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Research Paper

Narcissism and Unrequited Love: Effects on Self-Compassion and Beliefs about Future Relationships

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: To study the impact of experiencing rejection or heartbreak on individuals with narcissistic characteristics on state self-compassion and attitudes or beliefs towards future relationship perspective. To study how individuals with grandiose or vulnerable narcissistic characteristics when faced heartbreak and its impact on self-compassion and attitudes towards future romantic relationships. **Methodology:** A quantitative method was used and two hypotheses were concocted. The responses were collected through google forms; the qualified participants were only 100. Five self-report measures were used, The Heartbreak Scale, Grandiose Narcissism Scale, Hypersensitive Narcissism Scale, State-Self Compassion Scale and Future Perspective Questionnaire. The data was analyzed by doing multiple regression. **Results:** Individuals with grandiose narcissistic characteristics when experiencing rejection have an impact on their attitudes and beliefs about future romantic relationships while there is not much impact on state self-compassion. While, individuals with vulnerable narcissistic characteristics when faced with rejection might have an impact on state self-compassion and little to no impact on their attitudes and beliefs about future romantic relationships. **Conclusion:** There is some impact on self-compassion and future romantic relationships when experienced with rejection. Be it individuals with narcissism characteristics or not. Implications for further research are discussed.

Keywords: *Unrequited Love, Rejection, Heartbreak, Narcissism, Grandiose Narcissism, Vulnerable Narcissism, Self-Compassion, Beliefs on Romantic Relationships*

Who does not want to love and be loved back? Philosophers have stated that love is one of the most primary and desirable experiences of human life. Love, especially romantic love is seeked by everyone and is said to be one of the most essential bonds that humans have. Unfortunately, in some situations when individuals confess their love to the other person they get rejected. Unrequited love occurs when the difference in experience of love results in a yearning for more complex love by one of the individuals in the relationship. In simple terms, unrequited love means unreciprocated love. It involves having romantic feelings towards another person who does not feel the same for you.

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Rejection is said to be a painful and a powerful experience in many contexts, but having one's love refused by the person one loves is perhaps the most painful of all (Buameister and Dhavale, 2006). Research studies indicate that by the prime of adulthood they have already experienced unrequited love. When faced with rejection the individuals are highly impacted on many levels as they go through different emotional experiences like sadness, anger, pain, disappointment, humiliation, which causes a severe blow to the structure of self and also affects their expectations and beliefs in future relationships.

It is also implied that unrequited love is widespread and often an unpleasant experience (Bringle et al,2013). The past studies have talked about what unrequited love is, what are the causes of it and also the emotions that individuals go through when rejected are taken into account, but there are limited studies on the effect of the rejection from a romantic partner on oneself and on future romantic relationships.

Every individual reacts differently to rejection. Personality patterns of the individuals influence how they feel when they face rejection from a potential romantic partner. According to DSM-V, there are 11 personality disorders. Keeping that in mind, Narcissistic personality is a pattern of traits and behaviors portrayed by excessive self-concern and over evaluation of self. The individuals are self-focused, superiority and entitlement, there is an exaggerated need for attention and validation as well. The narcissism literature has commonly postulated two subtypes of narcissism, grandiose and vulnerable narcissism (Besser and Preil, 2010). Studies have shown these two types of narcissism differ in terms of reactions and emotions when faced with difficult emotional situations.

Narcissism is a difficult issue to deal with-in the context of romantic relationships. On one hand they appear to be ideal relationship partners, narcissists are experts in initiating romantic relationships. Weiss and Miller (2018) proposed two types of narcissism:- grandiose narcissism and vulnerable narcissism. These two forms of narcissism have distinct characteristics.

Grandiose Narcissism refers to individuals who are explicitly and outwardly immodest, self-promotional, self-enhancing, and entitled with a combination of traits of disagreeableness and aspects of extraversion (Miller et al,2017). Individuals with grandiose narcissism are more prone to short term relationships as they are more concerned with their own self-image. On the other hand, individuals with vulnerable narcissism are more likely to form emotionally charged relationships characterized by negative emotions. Individuals with characteristics of grandiose narcissism are likely to have an avoidant attachment style of relationships.

