# *Predatory Helpfulness and Coercive Control Provide the Framework for Understanding Domestic Abuse and Sex Trafficking*

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# BROAD THEME

- Use  predatory helpfulness and coercive control to close the gap between victim and system?
- How to better map gender-based abuse experience of the victim as they experience it?
  - Assessment reflect forensic psychology/criminal justice lens
  - Doesn't reflect the lived experience of victim
  - Gap between information gathered and what actually happened
- Stronger victim story = higher credibility = more accurate judicial response

# THREE OBJECTIVES

- Timeline:
  - Importance of the very beginning
  - Context or landing ground
- Fundamental "core" of most abuse is
  - Abuser wants victim to stay/obey
  - Abuser needs to be correct
  - Abuse needs to be deceptive
- Part abuser psychology and inherent part of the coercive control/abuse process
- How you measure abuse dynamic (IPV or other power relationships) sets the basis for supporting victim credibility
  - Are you detecting nuances of more invisible elements of abuse?

# HISTORICAL DEFINITIONS OF IPV

- Intimate partner violence (IPV) was typically defined as
  - Relationship with physical and psychological aggression
  - Quantity over dynamic
  - No context—including limited attention to deception early in the relationship
- Problematic because
  - Missing Data-- nuances of abuse dynamics
- Misclassifies perpetrators and victims
  - Women using violence = its bidirectional
  - Dismissive of same sex /queer violence
  - Misclassify incidents as minor
- Missing data = Invisible to community, friends, police and courts

# FEEDS INTO VICTIM CREDIBILITY

Long tradition in psychiatry/psychology:

Women (and some sexual minorities) seen as

- Hysterical/Neurotic/Overwrought/Irrational
- Hostile
  - Lying about abuse
- Evidence?
  - Story makes no sense

# MISSING DATA = INCOMPREHENSIBLE BEHAVIORS = VICTIM CREDIBILITY

- Why stay if abuse was so bad?
- Why not report to police? Or tell close friends?
- Why disclose sexual abuse so late in the investigation?
- If really raped, how come returned to partner?

# BAD SCIENCE IS SUSTAINING HOSTILITY AGAINST WOMEN AND QUEER VICTIMS

# BURDEN OF ESTABLISHING ABUSE SHOULD BE WITH THE EVALUATOR NOT THE VICTIM

# STEPS TO NARROWING THE GAP

- Timeline: Get the relationship history

- Measure coercive control

# HISTORICALLY INITIAL INTERVIEW

- When did you meet?
- When did things go wrong?
- When did he first use violence?
- Coercive control start?

# WHAT THEY EXPERIENCE…

- Affection
- Intent to help provide a solution to the barriers
- Create a sense of connection
- "Intense but not openly controlling"

# INITIAL STAGES/ GROOMING /SEDUCTION PREDATORY HELPFULNESS (BASRA, 2022)

- Wrong question to ask
  - Burden on victim to define
  - Moment is obscured by deception
- Replace with assessments of deception
- She sees intense affection = What do we see?

# WHY IMPORTANT?

The extent to which there was deception and more invisible coercive control influences:

1) Ability to recognize abuse overall
2) Ability to pinpoint when it became abusive

- If deceptive = victim cannot identify abuse
  - If victim/they cannot identify abuse = victim story is weak = they are unreliable
  - Willingness to report (internal clarity)
  - Self-blame
  - Loyalty/ambivalence (internal clarity)

# INITIAL STAGES/ GROOMING /SEDUCTION PREDATORY HELPFULNESS (BASRA, 2022)

*The first three months we were together, very attentive, always seemed to care about my needs or wants, did nice things for me."*

*"I was crazy about him; he was romantic, kind, thought he was too good to be true."*

# LOVE BOMBING (52%)

# HOUSING/ FINANCIAL AID (42%)

- *We were living at a DV shelter that only let you stay there six weeks*
- *God sent [her] this savior*

# DRUGS (42%)

- Nonjudgmental
- Helpful and kind

# EMOTIONAL SUPPORT /FAMILY (36%)

- *"Parked next to the [foster care group home] and started talking to"*
- *"Cool guy, sweetheart"*
- *"Were going to be a team"*

## CONSIDER EXPLORING:

1) What was the PH/deception (if any)
2) When did flip/exploitation start?
3) What form did it take?
4) In hindsight, does witness/victim recognize the deception to coercion?
5) Did we ask the question correctly?

