventual achievement of further goals within the relationship
	Conscious effort	Intentional behaviors are those performed with conscious and specific actions
How does intentionality impact romantic relationships?		"Just showing that you want to be in this relationship and that you feel...connected to this person, you want to put forth effort to make sure they know that they're somebody important."
		"Just carefully and completely thinking about things that you do before you do them...you don't want your relationship and your partner to be like an afterthought."
	Prioritization	Participants understand that another person has an interest in them when they perform consistent intentional acts
	Communication of Willingness	A person will express interest by acting in ways specific to the participant and that prioritize them in their daily life
What is the relationship between intentionality and the five love languages?	Communication of Willingness	Participants understand the willingness to meet their individual needs through intentional prioritizing behavior
	Reassurance of commitment	Intentional actions reassure the participant of an active presence
	Awareness	"Favoritism that doesn't hurt the group...like the buddy system, where they generally want to buddy up with one person."
	Compromise	"He would do all these little things for me to make sure that I knew that he loved me, and I would do the same thing for him...just little things to let the person know that you love them, and you care about them."
	Willingness	"I would rather people show me that they love me, rather than tell me."
	Specific effort	"Some people are horrendous with their words...but that doesn't necessarily mean that they don't love you, instead of being all lovey-dovey and sending you a sixteen-paragraph text in the morning when they wake up, you know, they're like: hey I got you this little race car, or I brought you a happy meal from McDonalds, and it just depends on the person."
	Communication	"I love the way you love me: Responding to partner's love language preferences boosts satisfaction in romantic heterosexual couples."
		e0269429. https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0269429

DISCUSSION

- Intentionality is a purpose behind the behaviors of an individual, and in the context of romantic relationships, acts as a driving force in relationship maintenance.
- Intentionality plays a key role in fostering intimacy, opening a channel of communication, and developing an understanding of shared affection. Participants discussed key behaviors and actions that communicate an intent to develop a romantic relationship, as well as how these intentional behaviors become more present fixtures of their relationships later, once a deeper connection is established.
- Intentional behavior communicates love and willingness to each partner and requires consistent effort to become a practice in a romantic relationship. Concerning Rusult's theory of Investment, for a relationship to last each of the partners must have few comparable alternatives, a sense of satisfaction with the rewards, and a significant amount of investment in the relationship. Intentionality in relationships increases relationship satisfaction and communicates a desire for commitment. The participants answered questions about how they know they're loved in a romantic relationship, and the participants tend to feel like their partner wants to be with them when the partner performs these intentional behaviors.
- The five Love Languages were developed to make people realize that they already know how to love, they just need to know and perform in line with what speaks the loudest to their desired long-term partner. In this way the five Love Languages fall directly in line with intentionality.
- The five Love Languages would not work without the presence of intentionality and are ultimately strengthened a great deal by even the awareness of that intentionality by each partner. In this case, actions speak louder than words, and the understanding that those actions are the actions that they are for the clear purpose of commitment and relationship satisfaction can strengthen that sense of intention.
- Intentionality can function through the five Love Languages to communicate a desire for connection and commitment in a relationship, and knowing the love language of a partner, as well as an individual's own love language, serves to provide an instructional foundation for behavior to maintain a consistent practice of affection in a romantic relationship.
- Limitations of this study include the range of participants. The study involved primarily undergraduate age females at a major Southeastern University, and future studies would benefit from an expansion of the age ranges and genders of the population considered.
- Future studies could also consider the possibility that the functionality of the Love Languages could stand on only the perception of a partner's awareness as well as the necessity of matching Love Languages in a romantic relationship. Future studies may also consider the role of intentionality in friendships and familial relationships, as well as the development of the Love Languages over time and with consideration of the family influence in socialization, for the purpose of awareness and easing conflict within family systems.

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