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ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Gender Differences in Narcissism and Courtship Violence in Dating Couples

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Abstract The current study explored the relationship between courtship violence and the exploitativeness/entitlement factor of overt narcissism, covert narcissism, and sexual narcissism. Data were analyzed from 63 currently dating couples on their own and partner's aggression using the CTS2. All were white, heterosexual students from a small US college in Central Pennsylvania. An interdependence analysis showed that correlations were entirely explained at the individual-level, thus demonstrating that gender is a key element in understanding narcissism and courtship violence. For women, exploitativeness/ entitlement was significantly correlated with sexual coercion in both dating partners. For men, covert narcissism was correlated with physical assault and sexual narcissism was correlated with their partner's sexual coercion. Narcissism also influenced some discrepancies in self- and partner-rated aggression.

Keywords Narcissism · Courtship violence · Sexual aggression

Introduction

The current study explored the role of narcissism in courtship violence in heterosexual dating couples. Narcissists are likely to react to disappointment with shame and rage, which can lead to aggression and a desire for revenge (Kohut 1978). This suggests that narcissists might be more likely to engage in courtship violence. However, given narcissists' tendency toward defensive self-enhancement (Raskin et al. 1991), they might also minimize or distort inappropriate behavior and their assessments of courtship violence may not be reliable. Thus, the current study employed data from both members of currently dating couples concerning courtship violence. Moreover, because there appear to be different forms of narcissism, the current study assessed three different types of narcissism. Finally, the data were analyzed using the interdependence analysis of Gonzalez and Griffin (1997, 1999).

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Courtship Violence

Courtship violence is the use of physical aggression, sexual aggression, and/or sexual coercion in dating relationships. Lifetime prevalence rates for physical aggression for college students run from 17% to 66%, with approximately one-third of men and 40% of women acknowledging their own use of physical aggression (Sugarman and Hotaling 1989). Research also suggests that approximately one in four college women is the victim of rape or attempted rape and that most of these acts occur in the context of dating relationships (e.g., Koss et al. 1988; Koss 1992; White and Koss 1993). Sexual coercion is even more common than sexual aggression (e.g., Koss et al. 1985, 1987). Thus, courtship is a period when aggression can and does occur. In addition, it is clear that both genders engage in both forms of aggression, although women may be more likely than men to acknowledge the use of physical aggression (Archer 2000; Sugarman and Hotaling 1989) and men may be more likely than women to acknowledge the use of

sexual coercion (Byers and O'Sullivan 1998). Moreover, women and men may have different motives, perceptions, and predictors of courtship violence (Ryan et al. 1999; Sugarman and Hotaling 1989). For example, men may show more instrumental aggression and women may show more hostile aggression (Ryan et al. 1999). Finally, relationships do not necessarily end when physical or sexual aggression is used (Koss 1992; Ryan et al. 1999; Warshaw 1988). Courtship violence is of research interest in its own right, but it is also interesting because of the potential links to later domestic violence.

Research on courtship violence has explored many potential causes and consequences of physical aggression by men and women in dating relationships (e.g., Ryan et al. 1999; Sugarman and Hotaling 1989). Potential correlates of physical aggression include favorable attitudes toward violence, level of commitment in the relationship, and personality variables (e.g., self-esteem) (Sugarman and Hotaling 1989). In contrast, most of the research on sexual aggression or coercion focuses on the characteristics of men who engage in the behavior and the consequences for its (female) victims (e.g., Allison and Wrightsman 1993; Craig 1990; Wiehe and Richards 1995). Nevertheless, research primarily on men has shown that physical aggression and sexual aggression or coercion share some correlates, including patriarchal group membership (e.g., Craig 1990; DeKeseredy and Kelly 1993; Schwartz and DeKeseredy 1997) and a hostile and dominant attitude toward female sexuality (e.g., Craig 1990; Emmers-Sommer and Allen 1999; Malamuth et al. 1995). The current study will explore the relationship between narcissism and courtship violence, including both physical assault and sexual coercion.

Narcissism

Narcissistic Personality Disorder is described in the DSM-IV-TR as involving a grandiose self-image, the need for admiration, and a lack of empathy (APA 2000). Some of the features of Narcissistic Personality Disorder can be found at lower levels in many people; thus, narcissism can also be described as a normally-distributed personality characteristic (e.g., Emmons 1984, 1987; Raskin and Terry 1988). Narcissism frequently involves arrogance, a sense of entitlement, and the willingness to exploit others, and it correlates with dominance and aggression (e.g., Emmons 1984; Raskin and Terry 1988; Sturman 2000).

