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Jonathan W. Kunstman, and Jon K. Maner

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Sexual Overperception: Power, Mating Motives, and Biases in Social Judgment

Jonathan W. Kunstman and Jon K. Maner
Florida State University

Results from 4 experiments suggest that power motivates heightened perceptions and expectations of sexual interest from subordinates. Having power over a member of the opposite sex activated sexual concepts that persisted across a temporal delay, indicating the activation of a mating goal (Study 1). Having power increased participants' expectations of sexual interest from a subordinate (Study 2) but only when a mating goal was attainable (i.e., when the subordinate was romantically available; Study 3). In a face-to-face interaction between 2 participants, power heightened perceptions of sexual interest and sexualized behavior among participants with chronically active mating goals (i.e., sexually unrestricted individuals; Study 4). Tests of mediation demonstrated that sexual overperception mediated power's effect on sexually tinged behavior. Through its capacity to induce goal pursuit, power can activate mating goals that sexualize interactions between men and women. This research demonstrates one route through which power might lead to sexual harassment.

Keywords: power, motivation, social judgment, social cognition, romantic attraction

The notion that power and hierarchy set the stage for sexual harassment is a near truism. It is clear that people sometimes respond to positions of power by directing sexually tinged thoughts and behaviors toward subordinates, coworkers, and colleagues (Bargh, Raymond, Pryor, & Strack, 1995; Pryor & Stoller, 1994; Zurbriggen, 2000). Yet, despite this connection between power and sex, considerably less is known about why power promotes sexual cognition and behavior: What psychological processes lead people in positions of power to view others as objects of sexual interest? The current paper integrates theories of power with theories of motivated social perception to examine one pathway through which power might elicit sexually tinged social interactions.

We propose that the links between power and sexual cognition may be rooted in power's ability to induce goal pursuit (Galinsky, Gruenfeld, & Magee, 2003; Smith & Bargh, 2008). In particular, we test the hypothesis that having power activates a motivational state associated with mating. Moreover, on the basis of theories of motivated social perception (e.g., Maner et al., 2005), we hypothesize that power elicits motivated biases in sexual perception, leading power holders to think (often incorrectly) that others are sexually interested in them. The current paper reports on four experiments testing the hypothesis that having power motivates heightened perceptions of sexual interest.

Power and Goal Pursuit

Consistent with previous theories (Keltner, Gruenfeld, & Anderson, 2003), power is operationally defined in terms of one's control over group resources, which affords the ability to influence other people by manipulating access to those resources. A growing literature suggests that having power motivates action and leads people to become goal oriented (Anderson & Galinsky, 2006; Galinsky et al., 2003; Magee, Galinsky, & Gruenfeld, 2007; Maner, Kaschak, & Jones, 2010; Smith & Bargh, 2008). Evidence for heightened goal orientation in powerful people is consistent with the notion that power affords access to resources and rewards. Be they social or material, having power means having control over some valuable form of capital that can be enlisted to achieve one's goals. Moreover, having power is associated with relative freedom from punishments or interpersonal sanctions. One benefit of being atop any social hierarchy is the relative impunity it grants from the actions or opinions of others. Hence, power leads to approach and goal pursuit, in part because those in power enjoy greater access to resources and suffer fewer obstacles to achieving their goals (Keltner et al., 2003).

Power has also been linked with cognitive precursors to goal pursuit, such as attention to rewards (Depue, 1995). Anderson and Berdahl (2002), for example, found that power was associated with heightened perceptions of social rewards in face-to-face interactions. As others have noted (e.g., Depue, 1995; Posner & Peterson, 1990), attending to goal-relevant cues is an important first step in goal pursuit because it prompts action. Thus, power serves as a social catalyst that ignites goal pursuit by focusing individuals on positive goal-relevant cues and by giving them the resources and freedom to achieve those goals. On the road to goal pursuit, power gives individuals the green light for action.

Jonathan W. Kunstman and Jon K. Maner, Department of Psychology, Florida State University.

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Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Jon K. Maner, Department of Psychology, Florida State University, Tallahassee, FL 32306-4301. E-mail: maner@psy.fsu.edu

Power and Mating Motivation

Although theories of power and motivation provide a strong basis for hypothesizing links between power and goal activation, those theories have been relatively silent on the matter of which goals, in particular, might be activated in powerful individuals. Although powerful people may pursue many different types of goals, we propose that those in power may be especially likely to pursue goals related to sex and mating. Power may activate mating goals for three reasons. First, mating goals are closely associated with the approach system (Depue, 1995), as procuring a mate typically requires a high degree of behavioral approach (e.g., initiation of romantic courtship, flirtation). Hence, power may activate mating goals because of their shared association with the behavioral approach system. That is, power's activation of the approach system may spread to mating-related goals, increasing the likelihood that those goals are pursued.

Second, power could activate mating goals via cognitive links between power and sex. As others have documented (e.g., Bargh et al., 1995; Pryor & Stoller, 1994; Zurbriggen, 2000), some individuals display strong cognitive associations between the concepts of power and sex. For example, Pryor and Stoller (1994) found that men scoring high on a measure of sexual coercion tended to overestimate the prevalence of sex–power word pairs on a memory recall task. Bargh et al. (1995) found that priming men high in sexual aggression with words related to power activated concepts associated with sex. Together, these studies suggest that, for at least some individuals, the concepts of power and sex are closely intertwined such that activating one concept activates the other. One implication of this association is that when individuals experience power, the activation of power concepts may inadvertently activate concepts associated with sex and mating. Due to this association, the experience of power may lead to the activation of mating goals. Indeed, theories of semantic priming imply that goals—like other mental representations—can be engaged through the activation of associatively linked concepts (e.g., Bargh & Chartrand, 1999).

Third, the hypothesized link between power and mating goals is consistent with evolutionary theories of mating (e.g., Buss & Schmitt, 1993; Gangestad & Simpson, 2000; Kenrick & Keefe, 1992). Evolutionary theories suggest that, throughout human history, dominant individuals have enjoyed relatively high sexual access to potential mates (e.g., Sadalla, Kenrick, & Vershure, 1987). Moreover, theories of motivation suggest that, as access to a goal increases, so too does a person's motivation for seeking that goal (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1974; Förster, Liberman, & Friedman, 2007). That is, if a goal is accessible, people are likely to pursue it. Thus, because potential mates have historically been highly accessible to people in positions of power and dominance, experiencing power may cause people to experience heightened levels of mating motivation.

Power, Mating Motivation, and Sexual Perception

The activation of mating goals may have important implications for the way powerful people view others. Based on a functionalist approach to social cognition, Maner and colleagues (2005) demonstrated that the activation of a particular goal can lead to biases in social perception, such that perceivers view others in ways that

help the perceivers satisfy their goals. The activation of a mating goal, for example, led men to see women as sexually aroused, even when women were not displaying any actual signs of sexual interest (see also Abbey, 1982; Haselton & Buss, 2000). In “projecting” sexual arousal onto members of the opposite sex, men overestimated how receptive women would be to their sexual advances. Perceiving a person as being sexually accessible and as displaying a high degree of sexual interest increases the likelihood that one might initiate a romantic encounter with that person. Thus, a sexual overperception bias could facilitate the satisfaction of mating goals.

