Unrequited Love: On Heartbreak, Anger, Guilt, Scriptlessness, and Humiliation

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Unrequited Love: On Heartbreak, Anger, Guilt, Scriptlessness, and Humiliation

Roy F. Baumeister, Sara R. Wotman, and Arlene M. Stillwell

Unreciprocated romantic attraction was explored by comparing narrative accounts. Unrequited love emerged as a bilaterally distressing experience marked by mutual incomprehension and emotional interdependence. Would-be lovers looked back with both positive and intensely negative emotions, whereas rejectors were more uniformly negative in their accounts. Unlike rejectors, would-be lovers believed that the attraction had been mutual, that they had been led on, and that the rejection had never been communicated definitely. Rejectors depicted themselves as morally innocent but still felt guilty about hurting someone; many rejectors depicted the would-be lover's persistent efforts as intrusive and annoying. Rejectors constructed accounts to reduce guilt, whereas disappointed lovers constructed them to rebuild self-esteem. Rejectors saw would-be lovers as self-deceptive and unreasonable; would-be lovers saw rejectors as inconsistent and mysterious.

Is love one of the supreme, most desirable experiences of human life? Many psychological theories have asserted that it is. Carl Rogers (e.g., 1959) proposed that receiving love in the form of unconditional positive regard was a crucial key to happiness and adjustment. Erich Fromm (1956) shifted the emphasis from receiving to giving and proposed that learning the difficult "art of loving" was the essential thing that promised self-realization, emotional satisfaction, and fulfilling insights. Undoubtedly some of these notions derive from countless vivid, familiar images and anecdotal impressions of people who are joyfully enmeshed in loving relationships, and such cases often make it hard to disentangle whether it is the giving or the receiving of love that brings happiness. Unrequited love offers the ideal chance to separate the two phenomena, however, because in unrequited love one person gives love and the other is loved. The stereotype of emotional distress that accompanies unrequited love immediately raises serious questions about the role of love in human fulfillment, however. Perhaps neither loving

nor being loved is enough; only when they are combined in a mutual relationship is there a significant chance for happiness.

Psychologists have devoted a great deal of effort to understanding how relationships begin (Berscheid & Walster, 1978; Byrne, 1971), are maintained (Rusbult, 1980, 1983; Tyler & Sears, 1977), and break apart (Duck, 1982a; Hill, Rubin, & Peplau, 1976; Simpson, 1987). Knowledge about relationships that fail to form and thrive has been relatively elusive, however, despite its potential value for adding to the accumulated understanding of relationship processes (see Duck, 1982b; Rodin, 1982). Obviously, when two people have no interest in forming a relationship, it would hardly be surprising that none would develop, but when one person earnestly wants a loving attachment, it is not readily understandable why the relationship should fail to form. After all, research has shown that people overwhelmingly tend to reciprocate positive feelings and evaluations directed toward them by others (Jones & Wortman, 1973; Kenny & Nasby, 1980), and so nonreciprocation stands out as a striking failure of this principle. Moreover, despite substantial research on how people manage to gain the affection and respect of others (see Jones & Wortman, 1973, for review), there is much less information available about how to divest oneself of another's attraction—but that is precisely the dilemma faced by the target of unrequited love. The present investigation was designed to shed some initial light on unrequited love as a relationship that fails to form or thrive and particularly to illuminate the experience and response of the person who finds himself or herself the reluctant object of another's unwelcome affections.

Mutuality and Interdependence

It is useful to analyze unrequited love on the basis of Kelley and Thibaut's (1978) formulation of interdependence theory.

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These authors sought to analyze human relations in terms of how each person's outcomes depend on the other's actions. In unrequited love, each person's emotions and other outcomes are heavily dependent on the other's acts. Because the matrix of bilateral outcome dependencies provides a useful tool for analyzing responses to unrequited love, they deserve explication. In this case, in particular, many outcomes involve emotions, and so this analysis highlights the interpersonal causation of emotion. Unrequited love presents a case of emotional interdependence, insofar as one person's actions determine another person's emotions.

First let us consider what is contingent on the would-be lover's acts. The would-be lover finds himself or herself wanting an attachment with someone, but that someone does not desire the attachment in return. The behavioral options for the would-be lover are, broadly put, to keep silent or to try to win the other's love. To try to win the other's heart offers possibilities ranging from extreme happiness to humiliating heartbreak for the would-be lover (depending on the other's response), whereas to the object of unwanted affections such efforts may cause annoyance, frustration, and even the unwelcome demand to inflict emotional pain. The rejector's distress may be especially severe if the would-be lover persists in his or her pursuit of affection, to the extent that rejectors may end up feeling persecuted, frustrated, and victimized. Meanwhile, for the would-be lover to take the alternative response of giving up would cost the would-be lover any chance for a happy experience of mutual love with this particular partner, while possibly offering relief to the rejector.

The target of unrequited love must make a series of choices in response to the would-be lover's overtures. The target's behavioral options are either to spend time, affection, and possibly other resources on the aspiring lover or to reject that person's advances. The first response may cause mild unpleasantness (i.e., boredom and discomfort from spending time with an undesired suitor) and carries the significant risk of encouraging the would-be lover to become more strongly involved and to make further demands, hence making the eventual problem considerably worse. The other main response, of rejecting the other's overtures, may cause guilt, discomfort, and other distress. Neither of these is a desirable outcome from the rejector's point of view. (Some targets may try to avoid responding, such as in passively avoiding the pursuer in the hope that he or she will lose interest; this may be only minimally unpleasant but is also only minimally effective, and sooner or later many of these individuals find themselves faced with the main two choices of going along or rejecting.) In contrast, the would-be lover may experience substantial (if short-lived) joy when the target responds positively but experiences acute distress and suffering if the target responds in a rejecting fashion.

Several important points follow from this analysis of the interdependence of would-be lover and rejector. The situation of unrequited love offers a very wide range of extreme outcomes to the would-be lover, ranging from potentially living happily ever after in mutual bliss (if one can win the other's love) to the acute distress and humiliation that would accompany a heartbreaking rejection. In contrast to this wide range of potential outcomes, the rejector faces a much narrower range as long as he or she does not recognize a realistic possibility of coming to love the other. In fact, the rejector's potential outcomes are *all bad,* except for possibly feeling relieved when the would-be lover finally gives up. Relief is merely the cessation of distress rather than anything positive. Thus, the structure of the situation is far more negative for the rejector than for the would-be lover (insofar as no positive possible outcomes are recognized), even though would-be lovers may have some possible outcomes that are more aversive than anything that the rejector is likely to experience. Put another way, the situation appears as a high-stakes gamble to the would-be lover but represents a no-win situation for the rejector.

Thus, the rejector may end up having a more negative and unpleasant experience than the would-be lover. The rejected lover may suffer more intensely than the rejector, but the possibilities for happiness may make the effort and emotional struggle seem worthwhile. To the rejector, there was nothing to gain and nothing worth suffering for, and so the experience as a whole may seem an episode of futile suffering and bilateral victimization.

Why Does Unrequited Love Occur?

Why should an available person fail to become romantically interested in a potential partner or, more surprisingly yet, experience a loss of love and a reduction in interest in a dating partner? There are strong tendencies for people to like those who like them (Jones & Wortman, 1973; Kenny & Nasby, 1980). As long as attraction elicits reciprocal attraction, unrequited love should be rare or nonexistent.

Findings about equity and romantic attraction suggest one pattern that may cause unrequited love. Initial romantic attraction seems to depend on the partner's desirability, such that the most desirable partners elicit the most attraction and the greatest enjoyment of initial dates (Walster, Aronson, Abrahams, & Rottman, 1966). But eventually people settle in relationships with partners who are about equal to their own attractiveness (Murstein & Christy, 1976). Thus, everyone tends to prefer a maximally attractive partner but tends to end up with a partner roughly equal to one's own attractiveness. A likely mechanism is that attractive people, having a broad range of interested potential mates, will tend to choose each other preferentially as romantic partners, leaving the less attractive ones to pair up later (Kalick & Hamilton, 1986, 1988; cf. Aron, 1988). This mechanism requires, however, that the less attractive people will be disappointed in their initial attraction to partners more desirable than themselves. These disappointments should form one category of unrequited love experiences.

A second path into unrequited love may be through platonic friendship. Although romantic love may depend on physical attractiveness, platonic friendship may not, and so people may form close friendships with members of the opposite sex who are not matched in romantic desirability. In such cases, the friendship may produce an increasing intimacy, which Sternberg (1986) described as the "common core" of all loving relationships. The intimacy and mutual liking may encourage one partner, perhaps especially the less attractive one, to develop romantic feelings for the other. The result may be to have one person wanting to move to a romantic relationship while the other prefers that the relationship remain platonic.

These two possible scenarios may not be exhaustive. Romantic impulses may also arise from as yet poorly understood processes of psychophysiological cues or Freudian dynamics. Moreover, the development of one-sided attraction may be fostered by a wide variety of factors, such as systematic patterns of misinterpreting nonverbal signals (e.g., Abbey, 1982). It is also plausible that people may sometimes reject others who are more attractive than themselves, such as if they felt they would be unable to retain their hold on that person's love.

Refusing love might even go against basic, innately prepared motives for attachment (see Bowlby, 1969, 1973; Hazan & Shaver, 1987; Shaver, Hazan, & Bradshaw, 1988), which is another reason to suspect that rejectors will experience emotional turmoil and inner conflict. The reactions to romantic rejection may be predicted to follow the course identified in other attachment failures, including stages of protest, despair, and detachment (see Bowlby, 1973; also Hazan & Shaver, 1987). Meanwhile, the rejector's violation of the human tendency to form attachments may be emotionally stressful and distressing for the rejector.

Humiliation and Guilt

Our analysis of equity and interdependence has suggested that the most distressing aftereffects of a failed relationship will be different for the rejector than for the heartbroken lover. The short-term emotional impact may involve annoyance, frustration, and social awkwardness for the rejector, whereas the would-be lover suffers the pain of disappointment and thwarted love. The broader implications, however, invoke humiliation and guilt.

Self-esteem may be particularly central in the would-be lover's experience. As suggested earlier, one common pattern of one-sided romantic love will presumably involve a relatively unattractive person becoming infatuated with a more attractive person who does not reciprocate the feelings. The reason for the rejection may lie in the fact that people are generally not attracted to less desirable others. If this is generally recognized, however, then the rejection carries the symbolic message that the would-be lover lacks sufficient desirable qualities to be a suitable partner for the rejector. Romantic rejection is thus more than a mere frustration of desire; it is a symbolic evaluation of one's deficient worth—in other words, a humiliating blow to one's self-esteem. The blow to self-esteem may cause rejected lovers to feel a need to restore their self-esteem afterward.

