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COERCIVE CONTROL AND TRAUMA-COERCED ATTACHMENT IN COMMERCIAL SEXUAL EXPLOITATION: A MIXED-METHOD EXAMINATION

by

KENDRA DOYCHAK, M.A., M.PHIL.

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Psychology in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of New York

2022

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A Mixed-Method Examination

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This manuscript has been read and accepted for the
Graduate Faculty in Psychology to satisfy the dissertation
requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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ABSTRACT

Coercive Control and Trauma-Coerced Attachment in Commercial Sexual Exploitation:
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by

Kendra Doychak, M.A., M.Phil.

Advisor: Professor Chitra Raghavan, Ph.D.

Commercial sexual exploitation (i.e., sex trafficking) can lead to myriad negative consequences for its victims, including exposure to coercive control and the development of trauma-coerced attachments. Scholars have offered theoretical conceptualizations of the relation between coercive environments and traumatic attachments, but this relationship is rarely empirically examined. The current study used data from 68 semi-structured interviews with former victims of sex trafficking to first, formally identify coercive control and second, empirically classify trauma-coerced attachment in this population. Mixed-method analysis were used to identify associations between coercive control and TCA in order to better explain how this abuse dynamic leads to the formation of such bonds with a focus on the unique role of intermittent reward and punishment (a subtype of coercive control). Findings indicated that women in pimp-controlled commercial sex were subjected to high and severe levels of coercive control, and that coercion takes a unique form in this population compared to coercive control in domestic violence contexts, where it is typically studied. Findings also indicate that more extreme coercive control contributes to more severe levels of trauma-coerced attachment. Unexpectedly, dissociation was not related to trauma-coerced attachment as hypothesized. Important guidelines

for the reliable assessment of coercive control and trauma-coerced attachment in a sex-trafficking context are offered for empirical, clinical, and legal settings.

Keywords: sex trafficking, commercial sex, trauma, coercive control, victimization

Acknowledgements

This journey would not have been possible without the love, support, and encouragement of so many.

To Dr. Chitra Raghavan, thank you from the bottom of my heart. You have been a remarkable model of selfless and relentless commitment, passion, and empathy. You have a profound and steadfast way of centering the growth of your students and fostering the autonomy of your mentees. You expect excellence, while leaving space for humanness—what a beautiful and rare combination to find in a person, let alone an advisor. To my committee, thank you for your dedication to this project and your thoughtful feedback through its development and completion. Your expertise undoubtedly helped to strengthen it and your excitement about it helped to propel me to the finish line.

To Sam, thank you for allowing me to turn our kitchen table into a desk, our living room into a study den, and our home into a psycho-socio-political debate stage. Your support and your friendship have truly been unconditional and unwavering. I could not have gotten through my graduate career without you as my 'biggest fan.' To my dear friends, you have brought me laughter and levity over the last six years, offering reprieve from the pressures of graduate school when I needed it most. Thank you for cheering me on and supporting my passions. And, thank you for continuing to send me the invite, despite my ever-steady stream of "can't make it" RSVPs.

To Skyler, Matthew, and Landon, thank you for seeing me, believing in me, and looking to me the way you do. So much of this is for you. I love you. To Bogey and Bachey, a deep and heartfelt thank you. You have instilled in me the love and safety necessary to explore my dreams and desires, to embody my inquisitive nature, to develop and trust the belief that I could achieve. I am here because of you. I am me because of you. To Lauren, you have held and tended to my every doubt and have celebrated and heightened my every success. How beautiful it will be to continue to grow and learn with you.

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Introduction to Literature Review: Traumatic Outcomes of Captive Abuse – Understanding Coercive Control and Trauma-Coerced Attachment in Commercial Sexual Exploitation

Sex trafficking, similar to so many other human rights violations, transcends national borders and continues to increase in prevalence (Baldwin, Fehrenbacher, & Eisenman, 2015; Dank et al., 2014; Orme & Ross-Sheriff, 2015; Task Force on Trafficking of Women and Girls, 2014; The International Labor Organization, 2012). This form of modern-day slavery has myriad negative outcomes for its victims, including subjection to abuse, coercion, and deprivation, as well as the risk of developing physical health symptoms (e.g., sexually transmitted diseases or physical injuries), mental health symptoms (e.g., depressive disorders, anxiety disorders, or substance use disorders), and psychological sequalae (e.g., somatic symptomology and trauma and dissociative disorders; Hom & Woods, 2013; Dovydaitis, 2010; Miller et al., 2007; Zimmerman et al., 2008). One trauma and dissociative related outcome, trauma-coerced attachment (TCA)[1], refers to a traumatic emotional attachment to an abusive partner. TCA is marked by powerful dependency and a shift in world- and self-view and affects the victims' cognitive, interpersonal, and emotional regulation systems. TCA results in an idealization of the abuser, feelings of love, loyalty, or gratitude toward the abuser, and behaviors aimed to protect or defend the abuser (Doychak & Raghavan, 2018; Raghavan & Doychak, 2015).

In this work, I will offer an explanation of TCA as induced by coercive control dynamics[2], as a predictable response to this abuse dynamic, and as exploited by the abuser to maintain compliance and dependency. I will situate TCA in a sex-trafficking context; although as my review will indicate, this psychological phenomenon has been studied across time and

[1] Trauma-coerced attachment has also been referred to as trauma bonding, traumatic attachment, and paradoxical attachment.

[2] A number of interchangeable terms will be used when discussing coercive control dynamics. "Coercion" will be used as shorthand for the larger dynamic. "Tactics" will be used to refer to specific elements of the overarching dynamic.

context. My literature review is segmented into six sections: 1) a brief introduction to the sex-trafficking crisis and the United States government's response; 2) a review and summary of the literature examining coercive control dynamics in a sex-trafficking context; 3) a framework for organizing and expanding the systematic study of coercive control; 4) a brief summary of the historical development of theory related to traumatic attachment; 5) a conceptualization of TCA as a trauma-related syndrome, which is evolutionarily adaptive and marked by relational and identity disturbances, and; 6) an operational definition of TCA for future study. In concluding, I will delineate the psychological and legal importance of understanding TCA and outline important future directions for the empirical and phenomenological study of TCA.

Chapter 1: Sex Trafficking – The Scope of the Crisis

Sex trafficking is an umbrella term, which includes various forms of sexual exploitation within the commercial sex industry—such as forced prostitution and forced engagement in pornography, exotic dancing, and sex shows—and can be both international and domestic (Deshpande & Nour, 2013; Hodge, 2008). For purposes of this review, I will narrow the definition of sex trafficking to include only forced prostitution. Who is considered forced and who is considered to have acted consensually hinges upon the definition of trafficking. The Victims of Trafficking and Violence Protection Act (TVPA; 2000, 2003, 2005, 2008, 2013)—a comprehensive federal statute aimed at combatting human trafficking through protection, prosecution, and prevention efforts—defines sex trafficking as "a commercial sex act induced by force, fraud, or coercion, or in which the person induced to perform such an act has not attained 18 years of age" or as "the recruitment, harboring, transportation, provision, or obtaining of a person for labor or services, through the use of force, fraud, or coercion for the purpose of subjection to involuntary servitude, peonage, debt bondage, or slavery."

According to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (2016), victims of sex trafficking are trafficked within countries, across borders of neighboring countries, and to distant regions, countries, and continents. Rates of international sex trafficking are mere approximations; however, the International Labor Organization (n.d.) reports 4.5 million victims of sex trafficking globally, with 500,000 to 600,000 new victims of sex trafficking each year. Some estimates suggest that as high as 96 to 98 percent of sex trafficking victims are women and children. Despite this overwhelming majority, it is worth noting the number of male sex-trafficking victims has increased over the last decade (Kara, 2010; Orme & Ross-Sheriff, 2015; United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2016). In addition, members of the LGBTQ

community—specifically trans individuals—continue to comprise disproportionate percentages of individuals trafficked for sexual exploitation (Nichols, Preble, & Cox, 2019). For example, one study found that while trans individuals comprise .6% of the population (Flores et al., 2016), they accounted for 3% of the trafficked sample (Nichols et al., 2019).

Precise rates of domestic trafficking are even more difficult to ascertain due to barriers to reporting and the under-identification of victims. Under-identification of victims may be a result of legal actors misidentifying victims as engaging consensually, individuals not reporting their experiences to the police for fear of retaliation (e.g., physical harm, deportation, or a feared inability to financially support themselves without their trafficker/pimp), and others only later understanding their experiences as coerced or their partners as "pimps" due to an absence of physical abuse or a presence of psychological captivity (Adams, 2011; Busch-Armendariz et al., 2009; Farrell et al., 2012; Heil, 2012; Nichols & Heil, 2015; Reid, 2010). Despite these problems, some estimates suggest that domestic trafficking has increased to comprise 42% of all trafficking victims (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2016). A rich clinical and anecdotal body of data suggests that a growing source of domestically exploited sexual labor is women of color (e.g., Schisgall & Alvarez, 2008); statistics from the Office for Victims of Crime (2013) estimate that black women and girls comprise approximately 40% of sex trafficking cases.

Although most governmental bodies indicate that rates of international and domestic trafficking may be underestimates (e.g., United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2016), some scholars, advocates, and individuals in the commercial sex industry argue that engagement in commercial sex can be consensual and as such, rates of trafficking are overestimates (e.g., Weitzer, 2010). This school further argues that engagement in commercial sex can be considered

sex “work” and that the call for action against trafficking is an act of hysteria or moral panic (Bergquist, 2015). Unresolved discourse surrounding agency, consent, forced choice, and survival sex is interdisciplinary. In this body of work, I will focus on delineating how a comprehensive understanding of coercive control from a psychological perspective can illuminate the discourse around consent. Specifically, I argue that the discrepancy between those who believe sex trafficking is underestimated and those who argue that it is overestimated lies in *how* and *when* coercion (a key factor in defining whether consent was coerced or freely obtained) is assessed. In the third section of this review, I will discuss the “how” and in the fourth section, explore “when” we should assess for coercion. In doing so, I will demonstrate that arguments suggesting trafficking rates are underestimates are not rooted in moral outrage, but rather scientific and empirical data.

Chapter 2: Coercive Control

Coercive control refers to strategic and ongoing use of abuse and control tactics, implemented to limit a victim's a decision-making ability, increase her dependency on the abuser, and deny her of liberty, autonomy, and equality (Stark, 2007). Stark (2006; 2007; 2009; 2010) revitalized the theory and framework of coercive control, arguing that interpersonal violence is not only physical and should not be measured by way of incident-specific acts of such physical abuse. Rather, interpersonal violence—specifically gender-based violence—should involve consideration of the totality of the abusive environment (e.g., compounding and interwoven control tactics within the relationship dynamic, patriarchal and gender-based conformity, and issues of fear and personal liberty).

Coercive control dynamics, power, and control are well- documented and well-understood in the psychological literature surrounding intimate partner violence (Barbaro & Raghavan, 2018; Day & Brown, 2015; Ditcher et al., 2018; Hamberger, Larsen, & Lehrner, 2017; Kaplenko, Loveland, & Raghavan, 2018; Loveland & Raghavan, 2017; Stark, 2007). Many of the interpersonal and abusive dynamics present in trafficker-victim relationships overlap substantially with those of romantic partners in the context of intimate partner violence (Raphael, Reichert, & Powers, 2010; Stark & Hodgson, 2003; Thaller & Cimino, 2016). For example, both abusive partners and traffickers/pimps use physically abusive forms of violence, as well as control tactics. Similarly, victims of both of these types of relationships cope with the abuses they have endured through denial or minimization, self-blame, and dissociation (Kennedy et al., 2007). Finally, it is worth noting that many traffickers and pimps are romantically involved

with one or more of the women they sexually exploit[3] (Norton-Hawk, 2004; Williamson & Cluse-Tolar, 2002).

Despite similarities and overlap with intimate partner violence, unique vulnerabilities and areas for compounded coercion exist exclusively in sex-trafficking contexts. First, victims of sex-trafficking experience sexual coercion, violation, and abuse in inimitable ways (e.g., bodily or sexual inspections, routine rape, forced abortions, engagement in commercial sex while menstruating, and orders of when and how to use—or not use—protection with buyers and traffickers; Doychak & Raghavan, 2018; Hom & Woods, 2013; Reid, 2016). Second, many traffickers employ other women in the ring, family members, or neighbors to pressure and surveil victims. Thus, unlike in intimate partner violence in which there typically exists one abuser, sex traffickers often network methods of coercion (Doychak & Raghavan, 2018; Hagan et al., 2019). Finally, financial control and access to money is uniquely regulated and denied in this context (e.g., women earn the money they are then forced to surrender to their traffickers). Therefore, although it is constructive to borrow from the intimate partner violence literature to understand coercive control dynamics operating in this context, researchers and scholars in the field of sex trafficking must consider the novel and unique ways in which sex traffickers employ these tactics to create environments of fear, compliance, and loyalty.

Measuring coercive control systematically is complex, in part, due to its individualized and nuanced nature. Coercive tactics are tailored to a victim's specific vulnerabilities and thus, "what counts as coercion depends largely on how it is ontologically defined" (Kim, 2011, p. 412). Further, coercion need not be physical in nature. Physical violence or force may be used

[3] Coercive control can and does exist in non-sexual relationships, both inside and outside of sex-trafficking contexts. The focus of this review is primarily on those relationships that involve sex and intimacy. However, examples of coercive non-sexual/intimate environments or relationships are also discussed for illustration.

periodically or at the onset of the relationship, but subtle and less overt forms of exerting power and control (e.g., a domineering stare or ongoing monitoring) often become sufficient once the threat and power differential is established (Herman, 1992; Pomerantz et al., 2021). Therefore, the abuse becomes undetectable in the absence of physical violence. Finally, coercive control is inherently dynamic in nature. The overlapping and interdependent tactics create an overarching environment marked by fear, dread, disempowerment, and disconnection (Herman, 1992; Stark, 2006). As such, measurement must capture nuanced tactics of coercion, as well as the overarching coercive control dynamic that is built up from these smaller, more invisible acts.

Coercive Control: Evidence from a Sex-Trafficking Context

Herman (2003) articulately stated, "It is theoretically possible… that each abuser might spontaneously re-invent the basic methods of coercive control for himself, but this seems quite unlikely, given the constancy and uniformity of these practices across class and culture." (p. 3). In other words, she suggested that it is possible to identify and organize specific tactics of coercion. I extend this suggestion and argue that it is critical to do so for its systematic examination. Indeed, a growing body of evidence now documents the presence of coercive control in sex-trafficking contexts and most of the work in sex trafficking already employs a coercive control framework, even if the definitions and scope somewhat differ across studies (Baldwin, Fehrenbacher, and Eisenman 2015; Doychak & Raghavan, 2018; Hagan, Raghavan, & Doychak, 2019; Hom & Woods, 2013; Kim, 2011; Preble, 2019; Raphael et al., 2010; Reid, 2016).

Preble (2019) interviewed formerly trafficked women to explore their perceptions of the trafficker's power, which is a critical element of establishing coercive control (i.e., fostering an existing or creating a new power differential). Factors such as length of the relationship

contributed to women perceiving the trafficker as more powerful (e.g., the ability to bribe officials) and as having a greater general ability to effectively utilize power. Hom and Woods (2013) interviewed frontline service providers regarding a range of coercive tactics utilized by pimps to establish and maintain control over their victims. For example, physical forms of violence (e.g., beatings or starvation), as well as non-physical forms of abuse and coercion (e.g., isolation and manipulation) were employed by the traffickers.

Baldwin et al. (2015) used Biderman's (1957) framework of coercion to examine the experience of psychological coercion among women trafficked for commercial sexual exploitation. The women in the study experienced coercive tactics such as sleep deprivation, occasional indulgences, and monopolization of perception (e.g., dominating decision making or limiting external influence), among others (Biderman, 1957), which led to deprived dignity and decreased autonomy. Reid (2016) referred to entrapment and enmeshment schemes in a study examining the coercive, manipulative, and controlling tactics employed by traffickers to exert control over trafficked minors. Traffickers created the perception of "familial" relationships (with the trafficker or others in the ring), and used debt, threats, and coerced co-offending to manipulate victims into compliance.