Vulnerable Narcissism is typically described in the narcissism literature as individuals with characteristics who are self-absorbed, entitled and distrustful of others while presenting substantial, overt psychological distress and fragility, they are also very weak, self-conscious, social insecurity and defensiveness. Individuals with higher tendencies of vulnerable narcissism may experience greater negative emotions in response to rejection due to their weak self-esteem and fear of rejection (Besser and Priel,2009). They see partners as sources of validation and need constant reassurance, to maintain their self-worth (Rohmann et al, 2012).

Rejection affects the self-concept of the individual. Deriving from self-concept, as defined by Neff (2003b), a self-compassionate mindset represents the balance between increased compassion and decreased uncompassionate self-responding to personal struggle. State of self-compassion is defined as the compassion towards oneself while one is facing difficulty in life, or feeling inadequate in some way, it is the compassionate mind towards oneself during a difficult period of time. So, when faced with rejection, the individuals feel inadequate about themselves, so compassion towards oneself can get affected due to the rejection.

The feeling of being rejected by potential partners can also have an effect on future romantic relationships. There is a high possibility that when individuals get rejected their perspective towards romantic relationships change. They start believing that if they want to pursue a romantic relationship, they would be likely to be rejected again. The fear of experiencing unrequited love and rejection again, stops them from having feelings for another person. This is because when reeling in rejection, individuals usually develop negative beliefs towards future relationships, however it depends on the type of personality pattern the individual poses.

Hypothesis 1: Individuals with tendencies of grandiose narcissism, exhibit characteristics of extraversion, arrogance, self-absorption, sense of entitlement, defensive and inflated sense of self (Bresser and Priel, 2010). As they are highly self-centered, getting rejected or being heartbroken would not affect their self-compassion or their beliefs about future romantic relationships as they believe they are very important, people are more likely to fall in love with them.
When unrequited love or rejection occurs, people with grandiose narcissistic traits will experience positive effects on their self-compassion and beliefs about future romantic relationships.

Hypothesis 2: Individuals with tendencies of vulnerable narcissism, exhibit characteristics of introversion, experience a wide ray of negative emotions, increased rates of psychological distress, anxiety, shame, low self-esteem and feelings of inferiority, as well as egocentric and hostile interpersonal behaviors (Weiss and Miller, 2018). As they are sensitive to negative emotions and have low self-esteem, getting rejected or heartbroken would affect their self-compassion and beliefs about future relationships as they believe that they do not deserve to be loved back.
When unrequited love or rejection occurs, people with vulnerable narcissistic traits will experience negative effects on their self-compassion and beliefs about future romantic relationships.

METHODOLOGY

Sample

The inclusion criteria for the study were as follows, the individuals should be in the age range of 20-30 years old, the individuals should not be in any kind of romantic relationship and have been rejected or experienced unrequited love and lastly, they should be citizens of Mumbai, India. The final sample consisted of 100 participants, 60 were females, 37, males and 3 preferred to not specify gender. The mean age of the participants was 23.61 years with a SD of 2.32. Approximately 22.8% were around 22 years of age, 32.4% were around the age of 23 years, and the rest were above the age of 24 years.

Procedure

The participants were recruited from sending out google forms via a secure web site. Informed consent was duly taken before they participated in the study. The participants were made aware about what the survey entails and it is purely voluntary to participate in the study. Hence, at any given point if they did not wish to be a part of the study they could withdraw, if they do not wish to be part of the survey they leave whenever they feel like.

Instruments

- **Heart Break Scale:** The Heartbreak scale was originally adapted from the, The Breakup Distress Scale (BDS) by referring to the break up as the rejection that the individuals have faced by Saint Louis University (2011). It is a 16-item questionnaire with a 6-point Likert scale, 0 (Strongly Disagree) to 6 (Strongly Agree). The scale showed a reliability (Cronbach **α**) of 0.91.
- **Grandiose Narcissism Scale:** The Grandiose Narcissism Scale was developed by Foster et a (2015), is a 33-item questionnaire to measure grandiose narcissism. The scale has seven subscales which reflect the seven factors of Narcissistic Personality Inventory. The scale is a six-point Likert scale, 1 (Strongly Disagree) and 6 (Strongly Agree). The scale showed a reliability (Cronbach **α**) of 0.92.
- **Hypersensitive Narcissism Scale:** The Hypersensitive Narcissism Scale was developed by Hendin & Cheek (1997) measuring vulnerable narcissism. It is a 10-item questionnaire with a 5-point Likert scale, 1 (very uncharacteristic or untrue) and 5 (very characteristic or true). The scale showed a reliability (Cronbach **α**) of 0.72.
- **State Self-Compassion Scale:** The State Self-Compassion scale was developed by Neff (2021) and was adapted from the Self-Compassion scale which was made by the same author. It measures six components of self-compassion. It is an 18-item questionnaire with a 5-point Likert scale, 1 (Very Untrue of me) and 5 (Very True of Me). The scale shows a reliability (Cronbach **α**) of 0.85.
- **Future Relationship Perspective Questionnaire:** The Future Relationship Perspective Questionnaire was developed by Harvard Business School (2008). The scale was developed to measure the attitudes and beliefs towards future relationships. It is a 5-item questionnaire with a 10-point Likert scale, 1-4 (Not at all True) and 7-10 (Very True). The scale showed a reliability (Cronbach **α**) of 0.53, which can mean the scale is not appropriate for the Indian population.