Guilt, rather than humiliation, is likely to be the central problematic implication for the rejector. Because the rejector inflicts harm and emotional pain on another person, the rejector may feel guilty. If the rejector provided any encouragement to the aspiring lover, then the rejector is particularly responsible for the other's suffering, because the rejector fostered hopes and then disappointed them. But even rejectors who did not lead the other on may still feel distressed about inflicting pain, thus creating the seeming paradox of feeling guilty despite self-perceived moral innocence.

Thus, the problematic implications of unrequited love involve lowered self-esteem and humiliation for the would-be lover but involve guilt for the rejector. Our research used auto-

biographical accounts of experiences of unrequited love, and accounts are generally understood to reflect interpretative efforts. That is, people construct stories about significant events in their lives to help themselves make sense of these events (Gergen & Gergen, 1988; Harvey, Weber, & Orbuch, 1990). These exercises in self-interpretation are therefore structured and possibly biased by the role-based motivations (see also Baumeister, Stillwell, & Wotman, 1990; Gonzales, Pederson, Manning, & Wetter, 1990). With unrequited love, systematic differences between the rejectors' accounts and the would-be lovers' accounts should therefore be based on how the two roles have different motives for making the accounts. One central prediction, therefore, is that the would-be lovers' accounts will be concerned with salvaging and restoring self-esteem, whereas the rejectors' accounts will be concerned with justifying actions and deflecting guilt.

Scripts and Scriptedness

Modern Western culture contains a fair amount of anecdotal lore about unrequited love, but it is one-sided, insofar as it focuses heavily on the rejected lover and has very little to say about the rejector's experience. At best, books and movies chiefly portray the rejector as seen through the eyes of the aspiring lover. Such views are hardly unbiased, and one important goal of our investigation was to illuminate the perspective of the rejector, who in many ways has a more unpleasant and negative experience than the would-be lover.

One function of cultural treatments of major life themes is to provide individuals with scripts to follow in their own lives. The imbalance in our culture's stock of wisdom about unrequited love entails that the aspiring lover has a wealth of scripted guidelines to follow, whereas the rejector does not. Confronted with a real and personal experience of unrequited love, the would-be lover has a great stock of distilled insight and fictional models to rely on, whereas the rejector may have very few. As a result, the would-be lover may find that he or she has thorough and detailed scripts to follow, whereas rejectors may find themselves largely scriptless and hence having to struggle with uncertainty, ambiguity, and second-guessing.

The would-be lover's script is affirmed and reiterated from multiple sources; for example, one can probably hear a song about unrequited love in almost any American house within any hour, simply by turning on the radio. A seemingly endless stream of books and movies has portrayed aspiring lovers persisting doggedly to win the hearts of their beloveds. Many techniques are portrayed as being eventually effective. If one is rejected in the end, the familiar script calls for heartbroken lovers to express their grief, perhaps assign blame, accept the failure, and then go on with their lives.

Rejectors, in contrast, have little conventional wisdom to guide them. Even the few media treatments of unrequited love that focus on the rejector's viewpoint (such as the movies *Fatal Attraction* or *Play Misty for Me*) fail to feature effective means of handling the problem but rather dwell on the mystified futility of the protagonist in attempting to discourage unwanted romantic attentions from an increasingly intrusive, maniacal pursuer. These are hardly helpful guides.

The rejector's role in unrequited love may therefore be of

interest as a case of a largely unscripted role. Unscripted roles may sometimes be appealing as offering freedom and opportunity for creative spontaneity, but such positive features presumably accrue mainly to attractive, chosen roles. The rejector is abruptly (and not by choice) cast in an unscripted role of interpersonal villain, and so one may predict that the rejector would find considerable uncertainty and ambiguity about how to act. Rejectors may also be likely to look back with regret on the episode, to feel that they reacted incorrectly, or to wish that they had done something differently. Because the scriptlessness is not widely recognized and because would-be lovers tend to be preoccupied with their own hopes and fears, they may tend to be fairly insensitive to this aspect of the rejector's experience.

Conspiracy of Silence

The common reluctance to transmit bad news to people has been called the "mum effect" (Tesser & Rosen, 1975). The mum effect undoubtedly aggravates the rejector's problem. Telling admirers that their love is hopeless and unwanted, and especially telling them *why* one finds them unlovable, would most likely be very difficult.[1] Furthermore, people may be especially reluctant to transmit bad news to unattractive others (Rosen, Johnson, Johnson, & Tesser, 1973), and as we have suggested, rejectors may often find themselves dealing with less attractive others.

Research on dating rejection has suggested the difficulties and miscommunication that accompany it. Folkes (1982) showed that people prefer to give impersonal, uncontrollable, and unstable reasons for refusing dates, even though the true reasons might be quite different. In particular, rejectors were reluctant to express their reasons for refusal when these reasons involved the personality or physical attractiveness of the individual asking them out. The reasons Folkes suggested for these misleading communications included concern about the rejectee's emotional reactions, desire to remain friends with the rejectee, and hope to avoid blame for the rejection; all of these would plausibly apply to rejecting love and affection just as they apply to rejecting a date.

The rejector's difficulties arising from the mum effect are likely to be multiplied by three other factors. First, the rejector is not merely the transmitter but to some degree the cause of the would-be lover's bad news. Second, the rejector's scriptlessness already gives rise to uncertainty, and combined with reluctance to deliver bad news, the result may be to make some rejectors want simply to avoid all contact with the would-be lover. Scriptlessness entails an initial degree of uncertainty, and the mum effect entails that the one seemingly necessary aspect of the rejector's role, namely, to deliver the rejection, would be seen as highly problematic and undesirable. As a result, rejectors may tend to adopt a pattern of passive avoidance of the would-be lover. Moreover, if they do find it necessary to make an explicit rejection, they may equivocate, use clichés, or express their rejection in ways that may fail to get the message across in full.

Third, the rejector's reluctance to transmit bad news is probably complemented by the would-be lover's reluctance to hear it. People may be generally reluctant to receive negative feedback or to recognize disappointing outcomes. In the case of unrequited love, this general tendency may be compounded by the common script for aspiring lovers that exhorts persistence in the face of failure. Even explicit rejections may sometimes be insincere (e.g., Muehlenhard & Hallabaugh, 1988). If even explicit rejections are sometimes suspect, then equivocal or ambiguous ones may be especially doubtful, and so many would-be lovers may tend to ignore all negative indications.

One likely result of this conspiracy of silence will be that the would-be lover will persist in his or her advances long after the rejector feels that the would-be lover should have desisted. They may disagree about whether an explicit message of rejection was delivered and about whether the would-be lover's persistence is appropriate or irrational and obnoxious.

Study 1

Because unrequited love is difficult to simulate effectively with a laboratory experiment, we used autobiographical accounts. This method has proven useful for studying similarly elusive phenomena such as divorce and romantic breakup (Harvey, Flanary, & Morgan, 1988; Harvey, Weber, Galvin, Huszti, & Garnick, 1986; Vaughan, 1986), masochism (Baumeister, 1988, 1989), marital disagreements (Ross & Holmberg, 1990), guilt (McGraw, 1987; Tangney, 1991, 1992), motivational themes in the life course (McAdams, 1985; also Kaufman, 1986), the interpersonal genesis of anger (Baumeister et al., 1990), and the appeal of criminal lifestyles (Katz, 1988).

Although autobiographical narratives are often described as memories, their usefulness for studying memory and other cognitive processes is questionable (Banaji & Crowder, 1989). It is often impossible to ascertain whether a systematic difference between groups of accounts reflects differential encoding, biased interpretation, or selective recall. But the motivational implications and conclusions may be the same regardless of which cognitive process was involved. For example, if restoring self-esteem emerges as a substantial aspect of would-be lovers' accounts, it may not be possible to determine whether the self-esteem motivations arose at the encoding stage or reflect post hoc coping (i.e., when the story is recounted long afterward), but it is nonetheless important to establish that heartbreak stimulates motivations connected with restoring self-esteem. The autobiographical technique thus emerges as useful for studying motivation and emotion rather than for elucidating cognitive processes (cf. Shaver, Schwartz, Kirson, & O'Connor, 1987). As such, it may be especially valuable because social psychology currently has fewer available methodologies for studying motivation and emotion than for studying cognition. The same argument applies to the technique's usefulness for examining powerful interpersonal phenomena.

Our approach was to collect stories regarding unrequited love and to compare rejectors' and would-be lovers' accounts. It

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[1] Administering the rejection itself is not a pure instance of the mum effect, as defined by Tesser and Rosen (1975), insofar as the rejector is the immediate cause of the would-be lover's bad news. On the other hand, the rejector is not causally responsible for the other's unattractive traits, and so reluctance to explain these traits would be a pure instance of the mum effect. The most direct result of the mum effect may therefore be that people do not hear accurate explanations of why they are being rejected.

is often not feasible to collect stories from the two people involved in the same event (see Vaughan, 1986; also Baumeister et al., 1990), and so we relied on contrasting sets of stories, each of which referred to a unique, separate episode. This raises a further ambiguity about cognitive processes, namely the possibility that rejectors and would-be lovers may have systematically chosen different stories to relate (although the same motivations may apply to selection as to biasing recall). To minimize the influence of selection bias, we asked subjects to choose an especially powerful and fairly recent experience. Still, the possibility of differential selection criteria cannot be ruled out, especially for people who have had many recent and powerful experiences of unrequited love.

An advantage of our approach, however, is that our data are based on the same people in both roles. Explanations based on possible personality differences between rejectors and would-be lovers are therefore largely ruled out. Furthermore, this approach avoids some interpretive problems that could have arisen had we allowed each subject to choose whether to write a would-be lover story or a rejector story, such as differential selection criteria for type of experience. Instead, any differences obtained with our methods presumably reflect the situational roles and the discrepant subjective experiences (including retrospective interpretations of these experiences by participants) that accompany them. In other words, our results do not signify that would-be lovers and rejectors are different kinds of people, but rather that the same people have systematically different kinds of experiences when they find themselves in those roles.