The current work investigates whether a similar process occurs among individuals in power. If power activates mating goals, people in power may project sexual interest onto members of the opposite sex. Thus, our main hypothesis was that power promotes motivated perceptions of sexual interest, wherein power leads individuals to perceive a high degree of sexual interest from members of the opposite sex.

This hypothesis is consistent with other research suggesting that power leads individuals to see others in functional or instrumental terms. Gruenfeld, Inesi, Magee, and Galinski (2008) found that individuals in power saw others in ways that were functionally related to achieving their goals (i.e., perceived subordinates or others as means to suit their own ends). For example, in one study in which sexual goals were primed, men in power (compared to subordinate men) were more likely to prefer an attractive but otherwise unqualified female subordinate. The combination of power and primed sexual goals led men to overlook the woman's qualifications and focus instead on how she could be instrumental to achieving their sexual goals. We have proposed that power itself activates mating motives. Thus, we expected that, even in the absence of an explicit sexual goal prime, power would promote heightened perceptions of sexual interest.

Moderators of Sexual Perceptions

In addition to our main hypothesis (that power will motivate heightened perceptions of sexual interest), the current studies also investigated hypothesized moderating variables. These moderating variables are intended not only to provide evidence for boundary conditions; they also are designed to help clarify the motivational mechanism underlying the expected pattern of social perception. As others have noted (Bargh, Gollwitzer, Lee-Chai, Barndollar, & Trötschel, 2001; Bargh et al., 1995; Förster et al., 2007), the presence of particular moderating conditions can help distinguish motivated cognitive processes from other types of cognitive phenomena (e.g., associative priming). Consistent with previous studies, we focus on three potential moderating variables: temporal delay, goal attainability, and individual differences in chronic mating goals. We also consider possible moderating effects of gender.

First, motivated processes have been characterized by their ability to exert persistent effects on cognition over time (Bargh et al., 1995, 2001; Förster et al., 2007). As a result, researchers have used temporal delay to differentiate motivated processes from other cognitive processes, such as semantic priming (Bargh et al., 1995, 2001). Unlike semantic primes, which have been shown to decay with time, motivated processes tend to remain active even after delay (Higgins, Bargh, & Lombardi, 1985; Wyer & Srull,

1989). To test whether power's effect on sexual perception is rooted in motivated processes, we used a delay manipulation to provide evidence that power activates sexual motives as opposed to mere sexual cognitions (Study 1). Specifically, we hypothesized that power would lead people to display heightened activation of sexual concepts and, critically, that this effect would persist across a time delay.

A second condition that distinguishes goal activation from other cognitive phenomena pertains to the attainability of the goal. As many researchers have noted, motivation reflects the product of a goal's value and of the likelihood of goal attainment (e.g., Atkinson, 1964; Fishbein & Ajzen, 1974; Förster et al., 2007; Vroom, 1964). Even though a goal may be highly valuable, if there is little chance of attaining that goal, motivation tends to be low. Conversely, if the same desirable goal is attainable, motivation tends to be high. Thus, in Study 3 we manipulated the attainability of a mating goal (via the romantic availability of the participant's partner) to investigate whether sexual expectations would be moderated by the partner's availability. We predicted that power would promote heightened expectations of sexual interest but only when the leader's subordinate was single and attainable.

Third, we examined individual differences expected to shape the effect of power on sexual perception. To further test whether power's effect on sexual perception was a product of mating motives, we explored individual differences in sexual goals (i.e., sociosexual orientation; Simpson & Gangestad, 1991). From a motivational perspective, power was expected to promote heightened sexual perceptions more strongly among individuals for whom sexual goals are chronically active than among individuals in whom such goals are less active. This hypothesis is consistent with research suggesting that goal primes often have the strongest effects in people for whom the goal is chronically active (Chen, Lee-Chai, & Bargh, 2001; Keltner et al., 2003; Maner, Miller, Rouby, & Gailliot, 2009). Most pertinent to the current research, Maner, Gailliot, Rouby, and Miller (2007) showed that activation of a mating goal promoted heightened attention to potential mates, but this effect was pronounced only among sexually unrestricted individuals (i.e., individuals for whom sexual goals were chronically active). Compared with sexually restricted individuals, sexually unrestricted individuals are more inclined to pursue short-term sexual encounters with strangers, have more permissive attitudes toward casual sex, and be more sexually promiscuous (Gangestad & Simpson, 1990; Simpson & Gangestad, 1991). Because activation of a mating goal has been shown to influence social perception more strongly for unrestricted individuals than for restricted individuals, we expected power to heighten sexual perception more strongly among unrestricted individuals than among restricted individuals.

Finally, we considered the possibility that power's effect on sexual perception might be greater among men than among women. Theory and evidence suggest that men (relative to women) are more motivated to strive for positions of power and to use their power as a means of attaining sexual gratification (e.g., Pryor, 1987). An evolutionary perspective implies that men are more motivated toward power because, throughout most of human history, power has translated into reproductive benefits to a relatively greater extent for men than for women (Buss & Schmitt, 1993; Sadalla et al., 1987). This literature implies that men's generally greater tendency to use power to attain sex may lead men to

display larger effects of power on sexual perception. On the other hand, it is plausible that once individuals are given power, motivated psychological processes will be observed to an equivalent degree in men and women. This would be consistent with most experimental studies of power, which tend not to find evidence for sex differences (e.g., Galinsky, Magee, Gruenfeld, Whitson, & Liljenquest, 2008; Maner & Mead, 2010; Smith & Bargh, 2008). With respect to sexual cognition, several recent studies indicate that, despite baseline differences in sexual motivation and cognition, men and women often respond to experimental mating goal primes in an equivalent fashion; once activated, mating motives can produce equivalent cognitive effects in men and women (e.g., Maner, Gailliot, & Miller, 2009; Maner, Gailliot, et al., 2007). Thus, although men and women might differ in baseline power- and mating-related processes (perhaps implying main effects of gender), there is reason to think that the two genders would respond in a similar fashion to experimental manipulations of power. Notably, previous experimental studies directly investigating the effects of power on sexual cognition have tended to include only men (Bargh et al., 1995; Gruenfeld et al., 2008), thus precluding tests of gender moderation. Hence, we remained relatively agnostic with respect to whether we would observe different responses among men versus women; we evaluated potential moderating effects of gender in all studies.

Overview of the Current Work

The current studies tested the hypothesis that power would activate mating motives that heighten expectations and perceptions of sexual interest from subordinates of the opposite sex. Furthermore, we predicted that heightened perceptions of sexual interest among power holders would, in turn, increase the likelihood of sexually tinged behavior in cross-sex social interactions. We evaluated these hypotheses with four studies that distilled the overall conceptual model into its constituent parts. In Study 1 we examined whether power would activate a mating motive. We tested whether having power over an opposite-sex subordinate (compared to working as equals) would result in greater sexual thinking immediately and after a delay. As mentioned earlier, persistence across delay is characteristic of motivated psychological processes. We therefore hypothesized that people in power (compared with those in a control condition) would display heightened sexual thinking and that this activation would persist across a temporal delay.

