The Darker Side of Family Communication

The Harmful, the Morally Suspect, and the Socially Inappropriate

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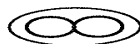
Is Love Blind TO Abuse?

Factors Affecting Victims' Preferences for Love-Communication from Abusive Romantic Partners

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For many families, love and suffering are not mutually exclusive. In 2010, the National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey predicted that over 34.27 million women and more than 11.21 million men will be victimized by a romantic partner in the context of intimate partner violence (IPV) (Black et al., 2011). In addition to physical forms of violence, the psychological abuse experienced within families is projected to be much higher, as *poly-victimization*, or the overlapping occurrence of different forms of abusive behavior, is common in these contexts (Basile & Hall, 2011). IPV prevalence, combined with its severe outcomes for individuals (Rogers & Follingstad, 2014; Sillito, 2012), families (Kitzmann, Gaylord, Holt, & Kenny, 2003; Rhodes, Cerulli, Dichter, Kothari, & Barg, 2010), and society (Kruse, Sorensen, Bronnum-Hansen, & Helweg-Larsen, 2011), necessitates further examination of the motives and experiences of family members within a communication context.

A commonly held belief is that abuse victims stay in IPV relationships because of love, received from and felt for abusive family members during the dark moments of family communication (Eckstein, 2011; Towns & Adams, 2000). Indeed, in the early days of studying IPV, both victim and practitioner/provider reports included frequent mention of love or romantic commitment as a primary motivator of women's reasons for staying with abusive partners (e.g., Snell, Rosenwald, & Robey, 1964). Decades later, love remains a central theoretical part of many IPV studies

but is largely included in name only. Love as a distinct variable is rarely examined by IPV researchers and appears to never have been explored as a communicative act among abusive couples.

To examine the role of this love and commitment feature, often claimed by victims as central to their relational experiences, I begin by framing multiple IPV contexts and operationalizing varied components of love as traditionally studied in nonviolent contexts. This foregrounding is followed by presentation of a study of love-communication as reported by IPV victims.

INTERPERSONAL LOVE

Human interaction, filial affection, and/or intimacy are arguably necessary for people's well-being and interpersonal competency (Horan & Booth-Butterfield, 2010). Intimate relational partners are the primary source of social support for individuals in both normative and stressful life situations (Collins & Feeney, 2000). Partners' expressions of intimacy involve making people feel personally validated by (i.e., *transactional affirmation benefit*) and close to (i.e., *interactional reliance benefit*) their relational partners (Lemieux & Hale, 2000). These features of affect-based intimacy are central to understandings of "love" in many family contexts. Considering these components of relational intimacy, Sternberg and Grajek (1984) conceptualized love as "generally" consistent across relational contexts (i.e., romantic, family, friendship). Their view of a general love experience may encapsulate—and be supported by—research on intimacy at large, but most love research has tended to differentiate "types" based on varied components.

Typological and Thematic Frameworks

Beginning with transactional exchange conceptualizations (e.g., Blau, 1964) and progressing to a more "communal" framing approach (e.g., Clark & Mills, 1979), the study of interpersonal love eventually took the form of typological research that distinguished between the levels and kinds of emotion, physiological reactions, and goals unique to each purported love type. Rubin's (1970) distinction between liking and loving (see Hatfield & Rapson's 1993 "passionate" versus "companionate" love) was a basis for more nuanced typologies.

Used in many social psychology studies to date (e.g., Hendrick & Hendrick, 1986, 1988), Lee's (1976) model conceived of three primary and three secondary types of love based on mixtures of each paired primary type. The primary types include *Eros* ("romantic, passionate"), *Ludus* ("game-playing"), and *Storge* ("friendship"). A subtype that pairs Eros and Ludus characteristics is that of *Mania*

("possessive, dependent"). *Pragma* ("logical, shopping list") is a Storge-Ludus subtype, and *Agape* ("all-giving, selfless") illustrates an Eros-Storge combination. Lee's model is believed to encompass the many other theories of love. For example, Storge and Agape embody companionate and communal love, respectively (e.g., Walster & Walster, 1978).

In Western culture, the ideal for romantic relational love has been framed as a passionate love similar to Eros. Even though passionate love is unlikely to sustain and/or be the sole impetus for lasting, long-term relationships (Sprecher, 1999), the ideology of romantic love maintains a stronghold on couples' beliefs and marital ideals in popular imagination as well as a focus of research for many relational scholars (Hefner & Wilson, 2013; Huston, 2009). Indeed, Aron and Westbay (1996) showed that these love types corresponded with other operationalizations of love, such as that of a prototype approach.

A prototypical approach to love, whereby we define or label aspects or types of love according to what they most resemble from our experiences, provides an alternative way to frame love as a relational concept. Aron and Westbay's (1996) research using this approach uncovered three factors comprising an overall love construct. These factors, uncovered via factor analysis and confirmed in subsequent studies, closely aligned with Sternberg's (1986) triangular theory of love, in which love is revealed by three components: *passion* (physical or cognitive romantic or sexual drives), *intimacy* (affectional closeness or connection experiences), and *commitment* (short-term decision or long-term choices to maintain pursuit/involvement). These features of love mirror attachment perspectives (i.e., sexuality-attachment-caregiving systems) for explaining family-affect and communication (Shaver, Schwartz, Kirson, & O'Connor, 1987). For example, according to attachment theory, relational communication behaviors (usually labeled *caregiving behaviors*) both predict and result from different attachment styles—theoretically attributed to intimacy and commitment experienced from primary caregivers at an early age (e.g., Birnbaum, 2010; Collins & Ford, 2010).