RESULTS

(a) Descriptive statistics for the variables accounted in the study:

Table 1 Means, standard deviation and range for rejection experienced (HBC), grandiose (GNC) and vulnerable narcissism (VNC), state self-compassion (SSC) and future relationship perspective (FRP), N = 100.

	Mean	SD	Range
Heartbreak Scale (HBC)	48.1	19.46	79
Grandiose Narcissism Scale (GNC)	115.19	23.28	124
Hypersensitive Narcissism Scale (VNC)	28.96	6.47	32
State Self-Compassion scale (SSC)	56.94	10.55	57
Future Relationship Perspective Questionnaire (FRP)	30.12	9.076	40

The mean and standard deviation of the variables are depicted in table 1. The mean for the Heartbreak scale was calculated to 48.1, with a SD = 19.46, and a range of 79. The mean for grandiose narcissism scale was computed to, 115.19, with a SD = 23.28 and a range of 124. The mean for hypersensitive narcissism scale was computed to 28.96, with a SD = 6.47 and a range of 32. The means for the variable state self-compassion computed to 56.94, with a SD = 10.55 and a range of 32. The means for the variable of beliefs in future relationship computed to 30.12, with a SD = 9.07 and a range of 40.

(b) Intercorrelations among all the variables:

Table 2: Inter-Correlation among rejection experienced (HBC), grandiose (GNC) and vulnerable narcissism (VNC), state self-compassion (SSC) and future relationship perspective (FRP), N = 100.

	HBC	GNC	VNC	SSC	FRP
HBC	**---**				
GNC	**0.388*** **	**---**			
VNC	**0.292** **	**0.319*** **	**---**		
SSC	**-0.179**	**-0.148**	**-0.397*** **	**---**	
FRP	**0.193***	**-0.123**	**0.165**	**-0.136**	

Note: All tests one-tailed.
**p <.05, **p <.01, ***p <.001*

Table 2 shows that there is a high positive correlation between the heartbreak the participants have suffered and grandiose narcissism (0.388, p<.001). You can also see a positive correlation between vulnerable narcissism and the heartbreak the participants faced after rejection (0.292, <.01). A positively high intercorrelation between grandiose narcissism and vulnerable narcissism (0.319, p<.001) was found as they are the two sides of the same coin. Results also showed a significantly negative correlation between self-compassion and vulnerable narcissism (-0.397, p<.001). A positive correlation between the heartbreak experienced and beliefs about future relationships was also seen (0.193, p < .05).

(c) Results for Multiple Regression:

After correlation, it seemed the data was fit for Multiple Regression analysis (Table 3.1 & 3.2), albeit the correlation between independent variables were high, the correlations between some of the independent and dependent variables could not have been ignored. Table 3.1 presents the results for our first hypothesis, Individuals with grandiose narcissistic characteristics when experiencing unrequited love or rejection, can effect their state self-compassion and their beliefs towards future romantic relationships. In model 1, we have state self-compassion as the dependent variable and in model 2 we have beliefs about future relationships as our dependent variable.

Table 3.1 Effects on state self-compassion and future relationship perspective on individuals with grandiose narcissistic characteristics who faced rejection.

Model 1: effects on state self-compassion on individuals with grandiose narcissistic characteristics who faced rejection.

Model 2: effects on future beliefs on individuals with grandiose narcissistic characteristics who faced rejection.