Study 2 tested the hypothesis that power would increase expectations of sexual interest from a subordinate of the opposite sex. We predicted that having power (relative to working as equals) would increase participants' expectations of sexual interest from an opposite-sex confederate. Study 3 again tested the prediction that power would increase expectations of sexual interest and also examined a hypothesized boundary condition: goal attainability. If power increases sexual expectations via the activation of a mating motive, that effect should be greater when the goal is potentially attainable (the subordinate is single) than when the goal is relatively unattainable (the subordinate is engaged to be married). Thus, in Study 3 we examined hypothesized moderating effects of the confederate's (purported) relationship status.

In Study 4, we examined power's effect on sexual overperception and behavior within a face-to-face interaction between two

participants. We hypothesized that having power would increase people's perceptions of sexual interest above and beyond any actual interest displayed by the partner. Moreover, we predicted that this sexual overperception would mediate increases in sexualized behavior during the interaction. To further delineate the conditions under which power would produce these effects, we evaluated the moderating effect of individual differences in sociosexual orientation. We expected larger effects among unrestricted individuals than among restricted individuals.

Finally, in addition to assessing perceptions of sexual interest, we assessed more general perceptions of liking (in Studies 2–4) to rule out the possibility that power simply leads people to expect more positive social evaluations from others. If power's effects are unique to sexual perceptions, we would not expect these effects to generalize to more global perceptions of social acceptance and liking.

Study 1

Our primary goal in Study 1 was to test whether having power leads people to display signs of heightened sexual motivation. Consistent with previous work (Bargh et al., 1995), we expected that having power would heighten the activation of sexual thinking. Moreover, on the basis of our theory of power and motivated cognition, we expected this activation to display a characteristic common of motivated cognitive processes: persistence across delay (Bargh et al., 2001). To test this hypothesis, we assigned participants to a position of power (or control) and led them to believe that they would be working with a member of the opposite sex. Participants then completed a word-stem completion task to measure the activation of sexual concepts. They completed this task either immediately after the power manipulation or after a 5-min delay. We hypothesized that, if power promotes sexual motivation, power should increase the activation of sexual concepts and this effect should persist across delay.

Method

Participants. Sixty-six introductory psychology students participated in exchange for course credit. Participants (66% female) had a mean age of 18.70 years. Five participants were excluded from analyses because they reported being suspicious or having foreknowledge of the experiment's hypothesis.

Design and procedure. The study used a 2 (Power: power, positive control feedback) \times 2 (Time: delay; no delay) between-subjects design. Participants arrived at the lab and were told they would work with a partner on a task that simulated decision making in organizations. They were told that they had the potential to earn \$50 in a raffle drawing, as well as valuable credits toward their psychology research requirement. Participants were told their partner was currently in a different room to prevent contact prior to the team task. Experimenters then explained that each participant would view a picture of his or her partner to ensure that they were not already acquainted with one another. To bolster this cover story, the experimenter took a digital photo of the participant (ostensibly to show it to the partner).

Participants then completed the Achievement Motivation Scale (AMS; Cassidy & Lynn, 1989), which was described as a measure of natural leadership ability and was ostensibly used to assign

participants to their role (for a similar procedure, see Maner & Mead, 2010). While participants completed the AMS, the experimenter purportedly photographed their partner. The experimenter then returned and showed participants a digital photo of their partner (actually an opposite-sex confederate).

After pretending to score the AMS, the experimenter delivered the power manipulation, which was adapted from previous power research (Galinsky et al., 2003). In the power condition, participants were told that they had earned a very high score on the AMS and thus were the most qualified to lead their team. As such, they would unilaterally determine how the team completed the task and how the team's rewards would be divided within the dyad. Participants were informed that they would evaluate their partner at the end of the study, and this evaluation would be the basis for dividing the extra research credits and money (should the dyad win the raffle). Participants were told they would make their evaluation anonymously. Thus, in the power condition, participants were given control over the task and associated rewards.

In the control condition, experimenters explained that the dyad would work as equals and all rewards would be split evenly within the dyad. So that both conditions would involve positive feedback, participants in the control condition were told they had scored very high on an index of creativity. Because assignment to the position of power was presumably based on having a high AMS score, we wanted to ensure that any effects were caused by power and not simply by receiving positive feedback.

Next, if participants were in the delay condition, they worked for 5 min on a family tree filler exercise used in previous goal-priming studies (see Bargh et al., 2001), followed by a word-stem completion task. The task was adapted from previous research (see Miller & Maner, 2010; Plant, Peruche, & Butz, 2005) to measure activation of sexual goals. For example, the letter string *S _ X* could be completed as *sex* or *six*. Participants were instructed to complete as many of the 10 items as they could in 5 min. If participants were in the no-delay condition, participants completed the filler task before receiving the power manipulation, and there was no delay between the manipulation and the word-stem completion task. After completing the word-stem completion task, participants were carefully probed for suspicion, debriefed, and dismissed.

Results

We conducted a factorial analysis of variance (ANOVA) with power condition and delay condition as between-subjects factors. The number of sexual words participants created served as the dependent variable (scores on this measure ranged from zero to 10). Gender was also included as a factor. As hypothesized, there was a main effect of condition, $F(1, 59) = 6.46, p = .02, d = 0.56$, such that participants in power created more sexual words ($M = 4.35, SD = 2.06$) than did participants in the positive feedback condition ($M = 3.27, SD = 1.80$). This effect did not interact with the delay manipulation, $F(1, 59) = 0.31, p = .57$. That is, participants in power created a greater number of sexual words regardless of whether they did so immediately after the power manipulation or after a 5-min delay. If anything, participants in power responded with a slightly greater proportion of sexual words after a delay ($M = 4.70, SD = 2.21$) than when they responded immediately ($M = 4.11, SD = 1.97$). There was no difference

between immediate and delayed responses within the control condition, $F(1, 59) = 1.77, p = .19$. There was a main effect of gender, $F(1, 59) = 7.83, p < .01$, such that men created more sexual words ($M = 4.76, SD = 2.32$) than women did ($M = 3.32, SD = 1.62$); however, gender did not interact with either the power manipulation ($p > .40$) or the delay manipulation ($p > .50$).

Discussion

The findings of Study 1 are consistent with the hypothesis that having power activates a mating motive. Compared with control participants, people who were given power completed a greater number of word stems with sexual words, indicating a greater degree of sexual cognition. Moreover, this effect did not degrade over time; rather, it persisted across a 5-min delay in which participants completed an unrelated task that required a fair degree of attention and cognitive resources. This is consistent with the hypothesis that power activates sexual motivation, above and beyond the semantic activation of sexual concepts.

Participants received positive feedback in both the power and control conditions. This study thus constituted a conservative test of the hypothesis, as presumably receiving any sort of positive feedback might make someone feel more positive about oneself and one's desirability to others. Nevertheless, it was power, rather than positively valenced feedback about the self, that caused an increase in sexual motivation. In Study 2, we went on to test the hypothesis that power would influence expectations of sexual interest.

Study 2

Study 2 tested the hypothesis that power would enhance sexual expectations from an opposite-sex subordinate. We expected that, compared with control participants, participants who anticipated having power over an opposite-sex partner would expect high levels of sexual interest from the partner.

In addition, to provide discriminant evidence that increases in sexual expectations are produced by mating motivation, rather than a more general tendency to expect positive evaluations from other people, we included a general measure of perceived liking. If effects are due to mating motivation, they should be specific to perceptions of sexual interest. If, instead, effects are driven by a more general tendency for participants to think that others like them, effects should generalize to broad perceptions of liking (i.e., power should increase the tendency for participants to think that a subordinate likes them as a person).