Both typological (Hendrick, Hendrick, & Adler, 1988; Lee, 1976) and thematic prototype (Sternberg, 1986) approaches to love can serve to describe the motives for love internalized by family members. However, because of their focus on cognitive-emotional and psychological factors, the way in which they operate externally—or are *communicated*—is missing from these theories. In the systemic world of families and dyadic partnerships, external indicators of purported love felt for another are necessary and indicate love experiences distinct from relational constructs typically used as primary indicators of romantic love (Marston, Hecht, & Robers, 1987). In other words, the communication of love not only reveals to the recipient its existence but also shapes its actual experience (Ackerman, Griskevicius, & Li, 2011). Certainly, love is communicated in a variety of ways (Honeycutt, Cantrill, Kelly, & Lambkin, 1998).

Communication of Love

Scholars have labeled dimensions or facets of internalized love as "styles" or "types" of love. To distinguish between those cognitive-emotional labels and the interpersonal communication of this feeling, I delineate *love languages*—a term from Chapman (2014), whose contributions are discussed later—as the strategies used to display felt-love for others. Although the method and outcomes may overlap, love languages (LLs) are distinct from typical relational maintenance behaviors (e.g., Stafford, 2010) or "intensification strategies" (e.g., Levine, Aune, & Park, 2006) in that the motive for performing LLs is primarily to express a sentiment regarding an individual, not necessarily to care for or further a relationship for its own sake. From a communication approach, language in general is merely a symbolic way to show our meanings to others in external ways (Hayakawa, 1972); the specific words chosen to represent our internal cognitions and emotions not only show the receiver our intentions but also convey certain identities. Thus, *love languages*, in all their diverse possibilities, are the means by which individuals reveal aspects of themselves and their relational love intent to others. Although LLs are used to convey love in any relationship, for current purposes, I focus on their use in romantic relationships. LLs can be directly or indirectly verbal as well as nonverbal in nature.

Scholars have examined the direct/explicit verbal communication of love in platonic (Morman & Floyd, 1998), familial (Floyd, 2005; Keeley, 2004; Kostelecky & Bass, 2004; Myers, Byrnes, Frisby, & Mansson, 2011), and romantic (Ackerman et al., 2011; Dillow, Goodboy, & Bolkan, 2014; Horan & Booth-Butterfield, 2010) relationships. However, communication of love or romantic affection is also demonstrated through indirect verbal messages such as compliments or affirmations and expressions of appreciation (Olson, 2003), provision of emotional support (Collins et al., 2014), and public revelation (e.g., telling others of love/attraction/pride for partner; O'Leary, Acevedo, Aron, Huddy, & Mashek, 2011).

Nonverbally, love is communicated via facial expressions or kinesics (Hafner & Ijzerman, 2011), vocalics (Farley, Hughes, & LaFayette, 2013), companionate physicality (i.e., nonsexual touch; Dainton, Stafford, & Canary, 1994), sexual physicality (Hendrick & Hendrick, 2002), gift giving or financial support (Cheal, 1987), shared activities or time spent together (Huston, 2009), loyalty/trust or embodied respect for a shared commitment (Hendrick & Hendrick, 2006), tie-signs (i.e., external indicators of relational status), favors/acts or instrumental support (Reis, Maniaci, & Rogge, 2014), and self-modification (e.g., to please or attract a partner) (Levine et al., 2006).

Whereas most research focuses on one or a few of many love-communication possibilities, a few scholars have explicitly considered them as plural and overlapping. There are distinct positive associations between particular love languages

and a variety of variables. For example, people prefer to send and receive different "languages" (Marston et al., 1987). Men and women may use different languages (Schoenfeld, Bredow, & Huston, 2012); diverse motivations (i.e., self versus other) exist for men expressing love for their wives (Olson, 2003). Further, different types of languages may be associated with varying levels of reported love intensity (O'Leary et al., 2011) and satisfaction and success (Huston, 2009) in long-term marriages. Finally, perceived equity of love-tactics used (Williams, 2012) and perceived levels of intimacy escalation (Honeycutt et al., 1998) can affect relational satisfaction and relationship development/escalation, respectively. Incorporation of multiple LLs in tandem suggests typological variety in the means and outcomes of each language. However, systematic inclusion of the full variety of love communication possibilities in relational research is lacking, with most scholars focusing on one or a few forms at a time. Methodical examination of LLs has largely been left to trade-specific and lay practitioners. To begin to explore such typological frameworks in more detail, I turn to a popular counseling perspective on LLs that has received much attention to date.

Chapman's 5 love languages. Chapman (2014) designed a typology of five LLs based on more than 40 years as a minister and relationship counselor. The original formulation (Chapman, 2010) has gone through multiple editions, with separate versions tailored specifically for singles, men, parents of children and teens, and members of the military. Chapman's texts have outsold their previous annual sales almost every year for over two decades and are extremely pervasive in pop culture (Casey, 2011; Feiler, 2011; Podrazik, 2013).

