

# Exercise

Professional Version | US English

# Coercive Methods For Enforcing Compliance



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## Description

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Abusers use a variety of techniques in order to coerce others into behaving the way they want. In 1956 the psychologist Albert Biderman developed a framework for understanding the methods foreign armies used to extract false confessions from prisoners of war. Psychologists now believe that abusers in many different situations use the same methods to achieve control over their victims. For example, victims of domestic violence or childhood abuse often report having experienced similar treatment. These methods include:

1. Isolation
2. Monopolization of perception
3. Induced exhaustion / debilitation
4. Threats
5. Occasional indulgences
6. Demonstrating 'omnipotence' and 'omniscience'
7. Degradation
8. Enforcing trivial demands

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## Instructions

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This is a Psychology Tools exercise. Suggested uses include:

- Client handout – use as a psychoeducation resource.
- Discussion point – use to provoke a discussion and explore client beliefs.
- Therapist learning tool – improve your familiarity with a psychological construct.
- Teaching resource – use as a learning tool during training.

This information sheet gives details of methods of coercive control used by abusers. A checklist allows clients to report what methods of control they were subject to. These can be used as an assessment measure, or are helpful as starting points for therapeutic conversations.

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## References

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Biderman, A. D. (1957). Communist attempts to elicit false confessions from Air Force prisoners of war. *Bulletin of the New York Academy of Medicine*, 33(9), 616-625









# Coercive Methods For Enforcing Compliance

Abusers use a variety of techniques in order to coerce others into behaving the way they want. Use the checklist below to record whether you have been subjected to any of these methods of coercive control.

| Method   | Example  |
|--|--|
| <p><i>Isolation</i></p>                                        | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Cut off from my family or friends</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Methods of communication controlled (e.g. phone, email, internet)</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Encouraged not to see people</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Encouraged not to work</li> </ul>   |
| <p><i>Monopolization of perceptions</i></p>                    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Physically isolated</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Freedoms restricted / not encouraged</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Behavior controlled by mixture of charm, seduction, and hostility</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Encouraged to focus on abuser's wants / needs instead of your own</li> </ul>  |
| <p><i>Induced debilitation / exhaustion</i></p>                | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Given drugs and alcohol</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Sleep deprived (e.g. not allowed to go to bed, woken in night)</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Diet controlled (e.g. starvation)</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Over-worked (e.g. kept busy, given many jobs, made physically tired)</li> </ul>   |
| <p><i>Threats</i></p>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Threats of death</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Threats of injury</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Threats of suicide if you don't comply</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Threats to loved ones</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Vague threats</li> </ul>   |
| <p><i>Occasional indulgences</i></p>                         | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Occasional favors</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Fluctuation of behavior - sometimes pleasant, other times punishing</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Promises (e.g. "I will change")</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Rewards for partial compliance (e.g. "I like this ... but stop doing that")</li> </ul>   |
| <p><i>Demonstrating 'omnipotence' and 'omniscience'</i></p>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Starting confrontations</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Taking compliance for granted (e.g. acting 'as if' you would never rebel)</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Demonstrating complete control</li> </ul>  |
| <p><i>Degradation</i></p>                                    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Humiliating treatment (e.g. humiliated in front of others, punishments)</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Sexual degradation (e.g. encouraged to engage in humiliating sexual behavior)</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Controlling or preventing personal hygiene</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Insults and taunts</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Denial of privacy</li> </ul> |
| <p><i>Enforcing trivial demands</i></p>                      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Demanding things be done a certain way</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Making little requests</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Habits that must be adhered to</li> </ul>  |

# Coercive Methods For Enforcing Compliance

Abusers use a variety of techniques in order to coerce others into behaving the way they want. In 1956 the psychologist Albert Biderman developed a framework for understanding the methods foreign armies used to extract false confessions from prisoners of war. Psychologists now think that abusers in many different situations use the same methods to achieve control over their victims. For example, victims of domestic violence or childhood abuse often report having experienced similar treatment.

| Method   | Effect / Purpose  | Examples  |
|--|---|---|
| <b>Isolation</b><br>                                       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Deprives the victim of social support for their ability to resist</li> <li>• Makes victim dependent upon the abuser</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Complete isolation</li> <li>• Cut off from family or friends (sometimes gradually)</li> <li>• Encouraged to stop work</li> </ul>   |
| <b>Monopolization of perceptions</b><br>                   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fixes attention upon immediate situation</li> <li>• Fosters introspection</li> <li>• Eliminates information not consistent with the abuser's message</li> <li>• Punishes non-compliance</li> </ul>           | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Physical isolation</li> <li>• Barren environment</li> <li>• Restricted freedom</li> <li>• Use of charm / seduction mixed with hostility to control behavior</li> </ul>       |
| <b>Induced debilitation / exhaustion</b><br>               | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Weakens physical and mental ability to resist<br/><i>("I'm tired, so I'll go along with it for now")</i></li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Administer drugs and alcohol</li> <li>• Sleep deprivation</li> <li>• Semi-starvation</li> <li>• Over-exertion</li> </ul>   |
| <b>Threats</b><br>                                       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cultivates anxiety and despair</li> <li>• Makes clear what the victim can expect for non-compliance</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Threats of death or injury</li> <li>• Threats to loved ones</li> <li>• Vague threats</li> <li>• Mysterious changes of treatment</li> </ul>                                   |
| <b>Occasional indulgences</b><br>                        | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provides positive motivation for compliance</li> <li>• Encourages victim to work to 'earn' indulgences<br/><i>("He's not all bad")</i></li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Occasional favors</li> <li>• Fluctuation of behavior</li> <li>• Promises</li> <li>• Rewards for partial compliance</li> </ul>  |
| <b>Demonstrating 'omnipotence' and 'omniscience'</b><br> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Suggests futility of resistance<br/><i>("He will know")</i><br/><i>("There's no point, he always gets what he wants")</i></li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Confrontations</li> <li>• Taking compliance for granted (e.g. acting 'as if' victim would never rebel)</li> <li>• Demonstrating complete control</li> </ul>                  |
| <b>Degradation</b><br>                                   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lowers self-esteem</li> <li>• Reduces victim to 'animal level' concerns</li> <li>• Makes cost of resistance appear more damaging than capitulation<br/><i>("I'm worthless", "I'm disgusting")</i></li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Physical or sexual degradation</li> <li>• Preventing personal hygiene</li> <li>• Demeaning punishments</li> <li>• Insults and taunts</li> <li>• Denial of privacy</li> </ul> |
| <b>Enforcing trivial demands</b><br>                     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develops a habit of compliance</li> <li>• Reinforces who is in control</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Demanding things be done a certain way</li> </ul>  |

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