Method

Participants. Fifty-five introductory psychology students (59% female) participated in exchange for course credit. Of these 55 participants, five were excluded from analyses (four participants were suspicious or had foreknowledge of the experiment's hypothesis and one participant failed to complete the study's dependent measures).

Design and procedure. After arriving at the lab, participants were told they would work with another participant on a task that simulated decision making in organizations. Participants were informed of the study's rewards (the potential to earn \$50 and

extra experiment credits toward their psychology research requirement). Participants then completed the AMS, which ostensibly was used to assign participants to a role in the upcoming task. In reality, participants were randomly assigned to either a power condition or a control condition; the manipulation was identical to that used in Study 1.

Experimenters then explained that they were interested in participants' first impressions of their partner. Participants were told that they would exchange a 2-min video message with their partner, from which they would form their first impressions. Participants then watched their partner's video message, which actually depicted an opposite-sex confederate. In the video, the confederate responded to general questions about life on campus (e.g., favorite classes). Videos were pretested by an independent sample of 70 participants (on 7-point scales); the confederates were perceived as slightly above average both in attractiveness (female, $M = 5.49$; male, $M = 4.94$) and in friendliness (female, $M = 5.12$; male, $M = 5.10$).

After watching the video, participants reported their first impressions of their partner, providing measures of perceived sexual interest and general liking. Sexual expectations were assessed with two items ("I could see this person having romantic or sexual feelings for me" and "I could see this person wanting to ask me out on a date"). These two items were combined to form an index of sexual expectation ($r = .60, p < .001$). Five items assessed more general perceptions of liking (e.g., "I think this person is interested in getting to know me," "My intuition is that this person will like me," and "I do not think this person will be accepting of me" [reverse scored]). These items were combined to create an index of general liking ($\alpha = .75$). The indices of sexual expectation and perceived general liking were significantly correlated ($r = .30, p < .05$). These measures were embedded in a set of distractor items (e.g., "I believe this person will be a hard worker and a productive teammate"). After completing these measures, participants were carefully probed for suspicion, debriefed, and dismissed.

Results

To test whether power (relative to control) enhanced expectations of sexual interest from subordinates of the opposite sex, we conducted a factorial ANOVA with power condition and gender as between-subjects factors. As hypothesized, there was a main effect of condition, $F(1, 49) = 4.59, p < .05, d = 0.65$, such that participants in the power condition expected greater sexual interest ($M = 3.15, SD = 1.10$) than those in the control condition did ($M = 2.44, SD = 1.10$). Although there was a slight (nonsignificant) trend for men to expect greater sexual interest than women (i.e., a main effect of gender; $p > .20$), the power manipulation did not interact with participant gender ($p > .50$).

An equivalent analysis on participants' expectation of general acceptance failed to yield any significant effects ($ps > .30$). Thus, power's effect on expectations for opposite-sex subordinates was specific to sexual interest and not indicative of more general expectations of social approval or liking.

Discussion

Results from Study 2 provide initial evidence that power heightens sexual expectations directed toward subordinates of the oppo-

site sex. Moreover, power's effects were unique to sexual perceptions and did not generalize to broad perceptions of liking. Rather than a general tendency to expect positive evaluations or acceptance from others, these results imply that power's effects are unique to perceptions of sexual interest. These findings provide additional evidence that power may sexualize perception by activating mating motives.

Study 3

Study 3 again tested the hypothesis that power would increase leaders' expectations of sexual interest from an opposite-sex subordinate. In addition, we examined a hypothesized boundary condition aimed at further delineating the circumstances under which power motivates perceptions of sexual interest. As noted by previous researchers (e.g., Atkinson, 1964; Fishbein & Ajzen, 1974; Förster et al., 2007), motivation's strength is influenced by the attainability of a goal: Motivation tends to be stronger and tends to exert stronger effects on cognition when goals are attainable than when they are difficult to attain. Thus, we manipulated goal attainability by varying whether or not the participants' partner was sexually accessible. In one condition, the partner described him- or herself as single; in the other condition the partner was already engaged to be married. If power increases sexual expectations via the activation of a mating motive, that effect should be greater when the subordinate is single (the goal is potentially attainable) than when the subordinate is engaged (and thus is difficult to attain).

As in Study 2, we included a measure of general social liking to test whether power's effect on perception was unique to sexual expectations or indicative of a broader tendency to expect positive evaluations from others. If power influences sexual expectations via activation of a mating motive, that effect should be unique to sexual perceptions and should not extend to general perceptions of social acceptance or liking.

Method

Participants. Seventy-four introductory psychology students (55% female) participated in exchange for course credit. Nine participants were excluded from analyses (five participants reported being suspicious or having foreknowledge of the experiment's hypothesis; the other four participants failed to complete the dependent measures or failed to follow directions).

Design and procedure. The study used a 2 (Power: power, positive feedback) \times 2 (Target availability: single, engaged) between-subjects factorial design. As in Studies 1 and 2, participants were told they would work with another participant on a task that simulated decision making in organizations. Participants were then informed of the study's rewards (extra research credits and the chance to win \$50). As in the previous studies, the AMS was ostensibly used to assign roles in the upcoming decision-making task; instructions were the same as in the previous experiments.

As in Study 2, participants were told they would exchange a brief video message with their partner and would report on their first impressions of the partner. Participants then watched videos of an opposite-sex partner, which were adapted from Study 2. The manipulation of the partner's relationship status occurred at the very end of the video: Confederates mentioned that they were

either "engaged to be married" or "single and looking to meet someone."

After watching the video, participants reported their first impressions of their partner, providing measures of perceived sexual interest and general liking. Three items assessed expectations of sexual interest ("I expect this person will find me physically attractive," "I could see this person wanting to ask me out on a date," and "I could see this person having romantic or sexual feelings for me"). The items were averaged to create an index of participants' sexual expectations ($\alpha = .72$). Six items assessed more general perceptions of liking (e.g., "I think this person is interested in getting to know me," "My intuition is that this person will like me," and "I do not think this person will be accepting of me" [reversed scored]). These items were combined to create an index of general liking ($\alpha = .71$). The indices of sexual expectation and perceived general liking were significantly correlated ($r = .34, p < .01$). These two composite measures were embedded within distractor items similar to those in Study 2. After completing these measures and recording a short video response for their partner, participants were carefully probed for suspicion, debriefed, and dismissed.