The basic premise of Chapman's typology is that individuals typically use five types of behaviors to communicate love to someone. Each of the languages includes various "dialects" or personal ways of conveying those languages. Research on LLs found distinct, expected factor loadings for Chapman's items ascribed to each LL (Goff, Goddard, Pointer, & Jackson, 2007).

First, the *words of affirmation* language includes verbal expressions of appreciation, compliments, or encouragement communicated with "kindness" (p. 42) (i.e., nonverbally consistent with a loving message) and humility (i.e., "requesting" as opposed to "demanding"; Chapman, 2010). Words of affirmation can be directly conveyed to the target or indirectly conveyed to others about the target.

Quality time consists of total distraction-free attention given to the target. One dialect of quality time is "shared activities" in which one or both parties have interest, the target is willing to perform, and both parties know the love-communication goal at the time; a secondary purpose is the relational maintenance strategy of shared memories or common experiences on which to draw at a future date. Another dialect is that of "quality conversation" involving standard verbal and nonverbal "effective listening" techniques. Words of affirmation differ from quality

conversation in that the former focuses on the message or "what we are saying," whereas the latter involves the meta-message or "what we are hearing" (Chapman, 2010, p. 61).

The giving and receiving of *gifts* or "visible symbols of love" (Chapman, 2010, p. 77), includes tangible objects provided for the sole purpose of conveying affection. Gifts may be bought, found, or created by the giver and thus are not limited to those with funds. Indeed, one dialect is the "gift of self" or mere presence used to indicate love (e.g., showing up at an event solely to support another in their interests or a time of crisis).

Acts of service involve "doing things you know your spouse would like you to do" (Chapman, 2010, p. 91). As an LL, the act of serving another is distinct from chore performance or responsible daily labor in that it involves conscious thought, advance consideration, and time/effort. Chapman notes that to truly perform acts of service in romantic relationships—where roles are often culturally pre-assigned—couples must often first challenge their stereotypes about traditional sex role expectations. Even scholarly research must struggle against these norms when measuring LLs. For example, in the study by Goff et al. (2007), this LL was broken by gender role norms into the "feminine" Domestic Service and the "masculine" Manual Service; this was maintained, despite the fact that eigenvalues for each loaded on their own factors such that it appears there was no reason not to collapse them into one Acts category in final analyses.

Finally, the *touch* LL is the activation of person-specific pleasurable physiological receptors to indicate affection. It may be performed using one's own body or objects and, for couples, can be platonic or sexual in nature; it must adhere to a couple's agreed-upon norms for appropriate time and place of occurrence. Both "implicit" momentary, passing touches and "explicit" time-consuming touches require conscious thought as an LL.

Comparing the LLs to various tactics used by interpersonal dyads, it is clear they match up with much of the scientific literature on communication by families and romantic partners. However, Chapman (2010) was arguably the first to propose a model of these relational communication strategies that (a) is "comprehensive" in nature, (or at least attempts to be), (b) ties their use to the specific goal-directed behavior of love communication, and (c) includes testable claims as to LL use across different contexts; this latter distinction I now detail.

Although not explicitly detailed by Chapman (2010) as such, his work implicitly included multiple axioms that serve as a working model of LL communication. First, he proposed that each individual possesses a primary and a secondary LL he/she prefers to receive and a primary/secondary LL he/she prefers to give. Next, the nature or dialect of each LL received is purported to differ according to a variety of factors. For example, a person may prefer to get quality time from a fiancé but prefer gifts or words of affirmation from parents to feel maximally

loved. Similarly, provision preferences may be (a) individualistic, with a person's preference differing from others' generally used cross-situationally, (b) relationship-specific, with a person preferring diverse LLs based on affiliation type (e.g., touch for husband/wife, gift for parents), and/or (c) contextual, with a different LL tailored to or preferred for each specific individual encountered. Finally, the amount of felt-love (and, implicitly, relational satisfaction) reported by relational members will be directly associated with the extent to which they perceive their partner communicating via their primary/secondary LLs. To date, none of these suppositions have been empirically tested. However, due to the frequency with which "love" is cited as a motive for positive and negative behaviors, exploration of LLs seems particularly important in the presence of intimate partner violence (IPV), a context to which I now turn.

LOVE AND FAMILY VIOLENCE

A fundamental assumption of family contexts is that they involve love among members, particularly in partnerships to which individuals have made conscious commitments. IPV couples have reported the simultaneous presence of love both during and after abusive encounters, and love (both for and from their abuser) has been cited as a reason for staying in abusive relationships (Borochowitz & Eisikovits, 2002; Browne, 1991). However, despite its prevalence as an explanatory mechanism for IPV, no actual evidence exists of a predictive link between romantic love and IPV (Yuste, Serrano, Girbés, & Arandia, 2014). Instead, victims, abusers, and the practitioners who directly work with them may continue to perceive romantic love as a factor in their violence—which may reaffirm cultural impressions of this same phenomenon (Halket, Gormley, Mello, Rosenthal, & Mirkin, 2014). Despite the assumption by many scholars that love is implicit in IPV contexts (for a summary of these beliefs, see Yuste et al., 2014), little attention has been devoted by scholars to the "seemingly paradoxical phenomenon of the existence of positive emotions in violence-ridden relationships" (Borochowitz & Eisikovits, 2002, p. 477).

