

Article

Narcissism and Subjective Arousal in Response to Sexual Aggression: The Mediating Role of Perceived Power

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Abstract: The present research examined the associations that narcissistic personality features had with subjective arousal in response to sexually aggressive behaviors, as well as whether these associations were mediated by the power that was believed to accompany these behaviors. Participants were 221 community members (115 women, 106 men) who completed a self-report instrument that captured *narcissistic admiration* (an agentic form of narcissism) and *narcissistic rivalry* (an antagonistic form of narcissism). In addition, participants were asked to rate how powerful they would expect to feel if they actually engaged in an array of sexually aggressive behaviors (e.g., “Tying up a person during sexual intercourse against her/his will”) as well as how sexually aroused they would be by each behavior. A multilevel mediation analysis revealed that both narcissistic admiration and narcissistic rivalry were positively associated with subjective arousal in response to sexual aggression and that these associations were mediated by the perceived power that was believed to accompany these sexually aggressive behaviors. These results suggest that perceptions of power may play an important role in the connections that narcissistic personality features have with subjective arousal in response to sexually aggressive behavior for both men and women. This discussion will focus on the implications of these results for understanding the connections between narcissism and sexual aggression in both men and women.



Citation: Zeigler-Hill, V.; Andrews, D. Narcissism and Subjective Arousal in Response to Sexual Aggression: The Mediating Role of Perceived Power. *Sexes* **2021**, *2*, 189–201.
<https://doi.org/10.3390/sexes2020017>

Academic Editor: Joana Carvalho

Received: 29 April 2021

Accepted: 18 May 2021

Published: 20 May 2021

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Keywords: narcissism; sexual; aggression; power

“Everything in the world is about sex . . . except sex. Sex is about power.”
—Anonymous quote that is often mistakenly attributed to Oscar Wilde

1. Introduction

Narcissism refers to a complex set of personality features that includes exaggerated feelings of grandiosity, a desire for status, a sense of superiority, vanity, self-absorption, feelings of entitlement, and a willingness to exploit others [1–3]. Narcissism has been found to be associated with a variety of aversive outcomes, including anger [4–6], hostility [7], rage [8], and aggression [9,10]. Numerous studies have also shown that narcissism is associated with certain forms of sexual aggression [11]. The purpose of the present study was to extend previous research by considering whether narcissistic personality features were associated with subjective arousal in response to sexually aggressive behaviors. In addition, we were interested in the possibility that the associations between narcissistic personality features and subjective arousal in response to sexual aggression may be explained, at least in part, by the perceived power that is believed to accompany sexually aggressive behaviors.

There are numerous factors associated with the likelihood of engaging in sexually aggressive behavior [12–15], but narcissism has consistently emerged as an important risk factor for various forms of sexual aggression [16–23]. For example, narcissistic men appear to be particularly likely to engage in sexually aggressive behavior in response to sexual rejection [11]. Although it has been suggested that narcissistic men may actually prefer consensual sexual activities to those involving sexual aggression [11], the existing data

does not directly address that exact issue. However, it is clear that narcissistic men are more willing than other men to resort to sexually aggressive behavior—including rape—when they are denied sexual access to the women they desire [11]. The basic explanation for this pattern is that narcissistic men may be particularly reactive to sexual rejection due to their sense of entitlement (e.g., the belief that they should be able to satisfy their sexual desires) in conjunction with their low levels of empathy and willingness to exploit others in order to benefit themselves [21].

Narcissism has often been used to explain why men engage in sexually aggressive behaviors that are targeted toward female victims [11], but it is important to note that both men and women are capable of sexual aggression [24–29]. Further, narcissism has been shown to be associated with various aspects of sexual aggression for both men and women [23,30–32]. For example, the association between narcissism and the use of sexually coercive tactics following sexual rejection was found to be of similar magnitude for both men and women [31]. In fact, the associations between certain aspects of narcissism and sexual coercion are actually *stronger* for women than they are for men [30]. Taken together, these results suggest that narcissism is a risk factor for sexually aggressive behavior among both men and women.

