

Ep #144: The 5 Love Languages & Thought Work



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With Your Host

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This is *Feminist Wellness*, and I'm your host, Nurse Practitioner, Functional Medicine Expert, and Life Coach, Victoria Albina. I'll show you how to get unstuck, drop the anxiety, perfectionism, and codependency so you can live from your beautiful heart. Welcome my love, let's get started.

Hello hello my love. I hope this finds you doing so well. As someone who reads, thinks, and talks a lot about relationships, I think it's high time that we talk about the five love languages, which is a framework for thinking about how we give and receive love, popularized by Gary Chapman in his 1922 book, which has been a New York Times best seller for about 100,000 years now.

This framework posits that we all give and receive love in five different ways. Words of affirmation, acts of service, receiving gifts, quality time, and physical touch. Per Chapman, you can have one or more predominant ways, but tend to have one main way that works best for you.

While many poo-poo this whole framework, a 2006 study by Nichole Egbert and Denise Polk suggests that there may in fact be some degree of psychometric validity to the five love languages. And that means, my nerds, that there's a study that shows that the five love languages may indeed be legit.

And while I'm not here in support of or to negate the validity of the love languages framework, what I am here to say is that these kinds of tools can be a super helpful starting place, particularly in a new relationship or one that needs some reinvigoration, and that it really behooves us to relate to them as such.

A starting off point, instead of making them into absolutes. Instead of saying, "This is the only way to show up and show me love." Because as humans, we are not static animals. We are dynamic and ever-changing,

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and our preferences and relationship to loving and being loved will change as we change.

And because we can use thought work to relate differently to the ways we are shown love by ourselves and others, we can create so much change in all of these rubrics.

Finally, as someone who is all about that neuroplasticity, I believe we should be careful to not box ourselves in and to say a definitive this love language works for me, this other one is garbage.

I believe that the love languages framework can be a super helpful tool that we can take to our thought work, to help reveal the ways in which our habitual thought patterns allow or block us from experiencing the gestures of love, kindness, and generosity others offer us from their own framework for loving, which is often quite different from our own.

As those of us with codependent, perfectionist, and people-pleasing thoughts, we may already have a hard time accepting certain expressions of love because we have that habit of all-or-nothing, black-and-white thinking that often comes about because it kept us safe in childhood.

When we became masterful at reading the room and deciding in the blink of an eye what is emotionally or physically safe or not by quickly categorizing it as a yes or no, a good and bad, danger, not danger, which is also a brilliantly mammalian skill that we tend to excel at.

So mix that way of thinking up with the love languages as a set of absolutes and you can find yourself painted into quite a little corner, turning away bids for love or connection because you've decided that they just don't work for you without exploring the topic further through thought work.

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What I think is really interesting here from a thought work perspective is that it's all about the story we're telling about each love language, which often comes from what we were taught as important in childhood, or what we didn't get in childhood and are trying to subconsciously of course attempt to receive in adulthood from our relationships.

That is, we can believe that our minds, our nervous systems got patterned in a specific way to have specific preferences. And we can also use thought work to shift those habitual relationships to different ways of giving love. By examining our patterns and understanding them, we can choose to have different thoughts that may change the ways we are able and willing to receive expressions of love.

Finally, before looking at each of the love languages specifically, I want to name the role that control plays here. From our codependent, perfectionist, and people-pleasing thought habits, we do sure love to try to control things. Our partners, our family, our friends, our childhood, our coworkers, our boss, strangers, the bodega owner, the weather, on and on.

We try to control the way we are shown love because we are scared not to. So again, we create these detailed internal rubrics for what it means to show up for us, to love us, to care for us. And if you're not doing it in the exact way I want you to, that you would know if you only took the time to read my mind and not have opinions of your own like you know I would prefer for you, then everything would be fine.

And you could accept love in whatever form as long as it's exactly the form you want, exactly the way you want it, right? It's like you tell your partner, "Hey, I'd love to receive flowers." And so you expect them to read your mind to know you meant peonies and not carnations. Or you meant carnations and not roses, right?

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So the more we can allow the people we love to be themselves, to pick the flower they want to give us because it's the one that brought joy to their heart, the more we can accept them as them. And can drop the desire to control everyone and everything. Thus, the more love we can feel regardless of the love language used to show us love.

