

## ABSTRACT

Title of Thesis: WHAT HAPPENS IF I SAY NO: ATTITUDES  
AND PREVALENCE OF EMOTIONAL  
COERCION IN SEXUAL DATING  
RELATIONSHIPS

Amy Lynn Sterner-Djangali, Master of  
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Thesis directed by: Associate Professor Manouchehr Mokhtari  
Department of Family Studies

Emotional coercion is a gray area for many dating couples. This study asked approximately 150 young men and women about their attitudes and experiences with emotional coercion in dating relationships and utilized both a Self-Report Measure and a Scenario Measure containing vignettes about coercion. The findings indicated that, overall, participants failed to find the use of coercion inappropriate. Participants found coercion by women to be less appropriate than coercion by men. According to the results, most participants could not tell the difference between acquiescence and true consent, which may help explain why and how coercion occurs. This study shows that education on this topic is needed for all individuals in order to promote healthier sexual relationships.

WHAT HAPPENS IF I SAY NO: ATTITUDES AND PREVALENCE OF  
EMOTIONAL COERCION IN SEXUAL DATING RELATIONSHIPS

by

Amy Lynn Sterner-Djangali

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Advising Committee:

Associate Professor Manouchehr Mokhtari, Chair  
Assistant Professor Jaslean J. LaTailade  
Associate Professor Suzanne M. Randolph

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# Chapter I

## Introduction

Sexual coercion can exist on many levels from slight verbal pressure to threats and physical violence (Eds. Johns Hopkins University, 1999). When the coercion is purely on an emotional level (i.e. “guilt tripping”, threats to leave the uncooperative partner) the line between coercion and consent can blur to a decided gray. This study is aimed at measuring the attitudes of traditional college age (18-25 years old) students concerning the use of emotional coercion or pressure in dating relationships. In addition to their attitudes, this study will also measure reported prevalence of emotional coercion.

### *Specific Aims and Hypotheses*

One aim of this study is to examine whether college aged students view emotional coercion that leads to a sex act as an appropriate way to get what they want in a sexual relationship. It is hypothesized that traditional college aged students in the coercion groups will view emotional coercion that leads to a sex act as appropriate based on their score on the coercion scale of the Scenario Measure.

A second aim of this study is to investigate gender differences in how participants view emotional coercion. It is hypothesized that participants in the male coercer scenarios will score higher on the Scenario Measure than participants in the female coercer scenarios based on their scores on the coercion scale of the Scenario Measure.

A third aim of the study is to explore the ability of participants to tell the difference between true consent and acquiescence. It is hypothesized that participants will not be able to distinguish between true consent and acquiescence within the Scenario Measures.

This study also poses several research questions. The first research question is “Do White participants differ significantly from Non-White participants on the Scenario and Self-Report measure?” The two other research questions explore prevalence of coercion in the Self-Report Measure. The researcher believes that participants will report having coerced their partners at some point during the relationship (research question 2), and that participants will report having been coerced by their partners (research question 3).

### *Relevant Terms and Definitions*

Terms and concepts relevant to this study are defined below:

- Emotional coercion → non-violent verbal manipulation and/or pressure by a partner in a sexual situation.
- Consent or “true consent” → explicitly agreeing to a sexual interaction with both free will and complete knowledge present (Spitzberg, 1998).
- Acquiescence → giving in to a partner’s sexual demands when some type of coercion is present.
- Token resistance → saying “no” to a sexual interaction when the individual’s real answer is yes or maybe. In some instances, an individual will say no as a means of game playing or because it is what is expected from them in traditional gender roles (Spitzberg, 1998).

## Chapter II

### Literature Review

Research supports the assertion that emotional coercion in sexual relationships is not an uncommon occurrence with young men and women (Larimer, Lydum, Anderson, & Turner, 1999; Murray & Henjum, 1993). The high rate of occurrence is all the more troubling because emotional coercion carries with it negative repercussions for its victims. Zweig and Barber (1997) have found that men and women who report being emotionally coerced into a sex act with their partner have poorer social adjustment skills. These researchers defined coercion as pressure to engage in a sexual activity.

Zweig and Barber (1997) used data gathered from the Michigan Study of Adolescent Life Transitions (MSALT). The MSALT was a 13-year longitudinal study that ran from 1983 to 1996. Zweig and Barber used specific data from Wave 7 of the MSALT. Wave 7 included data about romantic relationships and dating experiences. The study's sample were men (n= 527) and women (n= 872) between the ages of 19 years and 22 years old and included men and women who were currently attending college and those who were not (Zweig & Barber, 1997).

