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#### **ABSTRACT**

Both men and women are faced with relational situations in which sexually coercive behaviors are exercised. Because various studies offer mixed findings, a study utilized meta-analysis to compare men's and women's resistance to sexual coercion. Literature for the investigation was compiled from computer searches using key words such as "sexual coercion," "sexual aggression" and sexual resistance." Data bases searched included Psychlit, ERIC, Dissertation Abstracts and ALICE. Results indicated that men and women do not significantly differ in overall strategy usage and in verbal resistance behaviors. Men and women, however, do differ in physical resistance strategies, such that women engage in physical resistance to sexual coercion more often than men do. Possible reasons for this finding may be that women have fewer effective resistance choices available to them in sexually coercive situations. The lack of women's choice may be due to many men's belief that they have a right to sex. Moreover, women who engage in token resistance and/or are perceived by men as exercising token resistance as opposed to genuine resistance may only be adding equivocality to the potential sexual situation. The central issue of this study-how men and women differ in their strategies of sexual resistance--is very important to those undertaking educational programs on college campuses in response to incidents of sexual harassment. (Contains 2 tables and 50 references.) (TB)

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Resistance to Sexual Coercion Behaviors: A Meta-Analysis

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Resistance to Sexual Coercion Behaviors: A Meta-Analysis
Abstract

This study summarizes the literature on gender and resistance behaviors to unwanted sexual advances in an effort to compare men's and women's resistance strategies to unwanted sexual coercion. Results of the meta-analysis indicate that men and women do not differ in overall resistance behaviors or in verbal resistance behaviors. Women, however, engage in more physical resistance behaviors to unwanted sexual coercion than men. Discussion and implications of the findings follow as well as directions for future research. This issue of sexual coercion is extremely important to those of us who are undertaking educational programs on college campuses about responses to sexual harassment.

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Resistance to Sexual Coercion Behaviors: A Meta-Analysis

To a degree, the literature examining the area of sexual coercion and resistance is ambiguous in its findings.

Nonetheless, both men and women are faced with relational situations in which sexually coercive behaviors are exercised. Although the literature suggests that women are victimized by sexual coercion more than men (e.g., Stets & Pirog-Good, 1989), men are also victimized by sexual coercion (Aizenman & Kelley, 1988; Struckman-Johnson, 1988). As a result, both men and women are faced with enacting resistance behaviors (e.g., verbal, physical) in response to coercion (Parrot, 1991). Because various studies offer mixed findings regarding men's and women's resistance to sexual coercion, the purpose of this investigation is to utilize meta-analysis to compare men's and women's resistance behaviors to sexual coercion.

# Relational Context

Within the context of dating relationships, the notion of sexual intimacy is often equivocal (Burgoyne & Spitzberg, 1992). That is, the presence (or lack) of sexual interest is not easily discussed, negotiated, nor conveyed (Cupach, Metts, & Imahori, 1992). Although situational contexts often impact interaction, individuals are also impacted by gender-schemes and roles (Deaux & Major, 1987). The impact of such schemes contributes to men's and women's attempts to communicate sexual (dis)interest, which are often misinterpreted or misperceived (Abbey, 1987; Burgoyne &

Spitzberg, 1992).

Although outright sexually coercive behaviors are straightforward, both outright behaviors and behaviors cast with sexual overtones contribute to equivocality and angst (Thompson, 1991). Existing research examines resistance to both stranger and nonstranger sexual coercion. However, this paper is limiting its analysis to resistance of nonstranger sexual coercion due to its relational focus.

## Perpetration

Also ambiguous within the literature on sexual coercion is the notion of perpetration. Specifically, some literature indicates that men typically view relationships more sexually than women do (e.g., Abbey, 1982; Goodchilds & Zellman, 1984), are more expectant of sexual encounters earlier in the relationship than women (Roche, 1986), and are socialized to believe that they have a right to sex, often perceiving females' resistance to sex as token (Parrot, 1991).

Conversely, other literature contrasts with the commonly held stereotypes that women are relational gatekeepers (i.e., exercising resistance and reception strategies). Although scarce, some research examines the sexually coercive behaviors exercised by women (e.g., Aizenman & Kelley, 1988; Struckman-Johnson, 1988). O'Sullivan and Byers (1993) found that women do exercise sexual influence strategies with reluctant male partners; though, the results of their study found that the majority of women complied with the men's indication of



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reluctance and resistance and did not pursue sex any further.