THIS IS OUR JOB NOT THE VICTIMS'

# STEPS TO NARROWING GAP

- Timeline: Get the relationship history

- Measure coercive control not just discrete acts of abuse



# UTILITY OF COERCIVE CONTROL

- Increase sensitivity to abuse dynamic measurement
- Provides better theoretical framework to understand use of tactics including sexual violence
- Accounts for queer violence in a sensitive gendered way
- Provide better theoretical framework for "incomprehensible" behaviors and traumatic outcomes
- NARROWING GAP = HIGHER VICTIM CREDIBILITY



# WHAT IS COERCIVE CONTROL?

**Power Imbalance**

- Continuously exploited
- Abuse dynamic vs. acts
- Dynamic = ongoing and looping, "auto-catalyze"
- End goal
  - Dependency and submission
    - **She stays**
  - Abuser is validated as correct = victim is unreliable

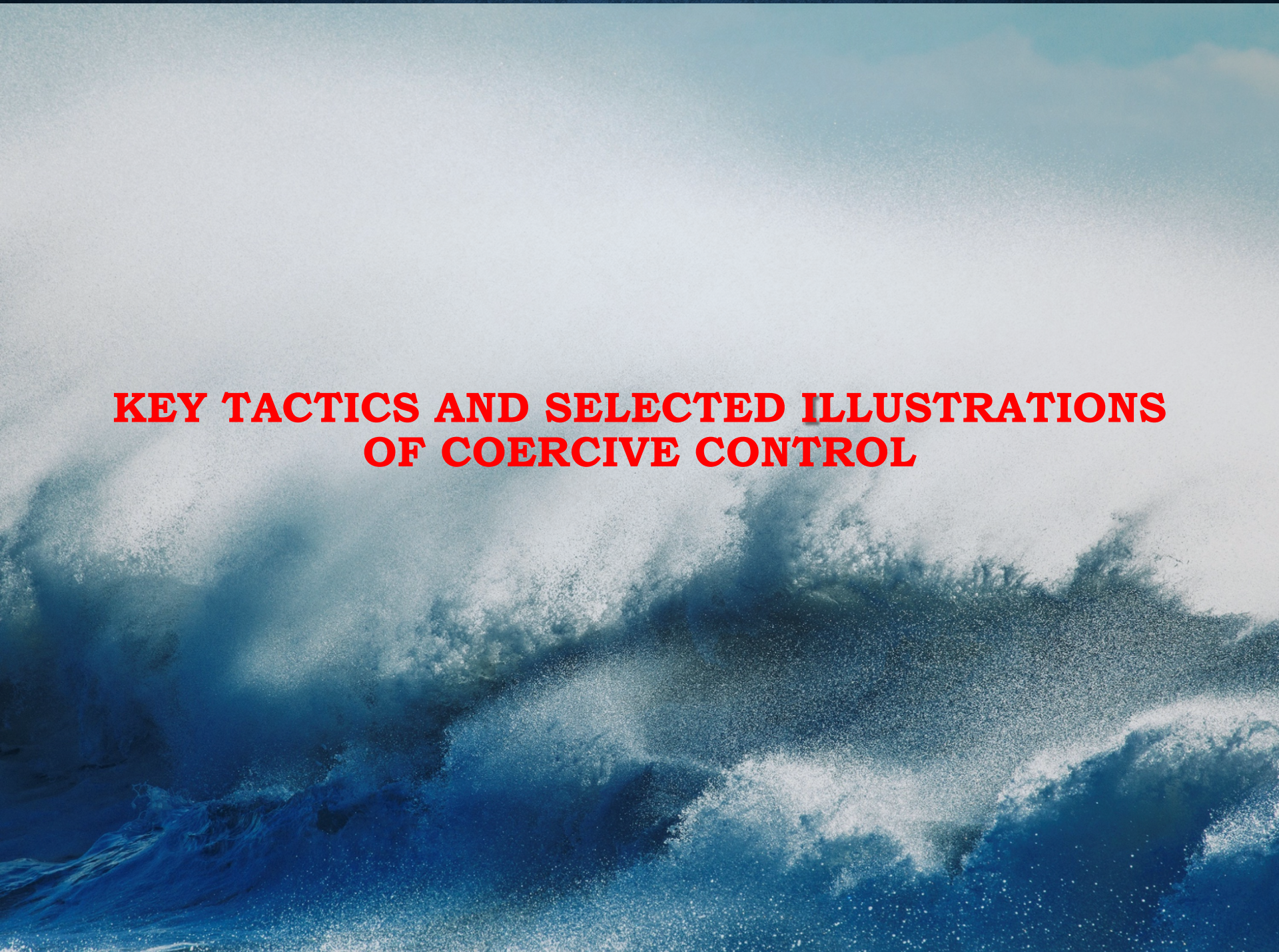


# BIRD'S EYE VIEW

- Tactics are continuous – a dynamic not discrete acts
- Privileged knowledge
- Pervasive not situational
- Obvious vs. Invisible
- Context-dependent

- Targets all domains
- No negotiation or resistance
- Retaliation and increased coercion (Raghavan, Cohen, & Tamborra, 2015).