Narcissistic grandiosity and sense of superiority may be a defense against underlying self-doubt, as the self-reported high self-esteem of narcissists tends to be coupled with implicit, presumably nonconscious, low self-esteem (Jordan et al. 2003; Zeigler-Hill 2006). Thus, the inflated sense of self of overt narcissists tends to be unstable and particularly susceptible to injury in the presence of negative interpersonal experiences (Rhodewalt et al. 1998). The narcissist's unstable self-concept leads to the need for constant admiration and to relationships that are "characterized by conflict, intense emotions, and instability" (Rhodewalt and Sorrow 2003, p. 531). In their need to confirm their grandiose self-image, narcissists may engage in behaviors that undermine their self-assessment (Mischel and Morf 2003). And, in narcissists' need for constant positive feedback, they may unintentionally elicit negative feedback that injures their fragile self-concepts. Thus, narcissists express both excessive grandiosity and extreme vulnerability. This is the narcissist's dilemma.

Given the need to protect an unstable self-image, narcissists may exhibit extreme reactions when their grandiose self-concept is threatened (Baumeister et al. 2000). Narcissists report greater dispositional hostility and vengeance (e.g., Brown 2004; Rhodewalt and Morf 1995). Furthermore, in laboratory studies, they show more anger and aggression in response to insult (Baumeister et al. 2000; Bushman and Baumeister 1998) and social rejection (Twenge and Campbell 2003). Such aggression in response to negative interpersonal feedback may be, in part, a result of their inability to control the impulse to retaliate when faced with ego threat (Vazire and Funder 2006). Given the potentially tumultuous and ego-threatening nature of intimate relationships, and the exploitativeness, lack of empathy, impulsivity, and tendency toward hostile retaliation of overt narcissists, it is not surprising that narcissism has been associated with spouse-abuse recidivism (Hamberger and Hastings 1990) and domestic violence in both men and women (Beasley and Stoltenberg 1992; Craig 2003; Simmons et al. 2005). The first goal of the present study was to determine whether narcissism also predicts violence in college dating relationships.

Narcissism has, in fact, been demonstrated to be a multidimensional construct that involves both healthy and maladaptive characteristics. For example, Raskin and Terry (1988) found seven components of narcissism, including authority and self-sufficiency, as well as vanity and exploitativeness. Emmons (1984, 1987) found four factors in narcissism: exploitativeness/entitlement, leadership/authority, superiority/arrogance, and self-absorption/self-admiration. Exploitativeness and entitlement appear to reflect the more maladaptive aspects of narcissism (Raskin and Novacek 1989). Unlike other dimensions of narcissism, which tend to correlate positively with self-esteem and other indicators of psychological health, the exploitativeness/entitlement factor is uncorrelated with self-esteem (e.g., Watson et al. 1992). Furthermore, exploitativeness/entitlement is associated with a host of negative interpersonal behaviors, including a lack of empathy (e.g., Emmons 1984, 1987; Ruiz et al. 2001; Watson et al. 1984), which seems to involve both lack of concern for others as well as

difficulty understanding the perspectives of others (Watson et al. 1992). In addition, the exploitativeness/entitlement dimension of narcissism is strongly associated with the frequency of perceived interpersonal transgressions and an unwillingness to forgive dating partners (Exline et al. 2004; McCullough et al. 2003).

Narcissism has also been proposed as an explanation for date rape (Baumeister and Catanese 2001; Baumeister et al. 2002). Narcissism is associated with greater acceptance of rape myths, less empathy for rape victims, greater enjoyment of a film that showed consensual affectionate behavior followed by a rape, and greater vengeance toward a female model who refused to complete the reading of a sexually arousing excerpt (Bushman et al. 2003). It is the narcissistic sense of entitlement with its associated lack of empathy which may result in greater reactance and possible date rape following a sexual refusal (Bushman et al. 2003). Thus, it was predicted that the exploitativeness/entitlement dimension of narcissism would be positively correlated with physical assault and sexual coercion in the current study.

Covert Narcissism

Another form of narcissism is covert narcissism. Unlike overt narcissism, which is associated with conscious grandiosity and unconscious shame, covert (or closet) narcissism is associated with conscious shame and unconscious grandiosity (Wright et al. 1989). Based upon clinical reports and empirical findings, covert narcissism has been described as involving outward expression of low self-esteem, anxiety, and hypersensitivity, but underlying attitudes of superiority revealed in grandiose fantasies and self-expectations (e.g., Wink 1991). Covert narcissism involves the same sense of entitlement and exploitativeness (Hendin and Cheek 1997) and hostility as overt narcissism (Rathvon and Holmstrom 1996), but is inversely related to self-esteem (e.g., Rose 2002). Baumeister and colleagues have argued that narcissistic individuals are not more aggressive in general, but, rather, tend to react to criticism or interpersonal slight by aggressing toward the source of that slight (Baumeister et al. 2000; Bushman and Baumeister 1998). Given that hypersensitivity to interpersonal slight is a primary feature of covert narcissism (Wink 1991) and the strong potential for experiencing interpersonal slights in dating relationships, it is possible that covert narcissism is related to courtship violence. Thus, it was predicted that covert narcissism would be positively correlated with physical assault and sexual coercion in the current study.

