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Review

Gender Differences in Intended Escalatory Tendencies among Marital Partners

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Abstract

This study addresses the intended escalatory tendency in eight hypothetical situations which the provocator's identity (partner or stranger, male or female) and the provocation form (verbal or physical aggression) were manipulated. The research question is "how does the identity of the provocator and the form of his/her provocation affect the participant's intended escalation level, and does the gender of the participant affect differences in intended escalation levels?" The research sample consisted of 208 Israeli couples. The main finding is that women's intended response to their male partner is more escalatory than men's intended response to their female partner. Results also show that women's escalation is the most severe to partner provocation, and the least severe to male strangers' provocation. Men's escalation is the most severe to provocation by male strangers, and the least severe to their partner's provocation. Findings indicate that men's intention to escalate decreases as their partner's provocation becomes more severe. The severity of provocation has little effect on women's intention to escalate. Such results are consistent with social role theory and sexual selection theory that maintain that status enhancement is more important for males than for females, and is more important for males than risk reduction is, whereas the opposite is true for females.

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Much of the literature on sex differences in aggression is based on social role theory (Bettencourt & Kernahan 1997; Bettencourt & Miller 1996; Eagly & Steffen 1986) and sexual selection theory (Archer 1996; Daly & Wilson 1988). Sexual selection theory locates the origins of sex differences in human evolution. According to this theory, men along the history of evolution concentrated on reproductive competition, for which status had crucial importance. Women concentrated on pregnancy, birth, and raising the children, for which security and safety had crucial importance. Social role theory also locates the basis of sex differences in the historical division of labor. Roles produce expectancies about gendered characteristics, leading to different patterns of behavior that are transmitted to future generations through socialization processes. Based on these theories it can be argued that *status enhancement* is more important for males than for females, and is more important for males than *risk reduction*, whereas the opposite is true for females. The main concern about aggression of women tends to be risk reduction rather than status enhancement (Campbell, 1999). The purpose of the present study is to test these arguments by comparing aggressive response to conflict with partners and strangers by men and women.

This study analyzes gender differences in the participant's intended aggressive response to aggressive provocation in relative terms. The intended aggressive response can range from lower than the severity of the aggressive provocation, equal, or higher. Hence, this approach examines interpersonal *escalatory* tendency (Winstok, 2008). This study addresses the intended escalatory tendency in eight hypothetical situations which the provocator's identity (partner or stranger, male or female) and the provocation form (verbal or physical aggression) were manipulated.

Risk Reduction and Status Enhancement

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3 Theories from various disciplines (e.g., social learning, Bandura 1973; evolutionary
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5 psychology, Buss 1995; rational choice theory, Klepper and Nagin 1989; Piliavin et al. 1986)
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7 suggest that human behavior is regulated to a large extent by anticipated consequences of
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9 prospective actions, aiming to maximize desirable outcomes (benefits) and minimize
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11 undesirable ones (costs) (Bandura 1973). In the context of interpersonal conflicts and
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13 aggression, the relationship between outcome expectations in terms of costs (anticipated risks)
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15 and benefits (anticipated opportunities) and behavioral decisions has been discussed
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17 theoretically and have found empirical support (e.g., Felson 1993; Oliver 1994; Wilkinson 2003;
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19 Winstok 2006). Accordingly, the risk of a conflict (physical injury) is likely to be higher for
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21 women than for men, and the benefit (opportunity to gain status) is small if any (Campbell
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23 1999; 2006; Winstok, 2007). Based on this theoretical framework, emphasizing gender
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25 differences in risk reduction and status enhancement, it is possible to logically deduce assertions
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27 on gender differences in behavioral decisions in various situations of interpersonal conflicts
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33 34 **Risk Reduction**

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36 Assuming that physical size on one hand and uncertainty on the other hand may be
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38 perceived as risk factors for physical injury, men would be perceived to be more dangerous than
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40 women (because, on average, they are larger), and strangers would be perceived to be more
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42 dangerous than familiar persons (because there is more uncertainty about their behavior). An
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44 unfamiliar man would be perceived as the most dangerous because men, on average are large,
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46 and because there is more uncertainty about the behavior of a stranger than the behavior of a
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48 partner. Unfamiliar women and partners would be perceived as less dangerous. In addition,
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50 according to these assumptions, a male partner of women is more dangerous than the female
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52 partner of men.
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3 According to the above mentioned theories, avoiding physical injury would have high
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5 priority in women's behavior in conflict. Hence it can be deduced that *the escalatory tendency*
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7 *of women towards unfamiliar men would be smaller than against their male partner and an*
8
9 *unfamiliar woman.* The question that remains unanswered by this theoretical framework is
10
11 whether escalatory tendencies of women are greater towards unfamiliar women (who are weaker
12
13 than men but their dangerousness is unknown) or towards their male partner (who is probably
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15 stronger than an unfamiliar woman but his dangerousness is known, or at least is experienced as
16
17 known more than the dangerousness of a stranger).
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21 22 **Status Enhancement**

