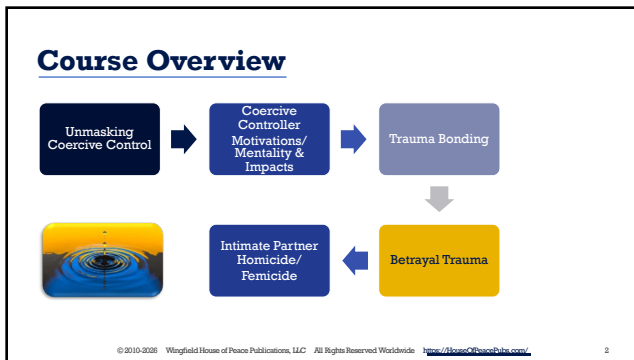


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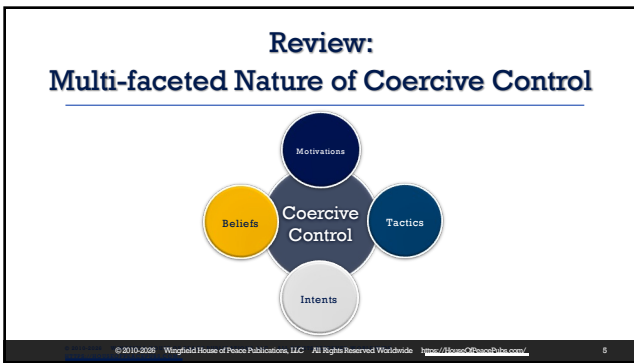
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4



5

Cracking the Code of the Coercive Controller

Motivations:

- **Entitlement-based:** belief that he is all knowledgeable, knows what's best for every member of the family, all family members should subjugate themselves to him.
- **Survival-based:** poor me, wants to be rescued and cared for over anyone else's needs in the family, helpless, unable to live/survive without his wife/partner.
- **Sadistic-based:** cold, calculated control, gains pleasure from seeing others in pain from his actions/behaviors. (Stacey Halley, 2018)

CONTROL:
"He wants to shut her up, retaliate or take revenge on her" - Michael Paymar


MOTIVATION:
Entitlement, Survival, & Sadism

OWNERSHIP

6

Impact of Coercive Controller's Motivations

- Twisting her reality
- Removing her autonomy
- Breaking her will to defend herself
- Inducing toxic stress responses
- Isolating her from support systems
- Restricting time and movement
- Depriving her of resources



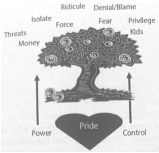
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Abuse as a Heart Problem: ♥ Pride & Entitlement

Chris Moles (2015) suggests that a heart of pride and entitlement is central to the motivation behind violent, coercive, and controlling behavior.

- **"Beliefs drive behavior"**. "The beliefs most commonly cited as contributing to domestic violence are those pertaining to **superiority, authority, and entitlement.**"
- **"Pride lies at the heart of violence and an abusive man does what he does because he wants what he wants."**
- **"Pride says, 'Everything is about me, and for me, and everything worthwhile is from me and to me.'"**
- **Pride seeks control.** "In relation to a heart of pride, control is a natural desire of one's perceived importance. In essence, when a man is filled with pride, he not only has a distorted view of power, but believes he is **entitled** to exercise that **power outside of his responsibility.**"
- **"A husband who Lord's abusive power over his wife is living inconsistently with the clear teaching of Jesus..."** "The heart of pride longs for **power over**, but the heart of Christ calls for **power under.**"



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Coercive Control Unmasked: ENTITLEMENT (OVERT OR COVERT)

- **Entitlement is an attitude that underpins and drives coercive control.**
- **"Entitlement warps the view of the abuser leading him to live in an altered reality of his own making."** (Hennessy, 2012)
- **Coercive controller's distorted beliefs:**
 - They have a special status that provides them with exclusive rights and privileges that don't apply to their partner and children.
 - They have the right to control, dominate, or manipulate their partner because they see themselves as superior or more deserving.

(Stuckey Halley, 2015)



For the Lord of hosts has a day against all that is proud and lofty, against all that is lifted up—and it shall be brought low. (Isaiah 2:12)

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Coercive Controller's Distorted Beliefs About his Rights in the Relationship

Physical caretaking —sees his partner as an unpaid servant	Emotional caretaking —it is his partner's duty to meet his emotional needs	Sexual caretaking —it is his partner's duty to keep him sexually satisfied
They see their partner as property .	Deference —entitled to have his tastes and opinions treated as edicts	Freedom from accountability —considers himself above criticism <small>(Bancroft, 2002)</small>

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Entitlement

Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others. In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death— even death on a cross! (Philippians 2: 3-8, emphasis added)


HUMILITY

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Impacts of Entitlement

- **Erosion of self-worth and identity**- the victim's feelings, needs, and autonomy are dismissed
- **She may withdraw into herself**- unable to show that she's having any kind of feelings that he doesn't agree with
- **Convinces her he knows best/he is right**- undermines the victim's ability to make independent decisions
- **Victims may begin to internalize the abuser's sense of entitlement**- can make it more difficult for the victim to break free, as the coercive controller believes they have the right to act in these harmful ways and that the victim owes them obedience or compliance
(Stuckey Halley, 2015)



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Advocate's Response: Entitlement

Advocate's task: supporting her in ways that restore her autonomy and dignity by helping her to see she and her children have rights. You can ask open-ended questions to help her explore her feelings, needs, desires, preferences, etc.

The coercive controller's sense of entitlement needs to be challenged and minimized through coercive control treatment and ongoing accountability, so that he can be working to recognize the boundaries of his own rights.