Sexual Narcissism

Sexual narcissism may be a third form of narcissism; however, it has been studied less than overt and covert narcissism. Sexual narcissism has been described as an egocentric pattern of sexual behavior that involves both low self-esteem and an inflated sense of sexual ability and sexual entitlement (Hurlbert et al. 1994). Although sexual narcissists tend to have negative attitudes toward sex and low levels of sexual satisfaction and sexual assertiveness (Hurlbert and Apt 1991), they are also preoccupied with sex and have high sexual esteem and a sense of entitlement about sex (Wryobeck and Wiederman 1999). This is a pattern similar to that found in acquaintance rapists who reported enjoying sex less than a comparison group of men but also reported having more sex and showed a history of sexual exploitation and excessive sexual preoccupation (Kanin 1985). Given the sexually-related sense of entitlement of sexual narcissism and the potential for reactance when sex is refused (Bushman et al. 2003), sexual narcissism may be an even stronger predictor of sexual coercion than the other two forms of narcissistic entitlement. In addition, sexual narcissism has also been tied to domestic violence in men (Hurlbert and Apt 1991). Thus, it was predicted that sexual narcissism would be positively correlated with physical assault and sexual coercion in the current study.

Gender Differences

Gender is an important factor in the expression of narcissism (e.g., Philipson 1985; Richman and Flaherty 1990). For example, men may be more likely than women to express overt narcissism. In contrast, women may "meet their narcissistic goals through more subtle, indirect, and affiliative means that conform to expectations of their sex role" (Morf and Rhodewalt 2001, p. 191). Richman and Flaherty (1990) found that men scored higher than women on several items in the Narcissistic Traits Scale, including items reflecting exploitativeness, entitlement, and a lack of empathy. In addition, Tschanz et al. (1998) found that exploitativeness/entitlement showed lower correlations with the other narcissism factors in women than in men. This suggests that exploitativeness and entitlement may be less common in women and less central to their narcissism. However, Simmons and colleagues (Simmons et al. 2005) found higher rates of clinically-elevated narcissistic personality styles in women than in men arrested for intimate partner violence. Thus, the current study explored potential gender differences in narcissism and in the relationship between narcissism and courtship violence.

In summary, the current study explored the role of three types of narcissism in courtship violence among college student dating couples. Given the likelihood that persons may over- or under-rate their own and/or their partner's violence, and the possibility that distorted ratings might be related to narcissism, data were gathered from both

members of dating couples. The availability of reports from both partners allowed for exploration of discrepant reporting and the association between narcissism and discrepant reports, as well as the association between narcissism and courtship violence and whether this can be explained at the individual- or at the couples-level.

Based on previous research, two hypotheses were tested:

1. The exploitativeness/entitlement dimension of narcissism, covert narcissism, and sexual narcissism are correlated with physical assault and sexual coercion in men and women.
2. The exploitativeness/entitlement dimension of narcissism, covert narcissism, and sexual narcissism are related to potential distortions in reporting aggression (i.e., the under-reporting or the over-reporting of aggression relative to their partners).

Finally, an interdependence analysis was performed to assess whether aggression and/or the relationship between narcissism and aggression operate at the level of the individual or at the couple-level.

Method

Participants

There were 70 couples from a small US college in central Pennsylvania who participated in the current study. All were self-described as in a "serious dating relationship." All were white and heterosexual. All were college students who responded to posters advertising a study on "conflict in serious dating relationships." The data from four couples had to be discarded, since their data on physical assault and sexual coercion were incomplete, and the data from three more couples had to be discarded, since their data on the narcissism measures were incomplete; this left 63 couples on which data were available. Most were between the age of 18 and 22. They knew each other an average of 24.31 months (SD=18.37) and they were dating an average of 15.96 months (SD=12.38). Each couple was paid $30 for their participation.

Materials

Exploitativeness/Entitlement

The exploitativeness/entitlement factor of Overt Narcissism was measured by summing 11 items (Emmons 1984) from the 54-item Narcissistic Personality Inventory (NPI; Raskin and Hall 1979). The NPI was developed to assess normal levels of narcissism in the general population. The items are forced-choice items based on DSM-III (APA 1980) criteria for Narcissistic Personality Disorder. This version of the NPI was selected because of relatively good subscale reliabilities (Emmons 1984). Items that assess the exploitation/entitlement factor of the NPI include: "I will never be satisfied until I get all that I deserve," "I expect a great deal from other people," and "I find it easy to manipulate people." Although the exploitativeness/entitlement factor seems to tap an even more maladaptive aspect of narcissism when variance due to the other three NPI factors is partialled out (e.g., Watson et al. 1992, 1988), the partialling also makes the factor more closely related to a measure of covert narcissism (see Watson et al. 1987). Consequently, we chose to retain the original measure of exploitativeness/entitlement. The Cronbach's alpha was .65 in the current study. Although this alpha is low, it is consistent with alphas reported in several other studies (e.g., McCullough et al. 2003; Rose 2002; Sturman 2000).