Researchers have also begun to examine the nuanced and expansive nature of specific coercive control tactics operating within the larger dynamic of coercive control. Hagan, Raghavan, and Doychak (2019) examined the specific use of isolation tactics within trafficker-victim relationships. In addition to physical isolation in which victims are limited or restricted physically and socially (e.g., not being able to form friendships with those not in the lifestyle), the women in this study also reported decreased social spaces or supports that felt safe, as well as the elimination of privacy. Despite being surrounded by other women in the trafficking ring or in

the lifestyle generally, the pimps/traffickers successfully created environments in which the women did not view others as safe, supportive, trustworthy, or reliable.

Similar findings were offered by Unger et al. (2021) using wiretap data involving conversations among four sexually exploited women and two pimps. Analysis found that the pimps used frequent tactics of coercive control, which extended to the women's interactions with one another. In other words, pimps established coercive control by proxy and controlled the ring—in part—by way of the women employing tactics such as surveillance (i.e., monitoring location and activities) and microregulation (i.e., calculated control over aspects of daily functioning) among themselves. These dynamics contributed to guardedness, suspicion, and cautiousness among the women in the ring, which functioned as a way to increase emotional and psychological dependency on and trust in the pimp.

This growing body of research offers evidence for the range of abuses endured by victims of sex trafficking and the coercive control dynamic created by sex traffickers. These studies suggest commonalities among traffickers and similar methods of control when compared to intimate partner violence. However, these studies also illuminate differences between intimate partner violence and sex-trafficking contexts.

A Testable Framework of Coercive Control

A systematic and psychologically—as well as legally—applicable framework of coercion is necessary for organizing and understanding its specific use in sex-trafficking contexts. In response to this need, my teammates and I convened experts—in the fields of psychology, social work, and law, as well as professionals in the subfields of coercive control, trafficking, and intimate partner violence—to participate in a series of expert panel discussions over the course of one year.

As an aim and outcome of the panel meetings, the experts agreed upon seven overarching tactics of coercive control. These tactics included: surveillance, microregulation, manipulation/exploitation, isolation, intimidation, deprivation, and degradation (see Appendix A, Table A1 for definitions; Raghavan et al., personal communication from expert panels, 2016). Raghavan and colleagues (2016) also considered the inclusion of sexual coercion, as well as intermittent reward and punishment, as principal tactics of coercive control. Ultimately, the experts decided that sexual coercion would be better subsumed under one of the existing categories due to its distinctly fluid nature. For example, sexual coercion could come in the form of surveillance (e.g., requiring strip/cavity searches for hidden money upon returning home) or microregulation (e.g., requiring the use of condoms with some buyers, but disallowing the use of condoms with regulars or high-paying buyers) and could extend to include reproductive coercion (e.g., coerced pregnancies or abortions and interference with contraception; Miller & Silverman, 2010). Doychak and Raghavan (2018) argued that intermittent reward and punishment is best categorized as a form of manipulation (i.e., offering acts of kindness to exploit the victim's vulnerabilities or needs and to maintain compliance).

Capturing the overarching dynamic of coercive control rests on identifying the unique and overlapping ways coercive tactics are enacted in each trafficker-trafficked dyad. Delineating only broad categories of coercive tactics both guides systematic inquiry and allows for flexibility in identifying and understanding the specific, individualized, and predatory ways in which coercive tactics are employed by each abuser. For example, a trafficker may use intimidation with one victim by verbally threatening to harm her family or report her drug use to Child Protection Services if she defies or displeases him, whereas he may use intimidation with another victim by physical threats such as pounding his fists on the table, throwing things, or hitting her.

Doychak & Raghavan (2018) tested the phenomenological validity of the coercive control framework offered by the expert panel using semi-structured qualitative interviews with a sample of former victims of sex trafficking. Findings supported its use in the context of commercial sexual exploitation. Extreme forms of coercive control were present in every trafficking relationship. In this study, surveillance and isolation were the most common forms of coercion. However, no fewer than four out of seven tactics were utilized in each relationship. Inter-rater reliability, despite complex interviews, was high both at the conceptual level of identifying overarching dynamics of coercion and also at the concrete level of capturing the ways in which coercive tactics were subtly enacted. In addition, the interview was able to efficiently capture nuanced instances of coercion and unique coercive tactics specific to each relationship. Finally—perhaps practically important—the length of time needed for this segment of the interviews was under an hour. Assessing for coercive control using a guiding framework with clear definitions allows for comprehensive measurement without losing nuance. Applying this systematic framework can enable the examination of the ways in which sex-trafficking coercion overlaps with intimate partner violence and also the ways in which it is employed uniquely in this setting.

When Should we Measure Coercive Control

How we identify coercive control (i.e., the definition and measurement tool) is key in determining who was trafficked. Considering when we assess for coercion is critical for shifting—and deepening—the field's understanding of coercive control and when it has occurred. Typically, research studies, clinical conceptualizations, and criminal justice applications assess for coercive control only by examining the entry point into commercial sex (i.e., to what extent there was consent or coercion when sex was first exchanged for money or other economic value). Although this is a critical period of time to consider, many women enter

into the commercial sex industry believing that they have control over with whom they will sleep, how much money they will earn and keep, and when they can exit (Raghavan, 2019; 2020).

In reality, most women lose control of decision-making power in these domains after they initially "consent" to engage in commercial sex, whether or not this consent was obtained under pressure, coercion, fraud, or deception. Thus, how women remain trapped in commercial sex is equally important in determining whether trafficking has occurred, even if it appears that consent was present at the entry point (Raghavan, 2019; 2020). That is, trafficking—force, deception, and coercion—can occur at various points throughout an individual's engagement in commercial sex and measuring coercive control dynamics can aid in the accurate identification of trafficking victims over the course of commercial sex involvement.

In addition to expanding the timepoints we examine for the presence of coercion, we must also reject the notion that empowerment and coercion cannot exist simultaneously within the same person. The false dichotomy between coercion and empowerment in victims of sex trafficking has also hindered a more accurate detection of sex trafficking victims. Some women (and men) describe commercial sex as empowering and report the decision to engage in the industry was one of their own will. Individuals involved in the commercial sex industry have described moments within commercial sex as liberating. They have spoken of "favorite" regulars and of buyers who "needed" them or made them feel powerful or important (Begum et al., 2013). However, individuals in commercial sex also describe it as demeaning and report needing to drink, consume drugs, and/or dissociate during sex with other buyers because rejecting a "date" is not a safe option when your schedule is controlled by someone else (Begum et al., 2013; Coy, 2009; Tschoeke et al., 2019).

Feelings of empowerment can exist for many different reasons. The ability to earn large sums of money, the feeling of being needed by wealthier and more powerful men, and the capacity to control someone else's pleasure can all contribute to feeling empowered. But, empowerment can also be temporary, not contribute to one's true agency, or even be "defensive" or artificially created by the trafficker. For example, women can feel empowered by the idea of earning but in reality, do not see much of these earnings. Or, a woman may feel agentic in contributing to someone's need for her—particularly if he is higher status—but the feelings of agency do not translate into whether she could have refused sex with him without punitive retaliation. Both empowerment and coercion can exist at different moments of involvement in commercial sex. Feelings of empowerment do not sanitize an environment of coercion; similarly, an environment of coercion does not preclude, at least entirely, the possibility for moments of empowerment or perceived agency. Ultimately, how much coercion exists across domains may provide a better indicator of whether trafficking is occurring.

In sum, in defining who is sex trafficked, I propose that we not only assess the entry point but also if coercion—including restrictive and punitive tactics—was present throughout involvement in commercial sex. The following four major domains can guide that assessment: a) control over provision of sexual services including number of clients and types of sexual services; b) control over money including who receives the money, sets the prices, and keeps the money; c) control over exiting commercial sexual exploitation without retaliation, pressure, or fraudulent promises; d) and who determines the daily schedule, including hours worked and days off. Further, I suggest the consideration of both coercion and empowerment without the existence of one barring inquiry into the other. When adopted by legal and clinical personnel, the false dichotomy between empowerment and coercion contributes to the under-identification of

sex-trafficking victims. When it is adopted by individuals in commercial sex themselves, it can lead to denial of coercion, abuse, and psychological harms often inherent in commercial sexual exploitation.

Chapter 3: Trauma-Coerced Attachment

Sing me a pretty love song as I start to cry
Tell me you love me as you wipe the blood from my eye
Tell me why the only one who can wipe away my tears
Is the only one who's the source of all my fears. (Lloyd, 2011, p 149)

Clinical case studies and research evidence (e.g., see Reid et al., 2013 for a review)—as well as diagnostic categories (American Psychiatric Association, 2013)—indicate exploitative and abusive relationships marked by conditions of physical and/or psychological captivity can lead to a variety of traumatic responses. One such response—trauma-coerced attachment—refers to a powerful dependency on an abusive partner and a shift in world- and self- view. Victims who form traumatic attachments may behave in ways that are confusing to an observer. They may deny the abuse, minimize the violence, take responsibility or blame for the violence, and even protect their abuser(s) from social or legal repercussions (De Fabrique et al., 2007; Doychak & Raghavan, 2018; Dutton & Painter, 1981; Reid et al., 2013; Williamson, 2010).

Early mentions of these attachments were referred to as "identification with the aggressor" (Ferenczi, 1933). More recently, this phenomenon has been popularly referred to as Stockholm Syndrome in mainstream media (Carver, 2011; Klein, 2019; Westcott, 2013) and commonly referred to as trauma bonding in the literature (Dutton & Goodman, 2005; Dutton & Painter, 1981, 1993; Raghavan & Doychak, 2015; Reid, 2016; Reid et al., 2013). The most recent edition of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (5th ed.; DSM–5; American Psychiatric Association, 2013) outlines the elements of traumatic attachment under an Other Specified Dissociative Disorder. Researchers have also partially captured the complex processes, dynamics, and outcomes of traumatic attachment through concepts such as Battered Women's Syndrome (Dutton & Painter, 1993; Walker, 1984), learned helplessness (Walker, 1978; Wilson et al., 1992), and Complex-PTSD (Herman, 1992, 1992b). In this work and others

(Doychak & Raghavan, 2018; Raghavan & Doychak, 2015), I refer to traumatic attachment as trauma-coerced attachment in order to capture the abuser's deliberate use of coercive tactics and heighten the lack of reciprocity in the relationship dynamic (sometimes implied by use of the term "bond").

In the following sections, I will offer a brief summary of the historical development of theory and inquiry surrounding traumatic attachment. Next, I will argue that traumatic attachment is a traumatic response to coercion or captivity utilizing the trauma and attachment literature. In doing so, I will develop TCA as a trauma-related syndrome, which at its core is marked by relational and identity disturbances. Finally, I will distinguish between the processes and outcomes of traumatic attachment, ultimately offering an operational definition of TCA for empirical and systematic study.

Traumatic Attachment: A Historical Overview

The phenomenon of victims forming seemingly paradoxical attachments to their abusers is well-documented throughout history. Traumatic attachment has been observed across myriad abusive contexts involving interpersonal violence or captivity: war (Romero, 1985; Schein, 1957; Zerach et al., 2019), hostage situations (Auerbach et al., 1994; De Fabrique et al., 2007), cults (Coates, 2012; Rosen, 2014); child abuse (deYoung & Lowry, 1992; Goddard & Stanley, 1994), intimate partner violence (Dutton & Painter, 1981, 1993; Graham, Rawlings and Rimini, 1988; Romero, 1985; Wallace, 2007), and most recently, sex trafficking (Doychak & Raghavan, 2018; Reid, 2016). In each of these contexts, the sociopolitical and psychological zeitgeist has informed the way in which traumatic attachment is understood, conceptualized, and studied in time. These attachments were initially understood to be a result of victim defectiveness, weakness, or inferiority. Sociopolitical movements and conscious raising have led to more

comprehensive explanations, which shift the onus from the victim to the perpetrator and conceptualize traumatic attachment as necessary for survival. A brief overview of this evolution is provided below.

Victim as Defective or Masochistic

In 1936, Anna Freud proposed a theory involving a defensive process in which the ego of a victim of abuse "identifies with the aggressor" in order to protect itself against the authority figure who has generated anxiety. Within her theory, Anna Freud hypothesized that the ego undergoes this identification as a means of escaping potential punishment or as a way to avoid anger or wrath (Ferenczi, 1949; Freud, 1936; Papiasvili, 2014; Sarnoff, 1951).

Comparable to earlier theories of posttraumatic responses such as shell shock, which considered the individual who developed these symptoms to be weak, deficient, or morally inferior, those who utilized Anna Freud's identification with the aggressor theory to explain these traumatic attachments often demonized or vilified the victim. For example, Sarnoff (1951) interviewed 100 Jewish concentration camp victims who aligned with Nazi soldiers. Though his stated goal was to better understand those who fell victim to this process, his findings asserted that individuals who were "chronically anxious," "severely rejected," "internally weak" and in search of "devious means of increasing their adequacy" were those that identified with the Nazi soldiers.

Similarly, traumatic attachments observed in victims of childhood sexual abuse were explained through explanations that relied on sexualizing the child and placing blame on the victim for the abuses endured. For example, theories suggesting the child "seduces, entices, encourages, or otherwise brings on the sexual behavior of her parent" appeared within

explanations of traumatic attachment between victims of childhood sexual abuse and their parents (Sarles, 1965 as cited in deYoung & Lowry, 1992, p. 169).

Victim as Weak or Susceptible

Conceptualizations of those who develop traumatic attachments as being weak or inferior began to shift, as evidenced in the literature regarding these attachments in cults, hostage scenarios, and intimate partners. The shift was subtle; rather than placing an emphasis on the victim's defectiveness or deficiencies, scholars began emphasizing pre-existing vulnerabilities that "allowed" or "enabled" individuals to develop traumatic attachments. The goal of this line of inquiry was to better identify victims and develop more effective prevention and intervention strategies.

Theories such as learned helplessness—and those similar to it—were common throughout the 1970's and 1980's. These theories proposed that both psychological and sociological variables contributed to the development of traumatic attachments (Walker, 1978). In discussing these attachments (i.e., battered women syndrome), Shainess (1979) attempted to readjust Freud's initial theory of masochism, which posited that all women are masochistic. She suggested that "gender restriction in society has played a part in the evolution of a submissive and self-destructive style which does indeed increase vulnerability to violence" (p. 188). In other words, victims of abuse and individuals who fall victim to these attachments do so for reasons related to their own psychology, but also for reasons related to sociopolitical influences.

Literature surrounding traumatic attachments began including terms such as "brainwashing" or "thought reform" in relation to prisoners of war or cult members (Deutsch & Miller, 1983; Ungerleider & Wellisch, 1979). Though these conceptualizations did not vilify the victim as earlier theories had, they presumed and explored pre-existing vulnerabilities in the

victim's psychology that made them more susceptible to these control tactics (e.g., "ideological hunger," idealism, social ineptness, or difficulties with romantic relationships). The emphasis on examining the victim, characteristic of conceptualizations throughout the 1970s and 1980s, helped maintain a system that did not require critical analysis of the perpetrator (West, 1993).

Though this era marked improvements in approaches to understanding traumatic attachment—particularly with understanding how predators target young runaway or abused girls for commercial sexual exploitation—the study of preexisting vulnerabilities indirectly contributed to a conceptualization of victims of weak or vulnerable. Through this lens, blame managed to escape the perpetrators inflicting this violence and creating environmental circumstances under which traumatic attachments form. It was not until the 1990's that theoretical explanations of traumatic attachment began to include mention of the perpetrator, the use of control, and power differentials within these relationships (de Young & Lowry, 1992; Dutton & Painter, 1991; West, 1993).

