

# Narcissists: The Casanova of a Familial Relationship

Azureen, A. A (Corresponding author)<sup>1</sup>, Azureen, A. A (Corresponding author)<sup>2</sup>, Siti Kausar, Z<sup>3</sup>, Fang Yi Xue<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup>*Faculty of Education & Liberal Arts, Inti International University, Persiaran Perdana BBN Putra Nilai, 71800, Nilai, Negeri Sembilan, Malaysia E-mail: [azureen.abdaziz@newinti.edu.my](mailto:azureen.abdaziz@newinti.edu.my)*

<sup>2</sup>*Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities*

*Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (The National University of Malaysia)*

<sup>3</sup>*Faculty of Education & Liberal Arts, Inti International University, Persiaran Perdana BBN Putra Nilai, 71800, Nilai, Negeri Sembilan, Malaysia E-mail: [sitikausar.zakaria@newinti.edu.my](mailto:sitikausar.zakaria@newinti.edu.my)*

<sup>4</sup>*Faculty of Education & Liberal Arts, Inti International University, Persiaran Perdana BBN Putra Nilai, 71800, Nilai, Negeri Sembilan, Malaysia E-mail: [yixuefang@newinti.edu.my](mailto:yixuefang@newinti.edu.my)*

## Abstract

Narcissism has had a long and ardent history as a personality construct, but currently, among clinical professionals, it is acknowledged as a disorder. The study aimed to explore the relationships between narcissism, self-esteem, and love styles. A quantitative research design was used involving 100 university employees from a Selangor university. Following that, the participants were divided into two groups, Sample A, and Sample B. They responded to questionnaires on narcissism, love, and self-esteem. Correlation and regression were utilized as data analyses methods. The findings revealed significant connections among the components of narcissism, self-esteem, and love styles.

**Keywords:** Narcissists; love; relationship; self-esteem.

## Introduction

Over time, there have been many variations of narcissism as a personality construct. Now, however, in the clinical sense, it is recognized as a personality disorder. The purpose of this study was to explore the relationships among narcissism, self-esteem, and love styles, utilizing a quantitative research design. Consequently, 100 employees from a university in Selangor were selected as participants, and subsequently divided into two groups, making up Sample A and Sample B. The participants were given questionnaires to respond to about narcissism, self-esteem, and love styles. Following that, correlation and regression analyses were conducted to analyze the data. It was found that there were evident linked relationships between narcissism, self-esteem, and love styles. Nonetheless, there is an assumption that there is the possibility for reciprocity between self-love and love for others; however, in this study, the key focus is on the varying degrees of individual narcissism. Additionally, the relationship between self-esteem and love styles was also studied to

identify if there were differences between the respective effects of narcissism and self-esteem on the identified love styles.

This article begins with presenting the definitions of narcissism as well as reviewing the available literature and prior studies on narcissism and related interpersonal relationships. A particular concept for love styles, based on the literature, is also put forth and explained. Finally, the love experience of individuals with narcissism, speaking from both general, and personal current perspectives are examined to better comprehend the significant relationships between narcissism, self-esteem, and love styles.

## Literature Review

As a personality construct, narcissism, or in clinical terms referred to as “narcissistic personality disorder” (NPD), has had its variations over time. Narcissists are identified by several key characteristics (American Psychiatric Association, 1994) as defined in Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental

Disorders. In the forefront is these narcissists' overly high regard for themselves. They hold the notion that they are not only unique or special, but also better than others, which is apparently reinforced by the narcissists themselves, both internally and externally. Internally, they imagine themselves with the desired fame, love, and power. On the other hand, externally, they are attention- and praise-seeking, and are often show-offs. They mingle with others they deem of "high status" while also refusing to accept any criticism against themselves. However, such notions significantly influence their interpersonal behaviours, causing them to be envious, manipulative, and uncompassionate (American Psychiatric Association, 1994).