So let's look at how codependent, people-pleasing, perfectionist thinking folks might receive the different languages of love and some examples of common thought patterns we may have. And if these examples don't match up exactly with your own way of thinking, that's cool.

I invite you to write out your own thought habits to do thought work on them so you can get clear on your own habitual ways of thinking that may be blocking you from getting the love you actually want, regardless of how it's packaged.

I have a free handout that details the thought work protocol, walks you through it step by step, and I'll put a link in the show notes to that. And you can find the show notes at victoriaalbina.com/144. It's always the episode number and that will link you right to the show notes.

So go check that out, download it, it's free because giving gifts is one of the ways that I show love. And I love giving you all gifts. And that is a most perfect segue - I love a perfect segue. Is my love language perfect segues? Perhaps.

But really, it's the most perfect segue to talking about the first love language, which is gifts. So per the love languages quiz, I ranked exactly 0.0% on the language of receiving gifts, which is funny because like I just said, I love to give gifts.

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And there are times when I do love to receive gifts. So my amazing friend Jules had this Anaïs Nin quote I love written up by this artist in this beautiful font and had this gorgeous glass frame made. And it sits in my little exercise room right in front of the Peloton and I look at it every day and it brings me so much joy.

And it brings me so much joy not because I love getting gifts but because I love that she thought of me and she went to all this effort to have this thing made for me. And it's aesthetically stunning to me and it brings me joy.

And interestingly enough, I generally don't have the same reaction when I'm given a gift by an intimate, by a lover, a partner, a date. It is much less likely to resonate in my body at first blush as something I'm grateful for. It's a really interesting dichotomy there, right?

The friend gift as like, aww; lover gift, something blocks within me. And I can look back and I can see that before thought work, I really wasn't into receiving gifts when that was the primary way that a partner or lover tried to show me love.

And in the absence of the other love languages that resonate more for me being met, I wasn't into the gifts. So let me give you an example because I can imagine this is like, wait, what?

So let's say that a partner who I was living with, sharing space with wasn't doing acts of service, which is an easier way to light me up. So if they weren't taking out the garbage, or doing their fair share around the house, then I didn't care if you brought me home a gift.

And even if it was something that I absolutely loved, it was unlikely to flood me with feelings of love because I was over here thinking about the things

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you didn't do. I was all full up with resentment about it because of my thoughts.

See how that thought was like, cool, thanks for bringing home my most favorite soap that I totally adore, but actually, you didn't do the dishes, was blocking me from receiving the loving gesture that was that thoughtful gift. It's really fascinating, right?

A lover of mine recently shared that they appreciate what they consider to be thoughtful gifts, but not just random things given as gifts. Things that they interpret as things bought from obligation, such as for a holiday or a birthday, things where the giver was like, oh crap, I have to get this human a present and just brought whatever.

Things, that is, that don't meet their own thoughts of what a thoughtful gift is to them. So that's that block there that keeps them from receiving the loving gesture of a gift is does it meet my standard, my story of what a thoughtful present is, or is it just kind of something random that doesn't really reflect that you know me?

A friend recently shared that her dad, who she says never really tried to get to know her growing up would often give her gifts that made no sense to her. So things she had absolutely no interest in like dolls when she was super into dinosaurs, or clothes that were like, 10 sizes too big, or too small.

So in her mind as well, gifts are really complicated. And so the story that she's built for herself is that gifts are not her love language. She prefers not to get them, in this case, to avoid the complicated feelings that arise when a gift is given to her.

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So I'm not out here saying that you shouldn't have preferences because we all have them and it's great to know them. What I am saying is to pause before you say, for example, "I'm just not into gifts." So you can examine the stories under that preference instead of being like, well, gifts are just not my love language so it's not for me, please don't get me anything ever.

And this holds true for all the love languages as we walk through each one. We get to pause and to ask ourselves lovingly, gently, compassionately, what is the thought that's creating this feeling? What is the narrative creating this sensation in my body?

Next up is acts of service. So this love language is about doing things for the person you love or care about, and having the person you love or care about do things for you as a way of showing you love.

