"No Does Not Always Mean No": The Discursive Representation of Female Sexual Rejection as "Last Minute Resistance" in Pick-Up Artist Communities

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This study examines the representation of female sexual rejection within pick-up artist (PUA) communities, which are groups of heterosexual men who aspire to become experts in the "art of seducing women." Driven by critical discourse analysis, the study explores how PUAs share their strategies about how to overcome women's refusal to engage in sexual activities during a date, which they refer to as "last minute resistance." The first part of the study highlights how PUAs tend to disregard verbal or physical rejection, interpreting it as a form of token resistance that needs to be defeated. The second section analyzes the syntactic-lexical semantic interface between agency and the gender of the subjects involved in the corpus, showing how PUAs portray themselves as dynamic agents who "lead the game," while women are the "passive objects" of their pursuits. By exposing PUAs' distorted discourse, the study contributes to raising awareness about toxic representations of consent and promoting a more respectful approach to sexual interactions.

Keywords: discourse analysis, manosphere, last minute resistance, pick-up artists, sexual consent

This work investigates the representations of female sexual rejection as conceived by some members of pick-up artist (PUA) communities, groups of heterosexual men who strive to master the "art of seducing women." Along with men's rights activists (MRA), involuntary celibates (Incels), and men going their own way (MGTOW), PUAs are part of the "manosphere," a network of online communities often accused of anti-feminism, hegemonic masculinity, and hostility toward women (Van Valkenburgh, 2021).[1] Each group holds specific ideologies: MRAs believe that men are discriminated against, so they try to defend their rights in what they consider a "gynocentric" society (Cannito & Mercuri, 2022); Incels blame women and society for being unable to find romantic partners despite their desire for intimacy (Tranchese & Sugiura, 2021); MGTOW believe that women are so toxic that they must be avoided as much as possible (Lin, 2017); and PUAs, who will be analyzed in this work, aim to achieve sexual and romantic

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Date submitted: 2022-08-05

[1] Disclaimer: The data analysis sections of this work quote offensive language that is considered misogynist. The author and the journal condemn sexism and all forms of offensive language.

success by manipulating women (Rüdiger & Dayter, 2020). Guided by their "pick-up gurus" (PUGs), who disseminate costly instructions on how to play "the game" of conquering women (Dayter & Rüdiger, 2019), PUAs can be defined as discursive communities of practice in which members share their experiences through in-group jargon based on military (e.g., "target"), sports (e.g., "game"), and business ("lower/raise value") terminology (Rüdiger & Dayter, 2020). Their pseudoscientific theories supported by alleged statistics provide them with "a serious scientific air [while creating a distinction between] those who are 'in-the-know' and those who are not" (Dayter & Rüdiger, 2019, p. 18).

PUAs and the manosphere have received public criticism for the misogynist stance that informs their groups' discourses, as noted by Massanari (2017), who refers to them as "toxic technocultures" that operate through websites where anonymity is protected and content is less controlled. Moreover, Manne (2017) notes that the manosphere's misogyny should not be understood only in terms of the mere hatred that some members feel toward women. Rather, it is primarily about the desire to exert control over women, police their behavior, and punish them if they do not conform to traditional gender roles that prioritize male dominance. In essence, their misogyny can be seen as a mechanism of maintaining power by enforcing strict gender norms and punishing women who dare to challenge them.

As for the community analyzed in this study, the origins of contemporary PUA groups date back to the 1970s, with works such as Jeffries' (1992) *How to Get the Women You Desire Into Bed* and Weber's (1970) *How to Pick Up Girls!*, which promote a series of "neuro-linguistic programming" (Weber, 1970, p. 1) techniques on "speed seduction" (Weber, 1970, p. 1). In 2005, journalist and PUA Strauss (2005) published what is considered "the Bible" of pick-up artistry: *The Game: Penetrating the Secret Society of Pick-Up Artists*, a narration of the author's journey from being an "average frustrated chump" (Strauss, 2005, p.447) to becoming a "PUA" and eventually a "pick-up guru" (PUG; Strauss, 2005, p. 2). Strauss and other PUGs have monetized their knowledge by sharing seduction techniques through an industry of workshops, books, and coaching sessions that have transformed men's desire of "conquering" women into a cash-cow worth around $100 million a year (O'Neill, 2018). However, some PUGs have also been criticized for their sexist and sometimes harassing behavior (O'Neill, 2018). For instance, PUG Julien Blanc was denied access to the United Kingdom and Australia in 2014 after he had published a video in which he encouraged men to grab women without their consent and force their heads toward their crotches. He later appeared in a video apologizing and justifying his posts as a "horrible attempt at satire [. . .] taken out of context" (CNN, 2014, para. 13).

Unlike Incels, who use biological determinism and fatalism to explain their lack of sentimental relationships (Ging, 2019; Scotto di Carlo, 2023), PUAs claim that the art of seduction can be "learned" by improving one's "inner game" (personality and confidence) and "outer game" (physical appearance; Wright, 2020). They use a range of strategies, such as "sarging" (Italian Seduction Club, 2006), a term referring to men's strategy of going out to meet as many women as possible. This involves repetitive "openings" (i.e., approaches) starting off with a "pick-up line" (e.g., "It looks like the party's over here") and giving attention to all the members of the group except the "target" (the woman who the PUA is interested in, usually referred to as a "Hot Babe" or "HB," followed by a decile ranking number) until attraction is established. Only then do the men proceed to perform "kino escalation," which involves "escalating" from casual conversation to intimate light touching (Wright, 2020).