With its clinical understanding as the foundation, narcissism is considered a continuous variable by social and personality psychology researchers (Raskin & Hall, 1979), whereby its defining traits are expanded from those of NPD to the normal population. While the narcissistic personality is akin to the clinical NPD in terms of quality, it is not equivalent in degree. This means that, even though a person may have a high score on the narcissism personality scale, it does not equate to them having NPD; instead, they may possess many traits similar to those having NPD, just to a lesser degree. Therefore, here, "narcissists" and "non-narcissists" refer to people close to the upper limit and lower limit of the narcissism scale respectively.

### **Self and Other**

Generally, there are two key characteristics of narcissists that affect their interpersonal relationships with others—they certainly hold themselves in very high regard and are less interested (than non-narcissists) in intimacy in their relationships. Findings from related literature that support this high personal regard include their thinking that they are smarter and more attractive (Gabriel, Critelli, & Ee, 1994), and unique (Emmons, 1984). Besides that, narcissists are termed to have a strong egoistic bias without much of a moralistic bias (Paulhus & John, 1998), with them being found to be stronger on certain agentic traits, such as intelligence and social extraversion, but equal to others on communal traits, like morality and

caring. In fact, narcissists consider communal traits less important than agentic traits (W. K. Campbell, Rudich, & Sedikides, 2002). It has also been found that this differs slightly with high self-esteem individuals, who are apparently more agentic, albeit not more so than narcissists, and more communal than others. Moreover, other findings focus on narcissists' unconcern for relational intimacy, with even a lesser need for it compared to non-narcissists (Carroll, 1987), where they focus only on the self over others (Emmons, 1987; Raskin & Shaw, 1988) and are uncompassionate, or lack empathy (Watson, Grisham, Trotter, & Biderman, 1984).

### **Self-Regulation Strategies**

Narcissists are the way they are because they manipulate their interpersonal relationships for self-regulation purposes, especially in enhancing or maintaining their self-esteem (Morf & Rhodewalt, 2001; Raskin, Novacek, & Hogan, 1991b). They strive to demonstrate their superiority over others (Bradlee & Emmons, 1992; Carroll, 1987; Emmons, 1984; Raskin, Novacek, & Hogan, 1991a, 1991b; Raskin & Terry, 1988). If unable to, they may even become angry and aggressive (Bushman & Baumeister, 1998; Rhodewalt & Morf, 1998), or claim others' success for themselves, and blame others for their failures. Similarly, they can also be exhibitionists (Buss & Chiodo, 1991), and attention-seekers (Rudich, 2001). These behaviours have been observed when in pairs (W. K. Campbell, Reeder, Sedikides, & Elliot, 2000; Farwell & Wohlwend-Lloyd, 1998) or groups (Gosling, John, Craik, & Robins, 1998; John & Robins, 1994).

Nevertheless, narcissists are not entirely unpleasant; in fact, they can be rather charming. They have been found to be confident in social settings (Watson & Biderman, 1994), interesting and entertaining (Paulhus, 1998, Study 2), and energetic (Raskin & Terry, 1988) in order to gain social access to what they deem as the popular "in" crowd.

These narcissistic characteristics cross over into the realm of romantic relationships as well. Similarly, in such relationships, they do not seek intimacy, but are rather self-serving, and therefore, also seek romantic partners that are able to fulfil those needs. As a result, they have

been reported to be less committed than non-narcissists in their romantic relationships, often looking for other “options” besides their partner (W. K. Campbell & Foster, *in press*), including sexual partners. They have been found to be more socio-sexual (Foster, Shrira, & Campbell, 2002) compared to non-narcissists, engaging in sexual activities without the elements of intimacy and closeness. And although they expect their potential romantic partners to be “perfect”, particularly individuals who are considered successful and popular, and probably adore them (W. K. Campbell, 1999), they do not think very highly of them, still regarding themselves as superior to their partners (W. K. Campbell et al., 2002).