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Basic Rights in a Relationship

- To have your own view, even if your partner has a different view
- To live free from criticism and judgment
- To live free from emotional and physical threat
- See course website for handout (Evans, 1993)



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Rights as Christians

The "no rights" teaching "can be absolutely devastating in cases of domestic cruelty." (Rebecca Davis)

Examples of rights in the Bible:

Proverbs 31:8-9 says, "Open your mouth for the mute, for the rights of all who are destitute. Open your mouth, judge righteously, defend the rights of the poor and needy."

Psalms 82:3 says, "Defend the cause of the weak and fatherless; maintain the rights of the poor and oppressed."

Acts 25:11- To escape from the injustice of a prejudicial tribunal, Paul invoked his right as a Roman citizen: "But if the charges brought against me by these Jews are not true, no one has the right to hand me over to them. I appeal to Caesar!"

Matthew 20:15a- "Is it not lawful for me to do what I wish with what is my own?" (rights of property owner)

Resources:

- Do Christians Have Rights? (Vericks) <https://deliverednot.com/blog/christians-no-rights-not-own/>
- Do You Have Rights? (Pere & Hoffman) <https://www.facebook.com/ParadiseParsons/videos/114953888401726/>
- Rebecca Davis' books- <https://www.amazon.com/Unwitnessing-Scriptures/dp/0830713338/>

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Grounding Break

So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. (Genesis 1:27)



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Coercive Control Unmasked: SUPERIORITY

He considers himself superior to her and sets out to convince her of his **superiority** and her insignificance. (This could be more covert.)

"He will not only believe he is better than his wife, more deserving, and justified in his behavior, but further investigation will reveal that many times he will see men as superior to women in general."...Men who apply the principles consistent with that of a biblical husband will not only practice servant leadership, but the others-centered love of Christ (Moles, 2015)

Sees his partner as less intelligent, competent, logical, and even less sensitive than he is

Depersonalizes or objectifies his partner; extreme jealousy in private

Hello I'm BETTER THAN YOU


For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: **Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the faith God has distributed to each of you.** (Romans 12:3)

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Some Impacts of Superiority

- Diminishes the victim's sense of self-worth and autonomy
- Feelings of inferiority or inadequacy; diminishing her belief in her own abilities
- Exhaustion from striving to meet coercive controller's unrealistic, ever-changing expectations and impossibly "high bar"



For those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted. (Matthew 23:12)

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Advocate's Response: Superiority

Emotional support and empowerment/equipping-

- Help the victim recognize patterns of superiority
- Provide validation and encourage her to reconnect with her **strengths and skills** to regain confidence
- Support her in restoring her **agency** (decision making)
- Help to untwist distorted messages about love/healthy relationship

Then they began to argue among themselves about who would be the greatest among them. Jesus told them, "In this world the kings and great men lord it over their people, yet they are called 'friends of the people.' But among you it will be different. Those who are the greatest among you should take the lowest rank, and the leader should be like a servant. Who is more important, the one who sits at the table or the one who serves? The one who sits at the table, of course. But not here! For I am among you as one who serves." (Luke 22:24-27)

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Coercive Control Unmasked: CONTROL

"From the very beginning her needs are secondary, and even his apparent courting is designed not to make his partner feel good but to enhance his control." (Hennessy, 2012)



Use of Control:

- Coercive controllers use **brainwashing** and undermining her beliefs to **replace them** with his demands and beliefs.

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Case Example & Breakout Discussion: CONTROL

*Chris is not a person who "acts out" occasionally. He is obsessed with **controlling** every little thing almost constantly. He began with how I folded towels, his socks, where things went in the pantry, what the children called him, using pronouns, how straight I parked, and various other things. When he felt that I chose anything over him, he erupted. First, he locked me away from my clothes so that I couldn't get ready for work; then he grabbed me and placed me on the file cabinet and didn't let me leave the room; he imprisoned me in the bathroom, and bedroom numerous times, and these confinements just escalated more and more. "Confinement" seems too mild a word. Chris was there, holding me by the arms or yanking me around while he preached, yelled, swore, and degraded me.*




**What are the impacts on the victim?
How can the advocate respond?**

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Debrief: Impacts of Control

Some possible impacts:

- ✓ Fear, anxiety, and hypervigilance
- ✓ Loss of autonomy and identity
- ✓ Depression; learned helplessness
- ✓ Distorted view of reality
- ✓ Bodily harm




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Debrief: Advocate's Response

Helping her to understand:

- The issue isn't that the coercive controller **loses control** and acts impulsively, but that they **deliberately seek to control** their partner. True change isn't about him "getting a better grip" on himself, but requires him to **let go of his need to dominate her**.
- "One of the most chilling revelations...was that while a group of perpetrators were describing appalling behaviour they readily conceded that they were not angry while behaving outrageously. Most of them conceded that they were in control and were well aware of the limits of what they could get away with. When we interviewed some of the men, years after they had been in our groups, we were again reassured that they did know what they were doing and remained alert as to how far they could go. This admission confirms that the woman has no role to play in being abused as the man will choose when and how he will maintain his control." (Hennessy, 2012)



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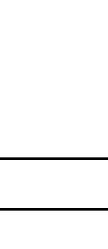
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Construction & Maintenance of Unreality

Impact of capitulating to a coercive controller's notion of reality rather than trusting one's own senses can have a **severe impact on psychological well-being and notions of self**

Impact of living within an unreality of someone else's making is that you **become paralyzed**

She internalizes the controls placed on her and learns to anticipate and avoid failure. (Williamson, 2010)



If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free. (John 8:31-32)

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Reality Distortion

Women may adapt to coercive control by **negotiating the perpetrator's constructed "unreality"** which can normalize or minimize the abuse as part of survival.

Living with and negotiating coercion and control may trigger emotional and psychological responses that mimic symptoms of **post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)**.

Fear and anxiety can persist for **many years after** an assault or patterns of coercive control.