The researchers found that persons who were emotionally coerced into a sex act showed lower levels of well-being than individuals who had been violently coerced or raped. This may be because victims of emotional sexual coercion feel partly responsible for the incident. This can be especially true of situations in which the coercion was emotional and not necessarily violent (Zweig & Barber, 1997). Victims of emotional coercion ultimately had to consent (or at least acquiesce) to their partner in order for the sexual act to take place; thus, they may feel responsibility for the act. This may lead to a longer “recovery time” for a person who was emotionally coerced rather than physically forced into a sex act (Zweig & Barber, 1997). Persons who have been emotionally coerced may or may not go on to develop “normal” attachments with future partners; much depends on the kind of support (positive or negative) they receive following the coercive incident (Zweig & Barber, 1997).

In a recent study, researchers surveyed 272 single women from the Detroit metropolitan area and examined women’s sexual assault experiences based on perpetrator tactics (Abbey, BeShears, Clinton-Sherrod and McAuslan, 2004). The study was conducted over the telephone utilizing random-digit dialing procedures. The

researchers found that verbal coercion victims were more likely to hold themselves responsible for the assault than women who were physically coerced or intoxicated. The participants were also less likely to hold the perpetrator responsible even though they may have labeled the interaction as forced sex or rape; rather, the participants blamed a lack of communication between themselves and the perpetrator for the experience (Abbey, et. al., 2004).

#### *The Influence of Gender on Perceptions of Coercion*

Men and women have been found to have very different views about emotional coercion. Women view coercive tactics used by their partners as less acceptable than their male counterparts (Haworth-Hoepfner, 1998). However, women also expect coercive behavior across certain situations. Though they still recognize the behavior as coercive, men and women will view coercion as justified or tolerable in some situations (Haworth-Hoepfner, 1998).

For example, in a study by Cook (1995), both men and women said that sexually aggressive behavior such as emotional coercion should be expected when the woman acts in such a way as to be perceived as sexually forward. This can include the woman asking out the man or accompanying him back to his

apartment (Cook, 1995). Cook's sample included 235 men and 311 women.

Men do view coercion as tolerable or justifiable in a wider variety of situations than women. In a study comparing young men's attitudes about sexual coercion in the United States and Sweden, Lottes and Weinberg (1997) found that men viewed sexually experienced women as "legitimate victims of coercion." Men disregard these women's choice in this matter based solely on their past sexual experiences. This can explain why coercion, emotional or otherwise, can be so prevalent within a dating relationship. If the couple has engaged in the sexual activity in the past, one partner may not see that their uncooperative partner may still say "no" this time.

A 2000 study for the National Institute of Justice surveyed one thousand undergraduate college women about their personal experiences with sexual victimization (Fisher, Cullen, & Turner, 2000). Women were asked a variety of questions regarding sexual victimization including incidences of sexual coercion. The researchers defined sexual coercion as "unwanted completed/attempted [sic] penetration/contact [sic] with the threat of non-physical punishment, promise of reward or pestering/verbal

pressure,” (page 8). Eleven percent of the women in this study reported being coerced.

### *Does Race Influence Coercion?*

As evidenced by the aforementioned research, it is clear that gender has a great deal to do with the perception of the presence of coercion within a situation. One may wonder if people of different racial backgrounds view emotional coercion differently as well.

In an exploratory study by Kalof and Wade (1995), the researchers studied the attitudes about and experiences with sexual coercion in 383 undergraduate students. The study included 197 females and 126 males. While not specifically spelled out, Kalof and Wade’s (1995) definition of sexual coercion seems to include both emotional and physical aggression and pressure. The researchers studied not only the differences between genders within their sample, but also looked at the differences in responses of White (n= 323) and Black (n= 60) subjects (Kalof & Wade, 1995).

Kalof and Wade (1995) found no significant differences between White and Black subjects on the prevalence or attitudes about emotional coercion. This lack of significance may be due to the small number of Black subjects within the sample (60 Black

subjects as compared to 323 Whites subjects) (Kalof & Wade, 1995).

In another study, Rouse (1988) examined varying forms of abuse in White and non-White dating relationships. Rouse (1988) focused on Black, White and Hispanic college students. The total sample consisted of 130 White students and 98 non-White students (64 Black students and 34 Hispanic students). Rouse (1988) focused on six forms of abuse: possessiveness, rejection, sexual pressure, moderate physical abuse, consequences, and sexual abuse. For the purposes of this paper, only the findings on sexual pressure will be discussed. The findings on sexual abuse will not be discussed as they relate more to physical abuses such as rape and sexual assault.