Covert Narcissism

Covert narcissism was measured by summing the ten-item Hypersensitive Narcissism Scale (HSNS; Hendin and Cheek 1997). This ten-item scale was developed by retaining the ten items from Murray's Narcissism Scale (Murray 1938) that were positively correlated with a composite of two MMPI-based measures of covert narcissism. Items include: "My feelings are easily hurt by ridicule or by the slighting remarks of others," "I often interpret the remarks of others in a personal way," and "I feel that I have enough on my hands without worrying about other people's troubles." Internal consistency estimates have been above .70 in multiple samples, and the scale correlates negatively with extraversion but positively with neuroticism (Hendin and Cheek 1997), a pattern reflecting the nature of covert narcissism. The Cronbach's alpha for Covert Narcissism was .75 in the current study.

Sexual Narcissism

Sexual narcissism was measured by the Hurlbert Index of Sexual Narcissism (HISN; Hurlbert et al. 1994). The HISN is a 25-item measure of sexual narcissism. It includes statements such as, "In sex, I like to be the one in charge," "My partner has difficulty understanding my sexual needs," and "In general, most people take sex too seriously." All items are rated on a five-point Likert scale and summed for a total score. Scores range from 0–100 with higher scores indicating greater sexual narcissism. According to Hurlbert and his colleagues, the scale shows good internal consistency and test-retest reliability. The Cronbach's alpha for Sexual Narcissism was .82 in the current study

Physical Assault and Sexual Coercion were measured by the Revised Conflict Tactics Scale (CTS2; Straus et al.

1996). The CTS2 has been shown to be a reliable and valid measure of relationship violence. In the CTS2, individuals respond to each item for their own behavior and their partner's behavior. The subscales of the CTS2 include physical assault, sexual coercion, psychological aggression, and partner injury. Partner Injury could not be used as a subscale in the current study because of insufficient internal reliability (α=.32), probably due to the lack of endorsement of the injury items.

Each item on the CTS2 was rated for frequency of occurrence: 0 = "this never happened," 1 = "once in the past year," 2 = "twice in the past year," 3 = "3–5 times in the past year," 4 = "6–10 times in the past year," 5 = "11–20 times in the past year," 6 = "more than 20 times in the past year," and 7 = "not in the past year, but it happened before." For the purpose of the current analyses, a response of 7 was coded as 0. Each item was rated first for oneself and then for one's partner. In the current study, CTS2 ratings were summed and then averaged for each person's ratings of themselves and their partners' ratings of them.

Physical Assault

Physical assault was measured by 12 items in the CTS2. These items include: "I threw something at my partner that could hurt," "I twisted my partner's arm or hair," "I pushed or shoved my partner," and "I punched or hit my partner with something that could hurt." There were also 12 parallel items reflecting partners' ratings of the participants' physical aggression. The alpha for physical assault was .74 in the current study.

Sexual Coercion

Sexual coercion was measured by the seven sexual coercion items in the CTS2. These items include: "I made my partner have sex without a condom," "I insisted on sex when my partner did not want to (but did not use physical force)," and "I insisted my partner have oral or anal sex (but did not use physical force)." There were also parallel items reflecting their partners' ratings of the participants' sexual coercion. The alpha for sexual coercion was .61 in the current study.

Procedure

Posters advertising a study of conflict in serious dating relationships were displayed throughout the college campus. The study was run by a blind experimenter. Individual couples who contacted the experimenter were scheduled to be run at the same time; however, they were placed in different rooms in order to ensure confidentiality. They responded to the questionnaires individually, but were debriefed as a couple. During the debriefing, they were asked to sign a form in which they promised not to pressure their partner to discuss the study. They were also given the names and phone numbers of individuals they could contact on the campus if any problems arose as a product of their having participated in the study (the list included the campus ministers and campus counselors, as well as the investigators).

Results

Some preliminary analyses were done prior to testing the hypotheses. Paired-sample *t*-tests were run on the differences in self-rated and partner-rated physical assault and sexual coercion in men and women. Out of 12 tests, only three significant gender differences emerged. Female participants rated their own sexual coercion (M=1.14) lower than they rated their partner's sexual coercion (M=1.70; t (65)=−1.97, p=.05) and they rated their own physical assault (M=2.36) higher than they rated their partner's physical assault (M=1.68; t (65)=2.61, p=.01). Female participants also rated their own sexual coercion (M=1.14) significantly lower than did their male partners (M=1.98; t (65)=−1.98, p=.05).