So when I think about us and our love of control, I certainly feel that control and trying to control things comes up for us for sure as a block to receiving acts of service as love, especially when we have perfectionist stories that say that a task must be done in a perfect way.

And extra especially when we believe that a task or chore being done a certain way is linked to how we feel in our lives writ large. So my mind goes immediately to housework. I've heard this a million times from clients and friends and back in the day, from patients.

"I just can't relax if the house doesn't look perfect." What follows from that story is that of course only you can get it to look perfectly perfect, so why would you accept the act of service of tidying up the house if you believe in your heart of hearts that you're the only one who can make it look perfect and up to your standards?

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Another one I've heard is, "I just can't enjoy dinner if there are dishes in the sink." But if we have the idea that there's a perfect way to load the dishwasher, then someone doing that for us will not bring us joy or peace or ease because they likely won't do it right.

We might say acts of service don't bring me joy and are not my love language when in fact, it may be your perfectionist thinking and desire for control, the desire to be seen as the martyr who does all the housework that keeps you from appreciating the gift of someone doing something nice for you, especially when your story is that only you can do it right.

Next up is words of affirmation. If, from our codependent and perfectionist thinking, we don't believe that we are worthy of love, care, kindness, then words of affirmation are not something we are likely to believe.

It's like we can't let them in and align our own thoughts to accept that kind of kindness if it's not what we're used to, if it's not what we grew up with, if we're not yet ready. If we don't yet have the internal thought rubric to support a belief that anyone else could think that we are smart or pretty or beautiful or amazing or a wonderful worker, a great parent or partner, communicator, whatever, when we are so harsh with ourselves, so judgmental of us from that perfectionist habit.

If you are holding on to the thought that you are not enough, you are simply not going to believe it when someone else tells you that you are. And it's not going to do much for you. But if your thought is that others can in fact see good things about you and you yourself see and believe good things about you, then words of affirmation are likely to feel good for you.

So the work here is not to toss words of affirmation out the window, but rather to use the thought work protocol to show you the thoughts you carry about yourself from your socialization, your conditioning, your family

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blueprint that block you from having that positive self-regard, which we talked about way back in episode 50. That was a good one, go give it a listen.

But when you can see those thoughts, you can start to create some wiggle room in your mind and body to start to believe that someone else can think you're awesome. The saying used to go that you need to love yourself to love others, and we know now that that's not quite true.

In letting yourself be loved, you come to see yourself as lovable. It's a two-way street. So it may be interesting to take a look at any thoughts you have that tell you that words of affirmation do nothing for you because that belief may be blocking you from experiencing yourself as lovable by letting yourself be told how lovable and wonderful you are.

I'll also invite you to examine how words of affirmation were used in your childhood. Was it the old bait and switch? Such as, "You're such a beautiful girl. Imagine how beautiful you'd be if you lost 10 pounds? You're such a smart kid, think how far you could go if you just applied yourself. Wow, you have such a bright future, once you get over this whole wanting to be an artist thing."

So if that happened, particularly if it was a frequent theme, it makes sense that your body, your animal may not trust words of affirmation. So too for those of us whose caregivers said one thing and did another.

If that was the case, you may have come to distrust words and you only trust actions. Your mantra may have come to be, "Don't tell me you think I'm awesome. Show me." If any of that is resonating, then it might not be that you categorically as a human don't respond to words of affirmation.

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It may just be that your brain sees them as the harbinger of criticism to come, or disappointment on the horizon. And so you can choose to use thought work to shift that association for yourself if you'd like to.

Finally, a common habit in codependent thinking is wanting others to read our minds. And as I said before, to say and do exactly what we want them to on our terms, because we have this very narrowly defined framework of what feels loving to us, which is another way we try to control others and the world, and try to control our own inner landscape by controlling everything around us.

So it might be interesting as well to ask ourselves if we don't like words of affirmation or if we have a control-based story here too about what the specific words are, which we have decided are acceptable, as loving for us.

And that brings us to physical touch. So admittedly, this can be a particularly complicated one for a lot of humans, especially if we have trauma around non-consensual touch, or for those of us who may be neurodivergent have a totally different and beautiful relationship to touch that's specific to them.