One of the most controversial practices discussed in PUA communities is how to overcome "last minute resistance" (LMR) to convince a woman to engage in sexual activity even after her refusal. PUAs argue that a woman's "no" is often just "token resistance" (Osman, 2013) aimed at testing a man's self-control or defending herself against being labeled an "easy woman," a practice known as "Anti-Slut Defense" or "ASD" (Dayter & Rüdiger, 2015, p. 17). More specifically, according to O'Neill (2018) and Wright (2020), the idea of token resistance implies the belief that men can interpret women's inexpressible desires. From this viewpoint, Flood (2013) has noticed that PUAs appropriate feminist positions that recognize a double social standard related to male and female sexual behaviors since "men's sexual conduct is relatively free of social constraints, while women's sexual behaviour is judged more harshly" (p. 95). However, PUAs and feminists differ in their positions on gender and agency: While both acknowledge women's sexual desires, PUAs claim that it is men's responsibility to interpret and satisfy them because women are not able to express their needs, which are embodied in the ambiguous form of LMR (Flood, 2013). From PUAs' perspective, it is men's task to make women's sexual desires come true, "leading the game" all the time. Nevertheless, it is important to note that this attitude is not a noble attempt to free women from their social constraints, but rather a rationalization for these men's persistent pursuit of sexual interaction, even in situations where women's rejection is not a matter of suppressed desire but rather a genuine lack of interest.

PUA gurus support their theory with time frames for the assessment and overcoming of rejection. According to PUA Buffalmano (2022), LMR "optimally lasts from 0 to 45 minutes, with 90% of instances lasting between 5 minutes to 45 minutes" (para. 2), and it is due to several reasons, among which are the following (Buffalmano, 2022, para. 3):

1. She is shit-testing the man to assess his character.
2. She might like him, but is not fully sold on taking it to the next level.
3. She is emotional or nervous.
4. She is making him wait to seem more "serious" and Madonna-like.
5. She still needs some more time and comfort before sex.

Notably, the reasons provided for LMR never acknowledge a woman's simple refusal. The underlying belief is that "no does not always mean no" (personal communication, April 27, 2018) as LMR is considered a mere obstacle that can be overcome using the right strategy.

Sexual Consent

Despite the plethora of legal, sociological, and psychological literature on the issue, there is no universally accepted definition of sexual consent or of how it should be communicated (Beres, 2007). Many conceptualizations are based on common sense meanings without critical reflection on their origins, resulting in what Bourdieu, Chamboredon, and Passeron (1991) refer to as "spontaneous sociology." For instance, some definitions are based on a dichotomy between pleasurable and not enjoyable sex (Jones, 2002), morally unproblematic and problematic sex (Hurd, 1996), or consensual sex and criminal activity (Archard, 1998). Other studies such as Ostler's (2003) reflect on the importance of behavior as an implicit indicator of one's attitude toward consent, noting that a person may behave in ways that suggest sexual

consent regardless of their actual willingness. However, relying solely on a person's behavior as an indicator of consent can have negative consequences on juries evaluating cases of sexual assault as this may perpetuate harmful stereotypes and lead to victim-blaming.

Moreover, while most literature bases consent on some form of verbal or nonverbal mutual understanding to engage in sexual activity, there is a lack of consensus regarding the conditions under which this agreement should take place. Some studies such as Dripps' (1996) define consent as "any yes," suggesting that any implicit or explicit agreement constitutes consent. This position can lead to assuming that a person's actions or lack of resistance indicates consent even when the individual may be unable to give consent due to various reasons, such as intoxication, fear, or coercion. Others differentiate between different types of consent, such as "real" and "quasi" consent (Archard, 1998) or "valid" and "invalid" consent (Kazan, 1998), implying that even when consent is given under coercion, it should still be considered consent. Fortunately, not all experts accept the "any yes" definition. Studies such as Humphreys' (2005) support the claim that consent must be given freely, defining any other condition as violence.

Reading through PUA forums, it can be seen that the community's beliefs concerning LMR seem to embrace Dripps (1996) and Ostler's (2003) "any yes" theory of consent, which dangerously blurs the line between consent and sexual harassment/violence. Against this standpoint, this work contends that PUAs' rhetoric should be seriously taken into consideration rather than dismissed as jokes shared within a goliardic environment. The analysis of the strategies advocated by PUAs to escalate to sexual encounters regardless of women's consent presented in this article will provide an opportunity to not only investigate the proliferation of toxic masculinity online but also contribute to the debate on sexual consent, which is strongly needed both within and beyond the manosphere.