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24 How would escalation affect status? It is assumed that, for men, involvement in conflict
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26 between same-gender opponents may uphold and enhance status, and avoiding such conflicts
27
28 may diminish status. On the other hand, conflicts with opposite gender opponents may damage
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30 status and avoiding these conflicts may add to it. For example, a man who avoids a conflict
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32 with another man could be labeled weak or cowardly. A man who escalates a conflict with a
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34 woman may be perceived as one who overcomes his opponents because of their weakness,
35
36 rather than his strength, which is regarded a sign of weakness and cowardice as well. Another
37
38 derived proposition is that the status of strong individuals who have a conflict with weaker ones
39
40 may be harmed. According to the theories mentioned above, status concerns would be the
41
42 strongest factor in the behavior of men. On the basis of this analysis, it can be deduced that *the*
43
44 *escalatory tendency of men against unfamiliar men is higher than against their female partner*
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46 *and an unfamiliar woman.* A question that remains unanswered by this theoretical framework is
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48 against whom men would escalate the least: their female partner or an unfamiliar woman?
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54 55 **Interaction of Risk Reduction and Status Enhancement**

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3 Additional deductions from the aforementioned theories can be made by moving the
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5 analysis from the personal to the interpersonal level. It is argued that, in addition to personal
6
7 motivations affecting the behavior of men and women in conflicts, aggression is also influenced
8
9 by the actor's evaluation of the motivations guiding their opponents' conduct. It is a widespread
10
11 notion that men are expected to practice chivalry in their interaction with women (Felson, 2002;
12
13 Felson & Feld, 2009). Yet, women's certainty of men's commitment to chivalry is different
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15 when the man is a stranger or an acquaintance. On average, more is known about the extent to
16
17 which a man is chivalrous when the man is familiar, and more is unknown when the man is a
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19 stranger. Hence it may be assumed that in a conflict with a stranger, women's motivation to
20
21 avoid harm would be more important than in a conflict with their partner. It may further be
22
23 suggested that women would perceive other unfamiliar women to have attitudes similar to their
24
25 own, making them less dangerous than unfamiliar men but more dangerous than their male
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27 partner. On the basis this analysis, it can be deduced that *the escalatory tendency of women is*
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29 *higher against their partner than against unfamiliar woman and men.*

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36 The same principles may work for men. They may believe that despite their own physical
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38 advantage, their partner does not regard them as a considerable threat, if at all. Therefore they
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40 may believe that their partner's readiness to escalate their conflicts would be high. Men's
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42 commitment to the chivalry code of conduct and their partner's awareness of this commitment
43
44 may increase men's vulnerability in conflicts with their partner. Under such conditions men may
45
46 seek a course of action that would reduce friction and risk. They may be expected to respond
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48 with moderation to their partner's aggression in order to prevent conflicts from deteriorating to
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50 severe aggression. This analysis leads to the deduction that *the escalatory tendency of men*
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52 *against their partner would be weaker than against unfamiliar woman and men.*

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3 In sum, the research question in this study is "how does the identity of the provocator
4 (partner or stranger, male or female) affect the study participant's escalation level, and does
5 gender of the participant affect differences in escalation levels?" Based on gender differences in
6 risk reduction, status enhancement and the interaction between the two, Hypothesis 1 is that:
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8 *Women's escalation is the most severe to partner provocation, and the least severe to male*
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10 *strangers' provocation;* and Hypothesis 2 is that *Men's escalation will be the most severe to*
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12 *provocation by a male stranger, and the least severe to their partner's provocation.*
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19 Method