The sexual pressure index included both incidences of a subject being pressured for sex *and* the incidence of their partner becoming upset if/when refused (Rouse, 1988). Rouse varied the findings both by race and by gender using a Chi-square test statistic. Rouse found no significant differences on race for these three groups. The mean percentage of incidences of sexual pressure among Black, White and Hispanic participants was 50%.

White participants did report being pressured “somewhat less often” (p. 314) but this difference was not significant (Rouse, 1988).

Interestingly, when sexual pressure was examined for differences by sex, the percentage of men who reported being sexually pressured was higher for Black and White participants (41% and 40% respectively). However the opposite was true for Hispanic participants where 53% of Hispanic female participants reported experiencing sexual pressure from their partners (Rouse, 1988).

While these two studies are neither definitive nor exhaustive on the relationship between race and coercion in dating relationships, they do suggest that one’s race may have little or no bearing on the prevalence of emotional coercion. And if prevalence rates do not vary with race, it may be assumed that the attitudes about emotional coercion do not vary (for better or worse) as well.

#### *Men as Victims of Emotional Coercion*

Victims of emotional coercion are not limited to women; men are also coerced into sex acts. It is harder to view women as perpetrators but that may be because their means of coercing tend to be less threatening such as pleading and attempting to make their partner feel guilty (Murray & Henjum, 1993).

In a study of primarily White Canadian university students, which compared males' and females' experiences with sexual coercion, 18% of men reported experiencing some type of sexual coercion (O'Sullivan, Byers, & Finkelman, 1998). While the percentage was much higher for women (42.5%), this does show that the problem of emotional coercion is an issue for men as well as women. In this same study, men reported "continued arguments and pressure" as the most common ways in which they were coerced (O'Sullivan, et al., 1998).

Struckman-Johnson and Struckman-Johnson (1994) conducted a study with 204 college men. They asked the participants to report on the incidence of pressured or physically forced sex acts since the age of 16 and one third had experienced such an event. Although the sample population was primarily heterosexual, the men reported being coerced by both men and women. When coerced by another man, subjects reported the use of more emotionally coercive tactics (bribery, verbal pressure, manipulation) as well as physical coercion (physical restraint, intoxication). When coerced by a woman, subjects reported verbal pressure and manipulation as the most common strategies (Struckman-Johnson & Struckman-Johnson, 1994).

The results showed that when coerced by a woman, most of the subjects had low or no negative reactions. However, one fifth did report a strong negative reaction when coerced by a woman (Struckman-Johnson & Struckman-Johnson, 1994). The men in the study reported a wide variety of feelings associated with the experiences (both with male and female perpetrators) including confusion, embarrassment, anger, loss of control and pride (in cases where the subject resisted the attempt at coercion) (Struckman-Johnson & Struckman-Johnson, 1994).

In a recent study, Russell and Oswald (2002) administered a questionnaire to 173 heterosexual, undergraduate men. Sixty-three men in the study (36.4%) reported using sexual coercion to get what they want in a sexual relationship. Of those men, 25.3% reported saying things they did not mean, 17.1% reported they became too sexually aroused to stop, and 8.2% argued with their partner until a sex act took place (Russell & Oswald, 2002).

Russell and Oswald (2002) also looked at victims of sexual coercion in their study. Fifty men reported having been coerced into a sex act either verbally or physically. As in the Struckman-Johnson study (1994), Russell and Oswald (2002) found that women most commonly used verbal pressure and manipulation to

coerce their partners. Of those men, 14.6% reported their partner used continual arguments, 14.0% reported their partner said things she did not really mean and 15.7% reported that their partner used threats (general and specifically to end the relationship) (Russell & Oswald, 2002).

In a 1988 study of unwanted sexual activity, Muehlenhard and Cook found that men were more likely than women to engage in unwanted intercourse (62.7% of men as opposed to 46.3% of women.) The sample consisted of 507 men and 486 women who were administered a self-report measure designed to assess participants reported frequency of unwanted sexual activity. The researchers theorized that men had experienced unwanted intercourse more often than women because of the traditional sex-role scripts that pit men as experienced sexual aggressors in dating relationships (Muehlenhard & Cook, 1988).

Generally, it is less desirable in our society for men to be sexually inexperienced; rather they are to be not only sexually experienced but also the aggressor in a dating relationship. Therefore, men will acquiesce to sexual pressure from their partners as a way to save face or live up to their partner's and society's expectations (Muehlenhard & Cook, 1988). The

stereotype about what a “real” man should or should not be can account for unwanted/coerced sexual activity.