Additional research indicates that women are more proceptive in mate selection than men (e.g., Moore, 1985; Perper, 1985).

That is, women are more active in seeking a potential partner than men. Once a relationship is initiated, however, men tend to assume the responsibility of escalating sexual intimacy (Gaulier, Travis, & Allgeier, 1986, cited in Allgeier & Royster, 1991; Perper, 1987). As a result, women are often again placed in the role of relational gatekeeper—negotiating receptive/rejection behaviors in response to sexual advances (Allgeier & Royster, 1991).

These findings are consistent with traditional sex-role stereotypes. Specifically, during interactions, both men and women are influenced by both cognitive and behavioral gender-schemes (Deaux & Major, 1987). According to Deaux and Major (1987), men and women rely on their cognitive gender-schemes when they are unfamiliar with the situation and/or the other individual. Cognitive gender-schemes are often influenced by traditional, societal norms and rules prescribing how men and women should behave. Within the sexual context, men are socialized to pursue sexual activity whereas women are socialized to resist it (McCormick & Jesser, 1983). Often, adherence to one's sex role leads to unwanted sexual activity.

For example, Lewin (1985) found that women's acceptance of male supremacy ideologies, the norm of male initiative, the norm of female inexperience, and the "stroking" norm strongly affects



women's engagement in unwanted intercourse. Similarly, men often engage in unwanted sex out of the fear of appearing unmasculine should they refuse (Muehlenhard, Goggins, Jones, & Satterfield, 1991). Overall, both men and women have relented to unwanted sexual activity (e.g., Muehlenhard & Cook, 1988; Muehlenhard & Long, 1988).

Within the context of escalating relationships, Deaux and Major's (1987) argument that men and women adhere to genderschemes is well-supported by research indicating that men take responsibility for sexual advancement (e.g., Allgeier & Royster, 1991). Although Deaux and Major argue that men and women have equal choice opportunities at their disposal within a given situation, this argument is questionable (Emmers, 1994). Specifically, although men and women may have equal choices, the effectiveness of such choices may differ for men and women. particular, Deaux and Major's (1987) argument is challenged within the context of overriding societal pressures and expectations. That is, many men and women still adhere to societal scripts within the context of sexuality (e.g., Mosher & Tompkins, 1988). As a result, men often pursue sex whereas women often subdue men's sexual advances (e.g., Check & Malamuth, 1985).

Men are often power-privileged in the physical and traditionally scripted domains. Women often report being forced into sex as a result of being physically overcome whereas men often report psychological pressure as contributing to their



engagement in unwanted sex (Struckman-Johnson, 1988). In one study, men cited sex role stereotypes more than women as the reason they succumbed to unwanted sex (Muehlenhard & Cook, 1988). Overall, then, men's and women's adherence to traditional sex roles and scripts can incorporate tension into potentially sexual situations due to the persist/resist notion. Conversely, the absence of traditional scripts can also add equivocality and tension to a sexual situation due to the guidance that scripts and sex roles provide.

## Token Resistance

Adding equivocality to potentially sexual situations is the notion of token resistance (e.g., Muehlenhard & Hollabaugh, 1988). Token resistance refers to an individual's insincere refusal of sex or saying "no" to sex when the individual has every intention of having sex (Muehlenhard & Hollabaugh, 1988). Men often believe that women mean "yes" when they say "no" to sex due to traditional sex roles (e.g., Check & Malamuth, 1983). Thus, men may perceive the woman's refusal of sex as really meaning "yes" and her engagement in token resistance is an attempt to protect her reputation (Check & Malamuth, 1983; Parrot, 1991).

Usage of token resistance behaviors contributes greatly to rape myth acceptance (Burt, 1980). Rape myth refers to beliefs that individuals hold regarding rape, rapists, and victims of rape. Specifically, rape myth contends that the victim of a sexual assault is somewhat or substantially responsible for the



rape. Acceptance of adversarial sexual beliefs has also been found to greatly impact rape myth acceptance (Burt, 1980).