Materials and Methods

Grounded in critical discourse analysis, which highlights the dialectical relationship between discourse, ideology, and power (Van Dijk, 2001, p. 352), the first part of this work focuses on the analysis of the collocations[2] of the phrase "last minute resistance" and its acronym "LMR" to identify the patterns used to reinforce the toxic ideologies on consent held by some members of this branch of the manosphere. Following Rüdiger and Dayter's (2017) guidelines for studying PUA forums, I selected the corpus ("PUAcor") from two forums that provide unrestricted access to their content, focusing on PUA "field reports," that is, posts that present firsthand accounts by members detailing their dating experiences with women and the tactics used to seduce them. Rüdiger and Dayter's (2017, 2020) groundbreaking research has proven invaluable to this study, offering insights into effectively handling distressing data such as misogynistic and violent content, which can greatly impact researchers' well-being. In line with their viewpoint, I refuse to adhere to the notion of researcher neutrality for this issue

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[2] In corpus linguistics, collocations refer to words that frequently appear together in a corpus. These words may have a strong tendency to co-occur with each other due to syntactic or semantic relationships and can provide insights into the meaning and usage of words in a language as well as inform language learning and teaching practices (see Evert, 2008; Liu, 2010).

and openly express my strong aversion toward the research subjects and their language, understanding that neutrality could be easily misunderstood. Yet, to guarantee PUAs' anonymity, even if the forums require their members to use fictitious handles, I decided to disclose neither the names of the forums under examination nor the pseudonyms used by the authors of the posts.

To analyze PUAcor, I used the Key Word in Context tool in Sketch Engine (Kilgarriff, Rychlý, Smrž, & Tugwell, 2004), a comprehensive corpus manager and text analysis software. The field reports were scrutinized by querying PUAcor for the node words "last minute resistance" and "LMR"[3] within a five-year timespan (April 2017–April 2022). I retrieved concordance lines[4] by selecting a window size of four words to the left and four to the right to extract the pre-modifiers (e.g., attributive adjectives, nouns) and post-modifiers (relative clauses, appositive noun phrases, prepositional phrases) of the two node words and gain deeper insight into their contextual usage patterns. The final corpus comprised all field reports containing the two keywords, for a total of 70,529 tokens and 4,860 types included in 112 posts written by about 98 identifiable users.[5]

In line with Baker, Gabrielatos, and McEnery's (2013) approach to semantic categorization, I then manually annotated and categorized the clusters to identify semantic patterns that would have remained obscure otherwise. This qualitative process yielded five categories, indicative of the recurrent thematic discourses concerning the two node words. The final phase of the analysis then involved selecting excerpts from the data that best represented these thematic patterns and interpreting them to provide insights into the discursive construction of LMR in PUA forums.

The second section involved analyzing the patterns of agency used with male and female subjects in the field reports. The aim was to explore whether these men reproduced their perception of sexual encounters as a display of male power in the syntactic subject-object structure of their narratives. The hypothesis was that men would portray themselves as the semantic and syntactic agents who dominate the "game," while women would be positioned as the grammatical and metaphorical "objects" discussed throughout the forum. This would show how PUAs' language reinforces the objectification of women within this environment in which sexualized and objectified discussions about women can be dismissed by its members as a form of homosocial bonding, which according to Cameron is "a way for men to have close emotional and social bonds without feeling they have any redress because people are saying 'oh, it's just a bit of fun' or 'it's just a compliment'" (as cited in Cooper, 2016, para. 3).

Results

In the first step, I conducted a preliminary quantitative analysis of PUAcor by querying it for the nodewords "last minute resistance" and its acronym "LMR." The findings revealed that the latter is used

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[3] In the analysis, whenever the acronym "LMR" is used, it refers to both LMR and last minute resistance (unless otherwise specified).

[4] Concordance lines are parts of a text that contain a specific word or phrase, along with the surrounding words or context (see Evert, 2008; Liu, 2010).

[5] Since some users might have more than one account, this number is only an approximation.

more frequently than the full phrase (94.6% *vs*. 5.3%), which is not surprising since using acronyms is part of a tactic employed by PUAs to create a barrier between the uninformed and the "initiated."

In the subsequent step, I classified the occurrences of "last minute resistance" and "LMR" by dividing them into the following semantic categories, based on their collocations: Quantity of LMR performed by women, LMR as a problem to solve, LMR as an obstacle, LMR as a war, and LMR as a source of strong emotive reactions; see Table 1.[6]

Table 1. Semantic Categories of Collocations Including "LMR" and "Last Minute Resistance."

Semantic Categories	%
Quantity of LMR used by women	35.8
LMR as a problem to solve	22.4
LMR as an obstacle	16.3
LMR as a war	15.1
LMR as a source of emotive reactions	10.3

Quantity of LMR Performed by Women

The debate on LMR often centers on the levels of resistance men may encounter during a date, ranging from no or minimal resistance to repeated and conspicuous LMR (35.8%). Table 2 (column 2) provides some examples of the main pre- and post-modifiers commonly associated with LMR when expressing the amount of resistance encountered. The third column of the table displays the percentage of cases in which the word clusters displayed in the second column have reportedly led these men to engage in sexual activity with a woman despite her initial rejection.[7]

Table 2. Quantity of LMR Performed by Women (35.8%).

Quantity of LMR	Examples of Collocates	Reported Escalation to Sex
Low/No	No_; a little bit of_; some_	100%
High	A big deal of_; a large bit of_; quite a lot of_; lots of_; a big hurdle of_; plenty of_; hardcore_; crazy_; heavy_; major_; 5h_; massive_; _to the max	23.2 %
Repetitive	_again; still_; constant_; repeated_; same_	16.6%

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[6]It is important to note that my categorization is subjective, and there may be instances where content overlaps across multiple categories. As a result, the categories provided should be understood as an approximation.