Here too, I would posit it's not that most of us were born as animals who don't appreciate touch, but that our nervous system learned that touch isn't safe, either because of stress, distress, or trauma, how touch was coded in our minds, secondary to our experience, or because our neurological circuitry simply processes touch as something that doesn't feel safe or good for us.

For the former group, somatic therapy and trauma therapy, which is well beyond the scope of this coaching podcast, can be helpful as a way to help us re-pattern our relationship to touch.

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And for those who may find themselves, for example on the autistic spectrum, you may prefer a different kind of touch or very specific kinds of touch, self-touch. A dear friend of mine who is on the spectrum prefers firm touch, but does not like light touch, or something else.

If touch is not your love language, you get to do some thought work to understand why. That doesn't mean you want to need to change it, but it can be helpful and empowering to understand your why.

So I personally really, really, really love touch. I'm a big hugger. I'm Latina, I'm from a people - we kiss on the cheek when we meet up with people, or when we meet people for the first time, when we hug people. Brains are so fascinating. I just started thinking about Argentina and so I just heard myself say, "Emm," instead of, "Umm," in English. It happens automatically. I love brains.

But anyway, somebody went on a tangent. Reeling it back in, I love touch. That was the point. I'm from a people who are very, very touchy. And when I'm dating someone new, I tell that person that touch is a really important way for me to have connection.

And I do that because why not? And it's really, really helpful for example if we're having conflict, or if I'm upset or dysregulated or having a hard conversation, I want my intimates to know that the kindest thing you can do for me, a way to really show me love, that deeply helps me co-regulate is through touch.

A hug, a hang on my knee. If you really want me to hear you and to connect in with you and what you're saying, say it while touching me. Sure, I could do thought work to explore that if I wanted to change it, but I don't want to. It's a thing that works for me and that feels really good about me.

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And at this point in my life, in my growth, in my dedication to myself and having my own back, this is a non-negotiable. So if I was dating someone and told them it's really important to me that you provide me with touch to help me co-regulate if we're having a fight and someone said, "I absolutely cannot do that, I will not do that, I'm not available for that," I would both honor that that's their choice, that's how they want to take care of themselves, and that's not something that works for me.

When my nervous system is dysregulated, and remember, I'm someone with a history of chronic intermittent depression and anxiety, I know myself. I know my body, I know my nervous system, I know my triggers, I know my glimmers, I know how to support myself.

And not having touch available during conflict or a fight is not something that I am currently available for. Perhaps as I continue to grow through thought work and somatics, as I continue to learn to regulate my nervous system in evermore powerful ways, that may shift.

I'm here for it. And at this point, I just know my non-negotiables, and touch in moments where there's conflict or disagreement, that's one of them. And I have no interest as well in doing thought work to change that because I'm quite happy with it. And I don't want to change it.

But it is pretty great to know that I could use thought work if I wanted to change it. I just don't, so I'm not going to. And so that brings us finally to quality time.

Fascinatingly enough, quality time used to not be my favorite, favorite. So if you have not developed the skill of presence and being present, it can be really challenging to see quality time as a gift.

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I now love quality time and it ranks highly on the love language quiz for me, but a decade ago, 15 years ago, before I was meditating, doing breathwork, somatic practices, knew how to regulate my nervous system, et cetera, I don't think I ever would have named quality time as as much of a bodily yes for me as I do now that I'm generally more embodied and present in my life.

Now, I can more easily just sit on the couch with a date or a friend and can allow myself to feel a deep connection and an appreciation for the time we spend together. Because I'm truly there for it, in my body, and because I'm telling the story that the person I'm with is giving me one of the most important gifts possible, which is their time.

But before it felt safe to be present in my body like it mostly does now, I'd be watching a movie with a lover or a friend and I'd be jumping up every 10 to 15 minutes to get a drink, or a snack, to do some task or something that was effectively me avoiding being present.

It was buffering against the discomfort of quality time and I had no idea what I was doing. It turns out that it is not that my love language isn't quality time. It's that I didn't have the skill or ability to stay present for quality time then, and I'm so glad that I do now.