In addition, Pearson correlations were run between male and female participants' self-rated and partner-rated physical assault and sexual coercion. All of the ratings of physical assault were significantly correlated (see Table 1). No statistically significant difference between men and women was found in either the correlations between rating oneself and rating one's partner or the correlations between rating oneself and one's rating by their partner. However, men and women showed higher correlations between the physical assault ratings given by individuals both for themselves and their partners than for self and partner ratings of the same person. These correlations were found to be significantly different using tests recommended by Steiger (1980). All of the ratings of sexual coercion were also significantly correlated (see Table 2). Again, no statistically significant difference between men and women was found in either the correlations between rating oneself and rating one's partner or the correlations between rating oneself and one's rating by their partner. In addition, men and women showed higher correlations between the sexual coercion ratings given by individuals both for themselves and their partners than for self and partner ratings of the same person.

The instructions of Gonzalez and Griffin (1997, 1999) were employed to analyze the interdependence of self ratings and partner ratings of physical assault and sexual coercion among the couples. Because all of the couples in the current study were heterosexual, the analyses for distinguishable dyads were used. An interdependence analysis assesses how much of the correlation between self ratings and partner ratings could be explained on the

Table 1 The correlations between self-rated and partner-rated physical assault for men and women.

	Women's self-rated physical assault	Women's ratings of their partner's physical assault	Men's self-rated physical assault
Women's ratings of their partner's physical assault	84**		
Men's self-rated physical assault	.32**	.50**	
Men's ratings of their partner's physical assault	.47**	.68**	.87**

N=66 couples
**$p<.01$

individual level and how much could be explained on the couples level. In order to separate the correlation between one variable for a partner and another variable for the other partner into the couple-level correlation and the individual-level correlation, the couple-level correlation must be meaningful. The couple-level correlation can only be meaningful when there are a substantial number of couples where both partners are alike on each variable (i.e., both high or both low). If the intraclass correlation, which measures similarity between partners, is not sufficiently large for each of the variables relative to the other correlations, then the couple-level correlation cannot be meaningful. In the current study, the intraclass correlation to measure similarity between partners was not sufficiently large to be meaningful for any of the aggression rating variables, any of the narcissism measures, or any of the aggression measures. Consequently, the results of the interdependence analysis showed that the correlations were entirely explained at the individual-level.

Data were averaged across self-ratings and partner ratings for physical assault and sexual coercion. Paired sample *t*-tests were run to assess potential gender differences in all of the major variables (see Table 3). The *t*-tests revealed three significant gender differences. Men were higher than women in sexual narcissism and sexual coercion, and women were higher than men in physical assault.

Associations between Narcissism and Aggression (Hypothesis 1)

Results showed statistically significant correlations in the ratings of physical assault and sexual coercion between men and women (see Tables 1 and 2). However, the interdependence analysis showed that correlations were entirely explained at the individual-level.

Because the data from the men and women are not independent (i.e., they are actively dating couples), their data cannot be combined, in spite of the fact that these correlations were not statistically significantly different for men and women (Gonzalez and Griffin 1999). Thus, correlations were run between narcissism and the averaged aggression scores for men and women separately (see Table 4). Hypothesis 1 predicted that the exploitativeness/entitlement dimension of overt narcissism, covert narcissism, and sexual narcissism would be positively correlated with physical assault and sexual coercion. Results showed that, in women, exploitativeness/entitlement was positively correlated with sexual coercion in both dating partners (i.e., women with higher levels of exploitativeness/entitlement were more sexually coercive and their partners were more sexually coercive). However, neither covert narcissism nor sexual narcissism significantly correlated with the aggression measures in women. In contrast, for men, covert narcissism significantly correlated with physical assault and sexual narcissism significantly correlated with their partner's sexual coercion. However, exploitativeness/entitlement was not significantly correlated with the aggression measures in men.

Correlations between the narcissism measures were also run. In women, exploitativeness/entitlement significantly correlated with covert narcissism ($r=.29$, $p=.02$), but not sexual narcissism ($r=.12$, $p=.34$). And, sexual narcissism did not correlate with covert narcissism (r=.01, $p=.93$). In men, covert narcissism significantly correlated with sexual narcissism ($r=.30$, $p=.02$) and exploitativeness/entitlement

Table 2 The correlations between self-rated and partner-rated sexual coercion for men and women.

	Women's self-rated sexual coercion	Women's ratings of their partner's sexual coercion	Men's self-rated sexual coercion
Women's ratings of their partner's sexual coercion	.72**		
Men's self-rated sexual coercion	.26*	.48**	
Men's ratings of their partner's sexual coercion	.29*	.34**	.75**

N=66 couples
*$p<.05$, **$p<.01$

Table 3 Gender differences in narcissism, physical assault, and sexual coercion.