[7] Information regarding the escalation to sexual encounters has been obtained through content analysis by thoroughly examining individual reports. However, it is essential to note that the corpus consists of self-reported field reports. It is crucial to take this factor into consideration as it may impact the reliability of the data.

The analysis of PUAcor reveals that PUAs often exploit the absence or scarcity of LMR as a means to express indirect self-praise. This characteristic aligns with what Rüdiger and Dayter (2020) refer to as "action brags" (i.e., reporting external events as evidence of their success or lack thereof) in their "PUA self-praise iceberg theory" (p. 30), according to which PUAs' explicit brag statements represent only the tip of an iceberg, with the vast bottom part consisting of indirect, contextually defined forms of self-praise. For instance, instead of saying, "I am an excellent dancer" (Rüdiger & Dayter, 2020, p. 30), PUAs might indirectly self-praise by saying, "At the community dance last Saturday, all the ladies chose to dance with me, and someone even filmed my waltzing" (Rüdiger & Dayter, 2020, p. 30). Within PUAcor, instances that reported minimal or no LMR allegedly resulted in almost effortless escalation to sexual intercourse, commonly referred to by PUAs as an "f-close" (see Example 3 below). In these cases, escalation to sex was reported in 100% of the field reports. Example 1: "I start grinding my abs into her sensitive areas then carry her to my bed, *done deal. No LMR*. Probably the best sex of my life, we really vibed well and have complimentary styles" (personal communication, June 5, 2018; PUAcor3/SE). Example 2:

> We get back to my place. I recite a few foreign-language poems for her for fun. [. . .] *A little bit of lmr* when I went for the panties. I go back to making out with her and slowly work my way back down. *No problem*. (personal communication, April 9, 2018; PUAcor1/SE).[8]

These men credit their reported escalation to sex or, as they call it, "success" or "done deal," to their tactics, implying that their skills were responsible for the ease with which they were able to "close the deal" with "no problem." This is a problematic approach that prioritizes self-aggrandizement and objectifies sexual partners rather than respecting boundaries and seeking enthusiastic consent.

Conversely, in field reports in which LMR collocates with pre-modifiers indicating high levels of resistance, dates have reportedly escalated to sex in 23.2% of the cases. Collocates such as those referring to having received "lots of" LMR usually emphasize either the narrator's ability of having overcome high resistance despite many initial difficulties, as in Example 3: "F-closed a Couch Surfer, *lots of LMR*. Thanks couldn't have done it without you! :)" (personal communication, July 15, 2018; PUAcor8/SE), or that LMR was so significant that it prevented further progress, as in Example 4, where LMR was considered as such even after five hours of rejection: "However, this was like a *5 hour LMR.* To be honest, *I was too tired* [. . .]. She'd complain every time I'd try to get her clothes off" (personal communication, May 19, 2018; PUAcor17/NSE). In cases like these, it is often emphasized that the woman was eventually not worth the effort or that the man's lack of reported escalation to sex was not caused by his own shortcomings but by other factors, such as those mentioned in Example 4. These might be cases indicative of a lack of genuine consent and of a violation of the woman's boundaries.

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[8] Original spelling and punctuation have been retained in all posts cited. All emphasis added. The codes in brackets at the end of each example (e.g. [PUAcor37/SE]) indicate the name of the corpus (PUAcor), the number with which the post has been labeled (e.g., 37), and whether the field report from which the excerpt was drawn reported escalation to sex (SE) or not (NSE).

From a discursive perspective, it appears that high and low/no LMR cases can both serve as opportunities for PUAs to engage in "action bragging" (Rüdiger & Dayter, 2020, p. 30). Rather than explicitly boasting about their skills, PUAs reinforce their "positive face" (Brown & Levinson, 1987) by describing what happened during their real-life experiences regardless of whether the outcome was positive or not for them. Reporting of "being tired" after a "5 hour LMR" (see Example 4) is a clear instance of PUAs' distorted view on consent. This misconception is not uncommon among these communities, as evidenced by a subset of collocations that highlights repetitive rejections mainly apostrophized through the words "again" or "same" (16.6% of sexual activity reported), revealing how PUAs are insistent despite women's constant and explicit signals of resistance. Persisting after the woman's physical and verbal rejection ("she stopped [. . .] and said she can't do this so quick;" see Example 5) even multiple times ("Same LMR story;" see Example 6) is simply a form of sexual coercion or even sexual assault. Example 5:

> I pushed her against the door and went for it [. . .] but the moment I started taking of her trousers *she stopped and said she can't do this so quick. Naturally I backed off* [. . .] I felt like that was my chance I'd blown it she still wanted to talk and didn't want me out but *I thought you don't invite someone around at night for a conversation so I tried a second time* [. . .]. She resisted *AGAIN*. (personal communication, April 27, 2018; PUAcor12/NSE)

Example 6:

> The next day we meet up again, this time for a brief lunch-date and again back up to her place. *Same LMR story*, but on a different day. I leave her apartment on good terms, if not a bit frustrated. (personal communication, April 27, 2018; PUAcor12/NSE)