So if quality time doesn't feel like something you value, or that really moves the needle for you, it just may be an interesting thing for you to take a look at and get curious about. Why is that for you in your life? What are the thoughts? What are the stories that you're telling around spending quality time and why might something like a gift or words of affirmation feel better for you?

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I say this as I have been, not because one love language is more or less better than any other, but because it's really fascinating to get to know ourselves and those we're intimate with on such a deeper level.

In conclusion, my darlings, the five love languages are a potentially fun and useful tool for opening up communication about your current preferences and what feels easily loving and good for you today.

Someone I'm dating is super into them and we had this really fun afternoon where we sat in the sun and went through the quiz question by question and talked about our answers, and it was such a great way to get to know each other.

Knowing they aren't into gifts, knowing they love touch, et cetera, et cetera, has been so useful. It means that when we're together and I get up to go to the loo, I make sure to touch their shoulder on the way out for a small example, and that's great.

And because I share that acts of service resonate as loving gestures for me, they're extra attentive to doing things around the house. To cleaning up after themselves, they take the garbage out without anyone asking, on and on, and I love that.

Not because they or I have rigid stories about what does and doesn't make us feel loved, but because why not call in ease? These simple things we do to meet one another and to make each other feel cared for and loved can be so easy.

And I think it's a great thing to choose to engage with these simple ways of bringing more love into our lives. And we can do that while also recognizing that when our thoughts and stories change, our love language can change.

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Because the story we're telling about the offering we're being given impacts the ways we receive it.

And whether we are open to seeing the intention behind the gifts, the words, the act, the touch, has a lot to do with whether we are approaching receiving with an open heart. Because if not, we are basing our experience in our own narrative and history.

And while of course that makes sense because science, we can choose to pause and to use our neuroplasticity through the thought work protocol to consider changing those old cassette tapes out for new ones.

And I recommend doing that work to just investigate, to ask the questions, to get real about why we respond to one love language or another. So we can stop spending our time demanding that people love us in a very specific way that lines up with our narrative of being loved, and instead, can open ourselves up to seeing the love that's possible, that's being offered through any of these five ways of relating.

And listen, if you know what resonates in your body, let's say it's acts of service or touch or whatever, tell your partners. Tell your friends, tell your parents, tell your kids, tell the people you love. Let them know what you prefer, what lights you up, what you most enjoy receiving.

While not closing off your heart to other ways of being shown love. It might just surprise you how good any of the love languages can feel when you greet them with that big open heart.

Alright, thanks for listening my sweet darlings. If you have not received the thought work protocol or my free meditations, why not? Maybe receiving gifts is not your love language is what you're saying. Maybe then you don't

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call them gifts. You just call them resources. How does that feel? Do you like free resources? I got free resources for you.

If you head over to victoriaalbina.com, right at the top of the page, you can download my free meditations and you can head on over to victoriaalbina.com/144, which is the show page for this episode, and you can download the thought work protocol right there in so much detail because I love sharing free gifts or free resources with you.

And if you are loving what you are learning on the show week after week, you're going to love Anchored. It is my absolute favorite place in the world. It is the greatest gift in my life is to hold space with these beautiful and amazing, incredible humans who've joined this community, this collective, so they can overcome their codependent, perfectionist, and people-pleasing thought habits and can live a life with more joy and self-love using thought works, somatics, and breathwork, mind-body-spirit.

And we are enrolling currently for the February cohort. Head on over to victoriaalbina.com/anchored to learn more and to apply now. Really, really, really looking forward to connecting with you and to having you join the familia over in Anchored.

It's such a delight. Have a beautiful day, but first, let's do what we do. Gentle hand on your heart if that feels loving. Close your beautiful eyes if that feels safe and you are not driving.

Remember, you are safe, you are held, you are loved. And when one of us heals, we help heal the world. Be well, my darling. I'll talk to you soon.

If you've been enjoying the show and learning a ton, it's time to apply it with my expert guidance so you can live life with intention, without the anxiety,

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overwhelm, and resentment, so you can get unstuck. You're not going to want to miss the opportunity to join my exclusive intimate group coaching program, so head on over to victoriaalbina.com/masterclass to grab your seat now. See you there. It's going to be a good one.