

Introduction

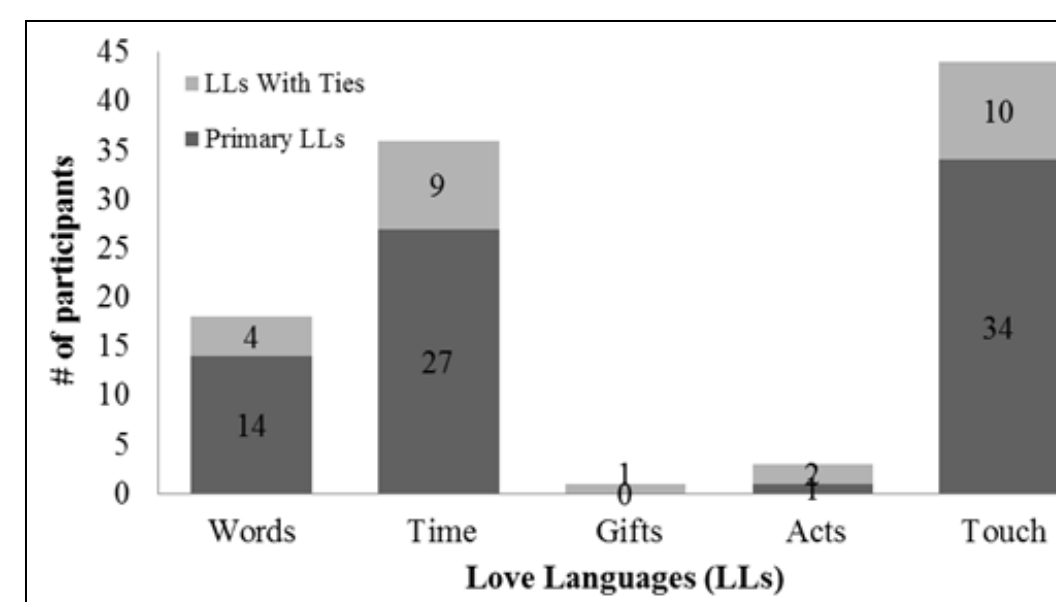
The Five Love Languages (Chapman, 1992), a controversial relationship theory developed by pastor and speaker Dr. Gary Chapman, proposes that individuals have a preferred means of communicating affection. These preferred means of communication are referred to as “love languages” and Dr. Chapman proposes that there exist 5 of these love languages. This theory has become popular among the general public and within marriage therapy settings while remaining tangential in academic circles. Egbert & Polk (2006) attempted to validate, with some success, this theory by correlating the 5 love languages with relationship maintenance typologies described by Stafford, Dainton, and Haas (2000). The current study attempted to expand the validation of Chapman’s relationship theory by utilizing measures of the autonomic nervous system (ANS). We hypothesized that if individuals do exhibit preference for an identifiable “Love Language” (LL) then these preferences would be evident in changes observed in the ANS when presented with imagery related to the preferred LL. In order to measure changes in the ANS, we utilized psychophysiological measures (heart rate, skin conductance, and respiration rate).

Method

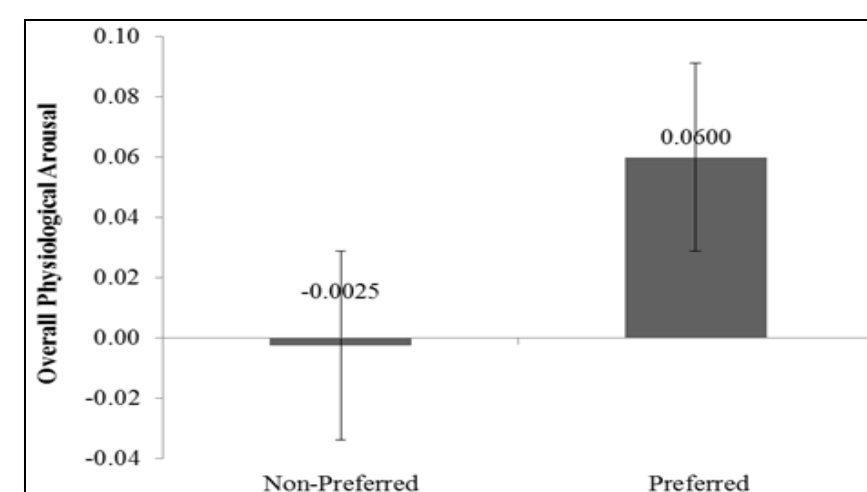
We recruited 89 participants to complete Chapman’s LL questionnaires and to undergo psychophysiological recording. Psychophysiological responses (skin conductance, respiration rate, and pulse rate) were also recorded from the participants while they listened to recorded guided imagery scripts that each represented one of Chapman’s described love languages. The two main imagery techniques utilized for this purpose were *imaginal exposure* and *guided imagery*. The imagery scripts were designed to combine elements of both of these techniques in order to place participants in convincing LL scenarios. Participants listened to progressive muscle relaxation followed by the 5 imagery scripts with deep breathing between each script. The scripts were randomized. A composite score that combines all three physiological measures was computed (Seider et al., 2009). The composite score and the individual physiological measures were used as dependent variables in the data analyses. All values are an average of double subtracted baseline difference scores.