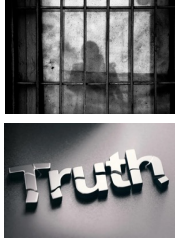
(Lohmann et al., 2024; Williamson, 2019)



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*"Terror, intermittent reward, isolation, and enforced dependency may succeed in creating a **submissive and compliant prisoner**. But the final step in the psychological control of the victim is not completed until she has been **forced to violate her own moral principals and to betray her basic human attachments**. Psychologically, this is the **most destructive of all coercive techniques**, for the victim who has succumbed loathes herself." (Herman, 1982, p. 83)*



Coercive Control Survival

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Cognitive Distortions in Women Victims of IPV

Main cognitive distortions in women victims of IPV:

- self-blame
- low attribution of responsibility to the aggressor
- minimization of violence or damage
- normalization of IPV
- denial/loss of self
- denial of injury
- perceived sense of control hope of change
- savior beliefs
- "should" beliefs in the relationship
- focus on positive aspects of the relationship or aggressor
- denial of other emotional options besides staying with the partner

***Distortions related to decision making of staying versus leaving:**



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Case Example: DARVO Depp v. Heard

Defamation Claims

- Johnny Depp filed a defamation suit against Amber Heard over a December 2018 Washington Post op-ed in which she described herself as a public figure representing domestic abuse.
- Although the op-ed did not name Depp, he claimed it implied he was an abuser, causing harm to his reputation and career.
- Heard filed a counterclaim alleging that Depp's legal team had defamed her by calling her allegations a "hoax."
- Trial: April 11-June 1, 2022, Fairfax County, VA
- Resource- 'Depp v. Heard' on Netflix



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Case Example & Breakout Discussion

Heard's Allegations of Depp's Behavior

- physical violence- slapped, punched, or pushed her on multiple occasions, often during what she claimed were drug- or alcohol-induced rages; smashing objects around the home or hotel rooms
- sexual assault with a liquor bottle
- extreme verbal insults and threats toward her; graphic language to demean and frighten her
- jealous and controlling behavior- angry over roles she took or outfits she wore
- isolated from her support network
- behaviors escalated over time with repeated conflict and reconciliation

Depp's Allegations of Heard's Behavior

- physical violence- attacked him on multiple occasions, including throwing objects at him, striking/punching him, causing injuries
- verbal insults
- gaslighting- minimizing or denying her own abusive actions while portraying him as the aggressor
- manipulation tactics to gain upper hand, including false accusations of abuse against him

**Johnny Depp & Amber Heard:
Who has the power and control?**

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Debrief


Trial Outcome

- Jury largely found in **Depp's favor** on defamation claims, awarding him damages; jury found in **Heard's favor** on one count of her counterclaim.
- ✓ **Deny**- Depp's defense focused on denying her version of events
- ✓ **Attack**- Depp's legal team aggressively attacked Heard's credibility throughout the trial
- ✓ **Reverse Victim & Offender**- key element of trial was Depp's portrayal of himself as the true victim of abuse, suffering from costs to his career, reputation & well-being

Who had the power in the relationship?

- 23-year age gap (Depp born in 1963; Heard in 1986)
- Depp had greater wealth and fame
- Depp owned multiple properties; Heard lived in some of these homes, but the assets were largely controlled by Depp
- All doctors and employees were paid for by Depp

Resource: Julie Owen's **extensive analysis** of the case outlines how Depp fits the abuser profile and the power and control wheel.



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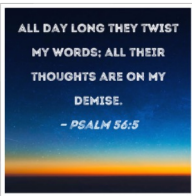
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Some Impacts of DARVO

Some possible impacts:

- Denial of experience**- can be re-traumatizing
- Reversal of roles makes it harder for victims to seek support**- feeling isolated and disbelieved
- Undermining victim's sense of reality**- often leads to confusion, self-doubt, and self blame; victim may feel responsible for the abuse, further entrenching emotional dependence
(Freyd, 1997; Haney et al., 2004; Rosenfeld & Freyd, 2002; Haney & Freyd, 2001; Winters, 1979)

***Caution about survivor presentation due to trauma!** (ex.- Heard during trial)



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Advocate's Response: DARVO

Help the survivor to understand the coercive controller's actions are **not her fault**.

Help her to identify where he is engaging in **role reversal**, twisting her words around, and bullying her.

Reassure her that her feelings and perceptions are **valid** and that she does not need to accept false accusations or twisted narratives.



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Grounding Break

But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. (1 Peter 2:9)

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Coercive Control Unmasked:
CONFUSING LOVE & COERCIVE CONTROL

- **Coercive control "is a dangerous reversal of love."** (Jeremy Pierre and Greg Wilson, 2016)
 - The coercive controller tries to convince his partner that his mistreatment of her is proof of how deeply he cares.
 - He professes to loves her when it's convenient, but what he is doing is just using the 4 Cs.
 - Confusion of love with coercive control is what allows coercive controllers who kill their partners to make the absurd claim that they were driven by the depths of their loving feelings.

Abuse is impatient, abuse is unkind. It is envious, it boasts, it is proud. It dishonors others, it is self-seeking, it is easily angered, it keeps a record of wrongs. Abuse delights in evil but is miserable with the truth. It never protects, never trusts, never hopes, never perseveres. Abuse always fails...

Adapted from 1 Cor. 13:4-8
#calledtopace

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Some Impacts of Confusing Love & Coercive Control

- Cognitive dissonance
- The victim may internalize this justification/distorted message and begin to rationalize or excuse the abuse.
- Normalization of harmful behaviors makes it hard to identify abuse and, therefore, to seek help or leave.
- Impacts on self-esteem and self-worth

LOVE IS NOT ABUSE
/COERCIVE CONTROL

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Advocate's Response: Confusing Love & Coercive Control

Identify how the coercive controller uses these messages to control her and **keep her entrapped**.