Victim as Traumatized Respondent

Modern day conceptualizations of traumatic attachment have emphasized that the victim is not to blame for the abusive actions to which she is subjected, nor is she to blame for responding to a depraved social environment any more than a soldier is to blame for developing PTSD. Contemporary and recent theoretical developments of this phenomenon highlight another important shift in this evolution, one from the pre-existing vulnerabilities and learned helplessness of the victim to the control and abuse tactics used by the perpetrator (Cantor & Price, 2007; de Young & Lowry, 1992; Dutton & Painter, 1991; Herman, 1992; West, 1993; Doychak & Raghavan, 2018; Reid, 2016).

Beginning in the 1990s and extending to present day, scholars have begun placing more focus on the perpetrator's role in traumatic attachments. For example, power differentials between a sexually abused child and abusive parent entered into theoretical explanations of how traumatic attachments occur (de Young & Lowry, 1992). Further, discussion of the positive, rewarding, or seemingly caring manipulation tactics emerged in theories of traumatic attachment among cult members (Coates, 2014), domestic violence victims (Dutton & Painter, 1991); and sex-trafficking victims (Doychak & Raghavan, 2018). Scholars hypothesized that it was not only the control and abuse tactics that led to these attachments, but also the intermittent acts of perceived kindness that contributed to the formation of these bonds (Coates, 2014; Cantor & Price, 2007; Doychak & Raghavan, 2018; Dutton & Painter, 1991).

In addition to emphasizing the role of abuse tactics rather than victim vulnerabilities, current theories of traumatic attachment conceptualize victim responses not as defective, but as either adaptive or predictable. For example, Cantor and Price (2007) redefine the seemingly puzzling response of victims who traumatically attach as evolutionary and adaptive given the circumstances of the abusive environment (i.e., an inability to escape). In the following section, I will discuss the development and nature of traumatic attachment. Then, I will summarize one view that argues traumatic attachments are an evolutionary response to entrapment rooted in survival, rather than pathology (Cantor & Price, 2007; Doychak & Raghavan, 2018; Dutton & Painter, 1991). Finally, I will expand upon reframing TCA as a traumatic response associated with the larger umbrella of dissociative disorders and offer an operational definition for systematic study.

Trauma-Coerced Attachment: How it Develops

Across history, terminology, and context, most researchers and clinicians highlight similar characteristics of traumatic attachment, including: 1) intense and unhealthy dependency despite—and because of—the abuse, 2) belief that the relationship is special or unique, 3) willingness to suffer for abuser's benefit, 4) belief that no one and nothing can replace this relationship and catastrophic fears of not surviving were the relationship to end, 5) use of defenses to protect against ruptured value systems, and 6) changes in identity. Many of the beliefs around the self and the abuser are marked by dissociation from reality in ways that enable conflicting, fragmented, paradoxical cognitions and experiences to co-exist.

In explaining the core element of TCA—intense dependency observed in victims of abuse—Dutton and Painter (1981) describe the process of promoting it. Expressed agency or independence is a threat to the abuser and thus, is met with violence or punishment. In response, a victim of intimate partner violence begins to shrink and organize her life around her partner and his demands in order to avoid abuse. Inadvertently, this behavior fosters and intensifies the dependency on the abusive partner, as meeting his needs and holding him at the center of her world becomes central to minimizing the risk of violence (Dutton & Painter, 1981).

Second, a victim who forms a traumatic bond develops the belief that the relationship between herself and her abuser is unique or special. Abusers create emotionally and physically isolated environments; as such, the victim must turn to the abuser for resources, support, direction, and affection (Hagan et al., 2019; Goddard & Stanley, 1994). For example, one victim of sex-trafficking described the specialness of her relationship with her trafficker by saying, "I had someone to come home to, to kiss, and to hug. I felt bad for the women who didn't… He was the best thing to ever happen to me" (Doychak & Raghavan, 2018, p. 10). Because the

perpetrator creates an environment in which he is the sole source of solace or comfort, the relationship must be preserved and sanctified as it is her only means of maintaining connection fulfilling the deep and human need to belong (Post, 1987).

Third, a willingness to suffer for the abuser's benefit, is a phenomenon observed across contexts of trauma coerced attachment. For example, prisoners of war (POWs) held by the Chinese during the Korean conflict falsely confessed to war crimes and informed on fellow POWs (Schein, 1957), putting themselves and members of their own military at risk for severe punishment and even death. Hostages have also been documented as willing to suffer for their captors' benefit. Patty Hearst, victim of the Symbionese Liberation Army, committed crimes for her captors (e.g., robbery) and faced a prison sentence.

Fourth, victims who form traumatic attachments often hold the belief that no one and nothing can replace their relationship with their abuser and experience catastrophic fears of not surviving were the relationship to end. Internalized blame for the abuse—and the inability to control it—leads to lower self-esteem and feelings of hopelessness and helplessness. The occurrence of the abuse then becomes further evidence of her inability to escape it, despite her best efforts (Dutton & Painter 1981; Frieze, 1979). This belief, coupled with isolation from other supports and idealization of the abuser based on existing and exploited power imbalances creates the overwhelming perception that she cannot live without him (Dutton & Painter, 1981; 1993; Frieze, 1979).

Fifth, researchers have observed ruptured value systems in victims of TCA and have theorized that individuals who form traumatic attachments are employing defenses to reconcile pre- and post- abuse value systems (Herman, 1992). For example, whether theorized as reaction formations or attempts to distill cognitive dissonance, child abuse victims (Goddard & Stanley,

1994) and hostages (Post, 1987) undergo a process of identification with the abuser's worldview in an attempt to consolidate fragmented, incomplete, or incompatible psychosocial identities. In this new world order, the perpetrator is humanized. In the absence of close others, the perpetrator is adulated.

Finally, central to the understanding of abusive or exploitative relationships—as well as to theories of traumatic attachment—is the abuser's assault on the victim's identity and subsequent identity change. For example, cult researchers have noted that identity assault and change is a critical step in gaining compliance and loyalty during indoctrination or initiation (Ward, 2010; White & Omar, 2010). In political or religious cults, as well as in commercial sexual exploitation, the victim is often given a new name, symbolizing the obliteration of the former self and the complete adoption of the new identity (Herman, 1992). Extreme identity disruptions between the pre- and post- abuse self contribute to shame, self-loathing, and self-blame for the abuses endured.

These processes and outcomes occur simultaneously and interlock in inextricable ways contributing to the development of trauma-coerced attachments. However, organizing these processes and outcomes is crucial for understanding traumatic attachment and subsequently, for systematically studying TCA.

Trauma-Coerced Attachment as a Traumatic Response to Coercive Control

A particular challenge in defining the response of TCA is determining how best to organize and understand it. Typically, syndromes and mental disorders are organized around cognitions and emotional regulation systems. Is TCA a cognitive disorder? An emotional regulation problem? A dissociative and identity disorder? All of the above? Indeed, TCA contains all of these elements and does not easily fit into any neat existing box with a traditional

definitional spine upon which to hang other symptoms, leaving it somewhat orphaned. For example, depressive disorders are easily approached as mood disorders accompanied by cognitive symptoms and schizophrenia is widely accepted as a thought disorder, albeit associated with mood symptoms.

I argue that TCA is a trauma response with a unique definitional spine—that of an intense dependency on a particular abuser. In other words, the coerced affiliation with the abuser is the primary domain that ultimately impacts other elements of TCA—cognitions, identity, paradoxical behaviors, and dissociation—in a circular loop[4]. Thus, just as mood and emotions are the central units of assessment that indicate whether or not someone is clinically depressed, the paradoxical relationship with the abuser is the central unit of assessment to indicate whether this form of trauma and dissociation exists.

Using the relationship as the central unit of measurement to indicate trauma or mental disturbance is not new, but perhaps overlooked and undervalued in the era of privileging cognitions and emotions as central to psychology. For example, *folie a la famille*, a now all but defunct diagnosis emphasizes shared delusional beliefs that are first held by one individual and then then spread to others in close relationships; this particular mental disturbance is equally marked by the delusion and the relationships which produce and maintain it. One could not exist without the other. Further, Herman's development of Complex-PTSD includes disruptions in disturbances in relational capacities, attention/consciousness, and self-concept and belief systems, which are a direct consequence of psychological captivity or chronic coercion (i.e., a relationship). However, in simple-PTSD and even in other conceptualizations of Complex-PTSD, posttraumatic stress is defined not by its genesis, but by its symptom profile of

[4] This coerced affiliation is dynamic and cyclical in nature, such that the cognitions, identity disruptions, paradoxical behaviors, and dissociation it produces then serve to strengthen the affiliation.

cognitions, emotions, and/or reactivity (Cloitre et al., 2013; Cloitre et al., 2014; Herman, 1992; 1992b).

Though organizing psychological disorders around a relationship is a less-traveled avenue for conceptualization, the trauma and attachment literature can help inform how the fundamental needs for attachment are perverted by the unique situational conditions that produce TCA. Reactions to traumatic exposure—otherwise known as the human stress response—are derived from a complex combination of psychological, biological, and physiological systems evolved for adaption and survival in the face of potential harm or threat (Friedman, 2015). More simply, reactions such as fear and anxiety (common responses to trauma exposure) are necessary for survival due to the biological and behavioral responses associated with these feeling states. Typically, “fight, flight, or freeze” are offered as common and adaptive responses to a threat. Aggressive defense (fight), withdrawal or escape (flight), and tonic or attentive immobility (freeze) are evolutionarily adaptive responses unless defense is futile, escape is impossible, and exposure to the threat is prolonged, therefore making immobility unrealistic. For victims of partner violence, the numerous barriers to leaving—whether structural or psychological—make escape impossible or implausible and make defense a risk for further violence or punishment. Accordingly, the victim relies on appeasement as a means of surviving the abusive and coercive environment. In these instances—those marked by coercion and captivity and present in TCA—appeasement as a response becomes both relevant and necessary.

Cantor and Price (2007) demonstrated the appeasement response can be observed in other mammals and species in which affiliative and social relationships occur. In observing chimpanzees and baboons, they found appeasement can take many forms but functions to convey submission, decrease conflict, and minimize the impact of the threat. In addition, behaviors to

assuage anxiety and re-establish connection were demonstrated post-conflict (e.g., leaving safe others to return to the dominant aggressor). In the context of longer-term abusive relationships in humans, the victim must not only appease an aggressor during an isolated fight, but do so continuously, which eventually leads to a state marked by relational dependence, as well as accompanying emotional dysregulation and alterations in consciousness (i.e., TCA).

Clarifying further, as posited by Bowlby and other attachment theorists, attachment is necessary for survival (1969, 1980). As mammals, humans—adaptively—seek to maintain proximity to primary attachment figures (i.e., those who provide resources, protection, care, shelter, etc.). In adulthood, these attachment figures are often romantic partners (Hazan & Shaver 1987, 1990). In the context of sex trafficking, romantic partners are most often the traffickers themselves (Norton-Hawk, 2004; Williamson & Cluse-Tolar, 2002). However, these romantic relationships are marked by violence and coercion. In an environment defined by captivity and isolation, the victim has no attachment figure but the abuser and as such, becomes terrified at the prospect of losing him. Further, coercive tactics operate in tandem to invade the victim's privacy and attack her identity, making the victim question reality and feel responsible for her circumstances. The identity disruption inherent to traumatic attachment occurs when the abuser succeeds in becoming the sole attachment figure and occupying the victim's mind until she loses previous alternative perspectives (Herman, 1992; Reid et al., 2013; Ward, 2010; White & Omar, 2010).

The DSM-5 includes a version of traumatic attachment as an Other Specified Dissociative Disorder[5], organizing the impact of coercion around self-organization and identity

[5] The DSM-5 defines an Other Specified Dissociative Disorder: Identity Disturbance due to Prolonged and Intense Coercive Persuasion as "Individuals who have been subjected to intense coercive persuasion (e.g., brainwashing, thought reform, indoctrination while captive, torture, long-term political imprisonment, recruitment by sects/cults or by terror organizations) may present with prolonged changes in, or conscious questioning of, their identity" (p 306).

disturbances and re-introducing Herman's inclusion of chronic exposure to coercion as a necessary precursor to receiving the diagnosis. Realigning TCA within trauma and dissociative disorders is helpful to explain the role of attachment in TCA, but also to distinguish that TCA is a trauma-related response with core damage in the attachment domain, but not an attachment disorder per se. This distinction is important because the historical—and present day—notion that women who form traumatic attachments are weak or responsible rests on assumptions of volitional choice making around unhealthy relationships. Correctly identifying TCA as a traumatic response returns the focus to its correct causal path—that of chronic trauma leading to a long-term traumatic response. As such, trauma-coerced attachment (TCA) is a trauma-related syndrome resulting from psychological captivity (i.e., a coercive relationship) and is situated at the nexus of evolutionary responses to this captivity, attachment disturbances, and dissociation—both general and in relation to the self—in order to deny this reality. The attachment—and its associated ideations, feelings, and behaviors—is a way of surviving in a repressive, life-threatening, and abusive environment.

Operational Definition

Doychak & Raghavan (2018) developed and tested an operational definition and dimensional model of TCA in an in-depth qualitative analysis. The model seeks to separate process from outcome and present a definition of TCA independent from the conditions under which it forms.[6] The authors argued their model allows for systematic study of TCA without jeopardizing phenomenological validity. According to this model, TCA refers to a powerful emotional attachment to an abusive partner, which is dynamic in nature and remains in-flux both

[6] The elements of TCA are presented in Doychak and Raghavan (2018) as features and outcomes for purposes of systematic organization. However, it is important to note that in practice, these elements are both causes and outcomes with bidirectional relation to the traumatic attachment.

during the relationship and after the relationship ends. TCA involves two key defining features and three categories of outcomes (See Figure 1). The first defining feature is a powerful dependency on the abusive partner and demonstrates the relational- and attachment- related disturbances inherent in traumatic attachment. This powerful dependency is marked by two outcome clusters, including ideations about the abuser (e.g., idealization and beliefs in his omnipotence, grandiosity, or sacredness) and feelings toward the abuser (e.g., positive feelings of love, gratitude, respect, or loyalty). The second key feature of TCA is a shift in world- and self- view—in other words, the identity disruption and dissociation—whereby the victim adopts the abuser's point of view as it pertains to many aspects of the relationship and world around her. This is evidenced in the outcome cluster of behaviors toward the self and others (e.g., defending or protecting the abuser, minimizing the abuse, blaming the self for the abuse; see Doychak & Raghavan, 2018 for full theoretical conceptualization).

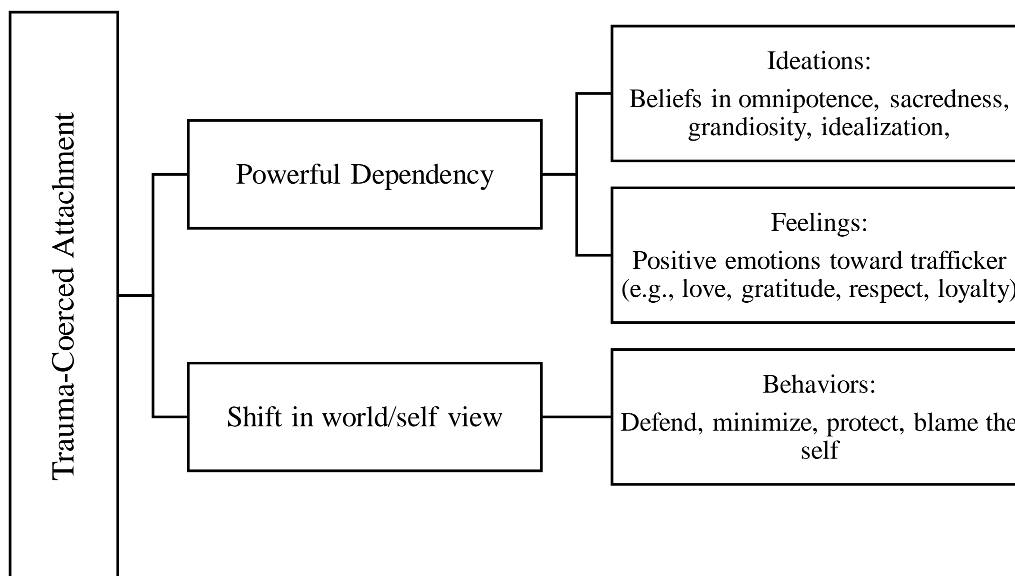

Figure 1. Trauma-coerced attachment. This figure illustrates the two key features and three outcomes of trauma-coerced attachment.