Our sample was drawn from upper-level university students, and although it contained several older and nontraditional students, the majority were undoubtedly in their early 20s. University students are typically used as research subjects for reasons that feature convenience, but their usefulness for this study has several other aspects. First, as predominantly single young adults they may be assumed to have an unusually high rate of recent experiences of incipient romance, including unrequited love. Second, they are fairly literate and articulate, making it possible to work from written accounts (thereby minimizing interviewer biases that could affect spoken accounts). Reliance on students does mean, however, that one should be cautious about generalizing to very different groups. It is plausible that recollections of failed love experiences may change over time, and this would not be apparent in our sample, for whom the experiences were mostly recent. Also, some theorists might question whether late adolescents or particularly early adolescents are capable of love, and so terms such as *infatuation* or *puppy love* might be apt descriptions of some of the incidents. Last, university students have generally resisted some cultural norms and prescriptions, and so their experiences should not be generalized to groups that are heavily bound by tradition.

Method

Subjects

Participants were 71 subjects enrolled in upper-level psychology courses who received extra course credit. All students in the course were invited to participate regardless of whether they wanted the extra

credit. They were assured of anonymity and in fact were requested not to use real names on the questionnaire materials. Informed consent and extra credit forms were kept separate from the questionnaires, so that no responses would be individually identifiable. Although some older, nontraditional students took part, the majority of respondents were in their early 20s and predominantly middle class. Both men and women were well represented in the sample, with a slightly higher (62%) proportion of women.

Each subject was asked to furnish two stories. Eight subjects failed to write the second story, so only one story was obtained from them. Two of the missing stories were rejector stories and the other six were would-be lover stories. Thus, the final sample consisted of 134 stories.

Procedure

The data were collected in a series of group sessions. Subjects were given an initial oral briefing that emphasized the study of personally important, emotionally powerful experiences. Each subject wrote two stories, one from the rejector's perspective and one from the would-be lover's perspective. The order was randomly counterbalanced so that half the subjects wrote the rejector story first and the others wrote the would-be lover story first. The instructions for the rejector condition began by saying "Please write a true story from your life in which someone was romantically attracted to you and the attraction was not mutual (you were not romantically attracted to that person). Nearly everyone has experienced such things more than once; please choose an especially powerful and memorable experience." Further instructions asked subjects to be thorough and "tell the full story." The instructions for the would-be lover condition were identical except for the first sentence, which was changed to read ". . . in which you were romantically attracted to someone and the attraction was not mutual (the other person was not romantically attracted to you)."

Subjects then wrote until they were finished. When subjects handed in their questionnaires, they were given written debriefing forms that explained the purposes, goals, and methods of the research.

Coding

The handwritten stories were typed by a secretary to prevent any effects of handwriting on the coding and to provide a further shield for the anonymity of participants. A list of coding dimensions was generated by Roy F. Baumeister and Sara R. Wotman, who listed all the areas on which they expected systematic differences between rejectors and would-be lovers, as well as several dimensions (e.g., platonic friendship and homosexuality) on which it seemed desirable to confirm the absence of differences, for purposes of ruling out possible confounds. One judge, blind to the main hypotheses, then coded all the accounts in a random order. Two other judges each coded part of the stories for the purpose of computing reliabilities. Discrepancies were discussed briefly, and the final coding reflected the consensus. The dimensions for coding will be described in the Results section together with the findings.

Some stories could not be coded because of ambiguity or irrelevance of the dimension. These *maybe* codings were kept to a minimum by the rule that if a feature was absent from a story, it was coded as *no*. Stories coded *maybe* were deleted from analyses on that dimension, and so different analyses have slightly different *n*s. In the analyses reported below, the number of *maybe* codings is the difference between 134 and the *n*. Overall, less than 1% of the codings were *maybe*.

Interrater agreements (before discussion) were computed for 57 items. The proportion of agreements between raters ranged from .750 to .972, with a mean of .904. Cohen's kappa ranged from .500 to .944, with a mean of .809. The codings thus appear to have been adequately reliable.

Results and Discussion

The two sets of accounts were superficially similar, describing an assortment of romantic disappointments. They did not differ as to whether the would-be lover got over the incident or was still carrying a torch. A number of stories involved relationships that began as fairly casual dating, with unrequited love developing when one person began to fall in love while the other did not. One account described a homosexual attraction, and in another account the author's heterosexual love was thwarted when the beloved emerged as a homosexual, but the overwhelming majority of accounts were clearly heterosexual.

In the introduction, we proposed two possible hypothetical scenarios for unrequited love, and both of these were evident in our sample, although it is not possible to draw conclusions about how prevalent each is. Some accounts clearly referred to platonic friendships that one person (but not the other) hoped to transform into romantic love; indeed, after reading through our accounts, it is difficult to escape the impression that many platonic heterosexual friendships contain a strong undercurrent of romantic interest, if only on one side. Other accounts, particularly those by rejectors, explicitly said that the would-be lover was not desirable or attractive enough to be a suitable romantic partner for the rejector.

We feature analyses based on the chi-square technique. It is worth noting that this statistic assumes independence of rows, and that this assumption could have been violated because each subject was asked to furnish both a rejector and a would-be lover story. If subjects had a habitual tendency to write both stories in a similar fashion, such as reflecting any impact of personality, intelligence, or writing style on the accounts, this would have worked to diminish our effect sizes (by making the two sets of stories more similar), and so actual differences may be larger than we found. On the other hand, if subjects were inclined to write the two stories in opposite fashion, presumably to emphasize a contrast between them, such a tendency would have inflated our effect sizes and possibly generated spurious significant differences. (The latter problem was a major reason for conducting Study 2 in a way that assigned each subject to write and rate only one experience.) In our view, these dangers were offset by the desirability of having each subject write two stories, which ensured that obtained differences reflected role experiences rather than personality differences and the desirability of maximizing the amount of data obtained with our limited available subject resources. Still, to investigate the extent of the potential problem, we computed the correlations between stories furnished by the same subject. The mean correlation across the 57 items was negligible, $r = .018$, which suggests that in general the two stories furnished by each subject were largely independent. Furthermore, on the various dimensions, over 90% of the correlations were between .25 and $-.25$, which further confirms the overall pattern of independence. The strongest negative correlation was $-.290$, and it was obtained on the dimension of positive emotions. In general, then, the assumption of independence seems to have been reasonably well satisfied empirically, and it does not appear that our effect sizes were artificially inflated by having each subject furnish two stories.

A possibly superior and more appropriate analysis strategy

would be a multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA), using only the subjects who furnished both stories and therefore treating role as a within-subject variable. A MANOVA on the entire list of dependent variables yielded a significant overall effect for story role (i.e., rejector vs. would-be lover), $F(57, 68) = 7.51$, $p < .0001$. Rejectors and would-be lovers do not tell the same kinds of stories regarding their experiences when love is given but not reciprocated. Additionally, we conducted five MANOVAs, one for each of the major groups of dependent variables (as covered in the following subsections). Each confirmed an overall pattern of significant effects for story perspective. Rejectors and would-be lovers differed in their report of the emotions involved in the incident, with the would-be lovers reporting more positive feelings and rejectors admitting mainly to more negative emotions, $F(9, 116) = 15.186$, $p < .0001$. A consistent pattern of effects on self-esteem was found, $F(3, 122) = 30.166$, $p < .0001$. Issues of guilt and morality were differentially represented, $F(5, 121) = 11.957$, $p < .0001$, as were the presentation of key events, $F(6, 119) = 11.223$, $p < .0001$. Finally, rejectors and would-be lovers differed in their perceptions of the other person involved, $F(8, 117) = 11.094$, $p < .0001$. The single-item analyses of variance (ANOVAs) deriving from these MANOVAs confirmed the chi-square differences, to which we now turn.

Emotion

Table 1 presents the main findings regarding emotional patterns. We began by coding for whether the story made some reference to the author having experienced positive affect. A reference to love was not by itself sufficient to be coded as indicating positive affect, for love could conceivably be experienced as painful and unpleasant; a story was only coded as containing positive affect if the author indicated that he or she had felt pleasant, desirable emotional states. All but one of the would-be lovers' stories included positive affect. Although the majority of rejectors also noted some positive affect in their stories, the difference was significant, $\chi^2(1, N = 134 \text{ stories}) = 32.06$, $p < .001$. Because this difference seemed an unsurprising consequence of the instructions (insofar as love generally brings some positive emotions), we performed a separate coding for expressions of positive affect in retrospect (i.e., looking

Table 1
Emotion

Dimension	Percentage coded as yes	
	Rejectors	Would-be lovers
Positive emotions	57.1	98.4
Positive affect in retrospect	33.3	53.1
Negative emotions	70.0	43.8
Wish it never happened	21.4	6.4
Rejector felt reluctant to deliver rejection	60.9	17.5
Would-be lover feared rejection	7.1	22.2
Would-be lover had feelings of longing, preoccupation	27.0	46.0
Rejector felt flattered	23.5	1.6
Rejector felt annoyed	51.4	3.1

back fondly or feeling good while recalling the incident). Retrospective positive affect was expressed significantly more commonly by would-be lovers than by rejectors, $\chi^2(1, N = 133$ stories) = 5.31, $p < .05$. In contrast, negative affect was significantly more common in the rejectors' stories than in the would-be lovers' stories, $\chi^2(1, N = 134$ stories) = 9.42, $p < .01$.

Thus, to put it simply, rejectors had more negative affect and would-be lovers had more positive affect. This helps to explain the finding that rejectors were significantly more likely than would-be lovers to indicate that they wished the incident had never happened, $\chi^2(1, N = 133$ stories) = 6.16, $p < .05$. (Stories were coded yes on this dimension if they explicitly stated some preference that the incident had never occurred or if they described the incident in strongly and exclusively negative terms.) It is consistent with the interdependence theory analysis suggesting that rejectors' situation lacks positive, desirable outcomes and so their situation is on the whole more negative than that of the would-be lovers'.

The subjective experiences associated with the two roles are illuminated by several supplementary findings. (For each of the following findings, the emotion was reported more commonly by the role with which it is associated.) Would-be lovers had feelings of longing and preoccupation, $\chi^2(1, N = 126$ stories) = 4.93, $p < .05$, and suffered from fears of rejection, $\chi^2(1, N = 133$ stories) = 6.16, $p < .05$. Rejectors felt reluctant to deliver the message of rejection, $\chi^2(1, N = 126$ stories) = 24.174, $p < .001$. They also reported a great deal of anger, resentment, and annoyance, $\chi^2(1, N = 134$ stories) = 38.40, $p < .001$. The latter finding involved an especially large discrepancy, for half the rejectors noted feelings of anger and annoyance, whereas would-be lovers neither expressed annoyance themselves nor expressed much awareness that the rejectors were annoyed.