In a few studies that operationalized "romantic love" *and* studied its role in IPV contexts, scholars uncovered nuanced roles of the construct of love, its performance by partners, and associated relational functioning. Certainly, romantic love can be seen as both an impetus for and/or existing despite violence in relationships. As found by Borochowitz and Eisikovits (2002), those who viewed love and IPV as distinct, separate occurrences in their relationship tended to minimize the impact of violence, normalize its role in relationship conflict, and emphasize the overpowering role of love in their IPV relationship. Those who instead viewed love and IPV as mutually functional in their relationship emphasized the role of violence as arising from the complexity of misunderstandings

about love; a tool to maintain love; and indicative of overwhelming needs of love from the victim.

If, as noted by Borochowitz and Eisikovits (2002), "acts of meaning, rather than violent behavioral acts alone ... delimit the boundaries of life in violence" then couples must create "meaning ... constructed in a manner that allows for a quality of relationship conducive to ['continuous coexistence']" (p. 492). Basically, they argue that love in IPV contexts must occur in ways that perceptually (at least for victims) outweigh the violence. Specific aspects of a larger romantic love discourse may be drivers for abused women seeking to cement and/or invest further in IPV contexts (Power, Koch, Kralik, & Jackson, 2006). As such, the same behaviors that indicate romantic love in non-IPV contexts (e.g., sharing physical warmth, spending time with or monitoring a partner) provide ideal covers for perpetrators to contextualize their use of abusive behaviors within a framework of love. It is this potential overlap between the specific acts of love-performance and the perpetration of IPV that has yet to be examined. To explore the manner of this love performance in IPV contexts for both male and female victims, I proposed the following research questions:

RQ1: Which love languages do IPV victims report made them feel "most loved" when communicated by an abusive romantic partner?

RQ2: What differences, if any, exist between male and female IPV victims' preferences for love languages communicated by abusive romantic partners?

Varying abuse types (e.g., physical, psychological), severity and outcomes, and corresponding relationship types (e.g., *situational couple violence*, *intimate terrorism*) have been found to be predictive of the types of communication occurring in those relationships (Johnson & Leone, 2005; Olson, 2004). Correspondingly, it is likely that patterns in partner communication preferences are also present in IPV contexts. There is a clear positive association between the extent of psychological and physical victimization and negative personal and relational outcomes (Leone, 2011); more (and severer) abuse relates to negative perceptions and experiences within and outside the relationship (Sullivan, Schroeder, Dudley, & Dixon, 2010). For example, Eckstein (2012b) found that greater physical and psychological victimization were tied to victims' higher levels of relational uncertainty about their partner and the relationship as a whole. More frequent and severe abuse victimization was also connected to victims' stay-rationalizations during the course of their relationship, such that fear and externally directed reasons were more likely for those with high levels of victimization (Eckstein, 2012a). Thus, it was expected that communication preferences related to love would also differ corresponding to abuse experienced. To test this supposition, I proposed the following hypotheses:

H1:   Abuse will be negatively related to LLs, such that higher levels of physical victimization will result in victims reporting lower preference/s for: (a) acts of service, (b) words of affirmation, (c) quality time, (d) gifts, and (e) touch.

H2:   Abuse will be negatively related to LLs, such that higher levels of psychological victimization will result in victims reporting lower preference/s for: (a) acts of service, (b) words of affirmation, (c) quality time, (d) gifts, and (e) touch.

METHODS

Participants and Procedures

Men and women were recruited for participation via targeted Internet sampling in general and violence-specific forums as well as convenience word-of-mouth methods. Postings included study information, the online survey link, victim resource information, and researcher contact information. Due to safety concerns, people currently "in" an abusive relationship were instructed not to participate in this study. Given inclusion parameters both prior to and on accessing the survey, uncompensated participants self-selected as "having experienced physically or psychologically abusive behavior from a past romantic partner." Twenty-nine people (5.9%) reported on a same-sex relationship (with 94.1%, $n = 466$ differently sexed), but—similar to most research on hetero-/homosexual relationship differences (Frankland & Brown, 2014; Kurdek, 2004)—no significant differences between sexual relationship types emerged on any of the results in this study. Further, eliminating homosexual relationships from the study only marginally reduced variability of the overall results, with no changes in significance found for the main analyses. Therefore, groups were collapsed and results include all individuals.

Excluding substantially incomplete surveys ($n = 13$) from final analyses in an effort to respect participants' desires to discontinue the study, 495 people (338 females, 157 males) self-identified as IPV victims for this study. Partners/perpetrators of participants were 32.3% ($n = 160$) female and 67.7% ($n = 335$) male. Participants ranged from 18 to 74 years of age ($M = 36.68$, $SD = 13.61$), were mostly White (85.9%), and had completed some college (34.9%) or earned a bachelor's degree (25.9%). Further demographics are available from the author.

An Internet web service with SSL data-encrypted server settings hosted the survey. Respondents began by clicking a link agreeing with the informed consent terms. Collector settings deleted IP addresses and survey web history from a participant's computer on exiting the survey and from the composite database when sending the results to the researcher; randomly assigned participant numbers were the only record of participant identification.