Doychak and Raghavan (2018) found that within TCA, the attachment may wax and wane over time. In other words, the presence—or lack thereof—of TCA is not dichotomous. Rather, fluctuating degrees of traumatic attachment may be present among and within victims, leading to mild, moderate, and severe forms of TCA. As presented in the original study (Doychak & Raghavan, 2018), mild TCA is characterized primarily by compliance; moderate TCA is characterized primarily by appeasement; and severe TCA is characterized primarily by idealization (See Appendix B, Table B1). Within these dimensions, victims and survivors may comply with their abusers demand for a number of reasons, including a desire to avoid punishment, to appease the abuser, or to convey gratitude or respect of him and the relationship (i.e., moderate attachment). In the most extreme cases, compliance is a self-reported product of idealization or belief in the abuser's omnipotence and grandiosity.

This dimensional model suggests that at varying points during the relationship and even after its ending, the victim may have differing levels of insight into the nature of her dependency on, affection toward, and abuses inflicted by her trafficker. Dissociation—which can enable the co-existence of fragmented, contradictory, incompatible, or unbearable—psychosocial realities may play a contributing role in insight and severity of attachment. Though much of the theoretical development surrounding traumatic attachment involves mention of dissociation (Dutton & Painter, 1981; 1993; Herman, 1992a, 1992b; Post, 1987; Ward, 2010; White & Omar, 2010), it has rarely been systematically studied.

The findings presented by Doychak and Raghavan (2018) offer an important framework for the empirical study of TCA. Separating process and outcome in order to operationalize TCA is important for its systematic study and identification. Further, understanding the conditions that contribute to its development (i.e., coercion, captivity, or abuse)—and the reality that TCA

requires ongoing abuse to maintain it—is crucial for developing sound clinical prevention and intervention strategies, as well as justice-oriented policies and approaches to sex trafficking. Additional research with a larger and more diverse sample of trafficking victims is needed in order to better understand the seemingly contradictory consequences of coercion (i.e., TCA), to ask—and answer—more systematic questions regarding the relations among TCA, coercion, and dissociation, and to determine whether the dimensional model replicates to various forms of trafficking (e.g., international and domestic) and thus, to return the study of TCA to a fully legitimized empirical scrutiny through which victims of trafficking can benefit.

Chapter 4: Tying it all Together – Commercial Sexual Exploitation, Coercive Control, and Trauma-Coerced Attachment

Commercial sexual exploitation (i.e., sex trafficking), similar to so many other human rights violations, has myriad negative outcomes for its victims, including abuse and deprivation, as well as the risk of developing physical health symptoms, mental health symptoms, and psychological sequalae. A growing body of evidence—described in earlier sections—suggests that coercive control is central to understanding sex trafficking dynamics and women's captive experiences (Baldwin, Fehrenbacher, and Eisenman 2015; Doychak & Raghavan, 2018; Hagan, Raghavan, & Doychak, 2019; Hom & Woods, 2013; Kim, 2011; Preble, 2019; Reid, 2016). In addition, emphasis on centering TCA in understanding trafficking dynamics has also emerged in the past decade (APA Task Force on Trafficking of Women and Girls, 2014). The primary goal of this section is to lay the empirical and theoretical foundation for the study of TCA as a traumatic outcome to abuse which is undergirded and maintained by way of dissociation, and for the study of the relation between coercive control and TCA.

I argue that TCA develops as a traumatic response to coercive control and an environment of psychological captivity. Over time, the dynamic of coercive control—created and maintained through specific, chronic, and individualized tactics—produces an environment of psychological captivity, marked by coerced dependency and a distorted self- and world- view in which the victim may feel fear, powerlessness, and disconnection, but also gratitude and love (i.e., TCA). For example, in response to coercive control, a victim begins to shrink and organize her life around her partner and his demands in order to avoid abuse. This behavior fosters and intensifies the dependency on the abusive partner, as meeting his needs and holding him at the center of her world becomes central to minimizing the risk of violence (Dutton & Painter, 1981).

Further, because the perpetrator creates an isolated environment in which he is the sole source of solace or comfort, the victim must turn to the abuser for resources, support, direction, and affection (Hagan et al., 2019; Goddard & Stanley, 1994). As such, the relationship must be preserved and sanctified as it is her only means of maintaining connection and fulfilling the deep and human need to belong (Post, 1987). This need to belong further deepens the traumatic attachment in a cyclical fashion, even in the absence of proximal abuse.

Additionally, within coercive and captive environments, abusers assault the victim's identity and subsequently cause shifts in identity. Extreme identity disruptions between the pre- and post- abuse self contribute to shame, self-loathing, and self-blame for the abuses endured. The occurrence of the abuse becomes further evidence of the victim's inability to escape it, despite her best efforts (Dutton & Painter 1981; Frieze, 1979). The belief that she cannot escape it, coupled with isolation from other supports and idealization of the abuser based on existing and exploited power imbalances creates the overwhelming perception that she cannot live without the abuser and results in ongoing attempts to preserve the relationship (Dutton & Painter, 1981; 1993; Frieze, 1979).

In many trafficking situations where the victim and trafficker are from similar marginalized groups (e.g., regarding ethnicity, race, immigration status, or sexual and gender identity), identity and dependency may be particularly crucial, amplifying the psychological entrapment. Coercive tactics such as intimidation and manipulation may exploit these shared identities in the direct form of threats regarding deportation or police violence or in the indirect form of an "us versus them" mentality (Adams, 2011; Busch-Armendariz et al., 2009; Farrell et al., 2012). For example, a victim of trafficking may be reluctant to report a Black trafficker or an undocumented trafficker for fear of retaliation, state violence, or deportation. Relatedly, those in

the queer community may be hesitant to report others for fear of alienation or ostracization. Even when identities are not shared, the “us versus them” mentality can be instilled and exploited (e.g., those in the life versus “squares,” the ring/family/sister-wives versus law enforcement, etc.). Because these concerns are rooted in reality (albeit exploited by traffickers), they may create additional layers of loyalty, identification with the trafficker, and anticipated self-blame regarding outcomes of leaving or reporting and may contribute to increased dependency, perceived need to protect, and more severe attachments.

In all dyads involving traumatic attachment, defenses are employed to reconcile pre- and post- abuse value systems (Herman, 1992). For example, dissociation enables identification with the abuser’s worldview in an attempt to consolidate fragmented, incomplete, or incompatible psychosocial identities. Such dissociative defenses manifest in survivors praising the abuser, taking blame for the abuse, and defending the abusers’ actions including lying for him in court. Because the coercive nature of sex trafficking victims’ experiences and the seemingly contradictory nature of TCA are not always appropriately weighed, women involved in the commercial sex industry (by way of coercive methods) are criminalized by police, courts, and attorneys and often face harsh criminal charges (American Bar Association, n.d.; Aycock, 2019; Soohoo, 2015). For example, bottoms (i.e., women considered “favorites,” who are responsible for enacting coercive tactics and sometimes violence) are condemned by those within and outside of the commercial sex industry. Understanding the abuses endured in the coercive and captive environments of trafficking victims—and their relation to seemingly contradictory outcomes (i.e., traumatic attachments)—can help develop trauma-informed prevention, intervention, and aftercare services in clinical and legal settings.

Chapter 5: Objectives of the Current Study

This mixed-method study aimed to examine coercive control and trauma-coerced attachment in a sample of former victims of sex trafficking. To my knowledge, the study included the largest sample sex-trafficking survivors in North America to date, and aimed to include those with diverse avenues into the commercial sex industry (e.g., international and domestic trafficking, survival sex and coercion, etc.) from various regions across the United States.

The primary goal of the current study was to empirically and systematically examine coercive control in a sex-trafficking population. A second aim was to build upon existing research, and test if the conceptualization of TCA as dimensional (i.e., varying degrees of attachment may be present among victims) is supported in this larger sample. Third, the present study aimed to empirically examine theoretical conceptualizations of the relation between coercive control and TCA. Additionally, a unique aim of this study was to explore the nature and severity of dissociation as it relates to dimensions of TCA (e.g., the victim may have differing levels of insight regarding the nature of her relationship to her abuser and herself—in part—based on levels of dissociation and thus, dependency may wax and wane). Finally, this study sought to qualitatively explore how ethnic and racial identity and immigration status may impact TCA through shared marginalized identities.

The current study employed mixed-method analysis with an aim to integrate idiographic specificity and nomothetic generalization. Qualitative data analysis—in-depth examination of similarities, differences, patterns, and themes—allowed for nuanced questions about the nature of coercive control and the processes, outcomes, and dimensions of TCA across participants (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Wiggins, 2011). Quantitative analysis was used to examine questions and

hypotheses for which guiding theory and survey instruments are already empirically based (e.g., measures of dissociation).

Research Questions and Hypotheses

RQ1: How does coercive control manifest in the context of sex trafficking (i.e., what forms does it take)? And, how severe are levels of coercive control in this sample?

H1 (Qualitative): As a growing body of literature suggests, coercive control is fundamental to sex-trafficking. As such, I hypothesize that existing coding schemes will account for a large portion of coercion tactics (See Appendix A, Table A1), and that there will be high and severe levels of coercive control (i.e., a large number of tactics and frequent use of such tactics).

RQ2: Is TCA best understood and conceptualized as dimensional? In other words, does the phenomenological experience of TCA reported by women in this sample support existing dimensional categorizations (i.e., no attachment, mild, moderate, severe), or is it categorical (i.e., no attachment or attachment)?

H2 (Qualitative): As found in previous research, TCA will be dimensional suggesting that the severity of traumatic attachment differs across victims of sex trafficking. Specifically, I expect to find that TCA will fall into broadly three categories: mild, moderate, and severe. Each of these categories can be distinguished by key characteristics of compliance, appeasement, and idealization respectively (See Appendix B, Table B1).

RQ3. What is the relationship between coercive control and TCA? More specifically, does the severity of various coercive control tactics contribute to different dimensions of TCA in victims of sex trafficking?

H3 (Quantitative): It is expected that more extreme overall coercion—measured by total scores from The Checklist of Controlling Behaviors—will lead to more severe dimensions of TCA.

RQ4: What types of coercive control tactics are utilized to facilitate TCA?

H4 (Qualitative and Quantitative): As previous research suggests, occasional acts of perceived kindness (intermittent reward and punishment) from the abuser are necessary to contribute to the formation of traumatic attachments. As such, I hypothesize that the coercive tactic of manipulation—and specifically the subtactic of intermittent reward and punishment—will play a necessary role in the formation, maintenance, and severity of TCA, such that in cases where intermittent reward and punishment is not used, TCA will not form (i.e., no attachment).

RQ5: Are overall levels of dissociation associated with dimensions of TCA?

H5a (Quantitative): Since many of the beliefs around the self and the abuser are marked by dissociation—enabling conflictual, fragmented, paradoxical, or unbearable cognitions and experiences to co-exist— it is expected that dimensions of TCA will differ according to levels of dissociation.

H5b (Quantitative): In building upon earlier hypotheses, I expect that dissociation will mediate the relationship between coercive control and TCA. In other words, higher levels of dissociation will partially account for the relationship between coercion and trauma-coerced attachment.

RQ6: Do shared marginalized identities (e.g., ethnicity, race, or immigration status) between the trafficker and victim impact the severity of TCA?

H6 (Qualitative): Although this research question is exploratory and open-ended in nature, it is expected that shared marginalized identities of the trafficker and victim will generally strengthen TCA, as shared identities may contribute to increased identification with the trafficker, anticipated self-blame regarding outcomes of leaving or reporting, fewer outside resources for support, and more intense feelings of loyalty and the need to protect the trafficker.

Chapter 6: Research Design and Methods

Method

Data for the current analysis was drawn from an ongoing mixed-method study examining traumatic outcomes (e.g., PTSD, dissociation, shame, etc.), coercive control, and trauma-coerced attachment in a sample of former victims of sex trafficking. Participants for the overall study included minors and adult women, who were recruited through community-based victim service organizations in two large metropolitan cities in the Northeast and South, as well as through online forums, listservs, and networks of former victims of sex trafficking across the United States. Semi-structured interviews were conducted in-person or via remote video calls. For the current study, mixed-method data from the first 73 participants will be used for analysis. This included 75 trafficking narratives (two participants completed the interview for two pimps/traffickers). A total of five interviews were excluded from analysis due to unmet inclusion criteria (e.g., survival-based commercial sex/non-trafficker controlled) or missing data (e.g., discontinued interview).[7] In sum, 68 interviews were used for analysis and included data collected from April 2019 through February 2022.

Participants

In order to be included in the present analysis, individuals must have been female-identifying and have been involved in pimp- or trafficker- controlled commercial sex. If entry into commercial sex was by way of survival sex (e.g., of desperation or extreme need), but commercial sex was later pimp-controlled, those interviews were included in the analysis. Participants trafficked both domestically and internationally were eligible for participation.

[7] One participant ended the interview before completing it due to feelings of distress.

The sample was diverse. Almost half of the participants identified as women of color, including Latinx (*n* = 15, 20%), Black or African American (*n* = 7, 9.33%), and Two or More Races (*n* = 7, 9.33%); the other half of women identified as White/Non-Latinx (*n* = 41, 54.67%). A lower percentage of the sample fell into the categories of Asian (*n* = 1, 1.33%) and Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander (*n* = 3, 4%). No one from the sample identified as American Indian/Alaska Native or White/Middle-Eastern. At the time of participation, women in this sample ranged from ages 13 to 66 years old, *M* = 38.74, *SD* = 11.29. The large majority of participants were trafficked domestically (*n* = 67, 89.33%), with six participants who experienced international trafficking (8%) and one who experienced both international and domestic trafficking (1.33%). Women in this sample were initially trafficked at varying ages, ranging from 4 to 55 years old, *M* = 20.82, *SD* = 8.99. Age differences between participant and trafficker ranged from -7 to 71 years, *M* = 14.55, *SD* = 13.86.

Measures

Semi-Structured Interview Guide

The semi-structured interview guide in this study was initially developed—using existing theory and clinical cases—and piloted in a qualitative exploration of coercive control and trauma-coerced attachment in former victims of sex-trafficking (Doychak & Raghavan, 2018). For the purposes of the present study, the interview guide was refined based on findings from previous interviews, expert panel discussions regarding coercive control, and updated research questions. The current interview guide contains open-ended questions organized into five sections, including: brief demographic section, introduction into commercial sex/onset of relationship with trafficker, coercive control, trauma-coerced attachment, and body image/sexual

dysfunction. Introductory statements, prompts, and inquiries were standardized and included within the guide.

Checklist of Controlling Behaviors

The Checklist of Controlling Behaviors (CCB; Lehmann, Simmons, & Pillai, 2012) is an 84-item measure to assess the intensity, frequency, and type of coercive and physical violence in intimate partners. The instrument includes 10 subscales, including: physical abuse, sexual abuse, male privilege, isolation, minimizing and denying, blaming, intimidation, threats, emotional abuse, and economic abuse. Respondents are asked to indicate how often they experience various types of abuse/coercion from 1 (never) to 5 (very frequently). The CCB has demonstrated good reliability and construct validity. In a sample of 2,135 women seeking shelter placement due to intimate partner violence, factor analysis confirmed the construct validity of the 10 subscales. Cronbach's alpha for the overall CCB score was .94; subscales ranged from .80 (threats) to .92 (economic abuse).