Variable	Model 1			Model 2		
	B	β	SE	B	β	SE
Constant	65.47			34.23		
Rejection Experienced	-.078	-.143	.059	.132	.284*	.049
Grandiose Narcissism	-.042	-.092	.049	-.091	-.233	.041
R^2	.039			.084		
ΔR^2	.019			.065		

**p <.001*

As shown in the results in Table 3.1 for model 1, with state self-compassion as the dependent variable, the R squared was computed to 0.39 and adjusted R-squared equal to .019. The beta value was calculated to -.143 and -.092 for rejection experienced by the individual (heartbreak scale) and grandiose narcissism scale, respectively. The t-value was computed to 12.27 which also indicates that the relationship is weak and does not have a significant relationship.

The results for model 2 (Table 3.1), with beliefs about future relationships as the dependent variable, the R squared was computed to .084 and adjusted R-squared equal to .065. The beta value was calculated to .284 and -.233 for heartbreak scale and grandiose narcissism scale respectively. The values were significant at $p < .001$ level which indicate that when individuals with grandiose narcissism characteristics experience unrequited love it does have an impact on beliefs about future romantic relationships ($t = 7.6$, $F=.4.4$, $p<.001$)

Table 3.2 presents the results for our second hypothesis, Individuals with vulnerable narcissistic characteristics when experiencing unrequited love or rejection, can effect their state self-compassion and their beliefs towards future romantic relationships. In model 1, we have state self-compassion as the dependent variable and in model 2 we have beliefs about future relationships as the dependent variable.

Table 3.2 Effects on state self-compassion and future relationship perspective on individuals with vulnerable narcissistic characteristics who faced rejection.
Model 1: effects on state self-compassion on individuals with vulnerable narcissistic characteristics who faced rejection.
Model 2: effects on future beliefs on individuals with vulnerable narcissistic characteristics who faced rejection.

Variable	Model 1			Model 2		
	B	β	SE	B	β	SE
Constant	76.51			21.73		
Rejection Experienced	-.037	-.069*	.053	.074	.158	.048
Vulnerable Narcissism	-.614	-.377	.158	.167	.119	.145
R^2	.162			.050		
ΔR^2	.144			.031		

**p <.001*

As shown in the results in the table 3.2 for model 1, with state self-compassion as the dependent variable, the R squared was computed to .162 and adjusted R-squared equal to .144. The beta value for the rejection experienced by the individual (heartbreak scale) was calculated to -.069 and -.377 for hypersensitive narcissism scale. The t-value was computed to 7.63 The values were significant at $p < .001$ level which indicates that when individuals with grandiose narcissism characteristics experience unrequited love it does have an impact on beliefs about future romantic relationships ($t = 16.4$, $p<.001$, $F = 9.3$, $p<.001$).

The results for model 2 (Table 3.2), with beliefs about future relationship as the dependent variable, the R squared was computed to 0.50 and adjusted R-squared equal to .031 The beta value was calculated to for heartbreak scale was .158 and .119 for hypersensitive narcissism scale. The values were not significant in any way with respect to the effects on beliefs about future relationships when experiencing unrequited love.

DISCUSSION

As mentioned before, there is limited research on how unrequited love has an impact on many levels for the individual. In this study we focus on self-compassion and attitudes or beliefs about future relationships. Prior research had signaled towards the direction if the individual has experienced rejection or heartbreak due to it, it would have an effect on their self-compassion as well as their attitude and beliefs towards future relationships. An individual thinks about themselves in a negative light.

The present study reflects significant correlation between experiencing rejection and their beliefs about future relationships getting affected (table 2), which signals that experiencing rejection can make an individual vary of future romantic relationships in the fear of rejection which can lead to a poor state of well-being. As it shows a positive correlation (0.19, $p< .05$) between the two variables, it can be said that the amount of hurt the individual has endured will have a direct effect on their beliefs about romantic relationships, and they can form a negative belief or attitude towards romantic relationships.

There is a negative correlation between vulnerable narcissism and state self-compassion (-0.397, $p<.001$), as shown in table 2, which signifies that, if there are strong traits of vulnerable narcissism in an individual their state of self-compassion will be comparatively less. Vulnerable narcissism has been described as highly neurotic, prone to distress, emotional fragility, covert, mindfulness and thin skinned, which suggests that even a slightest stressor can have an effect on their state of self-compassion.

Result also showed a positive correlation between individuals with vulnerable characteristics and the rejection they experienced (0.292, $p < .01$), this is also linked with the traits of vulnerable narcissism and how they are highly affected by rejection. If they have strong traits of vulnerable narcissism, the heartbreak they endure after getting rejected is also quite high. The correlation between grandiose and vulnerable narcissism (0.319, $p<.001$) was expected as they are said to be two peas in a pod, or said to be twins as they are defined as the two subtypes of narcissism (Jauk et al, 2017).