The Adversarial Sexual Beliefs Scale (ASB) (Burt, 1980)
measures acceptability of attitudes for using physically coercive
behaviors in relationships. Many of the items included on the
Adversarial Sexual Beliefs Scale illustrate token resistance.
Some of these items include "In a dating relationship a woman is
largely out to take advantage of a man," "Most women are sly and
manipulating when they are out to attract a man," and "A lot of
women seem to get pleasure in putting men down" (p. 222). Thus,
a male's acceptance of rape myth in conjunction with a female's
usage of token resistance may escalate the possibility of a
sexually coercive situation.

Most likely, a man's acceptance of rape myth relates to his questioning a woman's true feelings when she refuses sex. Problematically, as many as 39% of women have admitted to engaging in token resistance at least once (Muehlenhard & Hollabaugh, 1988) and 17% of women have admitted to making a practice out of engaging in token resistance. Implications for engaging in token resistance may be that women are sending signals that contribute to males' sexual aggression, particularly if the male accepts rape myth. As a result, men may often interpret women's overt resistance behaviors to sexually coercive acts as covert receptivity behaviors.

Usage of token resistance contributes to ambiguity in relational situations in that sexual issues often become unclear.



One study (Burgoyne & Spitzberg, 1992) offers an example of token resistant behavior that clearly illustrates the ambiguity token resistance can contribute to a potential sexual situation:

Tammy immediately pulled away from Dave and told him that she did not want them to get carried away. After she said this she placed Dave's hand on her breast (p. 33).

Specifically, women's usage of token resistance behaviors may imply their controlling the sexual aspect of the relationship (Muehlenhard & Hollabaugh, 1988). Men accepting of rape myth may interpret token resistance behaviors as invitations to sex.

Moreover, men accepting of rape myths may become more aggressive by a woman's attempt to control the sexual aspect of the relationship. As a result, token resistance may be perceived as gameplaying by some men and may even contribute to their aggressive or coercive behavior.

More recent research, however, contends that both men and women exercise token resistant behaviors. Contrary to popular belief, some studies have found that men exercise token resistance behaviors more than women (e.g., Sprecher, Hatfield, Cortese, Potapova, & Levitskaya, 1994). Overall, token resistant actions often contribute to ambiguity and the mixed-message may also imply control differentials in untraditional domains.

Clearly, sexual situations in dating relationships are often ambiguous and stressful (Thompson, 1991). Whereas some literature indicates that men assert more power and sexual advances than women (e.g., Abbey, 1982; Roche, 1986), others



found that women can be sexually coercive (e.g., O'Sullivan & Byers, 1993; Struckman-Johnson, 1988), more proactive than men in partner selection (Perper, 1985), and often engage in token resistance to men's sexual advances (e.g., Burgoyne & Spitzberg, 1992; Muehlenhard, 1988; Muehlenhard & Hollabaugh, 1988).

Research on Sexual Coercion and Resistance Strategies

Research on sexual coercion and resistance strategies is fairly recent. According to Mc Cormick (1979) "very little empirical information about how people influence one another to have sexual intercourse or to avoid it" exists (pp. 194-195). Within the last decade, much research has focused on sexual coercion and aggression (e.g., Briere & Malamuth, 1983; De Turck, 1987; Muehlenhard & Linton, 1987) and resistance to sexual coercion (e.g., Atkeson, Calhoun, & Morris, 1989; Bart & O'Brien, 1985; Brady, Chrisler, Hosdale, Osowiecki, & Veal, 1991; Metts et al., 1992). Despite the influx of research examining sexual behaviors, findings are nevertheless inconsistent.

# Stracegies and Context

Problematic within the availability of research regarding sexual behavior is the notion of context. That is, some studies examine stranger rape situations (e.g., De Keseredy, Schwartz, & Tait, 1993; Ullman & Knight, 1991) whereas others examine nonstranger or date rape situations (e.g., Bostwick & De Lucia, 1992; Dull & Giacopassi, 1987; Holcomb, Holcomb, Sondag, & Williams, 1991; Spitzberg, 1994). Moreover, some studies examine females' resistance to males' sexual coercion (e.g., Levine-Mac-



Combie, 7 Koss, 1986; Ullman & Knight, 1992) whereas others examine males' resistance to females' sexual coercion (e.g., Aizenman & Kelley, 1988; Struckman-Johnson, 1988). Finally, some studies examine resistance strategies that are disingenuous, such as token resistance (e.g., Muehlenhard & Hollabaugh, 1988; Sprecher et al., 1994).