20 Sample

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22 This study analyzes data collected from a sample of 208 couples who participated in the
23 last wave of a three-wave longitudinal research project on conflicts in intimate relationships.
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25 The project was funded by the Israel Science Foundation, and carried out by the Center for the
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27 Study of Society at the University of Haifa.
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34 **Sampling and data collection.** The couples were recruited by an ad in local newspapers
35 and by notices placed on service bulletin boards. The ads and notices explained that couples are
36 needed for a study on couples' quarrels. Participating couples were chosen by three criteria: 1)
37 Both partners agreed to take part in the research; 2) The couple has been living together for at
38 least six months prior to the research; 3) The couple was not separated or in a process toward
39 separating or divorce.
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48 The Research Ethics Committee at the University of Haifa authorized the protocol for the
49 interview and the consent procedures. A call for participation in the research was advertised and
50 then a short telephone interview was conducted. The candidates were given a brief explanation
51 about the research, their role in it, and their rights and obligations. They were also screened for
52 compatibility with the research and its criteria during the telephone interview. Graduate and
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3 undergraduate female students were trained for this purpose and collected the data. The
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5 interviews were conducted at the participants' homes. She first introduced herself and then
6
7 explained the purpose of the study, the participants' rights and obligations and their part in the
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9 study. She then gave the candidates an explanatory leaflet summarizing the information
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11 provided verbally and gave them time to review the paper and sign as evidence of their consent
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13 to take part in the study. Each partner completed the questionnaire individually in private
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15 without the presence of the second partner, first the woman and then the man. The surveyor only
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17 offered explanations and clarifications in case of difficulty (such as language and
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19 understanding).
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24 **Sample characteristics.** Men's average age was 37.23 years ($SD=10.75$). Women's
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26 average age was 34.71 years ($SD=9.89$). 81.6% of sample couples were of the same country of
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28 origin. Among men, 77.2% were born in Israel, 5.8% were born in Western
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30 Europe/America/Canada/South Africa, 1.4% born in North Africa and the Middle East, 13.9%
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32 were born in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet States, and 1.5% came from other regions.
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34 Among women, 78.2% were born in Israel, 5.3% in Western Europe/America/Canada/South
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36 Africa, 1.5% were born in North Africa and the Middle East, 14.6% were born in Eastern
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38 Europe and the former Soviet States, and 0.5% came from other regions. Most of the
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40 participants were Jewish: 95.1% of men and 94.7% of women. Average cohabitation was 9.1
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42 years ($SD=10$); participants had an average of 1.7 children ($SD=1.4$); 77.9 % of participant were
43
44 married. The education of men was 14.3 years in average ($SD=2.6$) and that of women 14.6
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46 ($SD=2.4$). 70.7% of men worked full time, 14.4% worked part time, 2.9% held odd jobs, 6.7%
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48 were unemployed, 1.9% were in training and 3.4% were retired. 52.4% of women worked full
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50 time, 24.5% worked part time, 2.9% held odd jobs, 16.3% were unemployed, 1.4% were in
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52 training, and 2.4% were retired. The men sampled reported an average monthly family income
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of 7200 New Israeli Shekels ($SD=3400$), and the women reported an average monthly family income of 6700 New Israeli Shekels ($SD=3300$).

Experimental Design

This study investigated intended escalatory tendency using eight hypothetical situations manipulated by three factors. The first factor varied provocator's relationship to the study participant: partner versus stranger. The second factor varied gender of the provocator. The third factor varied type of provocation: verbal aggression versus physical aggression. The verbal aggression condition asked participants how they would respond if the provocator: "talked hurtfully to you. For instance, shout at you, curse or insult you." The physical aggression condition asked participants how they would respond if the provocator: "actually hurt you physically but without injuring you. For instance, push, slap, punch, or kick you." Participants assessments were coded on a 5 point scale: 1= a non aggressive or relatively less aggressive response by far; 2= a less aggressive response; 3= an equally aggressive response (balance); 4= a more aggressive response; and 5= a much more aggressive response.

Data Analysis

The hypotheses were tested using a 2x2x2 repeated measure analysis ANOVA (with Bonferoni pair-wise comparison). In this analysis, participant's gender, provocator identity and provocation were presented as the within-subjects variables.

Results

The statistical tests and Eta square for the main effects and interactions between participant gender, provocator identity and severity of provocation on participant's escalatory tendencies are detailed in Table 1. Table 1 demonstrates that the strongest main effect is for the relation of provocator's identity (stranger versus partner) to escalation, and the weakest main effect is for severity of aggressive provocation. Among the interactions, the strongest

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relationship to escalation is for the interaction of participant's gender and provocator's identity.

Thus, the role of the severity of aggressive provocation is less important in determining escalation intentions than participant gender and provocator identity. Figure 1 provides the mean escalatory tendencies and indicates the specific ways in which the identity of the provocator (partner or stranger, male or female) affect the participant's escalation level, and the specific way participant's gender affects escalation.