Measures

Demographic items assessed personal and relationship characteristics of each participant. Additionally, measures included items operationalizing (a) physical and (b) psychological abuse victimization and (c) love language communication.

The physical assault subscale of the Conflict Tactics Scales 2 (CTS2; Straus, Hamby, & Warren, 2003) was supplemented for comprehensiveness with the Partner Abuse Scale-Physical (PASPH; Hudson, 2000). Participants assessed the frequency (0 = *Never* to 6 = *Always*) of physical tactics used by a former partner via 19 items spanning types and severity levels of physical victimization (e.g., *twisted skin*; *beat up badly*; *tried to choke or strangle*) calculated as mean frequencies of tactics reported (M = 2.13, SD = 1.10, α = .94).

A sex-modified version of the Index of Psychological Abuse (IPA; Sullivan, Parisian, & Davidson, 1991) measured ridicule (e.g., *tried to humiliate*), harassment (e.g., *harassed family in some way*), criticism (e.g., *criticized parts of which I was proud*), and emotional withdrawal (e.g., *withheld approval, appreciation, or affection as punishment*). Participants reported frequencies (1 = *Never* to 7 = *Always*) of 25 psychological behaviors experienced from the former partner, with mean scores calculated for analyses (M = 4.15, SD = 1.24, α = .93).

To measure the communication victims preferred as "most effective" in conveying love when used by their former abusive partner, twenty-four items comprised five subscales measuring: Acts of Service, Words of Affirmation, Quality Time, Gifts, and Touch (using five items for each, except for Touch, which used four items) (Brule, 2002). Psychometric properties for all subscales and items are provided in Table 1. Participants read the following: "People often feel loved as a result of different behaviors from those closest to us. The following are statements about behaviors others do to make us feel loved. While all of these actions may make us feel loved, we are interested in knowing what made you feel MOST LOVED by your FORMER PARTNER. Remember—while all of these statements may be true—indicate which ones made you feel MOST LOVED when they happened." Thus, mean scores for each LL subscale were used to indicate victims' perceived efficacy of receiving the combination of specific behaviors, or the extent to which items, in comparison to all potential possibilities, made them most feel loved when used by the former partner (1 = *Never true for me* to 5 = *Always true for me*).

RESULTS

In preliminary analyses conducted to ascertain relationships among LLs, bivariate correlations indicated that each LL was significantly positively related to all others

and was negatively related to both physical and psychological abuse victimization. Physical and psychological abuse victimization were positively related to each other (see Table 2).

The first research question asked which LLs victims would report made them feel most loved by a former abusive partner. Results of paired samples t-tests comparing the five LLs showed that Touch was preferred more than: Acts [t (484) = 13.60, p < .001], Quality Time [t (485) = 8.12, p < .001], Words [t (486) = 7.21, p < .001], and Gifts [t (484) = 12.97, p < .001]. Words of affirmation were rated as more desired than were Acts [t (484) = 8.41, p < .001] and gifts [t (483) = 8.05, p < .001]. Words and Quality Time did not significantly differ from one another in perceived effectiveness at communicating love, but Quality Time was preferred over Acts [t (484) = 2.79, p < .001] and Gifts [t (483) = 7.28, p < .001]. Finally, Gifts and Acts of service did not significantly differ from one another. Sample means and standard deviations for each love language scale are provided in Table 1.

The second research question asked about differences between male and female preferences for LLs received. Five one-way analyses of variance (ANOVAs) were used to test the role of victims' sex in predicting their preference for particular LLs. The ANOVA examining Acts produced a main effect for sex, such that men were more likely than women to prefer this LL, F (1, 484) = 8.54, p < .01, η^2 = .02. Additional main effects showed that men were more likely than women to prefer Touch, F (1, 486) = 5.46, p < .05, η^2 = .01, and Quality Time, F (1, 484) = 5.28, p < .05, η^2 = .01. No significant main effects for sex emerged for Words of affirmation or Gifts.

Hypotheses predicted that people who reported low levels of felt-love efficacy from, or preferences for, each LL would have experienced more abuse (physical in H1, psychological in H2) than those with high efficacy preferences on each LL. These results were predicted for Acts (Ha), Words (Hb), Quality Time (Hc), Gifts (Hd), and Touch (He). I first calculated tertile groupings, whereby participants were categorized independently for each LL, based on their indicated preference for a particular language. Participants were considered "high" on receipt-preference for a LL if they scored ≥3.00 for Acts (n = 176), ≥3.40 for Words (n = 169), ≥3.20 for Quality Time (n = 187), ≥3.00 for Gifts (n = 176), and ≥3.75 for Touch (n = 171). People were considered to have a "low" preference for receiving an LL if they scored ≤2.00 for Acts (n = 190), ≤2.20 for Words (n = 175), ≤2.40 for Quality Time (n = 208), ≤1.80 for Gifts (n = 151), and ≤2.67 for Touch (n = 174). Preliminary support for these hypotheses was found via bivariate correlations (see Table 2), showing both physical and psychological abuse as negatively related to each preferred LL.

Independent samples t-tests further revealed that greater physical abuse was experienced by "low" raters of an LL than by "high" raters of that same LL. This finding was significant for all five LLs, such that significant mean differences in

Table 1. Victims' Preferred Love Languages as Used by Former Abusive Partners.