### *Why Do Men and Women Coerce Their Partners?*

Men and women may have trouble identifying coercive behavior within themselves. In a recent study, Hogben and Waterman (2000) studied 353 university students (176 men, 177 women) concerning their sexual behaviors, including incidences of both physical and emotional coercion. They found that sexually aggressive women in their study did not identify their behavior towards their partners as coercive. Their behavior, as self reported, did fall under the study’s definition of sexual coercion of persistent verbal attempts to obtain intercourse (Hogben & Waterman, 2000).

Another reason why men and women may not realize when they are coercing their partners is because they may be unable to correctly identify true consent (Spitzberg, 1998). In fact, men and women may see their partners acquiescing to their pressures for sex rather than consenting. Another term for acquiescence may be “giving in” (p 184, Spitzberg, 1998).

True consent of a sexual act is contingent upon two things: knowledge and free choice (Muehlenhard, 1995; Spitzberg, 1998).

Knowledge simply refers to the fact that a person knows exactly what they are consenting to. For example, if one asks their partner to hold hands and then kisses them instead, they would be guilty of deceiving their partner; of withholding knowledge which may have impacted their partner's willingness to consent. In this example, the act of kissing would have crossed over to a nonconsensual act (Spitzberg, 1998).

The second criterion of true consent is free choice. Free choice means that a person consented without threats, pressures or any other coercive act on the part of the initiator (Muehlenhard, 1995; Spitzberg, 1998). By this definition of free choice, any act of coercion on the part of the initiator negates the possibility of true consent.

As previously stated, acquiescence is giving in to a sex act rather than consciously choosing (truly consenting) to it (Spitzberg, 1998). A person may acquiesce for a number of reasons:

- Obligation → "He bought me an expensive dinner, so he expects sex."
- Fears of emotional harm → "She may leave me if I don't have sex"

- Fears of physical harm → “He may hurt me if I don’t have sex.”
- Prevention → “If I don’t have sex, we’re going to have another fight.”

In a very recent study, 114 women were surveyed concerning their experiences with verbal sexual coercion (Livingston, Buddie, Testa and VanZile-Tamsen, 2004). The participants completed a questionnaire and a qualitative interview regarding their experiences. According to the findings, when pressured, 54.4% of participants gave in to the verbal sexual coercion due to “extrinsic motivation” (defined by the researchers as alleviating pressure or avoiding aggression and physical harm). Other participants (23.7%) reported giving in to their partner out of a sense of obligation to their partner or to avoid feelings of guilt (what the researchers called “intrinsic motivation”) (Livingston, et. al. 2004). The list of reasons a person may have for acquiescing are varied and nearly limitless (Spitzberg, 1998). The person who acquiesces may essentially be saying, “I am doing this because I do not feel I have any other choice.”

Now that we have defined true consent and acquiescence the question remaining is why/how a person can confuse the two and

end up coercing their partner? A person who is acquiescing may not specifically say “No, I do not want to have sex with you.” Instead, they may count on vague statements (“I have a headache”) or nonverbal cues and body language to say no for them. When this does not work, and their partner persists, they may simply give in to the sexual act. The partner, not ever hearing a definitive “no” either assumes consent has occurred since their partner now seems willing, or (more pessimistically) simply does not care as long as they are getting what they want out of the situation (Spitzberg, 1998). And again, since the partner does not hear “no”, they may continue to pressure their partner for a sexual interaction.

Another reason why men and women coerce and are coerced by their partners is because of the concept of token resistance which is related to the issue of acquiescence and consent. Token resistance refers to the “no means yes” phenomenon that takes place in dating relationships. It can be a true token resistance (a woman says no but really does mean yes) or it can merely be a perceived token resistance (the woman says no and means no but her partner assumes she really means yes) on the part of the partner (Muehlenhard & Hollabaugh, 1988).

Women may engage in token resistance due to the traditional sex-role stereotype which places high priority on women being submissive and being “good girls” who need to be convinced by their male counterparts to engage in sexual activity (Muehlenhard & Cook, 1988; Muehlenhard & Hollabaugh, 1988). Therefore, when a person says “no” and means it, their partner may erroneously take their “no” as token resistance that merely needs to be overcome with more “convincing”. The unwilling partner acquiesces and unwanted sex is the result (Muehlenhard & Cook, 1988; Muehlenhard & Hollabaugh, 1988).