Although narcissism has consistently been shown to be associated with sexually aggressive behavior as well as the attitudes that may support these behaviors (e.g., greater acceptance of rape myths; [16]), it remains unclear whether narcissistic personality features are associated with subjective arousal in response to sexual aggression. The most direct evidence for this possible association comes from research showing that men with higher levels of narcissism reported being more sexually aroused than men with lower levels of narcissism by film clips depicting consensual affectionate activity that was followed by rape [16]. This would certainly seem to support the idea that narcissistic men are aroused by depictions of sexual aggression. However, the results of the same study revealed that men with higher levels of narcissism did not report being more aroused than those with lower levels of narcissism by altered versions of the same film clips that depicted only rape by omitting the consensual affectionate activities that preceded the rape. This suggests that narcissism may have complex associations with subjective arousal in response to sexual aggression. This is a potentially important issue because sexual arousal has been shown to have implications for various aspects of decision making, including the willingness of individuals to engage in sexually aggressive behaviors [33,34]. One possibility is that issues concerning *power* (e.g., watching the attacker overpower the victim following sexual rejection) may play an important role in understanding the connections that narcissistic personality features have with subjective arousal in response to sexual aggression.

1.1. Narcissism and Power

There is still considerable debate concerning the conceptualization of power in social contexts, but there is at least some level of agreement that it refers to the ability of individuals to influence the behavior of others or exert asymmetric control over valuable resources [35–37]. Power is often considered a fundamental feature of interpersonal relationships because it determines how they operate and function [38]. It has been argued that narcissism should be characterized by the pursuit of power because narcissistic individuals may believe they are entitled to be more powerful than other people [1], and previous studies have shown narcissistic personality features to be associated with various constructs related to power, such as the need for power [39,40], a personal sense of power [41], and the endorsement of social values that involve power [42,43].

Narcissism has been shown to have particularly strong associations with dominance-related motives and behaviors [44–48]. This is important because issues concerning dominance are often entwined with power [49]. The connections between narcissistic personality features and power are also consistent with recent arguments that the navigation of status hierarchies, which are often closely linked with issues concerning power and dominance, may be essential for understanding narcissism [47,50,51].

Considerable bodies of research have been devoted to understanding narcissism and power as separate constructs, but relatively few studies have considered narcissism and power together. As a result, it remains unclear how narcissism and power may work together to predict certain outcomes. Some studies have shown that power *moderates* the associations that narcissism has with outcomes [52,53]. For example, certain aspects of narcissism have been shown to have particularly strong negative associations with indicators of romantic relationship functioning (e.g., relationship satisfaction) when individuals perceive themselves to have low levels of power within their romantic relationship [53]. However, the focus of the present study will be on the possibility that perceived power may *mediate*—rather than moderate—the association that narcissism has with subjective arousal in response to sexual aggression. The basic idea is that narcissistic personality features may promote sensitivity to potential cues concerning power in the social environment [54]. Narcissistic individuals may be sensitive to power-related cues in almost any context, but sexual encounters may be particularly interesting to consider given the importance of perceived power dynamics during sex [55]. This sort of sensitivity may predispose narcissistic individuals to interpret their own engagement in sexually aggressive behaviors as demonstrations of their power over others. This is consistent with the argument that individuals who are motivated by power tend to understand the world in terms of power (e.g., they are more likely to believe that most interactions between individuals involve the struggle for power; [56,57]). In turn, we expect that sexually aggressive behaviors that are believed to demonstrate power over others will lead to greater sexual arousal for narcissistic individuals [58–63]. That is, narcissistic individuals may be aroused by sexually aggressive behaviors, in part because they believe these aggressive behaviors demonstrate their ability to exert power over another person.

Past studies concerning narcissism and sexual aggression have often treated narcissism as a unidimensional construct despite considerable evidence that it is almost certainly multidimensional in nature [64,65]. This may be an important limitation because studies that have distinguished between different aspects of narcissism have found that those aspects of narcissism that involve feelings of entitlement or a willingness to exploit others to be more strongly associated with sexual aggression than other aspects of narcissism, such as those involving self-promotion [22,30]. To address this limitation with the existing literature, we used the Narcissistic Admiration and Rivalry Concept (NARC; [66]) in an effort to provide a more complete and nuanced understanding of the connections that narcissistic personality features have with subjective arousal in response to sexually aggressive behaviors. The purpose behind the development of the NARC model was to clarify some of the conflicting results concerning narcissism by distinguishing between two different—but not mutually exclusive—aspects of narcissism, which are known as *narcissistic admiration* (an agentic aspect of narcissism that is characterized by assertive self-enhancement and self-promotion) and *narcissistic rivalry* (an antagonistic aspect of narcissism that is characterized by self-protection and self-defense).