To summarise, narcissists have certain defining characteristics that reflect their views of themselves and self-regulation that they bring to all their relationships. They have extremely high regards for themselves especially in terms of agentic traits, but have little concern for others, and expect others to fulfil their desires for self-esteem, status, and even sex. In terms of their self-regulatory strategies, they can be charming, flirty, interesting, or aggressive when necessary according to what serves their goals best.

### **Narcissism and Love**

It is essential to first define and observe the construct of love before examining the model of narcissists’ love relationships that was developed. This model was based on Lee’s (1973) six distinct types of love (C. Hendrick & Hendrick, 1986, 1990; S. S. Hendrick & Hendrick, 1992), which are eros, ludus, storge, pragma, mania, and agape. The first, eros, refers to passionate, romantic, erotic love. Ludus is considered the game-playing love, where there is little commitment to the partner, with affection also given to possible multiple partners. Storge is friendship love that emphasises companionship and trust, while pragma involves practicality, logic and convenience in love, rather than romance. Mania is often an obsessive love, with emotional highs and lows in the relationship. Lastly, pure, selfless love with a partner is the root of agape.

### **A Model of Narcissists’ Approach to Love**

In order to truly understand the romantic relationships of narcissists, their aforementioned beliefs, goals, and strategies should be considered. This is because, it can be safely assumed that, often, a certain love reflects the beliefs, goals, and strategies of the person involved in the relationship, which in this case, is the narcissist. Certain traits they possess carry over into their romantic relationships; for example, their high regards for themselves as superior, smarter, and more attractive, and their unconcern in pursuing intimacy with their partners. Their other skills and strategies employed in other interpersonal relationships with others could also contribute to how they approach their romantic ones, including confidence, charm, manipulation, and extraversion. Ultimately, they seek romantic relationships that fulfil their esteem, status and sexual needs.

Narcissists may only take interest in having romantic relationships in the first place because their partners fulfil their needs for attention and sex; however, they dislike the intimacy and commitment that is often required in such a relationship. For narcissists, how their partner feels is of little concern to them, but rather, they are more interested in how they can enjoy the pros of romantic relationships without the cons.

It is expected that, in order to gain the attention, esteem and sex the narcissists want and need, they would start and maintain a romantic relationship by utilising their gifts of confidence, charm, and extraversion, while maintaining a safe emotional distance from the partner. It is also likely that, to cater to the narcissists’ need for freedom and non-commitment, and a continued boost to their self-esteem and socio-sexuality, they might seek additional romantic or sexual partners as a strategy, which could ultimately assist the narcissist in moving on to another romantic attachment if the current one fails.

Based on what had been expounded on earlier, it is observed that the narcissists’ strategy relates to the Lee’s (1973) ludus love, also known as game-playing love. With ludus, the narcissists would not only be skilful in executing it due to their charm, confidence and extraversion, but also be able to get exactly what they want in a romantic relationship

without having to deal with what they do not. Therefore, it is expected that the narcissists' experience of love would most likely be the game-playing love ludus.

### Self-Esteem and Love

Empirical findings on both self-esteem and love are relatively few, compared to those that can be found on narcissism and love. However, from those, the main finding is that high self-esteem individuals have a low chance of experiencing mania, or obsessive love, which is instead, more correlated to low self-esteem individuals (C. Hendrick & Hendrick, 1986), which was also affirmed in clinical studies (Moss, 1995). This is because these individuals with low self-esteem were more likely to intensely obsess over their objects of love (Dion & Dion, 1975). However, though a causal relationship between mania love and self-esteem has not been determined, it can be argued, whereby mania could cause an individual to regard themselves in low esteem, while self-esteem offers a certain protection from the extreme emotional highs and lows typical in such a love experience.

On the other hand, past research has also shown a correlation between self-esteem and eros, or erotic love (C. Hendrick & Hendrick, 1986). Not only do individuals with high self-esteem experience love more frequently, they also experience them more passionately, especially compared to those with low self-esteem (Dion & Dion, 1975). Similar results of self-esteem and love are expected in the current study as well.