## Resistance to Sexual Coercion

In regard to sexually coercive situations, a controversy still exists regarding whether to resist or acquiesce. For example, police often discourage resisting an attacker in order to prevent bodily harm (Brodsky, 1976). Kleck & Sayles (1990) report, however, that males and females who engage in any sort of resistance to an attack are less likely to have a rape completed against them.

Yet, whereas some research indicates that physical resistance strategies are most effective in avoiding rape (Ullman & Knight, 1993), others found that physical resistance increased the likelihood of contact (Siegel, Sorenson, Golding, Burnam, & Stein, 1989). Siegel et al. (1989) found that verbal resistance strategies were most effective in resisting sexual soercion whereas Mc Donald (1971) found that a combination of verbal and physical strategies was more effective against assault than physical resistance alone.

Resisting sexual advances primarily involves any or all of three types of resistance behaviors: (a) verbal, (b) physical, and (c) outside intervention. Because this investigation is

concerned with the resistance behaviors of the victim, the focus will be the victim's verbal and physical behaviors. Somewhat problematic is the paucity of research regarding males' resistance to sexual coercion. As noted earlier, research examining the effectiveness of any one or combination of these behaviors has produced mixed results (e.g., Bart & O'Brien, 1985; O'Sullivan & Byers, 1993; Quinsey & Upfold, 1985; Ullman & Knight, 1992). Therefore, meta-analyzing applicable resistance studies may shed light on types of resistance strategies used as well as gender differences in usage.

### Method

## Literature Search

Literature for this investigation was compiled from computer searches using key words such as: "sexual coercion," "sexual aggression," "sexual resistance," and "date rape." Computer data bases searched include Psychlit, Eric., and Dissertation

Abstracts as well as library reference bases, such as ALICE, in order to locate articles, dissertations, and books addressing sexual coercion and resistance. The purpose of the literature search was to locate articles reporting the comparative frequencies of men's and women's various resistance strategies.

Each article's reference section was examined in order to locate additional relevant articles. All examined articles meeting the following criteria were included in this investigation:

a) The manuscript examined nonstranger sexually coercive situations.



- b) The manuscript examined victim resistance (i.e., verbal, physical strategies) to sexual coercion.
- c) The manuscript included a sample of both male and female participants.
- d) The manuscript included data of both males' and females' resistance behaviors.
- e) The data from each manuscript had to report adequate statistical information to allow an estimate of the relationship between sexual coercion and males' and females' resistance behaviors.

# Manuscript Coding

# Verbal or Physical Resistance

This code determined whether the strategies exercised by males or females were verbal or physical in nature. Verbal strategies involved the victim using threats, explanations, or persuasive strategies to resist sexual coercion. Token resistance was not coded as a verbal resistance strategy because such behaviors are disingenuous in nature. That is, usage of such behaviors are not exercised when the victim is truly resisting the sexual coercion. Physical strategies involved flight or some physical behavior used to halt the sexual coercion (e.g., pushing the pursuer away, removing the pursuer's hand from the target's body, etc.). The two authors had 100% agreement on the studies which involved males' and females' resistance to sexual coercion as well as the types of strategies used.



# Statistical Analysis

Consistent with the statistical technique utilized in other meta-analyses (e.g., Allen, Emmers, Gebhardt, & Giery, in press), this investigation also followed the methodology proposed by Hunter & Schmidt (1990). This method has also been referred to as a variance-centered form of meta-analysis (Bangert-Drowns, 1986) and holds that an average effect is derived from a sole population of effects and deviations from the average effect are due to sampling error.

The correlation coefficients calculated in this investigation represent the effect sizes. Cumulatively, an overall correlation was calculated for each study as well as a correlation for verbal resistance strategies and a correlation for physical resistance strategies exercised by both men and women in response to sexual coercion. Chi-squares were also calculated in order to test the homogeneity of groups. A significant chi-square is indicative of nonhomogeneity whereas a nonsignificant chi-square indicates homogeneity.