Self-Esteem

We coded for any indications that the author's self-esteem was affected by the incident. The self-esteem findings are summarized in Table 2. A significant minority of rejectors, but almost no would-be lovers, indicated that their self-esteem was raised by the incident, $\chi^2(1, N = 134$ stories) = 4.34, $p < .05$. Usually this was described by rejectors in terms of finding it flattering to have an admirer, and typically this was mentioned in connection with the initial stages of the incident. It is also noteworthy that the esteem-enhancing implications of the event for the rejector were almost unanimously omitted by the would-be lovers. We coded for indications that the would-be lover's attention was flattering to the rejector, and such indica-

tions were almost all found among the rejectors' own stories, $\chi^2(1, N = 130$ stories) = 13.70, $p < .001$.

Loss of self-esteem was a fairly common feature of would-be lovers' stories, whereas rejectors rarely reported any loss of esteem, $\chi^2(1, N = 133$ stories) = 41.43, $p < .001$. These results are consistent with the hypothesis that to love someone who does not love one in return can be humiliating. They suggest that romantic rejection carries a symbolic message of inferiority.

We also coded for self-enhancing statements such as references to one's attractiveness, desirability, deservingness, or other good qualities. These were far more prevalent in the would-be lovers' accounts than in the rejectors' accounts, $\chi^2(1, N = 134$ stories) = 22.59, $p < .001$. This finding supports the hypothesis that would-be lovers use accounts to rebuild their self-esteem.

These results indicate that self-esteem considerations play an important role in the experience of unrequited love, especially for the would-be lover. Unrequited love tended to raise the self-esteem of the rejector and lower the self-esteem of the admirer. Rebuilding one's self-esteem may be a significant aspect of the process of recovering from romantic rejection.

Morality, Guilt, and Justification

Guilt feelings were apparently a significant part of the rejector's experience. Table 3 presents the main findings bearing on guilt and related topics. Rejectors were significantly more likely than would-be lovers to indicate having had guilt feelings, $\chi^2(1, N = 132$ stories) = 26.21, $p < .001$. Moreover, would-be lovers seemed rather oblivious to the rejectors' guilt feelings; the rejectors' guilt feelings were far more commonly reported in their own stories than in the would-be lovers' stories, $\chi^2(1, N = 132$ stories) = 20.24, $p < .001$.

Statements justifying oneself presumably reflect an awareness that one's behavior (or feelings) could conceivably be challenged on moral grounds, as well as indicating that one regards one's behavior as proper and defensible. Rejectors were significantly more likely than would-be lovers to make such self-justifying statements, $\chi^2(1, N = 134$ stories) = 9.71, $p < .01$. Thus, a common pattern was to express guilt feelings over having hurt someone but then to justify oneself by depicting one's innocence and one's inability to prevent the situation.

References to unscrupulous, immoral, or improper tactics used by the would-be lover were significantly more common in the rejectors' stories than in the would-be lovers' own stories,

Table 2
Self-Esteem

Dimension	Percentage coded as yes	
	Rejectors	Would-be lovers
Self-esteem raised	15.7	4.7
Self-esteem lowered	1.4	49.2
Self-enhancing statements	7.1	42.2

Table 3
Guilt and Moral Issues

Dimension	Percentage coded as yes	
	Rejectors	Would-be lovers
Rejector felt guilty	33.8	3.1
Author felt guilty	33.8	0.0
Self-justifications	35.7	12.5
Unscrupulous tactics used by would-be lover	21.7	0.0
Unscrupulous tactics used by rejector	5.7	14.1

$\chi^2(1, N = 133$ stories) $= 15.68, p < .001$, consistent with the view that the would-be lovers did not see their own behavior as morally problematic. (In fact, no would-be lovers indicated that their methods were unscrupulous or immoral.) Such tactics included promising to go out together as platonic friends but then trying to use the occasion for romantic advances, lying about the rejector or about the relationship to other people, as well as several more bizarre or creative strategies. As an example of the latter, one subject reported that after her pursuer agreed to remain platonic, he pretended to have another love object named Lisa and would approach the subject for tips about how to win Lisa's heart, and then, a few days later, would use these tips on the subject.

The total number of references to unscrupulous behavior by rejectors across all stories was almost as high as the number of references to would-be lovers' unscrupulous behavior, but the former were evenly divided across the two sets and so no significant difference emerged.

Taken together, these results appear to indicate that issues of guilt, morality, and justification are far more important and central in the rejector's experience than in the would-be lover's experience. Rejectors did feel that would-be lovers sometimes did unscrupulous things, but would-be lovers themselves did not seem to experience moral conflicts or guilt, and they showed no apparent need to justify themselves. In contrast, rejectors reported guilt feelings and went to some lengths to defend themselves against these feelings by justifying their actions. If one accepts the view of Harvey et al. (1990) and Gergen and Gergen (1988) that people make accounts to interpret events and help them cope with the aftermath of such events, one can reasonably conclude that would-be (rejected) lovers use accounts to rebuild their self-esteem, whereas rejectors use accounts to justify themselves and reduce their sense of guilt.

Key Events

Several events are decisive in the drama of unrequited love, and the two parties involved seemed to depict them in systematically different ways. Table 4 summarizes the main findings on these events. One event of central importance is whether the rejector led the would-be lover on to some degree, for if such encouragement was provided, then the rejector is presumably at least partly responsible for the episode and for the other's heartbreak. Only a quarter of the rejectors, but over half of the would-be lovers, indicated that the rejector had at one point

Table 4
Crucial Events

| | Percentage coded as yes | |
Dimension	Rejectors	Would-be lovers
Feelings were initially reciprocated	19.1	35.5
Love was communicated	97.1	82.1
Rejector led the other on	24.2	54.8
Deny that rejector led would-be lover on	38.6	15.6
Overt, explicit rejection	49.3	23.8
Would-be lover persisted	61.4	15.6

encouraged the other's interest in some way, and that difference was significant, $\chi^2(1, N = 128$ stories) $= 12.57, p < .001$. Indeed, would-be lovers were significantly more likely than rejectors to think that their feelings had been reciprocated at some point, $\chi^2(1, N = 130$ stories) $= 4.42, p < .05$. We also coded for explicit indications that the rejector did not lead the other on or encourage the other's affections, and these were significantly more common in the rejectors' accounts than in the would-be lovers' accounts, $\chi^2(1, N = 134) = 11.09, p < .001$.

The message of rejection is centrally important because it embodies the crux of the rejector's moral dilemma: It is wrong to hurt someone, but it is also wrong to allow someone to continue falling more deeply into a futile, doomed love (which could lead to even greater hurt in the future). We have already noted that rejectors described their difficulties and reluctance concerning the expression of rejection. Nonetheless, their stories tended to feature a clear and explicit message delivered to the would-be lover as to the impossibility of romance. Rejectors were much more likely than would-be lovers to report an explicit, overt message of rejection, $\chi^2(1, N = 130$ stories) $= 9.03, p < .01$.

Thus, rejectors and would-be lovers differed systematically as to several important events. It is possible that some of these differences referred to selection of different stories to tell; thus, perhaps, rejectors were guided by the motivation to avoid guilt and therefore selected an event in which they certainly did not lead the other person on and were emphatically clear about the rejection. On the other hand, it is also plausible that these differences may arise from differences in the way rejectors and would-be lovers perceive, interpret, and recall identical events. We have already noted that rejectors found it subjectively difficult and aversive to deliver the bad news (see also Folkes, 1982), and it is plausible that they sought to soften the blow by saying positive things or praising the would-be lover, which might enable the would-be lover to hear a mixed message rather than a definitive rejection. Would-be lovers may have been motivated to perceive more reciprocal affection and encouragement than actually existed (see Abbey, 1982, on misinterpreting friendliness as affection) and may have been guided by both motivated, wishful thinking and by cultural scripts in refusing to acknowledge a rejection as final.

Another major difference between the two sets of accounts concerned the persistence by the would-be lover in attempting to win the desired partner's heart. Would-be lovers should presumably persist until it becomes clear that there is no hope, at which point they ought properly to desist. However, if the two parties disagree about whether an explicit message of rejection has been delivered, then they may be expected to disagree about whether the would-be lover persisted irrationally or excessively past the appropriate point. This was found: The would-be lover's persistence was described far more commonly by rejectors than by the would-be lovers themselves, $\chi^2(1, N = 134$ stories) $= 29.34, p < .001$. Many rejectors spoke of the would-be lover's persistence in heated terms reminiscent of persecution victims. They alluded to having to hide for their lives, described their frustration and growing hatred for the admirer, and even castigated the admirer as mentally unbalanced. Much of the anger and annoyance in the rejectors' accounts can be ex-

plained as exasperation arising from the persistence of the would-be lover.

Perceptions of Each Other

There are several noteworthy aspects of how the would-be lovers and rejectors portrayed each other. Table 5 presents the results pertaining to mutual perceptions. Roughly half of both groups had some positive, praising things to say about the other person, although there was a marginally significant tendency for would-be lovers to be more praising of the other person, $\chi^2(1, N = 133$ stories) $= 3.36, p < .10$. Undoubtedly some would-be lovers idealize the people they love, and these tendencies for idealization were more commonly noted in the would-be lovers' accounts than in the rejectors' accounts, $\chi^2(1, N = 132$ stories) $= 5.87, p < .05$.

Rejectors may have been willing to praise their admirers, but they were certainly willing to criticize them too. Rejectors' accounts contained substantially more derogatory, devaluing statements about the other person than would-be lovers' accounts, $\chi^2(1, N = 133$ stories) $= 10.30, p < .01$. This may arise in connection with the feelings of annoyance and guilt, which link negative affect to the would-be lover's presence and efforts. It may, however, simply reflect the matching problem we hypothesized, namely, that unrequited love may often involve an attraction by an inferior, less desirable person toward a more desirable individual, and so the rejectors' derogatory comments may merely be acknowledgment of the would-be lover's inferior attractiveness.