Results

Our primary goal in the current study was to test whether power led to heightened expectations of sexual interest from the partner and whether this effect depended on the availability of the partner. As in our previous studies, gender was included as a factor to explore possible moderating effects. A 2 (condition: power, positive feedback) by 2 (partner availability; single, engaged) by 2 (gender: male, female) between-subjects ANOVA on expectations of sexual interest revealed a main effect of power condition, such that participants in power expected greater sexual interest than participants in the positive feedback control condition did, $F(1, 64) = 5.50, p < .05, d = 0.68$. There was also a main effect of partner availability, such that participants expected greater sexual interest from single partners than from engaged partners, $F(1, 64) = 9.09, p < .01, d = 0.73$. These main effects were qualified by the hypothesized interaction between power and partner availability, $F(1, 64) = 5.63, p < .05$. As illustrated in Figure 1, when partners were single, participants in the power (relative to control) condition displayed greater expectations of sexual interest, $t(64) = 3.20, p < .01$. In contrast, power (relative to control) did not increase sexual expectations when the partner was engaged ($t < 1$). Although there was

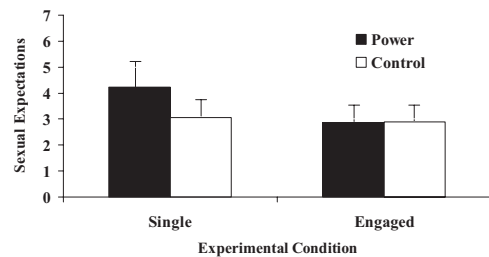


Figure 1. Power increased expectations of sexual interest among participants interacting with an ostensibly single (i.e., romantically available) partner. No effect was observed among participants interacting with a partner who ostensibly was engaged. Error bars reflect standard errors.

a slight trend for men to perceive more sexual interest than women ($p = .21$), gender did not significantly interact with either the power manipulation ($p = .74$) or the partner availability manipulation ($p = .74$).

A similar analysis of expectations of general liking revealed only a marginal main effect of partner relationship status, $F(1, 64) = 3.21$, $p < .08$, such that participants expected to be liked more by single partners ($M = 4.72$, $SD = 0.80$) than by engaged partners ($M = 4.39$, $SD = 0.60$). Neither the main effect of power condition, $F(1, 64) = 0.16$, $p = .69$, nor its interaction with relationship status, $F(1, 64) = 0.416$, $p = .52$, approached significance. Thus, power's effects were unique to sexual expectations and were not indicative of a more general tendency to expect acceptance or liking from the partner.

Discussion

As predicted, power led participants to expect high levels of sexual interest from an opposite-sex partner but only when the partner was single. These results replicate and extend findings from Study 2 and provide further support for the hypothesis that power motivates perceptions of sexual interest. Consistent with this hypothesis, power increased sexual expectations but only when the sexual goal was attainable. When it was not attainable (because the person was already engaged), power had no effect on sexual expectations. Whereas this pattern supports a motivational interpretation, it is less consistent with the possibility that effects were driven by the semantic activation of sexual concepts; if that had been the case, sexual interest should have been projected in a less discriminant fashion. In addition, no effects of power were found for expectations of general liking. Thus, power's effect was unique to sexual expectations and was not indicative of a more general propensity to expect acceptance or liking from others.

Study 4

Study 4 extended the present investigation in a number of important ways. First, rather than evaluating power's effect on expectations of sexual interest prior to an anticipated social interaction, we evaluated power's effect on perceptions of sexual interest within a face-to-face dyadic interaction between two participants. Second, in addition to assessing the power holder's perceptions of sexual interest from the subordinate, we assessed the extent to which subordinates actually did feel attracted to the power holder. This allowed us to test whether power holders' perceptions of sexual interest would be observed over and above any actual interest experienced by the subordinate (thus providing direct evidence for sexual *overperception*). This is important because previous research suggests that sometimes subordinates do, in fact, display heightened romantic interest in their superiors (Sheets & Braver, 1999).

Third, we tested whether power's effects would be moderated by individual differences in sociosexual orientation (as measured with the Sociosexual Orientation Inventory; SOI). The SOI distinguishes unrestricted individuals, who are highly motivated to seek short-term sexual relationships, from restricted individuals, who are less motivated to seek such relationships (Gangestad & Simpson, 1990; Simpson & Gangestad, 1991). We hypothesized, consistent with previous research (Maner, Gailliot, et al., 2007), that if

power increases sexual perceptions via the activation of prepotent mating motives, effects on these perceptions should be greatest among unrestricted individuals, for whom sex is a strong chronic goal. In addition, we explored possible moderating effects of participants' likelihood to sexually harass (LSH; Bargh et al., 1995; Pryor, 1987; Pryor & Stoller, 1994). The LSH measures individual differences in sexual coercion or the propensity to use positions of power or authority to gain sexual favors (Pryor, 1987). The presence of strong associative links between power and sex has been documented in people scoring high in LSH (Bargh et al., 1995; Pryor & Stoller, 1994). In light of this past work, we included a measure of LSH to explore the possibility that power might have greater effects among people high in LSH (perhaps reflecting the relatively greater spreading of semantic activation from power to sex among those individuals).

Fourth, in addition to evaluating power's effects on sexual overperception, we investigated the implications of those overperceptions for sexually tinged behavior within the interaction. Presumably, if power holders perceive their subordinates as displaying a high degree of sexual interest, power holders might be apt to sexualize the interaction, leading to increased sexually tinged behavior. Assessing sexually tinged behavior during the interaction also allowed us to test the hypothesis that sexual overperception would mediate power's effect on increased sexual behavior.

Finally, as in the previous studies, we tested whether power's effects were distinct from a general tendency to perceive a high degree of social acceptance or liking from others. Supplemental analyses examined effects on a general measure of perceived liking.

Method

Participants. Seventy-eight participants completed the study in opposite-sex pairs for course credit (i.e., 39 mixed-sex dyads). On average, participants were 19.2 years old ($SD = 1.18$). A proportion of the sample ($n = 13$) reported being in committed long-term relationships of greater than a year and a half. Interest displayed by an attractive alternative to one's current partner can threaten relationship commitment and elicit relationship maintenance processes designed to reduce temptations posed by relationship alternatives (e.g., Simpson, Gangestad, & Lerma, 1990). Because these highly committed individuals would not be expected to display increases in sexual approach during a social interaction, their data were excluded from analyses.

Design and procedure. Participants arrived at the lab in opposite-sex pairs and were randomly assigned to either a power or a positive feedback control condition. Within dyads assigned to the power condition, one person was randomly assigned to be the leader and was given the same instructions regarding the powerful role as used in the previous studies. The other person was assigned to a subordinate position and was instructed to follow the direction of the leader. Subordinates learned they would be evaluated by their partner at the end of the experiment, and this evaluation would be the basis for dividing the dyad's rewards. Within dyads assigned to the control condition, one person was randomly assigned to receive positive creativity feedback; this feedback was the same as in previous studies. The other member of the dyad received no feedback.

Experimenters then explained that participants would complete a task that would involve building a figure in large Lego blocks from a color picture. Participants were given 7 min to build the figure. After 7 min, participants completed a short questionnaire about their perceptions during their interaction and of their partner. Embedded in this questionnaire was one item assessing perceptions of general liking (“How much do you think the other participant would be interested in getting to know you better?”) and two items assessing perceptions of sexual interest (“If you had to guess, how much do you think that the other participant would like the opportunity to go out on a date with you?” and “If you had to guess, to what extent do you think your partner had any sexual or romantic feelings toward you during your interaction?”). These items were highly correlated and combined to form an index of sexual perception ($r = .72, p < .001$). As in the previous studies, perceptions of sexual interest and general liking were significantly correlated ($r = .47, p < .001$). Participants’ actual interest in the partner was assessed with two items (“To what extent did you have any sexual or romantic feelings toward your partner during your interaction?” and “How much would you like the opportunity to go out on a date with the other participant?”). These items were highly correlated and combined to form an index of actual sexual interest ($r = .56, p < .001$). To reduce concerns with confidentiality, participants completed all questionnaires alone and sealed their responses in an envelope that was then placed in a dropbox.