The first hypothesis stated, Individuals with grandiose narcissistic characteristics when experiencing rejection will have a positive effect on their state self-compassion and beliefs towards future relationships. The results partially supported the first hypothesis, showing that self-compassion is not affected by rejection when it is concerned with individuals with

grandiose narcissism characteristics. Individuals with grandiose narcissism characteristics seem to depict a persona with high self-confidence and self-esteem (Rohman et al, 2012) which can also indicate that they are highly self-compassionate. Current study showed that their self-compassion was not much affected after being rejected, as they are less likely to blame or find fault with themselves and may just perceive that something is just simply wrong with the other person as they have all the qualities that make them a good person and as a romantic partner.

The second part of the first hypothesis bears fruit. Through the regression model (table 3.1, model 2) we can see that attitudes or beliefs towards romantic relationships get affected when individuals with grandiose narcissism characteristics get rejected or experience heartbreak. They do not develop negative beliefs and attitudes towards romantic relationships. It also implies that getting rejected would not negatively impact future romantic relationships. Moreover, they are so self-absorbed that they would not care that they are rejected nor would it stop them pursuing more romantic interests. In fact, this rejection may give them the liberty to pursue more romantic relationships. Individuals with grandiose narcissistic characteristics define their relationships as shallow, transitory and lacking in commitment (Campbell, et al, 2002). Rejection from a loved one would not change much in their thinking patterns or attitude towards romantic relationships.

The second hypothesis stated that, Individuals with vulnerable narcissistic characteristics when experiencing rejection will have an effect on their state self-compassion and beliefs towards future relationships. The results of the second hypothesis were partially right as well; analysis reveals that self-compassion is greatly affected when individuals with vulnerable narcissistic characteristics are rejected by a loved one. These individuals already have a fragile concept of self and emotional stability, and negative affect, which is why when they are rejected or heartbroken their weak sense of self cannot take it and they end up blaming themselves. While individuals with grandiose narcissism characteristics blame the other person for the rejection, individuals with vulnerable narcissistic characteristics tend to blame themselves when they get romantically rejected. One blaming themselves for being rejected often leads to having a low state of self-compassion. As predicted, individuals with vulnerable narcissistic characteristics when rejected would affect their self-compassion are likely to be correct. To be precise, the more hurt or heartbroken they are from the rejection, compassion towards oneself will be less during those situations.

The second part of the second hypothesis, individuals with vulnerable narcissism when experiencing rejection will have an effect on beliefs about future relationships, did not get proved. These individuals have an anxious attachment style (Rohman et al, 2012), they are vary about getting into new romantic relationships. So, in a sense, rejection would not be affected as they are already apprehensive about getting into relationships. Another reason might be the fact that they also have a fear of abandonment, which prepares them for the worst in the context of romantic relationships. It can be stated that their attitudes or beliefs towards romantic relationships are already negative in nature. Thus, being rejected or experiencing heartbreak will not change their attitude towards romantic relationships as they have already prepared themselves for the worst.

CONCLUSION

The results of the study should be understood with some conditions bearing in mind. The participants were from Mumbai city in India with the age bracket of 20-30 which may

highly influence the way they perceive romantic relationships. In addition, the participants were from the more urban part of Indian cities, meaning that individuals from rural cities might bring a change in the results. The present study concludes, to put it mildly, that experiencing romantic rejection has a certain kind of impact on the individual that has been rejected.

Results reflect that attitudes or beliefs about future romantic relationships get affected when individuals with grandiose narcissistic characteristics experience romantic rejection while there was not much impact on state self-compassion. Whereas, individuals with vulnerable narcissistic characteristics experience romantic rejection, their self-compassion is negatively affected with no impact on beliefs or attitudes towards future romantic relationships.

Narcissism and romance are two words that are not really used in a sentence together. In correspondence with our initial expectation, vulnerable narcissism and grandiose narcissism have a significant overlap yet the impact of rejection was on different constructs. According to the study presented here, grandiose and vulnerable narcissism plays a distinct role in accepting the rejection and its impact on the individual. As a result, the findings add to our knowledge of narcissism as a personality trait. Continuity to pay closer attention to individuals with characteristics of narcissism in the context of relationships will be a benefit to understanding the complexity of what narcissism personality is.

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Conflict of Interest

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