### Results

Of the studies examined for potential inclusion in this investigation, six studies examined both male and female resistance to sexual coercion and were included in the analysis. See Table 1 for an overview of included studies. The overall analysis of the 6 studies with 993 subjects indicated an average negative correlation (ave r = -.045) between gender differences in resistance to sexual coercion. The effect is homogeneous  $\chi^2$ 



(5) = 1.74 (p <.05). The average correlation for gender differences in exercising verbal resistance behaviors to sexual coercion (N = 910) was ave r = .008 and is homogenous  $X^2$  (5) = 2.78 (p <.05). Finally, the average effect for gender differences in using physical resistance behaviors to sexual coercion (N = 609) was ave r = -.146 and was also homogenous  $X^2$  (4) = 7.23 (p < .05).

No significant differences exist between men and women in overall strategy use or in verbal strategy use. However, the results do indicate that women, in comparison to men, are more likely to exercise physical resistance behaviors (i.e. "fight or flight") to unwanted sexual coercion. See Table 2 for a summary of the results.

## Discussion

The results of this study are intuitively logical.

Specifically, women engage in more fight and flight resistance behaviors when faced with unwanted sexual advances than men.

According to research on gender and interaction (Deaux & Major, 1987), men and women have an equal array of behavioral choices available to them in various situations. This argument, however, has been questioned (Emmers, 1994). Results of this investigation indicate that, although men and women may have equal choices, the effectiveness of those choices differs for women and men. Specifically, women in sexually coercive situations more often resort to physical resistance in order to suppress sexual coercion whereas men needn't necessarily engage



in physical resistance because verbal resistance strategies suffice.

Past research indicates that women often adhere to men's reluctance to engage in sex and do not pursue the issue (O'Sullivan & Byers, 1993). Men, however, often believe that they have a right to sex (Parrot, 1991) and that it is their responsibility to advance the sexual aspect of a relationship (Roche, 1986). Consequently, women may have to resort to physical resistance because the type of coercion they most often grapple with is male's physical coercion (Struckman-Johnson, 1988). Struckman-Johnson (1988) found that men most often reported acquiescing to psychological, not physical, pressure from females. Overall, then, females' resistance behaviors may mirror the type of coercive behaviors enacted upon them.

As noted earlier, a number of women have admitted (39%) to engaging in token resistance behaviors at least once during potentially sexual situations (e.g., Muehlenhard & Hollabaugh, 1988). Implications for engaging in token resistance may be great, especially in situations in which the perpetrating male is accepting of rape myth (Burt, 1980). In such situations, a male may perceive a female's resistance to sexual advances as disingenuous attempts to protect her reputation (Check & Malamuth, 1983). As noted by Parrot (1991), token resistance behaviors are often problematic because they are communicated with "I'm resisting, but please persist" overtones (p. 140).

Thus, a male's acceptance of rape myth (Burt, 1980), coupled



with the misperceptions of many intimate encounters (Abbey, 1987; Burgoyne & Spitzberg, 1992), may often fuel a male's persistence for sex. Persistence for sex may undoubtedly be escalated if the male perceives the woman as engaging in token resistance behaviors and be further advanced if the female actually is engaging in such behaviors. As a result, women who are genuinely resistant to unwanted sex often have to advance beyond verbal refusal to physical resistance.

The combined force of these beliefs, especially in light of the equiv rality of many potentially sexual situations (e.g., Abbey, 1987), is undoubtedly great and lends itself to persistence for sex. The persistence for sex may be even greater in situations in which the male is accepting of rape myth. Due to the belief systems in support of persisting for sex, a simple "no" given by a female will most likely be ineffective. Results of this study indicate that women do indeed engage in physical resistance behaviors more often than men.

Other research, however, indicates that men engage in more token resistance than women (e.g., Sprecher et al., 1994).

Sprecher et al. (1994) argue that perhaps the reason men report higher usage of token resistance may be that they define more situations as sexual whereas women would not. As a result, men may believe that they are resisting a sexual situation when sexual suggestion was not intended by the female. This explanation parallels Abbey's (1982) argument that men typically perceive relationships more sexually than women do. Overall, it



seems as though the influx of traditional and nontraditional sex roles, misperceptions of intention, and the various means in which sexual interest is conveyed all contribute to equivocality in sexual situations.

examining the effectiveness of such resistance behaviors (e.g., Metts, Cupach, & Imahori, 1992) in that research on whether to resist or acquiesce to coercion is ambiguous. Specifically, police often discourage resistance in that it may increase the severity of an attack (Brodsky, 1976). Conversely, other research indicates that any sort of resistance is beneficial to the victim (Kleck & Sayles, 1990). Recent research is beginning to examine the notion of "se lal miscommunication"——specifically, the prevalence of men and women who say "yes" to sex when they really mean "no" (Sprecher et al., 1994).