The NARC model has been useful for clarifying the complex connections that narcissism has with various attitudes and behaviors [67]. For example, narcissistic admiration and narcissistic rivalry have been found to share a strong desire for attaining status [47], which is consistent with recent arguments that the pursuit of status may be at the core of narcissism [50,51]. Despite being similar with regard to the desire for status, narcissistic admiration and narcissistic rivalry have been found to diverge in terms of the motives and strategies surrounding the pursuit of status. More specifically, narcissistic admiration and narcissistic rivalry have been found to have similar positive associations with the dominance-based orientation toward status (i.e., relying on conflict, intimidation, and fear to acquire status) but divergent associations with the prestige-based orientation toward status (i.e., displaying competence and demonstrating valuable skills to gain status) such that narcissistic admiration was positively associated with this orientation, but narcissistic rivalry was negatively associated with this orientation [47,48]. These results suggest that narcissistic admiration is characterized by a flexible approach to pursuing status that in-

volves either dominance-based or prestige-based approaches, whereas narcissistic rivalry is characterized by a rigid focus on dominance-based approaches in conjunction with an aversion to prestige-based approaches. This is important for the present research because the dominance-based orientation to the pursuit of status has been shown to mediate the associations that both narcissistic admiration and narcissistic rivalry have with the use of aversive strategies for maintaining romantic relationships such as threatening to harm one's partner if they engage in infidelity or attempt to leave the relationship [68].

1.2. Overview and Predictions

The goal of the present study was to examine whether narcissistic personality features were associated with subjective arousal in response to sexually aggressive behaviors. More specifically, we expected narcissistic admiration and narcissistic rivalry to be positively associated with subjective arousal in response to sexual aggression. The rationale for this prediction was that narcissism is likely to promote the adoption of a selfish, pleasure-based mentality that may allow narcissistic individuals to become sexually aroused in situations that involve sexual aggression. This prediction is consistent with the results of previous studies showing that narcissism has been shown to predict sexual arousal in response to certain depictions of rape [16]. Although we expected both narcissistic admiration and narcissistic rivalry to be positively associated with subjective arousal in response to sexual aggression, we expected this association to be particularly strong for narcissistic rivalry because the antagonistic aspects of narcissism tend to have especially strong associations with sexual aggression [22,30] and attitudes that support sexually aggressive behaviors (e.g., hostile attitudes toward women; [69]).

We were also interested in examining whether the associations between narcissistic personality features and subjective arousal in response to sexual aggression would be mediated by the feelings of power that are believed to accompany sexually aggressive behaviors. That is, we expected the associations that narcissistic admiration and narcissistic rivalry had with subjective arousal in response to sexual aggression to be due, at least in part, to the perception of sexually aggressive behavior as a demonstration of power. The rationale for this prediction was that narcissism is associated with various aspects of power [39–43], which may predispose narcissistic individuals to interpret sexual aggression as being indicative of power. In turn, power has been shown to strengthen the tendency to pursue goals by focusing on rewards and the satisfaction of desires while weakening inhibitory processes such as considering potential punishments or the desires of others [35,70,71]. We expected perceived power to mediate the associations that both narcissistic admiration and narcissistic rivalry had with subjective arousal in response to sexual aggression, but we expected this indirect association to be particularly strong for narcissistic rivalry due to it being characterized by heightened motives for power, dominance, and superiority over others [47,48].

2. Materials and Methods

Participants were 221 community adults (115 women, 106 men) from the United States, who were recruited using Amazon's Mechanical Turk (MTurk) to complete a set of questionnaires that required approximately 20 min in exchange for financial compensation (USD 3.00). Participants were asked to complete measures concerning narcissism, the perceived power associated with particular sexual acts, and their subjective arousal related to particular sexual acts, along with other measures that are not relevant to the present study (e.g., spitefulness). The mean age of these participants was 36.38 years ($SD = 11.91$; range = 18–77 years), and their racial/ethnic composition was 75% White, 10% Black, 8% Asian, 5% Hispanic, and 2% other. The romantic relationship composition of the sample was 25% single, 14% dating, 9% cohabitating, 2% engaged, 43% married, and 6% divorced. The median relationship length for those participants who were currently involved in a romantic relationship was 7.00 years ($SD = 10.04$). The sexual orientation of the sample was 88% heterosexual, 6% bisexual, and 6% homosexual.