In the present sample, a Bayesian Cronbach alpha coefficient of .975 was obtained (frequentist Cronbach's $\alpha = .97$). The mean score and standard deviation yielded from the women in this sample were $M = 185.36$; $SD = 76.70$. Based on scoring recommendations outlined in Lehmann et al. (2012), the overall sample mean fell in the "occasional" category of coercive controlling behaviors (i.e., the mid-range; See Appendix C, Table C1).

Multiscale Dissociation Inventory

The Multiscale Dissociation Inventory (MDI; Briere et al., 2002) is a 30-item self-report measure of dissociative symptomology. The MDI yields an overall dissociation score, as well as six scores on the subscales of disengagement, depersonalization, derealization, emotional

constriction/numbing, memory disturbance, and identity dissociation.[8] Respondents are asked to rate the frequency of their dissociative symptoms from 1 (never) to 5 (very often). The MDI has been validated in trauma-exposed, clinical, community, and university samples of over 1,300 participants (Briere et al., 2005). The measure has well-established and good psychometric properties with an overall alpha of .96. Subscales range from .74 (memory disturbance) to .94 (emotional constriction/numbing).

In the current study, a Bayesian Cronbach alpha coefficient of .963 was obtained (frequentist Cronbach's $\alpha = .963$). The mean score and standard deviation for the MDI in this sample were $M = 61.49$; $SD = 28.48$. When compared to $M = 22.92$; $SD = 17.88$ in participants without PTSD and $M = 56.29$; $SD = 40.11$ in participants with PTSD from another sample, the current sample reported higher levels of dissociative symptoms (Briere, Scott, & Weathers, 2005).

Procedure

Mixed-method interviews were conducted by two doctoral students, trained in the administration of study surveys/questionnaires and the qualitative interview.[9] The first 30 participants were interviewed in person and subsequent interviews were conducted via video as a result of current COVID-19 pandemic. Interviews that took place in person were conducted in the private office space of either the community organization or of the PI. Interviews conducted via video required a private, confidential space with a secure internet connection for both the interviewer and participant. In-person administration took approximately 60-90 minutes. Of note,

[8] One study testing the dimensionality of dissociation using the MDI found only five subtypes; depersonalization and derealization loaded together to form a single factor (Briere, Weathers, & Runtz, 2005).

[9] Training procedures involved over ten hours of watching training videos, role playing with lab members and the PI, and ensuring inter-interviewer consistency in administration of prompts, interview questions and probes, and questionnaires/surveys. Interviews were also initially done in pairs and consistency of prompts, probes, and recording data were compared to ensure reliability across interviewers while working with the same participant.

administration time increased when conducting the interviews virtually and remote interviews lasted 90-120 minutes, on average. To ensure that was no significant difference between in-person and remote interviews, I compared scores on the measure of dissociation (in-person, M = 60.45, SD = 29.94 and remote, M = 60.00, SD = 25.68).

Interviews began with informed consent, followed by the semi-structured interview guide and standardized questionnaires, and ended with debriefing and compensation. Compensation[10] was determined based on an estimation of time, travel, and potential child-care, and was awarded whether or not the interview was completed. All portions of the interview were read aloud and/or conducted by research assistants in order to mitigate any potential difficulties with reading or word comprehension.

Theory of Statistics and Software Programs Utilized

Based on the time- and labor- intensive nature of this study, sample size was limited and negated the possibility of frequentist analysis (i.e., null hypothesis significance testing). Because it is still relatively uncommon to utilize alternative theories of statistics, I provide a brief rationale and overview of the theory chosen for the current study. Recently, scholars have argued Bayesian statistics can be superior to null hypothesis testing[11] especially in samples of a smaller size or in clinical research questions. As such, Bayesian statistics—arguably a more conceptually sound statistical approach for clinical or qualitative research (Hackenberger, 2019; Lee & Chu, 2013)—were employed for data analysis. Unlike frequentist statistics—which utilize relative frequencies based upon hypothetical infinite sequences and unobserved data—Bayesian statistics are inherently subjective probabilities based on the observed data of the present sample. The

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[10] This research was funded by the Professional Staff Congress-CUNY Research Foundation. The principal investigator is Chitra Raghavan, PhD.
[11] See Hackenberger (2019), Lee and Chu (2013), and Kelter (2020) for more information regarding this debate.

Bayes factor provides a value, which incapsulates an estimate for both the null and the affirmative hypothesis in the form of a probability (Kelter, 2020; See Table 1 for Bayes factor meanings). Though it measures different statistics, the Bayes factor is akin, in practice, to the *p* value such that it is the statistical output used for interpretation.

Table 1

The Meaning of the Bayes Factors

Bayes factor	Interpretation
>100	Extreme evidence for H1
30-100	Very strong evidence for H1
10-30	Strong evidence for H1
3-10	Moderate evidence for H1
1-3	Anecdotal evidence for H1
1	No evidence
1/3-1	Anecdotal evidence for H0
1/3-1/10	Moderate evidence for H0
1/10-1/30	Strong evidence for H0
1/30-1/100	Very strong evidence for H0
<1/100	Extreme evidence for H0

Note. Table retrieved from Kelter (2020).

Software used in these analyses included MaxQDA and JASP. MaxQDA is a leading software designed for qualitative and mixed-method data analysis. JASP is an open-source statistical software program with both Bayesian and frequentist versions of common statistical analyses. All coding and qualitative analysis (including inter-rater reliability analyses) were conducted using MaxQDA. JASP was utilized for Bayesian quantitative analysis. Because there

are still no established conventions for reporting Bayesian findings, Navarro (2019) was used to guide methods of reporting[12] for the current study.

Data Analyses

Research Question One

To examine the form and severity of coercive control in this sample, qualitative analysis was used. Each interview was transcribed and uploaded into MaxQDA. Coding was then conducted by two doctoral students of psychology and when required, tie-broken by advanced MA-level students in the social sciences. All coders were familiar with the literature on coercive control and experienced in qualitative coding. Prior to coding, research assistants attended training meetings on coding procedures facilitated by the PI. Two research assistants coded each interview for coercive control independently from one another. In order to obtain an accurate measure of interrater reliability, original agreement (i.e., no variation), disagreements, and ultimate coding selections were documented. Any variations in coding were discussed by the research assistants and if necessary, were tie-broken by the PI. In addition, documentation of disagreements and/or tie-broken responses included notation of which coder's decision prevailed. After 20% of the interviews were coded, this documentation was reviewed.

Coercive control was coded in two rounds. First, research assistants coded for the presence or absence of coercive control tactics (See Appendix A, Tables A1, A2, and A3). An existing coding scheme—developed and used elsewhere (Doychak & Raghavan, 2018; Hagan et al., 2021; Legg & Raghavan, 2020; Loveland & Raghavan, 2017; Mitchell & Raghavan, 2019; Pomerantz et al., 2021; Unger et al., 2021)—was used to guide and organize this round of

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[12] Navarro (2019) suggests reporting the interpretative description with the Bayes Factor (See Table 1), as simply indicating a "statistically significant" result does provide not enough information. He further suggests that Bayesian priors, sampling plans, and so on can be included, but that this level of precision is not inherently necessary. I chose to include these additional details for the reader.

coding. If and when necessary, this coding scheme was modified based on the lived experience of women in this sample. During the second round of coding, the severity of tactics was coded, considering the totality of themes and patterns of coercion within the relationship (defined in frequencies: daily, few times per week, monthly, and rarely).

Research Question Two

In order to test the dimensionality of TCA, qualitative analysis was utilized. TCA was coded by two doctoral-level graduate students of psychology familiar with concepts of trauma-coerced attachment and experienced in qualitative coding. Prior to coding, research assistants attended training meetings on coding procedures facilitated by the PI. Two research assistants coded each interview for TCA independently from one another. In order to obtain an accurate measure of interrater reliability, original agreement (i.e., no variation), disagreements, and ultimate coding selections were documented. Any variations in coding were discussed by the research assistants and if necessary, would be tie-broken by the PI. In addition, documentation of disagreements and/or tie-broken responses included notation of which coder's decision prevailed. After 20% of the interviews were coded, this documentation was reviewed.

Transcripts were coded using methods inspired by grounded theory in order to a) recognize the complexity, nuance, and dimensionality of individual experience and b) account for the interrelatedness of concepts (i.e., the elements of TCA; Ong, 2012; Starks & Trinidad, 2007). Coding was based on a totality of themes and patterns within the relationship and the participants' reported ideations, feelings, and behaviors (see Appendix B, Table B1 & Table B3 for full code book). Although an existing coding scheme—derived from Doychak and Raghavan (2018)—was used to organize and guide coding, coding was both iterative and recursive. In other words, coding was informed by existing theory and schemes, but also modified if or when

necessary based on the phenomenological experience of women in this sample. As such, the coding scheme from Doychak and Raghavan (2018) was refined and solidified with new rules, inclusion/exclusion criteria, and specifiers (see Appendix B, Table B2).

Research Question Three

In order to examine whether higher levels of coercive control led to higher levels of TCA, a fixed-factor Bayesian One-Way ANOVA compared total scores on the Checklist of Controlling Behaviors (CCB) and the four qualitatively derived dimensions of TCA (i.e., no attachment, mild, moderate, and severe). Rather than interpreting results using a *p* value (standard in frequentist statistics), results were interpreted using the Bayes factor (See Table 1 above or Appendix C, Table C2 for interpretation guidelines).

Research Question Four

In order to test whether intermittent reward and punishment (i.e., a coercive form of manipulation) is necessary in the formation of TCA, both qualitative and quantitative analyses were used. Qualitatively, this question was explored through analyzing themes and connections in interviews evidencing no attachment and minimal intermittency, as well as for those with intermittency and more severe dimensions of TCA. The nature of reward (e.g., material, intimate, etc.) was also explored.

Quantitatively, Bayesian chi-square analysis for categorical data was utilized to test the significance of the relationship between intermittency and TCA. First, based on the aforementioned qualitative analysis, a variable was created for the severity of intermittency and included three levels of reward and punishment: (1) no intermittency, (2) mild intermittency, and (3) extreme intermittency. These values were assigned to both material/physical reward and intimate/affectionate reward and subsequently, transformed into a summed variable with a scale

from two through six. Next, a “high reward” categorical variable was created if reward values equaled four or above. High reward was then analyzed with high-level TCA (i.e., moderate or severe) and no attachment categories through a Bayesian chi-square analysis (i.e., contingency table or association test). Similar to aforementioned analyses, Bayes factor was utilized for interpretation with field-standard non-informative/default priors[13] (Kelter, 2020).

Research Question Five

In order to assess whether different dimensions of TCA differed according to levels of dissociation, total scores on the MDI and the four qualitatively derived dimensions of TCA (i.e., no attachment, mild, moderate, and severe) were compared using a fixed-factor Bayesian One-Way ANOVA. Again, the Bayes factor was interpreted to determine evidence for the affirmative hypothesis.

In building upon the previous analyses—in order to test whether the hypothesized relationship between coercive control and TCA is mediated by dissociation—Bayesian regression analysis was used. Bayesian regression involves probability distributions and assumes fixed data (as opposed to frequentist approaches, which assume normal distributions and fixed parameters). Coercion was operationalized using the CCB; dissociation scores were derived from the MDI; and TCA dimensions were derived from qualitative coding categories. For purposes of the present analysis, non-informative priors were again utilized, which is the most common approach (Kelter, 2020).

[13] Non-informative, default, or uniform priors make no assumptions about the data prior to observation (i.e., the current analysis). Therefore, they are less subjective and have become the agreed upon standard in Bayesian analysis (Kelter, 2020).

Research Question Six

The final exploratory research question regarding whether shared marginalized identities between trafficker and victim generally strengthened TCA was not pursued. There were only six participants who shared a marginalized racial/ethnic identity with their trafficker. Because of this, even qualitatively, there was not enough data for meaningful exploration or meaning making surrounding this research question and hypothesis.

Chapter 7: Results

Research Question One

Women in this sample experienced extreme levels of coercive control, supporting hypothesis one. Overarching coercive control tactics aligned with existing coding schemes and included: surveillance, microregulation, manipulation/exploitation, isolation, intimidation, degradation, and deprivation. Based on theoretical conceptualization and their relevance in the data, the sub-codes of emotional deprivation and sexual and reproductive coercion/abuse were added (See Appendix A, Tables A1 and A3 for definitions). Each of the seven overarching coercive control tactics was present in over half of all interview transcripts, ranging from the presence of surveillance in 98.5% of interviews and deprivation in 58.8% of interviews (See Table 2). In addition, a large percentage of the sample reported experiencing various coercive control tactics on a daily basis (See Table 3). Over half of the sample reported experiencing four of the seven overarching coercive control tactics (i.e., surveillance, microregulation, manipulation, and degradation) every day. Surveillance and microregulation were the two most frequently endorsed coercive control tactics occurring on a "daily" basis. Only 5% of the sample reported microregulation as "rare," and no one in the sample reported surveillance as "rare."

Approximately 65% of the sample reported feeling afraid on a daily basis. Despite overall high levels of fear and coercive control, no one in this sample endorsed daily severe violence (e.g., choking, use of weapons, or torture) and only 18% of the sample experienced daily "typical" physical violence (e.g., pushing, shoving, hitting, or kicking), compared to less physically violent tactics such as surveillance and microregulation, which were experienced by 83% and 82% of the sample respectively on a daily basis.

Of the 68 interviews available for coding, inter-rater reliability for the seven coercive control tactics and two sub-tactics was 84.80% (Cohen's k = .698, substantial agreement).[14] Specific inter-rater reliabilities varied based on the tactic, ranging from almost perfect agreement (Cohen's k = .901, 93.94%) on surveillance to substantial agreement (Cohen's k = .615, 76.47%) on deprivation. Following coding convention by Bauer (2000), inter-rater reliability was tested when 20% of the interviews had been coded for coercive control in order to determine whether inter-rater reliability was below chance, whether coders were sensitized to ambiguities, and whether additional training was necessary to mitigate slippage. At the 20% check (n = 14), inter-raters reached substantial agreement (Cohen's k = .652, 83.64%).[15]

Table 2

Percent of interviews with each coercive control tactic

Tactic	Number of Participants	Valid Percent
Intimidation	67	98.53
Microregulation	63	92.65
Manipulation/Exploitation	63	92.65
Surveillance	63	92.65
Degradation	60	88.24
Isolation	58	85.29
Deprivation	40	58.82

[14] See Appendix C, Table C3 for interpretative guidelines of Cohen's Kappa statistic (Landis & Koch, 1977).
[15] Tie-breaking for coercive control tactics is ongoing. Final code selections and percentage of which coder's selections prevailed will be presented at the defense.

Table 3

Coercive Control Tactics Experienced Daily

Tactic and Subtactic	Number of Participants	Valid Percent
Surveillance	52	82.54
Microregulation	49	81.67
Manipulation/Exploitation	41	68.33
Isolation	33	62.26
Intimidation	28	44.44
“Typical” Physical Abuse	11	18.33
“Severe” Physical Abuse	0	0
Deprivation	14	31.82
Emotional Deprivation	21	47.73
Degradation	35	56.45
Sexual Abuse/Coercion	17	29.83
Reproductive Abuse/Coercion	21	56.76

Note. The Isolation tactic combines “every I time tried” and “I stopped trying.”

Research Question Two

The second research aim was to explore the dimensionality of TCA. Specifically, I examined if existing coding schemes (i.e., no attachment, mild – compliance, moderate – appeasement, and severe – idolization) could be used to capture the phenomenological experiences of women in this sample. Hypothesis two was supported. Women in this sample were effectively coded into four attachment categories: no attachment (n = 12, 16%,),[16] mild attachment (n = 9, 12%), moderate attachment (n = 16, 21.33%), and severe attachment (n = 31, 41.33%).