Reinforce that **abuse is never a form of love, and that love is not supposed to hurt or control**.

Acknowledge and validate that **confusion** about the coercive controller's mixed messages is common.

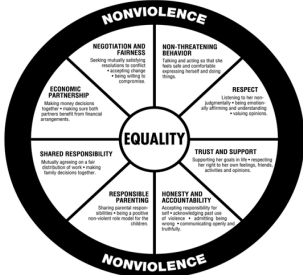
Help to untwist distorted messages and educate on what **healthy love** and boundaries looks like- see **equality wheel**.



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"Equality Wheel"- (mutuality and respect)



Healthy relationships are based on **mutuality and respect**. (Evans, 1993)

Resources:

- CTPM Live on [How to Build Healthy Relationships That Last](#)
- Duluth- Christian Partnership Wheel



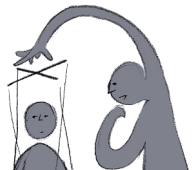
Duluth Abuse Intervention Project www.duluthmodel.org 38

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Coercive Control Unmasked: MANIPULATION

Few coercive controllers rely entirely on verbal abuse or intimidation to control their partners.

They tend to switch frequently to **manipulating** their partner to get what they want, also using this tactic just to upset or confuse her.




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Some Signs of Manipulation

- Changing his moods abruptly and frequently
- Denying the obvious about what he is doing or feeling; lying or misleading her about his actions, his desires, or his reasons for doing certain things
- Convincing her that what he wants her to do is what is best for her
- Getting her to feel sorry for him
- Getting her to blame herself, or blame other people, for what he does
- Getting her and the people she cares about to turn against each other



(Bancroft, 2002)

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Breakout Discussion: Manipulative Kindness

What does manipulative kindness look like and how does it entrap her?

What is the impact of manipulative kindness on her?

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Impacts & Advocate's Response: Manipulative Kindness

Some Impacts

- Confuses the victim and undermines her confidence
- Creates a false sense of hope
- Wins back her trust (web of entrapment)
(Evans, 1993; Stark, 2007)

Advocate's Role

- Validate her confusion
- Help in identifying the use of this tactic and patterns
- Educate on strategic vs. genuine nature
- Understand and educate how intermittent reinforcement works to keep her entrapped

Resource: [Hey Tabi Podcast - "When Kindness is a Trap..."](#)




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Coercive Control Unmasked: IMAGE MANAGEMENT

He strives to have a good public image.

- Most coercive controlling men put on the 4 C's faces for their communities, creating a sharp split between their public image and their private treatment of women and children.



"Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You are like whitewashed tombs, which look beautiful on the outside but on the inside are full of the bones of the dead and everything unclean. In the same way, on the outside you appear to people as righteous but on the inside you are full of hypocrisy and wickedness. (Matthew 23:25, 28)"

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Good Public Image

Private reality

- Enraged
- Selfish and self-centered; financially controlling
- Domineering
- Highly negative about females
- Assaultive; aggressive
- Entitled
- Critical and disengaged
- Demeans partner
- Coercively controlling & using children as a weapon

BUT

Public face with others

- Calm and smiling
- Generous and supportive
- Willing to negotiate and compromise
- Supporter of equality
- Non-violent/non-threatening
- Critical of men who disrespect or assault women
- Loving, attentive partner
- Complementary of partner
- Ideal, patient parent

Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves. (Matthew 7:15)



(Evans, 1983; Bancroft, 2002; Strak, 2007) © 2010-2009 Wingfield House of Peace Publications, LLC All Rights Reserved Worldwide <http://www.WingfieldBooks.com> 44


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Some Impacts: Good Public Image

- Psychological toll often includes confusion, isolation, self-doubt, guilt, and a diminished sense of self-worth
 - Nobody believes me- this leads to over explaining (J.A.D.E) because she feels no one understands.
 - Internal struggle- she may take on responsibility to protect his image.
- Dynamic makes it harder for the victim to recognize the coercive control, seek help, or leave the situation

Answer in chat: How would you respond if she shares with you how he is different in public than he is at home?

The Lord detests people with crooked hearts, but he delights in those with integrity. (Proverbs 11:20)




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Advocate's Response: Good Public Image

Help her recognize his coercive control—to see the incongruency between how he behaves at home versus in public, and how the attitudes and tactics reserved for home are a problem.
 Help her see that he has the skills to manage outside pressures. He needs to generalize back into using the same skills within the family system.

And no wonder, for Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light. It is not surprising, then, if his servants also masquerade as servants of righteousness. Their end will be what their actions deserve. (2 Corinthians 11:14)



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Coercive Control Unmasked: JUSTIFICATION

Externalizes responsibility for their actions, believing their partner makes them behave in abusive ways

Inflated sense of own importance- "God-like demeanour allows them to legitimise their own behaviours and prohibits them from acknowledging the effects on their target." (Hennessy, 2012)

Masters of excuse-making and rationalization

Whoever conceals their sins does not prosper, but the one who confesses and renounces them finds mercy. (Proverbs 28:13)



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Impacts & Advocate's Response: Justification

Some Impacts:

- Survivor may internalize blame and question her perceptions

Advocate's Response:

- Helping her to recognize his justifications and keeping the responsibility where it belongs (solely on the perpetrator) supports her in reclaiming her sense of reality

If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us. (1 John 1:8-10)

TRUST
Integrity

Accountability

TRUSTWORTHINESS = RESPONSIBILITY = RESPONSIBLE = COMMITMENT

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Coercive Control Unmasked: DENIAL & MINIMIZATION

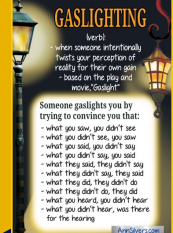


- **Denial**- downplaying the severity of their behavior, denying its impact, or outright refusing to acknowledge that they are engaging in abusive behavior. (Stark, 2007)
- **Minimization**- "It wasn't that bad," or "You're making a big deal out of nothing."
- Partly to protect himself and partly because his perceptions are distorted (Bancroft, 2002)

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Denial and minimization: Key components of Gaslighting



Someone gaslights you by trying to convince you that:

- what you saw, you didn't see
- what you didn't see, you saw
- what you said, you didn't say
- what you didn't say, you said
- what they said, they didn't say
- what they didn't say, they said
- what they did, they didn't do
- what they didn't do, they did
- what you heard, you didn't hear
- what you didn't hear, was there for the hearing

pop psychology

Gaslighting is when someone tries to get you to believe you are wrong.