Measures

Narcissism. We used the Narcissistic Admiration and Rivalry Questionnaire (NARQ; [66]) to capture *narcissistic admiration* (9 items; e.g., “I am great” [$\alpha = 0.88$]) and *narcissistic rivalry* (9 items; e.g., “I want my rivals to fail” [$\alpha = 0.89$]). Participants were asked to rate how well each statement described them using scales that ranged from 1 (not agree at all) to 6 (agree completely).

Violent Sexual Interests. We measured perceptions of aggressive sexual behaviors using a modified version of the Violent Sexual Interest Questionnaire (VSIQ; [72]) which is a 20-item instrument that asks respondents to indicate if they are sexually aroused by fantasizing about or engaging in specific sexual behaviors (e.g., “Tying up a person during sexual intercourse against her/his will,” “Humiliating a person against her/his will,” “Inflicting pain on a consenting person”). We modified the instrument so that participants in the present study were asked to rate how powerful they would feel if they engaged in each behavior using scales that ranged from 1 (not at all powerful) to 5 (very powerful), as well as how sexually arousing each behavior would be for them using scales that ranged from 1 (not at all sexually arousing) to 5 (very sexually arousing).

3. Results

The means, standard deviations, and intercorrelations are presented in Table 1. Narcissistic admiration had medium positive correlations with narcissistic rivalry, the average level of perceived power across the aggressive sexual behaviors, and the average level of subjective arousal across the aggressive sexual behaviors. Narcissistic rivalry had medium positive correlations with the average levels of perceived power and subjective arousal across the aggressive sexual behaviors. There was a large positive correlation between the average levels of perceived power and subjective arousal across the aggressive sexual behaviors.

Table 1. Intercorrelations and descriptive statistics.

	1	2	3	4
1. Narcissistic Admiration	—			
2. Narcissistic Rivalry	0.50 *	—		
3. Average Perceived Power	0.34 *	0.40 *	—	
4. Average Subjective Arousal	0.33 *	0.31 *	0.71 *	—
Mean	2.94	2.18	2.02	2.13
Standard Deviation	1.05	1.02	0.72	0.58

* $p < 0.001$.

Our hypotheses were consistent with an indirect effects model such that the associations that narcissistic admiration and narcissistic rivalry had with subjective arousal for particular sexual acts were believed to be a function, at least in part, of the perceived power that accompanied each of these acts. As a result, a multilevel mediation analysis was conducted using the MLMED macro [73]. The data constituted a multilevel data structure because observations at one level of analysis were nested within another level of analysis (i.e., responses concerning specific sexual acts were nested within individuals; [74]), so it required a multilevel analysis to account for the violation of the independence assumption that occurs with a nested data structure. MLMED accounts for within-person and between-person variability and estimates all of the parameters in the model simultaneously [74–76]. More specifically, this was a 2-1-1 model (i.e., the predictor variables were simultaneously entered at Level 2, whereas the mediator and the outcome variable were both at Level 1) that used person-centering for the mediator. MLMED uses Monte Carlo simulation

to estimate the indirect effects by generating 95% confidence intervals (CIs) using 10,000 resamples. Indirect effects were considered to be significant if the CIs did not contain zero.

The results of the multilevel mediation analysis are presented in Figure 1. These analyses revealed that narcissistic admiration ($a_1 = 0.14$, $SE = 0.05$, $t = 2.79$, $p = 0.006$, $CI_{95\%} [0.04, 0.23]$) and narcissistic rivalry ($a_2 = 0.23$, $SE = 0.05$, $t = 4.61$, $p < 0.001$, $CI_{95\%} [0.13, 0.33]$) were both positively associated with the perception of power. In turn, the perception of power was positively associated with subjective arousal ($b = 0.54$, $SE = 0.04$, $t = 12.78$, $p < 0.001$, $CI_{95\%} [0.46, 0.63]$). Both narcissistic admiration ($c_1 = 0.13$, $SE = 0.04$, $t = 3.26$, $p = 0.001$, $CI_{95\%} [0.05, 0.21]$) and narcissistic rivalry ($c_2 = 0.12$, $SE = 0.04$, $t = 2.87$, $p = 0.005$, $CI_{95\%} [0.04, 0.20]$) had positive total associations with subjective arousal but neither narcissistic admiration ($c_1' = 0.06$, $SE = 0.03$, $t = 1.85$, $p = 0.07$, $CI_{95\%} [0.00, 0.12]$) nor narcissistic rivalry ($c_2' = -0.01$, $SE = 0.03$, $t = -0.20$, $p = 0.84$, $CI_{95\%} [-0.07, 0.06]$) had significant direct associations with subjective arousal when the perception of power was included in the model. However, both narcissistic admiration ($a_1b = 0.07$, $SE = 0.03$, $z = 2.72$, $p = 0.007$, $CI_{95\%} [0.02, 0.13]$) and narcissistic rivalry ($a_2b = 0.13$, $SE = 0.03$, $z = 4.32$, $p < 0.001$, $CI_{95\%} [0.07, 0.19]$) had indirect associations with subjective arousal through the perception of power.