One area of particular criticism concerned self-deception. As already noted, many would-be lovers seem to have persisted past the point at which the rejector had firmly and clearly told them there was no hope, and this was one important stimulus to perceiving would-be lovers as engaging in denial or self-deception. Although a substantial minority of would-be lovers admitted that they had deceived themselves or ignored clear signals, rejectors were significantly more likely to see such self-deception on the part of the would-be lovers, $\chi^2(1, N = 133$ stories) $= 7.52, p < .01$. There were only a very few references to rejectors engaging in denial or self-deception. These two items can be recombined to furnish a measure of author's self-deception and denial, and this measure indicates that would-be

Table 5
Perceptions of Other Person

Dimension	Percentage coded as yes	
	Rejectors	Would-be lovers
Praising statements about other	43.5	59.4
Would-be lover idealized other	10.3	26.6
Devaluing statements about other	52.2	25.0
Self-deception by would-be lover	40.6	18.8
Self-deception by rejector	4.3	3.1
Rejector mysterious to other	2.9	39.1
Would-be lover seemed mysterious to other	20.0	1.6
Rejector was considerate	55.9	37.7

lovers' stories contained more admissions (18.75%) of denial and self-deception than the rejectors' stories (4.3%), $\chi^2(1, N = 134$ stories) $= 7.04, p < .01$. These results are consistent with the culturally endorsed view that romantic love is linked to positive illusion and makes people less likely to interpret events in an objective, rational fashion.

For the rejectors, one important dimension was consideration of the other's feelings, such as by administering the heartbreak in a gentle and compassionate fashion. Although a fair number of would-be lovers did allude to the other's considerateness, rejectors were particularly likely to mention their efforts to be considerate, $\chi^2(1, N = 129$ stories) $= 4.26, p < .05$. Their efforts to be considerate are quite possibly featured in their accounts because, as a sign of good intentions and noble motives, they defend against guilt.

Our results have emphasized discrepancies between how rejectors and would-be lovers depicted events, and it is apparent that there were serious discrepancies between the two sets of experiences. To examine the issue of discrepant understandings more closely, we coded whether the two characters were confusing, incomprehensible, or mysterious to each other. Indications that the rejector was mysterious to the would-be lover were more common among the would-be lovers' accounts than among the rejectors' accounts, $\chi^2(1, N = 134$ stories) $= 27.24, p < .001$. Conversely, indications that the would-be lover was mysterious to the rejector were more common among the rejectors' accounts, $\chi^2(1, N = 134$ stories) $= 11.43, p < .001$. Thus, both sides showed a significant awareness of having been unable to understand the other person, but neither side paid much attention to how mysterious they were to the other. If one recombines the two dimensions to furnish a measure of the author's perception of the other as mysterious or incomprehensible, one finds that the would-be lovers were more mystified than the rejectors, $\chi^2(1, N = 134$ stories) $= 5.89, p < .05$. These results suggest that people may find it easier to understand why someone loves them than to understand why someone fails to love them. Culturally popular images and fictional portrayals of aloof, mysterious rejectors may reflect interpersonal patterns of understanding rather than the personalities of rejectors.

Scriptlessness, Behavior Change, and Passivity

To attempt to explore the notion of scriptlessness, we coded stories according to whether there was some clear expression of not knowing what to do or not having clear guidelines. For example, one female rejector wrote, "I didn't feel attracted to John, I didn't know what to do. I didn't know what to say because I didn't want to hurt John's feelings." Consistent with predictions, indicators of scriptlessness were significantly more common among rejectors than among would-be lovers, $\chi^2(1, N = 134) = 4.58, p < .05$. People appear to know much better how to act as aspiring lovers than as rejectors, and when cast in the role of rejector people often find themselves uncertain about the best or proper way to act.

The general stereotype that would-be love produces alterations in behavior patterns was examined by coding for indications that the author had acted out of character. These were significantly more common among would-be lovers than among rejectors, $\chi^2(1, N = 133$ stories) $= 5.05, p < .05$. These

results fit the view that romantic love changes the way people view the world and themselves and leads people to act in ways that go against their normal habits, standards, and common sense. (Whether unrequited love, as compared with reciprocal romantic love, produces a greater frequency of such abnormal action is an issue for future research.)

Last, we coded for indications of passivity on the part of the authors. (Stories containing both active and passive self-descriptions were coded as *yes* on passivity, so the presence of passivity should not be interpreted as a lack of active behavior.) There was a high rate of self-reported passivity throughout the sample: 63% of would-be lovers described themselves as passive, especially in relation to not controlling their feelings and being dependent on the other person; 78% of the rejectors referred to being passive, especially insofar as they were the innocent targets of another's affection. The difference was only marginally significant, $\chi^2(1, N = 133$ stories$) = 3.69$, $p < .10$, so it is perhaps appropriate to emphasize merely the high degree of feelings of passivity on both sides.

Study 2

There were three main goals of Study 2. The first was to provide a conceptual replication of some of the key findings from Study 1 to verify that the results of the first study were not due to capitalizing on chance and were not artifacts of the data collection and analysis strategies. It seemed desirable to shift to a different methodology, so for Study 2 we had subjects provide ratings of their own experiences, using interval scales, rather than having coders judge each account on dichotomous scales. We also wanted to feature a between-subjects design, in contrast to the within-subject design of Study 1. In a pilot study, we asked subjects to describe one experience of unrequited love (randomly assigning them to either the would-be lover or the rejector role) and then to rate it on all the dimensions we had used in coding Study 1, plus the supplementary information we wanted to add. The resulting 13-page questionnaire proved too unwieldy, and subjects found it difficult to sustain involvement throughout. Accordingly, it was necessary to select only a limited number of central issues for replication. Study 2 therefore asked a couple of questions each about emotions, self-esteem changes, guilt feelings, key events, and mutual perceptions. Another change in Study 2 was to avoid telling subjects that "nearly everyone has had such experiences," which might conceivably have conveyed to the subject an implicit demand to fabricate or embellish an experience to seem more like "nearly everyone." Thus, the methods of Study 2 were substantially changed from those of Study 1, and if the two studies yielded similar conclusions it would presumably be justified to have high confidence in them.

The second goal was to collect some normative information about such experiences. How common is unrequited love? Study 2 asked people for the number of experiences they have had in the past 5 years, as well as attempted to ascertain the relative frequency of severe, moderate, and casual experiences. A related area of uncertainty from Study 1 was whether the experiences reported were typical of unrequited love, especially insofar as we asked subjects to choose the most powerful experience they had had. Study 2 asked subjects to rate their experiences of unrequited love collectively as well as asked them to rate the most powerful one.

The third goal was to shed some initial light on possible sex differences. Past research has suggested that men and women are more similar than different in love experiences (e.g., Hatfield & Sprecher, 1986; Hazan & Shaver, 1987; Maroldo, 1982; Rubin, 1970; Smith & Hokland, 1988), but because our culture has traditionally assigned the role of initiating romance to men, it could be hypothesized that the experiences in unrequited love would differ by sex.

Method

Eighty-four subjects were recruited from upper level psychology courses in exchange for extra credit. They were told in advance only that the study dealt with romantic relationships and would involve a questionnaire. The data were collected in a series of group testing sessions. The questionnaires were anonymous and began with a measure of self-esteem. This measure is an adaptation of the one developed by Janis and Field (1959), using the first three subscales from the Fleming and Courtney (1984) revision of that scale. (Copies of all measures are available from us.)

Each subject was randomly assigned to write a brief description of either a rejector or a would-be lover experience. Following the written account, subjects were asked to rate this experience on a series of dimensions, each of which was followed by a 15-point scale. For example, one item read, "To what extent was your self-esteem raised by the experience? " and the scale endpoints were labeled *extremely* and *not at all*. For other items, such as "How often did you have warm or positive feelings toward this person? " the scale endpoints were labeled *never* and *frequently*.

After that, subjects were asked to furnish information about the number of rejector and would-be lover experiences they had had in the past 5 years. For example, the would-be lover item instructions read, "We would like to get an idea of how often these experiences happen to people. Please indicate how many times (in the past 5 years) *you* have been attracted to another person, but that other person did not feel an equal attraction to you," followed by separate ratings for "a powerful, intense, and serious attraction," "a moderate, less intense attractions," and "a casual attraction or a passing crush." After this, subjects were asked to rate these experiences as a group.

Two subjects said they had not had any recent experiences of the type assigned to them (one rejector and one would-be lover), and so they furnished neither a story nor the ratings. The remainder of the sample consisted of 27 men and 55 women, ranging in age from 18 to 28, with a mean age of 20.7.

Results

The goals of Study 2 included both replication and extension. Because the replication predictions have clear directionality, one-tailed tests were used, whereas two-tailed tests were used for the new material.

Replications

A primary goal of Study 2 was to replicate the main findings of Study 1, using a self-rating methodology and interval scales rather than dichotomous codings as in the first study. Subjects rated their experiences on 20 dimensions. Independent t tests were used to compare the ratings of rejectors and would-be lovers. Chance variation would predict one significant differ-

ence (at $p < .05$) out of the 20 items in the predicted direction, and one in the opposite direction. Seventeen significant differences were obtained in the predicted direction. (No significant differences were found in the opposite direction.) Thus, it appears that the results were not based on capitalizing on chance.

A related concern was the possibility that items were not independent, as would be reflected in high intercorrelations. We computed intercorrelations among the 20 scales. The mean intercorrelation was .113, and the average absolute value of intercorrelations was .185. Furthermore, of the 190 correlations, only two exceeded .6, and only two more exceeded .5. These results appear to suggest that the 20 dimensions were only weakly interrelated. Three of the four largest correlations involved the item involving excessive persistence by the would-be lover, which was significantly correlated with the rejector's feelings of anger and annoyance ($r = .609$), with clear expression of interest ($r = .510$), and with the love being excessive considering how much encouragement was offered ($r = .511$). The largest correlation was between feelings of annoyance and negative affect ($r = .686$). These items may thus be interrelated in substantial, meaningful ways, all of which would be consistent with our arguments. For the most part, however, it appears that there was relatively little overlap among items, and separate analyses seem appropriate. Also, a MANOVA on the list of 20 replication variables confirmed a pattern of overall difference between rejectors' and would-be lovers' ratings, $F(20, 58) = 7.301$, $p < .0001$. The mean ratings for the replication items are presented in Table 6.