### Methodology

Quantitative methods were applied in conducting this study. From the literature, there were certain predictions and expectations of narcissists' experience of love that were then investigated in this study. This study had two samples, Sample A and B, to examine narcissism and love styles (according to Lee, 1973) by individuals who were not and were currently in romantic relationships respectively. In Sample A, the participants were asked to report their general view of love in romantic relationships while in Sample B, the participants who were in ongoing dating relationships were asked to report their experience of love in their current relationship.

With these two samples, two different perspectives on narcissism, self-esteem, and love could be obtained.

There were a total of 100 participants in this research. Both Samples A and B had 50 participants who were university employees, but had different compositions. Sample A had 40 women (80.0%) and 10 men (20.0%), while Sample B had 31 women (62.0%), 19 men (38.0%). All participants in the study were informed that the study revolved around personality and interpersonal relationships. Participants then completed a questionnaire containing items on self-esteem, narcissism, and love styles on a 10-point Likert scale. A Likert scale was selected to increase the variance in the responses as scores could range from 10 to 100.

The second method was the Narcissistic Personality Inventory (NPI; Raskin & Hall, 1979; range 0-40), which had 40 forced-choice items. Although the NPI is based on the DSM-III criteria for NPD, it is suitable for use with the normal population, and is the most widely used, valid, and reliable self-report measure of narcissism (Raskin & Terry, 1988; Rhodewalt & Morf, 1995).

Finally, participants completed the Love Attitudes Scale (LAS; C. Hendrick & Hendrick, 1986, 1990), which assessed the love styles generally experienced by the participants in their romantic relationships through 41 items. As previously described, the LAS consists of six subscales, each measuring a particular love style: eros (e.g., "My girlfriend and I were engrossed right after our first meet"; "My boyfriend and I have the right physical 'chemistry' between us"), ("I try to keep my my girlfriend unsure about my commitment to him/her"; "I enjoy playing the 'game of love' with a number of different partners"), storge (e.g., "Our friendship merged gradually into love over time"; "It is hard to say where friendship ends and love begins"), pragma (e.g., "A main consideration in choosing my romantic partner was how he/she would reflect on my family"; "I considered what my romantic partner was going to become in life before I committed myself to him/her"), mania (e.g., "When things aren't going right with my romantic partner and me, my stomach gets upset"; "Sometimes I get so excited about being

in love that I can't sleep"), and agape (e.g., "I would rather suffer myself than let my romantic partner suffer"; "I cannot be happy unless I place my romantic partner's happiness before my own"). Participants responded to items on a 7-point scale, which allowed for further variance in responses compared to a 5-point one, with 1 indicating strong disagreement, and 7 being strong agreement. After completing these surveys, participants were thanked and debriefed.

## Results and Discussion

### Correlations

In this study, there were several predictions on the relationship between narcissism and love styles that were investigated. As shown in Table 1, correlation scores between NPI and the six distinct LAS subscales were obtained and observed. For Sample A, with participants who were not in current dating relationships, narcissism had a positive correlation with ludus, which was predicted from the literature. Besides that, there were two marginally

significant relationships, which were a positive correlation with eros, and a negative one with storge. As predicted, self-esteem was seen as negatively correlated with mania, while other relationships between self-esteem and the love styles were statistically insignificant.

On the other hand, Sample B of individuals who were in ongoing romantic relationships was similarly found to have certain significant relationships between narcissism and the love styles. There were positive correlations found between narcissism and ludus, as well as pragma, but a marginally significant negative one to agape. Between self-esteem and the love styles, however, there was only a negative correlation with mania with marginal significance, while no others had statistical significance.

### Regression Analysis

To examine the potential moderating role of gender on the narcissism-love styles link, a series of regression analyses were conducted.