Being triggered means that something makes you uncomfortable or annoyed.

People who use rules, money, or will-control are narcissists.

Anything that hinders your ability to cope can be traumatic. Trauma has long-lasting impacts and it goes beyond ordinary sadness. Something being harmful isn't automatically traumatic.

actual psychology

Gaslighting is an elaborate strategy where you are manipulated to question your reality, memory, or sanity. That isn't an overstatement over what happened.

A trigger is something that causes a sudden increase in symptoms. See **Backboon** in PTSD or **comorbidity** in OCD. A trigger is not just a source of general discomfort.

Everyone has some narcissistic traits, and many people are unaware of it. You without being narcissist. **Narcissists personally identify a clinical diagnosis**, and it doesn't always lead to ab. use behavior.

Like a madman who throws firebrands, arrows, and death is the man who deceives his neighbor and says, "I am only joking!" (Proverbs 26:18-19)

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Impacts & Advocate's Response: Denial

Some Impacts:

- Creates distorted reality
- Questioning herself; feeling as if she's losing her mind
- May develop actual psychiatric symptoms
- If outsiders notice her instability, the coercive controller can use their observations to persuade them that her disclosure of coercive control is fabricated, that she's crazy, or is actually the coercive controller.

Advocate's Response:

- Listen to her story. Validate her. Believe her.
- Encourage use of timeline to see patterns
- Remind her that his denial does not mean that she is lying or creating the coercive control.

"That didn't happen. And if it did, it wasn't that bad. And if it was, it's not a big deal. And if it is, I don't believe it's my fault. And if it was, I didn't mean it. And if I did, you made me do it."

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I didn't do anything wrong and I promise to never do it again.

There are six things the Lord hates, seven that are detestable to him: haughty eyes, a lying tongue, hands that shed innocent blood, a heart that devises wicked schemes, feet that are quick to rush into evil, a false witness who pours out lies and a person who stirs up conflict in the community. (Proverbs 6:16-19)

The Lord detests lying lips, but he delights in people who are trustworthy. (Proverbs 12:22)

For there is nothing hidden that will not be disclosed, and nothing concealed that will not be known or brought out into the open. (Luke 8:17)


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Impacts of Denial of Doing Anything Wrong

The words of the reckless pierce like swords, but the tongue of the wise brings healing. (Proverbs 12:18)

The soothing tongue is a tree of life, but a perverse tongue crushes the spirit. (Proverbs 15:4)

Loss of enthusiasm	Prepared, on-guard state	Growing self-doubt; hesitancy to accept perceptions; loss of self-confidence	Concern something is wrong with her; desire not to be the way she is
Anxiety or fear of being crazy	Internalized "critical voice"	Concern that she isn't happier and ought to be	

❖ See course webpage for handouts (Evans, 1993)

- Indicators to help victims identify Verbal Abuse
- 10 Patterns of Verbal Abuse

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Coercive Control Unmasked: POSSESSIVENESS

Sense of ownership is one reason why coercive control tends to get worse as relationships get more serious.

Possessiveness is at the core of the coercive controller's mindset.

Because he feels he owns her, he has a right to treat her as he sees fit. (Bancroft, 2002)

Often includes behaviors such as surveillance, unfounded accusations of infidelity, and isolating her from family and friends.

You're Mine

You are my rightfully owned property & only I decide if & when this relationship ends...

"So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. And God blessed them. And God said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion...over every living thing that moves on the earth.'" (Genesis 1:27-28)

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Impacts & Advocate's Response: Possessiveness

Some Impacts:

- Isolates her from her support network
- Undermines her autonomy
- She is pulled further into the web of entrapment

Advocate's Response:

- Educate on how possessiveness is part of a larger pattern of coercive control
- Importance of safety planning
- Empowerment and rebuilding autonomy



You must love in such a way that the person you love feels free.

- Thich Nhat Hanh

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Coercive Controlling Mentality: Key Points to Remember

- Coercive control grows from **attitudes and values**, not feelings. The roots are **ownership**, the trunk is **entitlement, survival, and sadism**, and the branches are **control**. (Stuckey Halley, 2015)
- Coercive control is a **heart issue**- the problem is a desire for **control** rooted in **entitlement**. It flows from a **self-centered, prideful belief system**. (Moles, 2015)
- Coercive controllers are far more **conscious** of what they are doing than they appear to be. However, even their less conscious behaviors are driven by their core attitudes. (Hennessy, 2012)
- Coercive controllers are **unwilling** to cease control, not **unable**. They do not want to give up power and control. (Pence & Paymar, 1993)
- Victims are not crazy**. They must learn to trust their perceptions of how their coercive controlling partner treats them and thinks about them. (Bancroft, 2002)

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Impacts of Coercive Controlling Mentality

- > The impacts are **all encompassing** and invade every area of a survivor's life.
- > **Advocate's response:** Advocates encourage, educate, and equip/empower survivors to hold onto truth and find their **true identity**.