Emotions. Would-be lovers reported having had more warm and positive feelings toward the other person than rejectors did, $t(80) = 4.39$, $p < .001$. Rejectors reported having had more negative feelings toward the other person than would-be lovers did, $t(80) = 2.47$, $p < .01$. Would-be lovers reported more extreme concealment of their feelings than rejectors, $t(80) = 2.30$, $p < .05$. Asked whether the rejector was annoyed by the would-be lover's attentions, rejectors reported a much higher rate of annoyance, $t(80) = 3.18$, $p < .001$. Taken together, these results confirm the dominant impression from the first study, which was that the experience of unrequited love contains more positive affect for the would-be lover and more negative affect for the rejector.

Self-esteem. Rejectors reported greater increases in self-esteem from the incident than did would-be lovers, $t(80) = 1.75$, $p < .05$. Would-be lovers reported that the experience lowered their self-esteem much more than did rejectors, $t(80) = 5.02$, $p < .001$. These results support the conclusion from Study 1 that unrequited love provides a (mildly) flattering ego boost to many rejectors but is often a humiliating threat to the self-esteem of the disappointed lover.

Guilt. Asked whether, looking back from the present, they blamed themselves for anything that happened, neither rejectors nor would-be lovers showed much self-blame, and there was no significant difference ($t < 1$, *ns*). But rejectors did report having had significantly more guilt feelings than would-be lovers reported, $t(80) = 1.98$, $p < .05$. When asked about whether the other person had ever felt guilty or felt that he or she owed something to the subject, responses confirmed the higher guilt of the rejector role: Would-be lovers were more likely to think their rejectors felt guilty than rejectors were

Table 6
Replication Results From Study 2

Dimension	Rejectors	Would-be lovers
Warm feelings toward other person	8.6	12.15
Negative feelings toward other	7.9	5.7
Concealed own feelings	6.2	8.7
Rejector was annoyed by would-be lover's attentions	8.15	4.4
Self-esteem was raised	8.0	6.2
Self-esteem was lowered	3.5	7.7
Blamed self	5.1	4.6
Subject felt guilty	6.1	4.2
Other person felt guilty	2.4	4.6
Rejector led would-be lover on	5.1	7.4
Strongest degree of attraction ever felt by rejector	4.1	6.9
Would-be lover mistakenly believed feelings were reciprocated	7.5	4.2
Would-be lover expressed interest clearly	12.4	9.2
Rejector clearly indicated that he or she was not interested	8.15	3.6
Would-be lover was excessively or unreasonably persistent	9.3	5.4
Changed for the worse	5.1	7.7
Engaged in self-deception or refused to face facts	6.1	6.6
Other person was mysterious or incomprehensible	5.7	8.2
Subject was mysterious or incomprehensible to other	7.5	6.3
Would-be lover's love was excessive	9.0	7.7

Note. High scores represent higher rating by subject on that dimension (i.e., more frequently or more extremely).

likely to think that their would-be lovers felt guilty, $t(80) = 3.03$, $p < .01$.

Although this last finding confirms the conclusion from Study 1 that the rejector role is linked to greater guilt, it does differ from the results of Study 1 in that would-be lovers did not suggest in their spontaneously produced stories that their rejectors felt guilty. Thus, it may be that brokenhearted lovers can look back and recall or infer guilt in the person who rejected them, but their own interpretive accounts do not feature that guilt.

Key events. One important pattern in the findings of Study 1 had to do with whether the rejector had encouraged the would-be lover, led the would-be lover on, and reciprocated some of the would-be lover's affection. These discrepancies were replicated. Would-be lovers judged their desired partners to have led them on to a much greater extent than rejectors acknowledged having done, $t(80) = 2.42$, $p < .01$. To measure perceived reciprocation, we asked subjects what was the strongest attraction that the rejector had felt toward the would-be lover during the experience, and would-be lovers perceived significantly more love than the rejectors retrospectively acknowledged, $t(80) = 3.84$, $p < .001$, consistent with the findings of Study 1. Also, when both groups were asked to rate the degree to which the would-be lover had (mistakenly) believed that the rejector had loved him or her, rejectors acknowledged that the would-be lover had held that belief, but would-be lovers refused

to endorse that they had mistakenly believed in the other's love, $t(80) = 3.58, p < .001.$[2]

Another important discrepancy concerned the explicitness of the rejection. Consistent with the findings of the earlier study, rejectors tended to insist that they had been clear and explicit about not loving the other, whereas would-be lovers were much less likely to think that they had been rejected explicitly, $t(80) = 4.40, p < .001.$ This fits the mixed message hypothesis.

A final discrepancy concerned excessive, unreasonable persistence by the would-be lover. Rejectors reported much higher levels of such (excessive) persistence than would-be lovers, $t(80) = 3.63, p < .001.$ As noted earlier, the rejector's annoyance with the would-be lover was strongly linked to this unreasonable persistence $(r = .609)$.

Perceptions of self and other. Subjects were asked whether they had changed in any negative way, even temporarily, as a result of the experience. Would-be lovers reported significantly greater negative changes than rejectors, $t(80) = 2.52, p < .01.$ (This item too goes beyond any specific finding of Study 1 and may be considered an extension rather than replication; the difference would still be significant with a two-tailed test.)

Subjects were asked whether they had refused to face facts, had engaged in denial, or had deceived themselves. The direction of the trend was consistent with the previous finding (i.e., higher self-deception among would-be lovers), but the difference between rejectors and would-be lovers was not significant, $t < 1$, *ns.* This result is the main failure to replicate a finding from the first study. It may be that asking subjects to rate their own degree of self-deception is asking too much.

Would-be lovers found their partners' actions to be more mysterious and incomprehensible than rejectors found their partners' to be, $t(80) = 2.39, p < .01.$ Asked whether the subject thought his or her partner regarded the subject as mysterious and incomprehensible, no significant difference was found, $t(80) = 1.26, p = .106.$ Last, when subjects were asked whether the would-be lover's love was excessive in view of the encouragement given by the rejector, no significant difference was found, $t(79) = 1.22$, *ns.*

New Findings

A second goal of Study 2 was to shed additional light on the frequency, power, and consequences of experiences of unrequited love. Subjects were asked how many experiences of each type they had had in the last 5 years and were asked to rate some general perceptions of their would-be lover experiences as a group and of their rejector experiences as a group.

In the past 5 years, subjects had averaged 1.07 "powerful" experiences of loving someone who did not return the love, as well as 1.86 moderate attractions of that type and 3.66 casual attractions or passing crushes. Of the subjects, 92.8% reported at least one powerful or moderate experience of loving someone who did not reciprocate, and all but one of the other subjects reported one or more casual crushes. Assessing the frequency of rejector experiences is slightly more difficult, because one cannot always be certain whether the other person feels such an attraction. When asked to count only attractions of which they were certain, this sample reported an average of 1.76 incidents

in which someone was powerfully attracted to them, along with 2.11 moderate and 2.83 casual attractions. Subjects reported about an equal number of additional cases in which they suspected the attraction existed but were not certain. In this sample, 95.2% of subjects reported at least one experience (certain or suspected) in which someone else had a powerful or moderate unrequited attraction to them, and all but two of the remaining four subjects had been the target of casual or passing attractions.

When all experiences from powerful to casual and both certain and suspected are counted, it is apparent that people report being loved significantly more often than they report loving. Our sample reported an average of 6.60 experiences of unrequited attraction to someone else during the past 5 years, whereas during the same time span they thought they were the target of 13.70 cases of another's unrequited attraction. A repeated measures ANOVA indicated that this difference was significant, $F(1, 82) = 25.77, p < .001.$ The finding is noteworthy because it contradicts the usual pattern in which people seem more aware of their own feelings than of another's, and because the opposite might be predicted if people concealed many of their unrequited romantic feelings from the people they loved.

Subjects' ratings of their accumulated experiences in each role were analyzed using a repeated measures ANOVA. (Because some subjects had described a particular would-be lover experience in detail, whereas others had described a rejector experience, their condition was included as an independent variable in the analysis, but it proved to make almost no difference.) In comparing their own experiences, subjects rated the would-be lover experiences as having been more in the nature of adventures, $F(1, 79) = 14.15, p < .001,$ more in the nature of emotional roller coasters, $F(1, 79) = 36.32, p < .0001,$ more painful, $F(1, 79) = 51.97, p < .0001,$ and more exciting, $F(1, 79) = 14.482, p < .001,$ than their rejector experiences. In retrospect, they also considered that their experiences as would-be lover taught them more valuable lessons than their experiences as rejector, $F(1, 79) = 11.64, p < .001.$ The only other dimension rated was how harmful the experience was, and no difference was found between rejector and would-be lover experiences.

Sex Differences

To explore the possibility of sex differences, univariate Sex × Role ANOVAs were conducted. On the 20 items used in the replication study, one significant main effect for sex and one interaction would be expected by chance at the (two-tailed) .05 level. Three significant main effects were found, along with two significant interactions (and three marginally significant interactions). Thus, on these items, the number of findings is only slightly higher than what chance variation might predict, and so we are hesitant about placing much interpretive weight on the obtained differences. The broad null hypothesis that men and women experience unrequited love in largely the same way

cannot be rejected with much confidence on the basis of these data.

The sex effects were as follows. Men were more likely to blame themselves than women, $F(1, 78) = 5.23$, $p < .05$, regardless of role. Women were more likely to say that the rejector (whether it was the subject or the partner) led the would-be lover on at some point, $F(1, 78) = 4.93$, $p < .05$.

An interaction between gender and condition was obtained on the item asking the subject whether he or she changed in a negative way as a result of the experience, $F(1, 78) = 6.26$, $p < .02$. Earlier, we noted a marginally significant trend suggesting that would-be lovers were significantly more likely than rejectors to affirm that such a change had taken place. The interaction indicates that this pattern is substantially confirmed for women but not (indeed it was slightly reversed) for men.

Subjects were asked whether the would-be lover had at some point mistakenly believed that the rejector reciprocated the affection. An ANOVA on this measure found both main effects and the interaction between sex and condition to be significant. The interaction, $F(1, 78) = 8.97$, $p < .01$, takes precedence, but all three findings appear to derive from the elevation of the mean for female rejectors. (The other three mean ratings were nearly identical.) That is, female rejectors were more likely than any other subjects to say that the pursuer mistakenly believed that his affection was reciprocated.

In the ratings of all accumulated experiences, additional sex differences were found (and these do exceed the number that chance variation would predict). Women rated their would-be lover experiences overall as more painful than did men, $F(1, 78) = 11.93$, $p < .001$. They rated their experiences as rejectors to be more characterized as emotional roller coasters than did men, $F(1, 78) = 4.38$, $p < .05$. Last, in total number of experiences of unrequited love, there was an interaction between role and gender, $F(1, 82) = 9.83$, $p < .01$. Women had more rejector experiences, whereas men had more would-be lover experiences.