Table 1: Regression Analyses

Measure	Study 1 Study 1 (Sample A) (Sample B) Study 2 Study 3 Combined				
	A)	B)	2	3	Combined
Narcissism (NPI)					
Eros	.26*	.13	.05	.06	.10†
<b>Ludus</b>	<b>.32**</b>	<b>.29*</b>	<b>.16*</b>	<b>.42**</b>	<b>.28**</b>
Storge	.19†	.07	.00	.23*	.08†
Pragma	.01	.30*	.07	.08	.11*
Mania	.07	.03	.04	.16	.04
Agape	.07	.23†	.11	.21*	.13*
Self-esteem (Rosenberg)					
Eros	.13	.13	.15†	.17†	.15**
Ludus	.13	.18	.06	.05	.03
Storge	.04	.08	.21*	.13	.03
Pragma	.04	.12	.04	.07	.03
<b>Mania</b>	<b>.24*</b>	<b>.25†</b>	<b>.17*</b>	<b>.37**</b>	<b>.25**</b>
Agape	.03	.08	.07	.13	.00

NPI: Narcissistic Personality Inventory.

† p .10. \* p .05. \*\* p .01.

Correlations among Love Styles, Narcissism, and Self-Esteem were conducted in a stepwise manner. The gender and NPI were input in Step 1 and the Gender NPI interaction were input in Step 2. For Sample A, in the relationships between narcissism and all the six love styles, gender was not found to have a moderating role, but it did have a moderating role in the relationship between narcissism and mania for Sample B. Therefore, the correlation between narcissism and mania for men and women were examined more carefully. While there was no significance in narcissism and mania for men [(23), t(25) 1.16, p .256], there was a marginally negative correlation for women [(31), t(29) 1.73, p .094]. However, this finding can only be mildly considered due to the limited statistical tests and gender interactions available.

### **Self-determining Effects of Narcissism and Self-Esteem**

Besides looking at how narcissism, self-esteem, and love styles were correlated, the effects of both the former on the latter were studied. Results showed that they were similar to other zero-order correlation relationships. Even though self-esteem was controlled in Sample A, narcissism had a statistically significant effect on ludus [(33), t(78) 2.74, p .006], eros [(28), t(78) 2.09, p .042], and storge [(28), t(78) 2.18, p .035], with a marginally positive effect on mania as well [(23), t(78) 1.95, p .048]. In the same way, when narcissism was controlled, self-esteem and mania had a significant effect [(35), t(78) 2.86, p .008]. Narcissism and self-esteem did not have any significant effects on other relationships.

As for Sample B, on the other hand, when self-esteem was controlled, narcissism's effects remained significant as well for ludus [(34), t(55) 2.64, p .011], pragma [(29), t(55) 2.19, p .033], and agape [(25), t(55) 1.87, p .067]. For the relationship with self-esteem, however, when narcissism was controlled, it was significant with mania [(27), t(55) 2.04, p .047]. There was no effect for neither narcissism nor self-esteem with the rest, eros and storge.

### **Conclusion**

In summary, the relationships among the key

components of narcissism, self-esteem, and love styles were studied in this current research. As predicted, in both Sample A and Sample B, whether with participants not in current romantic relationships reporting on their general views, or those in ongoing relationships sharing their personal experience, narcissism was found to have a positive correlation with ludus. Even though gender did not play a moderating role in these cases, even when controlled for self-esteem, they were found to be significant. Therefore, these results indicate support for game-playing in a narcissistic relationship.

Furthermore, the current study also found other correlations between narcissism and love, although it may not be found to be true for all samples. Initially, from the literature, negative correlations were expected between narcissism and storge, and agape, with a positive one with pragma. However, this only appeared in one sample instead of both. Nevertheless, the predicted negative correlation between self-esteem and mania, which was statistically significant even with controlled narcissism and not moderated by gender, was found in both the samples, corroborating the results from previous studies.

Thus, while the study's other findings of narcissism and love styles with individuals' general opinion on love as well as their current romantic experience are not certain, narcissists evidently possess the love style of ludus.

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