The Abusive Mentality:

Controlling
Entitlement
Twists things into their opposite:
Disrespect of partner
Confuses love and abuse
Manipulative
Good public image
Feels justified
Denial & minimization of abuse
Possessive
(Bancroft, 2002)

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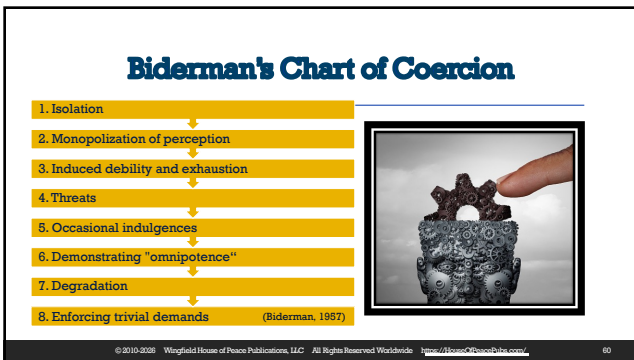
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Originally called *Stockholm Syndrome*, beginning to see language of **Trauma-Coerced Attachment (TCA)** used

“Trauma Bonding” Defined

Trauma bonds are dysfunctional attachments that form in the presence of danger, shame, or exploitation. They occur when we bond to the very person who is the source of the danger, fear, or exploitation. (Dr. Patrick Carnes, 2016; 2018)

Undermines recovery and resilience

pop psychology

Trauma bonding is when you're bonding with someone over shared trauma or similar past experiences.

actual psychology

A trauma bond refers to a situation where someone develops strong feelings of sympathy, loyalty, dependence, and attachment towards their abuser.

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Trauma Bonding is a psychological response sometimes seen in **abducted hostages**. Also seen with **coercively controlled women and children**.

Psychological shift that occurs to captives when they are threatened gravely but shown acts of kindness by their captors

When subjected to these situations for a period of time, the captive develops a strong bond with the captor and in some cases (especially with a captor of the opposite sex) develops a sexual interest

Tend to sympathize with their captors and think of them highly because they believe that their captors are showing favor because of their inherent kindness and thus might not be as bad as they look

Trauma bonding is not a weakness — it is a deliberate coercive strategy that weaponizes intimacy to produce psychological captivity.



(Gesiak & Gelshorpe, 2025)

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Components of Trauma Bonding

Positive feelings by the victim toward the controller

Negative feelings by the victim toward family, friends, or authorities trying to rescue/support them or win their release

Support of the coercive controller's reasons and behaviors

Positive feelings by the controller toward the victim

Supportive behaviors by the victim, at times helping the controller

Inability to engage in behaviors that may assist in their release or detachment

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I don't know why, but I want him back.

I know what he's done to me, but I still love him.

This doesn't make sense. He's got a new girlfriend and he's abusing her too...but I'm jealous.

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Understanding Trauma Bonding

- Emotionally bonding with a coercive controller is actually a strategy for survival for victims of coercive control and intimidation.
- Reaction in hostage and/or coercive control situations is so well recognized at this time that police hostage negotiators no longer view it as unusual
- On the downside, assures that hostages experiencing trauma bonding will not be very cooperative during rescue or criminal prosecution
- Length of time one is exposed to control and other factors are certainly involved

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Four Situations for Development of Trauma Bonding

- The presence of a **perceived threat** to one's physical or psychological survival and the belief that the coercive controller would carry out the threat
- The presence of a **perceived small kindness** from the coercive controller to the victim
- Isolation** from perspectives other than those of the coercive controller
- The **perceived inability to escape** the situation

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1. Perceived Threat to Survival

The perception of threat can be formed by direct, indirect, or witnessed methods.

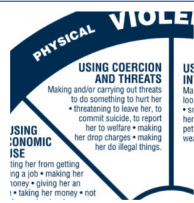
Direct	Indirect
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Criminal or antisocial partners can directly threaten her life or friends/family. • His history of violence leads her to believe that he will carry out the threat in a direct manner if she fails to comply with his demands. • The controller assures her that only her cooperation keeps her loved ones safe. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • He offers subtle threats that she will never leave him or have another partner, reminding her that people in the past have paid dearly for not following his wishes. • He may give hints like, "I know people who can make others disappear." • Can come from stories he tells-how he has obtained revenge on those who crossed him

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Perceived Threat to Survival

Witnessing violence or aggression is also a perceived threat.

- > Witnessing a violent temper directed at a TV, others on the highway, or a third party clearly sends the message that she could be the next target for violence.
- > Witnessing thoughts and attitudes of the coercive controller is threatening and intimidating, knowing she will be the target of those thoughts in the future.



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2. The "Small Kindness" Perception

In threatening and survival situations, we look for evidence of HOPE.

- > Small seemingly positive moments (manipulative kindness) signal to victims "maybe it will improve." The controller is often reinterpreted as "not all bad."
- > The reduction/absence of overt mistreatment is often misinterpreted by victims and credited to controllers as positive change.

Perception of a "soft side"- coercive controllers may share about their past

- > Sympathy increases
- > Victim begins to see the controller as wounded, possibly a "victim" too



The Mechanism: Intermittent Reward

- > Unpredictable "kindness," attention, or affection from the abuser strengthens trauma bonds by mixing fear with brief moments of reward.
- > Creates intense emotional arousal, hope, and loyalty, making the bond difficult to break. (Entrapment) (Lesiak & Galtschoppe, 2028)

> Recovery can involve grieving this hope.

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3. Isolation from Perspectives Other than those of the Coercive Controller

In coercive controlling relationships, the victim has the sense they are always **“walking on eggshells”** — fearful of saying or doing anything that might prompt a violent/intimidating outburst.

Taking the coercive controller’s perspective as a survival technique can become so intense that the victim actually develops anger toward those trying to help them.