Participants then completed a questionnaire that included the SOI (Simpson & Gangestad, 1991) and LSH (Pryor, 1987). The SOI measures individual differences in sexual attitudes and behavior (e.g., “With how many different partners have you had sex within the last year?”). High scores on the SOI indicate that one is sexually unrestricted (i.e., greater interest in casual sex). Participants completed an abridged version of the LSH (Pryor, 1987). Participants responded to three hypothetical scenarios assessing individuals’ willingness to use a position of power or authority to elicit sexual favors. For example, in one scenario, individuals were asked to imagine they were casting a film. Participants were then asked how likely they would be to use their position of authority to procure sexual favors from the auditioning actors or actresses. Each scenario featured three questions, which were averaged to form an index of LSH ($\alpha = .86$).

Sexualized behavior. Dyads were unobtrusively videotaped as they completed the Lego task; those videos were later rated for the presence of sexually tinged behavior by two coders, who were blind to condition. Coders were told to consider in their assessment behaviors such as frequent or persistent touch, excessive smiling, seating distance, and sustained eye gaze as indicators of sexualized behavior. The two coders rated the degree of sexualized behavior on a 1 to 7 scale ($r = .38, p = .003$). Because there was a high degree of dependence between participants’ behavior within dyads (e.g., a leader touches her subordinate, who smiles in return), the average of the two partners’ flirtation ratings served as the primary measure of sexualized behavior.

Results

Our central goals in the current study were to test whether (a) having power over an opposite-sex subordinate would lead to heightened perceptions of sexual interest and sexualized behavior, (b) whether power holders’ heightened sexual perceptions would

be observed over and above any actual sexual interest felt by the partner (i.e., overperception), (c) whether these effects would be moderated by the power holder’s sociosexual orientation, and (d) whether power’s effect on behavior would be mediated by perceptions of sexual interest. We used multiple regression analyses to test these hypotheses.

Sexual perceptions. Data collected in groups or dyads can violate assumptions of independence. If nonindependence exists, data should be analyzed at the dyad level (Kenny & la Voie, 1985). If data are not dependent, data should be analyzed at the individual level. Independence was assessed by computing intraclass correlations for the indices of sexual perception and general liking. Neither perceptions of sexual interest nor general liking were found to be dependent within dyads ($ps > .10$). Thus, the following analyses were conducted at the individual level.

We conducted regression analyses with power condition (power vs. control), role within the dyad (power/positive feedback vs. subordinate/no feedback), SOI, LSH, gender, and their two- and three-way interactions as predictors. There were significant main effects of condition and feedback and a significant two-way interaction between condition and SOI. Each of these lower order effects, however, was subsumed by the predicted three-way interaction among power condition, role within the dyad, and SOI, $\beta = -.36, t(60) = -2.62, p = .01$ (see Figure 2).

A simple effect test designed to test our primary hypothesis indicated that being in power (compared with positive feedback) increased sexual perceptions among sexually unrestricted individuals (one standard deviation above the SOI mean), $t(60) = -4.04, p < .001$, partial $r = -.50$ (left panel, Figure 2). In contrast, power (compared with positive feedback) decreased sexual perceptions among sexually restricted individuals (one standard deviation below the SOI mean), $t(60) = 2.73, p < .01$, partial $r = .34$, although this simple effect was substantially smaller than the one for unrestricted participants (left panel, Figure 2). No significant effects of power were observed among restricted or unrestricted partners

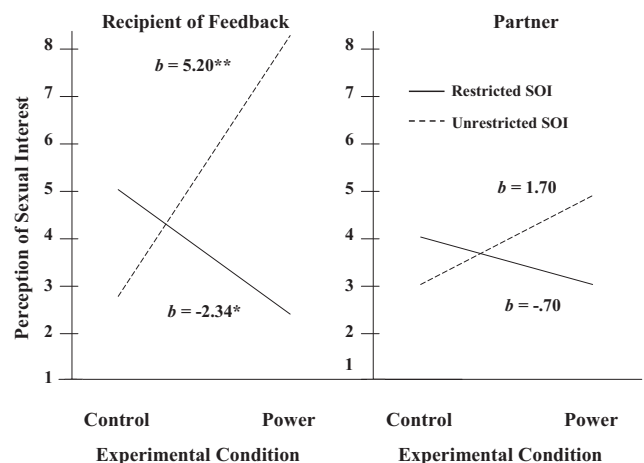


Figure 2. Power increased composite perceptions of sexual interest among sexually unrestricted leaders (left panel). Sexually restricted leaders displayed a smaller, though still significant, tendency toward lower perceptions of sexual interest (left panel). No significant effects were observed among partners (right panel). b refers to unstandardized regression coefficients. SOI = Sociosexual Orientation Inventory. * $p < .01$. ** $p < .001$.

(i.e., partners of those who received power or control feedback; right panel, Figure 2). Although there was a nonsignificant trend for men to perceive greater sexual interest than women, $t(60) = 1.49, p = .14$, gender did not significantly interact with the power manipulation ($p > .45$).

We conducted similar analyses to evaluate whether these effects were specific to perceptions of sexual interest, rather than being indicative of more general perceptions of social liking. An equivalent set of regression analyses on participants' perceptions of general liking revealed no significant effects ($ps > .50$). Thus, effects were unique to perceptions of sexual interest.

Sexual overperception. We next tested whether power increased participants' level of sexual perception over and above any changes in partners' level of actual sexual interest. We also evaluated whether this effect was moderated by participants' SOI. We conducted a regression analysis predicting sexual perceptions among those who had received feedback (i.e., leaders and positive feedback controls), with condition (power or control), SOI, gender, and their respective interactions as predictors. To assess whether power increased participants' perceptions of sexual interest over and above any increases in actual interest from the subordinate, we included as a covariate subordinates' (and control partners') ratings of sexual feelings toward their partner.¹

We observed the predicted interaction between power condition and SOI, $\beta = -.75, t(23) = -3.12, p < .01$. Simple effect tests confirmed that among sexually unrestricted participants, power (relative to control) increased perceptions of sexual interest, and this effect was observed over and above any increases in partners' actual sexual interest, $\beta = -1.11, t(23) = -2.69, p = .02$, partial $r = -.54$. Indeed, participants' perceptions of sexual interest were actually unrelated to the actual level of sexual interest felt by the partner ($p > .40$). Moreover, a regression analysis predicting partners' actual level of sexual interest revealed no effects associated with power ($ps > .30$), indicating that partners were no more attracted to power holders than they were to those receiving positive creativity feedback. Thus, the increase in sexual perception among power holders was independent of partners' actual level of sexual interest and did not reflect an increase in attraction toward those in power.

Consistent with the earlier analyses, we observed an opposite trend among sexually restricted participants, with those in power perceiving somewhat less sexual interest than those receiving positive feedback, although this effect was only marginally significant, $\beta = .54, t(23) = 2.04, p = .06$, partial $r = .44$.

Equivalent analyses on participants who did not receive feedback (i.e., subordinates and control partners) revealed only a main effect of sex, $\beta = .48, t(28) = 2.24, p < .05$, partial $r = .44$, such that men perceived greater sexual interest than women. No effects of power were found. Thus, power's influence on sexual overperception was unique to those in power. Whereas having power increased perceptions of sexual interest, being subordinated did not.