These repetitive rejections are often met by PUAs with signs of frustration and confusion, which in turn reveal concerning preconceptions on consent. In Example 5, retrieved from a thread entitled "No does not always mean no" (personal communication, April 27, 2018; PUAcor12/NSE), the idea of persistence as legitimate is supported by the belief that one "does not invite someone around at night for a conversation" (personal communication, April 27, 2018; PUAcor12/NSE). One of the pragmatic implicatures of this statement is the narrator's failure to acknowledge a woman's right to decline sexual activity regardless of whether she is in someone's home or had initially provided consent. It is worth noting that this post has received mixed reactions from the community, with some members cautioning the thread initiator that he should not have been so forceful, as the title of the thread alone "could probably get [him] convicted should the girl lodge a complaint and allege rape" (personal communication, April 27, 2018; PUAcor12/NSE). However, other members instead shared his "confusion" and "frustration" while commending him on his "good job" (personal communication, April 27, 2018; PUAcor12/NSE). This debate illustrates the varying attitudes and beliefs within the PUA community toward sexual consent.

LMR as a Source of Strong Emotive Reactions

Another category of field reports focuses on LMR as a source of strong emotive reactions (10.3%). In most cases, a woman's resistance to these men's sexual advances is mainly perceived as "strange," "unusual," or "confusing" (11.7% reported escalation to sex), while the remaining reports were written to ask for the community's support to overcome emotional distress, as can be seen in Examples 7 and 8 and Table 3. Example 7: "*Last minute resistance is confusing to me*. As a male I have no qualms about fucking on the first date, but I have taken women home to my bed only to have them erect this wall" (personal communication, October 12, 2018; PUAcor21/NSE). Example 8: "How to get a girl over her insecurities sex? *Lmr is destroying me*" (personal communication, January 21, 2019; PUAcor22/NSE).

Table 3. Emotive Reactions Triggered by LMR (10.3%).

Examples of Collocations	Reported Escalation to Sex
Confusing_; _is destroying me; _is a real pain; strange_; tired of_; struggling with_; odd behaviour with_; fuck_!; intoxicated by_; weird_; amusing_.	11.7 %

LMR was so unexpected by these men that it was referred to as a "confusing" problem (see Example 7) and even a source of major distress ("LMR is destroying me"; see Example 8), that needed to be solved. While some PUAs simply share their emotive reactions, others overtly turn to the community to ask for suggestions on how to "deal with" or "handle" LMR in an alternative way that would lead to sex, completely disregarding the possibility of being rejected (22.4% of the occurrences of LMR). Others do not know what to do since they say they are "new" to this phenomenon (0% reported escalation to sex), as can be seen in Examples 9–11 and Table 4. Example 9: "I think overall it was a pretty successful meet-up, but *if you guys have any more creative/better ways to deal with LMR, I'd appreciate it!*" (personal communication, December 12, 2019; PUAcor31/SE). Example 10: "*Experienced LMR for*, I think the first time ever in maybe 40 or so lays. I honestly thought it was just something that happened to other people and not me lol" (personal communication, April 11, 2018; PUAcor11/NSE). Example 11:

> I could have gone further physically. It was three hours coffee shop to couch—not a record but still pretty good. Cat was a great wingman. If there's anything I missed or *if you would have handled the LMR differently let me know below.* (personal communication, January 25, 2020; PUAcor44/SE)

Table 4. Framing of LMR as a (New) Experience to Have to Deal With (22.4%).

	Examples of Collocations	Reported Escalation to Sex
Deal with the experience in an alternative way	Deal with_ differently; handle_ in another way; address_ in a different way.	26.3%
New experience	Looking for lessons about_; I don't know about_; new to_; my first time with _; first time I encountered_;	0%

In these cases, LMR is seen as a consequence of using the wrong approach (see Examples 9 and 11) or even an opportunity to boast about previous sexual encounters (see Example 10). The act of asking for "more creative/better ways" (see Example 9) to manage a woman's right to refuse sexual advances reflects a discursive mindset that is insensitive to the autonomy and dignity of women and is symptomatic of deeper cultural attitudes and societal norms that perpetuate gender-based inequalities.

LMR as an Obstacle

The analysis has highlighted two more patterns indicative of PUAs' framing of LMR that reify it either as an object or personify it as an enemy. In the first case, LMR is portrayed as an impediment "put up" by women to defend themselves (15.5%), as seen in Example 12: "She was into it, or so I thought, but as soon *as I undid the bra the LMR defense walls went up*" (personal communication, February 3, 2020; PUAcor45/NSE). Men describe themselves as "hitting" against this barrier (0% reported escalation to sex) or as being "hit" by LMR as an object that women "throw" against them (20% reported escalation to sex), as shown in Table 5 and the following examples. Example 13: "After that we went to the couch to fool around a bit. Last time that I was here with her *I hit plenty of LMR* while doing what I usually do" (personal communication, December 26, 2019; PUAcor37/SE). Example 14:

> I know this may sound like it was an easy close, but the fact is the old me probably wouldn't have made it nearly so clear I was sexually into her and might not have k-closed in the park. Minimally the old me would have slowed things down while making out when *she put up LMR.* (personal communication, March 23, 2019; PUAcor26/SE)

These metaphors provide ways of conceptualizing social actors that have implications for the (re)production of ideologies concerning social groups (van Leeuwen, 1996). As Denes (2011) and Scotto di Carlo (2023) argue, these representations contribute to essentializing women and their sexuality as "passive" to the point of creating problematic scripts for interpreting consent. This is damaging not only to women but also to men as it perpetuates a toxic masculinity that prizes aggression and domination over empathy and collaboration (Dayter & Rüdiger, 2019; Rüdiger & Dayter, 2020).