In severe cases of trauma bonding in relationships, the victim may have difficulty leaving the coercive controller and may actually feel the coercive controlling situation is their fault.

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4. Perceived Inability to Escape

In coercive controlling romantic relationships, the belief that one can't escape is common (sense of till-death-do-us-part).

Controlling partners may have increased the financial obligations/debt in the relationship to the point that neither partner can financially survive on their own.

The controller may use extreme threats including threatening to take the children out of state, threatening to quit their job/business rather than pay alimony/support, threatening public exposure of the victim's personal issues, or assuring the victim they will never have a peaceful life due to nonstop harassment.

Controllers often keep the victim locked into the relationship with severe guilt — even threatening suicide if she leaves.

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In Unhealthy Relationships and Trauma Bonding Relationships...

There is a daily preoccupation with **“trouble.”**

- Trouble is any individual, group, situation, comment, casual glance, or cold meal that may produce a temper tantrum or verbal abuse from the controller.
- To survive, trouble is to be avoided at all costs.
- The **victim must control situations** that produce trouble.

God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. (Psalm 46:1)

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“Betrayal Trauma” Defined

Betrayal trauma occurs when the people or institutions on which a person depends for survival significantly violate that person’s trust or well-being (Freyd, 2007).

- Freyd’s theory initially focused on **childhood abuse**—“...if the person who has betrayed us is someone we need to continue interacting with despite the betrayal, then it is not to our advantage to respond to the betrayal in the normal way. Instead, we essentially need to ignore the betrayal.”
- Freyd expanded her research over the years to consider the impact of betrayal by **unfaithful spouses, abusive authority figures, corrupt institutions, etc.**

Betrayal Blindness

Being unaware, unrecognizing or just forgetting about betrayal. We engage in this unseeingness to be able to preserve our relationships, our world views, our ideals and our social systems.

(From the great work of Dr. Jennifer Freyd)

@DadAndDad

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Betrayal Trauma

Although **betrayal trauma** shares many of the same psychological, physiological and neurological symptoms associated with fear-based traumas...

the perpetrator is in close relationship with the victim and therefore the violation of trust is experienced as a deeply personalized (versus random) offense.

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Betrayal Trauma

If an enemy were insulting me, I could endure it; if a foe were rising against me, I could hide. But it is you, a man like myself, my companion, my close friend... (Psalm 55:12-13)

“We call it betrayal because it is personal. The wounds are felt deeply within the soul. The trauma is experienced physically as well as emotionally, and the perpetrator is the same one we turn to for comfort, love, safety and support.” (Joi Allerton, LWCS)

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Betrayal Trauma

Many symptoms arise immediately after a betrayal trauma, while other symptoms have a delayed onset, which may start months, and sometimes years, after the initial discovery of a betrayal.

Common delayed reactions to betrayal trauma:

Depression

Grief reactions

Skepticism

Shame

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Symptoms that Indicate a Betrayal Bond

1. Everyone around you has strong negative reactions, yet you continue covering up, defending, or explaining a relationship.
2. There is a constant pattern of nonperformance, and yet you continue to believe false promises.
3. There are repetitive, destructive fights that nobody wins.
4. Others are horrified by something that has happened to you, but you are not.
5. You obsess over showing someone that he or she is wrong about you, your relationship, or the person's treatment of you.
6. You feel stuck because you know what the other person is doing is destructive but believe you cannot do anything about it.
7. You feel loyal to someone even though you harbor secrets that are damaging to others.

(Patrick J. Carnes, Ph.D., CAS, Trauma Bonds)




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Symptoms that Indicate a Betrayal Bond

8. You move closer to someone you know is destructive to you with the desire of converting him or her to a non-abuser.
9. Someone's talents, charisma, or contributions cause you to overlook destructive, exploitive or degrading acts.
10. You cannot detach from someone even though you do not trust, like, or care for the person.
11. You find yourself missing a relationship, even to the point of nostalgia and longing, that was so awful it almost destroyed you.
12. Extraordinary demands are placed upon you to measure up as a way to cover up that you've been exploited.
13. You keep secret someone's destructive behavior toward you because of all the good they have done or the importance of their position or career.
14. The history of your relationship is about contracts or promises that have been broken and that you are asked to overlook.

(Patrick J. Carnes, Ph.D., CAS, Trauma Bonds)




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Impacts of Long-term Trauma and Betrayal

“When you learn how your physiology changes after chronic stress and trauma, you learn that it’s not YOU, it’s your nervous system that’s responding this way. Anyone who has been through prolonged adversity could have changes to their neuroception system that makes them more alert to danger signals. You’re not choosing to move into fight/flight/freeze/fawn/[flop/fatigue] and it’s not your fault!”

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Watching for Signs of Trauma

Thoughts – often offline, distorted, chaotic, and fragile

Emotions – cross the full spectrum of expression (elevated and sub-expressed)

Body – multiple physical presentations are experienced by women in trauma

When treating trauma...
 “We work with three levels of information processing – which goes along with the three levels of the brain.
 We work with cognitions and belief systems that are formed after trauma, which involves the cortex.
 We also have to work with the emotions, like rage and terror – that has to do with the limbic system.
 Then, we also have to work with the body because that’s where trauma impacts.”
 -Pat Ogden, PhD

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Guilt and Shame

Helpful guilt is a feeling of psychological discomfort about something we’ve done that is objectively wrong.

Unhelpful guilt is a feeling of psychological discomfort about something we’ve done against our irrationally high standards.

Shame is an intensely painful feeling of being fundamentally flawed.



(The Manual Institute for the Clinical Application of Behavioral Medicine)

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Supporting Betrayal/Relational Trauma Survivors

Assessing safety should always be the *first* concern when working with women experiencing betrayal trauma/relational trauma and intimate partner violence.

Encourage women to **share their story** as often as necessary - this is a critical part of processing and **validating** their lived experience.