Sexualized behavior. We next tested whether the interaction between power and SOI on sexual overperception would translate into more sexualized dyadic interactions. We conducted a regression analysis on ratings of dyads' behavior with power condition, the SOI score of the power holder (or, in the control condition, the person receiving positive feedback), the power holder's sex, and their interactions as predictors. To assess whether power increased

sexualized behavior over and above any increases in actual interest from the subordinate, we again included as a covariate subordinates' (and control partners') ratings of sexual feelings toward the partner.

Although no main effects reached significance, we observed the predicted interaction between power condition and the power holder's SOI, $\beta = -.54, t(23) = -2.18, p < .05$. Simple effects revealed that power (relative to control) increased sexually tinged behavior among dyads with an unrestricted leader, $\beta = -.87, t(23) = -2.29, p < .05$, partial $r = -.52$. There were no significant effects among dyads with a restricted leader ($ps > .15$). Again, this effect was observed even after controlling for the partner's actual level of sexual interest.

Mediation. Finally, we tested whether the interaction between power and power holders' SOI on sexualized behavior within the dyad was mediated by power holder's overperceptions of sexual interest (controlling for partners' actual level of sexual interest). As noted above, power increased sexualized behavior among dyads with an unrestricted leader, $\beta = -.54, t(23) = -2.18, p < .05$. When leaders' perceptions of sexual interest were entered into this model, we observed a significant relationship between perceptions of sexual interest and sexualized behavior, such that higher perceptions of sexual interest were associated with greater sexualized behavior, $\beta = .76, t(23) = 3.05, p = .01$. Further, the previously significant interaction between power and SOI dropped to nonsignificance ($p = .87$; see Figure 3). A Sobel test confirmed that perceptions of sexual interest statistically mediated the interaction between power and SOI on sexualized behavior within the dyad ($z = -2.20, p < .05$).

Meta-Analysis of Studies 2–4

We performed a meta-analysis to calculate the overall significance and effect size of power's effect on perceptions of sexual interest in Studies 2–4 (main effect of power in Study 2; effect of power within the available partner condition in Study 3; effect of power among unrestricted leaders in Study 4), weighting each study by its degrees of freedom (df ; Rosenthal & Rosnow, 1991). Across the three studies, power's effect on perceptions of sexual interest was significant ($z = 5.24, p < .001$). When each study was weighted by its df , the three studies yielded an overall effect size of $r = .44$ (a medium-to-large effect).

Discussion

Study 4 extends the previous findings by showing that power increased sexual perception within a face-to-face social interaction. Findings also confirmed that power increased sexual perceptions only among sexually unrestricted individuals—those with strong chronic sexual goals. The moderating effect of unrestricted sexuality is consistent with previous work suggesting that mating primes exert stronger effects among unrestricted individuals than among restricted individuals (Maner, Gailliot, et al., 2007). Indeed, power even appeared to decrease sexual perceptions among restricted participants. This could have been due to an inhibition of

¹ Analyses using a difference score approach (i.e., the raw score difference between subordinates' actual sexual interest and power holders' perceived sexual interest) yielded equivalent results.

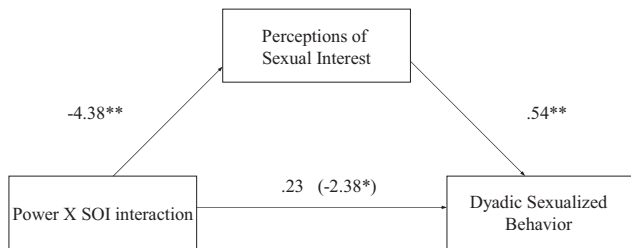


Figure 3. Perceptions of sexual interest mediated the relationship between power and sexualized behavior during a dyadic interaction. Unstandardized regression coefficients are listed. SOI = Sociosexual Orientation Inventory. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

mating motivation among highly restricted individuals. To the extent that restricted people are motivated to avoid sex with unfamiliar strangers, it is plausible that power might accentuate that tendency.

Moreover, these effects were observed even after controlling for any actual sexual interest displayed by the partner. Thus, this study provides evidence for sexual overperception. Power holders did not simply (accurately) perceive greater sexual interest from their partners; rather, they displayed a bias wherein they overperceived their partner's level of sexual interest. Indeed, power increased perceptions of sexual interest, even though subordinates were no more attracted to power holders than individuals were to their partners in the control condition.

The study also provided evidence that power holders' propensity to overperceive sexual interest can translate directly into increases in sexually tinged behavior. Analyses confirmed that unrestricted leaders' perceptions of sexual interest mediated increases in sexualized behavior during the interaction.

Finally, as in the previous study, findings confirmed that power's effect on social perception was unique to sexual perceptions, rather than being indicative of a general tendency to feel liked and accepted by others. Thus, in summary, Study 4 demonstrated that (a) power increases sexual perception, (b) that effect is pronounced only in sexually unrestricted participants, (c) that effect is observed even after controlling for subordinates' actual sexual interest (i.e., sexual overperception), (d) that effect mediates increases in sexually tinged behavior between power holders and subordinates; (e) the effect is specific to sexual perception and does not generalize to broad perceptions of liking or social acceptance.

General Discussion

Power motivates dramatic changes in the way people see and treat others. When power activates sexual motives, others may be perceived and treated in overly sexual ways. The current work tested one pathway through which power may sexualize perceptions and interactions with others. We hypothesized that power activates mating motives that bias expectations and perceptions of members of the opposite sex. Across four studies, this hypothesis was supported. Power increased the accessibility of sexual concepts that remained active even across a delay, suggesting the activation of sexual motivation (Study 1). Power increased expectations of sexual interest from a subordinate (Study 2), particularly when the subordinate was romantically available (Study 3).

Among sexually unrestricted individuals, power increased perceptions of sexual interest during a face-to-face interaction with a subordinate, even after controlling for any actual sexual interest felt by the subordinate; thus, power led participants to overperceive subordinate's level of sexual interest (Study 4). Moreover, the heightened perceptions of sexual interest among power holders mediated increases in sexualized behavior during the interaction.

Several pieces of evidence suggest that power's effects on sexual expectations and perceptions were driven by the activation of mating motives. First, Study 1 suggested that power led to increased accessibility of sexual concepts that persisted across delay. Whereas semantic primes have been shown to decay with time (Higgins et al., 1985; Wyer & Srull, 1989), the persistence of sexual concepts suggests the activation of sexual motives (cf. Bargh et al., 2001). Second, Study 3 found that goal attainability (in the form of a romantically accessible partner) moderated effects of power on sexual expectations. This moderating effect is consistent with theories of motivated cognition (Förster et al., 2007), which imply stronger motivated cognitive processes when goals are attainable than when they are unattainable. Third, effects of power on enhanced perceptions of sexual interest were most pronounced among individuals with chronically active sexual goals (those with an unrestricted sociosexual orientation). These results complement previous work suggesting sexually motivated cognition among unrestricted (but not restricted) individuals (Maner, Gailliot, et al., 2007). Fourth, effects in these studies were limited to perceptions of sexual interest; they did not generalize to more global perceptions of liking or acceptance. This finding rules out the possibility that effects were driven by a more general inclination toward social approach or affiliation. Taken together, these findings suggest that power can sexualize the perception of other people via the activation of sexual motives.