Subscale Items	Overall Sample Mean (SD)	Men Mean (SD)	Women Mean (SD)	t (df)
Acts of Service (α = .84)	2.54 (1.02)			
Did something for me like make me dinner		2.74 (0.95)	2.45 (1.04)	2.92 (484)**
Did something for me like clean the house so I didn't have to		3.26 (1.14)	2.62 (1.28)	5.47 (339.12)***
Did something unexpected to surprise me like washing my car for me or cleaning the kitchen		2.50 (1.17)	2.18 (1.25)	2.68 (481)**
		2.29 (1.22)	2.21 (1.30)	0.61 (475)
Did things for me just to show me he/she cared		3.16 (1.38)	2.96 (1.45)	1.45 (477)
Did a chore or errand for me so I didn't have to		2.42 (1.21)	2.25 (1.32)	1.38 (474)
Words of Affirmation (α = .90)	2.85 (1.17)	2.87 (1.13)	2.84 (1.20)	0.29 (485)
Complimented me on my appearance		2.98 (1.25)	3.17 (1.32)	1.52 (481)
Praised me in front of friends or family		2.77 (1.37)	2.52 (1.47)	1.77 (479)
Told me I was beautiful or handsome		2.85 (1.26)	3.06 (1.38)	1.59 (476)
Encouraged me verbally		3.01 (1.29)	2.74 (1.45)	2.02 (331.64)*
Often told me how special I was		2.75 (1.29)	2.67 (1.43)	0.62 (329.13)
Quality Time (α = .88)	2.84 (1.17)	3.02 (1.12)	2.76 (1.18)	2.30 (484)*
Spent time doing something with me like going for a walk		3.20 (1.33)	2.98 (1.39)	1.64 (478)
Simply spent time alone with me in the same room, even though we were doing separate activities		2.94 (1.22)	2.61 (1.36)	2.64 (330.86)**
Looked me in the eyes and listened to my thoughts/feelings		2.95 (1.46)	2.81 (1.59)	0.93 (322.75)
Spent a lot of quality time with me		3.11 (1.35)	2.81 (1.42)	2.23 (477)*
Met me some place to talk and spend time together		2.88 (1.36)	2.52 (1.42)	2.62 (477)**

Gifts (α = .85)	2.57 (1.09)	2.53 (1.07)	2.59 (1.09)	0.55 (483)
Gave me an unexpected gift		2.78 (1.27)	2.83 (1.31)	0.35 (479)
Bought me dinner or a movie		2.39 (1.29)	2.75 (1.27)	2.82 (477)**
Gave me funny or sweet cards or notes for no reason		2.85 (1.37)	2.56 (1.45)	2.10 (311.31)*
Did something like pick a flower to give to me		2.22 (1.32)	2.54 (1.46)	2.43 (322.04)*
Did something like bring me a small surprise from a trip		2.41 (1.32)	2.25 (1.35)	1.24 (477)
Touch (α = .87)	3.11 (1.17)	3.29 (1.17)	3.03 (1.16)	3.03 (1.16)
Gave me an unexpected hug or kiss		3.31 (1.33)	3.22 (1.33)	0.64 (482)
Sat and cuddled with me		3.38 (1.34)	3.06 (1.44)	2.32 (474)*
Touched me in some way		3.30 (1.30)	2.79 (1.28)	3.99 (480)***
Held my hand		3.19 (1.40)	3.00 (1.40)	1.40 (481)

Note: N = 482 participants (n = 155 men, n = 331 women).

*p < .05. **p < .01. ***p < .001

Table 2. Bivariate Correlations Among Reports of Love Language Preferences and Abuse Victimization.

Love Language	Acts of Service	Words of Affirmation	Quality Time	Gifts	Touch	Physical Abuse
Acts of Service	—					
Words of Affirmation	.71***	—				
Quality Time	.72***	.82***	—			
Gifts	.75***	.78***	.75***	—		
Touch	.66***	.77***	.81***	.69***	—	
Physical Abuse	-.15**	-.18***	-.20***	-.12**	-.19***	—
Psychological Abuse	-.14**	-.14**	-.20***	-.12**	-.16***	.55***

Note: *p < .05. **p < .01. ***p < .001.

physical abuse existed for Low (M = 2.40, SD = 1.24) and High (M = 1.96, SD = 0.99) raters of Acts' efficacy, t (357.42) = 3.73, p < .001; for Low (M = 2.38, SD = 1.18) and High (M = 1.91, SD = 1.00) raters of Words' efficacy, t (336.49) = 4.02, p < .001; for Low (M = 2.39, SD = 1.17) and High (M = 1.87, SD = 0.99) raters of Quality Time's efficacy, t (391.91) = 4.74, p < .001; for Low (M = 2.37, SD = 1.18) and High (M = 2.02, SD = 1.08) raters of Gifts' efficacy, t (325) = 2.86, p < .01; and for Low (M = 2.39, SD = 1.19) and High (M = 1.89, SD = 1.03) raters of Touch's efficacy, t (337.50) = 4.19, p < .001. When looking at high versus low raters of particular LLs, H1a-e was each supported.