Table 5. LMR as an Obstacle (15.2%).

	Examples of Collocations	Reported Escalation to Sex
LMR as an object	She erected the _ wall; the _ wall went up; solid _ wall; I hit_; I ran into _; she threw me some _; she is giving me_ shit; she maintains _;she put up a lot of_; stalled on _; stuck at _.	20.0%

Usually, members who report "hitting" the LMR wall request advice from the community about how to "overcome" or "get through" it. Rejection is normalized, as implied in Example 14, in which being part of the PUA community has made the man's attitude toward female sexual resistance more aggressive ("the old me would have slowed things down").

Table 6 further takes into consideration the verbs used to express action enacted or suggested to be taken against LMR, none of which accept the idea of a woman's refusal.

Table 6. Verbs Used in the "LMR as an Obstacle" Semantic Category.

	Examples of Collocations	*Reported Escalation to Sex*
Overcome	Get over _; getting past _; overcome _; go through_; get through _.	5.5%
Break	Smash _; blast _; break through_; tackle_; push through _; plow through _; burn through _; bust _;	38.4%

Considering a hypothetical scale of actions suggested to be taken against LMR ranging from the weakest to the strongest, it could be said that one end of the continuum could be occupied by "weak" verbs that imply a minimum use of force, such as "overcome" or "get through" (5.5% reported escalation to sex). These verbs are typically used when seeking guidance after an unsuccessful attempt to escalate a sexual encounter. This is evident in Examples 15 and 16, where these men refuse to acknowledge the possibility of the women changing their minds about engaging in sexual activity. Example 15:

> I have hooked up with 7 girls in the past month, but *I just can't get over the LMR hump*, and it's really starting to get to me. I'll get girls completely naked, and then I'll get shut down [. . .] *What do you recommend?* (personal communication, May 23, 2022; PUAcor63/NSE)

Example 16:

> Anyone have any advice? Even when I get a girl topless and down to her panties, *I get LMR that is hard as all hell to overcome*. Its as if they already consented to the idea of sex by taking all their other clothes off but then change their mind at the last minute. *Any advice?* (personal communication, May 3, 2022; PUAcor56/NSE)

Other field reports use verbs related to the semantic fields of "plowing" and "pushing" to "break" LMR, such as in Example 17: "Lesson learned: *really need to push through LMR*, and do much more push pull" (personal communication, February 8, 2020; PUAcor46/SE) or to "smash" it, as in Example 18: "*Preemptively smashing LMR*—The Vin DiCarlo Escalation Ladder, one of the best works ever produced by community" (personal communication, May 16, 2019; PUAcor27). This set of verbs, implying a stronger use of force, is used especially in situations reporting alleged escalation to sex (38.4%), perhaps to emphasize the member's dating skills enacted despite the woman's resistance.

The tactic of "pushing" and "breaking" LMR is worrisome as it reinforces the false notion that a woman's refusal can be "preemptively smash[ed]" (see Example 18) by using certain tactics. This not only invalidates the possibility of a woman rejecting sexual advances, but also perpetuates the idea that her choice can be disregarded entirely. Example 19 is particularly problematic since it claims that "breaking LMR […] is not related to rape" and that it is possible to achieve "consensual sex" after encountering LMR:

My point being then, that *breaking LMR does not relate to rape*, because in cases like these, *LMR has nothing to do with unwanted sex. Therefore it is possible to have consensual sex even after last minute frustration*, because there are other issues that prevent people from consenting into having sex, besides the desire of the said action itself. (personal communication, July 30, 2022; PUAcor89/SE)

This statement demonstrates PUAs' awareness of the risks associated with nonconsensual sexual activity, but it seems to imply that the difference between genuine and token resistance cannot be established a priori. The mere use of the word "resistance" implies a belief that there is a clear distinction between the two cases. This is problematic because it suggests that women's "no" can be interpreted as a "maybe" or a "yes" if enough pressure is applied. It is essential to understand that women have the right to say "no" at any point during a sexual encounter and that their boundaries must be respected and not seen as a source of "last minute frustration" (see Example 19).

LMR as a War

Another group of LMR collocations pertains to the semantic category of war (16.4%). In this case an encounter with LMR becomes a battle between men and the LMR enemy in which men must "combat," "battle," and "beat" LMR, as seen in Examples 20, 21, and 22, respectively. Example 20: "Any tips/tricks out there? or if the freeze out is truly the best way to *combat LMR, please convince me* :)" (personal communication, June 24, 2019; PUAcor29/NSE). Example 21: "I keep getting LMR from this girl and can't get through it. *How do I battle through this?*" (personal communication, July 31, 2022; PUAcor91/NSE). Example 22: "How to stop girls flaking when it's going well (with some advice to *beat LMR*)" (personal communication, December 12, 2019; PUAcor31/SE). More instances are shown in Table 7.

Table 7. LMR as a War (16.4%).