Implications of the Current Research

The current work extends the literature on power in several important ways and enhances our understanding of power's effects on social cognition and person perception. Previous research suggests that power leads people to objectify others and to see them in instrumental terms (Galinsky, Magee, Inesi, & Gruenfeld, 2006; Gruenfeld et al., 2008). Our work builds on these themes and suggests that power leads to the perception of intentions and desires in others that are consistent with the power holder's own motives (cf. Maner et al., 2005). Thus, those in power not only prefer people who can facilitate their goals (Gruenfeld et al., 2008), they also see in others mutual intentions and desires that facilitate those goals.

The current work also expands the power literature by providing evidence for the specific goals activated among those in power. Considerable work on power has demonstrated power's capacity to promote goal activation and behavioral approach (Anderson & Berdahl, 2002; Galinsky et al., 2003; Guinote, 2007; Keltner et al., 2003; Magee et al., 2007; Smith & Bargh, 2008). Much less work has focused on the specific goals and motives activated by the experience of power. The current work addresses this gap in the literature by showing that power promotes the activation of mating-related motives and behaviors. Even in the absence of explicit mating primes, power led to patterns of cognition indicative of sexual motivation. Power, coupled with the presence of an

opposite-sex social target, was enough to elicit biased perceptions of sexual interest. This work substantially extends theories that emphasize the motivational consequences of power.

The current findings also provide new insight into the psychological processes potentially associated with sexual harassment. Although past studies have focused on power's potential to release antisocial tendencies in certain people (Bargh et al., 1995; Maner & Mead, 2010), the current work suggests that power sexualizes social interactions in part because it biases the perceived intentions and desires of others. Hence, power can set the stage for harassment, because it leads to a fundamental misperception of the social environment (cf. Bargh & Raymond, 1995). Indeed, although additional research is needed to fully explore the implications for sexual harassment, the current research (Study 4) demonstrated that power holders' heightened perceptions of sexual interest directly mediated increases in sexualized behavior during a social interaction.

One solution to the potential problems caused by erroneous perceptions of sexual interest could be to build insight among those in power. For example, employers frequently require sexual harassment training. One simple addition to this training would be lessons that teach individuals that positions of power can lead people to mistakenly infer sexual interest from members of the opposite sex. This training might also remind those in power that small differences in perception can translate into broad miscommunication or inappropriate behavior. Such lessons may offer an easily implemented and inexpensive addition to existing sexual harassment training programs. In light of the massive financial, organizational, and physical and mental health costs of sexual harassment (Willness, Steel, & Lee, 2007), insight training may be an effective preventative investment.

The current findings also have implications for theories that link power with gender differences (e.g., Eagley, Makhijani, & Klonsky, 1992). Consistent with previous research (e.g., Haselton & Buss, 2000), the current studies provided some (mixed) evidence for baseline gender differences in sexual perception, with men sometimes displaying greater sexual perceptions than women. There was no evidence, however, to suggest that gender moderated effects of the power manipulations. This is consistent with evidence that, despite gender differences in prepotent motives related to power and sex, men and women sometimes respond in a similar way when they are given power (e.g., Galinsky et al., 2008; Maner & Mead, 2010). Indeed, one recent study even showed that priming people with power eliminated a baseline pattern of gender differences: Although men and women displayed different responses to negotiation in a control condition, priming power led men and women to respond in an equivalent way (Small, Gelfand, Babcock, & Gettman, 2007).

Future Directions and Limitations

Limitations of the current work provide useful avenues for further research. The current work raises the question of whether power's effects on sexual perception are due primarily to the misinterpretation of social cues or to expectations that are independent of objective cues. That is, do those in power misinterpret cues potentially signaling sexual interest (e.g., a smile or sustained eye contact), or do they form expectations of sexual interest essentially out of thin air? There is ample evidence that both

misinterpretation of social cues (e.g., Abbey, 1982; Haselton & Buss, 2000) and expectations in the absence of cues (Maner et al., 2005) can have powerful effects on perceptions of sexual interest. Thus, we suspect that both processes play a role in accounting for power's effect on sexual perception. Indeed, the current work provided evidence for heightened perceptions of sexual interest both in the absence of any social cues (Studies 2 and 3) and in a cue-rich social interaction (Study 4). Yet, the current studies were not designed to carefully delineate the role that cue misinterpretation plays. Future research would benefit from attending to this issue, in part because it provides a potential mechanism for intervention. If power's effects on sexual perception occur primarily through misinterpretation of social cues, interventions would benefit from teaching power holders to interpret social cues more appropriately.

Another limitation is that, although the current work provided new evidence for power's effect on sexual perception and behavior, it did so only in relatively artificial laboratory contexts. Interactions in real group settings are likely to be more complex; group processes often are dynamic and involve ongoing interactions among multiple people, each with his or her own motives and intentions. Future research would benefit from applying the framework developed in the current research to investigate the relationship between power and sexual perception in extant social groups and organizations.

Although this research provided evidence for moderating variables within both the situation (a partner's romantic availability in Study 3) and the person (individual differences in sociosexual orientation in Study 4), there are likely to be other moderating variables left unexplored by these studies. For example, motivation is often conceptualized as the product of a goal's attainability (expectancy) and value (Atkinson, 1964; Fishbein & Ajzen, 1974; Förster et al., 2007). We explored moderating effects of availability in Study 3, but we did not examine effects associated with value. Thus, future research would benefit from manipulating the romantic desirability of a potential romantic partner. One might expect power to display stronger effects on sexual perception when the partner is highly desirable than when he or she is relatively less desirable (Maner et al., 2005).

There are also likely to be other individual differences that moderate power's effect on sexual perception. Our conceptual framework implies that effects should be strongest among those with chronic sexual goals. One relevant individual difference pertains to a person's romantic relationship status. Power may enhance sexual perceptions primarily among single individuals who, presumably, are more motivated than those in a committed relationship to seek out new partners (Maner, Gailliot, & Miller, 2009; Simpson et al., 1990). Future studies would benefit from exploring a range of conceptually relevant moderating variables.

At a broader conceptual level, research should continue to examine the extent to which the experience of power activates specific social motives aside from those related to mating. Successfully navigating the challenges of social life requires a range of important social motives, such as seeking social status and social acceptance (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Ryan & Deci, 2000). Other studies have shown those motives to bias the perception of other people in ways that help observers achieve their goals (e.g., Maner, DeWall, Baumeister, & Schaller, 2007). Consequently, the

extent to which power activates such motives may have important implications for social perception.

Concluding Remarks

The present work suggests that power activates sexual motives that bias the perception of subordinates. In these studies, power over an opposite-sex subordinate led to heightened perceptions of sexual desire from the subordinate. Power holders' heightened perceptions of sexual desire, in turn, led to greater sexualized behavior within a face-to-face social interaction with the subordinate. This work provides new insight into one psychological process that leads those in positions of power to view subordinates as targets of sexual interest. Power may cause sexual harassment not only because it promotes disinhibition of antisocial or sexual tendencies. The current work suggests that power can also lead to a fundamental misperception of others and their (sexual) intentions. These misperceptions can sexualize interactions and set the stage for inappropriate behavior or unwelcome sexual advances.

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