Escalation in Response to Verbal Aggression

Bars 1 to 3 present the means of *men's* intended escalation in response to verbal provocation by: a female partner (Bar #1), a male stranger (Bar #2), and a female stranger (Bar #3). Men's escalation to their partner's verbal provocation (Bar #1) is the least severe and to male strangers' provocation (bar #3) the most severe.

Bars 4 to 6 present the means of *women's* intended escalation in response to verbal provocation by: a male partner (Bar #4), male stranger (Bar #5), and female stranger (Bar #6). Women's escalation to their partner's verbal provocation (Bar #4) is the most severe and to male strangers' provocation (bar #6) the least severe.

Overall, men's intended escalation to female partner aggression (Bar #1) is lower than women's escalation to male partner aggression (Bar #4). Men's escalation to male stranger provocation (Bar #2) is higher than women's escalation to female stranger provocation (Bar #6) (same sex escalation). Men's escalation to female stranger provocation (Bar #3) is lower than women's escalation to male stranger provocation (Bar #5) (opposite sex escalation).

Escalation in Response to Physical Aggression

Bars 7 to 9 present the means of men's intended escalation in response to physical aggression by: a female partner (Bar #7), male stranger (Bar #8), and female stranger (Bar #9). The least severe escalation by men is to their partner's physical provocation (Bar #7), and the

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3 most severe is to male strangers' provocation (Bar #9). These findings are consistent with those
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5 already identified for men's escalation to verbal aggression (bars 1 - 3). Yet, the effects on
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7 physical aggression are much greater than on verbal aggression.
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11 Bars 10 to 12 present the means of women's escalation to physical provocation by: a male
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13 partner (Bar #10), male stranger (Bar #11) and female stranger (Bar #12). The differences
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15 between women's escalation to their partner's physical provocation (Bar #10) and female
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17 strangers' provocation (bar #12) are small and not significant. Women's escalation to their
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19 partner's physical provocation (Bar #10) is higher than to male strangers' provocation (bar #11).
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21 These findings are consistent with those already identified for women's escalation to verbal
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23 aggression (bars 4 - 6). However, the differences in escalation are less extreme for physical than
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25 to verbal aggression.
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29 Overall, men's escalation to female partner physical aggression (Bar #7) is lower than
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31 women's escalation to male partner aggression (Bar #10). Men's escalation to male stranger
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33 aggression (Bar #8) is higher than women's escalation to female stranger aggression (Bar #12)
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35 (same sex escalation). Men's escalation to female stranger aggression (Bar #9) is lower than
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37 women's escalation to male stranger aggression (Bar #11) (opposite sex escalation). These
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39 findings are consistent with those already identified for men and women's escalation to verbal
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41 aggression (bars 1 - 6).
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45 46 **Gender of Participant Analysis**

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48 To further check the findings on gender differences in escalatory intention towards
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50 partners based on mean scores, we examined the distribution of participants' intended responses
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52 to their partner's provocations: 54.6% of male participants versus 74.0% of female participants
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54 indicated that they would respond aggressively if their partners provoked them verbally, and
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51% of male participants versus 76% of female participants argued that they would respond aggressively if their partners physically provoked them.

Figure 2 presents the same results used in Figure 1 in a form that may bring out more clearly the difference in responses to verbal provocations and physical provocation. Line #1 at the bottom of this figure shows that men's escalation *decreases* as their partner's provocation becomes more severe (verbal to physical aggression). Line #2 at the top of Figure 2 shows that men's escalation *increases* as male stranger provocation becomes more severe (verbal to physical provocation). For women, the differences between escalation to verbal and physical aggression are very small for both their partners (line #3) and female strangers (line #4). Thus, *the severity of provocation has a small effect on the women in this study.*

Discussion

This study addressed intended tendencies to escalate the level of aggression in hypothetical situations in which the provocator's identity (partner versus stranger, male versus female) and the provocation form (verbal versus physical aggression) were manipulated. As hypothesized, results show that: (1) Women's escalation is the most severe to partner provocation, and the least severe to male strangers' provocation; (2) Men's escalation is the most severe to provocation by male strangers, and the least severe to their partner's provocation. Such results are consistent with social role theory (Bettencourt & Kernahan, 1997; Bettencourt & Miller, 1996; Eagly & Steffen, 1986) and sexual selection theory (Archer 1996; Daly & Wilson 1988) that maintain that status enhancement is more important for males than for females, and is more important for males than risk reduction is, whereas the opposite is true for females.