Similar results for psychological abuse (H2) showed that those "low" in an LL preference were significantly more likely than "high" raters to have experienced greater psychological victimization. Significant high- versus low-group mean differences in psychological victimization were found for all five LLs: Acts (Low M = 4.39, SD = 1.33; High M = 3.92, SD = 1.21), t (364) = 3.55, p < .001; Words (Low M = 4.46, SD = 1.30; High M = 4.04, SD = 1.19), t (342) = 3.09, p < .01; Quality Time (Low M = 4.47, SD = 1.27; High M = 3.92, SD = 1.17), t (393) = 4.48, p < .001; Gifts (Low M = 4.45, SD = 1.28; High M = 4.07, SD = 1.21), t (325) = 2.73, p < .01; and Touch (Low M = 4.44, SD = 1.31; High M = 3.95, SD = 1.18), t (343) = 3.69, p < .001. When looking at high versus low raters of particular LLs, H2a-e were each supported.

The relationships between abuse types and all five LLs were established in the preliminary analyses, and differences in physical and psychological abuse between "low" and "high" raters of LLs were established in H1 and H2. Nonetheless, when coupled with LL-preference sex differences (RQ2), findings that women (M = 2.25, SD = 1.16) experienced greater physical victimization than men (M = 1.86, SD = 0.90; t (384.49) = 4.09, p < .001) suggest that the negative relationships between victimization and LLs may vary by victims' sex. To see whether sex-victimization interactions affected the sex differences found in LL-preferences or if LL-preferences were truly different among men and women regardless of victimization effects, hierarchical regression analyses were employed to test these options; each LL was run as the dependent variable in separate models. On the first step, victims' sex (dummy coded as men = 0, women = 1) was entered into the model. The second step included the independent variable of psychological abuse, entered separately and prior to physical abuse because sex differences were not found for psychological victimization in this sample. Step three included physical abuse. The fourth step included two-way interaction terms of the product of the first three variables paired with one another. Finally, a three-way interaction term was tested (see Table 3).

Hierarchical regression effects indicated that sex in the first step predicted preferences for Acts, Words, Quality Time, and Touch (see Table 3), with men reporting higher preferences for these LLs. On the second step, psychological

Table 3. Hierarchical Regression of Sex and IPV Victimization Predicting Love Languages Preferred from Former Abusive Partners.

Model Steps	ΔR	f^2	Sex	Psych.	Phys.	Sex × Psych.	Sex × Phys.	Psych. × Phys.	Sex × Psych. × Phys.
Acts of Service									
1	.02*	.02	-.13**						
2	.02**	.03	-.12**	-.12**					
3	.01	.04	-.11*	-.07	-.10				
4	.01	.05	-.01	.06	.37	.04	-.20	-.45	
5	.00	.06	.20	.15	.58	-.18	-.57	-.74	.43
Words of Affirmation									
1	.02**	.00	-.01**						
2	.02**	.02	-.00	-.14**					
3	.02**	.04	.02	-.06	-.16**				
4	.00	.04	.11	.06	.06	-.08	-.03	-.26	
5	.00	.04	-.05	-.00	-.10	.08	.25	-.04	-.32
Quality Time									
1	.01*	.01	-.10*						
2	.04***	.05	-.09	-.19***					
3	.01*	.06	-.07	-.12*	-.12*				
4	.00	.07	-.00	.01	.11	-.08	-.01	-.30	
5	.00	.07	-.04	-.01	.07	-.04	.05	-.25	-.07
Gifts									
1	.00	.00	.03						
2	.01**	.02	.04	-.12**					
3	.01	.02	.05	-.07	-.10				
4	.00	.02	.09	.00	.05	-.04	-.02	-.18	
5	.00	.02	.12	.02	.09	-.07	-.08	-.22	.07
Touch									
1	.01*	.01	-.11*						
2	.02**	.04	-.09*	-.15**					
3	.01*	.05	-.08	-.08	-.13*				
4	.01	.06	-.00	.06	.27	.00	-.12	-.43	
5	.00	.06	.21	.15	.49	-.22	-.51	-.73	.44

Note: Cell entries are β coefficients except in the first two columns.

*$p < .05$. **$p < .01$. ***$p < .001$.

victimization predicted all LL preferences, such that greater abuse experienced reflected lower reports of each LL. Thus, H2 was further supported when viewing LL preference as a continuous variable in the presence of sex as a separate model component. Physical victimization, in the third step, predicted only Words, Quality Time, and Touch, with greater physical abuse reflecting lower preferences for those LLs. This lent additional support to H1b, H1c, and H1e; however, for Acts (H1a) and Gifts (H1d), physical abuse failed to reach significance when sex was also included in the model. On the fourth step, none of the two-way interaction terms predicted any LLs. Finally, the three-way interaction term of psychological and physical abuse and sex did not predict any LLs. Therefore, the interactions of abuse types and sex did not additionally add to the predictive ability of the models. Victims' sex and type of abuse experienced operated independently in predicting different LL scores.

DISCUSSION

For IPV victims, it appears that the ways they preferred their former abusive partner to communicate love were determined by the type and extent of victimization they experienced, as well as by sex identification. These results have implications for theorizing models of violent and nonviolent family functioning. I discuss these aspects by incorporating discussion of this study's limitations alongside proposed avenues for future research. Further, practitioner applications of these findings will also be considered.