	Examples of Collocations	Reported Escalation to Sex
War	Beat_; combat_; defuse_; preempt her _; _ new tactics; battling_; eliminate _.	50.0%

Just like any war, however, battles do not only lead to victories on the men's part but also to failures, and so, not being able to "kill" LMR, as in Example 23: "*My attempts at killing LMR failed* so I walked her back to the bar. How i think i failed: Maybe i should have spent some more time building comfort, giving her some push-pull, building more DHV" (personal communication, July 28, 2022; PUAcor79/NSE) or "losing" the battle against it, as in Example 24: "*Losing* the hottest girl of my life to LMRK-close after a successful night, but messed up some LMR" (personal communication, April 9, 2018; PUAcor10/NSE).

In none of the instances mentioned above is it ever mentioned that refusal—be it verbal or nonverbal—should be respected as such. Once again, these field reports focus mainly on "manbragging" (Rüdiger & Dayter, 2020) while trivializing women's resistance as enacted to avoid appearing promiscuous ("She did not want to get the obvious slut reputation"; see Example 25) or to learn about the man a little more ("I recognized this as the quintessential shit test"; see Example 26). Example 25:

Few times I was thinking to myself about kinoing too much, but it seemed good amount after all. *I am pretty sure mostly the ASD and LMR came from idea that she did not want to get the obvious slut or easy reputation* (from fucking a guy she met first time ever). (personal communication, August 1, 2022; PUAcor101/SE)

Example 26:

However, as things were starting to get heated up and clothes were starting to come off, she would stop herself and tell me, very matter of factly, *"we're not going to have sex tonight." Protip: if a girl says exactly that, you are*going *to have sex that night. As long as you don't screw it up*. Now, I recognized this as the *quintessential shit test*, and previously, I would have just agreed and amplified. (personal communication, August 1, 2022; PUAcor101/SE)

When the words "we're not going to have sex tonight" are automatically interpreted as "the quintessential shit-test" (see Example 26), it can be seen how a woman's will is preemptively disregarded even if explicitly voiced. This certainly reinforces the idea that "no does not always mean no" (personal communication, April 27, 2018; PUAcor12/NSE) with all the legal consequences that this entails when juries have to judge sexual harassment and rape cases. Overall, these forms of denial reveal how field reports focus more on men's abilities to escalate to sex than on the women involved in these dates. As a preliminary reading of PUAcor had suggested, PUAs' narratives tend to reinforce the portrayal of men as assertive agents who are always in control by leading the game, while women are depicted as passive and interchangeable "followers" in sexual "conquests," as will be further analyzed in the next section.

Gender and Agency

To gain a more comprehensive understanding of the correlation between agency and gender in PUAcor, I conducted a syntactic-lexical semantic interface analysis of the pronouns "I" (referring to male subjects) and "she" and the verbs that were used in conjunction with them. To analyze the types of verbs that PUAs use more frequently in this context, I used Sketch Engine's verb categorizer feature to automatically categorize the verbs used in PUAcor as stative (relating to states, conditions, or properties), dynamic (relating to actions or processes), or reporting verbs (referring to thoughts or speech). The analysis uncovered a significant divergence in the verbs used depending on whether the sentences had a male or female subject, as can be seen in Table 8. In line with Sap *et al*.' (2014) study on agency and gender, sentences containing a male subject, often portrayed as having high agency, exhibited a greater frequency of dynamic verbs compared with those with a female subject (59.2% *vs*. 31.4%). In contrast, sentences with a female subject tended to use more stative verbs and demonstrated lower levels of agency (54.3% *vs*. 33.8%). Moreover, the data reveal that reporting verbs occur at the rate of 14.3% for female subjects, which is twice the rate of 7.0% for male subjects. This finding highlights the inclination of PUAs to align themselves with active actions while portraying female subjects more frequently as talkative rather than as agents. This reinforces gendered stereotypes and power imbalances by positioning men as proactive agents and women as passive objects.

Table 8. Male and Female Verb Patterns.

Verb Categories	I(Male) + Verb	She + Verb
Dynamic (e.g., take)	59.2%	31.4%
Stative (e.g., be)	33.8%	54.3%
Reporting (e.g., say)	7.0%	14.3%

In a second step, I performed a qualitative analysis of the dynamic verbs used in the patterns "She + VERB+ me" and "I+ VERB + her" to understand how PUAs discursively represent one of the main imperatives of their artistry, namely that of men having to "lead the game" and always being in a dominant position. The manual annotation of the data confirmed the presence of a high percentage of sentences in which men were both subjects and agents, while women were the grammatical and metaphorical "objects" of their discussions. The "I + VERB + her" pattern was used considerably more than "She + VERB + me" (16.8% and 3.2%, respectively) especially when describing actions taken to progress the date toward sexual intimacy. Table 9 shows the first 10 types of verbs used in both patterns and is followed by Examples 27, 28, and 29.