# DIFFERENT FROM "NORMATIVE CONTROLLING" BEHAVIORS?


KEY TACTICS AND SELECTED ILLUSTRATIONS
OF COERCIVE CONTROL

# CRITICAL TACTICS OF COERCIVE CONTROL

1. Surveillance /Stalking
2. Isolation
3. Microregulation
4. Deprivation
5. Degradation

# SURVEILLANCE AND ISOLATION

- Surveillance
  - Keeping tabs until public and private space is reduced
- Isolation
  - External world via seduction, pressure, nuisance
    - May already be in place in immigration contexts
    - Language issues
  - Internal world
    - No one can help me/feeling cut off or mistrustful

# MICROREGULATION

- Constant, trivial, unpredictable demand
- Strict rules or details
- Never get it right
- Economics
- Clothing, appearance, weight, diet

# DEPRIVATION AND DEGRADATION

## DEPRIVATION

- Access to shelter, money, safety
- Sleep

## DEGRADATION

- Attacks core vulnerability of the person
- Reduces self-esteem
- Destroys hope

# CRITICAL ELEMENTS OF COERCIVE CONTROL

6. Intimidation

7. Manipulation

8. Sexual Abuse

# INTIMIDATION

- Creation of fear, dread, anxiety
- With or without physical violence
- Threats of force
- Past references



# MANIPULATION

- Make something seem like it is, when it is not
- Rewrite the narrative/Lying
- Gaslighting
- Using rewards and punishment
  - Rewarded if submit but temporary

# SMILED AT A STRANGER CASE EXAMPLE

- BACKROUND: OCCASIONAL VIOLENCE, DAILY YELLING, DEGRADATION AND INSULTS, THREATS TO CALL CPS,
- Harangued until she agreed she was flirting (child nearby)
  - Praised and rewarded
- Microregulated
  - Don't smile at strangers
  - Loss of bodily agency not just public networks
- Gaslit her when protested
  - "You agreed that you flirted—now you're lying?
- Autocatalyzed his right to :
  - Surveil her
  - Isolated her
    - Materially
    - Psychologically

# EFFECTS OF INTIMIDATION AND MANIPULATION

- Afraid to act/give in to him
- Doubt your own reality
- Rely on abuser/or paralysis
- Loss of autonomy and agency
- **Validating the abuser as correct**

# SEXUAL ABUSE

- Invisible—private domain
- No language to describe it
- Don't know the law

# EFFECTS OF SEXUAL ABUSE

- Confused/Overwhelmed
  - Is this really happening?
- Loss of bodily autonomy
  - Shame
  - Emotional paralysis
  - Covering up the abuse
- Loss of agency
  - Self-Blame



# TAKEN TOGETHER…

- Hesitant/Silent/Invisibile
  - Fear, anxiety, dread from harangument, physical force
  - Paralysed by sexual abuse
  - Humiliated
- Isolated
- Undetected effects
  - Sleep deprived after assaults
  - Anxiety = more confusion
  - Tension ; Questioning authority vs, self-blame for giving in
- Interacts and Loops into **END GOAL**
  - Silence
  - Dependency and submission
  - Abuser is validated as correct

# MISSING DATA = INCOMPREHENSIBLE BEHAVIORS = VICTIM CREDIBILITY

- Why stay if abuse was so bad? Was it bad?
- Why not report to police? Or tell close friends?
- Why disclose sexual abuse so late in the investigation?
- If really raped, how come returned to partner?

# EFFECTS OF COERCIVE CONTROL

CAPTIVITY AND THE ILLUSION OF FREE WILL

# WHY GO TO SO MUCH TROUBLE?

- Early relationship sets tone of captivity
- Psychological captivity is more powerful
- Durable
- Confuses free will
- Muddies how to measure consent

- Affirmation that he is correct
  - Gratitude
  - Love
- Continues to appear like willing victim
- Non-credible

# CREATES PSYCHOLOGICAL CAPTIVITY

# WHY DOES SHE STAY/SILENT?

Because that is the goal!

# SUMMARIZE

- Relationship history sets context
- Abuse is a dynamic not act
- Increase sensitivity to abuse dynamic measurement
  - Makes visible the invisible
- **Provide better theoretical framework for "incomprehensible" behaviors and traumatic outcomes**

# BURDEN OF ESTABLISHING ABUSE SHOULD BE WITH THE EVALUATOR NOT THE VICTIM

# TELL IT LIKE IT REALLY HAPPENED!

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