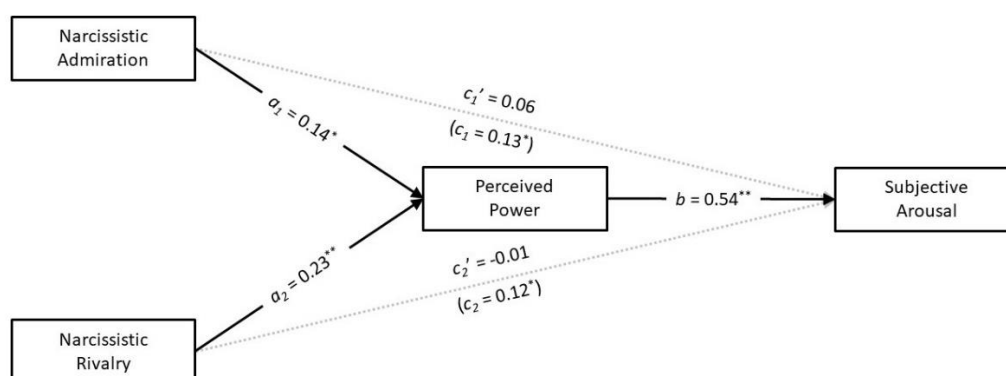


Figure 1. The results of the multilevel mediation analysis with perceived power mediating the associations that narcissistic admiration and narcissistic rivalry had with subjective arousal. Note. The solid black arrows represent significant associations, and the dotted grey lines represent nonsignificant associations. * $p < 0.01$; ** $p < 0.001$.

Gender differences have consistently been found for narcissism [77] and various factors connected with sexual arousal [78]. Further, gender has sometimes been found to moderate the associations that narcissism has with certain outcomes [79]. As a consequence, we conducted an exploratory analysis that included gender as a potential moderator of the indirect associations that narcissistic admiration and narcissistic rivalry had with subjective arousal through the perception of power. However, gender did not moderate these associations (i.e., there was no evidence of moderated mediation), nor were the reported results significantly altered by the inclusion of gender. That is, the indirect associations that narcissistic admiration and narcissistic rivalry had with subjective arousal in response to sexual aggression through perceived power were similar for men and women.

4. Discussion

The purpose of the present study was to examine whether the perceived power that accompanied sexual aggression mediated the associations that narcissistic personality features had with subjective arousal in response to sexually aggressive behaviors. We found support for our basic predictions. That is, both narcissistic admiration and narcissistic rivalry were positively associated with subjective arousal in response to imagining oneself engaging in sexual aggression, and these associations were mediated by the perceived power that was believed to accompany these sexually aggressive behaviors. This suggests that perceptions of power may play an important role in the connections that narcissistic personality features have with subjective arousal in response to sexually aggressive

behavior. Although similar patterns emerged for narcissistic admiration and narcissistic rivalry, these associations were somewhat stronger for narcissistic rivalry than they were for narcissistic admiration, which is similar to the results that have emerged for sexual aggression in previous studies [30].

Perceived power mediated the association that narcissistic admiration had with subjective arousal in response to sexual aggression, which is consistent with the possibility that this aspect of narcissism may be characterized by the desire to exert power over others in romantic contexts [80]. This pattern aligns with previous results showing narcissistic admiration to be associated with a willingness to resort to dominance-based strategies to gain power over others if less aversive strategies were unlikely to be successful [47]. This is also consistent with the idea that narcissistic admiration is characterized by an agentic orientation to social relationships [81], which may lead individuals to be so concerned about their own sexual desires and pleasure that they fail to consider the needs of others [82].