Trait Self-Esteem

A final set of analyses was conducted using trait self-esteem (with two levels of self-esteem, based on a median split) as an independent variable. Because this variable was included for exploratory purposes, results must be considered tentative and post hoc. Perhaps surprisingly, almost no significant effects were found, and most of the ones that did emerge were of minimal theoretical interest. The only noteworthy findings pertained to the ratings of aggregated would-be lover experiences. People with low self-esteem rated these experiences as more of an emotional roller coaster, $F(1, 78) = 9.39$, $p < .01$, more painful, $F(1, 78) = 10.12$, $p < .01$, and more harmful, $F(1, 78) = 4.23$, $p < .05$, than people with high self-esteem.

Discussion

In this study, subjects reported substantially more cases of being loved in vain than of loving in vain—indeed, almost double. Ultimately, it is implausible that there would be more rejector than would-be lover experiences; there ought to be an equal number in the entire population, because each experience involves one would-be lover and one rejector. Furthermore, in principle fewer rejector experiences should be reported because people must sometimes fail to know that another loves them. One likely explanation for this seeming logical impossibility is that people inflate the number of reports in which another loved them (or suppress the humiliating memory of loving in vain), consistent with the general pattern of positive illusions (Taylor & Brown, 1988; Taylor, 1989).

The frequencies of such experiences indicate that unrequited love is commonly experienced on both sides during the late teen and early adult years. The frequency and intensity of experiences vary widely, but nearly everyone in our sample was able to report at least one, and over 90% reported a strong or moderate experience.

These findings about the frequency and prevalence of unrequited love are reassuring with regard to some ambiguities about Study 1. It appears that most of our subjects have had only one or two powerful experiences of unrequited love (on each side), and so the hypothesis of selection bias seems unlikely, because there was relatively little latitude for selection. Also, although few people have a large number of such experiences, nearly everyone has had at least one. Asking subjects to report an experience of unrequited love does not apparently rule out a substantial part of the population from participating in the study.

On the dimensions we assessed, people rated their accumulated would-be lover experiences worse overall than their accumulated rejector experiences. This seems a partial contradiction of the finding that the rejector experiences were rated as more negative overall; the difference may be that the minor and casual rejector experiences do not present problems or traumas, whereas the most severe ones do. Another contributing factor may be that the present ratings reflect accumulated severity of pain, whereas the ratings from Study 1 reflected the simple likelihood of including any distress in the account. Rejectors may suffer more commonly and may suffer without accompanying benefit, whereas would-be lovers may suffer more acutely.

The findings regarding sex differences must be approached cautiously because they were not predicted from any clear theoretical framework and because the number of significant findings was not substantially higher (although somewhat higher) than chance would predict. Clearly, our data suggest that the sexes are more similar than different with regard to unrequited love, a conclusion that is consistent with some other studies on love (Hatfield & Sprecher, 1986; Hazan & Shaver, 1987; Maroldo, 1982; Rubin, 1970; Smith & Hokland, 1988). Still, some tentative implications can be suggested, if one assumes that the obtained differences are meaningful.

A first pattern of sex differences was that men appeared to have had more would-be lover experiences than women, whereas women have had more rejector experiences than men. This finding parallels Folkes' (1982) evidence that women were more likely to reject offers of a date, whereas men were more likely to have been rejected. They also conform to the Hill et al.'s (1976) suggestion that men fall in love more easily than women, whereas women fall out of love more readily than men. Apparently, men become attracted to women rather commonly, thereby casting the women into the role of rejector.

Women do, of course, fall in love in vain too. Our results suggest that women find these experiences more painful and aversive than men, and women are (perhaps as a result) more likely to say they changed in a negative way as a result of this experience. Inspection of the stories from Study 1 suggest that female unrequited lovers were perhaps more likely than male unrequited lovers to feel that they had been exploited sexually, possibly because men may be more likely than women to see another's romantic attraction as a sexual opportunity. Exploitation of any sort may leave the person reluctant to trust others for a time after the experience, which could be regarded as a negative change.

The higher rate of male self-blame (in both roles) seemingly contradicts findings that women feel more guilt over identical transgressions (e.g., Hoffman, 1975; Tangney, 1990). In this case, however, there is no reason to assume that transgressions were identical. If men take a more active, initiating role in romance, they may actually be more to blame for unhappy outcomes.

The contribution of trait self-esteem was surprisingly weak. The majority of self-esteem findings seemed to suggest merely that people with low self-esteem have a more aversive and difficult experience with unrequited love than do people with high self-esteem. This seems most consistent with the view of low self-esteem as a deficiency in resources (e.g., Steele, 1988; see also Baumeister, in press).

General Discussion

Unrequited love emerges from these data as a bilaterally distressing experience marked by mutual emotional dependency and mutual incomprehension. Frijda (1986) has proposed that strong emotion can serve either to organize or to disorganize a person's efforts to deal with the social environment. Most treatments of love have been focused on the positive, organizing consequences of love, such as by suggesting that love cements a social bond that provides the basis for a family (e.g., Shaver et al., 1988). Our data make clear, however, that love is also capable of producing profound disorganization, including distress, uncertainty, and erratic behavior.

We have emphasized the many important discrepancies between the rejectors' accounts and the would-be lovers' accounts, but there are some noteworthy similarities as well. Both parties find their lives and emotional states abruptly contingent on someone else, and both may wish that the other would feel and act very differently. A strong current of passivity runs through both sides, stimulated by a perceived inability to direct one's feelings (i.e., either to generate or suppress romantic attraction), and perhaps increased for the rejector by a general sense of scriptlessness. And of course both end up dissatisfied with the outcome, although probably for very different reasons. These results are strongly consistent with the view that emotional inequities are upsetting to both parties and destructive to relationships (Hill et al., 1976; Walster, Berscheid, & Walster, 1976).

Matching and Interdependence

We offered an analysis of unrequited love in terms of interdependence theory (Kelley & Thibaut, 1978), and the data appear to support this analysis. Both people involved in unrequited love appear to express some awareness that their outcomes are dependent on the other's responses. The stereotype from literary and popular sources (which, as we have said, usually portray unrequited love from the perspective of the would-be lover only) suggests that the would-be lover is helpless and vulnerable, whereas the rejector is free to do as he or she chooses. Likewise, Waller's (1938) "principle of least interest" proposes that to be less in love is to enjoy an advantageous position of power. Rejectors emphatically do not experience it that way, however. Instead, they feel themselves to be placed under external demands, forced to respond uncomfortably to unwanted advances, burdened with unpleasant feelings, and occasionally unable to escape from persistent, intrusive, annoying pursuit.

One ironic implication of our interdependence analysis is that, in unrequited love, both people have negative outcomes that can result from the other's actions. In a sense, both the rejector and the would-be lover end up feeling like victims—one of persistent, intrusive pursuit and unwanted attentions, the other of heartbreak and rejection.

The interdependence analysis also suggested that unrequited love, while appearing to the would-be lover as a high-stakes gamble, confronts the rejector as a no-win situation, in the sense that the rejector's situation matrix contains no significant positive outcomes. This fact could explain the pervasive negativity of the rejectors' accounts, including their greater tendency to express a wish that the entire event had never happened.

We also presented an analysis adapted from the matching hypothesis. That is, we suggested that people fall in love with the most attractive and desirable others, but they end up mating with others similar in attractiveness to themselves, and so unrequited love may often involve cases in which the would-be lover is less desirable as a potential romantic partner than the rejector. Our data lack any direct comparison of attractiveness and so any conclusions must remain speculative on this issue. Still, this hypothesis provides a plausible explanation for a substantial number of our findings. It was apparent that unrequited love constitutes a humiliating loss of esteem for the disappointed lover, and this seems to imply that the rejection implies a judgment that one is inferior and hence unworthy of being this individual's romantic partner. Furthermore, many rejectors said explicitly that their lack of reciprocal attraction was directly caused by the other person's relative undesirability. They usually did not express this directly to the would-be lover, however (see also Folkes, 1982), preferring to phrase their rejection in vague phrases about incompatibility, and often surrounding the words of rejection with compliments as if to avoid the obvious implication that the other was not good enough for them.

Love as Attachment

Bowlby's (1969, 1973) research on mother–child attachment suggested three patterns of response to loss, and Hazan and Shaver (1987) have suggested the potential utility of applying that conceptual scheme to romantic love between adults. The present studies offer one chance to consider whether adult romantic failures lead to anything resembling Bowlby's three responses.

The first response was defined as *protest,* namely vocal emotional distress and active refusals to accept rejection. These reactions were amply observed in this research, particularly in accounts by rejectors who reported how would-be lovers complained, cried, made further demands, requested explanations, persisted unreasonably, occasionally went berserk, and generally refused to accept the message of rejection. The second response, *despair,* was also evident, in that many would-be lovers described feeling sad, depressed, and passive, as well as being implicit in the references to loss of self-esteem. The third response, *defensive detachment,* was not implicit in any of our significance tests, but we may report from inspection of the data that a significant minority of would-be lovers did derogate the people who had rejected them and did say that they would now refuse a relationship with that person if the opportunity were to arise.

The Rejector's Experience

Stereotypes of aloof, casual, teasing, or sadistic heartbreakers may correspond to what novelists and would-be lovers imagine, but they do not correspond to our data. The rejector's experience emerges from these accounts as characterized by scriptlessness, uncertainty, and guilt, as well as an annoyance that may develop into intensely aversive feelings of being hounded. In both studies, the rejector's difficulties in extricating himself or herself from persistent, unwanted attentions emerged as one of the biggest differences between the two sets of accounts: central and pervasive for rejectors, yet hardly mentioned by would-be lovers. Initially it may be flattering to find that one attracts romantic attentions from another, but apparently this aspect often fades out and is replaced by the more negative aspects of the experience. The rejector's lack of scripted guidelines for playing his or her role may underlie the uncertainty, the efforts to avoid the situation, the passivity, and the preoccupation with trying not to do anything wrong.

Perhaps surprisingly, rejectors were more negative than the broken-hearted lovers in their accounts, reporting more negative affect and expressing more profound regrets over the whole affair. The course of affect and regret contrasts surprisingly with the esteem implications. Normally, esteem-raising experiences are treasured and bring positive affect, whereas esteem-lowering experiences are avoided and bring negative affect. But despite the flattering implications of having an admirer, the rejectors reported considerable negative affect and even tended to express some wish that the incident had never happened.