Results

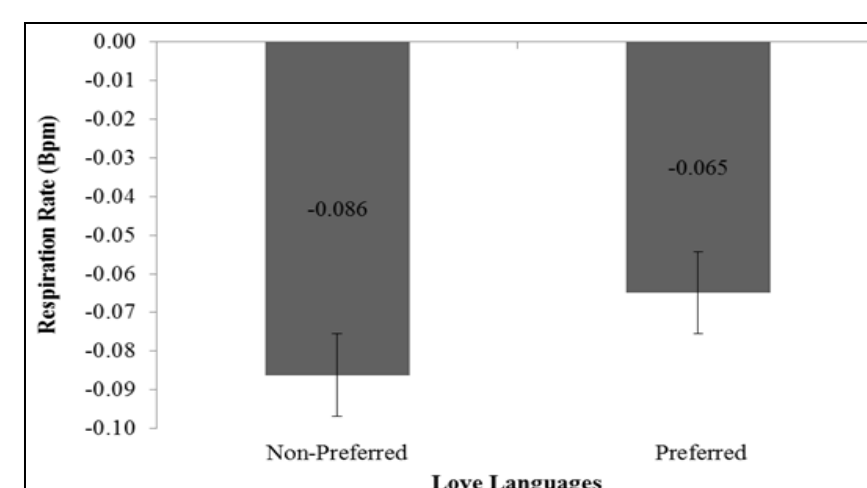
Primary Love Language. Researchers were able to identify a primary LL for each participant. The number of participants who were identified with each LL. This graph also reflects how the LL preferences changed when ties were taken into consideration. A tie occurred when two LLs received an equal high score.



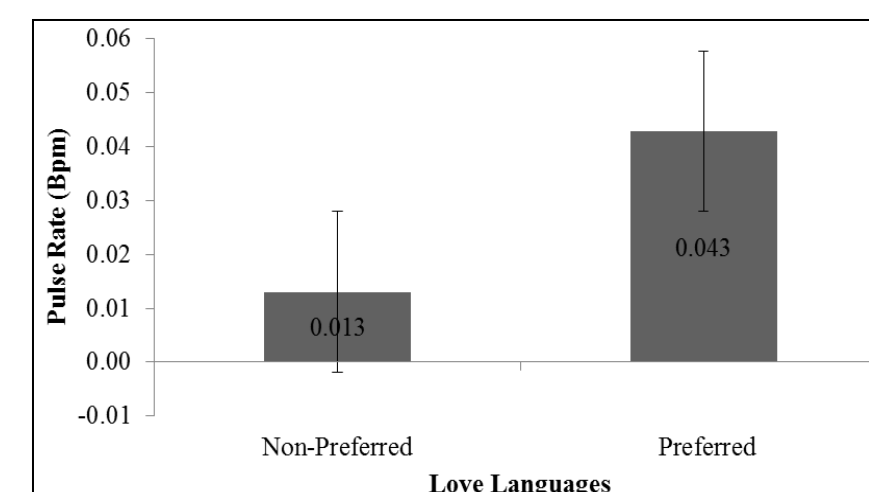
Average Difference for Composite Scores of Non-preferred and Preferred LLS. There was a significant difference between the Non-Preferred and Preferred LLs for this data. Arousal was significantly increased for the Preferred LL, $p < .05$.



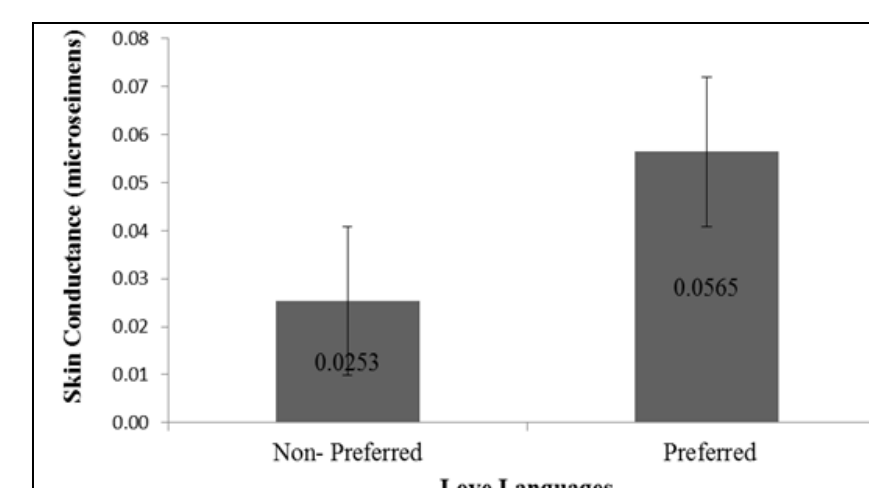
Average Difference for Respiration Rate to LLs. The negative values for the respiration rates are due to a decrease in breaths as result of participants becoming more relaxed during the study. There was no significant difference found between the Non-Preferred and Preferred LLs for Respiration Rate, $p = .37$.



Average Difference for Pulse Rate Response to LLs. A significant increase ($p < .05$) was found for pulse rate measured in beats per minute (bpm) for when participants listened to their preferred LL as compare to their non-preferred LL.



Average Difference for Skin Conductance Response to LLs. There was a significant difference found between the Non-Preferred and Preferred LLs for Skin Conductance, $p < .05$.



Conclusions

The composite score of the physiological responses indicated a significant increase in arousal for when participants listened to their primary LL. Further, participants’ heart rate and skin conductance significantly increased for their preferred LL while there were no significant changes found for respiration rate. These results indicate further validation, within the physiological realm, for Dr. Chapman’s intriguing relationship satisfaction theory.

References

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- 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.
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