Table 9. Subject/Agent Patterns "I VERB her"/ "She VERB me"

"I VERB her"	%	"She VERB me"	%
I take her	11.	She texts me	18.5
I pull her	7.6	She let me	14.8
I walk her	7.6	She stops me	7.4
I kiss her	6.9	She gave me	7.4
I get her [to do something]	6.1	She sent me	7.4
I let her	6.1	She hit me up	7.4
I made her	5.3	She wanted me	7.4
I grab her	5.3	She tested me	7.4
I bounce her	4.6	She get me naked	3.7
I move her	3.1	She dumped me	3.7

Example 27:

I was not having it because I might never see her again after today. I calibrated accordingly and pull her off the dance floor. We get to know each other a little more and *I pull her to* a lower volume spot. [. . .] Tested the waters and made sure she is ready to be pulled. (personal communication, July 18, 2022; PUAcor69/SE)

Example 28:

I cut her off "I know, I just needed a reason to talk to you. You look really pretty, if I let you walk away, I'll kick myself all night." She buys it, We chat for 30secs, and *I bounce her to the bar area*, we chat for two more minutes, she's telling me about how she traveled to spain in the fall. (personal communication, July 18, 2022; PUAcor70/SE)

Example 29:

> I debated going to my place, but ultimately decided it would be easier to try escalating where she was comfortable. Once we got there she tried to leave, but she was so drunk *I insisted I walk her to her place*. Part of this was out of legitimate concern, but I won't lie that the words of one of my RP mentors—"say whatever it takes to get inside"—didn't run through my head. She keeps trying to send me away but I keep insisting and eventually we go up to her place. (personal communication, June 15, 2022; PUAcor65/SE)

This pattern persists even when a female subject would be the more expected agent and subject of a sentence, such as when these men claim that they "pull" the woman home, making sure "she is ready to be pulled" (see Example 27) or "bounce" (= move) her to the bar area (see Example 28). The "I + VERB + her" pattern is used considerably more than "She + VERB + me" also when the woman tries to assert agency and resist further intimacy ("She keeps trying to send me away but I keep insisting"; see Example 29). The ultimate aim is to always try to overcome any form of resistance ("say whatever it takes to get inside"; see Example 29) even if the woman is incapacitated by alcohol ("she was so drunk I insisted I walk her to her place"; see Example 29).

It can thus be seen how these men establish their "game" frame via the "make the woman do X" pattern, positioning themselves at the center of the "pick-up game." Of course, while pronouns are one way of marking the subject of a sentence, it is important to note that they are not the only method. Therefore, it would be necessary to conduct further research to determine whether these percentages remain consistent for non-pronominal subjects, such as "Hot Babe" or "HB" mentioned previously (see Dayter & Rüdiger, 2020). Nonetheless, these men's narratives clearly indicate that they want to hold a position of power in their sexual encounters as some believe that they can obtain what they desire through coercion. In this way, their power becomes the benchmark against which they measure their "game," willing to push boundaries in pursuit of sexual gratification. By continuously comparing how far they go with how far they "could go," they reinforce the idea that sexual encounters are competitions in which power, and not only sex, is the ultimate prize.

Conclusions

This work has offered an analysis of the concept of LMR, as conceptualized by PUAs, to examine the representation of women's sexual rejection in field reports exchanged within their communities. The findings reveal that verbal or physical rejection is almost never taken at face value but rather seen as a form of token resistance that has to be overcome. All absorbed in their narratives, these men ignore women's will and use their field reports as an occasion for "manbragging" (Rüdiger & Dayter, 2020).

The analysis has uncovered a normalization of resistance, where women's rejections are ignored and trivialized as a behavior enacted to avoid appearing promiscuous. It also sheds light on the homosocial bonding practices used within PUA groups, where asking for feedback after encountering LMR or seeking suggestions on how to preemptively avoid it is a common practice that perpetuates a culture of sexual harassment and assault.

The analysis of the syntactic-lexical semantic interface of agency and gender in PUAcor discourse has revealed how PUAs represent themselves as always leading "the game" through the "make [the woman] do X" pattern, which reinforces power imbalances, positioning men as active agents and women as passive objects. Overall, PUAs' ideology seems to align with the "any yes" theory of consent, which may have profound negative consequences for women in the context of sexual abuse and harassment trials, including incidents of victim blaming and lack of accountability for the perpetrators.

From a legal and social viewpoint, the difficulty lies in the fact that consent is not solely an individual decision but rather influenced by societal norms and power dynamics that impact how consent is understood, negotiated, and communicated (Butler, 2006). Most importantly, as noted by Tiersma (2007), a reformulation of rape law alone would not provide a comprehensive solution to the multitude of problems in this area since the prototypical image of rape often involves a stranger forcefully assaulting an unsuspecting victim, while "date rape" falls within the legal definition but may be considered a less prototypical member of the category. Overcoming these stereotypes is challenging because bias starts from society and culture, making it unlikely that unwelcome sexual contacts such as those narrated in PUA field reports would be universally labeled as "rape."

Feminist literature, exemplified by works like Brownmiller (1975/2005) and Hooks (2019), which consistently emphasizes the importance of affirmative consent, stands in stark contrast to the manipulative strategies often employed by some PUAs, who prioritize coercion, deception, and emotional manipulation to obtain sexual encounters enabling the objectification and dehumanization of women.

Although rape law has evolved over time, further social and legal reform is necessary to confront and dismantle PUAs' rape culture by means of education and transforming societal norms. However, even the mere act of shedding light on and raising awareness about PUAs' distorted beliefs, as done by this work, can actively contribute to advancing the cause.

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