Narcissistic rivalry also had a positive association with subjective arousal in response to sexual aggression that was mediated by the perceived power of these sexually aggressive behaviors. This pattern suggests that narcissistic rivalry may predispose individuals to view sexually aggressive behaviors as demonstrations of power that, in turn, may lead to subjective arousal. This pattern is consistent with research showing narcissistic rivalry to be characterized by the desire to dominate others [47,80] and low levels of empathy [66,83,84] which may allow individuals to be sexually aroused by aggressive behavior. One potential interpretation of this pattern is that narcissistic rivalry may promote the sexual objectification of others rather than recognizing that others have their own needs and concerns. These results are also consistent with previous studies showing that individuals with high levels of narcissistic rivalry tend to use aversive strategies (e.g., intimidation, threat of physical force) with their romantic partners in order to achieve their goals [68,79,80]. It may be beneficial for future studies to consider more closely the roles that narcissistic personality features and perceived power may play in the behaviors of sexual offenders. For example, these results may provide additional insights into understanding why individuals may engage in behaviors such as rape that are targeted at either other adults or children.

Our results showed that perceived power played an important role in understanding the connections that narcissistic admiration and narcissistic rivalry had with subjective arousal in response to sexual aggression. This pattern is consistent with the explanation that sexual aggression is at least partially motivated by the *desire to exert power over others* [85,86]. Extreme forms of this power-based explanation for sexual aggression, which are often preferred by feminist scholars, suggest that the sexual nature of these behaviors is not motivationally relevant (i.e., sexual aggression is about power rather than sex). However, another explanation for sexual aggression, which is often preferred by evolutionary psychologists, is that these behaviors are often motivated by the *desire to obtain sex* [87–90]. For example, sexually aggressive behaviors—including rape—may be viewed as strategies that allow individuals to satisfy their sexual desires. Although these perspectives are often viewed as competing explanations for sexual aggression, it is possible that these explanations may actually complement each other such that *both* sex and power play a role in motivating some forms of sexual aggression [11]. Our results may be consistent with this combined perspective because the belief that sexually aggressive behaviors would enhance feelings of power were strongly associated with the subjective arousal that individuals anticipated experiencing if they actually engaged in those behaviors.

Our results revealed that gender did not moderate the indirect associations that narcissistic admiration and narcissistic rivalry had with subjective arousal to sexual aggression through perceived power. This pattern is consistent with the results of previous studies showing that narcissism is associated with various aspects of sexual aggression for both men and women [23,30–32]. However, it is still important for future research to consider the possibility that gender may moderate the associations that narcissistic personality features have with certain aspects of sexual aggression. For example, it has been argued that sexual

aggression is often used by men to assert control over another person, whereas women may use similar behaviors to establish a connection with another person [28]. It would be informative for future studies to examine whether narcissistic men and narcissistic women view sexual aggression as a means for establishing control over others or consider it to be a way to potentially build connections with others. It is also important to note that previous studies using pornographic stimuli have often found the largest gender differences in sexual arousal, with men reporting higher levels of arousal than women [91]. As a result, it would be informative for future studies concerning this topic to use more sexually explicit stimuli (e.g., video clips of sexually aggressive behaviors) in order to determine whether the associations that narcissistic personality features have with power and sexual arousal would be stronger for men than women under those conditions.

The present research focused exclusively on the connections that narcissistic personality features had with sexual arousal in response to inflicting sexual aggression on another person. It may be informative for future studies to examine whether narcissism is also linked with sexual arousal in response to being the recipient of sexual aggression. There has been speculation about a possible connection between certain aspects of narcissism and masochistic features such as the desire to be victimized or to have someone else in control of one's life [92–94], but there is little evidence showing that narcissism is associated with sexual masochism or a desire to be sexually dominated by another individual. Future research could clarify whether narcissistic individuals are generally aroused by sexual encounters that involve power differentials or if their arousal is limited only to those sexual encounters in which they are able to exert power over someone else.