Of the 68 interviews available for coding, overall inter-rater reliability for TCA was 77.94% with an almost perfect level of agreement (Cohen’s kappa = .951). The fifteen total disagreements between research assistants occurred in the following ways: no attachment and

[16] Interviews coded as criteria not met (n = 7, 9.33%) and no attachment (n = 5, 6.67%) were condensed into a single group for statistical analyses.

mild attachment (*n* = 1, 6.67%), mild and moderate attachment (*n* = 8, 53.33%), moderate and severe attachment (*n* = 6, 40%). The most frequent disagreements occurred between mild and moderate levels, followed by moderate and severe levels. Cohen's kappa statistic varied among the levels of TCA: no attachment (k = .948, almost perfect agreement), mild attachment (k = .575, moderate agreement), moderate attachment (k = .547, moderate agreement), and severe attachment (k = .841, almost perfect agreement).

An inter-rater reliability test (Bauer, 2000) was again performed when 20% of the interviews had been coded for TCA in order to determine whether inter-rater reliability was below chance, whether coders were sensitized to ambiguities, and whether one research assistant's codes prevailed over the other's significantly more times. At the 20% check (*n* = 14), inter-rater reliability was 71.43% with each research assistant's code being selected an equal amount of times during tie breaking (i.e., twice per assistant).[17]

Research Question Three

The third research aim was to determine the relationship between coercive control and TCA (i.e., if more extreme levels of coercion were associated with more severe dimensions of TCA). A fixed-factor Bayesian One-Way ANOVA was used to compare total scores on the CCB and the four qualitatively derived dimensions of TCA (i.e., no attachment, mild, moderate, and severe). Equal preference was given to both the null model and alternative model as is the field standard, P(M) = .5. After observing the data, the probability of the alternative model increased, P(M|data) = .897 and the Bayes factor indicated moderate evidence for the alternative hypothesis (BF_{10} = 8.711:1, see Table 4)[18] such that higher levels of coercion indicated higher levels of TCA

[17] When considering all 68 interviews, one assistant's codes were selected 8 times (53.33%) during the tie-breaking phase, as compared to the other assistant's codes, which were selected 7 (46.67%) times.

[18] Because Post-hoc analyses are employed to adjust for multiple comparisons, their use in Bayesian analysis is controversial. In Bayesian statistics, evidence is quantified in favor of or against proposed models. In other words, in

in this sample. The mean CCB score for this sample was 185.36, *SD* = 76.70. Participants with severe levels of TCA yielded higher mean scores on the CCB by 32.27 points, *SD* = 11.87. See Table 5 and Table 6 for CCB means across TCA dimensions.

Table 4

Model Comparison of Relationship between CCB and TCA

Models	P(M)	P(M|data)	BF_M	BF_{10}	error %
Null model	0.500	0.103	0.115	1.000	
TCA	0.500	0.897	8.711	8.711	0.009

Table 5

Mean CCB Score by TCA Level

				95% Credible Interval	
TCA	Mean	SD	N	Lower	Upper
No Attachment	157.083	74.525	12	109.733	204.434
Mild Attachment	184.750	56.943	8	137.144	232.356
Moderate Attachment	161.533	85.812	15	114.012	209.054
Severe Attachment	220.194	49.267	31	202.122	238.265

Table 6

One-Way ANOVA: CCB and TCA

				95% Credible Interval	
Variable	Level	Mean	SD	Lower	Upper
Intercept		183.369	25.232	137.704	241.213
TCA	1	-17.893	14.015	-46.748	9.034
	2	1.552	15.185	-28.917	31.836
	3	-15.926	13.246	-43.010	9.903
	4	32.267	11.865	8.949	56.426

contrast to frequentist statistics, decisions about the data are not being made and thus, post-host analyses are not necessary for correction.

Research Question Four

To examine hypothesis four, which posited that the presence of intermittent reward and punishment is necessary for the formation of TCA, I used qualitative exploration and a Bayesian association test. Qualitatively, reward was categorized into three types (e.g., physical or tangible reward, affectionate or intimate reward, and complimentary reward; See Appendix A, Table A2 for full coding definitions). Over 50% of the sample experienced some form of reward either every day or a few times per week (See Table 7), suggesting high levels of intermittency when considering the severe levels of coercive control also observed in this sample. Regarding the hypothesis that intermittency (specifically the presence of reward) is required for TCA formation, it is worth noting that those with severe attachments had substantially higher frequencies of all reward types when compared to those with no attachments (See Table 8).

Table 7

Reward Types and Frequencies

	Daily	Daily	Few Times Per Week	Few Times Per Week	
Reward Type	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent of Sample
Physical/Tangible	9	17.65	17	33.33%	50.98%
Affectionate/Intimate	23	47.92	14	29.17	77.08%
Complimentary	18	38.3	16	34.04	72.34%

Table 8

Reward Type by Attachment Level

Reward Type	Percent			
	None	Mild	Moderate	Severe
Physical/Tangible	22.22	14.29	42.85	52.38
Affectionate/Intimate	20.00	42.86	66.67	75
Complimentary	0	40	75	76.93

Note. Percentages include frequencies of reward experienced daily to a few times per week.

Qualitative codes were used to inform the variables used for the Bayesian association test. Because neither TCA dimension or level of reward was fixed, a Poisson sampling plan was used. When comparing high TCA (i.e., moderate and severe levels) with high reward (i.e., 4 and over on a 6-point scale), the resulting Bayes factor (BF_{10} = 2.991:1) suggested anecdotal-to-moderate evidence for the alternative hypothesis (See Table 9 and Table 10). Further, when comparing no attachment with high reward (i.e., 4 and over on a 6-point scale), the resulting Bayes factor (BF_{10} = 2.494:1) further supported the alternative hypothesis with anecdotal evidence (See Table 11 and Table 12).

Table 9

High Reward and High Level TCA

High Level TCA		High Reward		Total
		No	Yes	
No	Count	6.000	8.000	14.000
	% within column	37.500 %	17.778 %	22.951 %
Yes	Count	10.000	37.000	47.000
	% within column	62.500 %	82.222 %	77.049 %
Total	Count	16.000	45.000	61.000
	% within column	100.000 %	100.000 %	100.000 %

Table 10

Bayesian Contingency Tables: High Reward and High TCA

	Value
BF_{+0} Poisson	2.991
N	61

Note. For all tests, the alternative hypothesis specifies that group *0* is greater than *1* .

Table 11

High Reward and No TCA

No TCA		High Reward		Total
		Yes	No	
Yes	Count	13.000	43.000	56.000
	% within column	81.250 %	95.556 %	91.803 %
No	Count	3.000	2.000	5.000
	% within column	18.750 %	4.444 %	8.197 %
Total	Count	16.000	45.000	61.000
	% within column	100.000 %	100.000 %	100.000 %

Table 12

Bayesian Contingency Tables: High Reward and No TCA

	Value
BF_{-0} Poisson	2.494
N	61

Note. For all tests, the alternative hypothesis specifies that group *0* is less than *1* .

Research Question Five

The fifth hypothesis, which posited that levels of dissociation will differ according to levels of TCA, was not supported. A fixed-factor Bayesian One-Way ANOVA was used to compare total scores on the MDI and the four qualitatively derived dimensions of TCA (i.e., no

attachment, mild, moderate, and severe). Equal preference was given to both the null model and alternative model as is the field standard, P(M) = .5. After observing the data, the probability of the alternative model decreased, P(M|data) = .416. The Bayes factor yielded no clear evidence for or against the null hypothesis (BF_{10} = 1:1, see Table 13).

The mean MDI score for this sample was high, *M* = 61.49, *SD* = 28.48. The opposite of what was predicted, those with no attachment surpassed the sample mean and had the highest levels of dissociation, *M* = 73.17, *SD* = 30.64 when compared to other TCA dimensions. See Table 14 and Table 15 for MDI means across TCA levels of attachment.

Table 13

Model Comparison of Relationship between MDI and TCA

Models	P(M)	P(M|data)	BF_M	BF_{10}	error %
Null model	0.500	0.584	1.403	1.000	
TCA	0.500	0.416	0.713	0.713	3.276e-5

Table 14

Mean MDI Score by TCA Level

				95% Credible Interval	
TCA	Mean	SD	N	Lower	Upper
No Attachment	73.167	30.674	12	53.677	92.656
Mild Attachment	70.500	24.969	8	49.626	91.374
Moderate Attachment	48.000	28.890	14	31.320	64.680
Severe Attachment	63.129	26.066	31	53.568	72.690

Table 15

One-Way ANOVA: MDI and TCA

Variable	Level	Mean	SD	95% Credible Interval Lower	95% Credible Interval Upper
Intercept		62.942	9.714	40.999	83.974
TCA	None	6.675	5.764	-4.560	18.681
	Mild	4.185	6.345	-8.266	17.304
	Moderate	-10.778	5.951	-23.427	0.357
	Severe	-0.082	4.552	-9.418	8.907

Building upon the previous hypothesis, regression analysis was used to test whether levels of dissociation would partially account for the relationship between coercion and trauma-coerced attachment. Uniform distribution was used for all possible models as is the most common approach, P(M) = .25. This hypothesis was supported. The Bayes factors indicated the best predictor of TCA was coercion and dissociation (CCB + MDI, BF_{10} = 16.385:1, P[M|data] = .548), followed by coercion (BF_{10} = 12.050:1, P[M|data] = .403). In line with the findings from the previous hypothesis, dissociation alone was the worst predictor of level of TCA in this analysis (BF_{10} = .442:1, P[M|data] = .015; See Table 16 and Table 17).

Table 16

Model Comparison of Relationships among CCB, MDI, and TCA

Models	P(M)	P(M|data)	BF_M	BF_{10}	R^2
Null model	0.250	0.033	0.104	1.000	0.000
TotalCCB + TotalMDI	0.250	0.548	3.643	16.385	0.179
TotalCCB	0.250	0.403	2.028	12.050	0.131
TotalMDI	0.250	0.015	0.045	0.442	0.020

Table 17

Regression: CCB, MDI, and TCA

								95% Credible Interval	
Coefficient	P(incl)	P(excl)	P(incl|data)	P(excl|data)	$BF_{inclusion}$	Mean	SD	Lower	Upper
Intercept	1.000	0.000	1.000	0.000	1.000	2.985	0.135	2.707	3.246
TotalCCB	0.500	0.500	0.952	0.048	19.718	0.006	0.002	0.000	0.009
TotalMDI	0.500	0.500	0.563	0.437	1.289	-0.005	0.005	-0.017	1.001e-4

Table 18

Mean Scores of CCB, MDI, and TCA

	N	Mean	SD
TCA	65	2.985	1.166
TotalCCB	65	194.031	65.691
TotalMDI	65	62.631	28.168

Chapter 8: Discussion

In this study, I sought to test if we could identify and classify coercive control and trauma-coerced attachment in a reliable manner, as well as identify possible associations between coercive control and TCA to better explain how abuse leads to the formation of such bonds. I will first discuss the results from each of the research aims, followed by the implications of these findings and directions for future research, and close with concluding comments and limitations.

Using data from 68 sex-trafficked women, I explored how coercive control manifested in this context. The overarching coercive control tactics used in this analysis included: surveillance, microregulation, manipulation/exploitation, isolation, and intimidation, degradation, and deprivation (Beck & Raghavan, 2010; Dutton & Goodman, 2005; Johnson, 1995; Lehmann, Simmons, & Pillai, 2010; Raghavan et al., personal communication from expert panels, 2016; Stark, 2007). Findings suggest that this sample endured chronically coercive environments (over half the sample reported feeling fearful everyday) and experienced a substantial number of coercive control tactics frequently.

Previous research on sex trafficking (Doychak & Raghavan, 2018; Hagan et al., 2019; Pomerantz et al., 2021) highlights the heightened role of surveillance and microregulation in the context of sex trafficking and pimp-controlled commercial sex (e.g., “networks” of surveillance and the microregulation of financial earnings). In line with previous findings, women in this sample reported extremely high levels surveillance and microregulation suggesting these tactics may be particularly relevant in this context. The findings from this study also support existing literature (Herman, 1992; Pomerantz et al., 2021; Stark, 2006; 2007; 2009; 2010), which states that physical violence/abuse is neither necessary nor sufficient to induce compliance and enact

coercive control. See Table 19 for participants' descriptions of each of the coercive control tactics.

Table 19

Participant Quotes regarding Coercive Control Tactics

Question and Tactic	Participant Description
Did he/she ever follow you or have others keep track of you or your whereabouts? (Surveillance)	All the time, 24/7. Not permitted to leave the hotel. Him, or his little entourage—his brother, cousin, any of his gang members. It would be one of them or other girl… My cell phone was limited and monitored. (Interview Guide Participant 26)
	Yea, we had those boost phones. We only had the chirp capability. And it was all connected through his chirp. That's all it did… He always had eyes on us. Every few hours, there was a check in, like someone "stopped by" cause they were in the neighborhood, etc. (Interview Guide Participant 34)
Did he/she control aspects of your everyday life, daily tasks, and/or daily functioning? (Microregulation)	What I wore, what to eat. Daily schedule. And, his main girl picked outfits, and he'd say "Yay or nay." Meals, buyers, showers, change of clothes, no TV, certain times of day meant no phone. Everything. (Interview Guide Participant 18)
	Oh yea.. truthfully, you were naked unless he told you to wear clothes; I don't know that I had a glass of water without him knowing; I showed a picture of me during that time to my husband – he said I looked like a concentration camp victim; He had a whole meal plan for me (Interview Guide Participant 46)
Did he/she ever lie to you to get you to do something he wanted you to do? Did you ever feel manipulated? (Manipulation/Exploitation)	All the time, he would promise of a better situation ("this will be the last time") or dangle my career over my head… "if I don't have this money – then you can't go on tour, we can't have a place to live, etc etc." … The whole documentary thing was a lie. (Interview Guide Participant 33)
	Daughter was 3 months old, I was 17; He convinced me that the only way we would ever make it was to leave my mom's house; He placed us into a shelter, planned to go to welfare together and get an apartment; Welfare took forever… He said I have a way to get money; Meet me by here "you have

to really love [our daughter] to do this." Met him, told me that I can make money by walking down to the street, getting into the car, and… "If you really loved [daughter's name]." … Later, like with the other girls, he would constantly tell me they wanted to do it and make it seem like it was odd that I didn't want to; He would lie to me about their ages. (Interview Guide Participant 39)

Did he/she keep you from seeing or speaking to family, friends, or other people? (Isolation)

Oh for sure. I mean it was more like – he isolated in such a way that I didn't know I was isolated; I tell them so little about my life, but they don't know me; They know the narrative I told them – I told them I was going to school, busy with school and that's why I wasn't able to be around; And that I had an older boyfriend – knew where I lived, but nothing about the home; There were rules about eye contact, who I was allowed to talk to… It was "disrespectful" if I talked to someone I wasn't allowed to; Riskiest time for me was when I was on campus because he didn't know what I was saying. Eventually switched to online classes because he made me. (Interview Guide Participant 46)

Yes, constantly. He would tell me, once my parents got concerned, that they don't understand me, don't love me. He would bad talk my friends. He controlled the drugs and the drug dealing to friends. I was diagnosed bipolar, told me 'don't take medication, because people were trying to control/drug me.' He became combative with my family so they stopped trying. Started slow until it wasn't. (Interview Guide Participant 47)

Did he/she ever threaten you? Engage in behaviors to make you afraid? Or to make you comply with his/her demands? (Intimidation)

Yes, he would scream at me, pull my hair, hit me if I raised my voice. He hit the wall, kicked the wall… When he would be really furious, his face would change. (Interview Guide Participant 3)

Threaten to kill me, my children, himself… … He would show me pictures of my children. I don't know how he got them… Threaten me with deportation. Say that he would 'bury me where no one can find me.' Tied me to a tree naked, would leave me there all day/night… Beat me up, drown me, drag me… tied w/ chains to bedpost… locked me in a box… marks on my arms from chains, broke teeth, ribs… tie stuff around my neck, black out, then he'd let me go. Nothing he didn't do; burnt me with cigarettes, dragged me on floor… Urinating on me – made me worthy of him. (Interview Guide Participant 6)

Did he/she ever deny you basic necessities? For example, did you always have food, water, shelter, medication, healthcare, etc.? (Deprivation)	Lost the baby after he hit me in my stomach. Told me I would be a shitty mom… Wouldn't take me to the hospital afterward. Said it was a trick's baby anyway. (Interview Guide Participant 19) He wouldn't allow me out the room for three or four days (sometimes it was only a few hours). I got really good at peeing in cups… I would stash old coffee cans in the back of the closet so I could go to the bathroom… No food or water; I would hide water, protein bars… He had a doctor he worked with, if that doctor wasn't available, you weren't seeing anyone (Interview Guide Participant 46)
Did he/she ever use degrading language? Name calling? Cursing? (Degradation)	He would spit on me or walk by and slap me for no reason… he used to call me butt butt (I have a large butt). He would call me retard or 're re;' tell me I was psychotic or unstable. Something as simple as 'baby' can be degrading in the right context; They know how to use their words, they're heavy and have a lot of impact (Interview Guide Participant 63) He would make me wear the dog collar; cause I was known as being his "bitch." I was treated like a dog constantly… his grandmother called me a home wrecker, whore (Interview Guide Participant 69)

In addition to the core seven coercive control tactics, I also examined sexual coercion/abuse (with a further delineation of reproductive coercion/abuse), emotional deprivation, and intermittent reward and punishment. Although these tactics are fluid in nature (e.g., disallowing condom use could fall under reproductive abuse and microregulation in this context), they have particular relevance in this population and as such, were considered separately for the purpose of illustration. Research suggests that survivors of sex trafficking experience unique forms of sexual/reproductive abuse (e.g., bodily inspections, routine rape, forced abortions, orders regarding condom use, and forced engagement in commercial sex while

menstruating; Doychak & Raghavan, 2018; Hom & Woods, 2013; Reid, 2016). Indeed, a substantial portion of this sample experienced sexual abuse/coercion (i.e., nonconsensual sex acts, consent under duress, or forced compliance with sex acts) and a majority experienced reproductive abuse/coercion (e.g., control over condoms or birth control, sex with traffickers and johns while menstruating, forced abortions, or nonconsensual pregnancies). Future studies should aim to explore the unique role of sexual coercion and reproductive abuse in this context.