In the beginning stages of discovery, many of these wives blame themselves, even to the point of seeing themselves as having been abusive - it is important to **educate** with care as we slowly help them **accept coercive control is not a relationship problem - it is a person problem.**

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Relational Betrayal: Faith Perspective

- In a fallen world, a covenant union is not always expressed and lived well; the union of "one-flesh" can be violated by various forms of persecution/evil (Matthew 10:23). Leaving these relationships may be necessary.
- Leslie Vernick, Christian counselor and author of *The Emotionally Destructive Marriage*, teaches there is biblical support for sons and daughters of God to experience consequence for sin (1 Corinthians 5:9-12; James 5:19-20; Galatians 6:7). Vernick also submits safety may be more important to God than unconditional loyalty to one's spouse (1 Samuel 18-31; Matthew 2:13-15; Luke 14:5).
- Physical, emotional, verbal, and psychological abuse may mean that it is time to consider recognizing that the abuser has abandoned the marriage. A man who "covers himself with violence" is not a loving spouse (Malachi 2:16). Ephesians 5:25 is the standard for a Christian marriage. "Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her."

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Impact of Trauma on Faith & Restoring Faith



"In situations of terror, people spontaneously seek their first source of comfort and protection. Wounded soldiers and raped women cry for their mothers, or for God. When this cry is not answered, the sense of basic trust is shattered. Traumatized people feel utterly abandoned, utterly alone, cast out of the human and divine systems of care and protection that sustain life." (Judith Herman, 1992)

Restoring Faith:

- *For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison, and you came to visit me. (Matthew 25:35-36)*
- *Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ. (Galatians 6:2)*
- *Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn. (Romans 12:15)*

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Victim Assessment

- Coercive Control History
- Checklist of Controlling Behaviors
- Abuse Questionnaire
- Power and Control Wheel (<https://www.thehulthmodel.org/whatsit/>)
- Definitions of Coercive Control (use checklists in "Eyes Wide Open: Help! with Control Freak Co-Parents," Revised, 2025)
- Danger Assessment (Campbell, 1995)
- MOSAIC Method

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Intimate Partner Homicide/Femicide: Statistics

In 2023, 2,412 women in the U.S. were killed by men in single victim/single-offender incidents:

89.9 % of female victims knew their male offenders- among these, 57% were intimate partners (wives, common-law wives, ex-wives, or girlfriends).

Compared to a man, a woman is far more likely to be killed by her spouse, an intimate acquaintance, or a family member than by a stranger.

Female victims were killed by someone they knew at nearly 9 times the rate of being killed by a stranger.

Multiple studies have shown that female intimate partners are more likely to be murdered with a firearm than other weapons, demonstrating "the importance of reducing access to firearms in households affected by IPV."

(Violence Policy Center, 2025)

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Grounding Break

Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. (Phil. 4:6-7)

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Intimate Partner Femicide (IPF)

IPF was preceded and motivated by a **breakdown in the control** the perpetrator has of the relationship (and which they may feel **entitled** to) and their perceived loss of status or stability as a result.

(Monckton Smith, 2020)



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Intimate Partner Femicide

Dominant pre-relationship themes:

- perpetrator has history of coercive control, controlling patterns, or stalking

Relationship themes:

- presence of domestic abuse, controlling patterns, and monitoring/stalking behaviors

Post-relationship themes:

- separation instigated by the victim, stalking, threats to kill, or a threat to control or status (like illness or financial ruin)

Risk markers were:

- history of coercive control or stalking, possessiveness, control, monitoring, violence, sexual violence, isolation, threats to kill, threats to suicide, stalking, separation, escalating control, or violence

(Monckton Smith, 2020)

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8 Stage Progression to Homicide/Femicide

(Monckton Smith, 2020)

Stage 1	Pre-relationship - history of controlling patterns, domestic abuse, or stalking
Stage 2	Early Relationship - how relationship started was different from what it would become; started with the perpetrator being attentive and progressed to possessiveness and control
Stage 3	Relationship - giving of commitment seemed to coincide with rights to control
Stage 4	Trigger/s - withdrawal of commitment, or separation; real or imagined, or just threatened
Stage 5	Escalation - increase in frequency, severity, or variety of abuse, control, or stalking; attempt to reestablish control or status
Stage 6	A change in thinking/decision - perceived irretrievable loss of control and/or status; idea that homicide may be a possibility
Stage 7	Planning - indicators showed written plans around how the killing would happen; evidence of creating opportunities for the killing to happen
Stage 8	Homicide (Intimate Partner Femicide/IPF)- may involve extreme levels of violence (even in previously nonviolent people) where the level of violence used appears to have no direct relation to the level of violence evidenced in the relationship.

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**Shanann & Chris Watts:
2018 Murder**

Read the Story:
 > <https://www.nickiswift.com/137854/the-untold-truth-of-the-chris-watts-case/>

View the Video: *We Now Understand Why Chris Watts Confessed To Killing His Wife*
 > <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HbOFIKRzZ9A>

Netflix documentary
 > American Murder: The Family Next Door



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**Messages To:
New Survivors
By Longer-Term
Survivors**

Flasch, Pall, Stice, Easley, Murray, & Crowe, 2019:
<https://doi.org/10.1089/0192-6464.2019-0017>

*The eternal God is your dwelling place,
and underneath are the everlasting
arms. (Deut. 33:27a)*

to do list

- Self-Love and Inherent Strengths _____
- Healing as a Journey and Process _____
- Importance of Social Support _____
- Leaving the Abusive Relationship Behind _____
- Focus on Self-Care _____
- Guidance for New Relationships _____
- Practical Issues and Resources _____
- Recommendations for Children _____
- Religious and Spiritual Support _____
- Obtaining Education about IPV _____
- Advocacy and Social Action _____



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