Important as are the theories this study relied on, they do not provide appropriate basis for hypotheses about differences between genders in a given context, specifically in the dyadic one. This limitation may stem from the fact that the theories are one-sided. They attempt to explain

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3 why men are aggressive, and why women are not. Accordingly, the theories emphasize for men
4 the factors which encourage aggressive behavior (such as status enhancement), and for women
5 they emphasize factors which inhibit such behavior (such as risk reduction). Moreover, based on
6 these theories it can be argued that in any given context, including the dyadic one, men would
7 tend towards aggression more than women. This contradicts the accumulated knowledge in the
8 field, which demonstrates that women as well as men, may behave violently in intimate
9 relationships (e.g., Anderson, 2002; Archer, 2000; Fiebert, 2010; Gelles & Straus, 1988; Kessler
10 et al., 2001; McCarroll et al., 2004; Straus, Gelles, & Steinmetz, 1980/2006; Straus, 2009a;
11 Whitaker et al., 2007; Williams & Frieze, 2005). We suggest that the contradiction occurs
12 because those theories do not specifically attend to aggression-encouraging factors for women,
13 and aggression-inhibiting factors for men.
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29 This comparison found that women's intended response to their male partner is more
30 escalatory than men's intended response to their female partner. This finding is consistent with
31 the theoretical framework of this study and with the aforementioned empirical evidence that
32 women too act aggressively in their intimate relationships. This research also investigated the
33 differences in responses to provocation of various degrees of severity *in the dyadic context*.
34 Findings demonstrate that partner provocation severity has greater effect on men than on
35 women. Men's intention to escalate decreases as their partner's provocation becomes more
36 severe. The severity of provocation has little effect on women. These findings indicate that in
37 the dyadic context men tend to inhibit their aggression more than women do. The findings also
38 demonstrate that in the dyadic context men inhibit their aggression not only compared to women
39 but also as compared to their escalatory tendency towards strangers, especially male ones.
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3 How can the differences in escalatory tendency between men and women in the dyadic
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5 context be explained? In many societies, the violence of men towards their female partners is
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7 socially rejected and condemned, and men often pay dearly for such violence. On the other
8
9 hand, women's violence against their male partners is regarded understandable, pardonable, and
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11 sometimes humorous (Greenblat, 1983; Feld & Felson, 2009; Felson & Feld, 2009). It is also
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13 consistent with a recent study (Winstok, 2009) based on data from the survey on violence
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15 against women in Israel (Eisikovits, Fishman, & Mesh, 2000) that examined the extent to which
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17 men and women's severity of violence predicts involvement with welfare, judicial and
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19 enforcement agencies, and mental and physical health agencies. Data were obtained from a
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21 stratified probability sample of 2,544 women drawn from the general population in Israel.
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23 Findings indicate that severity of men's violence predicted involvement with social control and
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25 social service agencies. The more severe the violence, the higher was the probability agencies
26
27 would become involved. The severity of the woman's violence was irrelevant in this context.
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29 That is, the woman's violence severity was not correlated with the involvement of formal social
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31 agents. This finding indicates an asymmetrical approach to partner violence that pays more
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33 attention to men's than women's violence of the same level of severity. This probably reflects
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35 the fact that women are much more likely to be injured by physical attacks of a partner. It may
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37 also be part of the explanation for the lower propensity of men to escalate aggression by a
38
39 partner. Another recent study (Winstok, 2009b) addressed this issue for a sample of 218 men in
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41 Israel. It found that the more the men thought their partners were likely to approach and involve
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43 formal and informal agencies or threaten to leave or actually leave the relationship in response
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45 to aggression, the more these men tended to restrain their aggression.

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47 To the extent that couples are aware of the social norms which strongly condemn male
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49 violence against a partner and tend to treat female violence as inconsequential or humorous, it
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can provide part of the explanation for the results on gender difference in escalation.

Specifically, it may deter some men from being violent towards their partners. For women, to the extent that they believe they are protected by the norms condemning male violence against partners, women may feel less constraint on acting aggressively towards their partners. Unfortunately, although these norms may serve to inhibit male violence in most cases, sometimes they will not, putting women in danger of an escalated level of aggression by their partner. Thus, as has been found by a number of studies (Feld & Straus 1989; Straus, 2008a,2008b; Whitaker & Lutzker, 2009), women's violence towards their partner is a risk factor for victimization of women.

Limitations

Although the results are clear in the sense that the relationships are consistent and statistically dependable, and are consistent with what is known about gender differences in perpetration of partner abuse, there are limitations to keep in mind when considering the implications stemming from the results. One limitation is that the results refer to behavior intentions (Ajzen, 1991) and need to be retested using data on the escalation process in events which actually took place. A second limitation is the possibility that these results are unique to Israel. However that seems unlikely given the fact that gender symmetry in prevalence of partner violence occurs world-wide, in both economically developed and less developed nations (Kim & Emery, 2003; Stets & Pirog-Good, 1990; Straus, 2008a,2008b; Straus et al., 1980/2006; Sugihara & Warner, 2002; Tang, 1999).