It is important to acknowledge some of the limitations of the present study. The first limitation is that the correlational nature of the present research prevents us from determining the direction of causality between narcissistic personality features, perceptions of power, and subjective arousal in response to sexual aggression. There are various issues and limitations regarding the use of cross-sectional mediational analyses, such as those employed in the present study [95–97]. We adopted a process model for the present study that assumed narcissistic personality features would foster an interpretation of sexually aggressive behaviors as being indicative of social power, which, in turn, would promote subjective arousal in response to sexual aggression. Although the present results provided support for the expected associations, these results do not necessarily demonstrate the sort of causal pattern implied by mediation because other causal patterns could certainly exist between these variables. For example, it is possible that the tendency to be sexually aroused by aggressive behavior may actually precede the perception of sexually aggressive behaviors as reflecting power. As a result, it will be important for future research to gain a better understanding of the causal connections between these variables by employing experimental designs or longitudinal studies.

The second limitation is that we relied exclusively on self-report instruments, which may have allowed the present results to be influenced by factors such as socially desirable responses. This leaves open the possibility, for example, that some participants may have been reluctant to admit that they were aroused by sexually aggressive behavior. This is an issue that frequently emerges in research concerning paraphilic interests in which individuals are sexually aroused by atypical targets (e.g., children, articles of clothing) or activities (e.g., engaging in sexually aggressive behaviors, watching an unsuspecting person). One approach to dealing with the limitations of self-report instruments in these situations has been to employ physiological indicators of sexual arousal (e.g., using a penile plethysmograph to measure blood flow to the penis during exposure to certain types of stimuli). However, there are sometimes complex associations between subjective sexual arousal and physiological indicators of sexual arousal [98–101]. For example, there is often greater correspondence between subjective sexual arousal and physiological sexual arousal in men than in women [102]. Despite the complexities involved with physiological indicators of sexual arousal, future research would almost certainly benefit from supplementing the sort of subjective sexual arousal measure used in the present study with strategies that

do not rely exclusively on self-report instruments (e.g., using a plethysmograph to capture physiological indicators of sexual arousal rather than relying completely on subjective reports of arousal).

The third limitation is that we distinguished between narcissistic admiration and narcissistic rivalry, but there are other aspects of narcissism that may also have connections with responses to sexually aggressive behaviors such as sexual narcissism (which is characterized by the activation of narcissistic processes in sexual situations; [21,103]), neurotic narcissism (which is characterized by negative affectivity and distress; [65]), and communal narcissism (which is characterized by attempts to emphasize superiority over others through the exaggeration of communal characteristics; [104]). For example, it is possible that sexual narcissism, which is linked with the perpetration of sexual aggression [21], may have strong associations with subjective arousal in response to sexually aggressive behaviors. Future studies concerning the connections between narcissism and sexual aggression may benefit from including these other aspects of narcissism.

The fourth limitation is that our sample consisted of individuals from the United States and was composed predominantly of heterosexual White individuals. Although we did not find any evidence that demographic factors had a substantial impact on the present results (e.g., gender did not moderate the results), it would be beneficial for future studies to include samples with greater diversity in terms of culture, sexual orientation, and racial/ethnic background. It is also important to acknowledge that our sample was, at best, modest in size. Future research concerning the role that power plays in the connections between narcissistic personality features and arousal in response to sexual aggression would benefit from utilizing larger and more diverse samples drawn from a variety of cultures. Despite these limitations, the results of the present study expand the current understanding of the role that power may play in the connection between narcissistic personality features and sexual arousal in response to sexual aggression.

5. Conclusions

The present study examined whether the associations that narcissistic personality features had with subjective arousal in response to sexual aggression were due, at least in part, to the feelings of power that were believed to accompany sexually aggressive behaviors. Our results showed that narcissistic admiration and narcissistic rivalry had similar indirect associations with subjective arousal in response to sexual aggression through the perceived power of these behaviors. This suggests that issues surrounding power may play an important role in the connections that narcissistic personality features have with certain aspects of sexual aggression.

Author Contributions: Conceptualization, V.Z.-H.; methodology, V.Z.-H.; data collection, V.Z.-H.; data analysis, V.Z.-H.; writing—original draft preparation, V.Z.-H. and D.A.; writing—review and editing, V.Z.-H. and D.A. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Institutional Review Board Statement: The study was conducted according to the guidelines of the Declaration of Helsinki and approved by the Institutional Review Board of Oakland University (protocol code #1146046 [11.15.2017]).

Informed Consent Statement: Informed consent was obtained from all subjects involved in the study.

Data Availability Statement: The data presented in this study are openly available on the Open Science Framework (OSF) at <https://osf.io/nhm5q/> (Accessed date: 22 April 2021).

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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