What We Know: Similarities With Nonviolent Love Communication

Individuals can identify myriad ways they feel love when communicated by family members and often express preferences for some ways of communicating over others. Replicating previous research by Goff et al. (2007), all LLs were positively related to one another. In this study, significant differences were found in preferences for certain LLs compared to others (RQ1). Overall, the sample indicated they felt "most loved" when their partner used Touch to express love for them. In Goff et al.'s (2007) survey with college students, the most common preference for LL expression was Quality Time, followed by Touch and Words of Affirmation. Although similar in that these were mostly top preferences in this study, the current sample's preference for expressions of love via Touch is consistent with notions of romantic love associated with physical intimacy, particularly in Western culture relationships and when used as a form of maintenance in established relationships (Dainton et al., 1994). In that respect, these IPV victims do not appear to differ from the larger population.

What We Are Learning: Violent Nuance in Love Communication

Individual applications. When looking at the distinctions between types of abuse experiences, however, a different story emerges. For example, male victims expressed higher preferences than did women for Acts, Touch, and Quality Time (RQ2). One interpretation may be that men simply expressed stronger preferences for LLs overall.

A more contextual explanation may be that women's preferred LLs were tied to the manner and extent of abuse they received. On average, women in this sample reported significantly more physical victimization than did men. Further, higher levels of physical victimization were predictive of lower preferences for LLs. The same finding held for psychological victimization, such that greater abuse predicted lower preferences for each LL when used by a partner. One interpretation of this finding could be that, contrary to popular perceptions of victims staying passion- ately in love with their abusive partner (Halket et al., 2014), remaining in severe IPV situations is more likely to be for practical considerations outside their control than because of positive emotions (Eckstein, 2011, 2012a; Rhodes et al., 2010).

Although results from the hierarchical models suggest that sex and IPV victimization operate independently in predicting LL preferences (as no significant additional variance was explained by an interaction between the variables in the overall model tests), a societal understanding of IPV as it occurs for women versus men—in both experiences and outcomes—suggests a more complex story than captured by the current study (e.g., Williams & Frieze, 2005). For example, Eckstein (2012b) found that victims' gender was more important than biological sex in predicting IPV experiences and outcomes. It is a particular type of *masculinity*, not a sex in particular, that is situated as the "causal" factor in most feminist IPV models (e.g., Braithwaite & Daly, 1994). As such, future research should thus consider the role of gender (as opposed to sex) nuance in reporting LLs and IPV in general.

Theory and research implications. IPV is often theorized as a gendered occurrence in domestic contexts (Johnson, 2005; Langhinrichsen-Rohling, 2009). Anecdotally, particular LLs are often affiliated with sex roles (Chapman, 2010). However, research has yet to *consistently* find sex differences. Models of IPV victimization differ according to the theoretical approach taken (e.g., family violence and feminist models often contradict on findings related to sex differences), and Chapman's model of LLs is simply untested as an area of study. To clarify the influence of sex (and, correspondingly or not, gender style) in the communication by men and women in violent families, future research must articulate the ways in which tactics used to outwardly demonstrate emotions—positive and negative—are received by their targets.

To clarify these factors, basic issues in the measure of LLs must first be addressed. The construct validity of LLs, as measured by Chapman's scale (which uses participants' dichotomous choice of random pairings of the five LLs for each item), is currently potentially problematic, because (a) there is no one accepted measure of these constructs as of yet and (b) those using different scales often fail to report complete psychometric properties of their instrument. Thus, the convergent and divergent validity of the items used to measure each LL remains unknown. In addition to fine-tuning our explanatory (and predictive) models of emotions and family functioning (in violent and nonviolent contexts), such research would also have practical applications for enhancing coping strategies, emotion- and conflict-management tactics, and advice to third-party family members. Future work should consider both the validity of each language and the proposed axioms across myriad family and relationship contexts, as their prescriptive nature may serve as an empirically legitimate (as opposed to intuitive) recommendation for practitioners.

Also untested are some of Chapman's (2010) other claims regarding the ways LLs are used, received, and operate to affect relationship outcomes. As yet, the predictive validity of LL axioms as applied in the general population (as opposed to case examples) has not been determined. For example, do LLs change as we age? At what age do LLs become primary/secondary—that is, preferred over others? To what extent are they dominant culture versus family constructed? Do differences exist in LL preferences or social display norms across cultures and/or generations? And finally, as was examined in this study, what other types of life experiences (e.g., sex- and gender-specific wording/themes of specific tactics) shape prefer-ences for different LLs and in what ways? Knowing the answers to these types of questions not only would aid our understanding of communication in violent relationships but would also contribute to the study of love-communication in general family research.

CONCLUSION

The pervasiveness of the five LLs and their overlap with established research on relational communication styles (albeit ones yet unformulated systematically in a love-communication context) suggest potential for examining the communication of love. This study provides an initial step in examining LLs in a particular fam-ily context—intimate partner violence. Knowing that men and women abused by romantic partners have overall lower preferences for love expressed in any manner by their abusive partner lends support to the notion that love as sole motivator for staying in IPV relationships may indeed be a societal myth. "I love you" may be

easy to say, but for those living with daily communication to the contrary, love is not blind to abuse.

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