More specifically, the findings of the first and only attempt in Israel to learn about the epidemiology of intimate violence (Eisikovits, Winstok & Fishman, 2004) show a relatively low prevalence of physical violence when compared to the United States. This is particularly true with the more severe forms of violence. However the verbal abuse, threats and controlling

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3 behaviors are considerably higher. Furthermore, it seems that Israeli society is highly tolerant
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5 towards violence as reflected in prevalent attitudes towards intimate violence. It should also be
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7 taken into consideration that the differences found could stem from disclosure rights as well as
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9 differences in measurement.
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13 As with any research, the theoretical framework of this study can be a limitation. This
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15 theoretical framework led to the research hypotheses which were examined and supported. This
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17 does not serve as proof that the theoretical framework the study is based on has an advantage
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19 over other theoretical frameworks. For example, it can be argued that the findings stem from the
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21 awareness of men and women to the physical power difference between genders. That the
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23 response of men to the aggression of their female counterparts is milder in relation to women's
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25 aggression towards men because both genders are aware of men's higher resiliency and women's
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27 higher vulnerability. At times, seemingly contradicting theoretical frameworks are simply
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29 complementary explanations.
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33 34 **Theoretical and Methodological Contribution**

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36 The results of this study are consistent with theories that maintain that status enhancement
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38 is a primary feature in men's aggressive tendencies and risk reduction in women's aggressive
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40 tendencies (Campbell, 1999). Yet, these results also put in question whether, in general and
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42 regardless of context, men are more prone to violence than women. Findings provide twofold
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44 evidence that reject this notion in the context of intimate relationships: first, by comparing men
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46 and women's intended response to partner provocation, and second, by comparing the effect of
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48 provocation severity on the response to it. Such findings emphasize the importance of the social
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50 and situational conditions for the understanding of aggressive behavior (e.g., characteristics of
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52 the conflicting parties, their relationship, the actions and reactions they take).
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57 **Implications for Prevention and Treatment**

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3 The results have potentially important implications for prevention and treatment of partner
4 violence. For prevention, the results suggest that violence prevention programs should include
5 information on how aggression can escalate in relationships, and teach escalation avoidance
6 strategies. Treatment of existing cases should be preceded by screening to identify whether the
7 violence is male-only, female-only, or mutual, and the risk factors actually present in a case,
8 including questions similar to the questions used in this study to identify escalatory tendencies.
9
10 The results of this study suggest that a propensity to escalation will often be found among both
11 men and women, and even more so among women. When a propensity to escalation is found,
12 helping clients learn methods of dealing with aggression by a partner in ways that avoid
13 escalation could make an important contribution to improving the effectiveness of treatment of
14 violence in marital and dating relationships.
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29 **Conclusion**

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31 The research in this area of partner violence is led by two groups. Feminist scholars, who
32 maintain that the problem of intimate violence stems from the violence used by men to maintain
33 dominance over women (Dobash, Dobash, Wilson, & Daly, 1992), and family violence scholars,
34 who maintain that partner violence is perpetrated by both men and women and who view the
35 problem as rooted in a variety of risk factors, of which male-dominance is only one (Straus,
36 2008a, 2008b, 2009b; Straus et al., 2006).
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45 Despite the fact that evidence from numerous studies, including the present one,
46 unequivocally supports the family violence perspective, the feminist perspective remains
47 dominant. Unfortunately, the continued dominance of the feminist perspective means that
48 women's violence against male partners continues to be ignored or denied (Straus, In Press a, b).
49 Like other denials it allows the problem to persist (Zerubavel, 2006). It harms women first,
50 because violence begets violence, making violence by women a central risk factor that puts
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Running head: GENDER DIFFERENCES IN INTENDED ESCALATORY TENDENCIES 17