Emotional deprivation—as a function of the larger tactic of deprivation—emerged as an important and defining feature of the coercive control experienced in this sample. In previous studies, which used iterations of this coding scheme (Barbaro & Raghavan, 2018; Doychak & Raghavan, 2018; Feliciano, 2022; Hagan et al., 2021; Kaplenko et al., 2018; Kavanagh et al., 2017; Legg & Raghavan, 2020; Loveland & Raghavan, 2017; Mitchell & Raghavan, 2019; Pomerantz et al., 2021; Raghavan et al., 2019; Unger et al., 2021), deprivation was included and limited to the denial of basic necessities and/or fundamental physical or physiological needs (e.g., food, water, shelter, medicine/healthcare). Emotional deprivation (i.e., withholding of warmth, affection, kindness, or love) was often used as a form of punishment in this sample. For example, Participant 29 reported, "Oh yes [he withheld warmth and affection]. That was punishment. He would just be silent… shut down. Have us thinking what did we do. Everybody'd be on pins and needles." Another participant shared that emotional deprivation was the "quickest way to change my behavior. [The love] was why I was there. I didn't need the money… He would exploit that and withhold that love, give me the silent treatment, be up on another girl."

Perhaps, one of the most important findings to inadvertently emerge is the discrepancy between findings of coercive control from the semi-structured interview with those from the self-

report measure. On the one hand, the two measures were concordant on the presence and absence of behavior, supporting the validity of the semi-structured interview. On the other, important information regarding the frequency and intensity of coercion was missing with standardized self-report alone. Despite the frequent and extreme nature of coercive control experienced by this sample, standardized report measures (i.e., the CCB) yielded mid-range coercion scores (See Appendix C, Table C1). This suggests that self-report measures, which are limited to predefined behaviors, are insufficient in measuring coercive control when a more nuanced analysis is needed. Semi-structured assessment of coercive control allows for the contextualization of tactics, temporal changes in tactics and responses, additional tactics or methods not previously included, and population-specific considerations.

In addition to reliable classification of coercive control, I was able to classify women as not meeting criteria for TCA or as having various degrees of TCA. Of the 68 women in this sample, 12 did not meet criteria for TCA. In other words, twelve women in this sample developed little-to-no positive feelings toward their abuser, did not evidence overt dependency on their traffickers, and maintained intact world- and self- views. As not everyone involved in the commercial sex industry will develop TCA, the ability to reliably classify who does develop this form of attachment and who does not is important in practice. The current study offers reliable rule-outs to consider when making determinations regarding the presence of these attachments.

Among the 56 women with TCA, nine met criteria for mild attachment. This level of attachment differs from no attachment, as positive feelings are at least minimally present, as is dependency on the abuser—albeit for practical, structural, or financial needs. However, shifts in

identity and self- and world- view are less extreme (i.e., beliefs about her situation, the abuse, and the trafficker are not fragmented).

Taken together, when classifying women's level of TCA, the most frequent disagreements occurred around the moderate level of TCA. The lynchpin of disagreement was on the participant's awareness of the dual nature of the abuser and how to quantify this. Specifically, in some cases, positive feelings were strong but accompanied by negative feelings of varying degrees. In other cases, it was difficult to decide between *perceived* or *implied* attachment at the time of the relationship versus the present day self-report of the attachment. For example, Participant 59 spoke frequently of being "treated like a queen" by her trafficker and dreams about how they would "get married, settle down… we would run our own business around the life.. not a straight life." Despite the positive feelings reported and the adoption of the trafficker's worldview (e.g., dreams to remain in the life with him), at the time of the interview, the participant frequently reported dual emotions toward her trafficker. She referenced love and hate "through the whole relationship," as well as both being in love and being stuck as keeping her in the relationship. This dual understanding emerged after the relationship ended (15 years ago) and her attachment was severe at the time, but it took several rounds of discussion to disentangle this.

In sum, in some cases, distinguishing moderate levels of attachment (from mild and severe dimensions) may continue to present challenges. Despite this, the results from this study suggest that the presence and absence of TCA can be identified in a clear and reliable manner. Each dimension of TCA—and its defining elements—is further explicated in the following sections.

In this sample, mild levels of attachment were defined by limited illusions regarding the abusive nature of the trafficker accompanied by limited but notable positive feelings. For example, Participant 9 described her feelings for her trafficker during the relationship as “no super strong feelings, some appreciation and a lot of fear” while also reporting that her trafficker “met [her] basic needs.” Another participant described her feelings for her trafficker by stating, “in the beginning, I felt special but quickly realized he’s a monster… he is sick.” Although women in this category did evidence some attachment, I suggest that this does not rise to clinical levels and thus, these women should not be classified as trauma-coerced because they were able to maintain the reality of the abusive nature of the relationship. Additional research may further refine thresholds for clinical levels of TCA.

Women who met criteria for moderate attachment endorsed the duality of the abuser (e.g., source of comfort/security and also source of pain) and gratitude toward the abuser. One participant with moderate attachment described the love she had for her trafficker by saying it was “this confusing, messy, combination… ugly, dysfunctional, love, gratitude.” Similarly, Participant 16 reported that during her relationship with her trafficker, she “resented him” but also “needed him around” and was “grateful for what he did give [her].” Participant 25 reported, “My biggest fear was not having anybody or anywhere to go. No matter how he treated me, I still had someone to be with and somewhere to go.”

Finally, in severe levels of attachment, clear idealization, loyalty, self-blame/rationalization, and efforts to protect or defend the abuser were present. Participant six shared, “I was so dependent on him in every way. It was unreal. I worshipped him basically. I don’t understand how it happened. I’m not even like that with my children’s father.” Another Participant, who had been out of the trafficking relationship for 14 years, shared:

> I miss him. I wonder sometimes about him. I'll google his name. Is he alive? Is he arrested? It's mostly sadness for like, I wonder, if he had different opportunities what his life would have been like… I loved him, even when the worst parts of him showed… I think I always will [love him]. I've done the work and I know that it wasn't healthy. But, he has imprint on my soul that will always be. When you feel so deeply, love so deeply, it's only natural. I only started identifying as a survivor/victim about four years ago. He has a good soul, just shitty circumstances. (Interview Guide Participant 32)

In addition, women with severe TCA frequently blamed themselves for the abuse and/or rationalized the abusive actions of their traffickers. Participant 67 stated, "I would always say I must be the problem. I must have heard that wrong. Or I must be really bad. I must deserve this." Finally, with regard to defending or protecting the abuser, noteworthy examples of protecting the trafficker from legal repercussions and/or engaging in illegal acts were present, especially in interviews coded as severe attachment. Many of the women endorsed recruiting in order to make their trafficker happy, selling drugs/guns, holding/hiding weapons, and at times, stealing from businesses and individuals. Participant 63 reported:

> My first charges were sale of crack cocaine. I think he knew [the cops] were trying to get him and so, it was his friend that set me up. Every time after, he made me go do it. I don't think he thought he was gonna get out. I felt like he [made me do it], so I would be in jail while he was in jail… I don't believe I was just a girl for him. In his mind, I was something more to him. I think it was deliberate to take me off the streets since he was [off the streets]… He would rob people while I was in the room… He had someone contact him and when the john came to the door, it was a female and she had her dog here with her. I was supposed to have sex with her and her dog. I was freaked the fuck out and

said fuck no. That was the time he kept me in the room with a machete for 3 days. I don't think there was a limit to what he would do for money (Interview Guide Participant 63)

One of the main aims of this study was to integrate the findings on coercive control and TCA, and empirically examine the relationship between these phenomena. In addition to being a highly coerced sample, the women in this study had high levels of TCA, and the relationship between extreme coercion and TCA was statistically supported. As theorized in earlier sections, in long-term abusive relationships—especially in commercial sex whereby the trafficker is both pimp and partner—victims are forced to enter a chronic state of appeasement (Cantor & Price, 2007). Coercive tactics operate in tandem to isolate the victim, attack her identity and autonomy, make her question reality, and create a false sense of responsibility for her circumstances. This eventually leads to a state marked by relational dependence, emotional dysregulation, alterations in consciousness, and efforts to preserve connection to the sole attachment figure (i.e., TCA; Herman, 1992; Reid et al., 2013; Ward, 2010; White & Omar, 2010).

Existing literature suggests that that intermittent reward and punishment is an integral precursor to traumatic attachment (Cantor & Price, 2007; Coates, 2014; Doychak & Raghavan, 2018; Dutton & Painter, 1991). The current study aligns with existing literature, as findings suggest this specific form of coercive control was fundamental in the development of traumatic attachments. Women in this sample who did not form attachments experienced very little intermittency (and more specifically, reward, positivity, or care) when compared to women with moderate and severe attachments. Although the present analysis is not causal in nature, the association between the intensity/frequency of reward and the level of TCA is compelling evidence for the critical role of intermittency in traumatic attachment.

Categories from Doychak and Raghavan (2018) were used to organize reward into two broad types, including physical/tangible (e.g., presence of reward in the form of gifts, places, dates, decision making of other tangibles) and intimate/affectionate (presence of reward in the form of intimacy, affection, pet names, leniency). The reward reported by the women in this sample was easily categorized using these classifications. One participant talked about the intimacy and affection she experienced:

> He always called me babe and he had special nicknames—shortie and a special nickname I can't remember now… He would sleep with me… With cuddling sometimes. It was really nice. That's the person I fell in love with. He would make sure I walked on the inside of the sidewalk, open the door for me, hold my hand. (Interview Guide Participant 53)

Participant 19 described the physical and tangible rewards she was given by her trafficker, stating that he would "buy nice things after a fight, like go out to dinner, nice jewelry, best of everything type thing. Eye would be black and he would get me a Tiffany bracelet." Some physical/tangible reward was extreme. For example, this type of reward included "trips for two weeks" (Participant 26), "five-star restaurants" (Participant 48), and "Chanel bags" (Participant 53). Other participants reported simpler—yet equally as meaningful—physical reward. For example, women included "teddy bears" (Participants 1 and 57), "coffee" (Participant 8), and "Taco Bell and a dress" (Participant 60) as examples of their trafficker showing them generosity or buying them nice things.

In addition to the aforementioned reward categories, a third type of reward emerged as relevant and meaningful in this sample. As such, coding systems from Doychak and Raghavan (2018) were used and refined over the course of data collection and analysis and complimentary

reward was added. This type of reward was marked by efforts to make the survivor feel special or beautiful and involved compliments, favorable comparisons to other women, and at times, public displays of connection or ownership. For example, Participant 2 described feeling special when her trafficker was overt about their relationship to others in the life labeling him a "player" and stating, he was a "top notch hustler… in public, he'd be like "This my woman." I was his gem." Another woman, Participant 43, shared that her trafficker "called [her] things he didn't call anyone else. He would say that he wouldn't kiss anyone, but he would kiss [her]… Make it seem like [she] was the most important one."

Similar to more negatively valanced forms of manipulation (and coercive control more generally), reward in this sample was often individualized and designed to prey on the unique needs and desires of the victim who was receiving it. For example, one participant shared:

> I had a thing about my bare feet touching the ground. So, he would wash my feet, dry them, and put clean socks on my feet before they hit the ground… That feeling that he knew me so well and how could I live without him… He knew every part of me. He put clean socks on me. Who else is gonna do that? … Even all the way to end, little things he would do, like buy me my favorite teas. He would make sure I had them. I was obsessed with Twix ice cream bars, always had those. And I ALWAYS had a clean pack of socks. (Interview Guide Participant 63)

This same participant later described the manipulative aspect of the reward she received from her trafficker/partner. She reported:

> Those little moments have to be in place to make you feel safe, secure, and loved. They make you think they understand you on the deepest level. When you don't come from

> real love, you have no choice but to believe what they present you. The love and those good times, they were intentional, all part of the play. (Interview Guide Participant 63)

In contrast to strong evidence of the role of intermittent reward, I found no association between dissociation and levels of TCA. As women in this sample reported high levels of dissociation, this finding—or lack thereof—is not attributable to levels of dissociation being too restricted to capture such a statistical relationship. A simple explanation for this, of course, is that the relationship between dissociation and TCA is not as straightforward I proposed. However, women in this sample had been out of the life for a large variety of time, ranging from months to decades with most participants having left at least one-to-three years prior to the interview. This sample characteristic (i.e., variable time out of the life) could have contributed in meaningful ways to the lack of a consistent, clear, or statistically significant relationship between dissociation and TCA. Additionally, the MDI asks respondents to consider their dissociative symptoms *over the last month*. If participants were asked about their dissociative symptoms *at the time* of the relationship (or better still, if they were measured *during* the relationship), the hypothesized relationship may have been supported.

Interestingly, dissociation did partially explain the relationship between coercive control and trauma-coerced attachment. This suggests that dissociation alone has an unclear relationship with TCA in this sample, but that coercive control and dissociation combined are the strongest predictors of TCA in this sample. Though not statistically significant, those with no attachment had the highest group mean score on the MDI when compared to mild attachment, moderate attachment, and severe attachment groups. As theorized in earlier sections, dissociation can function to enable the co-existence of fragmented, contradictory, incompatible, or unbearable psychosocial realities. Further, it can be a way to survive a repressive, abusive, and even, life-

threatening environment. When considering defining elements of no attachment—lack of positive feelings toward the trafficker, minimal to no reward (i.e., 'positive' moments with the trafficker), and the awareness of the abusive nature of the trafficker—higher levels of dissociation may be employed as a defense to allow the survivor to exist within her reality. In other words, rather than the original hypothesis—which suggests dissociation enables the definitive elements of severe attachment—perhaps dissociation permits continued co-existence of victim and trafficker in its absence. Future research should aim to explore the role of dissociation with relation to both coercive control and trauma-coerced attachment.