One reason for the rejectors' greater negativity may be that the episode lacked any chance of positive or desirable outcome, as noted in the interdependence analysis. The would-be lover did have something to gain, but the rejector did not (beyond the initial boost to esteem). It is particularly helpful to consider the subset of cases in which unilateral romantic interest intruded on an established platonic friendship. To the rejector, there was no prospect of any desirable change, but the risk of losing a valued friendship was apparent. To the would-be lover, the chance of love may have outweighed any risk to a merely platonic friendship.

Moral issues were central to the rejectors' accounts. Rejectors were far quicker than would-be lovers to raise issues of guilt,

justification, and scruples regarding both their own behavior and the other person's behavior. Foremost among these moral issues, of course, was the rejector's own moral dilemma of not wanting to hurt the other but also not wanting to encourage the other. This dilemma may be one key to understanding the no-win situational structure that the rejector may encounter. A further paradox was that rejectors tended to insist on their moral, technical innocence, insofar as they never intended to hurt anyone and never encouraged the other's affections, but nonetheless they admitted that they felt guilty.

Several key features of rejectors' accounts may possibly be interpreted as responses to the guilt feelings. First, they tended to make self-justifying statements to defend the morality of their actions. Second, they felt reluctant to deliver the rejection. Third, they tended to derogate the would-be lover (see Lerner & Matthews, 1967). Fourth, many of them insisted that they never encouraged the other's affections or led the other on, and these assertions may be crucial to rejectors' efforts to portray themselves as innocent.

McGraw (1987) noted that theories about guilt have generally emphasized intentional violation of standards, and her own data contradicted that theoretical approach; our data provide further confirmation that intentional violation is not necessary to cause guilt. Our data also contradict the view of guilt as based purely on self-judgment, as suggested by Lewis (1971). In her words, "the imagery of the self vis-a-vis the 'other' is absent in guilt" (Lewis, 1971, p. 251). Our data, suggest, however, that people can feel guilty vis-à-vis another person even if their own view exonerates them from having committed deliberate violation of moral standards. In other words, guilt theory may need to encompass interpersonal perspectives to explain phenomena such as the guilt of the romantic rejector.

The Would-Be Lover

The would-be lover perceives a situation with extremely good and extremely bad possible outcomes. Some would-be lovers remain silent, but the majority appear to recognize that they can only achieve their goal by initiating pursuit of the desired partner. They may ignore or discount some discouraging responses from the rejector. In this, they are supported by a substantial body of cultural wisdom and popular scripts, which have endlessly reiterated the theme that an aspiring lover succeeds in the end by persisting despite initial rejection.

Unlike rejectors, to whom the incompatibility of the couple and the impossibility of romance often seemed clear, would-be lovers typically seemed to regard themselves as reasonably appropriate matches to their desired partners. Seemingly positive signs of reciprocal attraction from the partners encouraged this belief. As we noted, the question of whether the rejector encouraged the would-be lover was one on which the two roles offered sharply different accounts. We have suggested that rejectors may have retrospectively minimized any encouraging actions on their part to minimize any feelings of guilt, but it may be unwarranted to assume that the rejectors were the only ones with any distorted perceptions. Would-be lovers may be strongly motivated to interpret ambiguous actions or words from the other as encouraging.

A particular reason for distrusting the would-be lover's per-

ception of events was suggested in research by Steck, Levitan, McLane, and Kelley (1982). These authors distinguished between care and need as possible attitudes toward a romantic partner: *Care* is concern for the partner's welfare, whereas *need* is a self-oriented desire for one's own pleasure as stimulated by the other. The research findings of Steck et al. associated need with the early stages of attraction and romantic relationships (see also Sternberg, 1986). Thus, the would-be lover can be regarded as basically self-oriented, that is, as wanting to be with the other for the sake of one's own pleasure and desire. The partner's reaction to the aspiring lover's interest is secondary or "incidental to the actor's concerns" (Steck et al., 1982, p. 489). The would-be lover's preoccupation with his or her own needs, wants, desires, and feelings may make him or her ironically blind to what the rejecting partner is experiencing, and this may include ignoring unwelcome messages. As one man wrote, "There were certainly enough cues as to her lack of attraction for me, but I was too preoccupied to notice." Consistent with this analysis, we found that would-be lovers' retrospective accounts were prone to characterize the rejector as mysterious or incomprehensible.

To sustain hope, the would-be lover may have to avoid knowing the other's true feelings and may even have to ignore some signals of rejection. Thus, the would-be lover's failure to appreciate the rejector's true state of feelings may contribute to causing the would-be lover to persist in his or her efforts to win the other's heart. Furthermore, would-be lovers may often be oblivious to the fact that their persistence causes the rejector to feel increasingly annoyed and guilty. To the rejector, of course, this persistence simply reflects an obnoxious refusal to face facts and, hence, a needless prolongation of the unpleasant episode.

Self-esteem emerged as a central issue in many would-be lovers' accounts. To be rejected romantically is often a severe blow to one's self-esteem. Study 1 showed that retrospective accounts of would-be lovers were relatively often preoccupied with restoring self-esteem. Study 2 found that people who begin with low levels of self-esteem find romantic rejection especially painful and harmful. Both studies indicated that romantic rejection often threatens or lowers one's self-esteem. These findings fit nicely with Dion and Dion's (1975) evidence that people low in defensiveness had more experiences of love than did highly defensive people. This link suggests that to love is to make oneself vulnerable (and so defensive people, who avoid vulnerability, also end up avoiding love). Unrequited love reveals the scope of this vulnerability, which appears to involve self-esteem along with emotional distress: To love is to put one's self-esteem at risk.

Would-be lovers' accounts had a high rate of self-enhancing statements, which may have been included to help the person recover from the esteem loss caused by rejection. By pointing out that one has been desired and pursued on other occasions, one erases the implication that one is undesirable. Pointedly expressing one's superiority over a rival was also useful for this end, and several accounts were quite insistent about derogating the successful rival.

Despite the sometimes intense suffering, would-be lovers tend to look back with some positive feelings and memories on the episode. Some acknowledged that they acted out of character, deceived themselves, and lost some measure of dignity, but

most seemed to retain a soft spot in their hearts for the person they loved in vain. Even those who changed in negative ways, such as becoming reluctant to trust another or fall in love again, seemed disinclined to blame either themselves or their rejectors. It may be that in general love seems worth the risk, even after it has failed.

Limitations

Several limitations of this work must be kept in mind before generalizing from the findings. In the first place, the sample consisted mainly of young, single adults. It is possible that elderly, married people would remember their experiences with unrequited love in a quite different fashion. The threat to self-esteem in particular may diminish after one has had a long, successful, happy marriage. American university students may also be assumed to be relatively progressive and liberal in their attitudes about sexuality, relationships, and gender roles. It is quite possible that more tradition-oriented groups would yield very different patterns. We found relatively few sex differences, but in groups where sex roles are rigidly prescribed, such differences may be much greater. Female would-be lovers in particular may feel helpless in cultural contexts that do not permit women to initiate romantic contacts. In general, one must assume that the experience of love (unrequited or otherwise) is colored by cultural norms and conditioning, and so it seems risky to assume that people in very different cultures would conform to the patterns we found.

Another limitation is the fact that we were not able to obtain both parties in the same incident. This problem is faced by most studies using autobiographical accounts (e.g., Vaughan, 1986). It raises the possibility that some differences may be due to how people choose which of several experiences to describe. The results of Study 2 suggested that most people had only one or two powerful experiences of unrequited love, so the latitude of choice may have been minimal and the resulting problem may have been minor in this case. Still, for the minority of people who have many strong experiences of unrequited love, it is conceivable that they selected certain incidents to tell, using some criterion that systematically influenced the data they furnished.

Concluding Remarks

Our results are consistent with the view that interpersonal, situational roles are powerful determinants of how people interpret, recall, and describe significant events from their lives. We found that would-be lovers' accounts differed repeatedly from rejectors' accounts regarding even such core events as whether the romantic attraction had initially been mutual, whether encouragement had been provided, whether the rejection had been communicated clearly, and whether the would-be lover persisted unreasonably in trying to win the other's love. Furthermore, the accounts seemed to serve different functions for the two roles, consistent with the view that situational roles generate interpretive needs. For would-be lovers, esteem issues were central, the episode challenged their esteem, and their accounts contained statements to restore and bolster self-esteem. For rejectors, guilt issues were central, the episode challenged their

moral propriety, and their accounts contained statements to justify their actions and feelings. Apparently, rejected lovers construct accounts to restore their self-esteem, whereas rejectors construct accounts to reduce feelings of guilt.

For centuries, poets and musicians and other artists have celebrated passionate love as a form of attraction that mysteriously arises under surprisingly adverse circumstances. Recent psychological theory suggests a second mystery of love, however, namely the failure of love to arise in response to another's love. If human emotion is governed by principles of balance theory or by an innate longing for interpersonal attachment, why is love often not reciprocated? If mutual love is a fulfilling, ecstatic experience, why would someone refuse another's offer of mutual love? Our findings indicate two tentative responses to these fundamental questions. First, people are not indiscriminately guided by the wish for love, but rather they seem quite selective in whom they love. Being a vaguely suitable partner with earnest affection is far from enough to elicit reciprocal love. And, second, even when the aspiring partner is judged unsuitable and his or her love is refused, the rejector often finds the experience aversive and distressing. To refuse love, even unwanted love, seems to violate some deeply rooted and widespread human tendencies. Although many would consider it an enviable position to be in to have others offering love, in fact it turns out to be a difficult and upsetting position. The truly enviable, ideal position to be in, apparently, is to be loved only by those whom one oneself loves in return.

We began by citing theorists who suggested that the giving or the receiving of love, respectively, formed ideals of psychological fulfillment and happiness. Our data suggest that either giving or receiving love, without the other, is far from ideal—on the contrary, either without the other tends to be unsatisfying, unpleasant, and often distressing. Bilateral victimization, rather than fulfillment and happiness, may be a common outcome of unreciprocated love. To give love without receiving it in return causes pain, sorrow, and often a profoundly humiliating blow to one's self-esteem. To receive love without giving it in return causes uncertainty, awkwardness, guilt, and sometimes extremes of resentment and annoyance. It is perhaps the mutuality of love, rather than either the giving or the receiving, that makes it a pleasant, desirable, fulfilling experience.

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