

Marriage Enrichment Paper: Love Language Interviews

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I interviewed two married couples about their love languages, which allowed us to have fascinating conversations about one another's relationship dynamics. P and J have been together for nine years and married for five years, with a baby on the way. A and E have been together for 12 years, married for five years, and are also expecting their first child.

We discussed how there can be a significant difference between the love language one likes to *give to* their loved ones versus the love language one likes to *receive from* their loved ones. For example, E's top "giving" love language is acts of service, while her top "receiving" love language is quality time. While it's not ranked as her #1, E is still able to appreciate A's acts of service because she herself knows what it takes to express love in that way. Even if your preference for "giving" and "receiving" love languages are different, this can actually help you expand your library of love expressions and give you more opportunities to use or appreciate those love languages with your partner. For P, he prefers to receive acts of service from J much more than any of the other love languages; he likes to give quality time to J because that is her #1 love language and helps resolve conflicts between them. I think it's useful to distinguish between the two so that you are able to recognize when your partner is loving you in his or her own way.

There is also a difference between how one uses love languages with his or her spouse versus with their friends. P mentioned that he knows J's love language for him is different from her friends – J feels loved when receiving gifts from her close friends, while she doesn't expect or need gifts from P to feel loved. I personally related to this as well because I love to spend a lot of time and effort picking out gifts for friends, while it's not a priority love language between me and my husband. Naturally I believe there are high expectations placed on spouses because you share the closest connection and have made lifelong commitments to each other.

Both couples also had different ways of defining what each love language meant to them and rationales for their rankings. A was surprised at E's lower ranking (#4) of physical touch because she always wants to cuddle, but E saw cuddling as part of having quality time. It reiterated how there are so many different ways of understanding the five love languages. Perhaps making an assumption like A did about why E values cuddling – it's how they spend time together and less so about the physical touch and closeness – does not enable understanding that is as deep or nuanced. Talking about why each person ranked the love language a certain way helped open A's eyes to a new perspective on his wife's preferences.

E was also surprised that A had ranked touch as his #1 love language because she considered them to be naturally touchy feely with each other by default. In her own ranking system, she ranked lower what she felt was more of a natural baseline and ranked higher what she considered her special preferences. I also can relate to this because today I would rank acts of service lower on my own list because it's something I expect by default. I tend to see love languages as more "extra" special gestures that I prefer and appreciate. Acts of service is perhaps the most common, natural love language practiced in Asian households – e.g. parents wordlessly cutting fruit for you to eat while you are buried in homework. It's something that I will always do for my loved ones and expect from them because I consider it the bare minimum and a natural part of who I am. Love languages can be even more meaningful when a spouse intentionally and proactively uses it when it doesn't come naturally to him or her. It would be quite special to see someone push themselves beyond their comfort zone to show love to their spouse by the way he or she prefers. I witnessed that in how A and E both make an effort to use each other's preferred love language even when it doesn't feel as easy or natural to them.

Love languages can evolve and change over time. For both couples, who have been together for over nine years, their love languages have changed through different seasons of life. Physical touch was a much bigger part of E and A's relationship when they first got together at age 18, but it's now more dialed back as other expressions of love have come up to the top. P and J shared the same sentiment that their love languages ebb and flow in different directions – some lower ranked ones will temporarily rise to the top. Both couples struggled to complete ranking them from one to five because while they had a clear top one or two, and the rest fell more flat rather than hierarchical. Interestingly, the men have specifically expressed that their #1 love language has stayed consistent over the years. The women believe more strongly that different combinations of all five love languages were needed over the course of a relationship. As both couples are expecting their first child this year, I anticipate even more changes coming their way.

For both couples, this interview and exercise served as good reminders to continue working hard in their relationships. They have talked about their love languages throughout their relationship, so they have gotten into a good flow of knowing how to make each other feel loved. Despite this, P thinks more about love languages when he and J are fighting because they are focused on the lack of love expressions in those tense moments. All interviewees agreed that past arguments have been great opportunities for them to learn about each other's preferred love languages and understand how to use them to grow their relationships. Even after many years being with their partners, they recognize the importance of revisiting this topic and reminding each other to love on their spouses in the way they like to be loved. This is an excellent way to stay humble and in marriage and not take anything for granted no matter how many years pass. Love languages are not some magic or secret to a happy marriage but are helpful tools in understanding your partner better and learning ways to cherish him or her in your relationship.