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3 them in harm's way. Second, ignoring women's violence against men may legitimize ignoring
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5 men's violence against women. Partner violence is an abominable behavior, and should be
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7 unconditionally recognized as such, with no gender preconditions. The concept of gender
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9 symmetry in partner violence does not undermine women's right to a life without violence. It
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11 acknowledges that this right belongs to everybody, including men.
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15 The present study not only provides additional evidence of gender symmetry in partner
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17 violence, but it also emphasizes and demonstrates a research direction that has not received
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19 appropriate attention in the study of partner violence: the dynamics of conflicts that escalate to
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21 violence. This dynamic, which is probably central for understanding, preventing, and treating
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23 partner violence, may not have been the focus of research because it is a result of couples'
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25 interactions, hence it can undermine the notion that men are the source of the problem (Straus,
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27 2009b). Although the controversy regarding gender symmetry in perpetration and etiology of
28
29 partner violence is settled by more than 200 studies showing similar perpetration rates by men
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31 and women (Fiebert, 2010; Medeiros & Straus, 2007; Straus, 2008a, 2008b), it is important to
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33 also keep in mind the lack of symmetry in physical and psychological injuries. When the focus
34
35 is services for victims, women need to be the primary (but not exclusive) focus of attention.
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37 When the focus is on prevention and treatment, the symmetry in perpetration and the fact that
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39 half to two-thirds of partner violence is mutual (e.g., Kessler, Molnar, Feurer & Appelbaum,
40
41 2001; Straus, 2008; Whitaker, Haileyesus, Swahn, & Saltzman, 2007) needs to be recognized.
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43 The controversy over gender symmetry contributed immensely to the development of the body
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45 of knowledge in this field, but it is time to move on, and examine the dynamics of conflicts that
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47 escalate to violence, and implement the new knowledge in prevention and treatment programs.
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Table 1: Multivariate tests and tests of between-subject effects on level of escalation

Effect	<i>F</i>	<i>df</i>	η^2
Respondent Gender	7.032	1,203	.033**
Provocator's Identity	40.205	2,202	.285***
Severity of Aggressive Provocation	2.359	1,203	.011
Respondent Gender * Provocator's Identity	91.533	2,202	.475***
Respondent Gender * Severity of Aggressive Provocation	.0111	1,203	.001
Provocator's Identity * Severity of Aggressive Provocation	39.952	2,202	.283***
Respondent Gender * Provocator's Identity * Severity of Aggressive Provocation	28.174	2,202	.218***