Similarly, research on the effectiveness of specific types of resistance offers mixed results. For example, Ullman and Knight (1993) argue that physical resistance behaviors are most effective whereas Siegel et al. (1989) report that physical resistance is disadvantageous to the victim. Implications of the latter finding is particularly salient for women.

Results of this investigation indicate that women engage in physical resistance behaviors more than men when their goal is to resist unwanted sexual advances. Unlike token resistance behaviors, which are often verbal in nature, physical resistance involves engaging in fight or flight behaviors to avoid sex.



Yet, according to some research (Siegel et al., 1989), engaging in such behavior only encourages the attack that women are attempting to discourage.

## Limitations

Problems in undertaking an investigation such as this one involve the paucity of studies that examine males' resistance to sexual coercion. Most studies involve females' resistance to male sexual coercion. Another difficulty involves the various contexts and dependent variables focused upon in the existing research. That is, studies' foci range from stranger rape, acquaintance rape, and date rape and rely upon retrospective data of actual resistance, prospective reports of what one would do in such a scenario, "o subjects' ratings of hypothetical date rape scenarios.

## Conclusion

This study compared men's and women's resistance behaviors to sexual coercion. Results indicate that men and women do not significantly differ in overall strategy usage or in verbal resistance behaviors. Men and women do differ in physical resistance strategies, however, such that women engage in physical resistance to sexual coercion more often than men do.

Possible reasons for this finding may be that women have fewer effective resistance choices available to them in sexually coercive situations. The lack of women's choice may be due to many men's beliefs that they have a right to sex (Parrot, 1991). Moreover, women who engage in token resistance and/or are

perceived by men as exercising token resistance as opposed to genuine resistance may only be adding equivocality to the potential sexual situation. This may exacerbate sexual coercion, especially if the man is accepting of rape myths (Burt, 1980), such that it is necessary for women to engage in "fight or flight" behaviors in an effort to resist unwanted sex.

The central issue of this study considers the difference between men's and women's resistance strategies to unwanted sexual encounters. This issue is very important to those of us undertaking educational programs on college campuses about responses to sexual harassment.



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Abbey (1987) Study I:	Examined males and females reactions to what they had erroneously perceived as a sexual "come on" by the opposite sex via responses to open-ended questions.
Abbey (1987) Study II:	Participants expanded on the response to misperceived sexual "come on's" that were derived from Study I. In addition to addressing the resistance responses created from Study I, participants were able to expand on their reactions through a "write-in" format.
Belk & Snell (1988):	Examined types of avoidance strategies exercised by males and females to unwanted influence in close relationships. Data was derived from responses to participants' essay answers.
Brady et al. (1991):	Examined males' and females' resistance strategy responses to sexually coercive, date rape scenarios. Data was derived from responses to various scales and a potential rape scenario.
McCormick (1979):	Examined men's and women's avoidance strategies in response to unwanted sexual intercourse.  Data was derived from questionnaires and essay questions.
Siegel et al. (1989):	Examined men's and women's most frequently used strategies in response to an attempted sexual assault. Data was derived from responses to an open-ended question addressing resistance strategies.

Table 2

Correlations of Overall, Verbal, and Physical Resistance Behaviors

Study	Overall r	Verbal r	Physical r
Abbey, A. (1987) (Study I)	007 (N=131)	009 (N=911)	045 (N=402)
Abbey, A. (1987) (Study II)	.028 (N=107)	.063 (N=641)	031 (N=432)
Belk, S., & Snell, W. (1989)	.000 (N=102)	.000 (N=102)	.000 (N=102)
Brady, E., Chrisler, J., Hos dale, D., Osowiecki, D., & Veal, T. (1991)		139 (N=591)	.005 (N=592)
McCormick, N. (1979)	041 (N=229)	041 (N=229)	
Seigel, J., Sorenson, S., Golding, J., Burnam, M., & Stein, J. (1989)	091 (N=365)	.055 (N=365)	236 (N=365)

Note Positive correlations indicate that males used strategies more, negative correlations indicate that females used strategies more.