	Females	Males	*t*
Exploitativeness /entitlement (0–10)	2.54 (2.11)	3.29 (2.27)	−1.82
Covert narcissism (11–42)	26.73 (6.38)	26.32 (5.86)	.42
Sexual narcissism (12–73)	33.87 (9.95)	37.98 (12.51)	−2.17*
Physical assault (0–20)	2.04 (3.44)	1.61 (3.65)	2.17*
Sexual coercion (0–14)	1.38 (2.16)	1.81 (2.79)	1.97*

Ranges are in parentheses after the scale names. Standard Deviations are in parentheses after the means. The possible endpoints are 0–11 for exploitativeness /entitlement, 10–50 for covert narcissism, 0–100 for sexual narcissism, 0–72 for physical assault and 0–42 for sexual Coercion. N=63
*p<.05

(r=.56, p<.001). And, sexual narcissism also significantly correlated with exploitativeness/entitlement (r=.42, p=.001). Finally, there were no statistically significant correlations between the men and women on any of the narcissism measures (all of the correlations were between −.10 and .19, p>.10).

Narcissism and Discrepancy in Aggression Ratings (Hypothesis 2)

In order to assess the potential for distorted perceptions of aggression, discrepancy scores were created. They were calculated by subtracting self-rated physical assault from partner-rated physical assault and self-rated sexual coercion from partner-rated sexual coercion. The discrepancy scores were calculated separately for men and women. Paired *t*-tests showed no statistically significant gender differences in discrepancy scores.

Hypothesis 2 predicted that the exploitativeness/entitlement dimension of overt narcissism, covert narcissism, and sexual narcissism would be correlated with distortions in self-rated versus partner-rated aggression (see Table 5). When focusing on the relationship between narcissism and one's own aggression, positive correlations are indicative of the relative under-reporting of one's own aggression (or one's partner over-reporting your aggression) and negative numbers are associated with the relative over-reporting of one's own aggression (or partner's under-reporting your aggression). When focusing on the relationship between narcissism and partner's aggression, positive correlations are indicative of the relative over-reporting of their aggression (or one's partner under-reporting their own aggression) and negative numbers are associated with the relative under-reporting of their aggression (or partner's over-reporting of their own aggression). Results showed that sexual narcissism in women was correlated with the women's relative over-estimation of her own and her partner's sexual coercion. Exploitativeness was also positively correlated with the women's relative over-estimation of her partner's sexual coercion. In contrast, sexual narcissism in men was correlated with the men's relative over-estimation of his own and his partner's physical assault. In addition, covert narcissism also was correlated with the men's relative over-reporting of their own physical assault.

Discussion

The current study explored the complex relationship between narcissism, courtship violence, and gender in college students who were in self-defined serious dating relationships. Past research suggested that the exploitativeness/entitlement factor from the NPI, covert narcissism, and sexual narcissism were associated with problems in close relationships. The current study tested the prediction (hypothesis 1) that exploitativeness and entitlement, covert narcissism, and

Table 4 The correlations between Narcissism and physical assault and sexual coercion in men and women.

	Women's narcissism			Men's narcissism		
	Exploitativeness / entitlement	Covert narcissism	Sexual narcissism	Exploitativeness / entitlement	Covert narcissism	Sexual narcissism
Women's physical assault	.15	.01	−.01	.11	.09	.19
Men's physical assault	.15	.03	.04	.20	.27*	.24
Women's sexual coercion	.25*	.07	.19	.00	.02	.27*
Men's sexual coercion	.33**	.08	.18	.03	.04	.22

*p<.05, **p<.01

Table 5 The correlations between narcissism and discrepancies in self- and partner-reported physical assault and sexual coercion.

	Women's narcissism			Men's narcissism		
	Exploitativeness / entitlement	Covert narcissism	Sexual narcissism	Exploitativeness / entitlement	Covert narcissism	Sexual narcissism
Women's physical assault	−.15	.00	.08	.00	.18	.28*
Men's physical assault	−.10	−.02	−.06	−.03	−.28*	−.25*
Women's sexual coercion	−.12	−.06	−.32*	.07	−.01	.08
Men's sexual coercion	.33**	.07	.28*	−.20	.05	−.10

Discrepancy scores were calculated by subtracting self-ratings from partner ratings. When correlating aggression with women's narcissism, women are self and men are partner. When correlating aggression with men's narcissism, men are self and women are partner. Higher partner than self ratings are indicated by positive scores (i.e., the relative over-reporting of the partner), whereas higher self than partner ratings are indicated by negative scores (i.e., the relative over-reporting of the self)
*$p<.05$, **$p<.01$

sexual narcissism would be correlated with physical assault and sexual coercion in dating couples and the prediction (hypothesis 2) that exploitativeness and entitlement, covert narcissism, and sexual narcissism would be correlated with discrepancies in self- and partner-reported aggression.