Finally, the severity of TCA with attention to race, ethnicity, and immigration status unfortunately remains an area for exploration. Despite almost half of the sample identifying as women of color, only six shared the same marginalized racial/ethnic identity with their trafficker. This limited overlap in identity could be due to the high percentage of domestic trafficking cases (almost 90%) in this sample. Of note, almost 40 percent of traffickers/pimps in this sample were White. These data may suggest that the harmful stereotype that most traffickers are Black is not statistically supported when survivors are sampled from diverse avenues.

Implications and Future Directions

This is one of the largest studies to demonstrate coercive control is prevalent in the lives of trafficked women, does not need to be physical in nature (as theorized by others), and takes specific and unique forms in this context (e.g., differs from coercive control in domestic violence). As this study highlights, the coercive control tactics endorsed in this sample are similar to those observed in other settings (e.g., intimate partner violence). Yet, there also seem to be important and distinct ways in which coercive control is enacted and maintained in a sex-trafficking or commercial-sex context. For example, former victims of sex trafficking are

exposed to severe forms of sexual and reproductive abuse/coercion, extended networks of surveillance, and often complete regulation or denial of financial earnings. This study contributes to the literature on coercive control within this context. When direct-service providers know what tactics and experiences to look for and how to measure them, they can better identity victims of sex-trafficking and offer the legal protections/services or clinical services they may need.

Relatedly, the intensity and frequency of coercive control as measured by standardized self-report versus semi-structured interview differed in significant ways. In this sample of highly coerced women, standardized self-report inventories placed this sample in the mid-range of coercive control. This study offers strong support for the utility—and perhaps necessity—of assessing for coercive control in a way that captures context and temporality, as well as the specific, individualized, and predatory ways traffickers employ various tactics of coercive control. Future studies should aim to systematize the semi-structured assessment of coercive control.

Currently, the field offers compelling theoretical explanations of TCA (e.g., see Reid et al., 2013 for a review), but it has rarely been empirically studied. The current analysis validated existing TCA coding schemes and the dimensionality of these attachments. As such, it provides scholars and researchers a systematic framework from which to study TCA and paves the way for meaningful and methodically consistent research regarding this phenomenon. This has important implications for the many facets of victim services including mental health, physical health and legal support/protection. In practice, it can also act as a guide for direct-service personnel (e.g., attorneys, advocates, clinicians, and health providers) in understanding their clients/patients, engaging in trauma-informed ways, and destigmatizing and decriminalizing or

victimhood. For example, Chambers et al. (2022) used the co-occurrence of or Complex-PTSD and TCA as evidence for the importance of survivor-centered and multi-faceted treatment approaches (e.g., psychological and psychopharmacological) for this high-needs population.

The present analysis also prompts additional empirical and clinical questions related to TCA. For example, the ways in which TCA waxes and wanes over the course of the relationship—and the mechanisms that contribute to these fluctuations—remain a rich area to explore. Additionally, as theorized throughout, environments marked by chronic coercion combined with evolutionary responses to captivity, human attachment systems, and trauma reactions can create the conditions that lead to TCA. Extending this theory, individuals with any type of developmental attachment style could develop TCA if the repressive and coercive conditions were extreme and chronic enough. However, this has not been empirically tested here (nor elsewhere, to the author's knowledge). Considering—or systematically measuring—developmental attachment styles may lend further support to (or refute) the theoretical conceptualizations offered in this body of work.

In addition to validating a systematic definition and scale for TCA, the current study provided empirical evidence of the relation between coercive control and TCA. Though existing theoretical conceptualizations elucidate this relationship, it is rarely empirically and systematically studied. The statistically supported relationship between coercive control and TCA can inform providers' approach to working with victims, recognizing the many barriers to cooperating with law enforcement or court proceedings, leaving the trafficker and the life, and "betrayal" of their trafficker and partner.

Finally, the current study attempted to address this dearth in the literature and examine coercion, TCA, and dissociation in a large and diverse sample of trafficking victims using

mixed-method analyses. Existing literature highlights the role of dissociation in traumatic attachment (e.g., Herman, 1992a, 1992b) and the DSM-5 delineates responses to prolonged coercion under dissociative disorders. However, empirical studies examining the role of dissociation in the context of coercive control or traumatic attachment are extremely rare. Levels of dissociation in this sample were high; and although dissociation alone did not have a statistically significant relationship with traumatic attachment, it was meaningful in helping to explain the relationship between coercive control and trauma-coerced attachment. As such, dissociation remains an important avenue of inquiry for best understanding and aiding this population.

The current study includes the largest known sample of victims and survivors of sex-trafficking in the country. Its mixed-method approach allows for the integration of idiographic specificity (for in-depth and comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon of interest) and nomothetic generalization (for utility in replication, application, and systematic study). This type of examination is critical for developing and providing effective, trauma-informed prevention, intervention, and aftercare services in clinical and legal settings for the benefit of victims and survivors of sex trafficking.

Conclusions

Feminist scholars have long debated the role of coercion in commercial sex, as well as abolition versus legalization and consent, agency, and free choice versus coercion, exploitation, and restricted choice (See Moran & Farley, 2019 and/or Liberato & Ratajczak, 2017 for an overview of this debate). It is important to note that the stance presented in this body of work is not a moral one, but one that considers the historical development—as well as the patriarchal and racist societal systems—that enable the commercial sex industry to thrive. Further, it is a stance

that accounts for the vast range of exposure to abuse and coercion among those who have been trafficked for the purposes of commercial sexual exploitation and the failure of social service providers and legal actors to account for this variability (Bromfield, 2016; Chang & Kim, 2007; Vijeyarasa, 2008).

Failing to recognize the broad scope of experiences within forced sexual exploitation leads to a dichotomization of victimhood. Trafficked survivors are viewed as either consenting and “fallen” or physically abused and “innocent.” I argue that nuanced and subtle forms of coercion (i.e., abuse) exist between these poles and that dichotomous classification is harmful for those in the commercial sex industry. This dichotomization has contributed to the criminalization of victims who engage in commercial sex as a result of coercion, entrapment, and traumatic attachment. Without regard for the role of coercion and traumatic attachment, the blaming and criminalization of victims and survivors will persist. Just as other structural and social injustices fall along racial, class, and immigration status lines, the injustices and criminalization victims of trafficking face occur most at the margins of identity (Busch-Armendariz et al., 2009; Hepburn & Simon, 2010; Office for Victims of Crime, 2013; Polaris Project, 2018; Schisgall & Alvarez, 2008). An important first step in addressing a system that criminalizes and weaponizes victims—offered in this body of work—is using the phenomenological experiences of former victims to inform the identification and measurement of coercive tactics and to gain an in-depth understanding of how trauma-coerced attachment forms and persists.

Limitations

This study had some important limitations. Recruitment and enrollment fluctuated greatly over the three to four years that data was collected. Former victims of sex-trafficking and forced commercial sex are a historically and frequently exploited group. As such, community outreach,

network building, and the establishment of trusted relationships with organization leaders required repeated attempts at connection, ongoing meetings, sharing/refining of study materials, and so on. In addition, these efforts (and general participation) were interrupted and stalled by the COVID-19 pandemic. Once resumed, all study procedures were conducted remotely. Although this allowed for the inclusion of women from various regions/states of the United States not previously accessible, it is likely that virtual interviews qualitatively differed from in-person interviews. One obvious difference was the amount of time each virtual interview took when compared with those conducted in person.

Sample characteristics may have impacted the study findings, particularly surrounding dissociation analyses. The women in this sample were connected to victim and survivor service agencies, support groups, and/or forums related to healing, empowerment, and survivor communities. This was an intentional recruitment strategy aimed at mitigating the risk of participating. Nevertheless, the extent to which this sample had been/was actively involved in therapeutic services may be more substantial than rates of treatment-involvement in the general population of sex-trafficking victims and survivors. Exposure and engagement with treatment could have led to a decrease in dissociative symptoms or differences in the way coercive control and TCA were self-reported. Alternatively, treatment-involvement and its association to increased insight may have improved participants' ability to reflect openly on their experiences of coercive control and hold conflicting realities (e.g., love and hate for the trafficker). Further, despite this sample characteristic, rates of dissociation, coercive control, and TCA were high.

This sample was diverse in important ways. It included women with various entryways into commercial sex (e.g., survival-, addiction-, relationship- related), women from various regions of the US (and thus, with different norms related to their trafficking experience), women

with varying amounts of time since leaving the life, and different types of trafficking such as individual traffickers, gang-related trafficking, and drug-maintained commercial sex. However, the sample also lacked diversity in a number of noteworthy ways. First, the majority of sample was White (despite estimates that the majority of sex-trafficking victims are women of color). Second, the overwhelming majority of women in this sample were domestically—rather than internationally—trafficked. Sample diversity (and lack thereof) is both a strength and limitation of this study. On the one hand, the findings of the present analyses are supported across these dimensions of difference. On the other hand, there may be meaningful differences in the way study variables (e.g., coercive control, TCA, etc.) manifest across these categories (e.g., international versus domestic, rural versus urban, etc.). In addition, recruitment techniques and inclusion/exclusion criteria may have skewed the identity-related demographics of this sample.

APPENDICES

Appendix A

Coercive Control Codebook

Table A1

Main Tactics and Definitions of Coercive Control

Tactic	Definition
Surveillance	monitoring location and/or activities of target
Microregulation	controlling aspects of target's everyday life, daily tasks, and/or daily functioning; includes management of earnings from commercial sex
Manipulation/Exploitation	using intentional deceit, misrepresentation, or existing vulnerabilities to induce compliance and/or alter the target's perception; includes intermittent reward and punishment
Isolation	restricting or denying access to family, friends, people, or places
Intimidation	engaging in behaviors to induce fear, self-blame, or compliance, with or without the threat of physical harm; includes physical violence
Deprivation	denying target basic necessities and/or fundamental needs, includes physical or physiological needs (e.g., denial of medicine, food, sleep, etc.) and emotional needs (e.g., denial of warmth, love, support, kindness, etc.)
Degradation	using directly degrading language, attempts to reduce an individual's self-worth

Additional Coercive Control Tactics and Sub-codes

Table A2

Manipulation in the form of Intermittent Reward and Punishment

Tactic	Definition
Reward (Physical/Tangible)	presence of reward in the form of gifts, places, dates, decision making of other tangibles (intermittent or constant)
Reward (Intimate/Affectionate)	presence of reward in the form of intimacy, affection, pet names, leniency (intermittent or constant)
Reward (Complimentary)	presence of compliments, favorable comparisons to other women, public displays of connection or ownership (intermittent or constant)
Punishment	presence of or increase in coercive tactics or physical abuse in direct response to noncompliance, e.g., removal of privileges, status, affection, etc.

Table A3

Sub-codes and sub-tactics of Coercive Control

Tactic	Definition
Sexual Abuse/Coercion	occurs when the victim resists sexual acts unsuccessfully, complies under duress (i.e., threats, pressure, intimidation and humiliation), acts under forced compliance (i.e., lacks full freedom to refuse), or does not give consent (assault or rape)
Reproductive Abuse/Coercion	occurs when the trafficker controls the use—and none use—of condoms, directly interferes with contraception, forces sex while menstruating, controls pregnancy outcomes (e.g., forced pregnancies or forced abortions); includes trafficker and johns, can include threats, pressure, intimidation, or violence

Appendix B

Trauma-Coerced Attachment Codebook

Table B1

Dimensions and Characteristics of TCA

Dimension:	Characterized by:	Feelings:	Attitudes:
No Attachment		Negative feelings toward the abuser	Primary reason for staying with abuser is fear-based or due to structural issues
Mild Attachment	Compliance	Feelings are not entirely and/or consistently negative, endorses minimal positive feelings	Limited to no illusions about the nature of the relationship and/or abuser
Moderate Attachment	Appeasement	Grateful and/or respectful of the relationship and abuser, endorses positive feelings	Endorses dual nature of her exploiter as both abuser and sole source of comfort and security
Severe Attachment	Idealization	Idolizes abuser or relationships, believes in abuser's grandiosity or omnipotence, endorses negative feelings primarily in the context of self-blame or rationalization	Adopts abuser's worldview/ distorted self-view, blames self for the abuse, expresses loyalty

Additional Trauma-Coerced Attachment Rules, Specifiers, and Sub-codes

Table B2

Additional TCA Specifiers and Coding Rules

Steps	Coding Rules
Step 1: Are Criteria For TCA met?	*Must answer yes to these questions in order to move on to the following steps:* - Coercive control (4 tactics or more) or physical abuse present? [Y/N] - Dependency on abuser present? [Y/N] - Shift in world/self-view present? [Y/N]
Step 2: Specify Severity/Dimension	Use Table B1
Step 2a: Coding notes and rule-outs	*For Mild Attachment:* - At least one positive feeling expressed, but more negative than positive feelings overall. (R/o strength of positive feelings. If the strength of the feeling is overwhelming, consider moderate) - Minimal to no distorted self-view - If love for abuser is present, have a good reason why attachment is mild and not moderate *For Moderate Attachment:* - Increased strength and/or presence of positive feelings, with simultaneous acknowledgement of negative feelings - If love for abuser is present, start at moderate and work toward either direction *For Severe Attachment:* - Significant levels of both distorted self-view and dependency - Love for abuser is present with no ""buts""
Step 3: Assess Reward and Punishment	Clear pattern of reward and punishment is present? [Y/N]
Step 4: Assess Prolonged Attachment	*If present, TCA must be considered severe:* Prolonged period of attachment even after the relationship ends? [Y/N]

Table B3

Self-Perceptual and Behavioral Responses to Coercion

Response	Definition
Dependency	Participants may present with a dependency on the abuser whose behavior hurts—rather than nurtures the integrity of—the victim. Measured by: grandiose ideation or positive feelings toward the abuser
Shift in world/self-view	Participants may a normally integrated sense of self when it comes to many aspects of life but, adopt the abuser's worldview when it pertains to aspect of their relationships or of the lifestyle. Measured by: protecting or defending the abuser, trying to please the abuser, blaming the self/taking responsibility, minimizing or justifying the abuser, identity tied to abuser
Self-Blame (Physical Abuse)	Participant took blame/responsibility for the abuse (e.g., "If I would have made enough money, then I would have been able to eat")
Internalization (Verbal or Emotional Abuse)	Participant believed the negative things her abuser said to/about her (e.g., "If you hear you are just a whore enough times, you start to believe it.")
Resistance	Participant fought back, defended herself, refused or participant ignored demands or directives
Compliance Style	Fear, ambivalence, or loyalty

Appendix C

Miscellaneous Tables for Interpretation

Table C1

CCB Scoring Guidelines

Scale	Frequency				
	Never	Rarely	Occasionally	Frequently	Very Frequently
Physical Abuse	10	11-20	21-30	31-40	41-50
Sexual Abuse	9	10-18	19-27	28-36	37-45
Emotional Abuse	9	10-18	19-27	28-36	37-45
Economic Abuse	7	8-14	15-21	22-28	29-35
Intimidation	7	8-14	15-21	22-28	29-35
Threats	7	8-14	15-21	22-28	29-35
Minimizing & Denying	7	8-14	15-21	22-28	29-35
Blaming	7	8-14	15-21	22-28	29-35
Isolation	10	10-20	21-30	31-40	41-50
Male Privilege	9	10-18	19-27	28-36	37-45
CCB SUM	82	83-164	165-246	247-328	327-410

Table C2

The Meaning of the Bayes Factors

Bayes factor	Interpretation
>100	Extreme evidence for H1
30-100	Very strong evidence for H1
10-30	Strong evidence for H1
3-10	Moderate evidence for H1
1-3	Anecdotal evidence for H1
1	No evidence
1/3-1	Anecdotal evidence for H0
1/3-1/10	Moderate evidence for H0
1/10-1/30	Strong evidence for H0
1/30-1/100	Very strong evidence for H0
<1/100	Extreme evidence for H0

Table C3

Interpretation of Cohen's Kappa Statistic

Range	Interpretation
.01 - .20	Slight agreement
.21 - .40	Fair agreement
.41 - .60	Moderate agreement
.61 - .80	Substantial agreement
.81 – 1.00	Almost perfect or perfect agreement

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