* $P < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$

Figure 1: Means of the escalatory tendencies

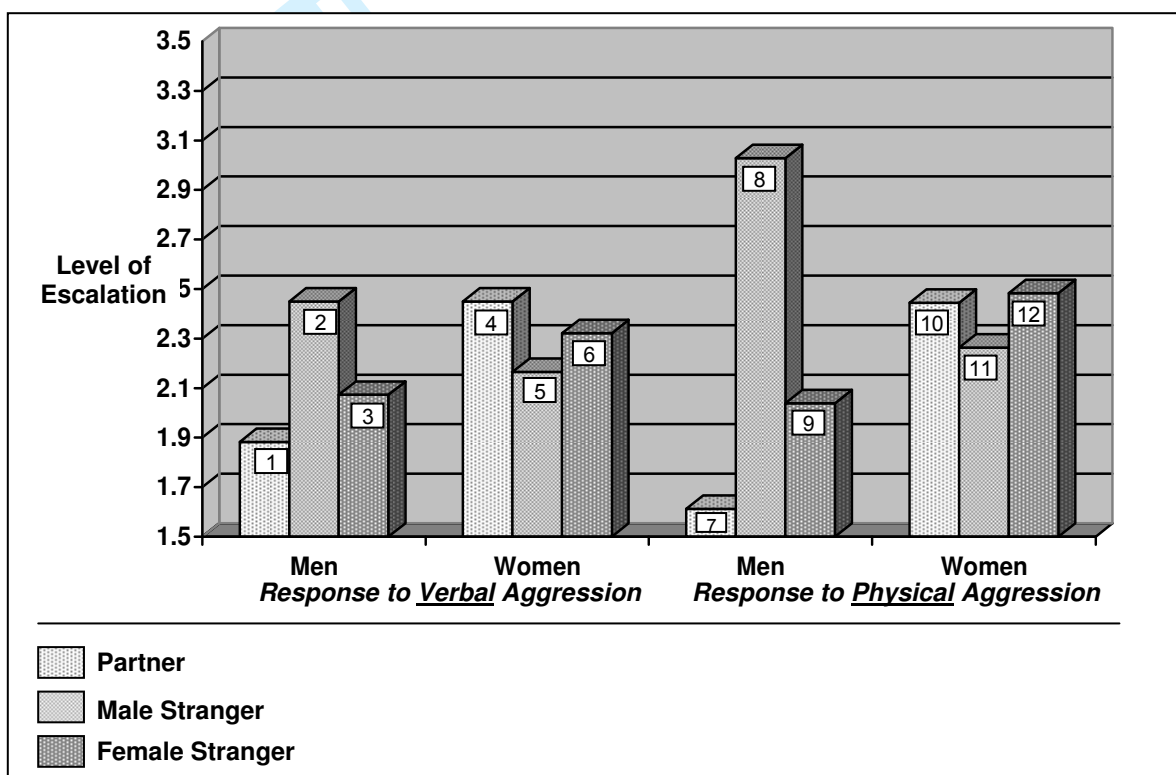
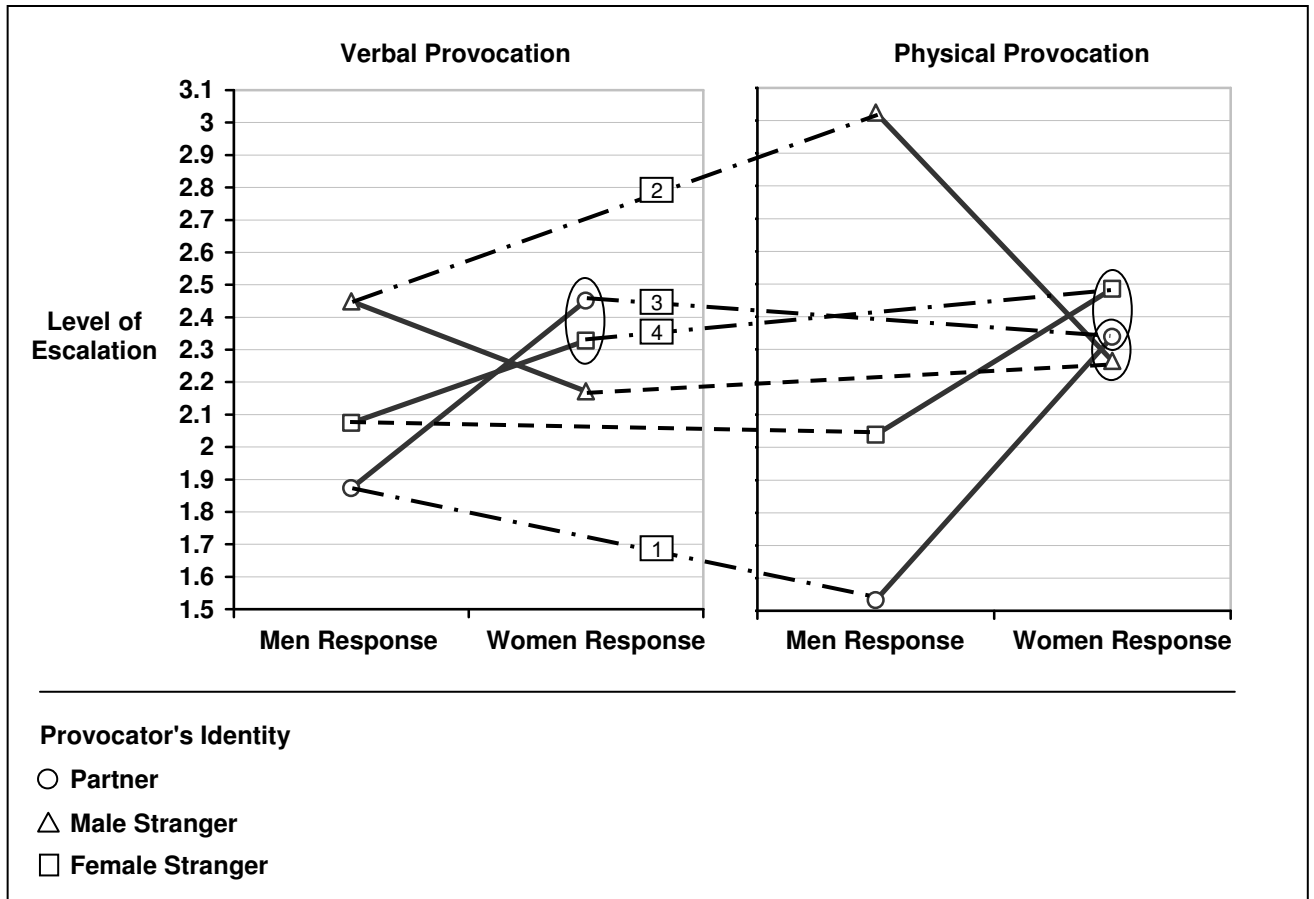


Figure 1: Means of the escalatory tendencies



Differences between means in the ellipse were not found to be significant. The remaining differences are significant ($p < .05$).