Most importantly, interdependence analyses showed that courtship violence and the relationship between courtship violence and narcissism could not be explained at the level of the couple. This was because there were different patterns of correlations for men and women (i.e., the correlations between self- and partner-rated aggression and the correlations between narcissism and aggression). Thus, gender was a key element in understanding narcissism and courtship violence in heterosexual dating couples.

For example, gender influenced the correlations between narcissism and aggression. It was predicted that all three forms of narcissism would influence courtship violence. And, all three forms of narcissism were significantly intercorrelated in men (correlations from .30 to .56). However, only covert narcissism significantly correlated with men's physical assault, even though the correlation with each of the other two narcissism measures was on the same order. And, sexual narcissism significantly correlated with their partner's sexual coercion (see Table 4). Covert narcissism was also associated with the relative over-reporting of one's own physical assault in men. Thus, it is in light of this finding that the correlations between narcissism and aggression for men must be understood.

It is possible that covert narcissism pulled out as the only significant correlate of physical assault in men because of the covert narcissist's hypersensitivity to his own physical aggression, as well as his hypersensitivity to interpersonal slight. This could reflect his inflated view of his own power in the relationship. In addition, it may be likely that men who are hypersensitive to criticism might be more likely to be violence-prone in their relationships, if it is true that violence is a result of threatened egotism (Baumeister et al. 2000). The HSNS may have been the best measure of such hypersensitivity in men in the current study. Finally, because of the significant inter-correlations between the three narcissism measures, it is also possible that covert narcissism is associated with a constellation of characteristics in aggressive men that might also include a sense of entitlement and the willingness to exploit their partners.

There was also a significant relationship between sexual narcissism in men and their partner's sexual coercion (and a small but non-significant correlation with their own sexual coercion; see Table 4). This could be the result of defensive projection in which the men over-estimate their partner's sexual coercion in order to justify their own coercive behavior. However, this is not supported in the discrepancy analysis. Thus, it is unclear why sexually narcissistic men partner with more sexually coercive women. Perhaps sexually narcissistic men are attracted to sexually coercive women or sexually coercive women may be attracted to sexually narcissistic men. In addition, the men's sexual narcissism might create an atmosphere in the relationship in which both partners feel freer to engage in some sexually coercive behaviors. Nevertheless, results of the present study extend previous research that found a link between a narcissistic attitude toward sexual encounters and domestic violence in men (Hurlbert and Apt 1991). The current study also found a relationship between sexual narcissism and the relative over-reporting of physical assault (of both self and partner). Perhaps sexual narcissists over-report their partner's physical aggression in order to justify their own physical aggression. It is also possible that the over-reporting of physical assault may be a product of the men's acceptance of greater physical aggression in their relationships. Unfortunately, the current study did not include a measure of attitudes toward courtship violence, so we do not know if sexual narcissism was associated with more favorable attitudes.

In women, the exploitativeness/entitlement factor of the NPI was the only significant correlate of aggression (i.e., sexual coercion) and exploitativeness/entitlement signifi-

cantly correlated with covert narcissism but not with sexual narcissism. Exploitativeness/entitlement significantly correlated with both the women's and their current partner's sexual coercion. Moreover, exploitativeness/entitlement was also associated with the relative over-reporting of their partner's sexual coercion. Perhaps exploitative and entitled women are hypersensitive to their partner's potentially coercive behaviors and/or they could be attracted to more coercive men (men who do not recognize or acknowledge their own coercion). Alternately, sexually coercive men may be attracted to exploitative and entitled women. The current results are consistent with past research on men and women demonstrating the maladaptive nature of exploitativeness and entitlement (e.g., Raskin and Novacek 1989; Rhodewalt and Morf 1995) and the association between exploitativeness/entitlement in women and their own sexual victimization (Billingham et al. 1999). It is also consistent with the pattern of research that shows that sexually coercive women may have more anger, more hostility toward men, and more problems in their relationships (Christopher and Lloyd 2000). However, it is inconsistent with research that suggested that exploitativeness and entitlement would be less important in women's than in men's narcissism (e.g., Richman and Flaherty 1990; Tschanz et al. 1998). Exploitative and entitled women may feel that they are better than others, that their needs are more important than others, and that other people should fulfill their needs. This may lead these women to think that it is acceptable to use coercion to manipulate and control their partners and to be hypersensitive to their partner's perceived coercion. Future research should explore the relationship between narcissism and the preferred coercion tactics of women and men.

In addition, as previously noted, gender influenced the pattern of correlations between the different forms of narcissism. Sexual narcissism was significantly correlated with the other two measures of maladaptive narcissism in men, but not women. Thus, sexual narcissism might be a different variable in men than in women. Moreover, women showed significantly lower levels of sexual narcissism than men and believed they were less sexually coercive than men. Perhaps it is more socially acceptable for men to be sexually narcissistic and sexually coercive and this is reflected in the women's responses in the current study. This could reflect a deep-seated gender difference in sexuality or it could be due to a social desirability bias consistent with gender-role norms. Research shows that women report less overtly sexual behavior than men (Oliver and Hyde 1993). Future research should explore gender differences in sexually-related coercion and narcissism. Unfortunately, a social desirability measure was not included in the current study. So, we cannot address the role of social desirability bias in the current results.

Because the current study involved both partners in the dyad, an interdependence analysis was appropriate. There are several reasons for expecting an interdependence analysis to be particularly useful in analyzing courtship violence. First, much of courtship violence might be common-couple violence (e.g., Johnson and Ferraro 2000). Because of this, it is possible that the aggression lies within the couple, rather than within the individuals. This is supported by the common presence of reciprocity in courtship violence (e.g., Ryan et al. 1999; Sugarman and Hotaling 1989). Second, the structure of the most common assessment instrument for relationship violence, the CTS2, allows for the assessment of aggression for both partners in the relationship (Straus et al. 1996). However, because the CTS2 is usually given to individuals rather than couples, it is difficult to know whether reciprocity of violence in relationships is because of the individuals' perceptions of aggression (i.e., their unique "world view"), because of the individuals' unconscious desire to justify self-aggression by implicating their partner as equally aggressive, or because there really is reciprocal aggression in the relationship.

The separation of the correlations into individual-level correlations and couple-level correlations was not meaningful in the current study because there was not sufficient similarity between partners on their self-ratings or their partner ratings of aggression. Nevertheless, the data from both men and women reflected a pattern of very strong correlations between the individuals' ratings for their own and their partner's behavior (see Tables 1 and 2). These correlations were found to be significantly stronger than those arising from both partners' ratings of the same person. This suggests that the reciprocity of violence found in previous research on courtship may at least be partly due to the fact that the same individuals were usually responsible for both self- and partner-rated aggression. Furthermore, this may be exacerbated by the format of the CTS2, which has parallel items for self and partner next to each other. Future research should explore whether the sequence of the items on the CTS2 influences the amount of reported reciprocity in courtship violence in dating couples. Researchers could try grouping the items differently (i.e., all of the self items could be placed together and all of the partner items could be placed together, as was the case in the first version of the CTS (Straus 1979)). Researchers could also compare the data from both versions of the scale to see if there is more perceived reciprocity in courtship violence in the second version. Finally, it may be that the separation of the correlations into individual-level correlations and couple-level correlations is meaningful with couples who have been in the relationship for an extended period of time, say 10 or more years. The couples in the current study were only dating for a few years at most, and consequently there may not have been sufficient

time for their interaction with one another to give rise to couples level correlations.

Limitations of the study include the fact that all of the couples were white, relatively young, and heterosexual. Moreover, the nature of the participant population at the college where the data were collected would suggest that most of the current participants were middle class. In addition, there may have been a selection bias because the study was advertised as one on "conflict in serious dating relationships." Couples who experienced no conflict or those who experienced high levels of conflict may have been unlikely to volunteer for the participant pool. Furthermore, another limitation concerns the relatively low alphas on two of the measures in the study, the exploitativeness/entitlement factor of the NPI and the sexual coercion subscale of the CTS2. Although many may have come to accept relatively low alphas for these subscales because they are very popular measures, an effort must be made to improve their reliability among reasonably large normal participant samples. Finally, the average ratings of both partners were used in the data for physical assault and sexual coercion. This is both a limitation and strength of the current study. Data were gathered from both individuals in the couple and both persons' ratings were used in order to attenuate the potential impact of distorted perceptions. In fact, some discrepancies in the perception of aggression were found and these discrepancies were influenced by gender and type of narcissism. Thus, future research should continue to explore the role of gender and narcissism in the accuracy of conflict perceptions. Of course, the problem with this will be the difficulty in knowing what "reality" is in interpersonal conflicts. Perhaps videotaping various scenarios or relying on outside observers might assist in detecting accuracy in couples' perceptions. It is also possible that collecting more explicit descriptions of specific instances might assist in obtaining more objective accounts (Fisher et al. 2003).

In conclusion, the current study explored the role of three forms of narcissism in courtship violence in seriously dating couples. The current study employed an interdependence analysis, and found the relationship between narcissism and courtship violence was different for men and women. There was also a different pattern of correlations for the three forms of narcissism and different correlations between narcissism and the over-reporting and/or under-reporting of aggression. This builds on past research that suggests that gender is an important factor both in the expression of narcissism (e.g., Philipson 1985; Richman and Flaherty 1990) and courtship violence (e.g., Sugarman and Hotaling 1989; Ryan et al. 1999) and it highlights the need for continued research involving both partners in dating relationships.

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