Though token resistance is applied more to the traditional “male as coercer, woman as coerced” stereotype, it could be applied to coercion victims of both sexes (Muehlenhard & Cook, 1988; Muehlenhard & Hollabaugh, 1988). The phenomenon does contribute to coercive activity in both sexes and increases the chance for more aggressive and violent forms of sexual activity such as sexual abuse and rape (Muehlenhard & Hollabaugh, 1988).

Ideally, all couples would be in tune to their partner’s nonverbal and verbal cues but this does not always occur, and so the line between consent and acquiescence blurs and unwanted

sex occurs (Spitzberg, 1998). Unwanted sex by acquiescence may be avoided by simply asking one's partner if they wish to engage in sexual activity and providing them with knowledge and free choice through open communication (Lewin, 1995; Spitzberg, 1998). Included within this open communication would be accepting a negative response without getting upset as this may foster guilt which in turn may lead to acquiescence and unwanted sexual activity.

When discussing emotional coercion in dating relationships it is important to note that men and women have experiences with coercion beginning at young ages. Murray and Henjum (1993) found that the majority of their subjects' experiences with coercion occurred during adolescence (specifically secondary school age). Jackson, Cram and Seymour (2000) found similar findings in their study of 373 New Zealand high school students (173 men, 200 women). They also found that emotional coercion led to sex acts other than intercourse.

### *Conceptual Framework*

The conceptual frameworks utilized within this study are conflict theory and social exchange theory. Following is an

overview of each theory and discussion of how each relates to the subject of emotional coercion in dating relationships.

Of particular interest is the concept of inequality within the framework of conflict theory. This theory states that subordinates will always seek to gain more power, while superordinate people will seek to keep the power they do have for themselves (Winton, 1995). This can be directly related to relationships in which emotional coercion may take place. The coercer in the relationship has a certain amount of power over their partner. According to conflict theory, the superordinate partner would utilize that power and continue to use coercive behavior in order to maintain their position as superordinate (Winton, 1995).

Just as the superordinate partner would continue to use coercion to maintain power in the relationship, the subordinate partner may continue to stay within the relationship either in hopes of eventually gaining power for themselves through submission to their partner or to avoid the natural conflict that comes from a break-up.

A break-up can be devastating to any couple. A superordinate partner can use this to his or her advantage within a coercive relationship (Winton, 1995). The conflict that can arise

from a break-up becomes the superordinate partner's resource and their ammunition for coercion: "If you don't have sex with me, I'll find someone who will!" Conflict theory is useful to describe and explain the behavior of the coercive partner within a dating relationship. Social exchange theory can be used to describe the non-coercive partner.

Social exchange theory was developed based on the principles of operant conditioned learning in which people react to positive and negative reinforcement (Winton, 1995). Human instinct is to maximize pleasure and to minimize pain and people learn how to do this socially, through environmental cues from peers and elders. A person's behavior in a new or recurring situation will depend on their positive or negative experience to a previous situation (Winton, 1995).

In applying social exchange theory to dating relationships, we can see that when couples come together they do so with the expectation that each will be awarded mutual esteem and respect by their partner. This concept is known as the rule of distributive justice (Winton, 1995). If the balance of awards is upset, the relationship can become unstable. This helps to explain why relatively healthy relationships can fail, but what about

relationships in which one or both partners engage in coercive behavior?

As with conflict theory, the issue of power in relationships is important in social exchange theory. Specifically, one member of the couple will have more power than another at any one time. However, the issue of power within exchange theory is closely related to dependence (Winton, 1995). In terms of coercion, the coercive partner will most likely be less dependent on their partner, which allows them greater leeway in the relationship. The non-coercive partner may be more dependent on their partner for love, status, money, etc, which may lead to greater tolerance of their partner's coercive behavior.

At the heart of social exchange theory, and many human relationships, is the concept of maximizing pleasure and minimizing pain. As a result, couples often perform a kind of hedonic calculus in their minds to try and determine what the outcome of certain behaviors might be. For the coercive partner, he or she might see the outcome of coercion as obtaining sexual satisfaction and even more power in the relationship. For the non-coercive partner, he or she may justify acquiescing to their partner as a means to hold onto their partner. This can be especially true

if the coercive partner threatens to leave the non-coercive, uncooperative partner.

### *Introduction to the Current Study*

Extant research shows that emotional coercion in sexual dating relationships is a problem for many men and women. The proposed study is unique due to the dichotomy of the measures. The Scenario Measure asks participants to review a scenario and give their opinion as to the behaviors of the individuals within the story. This measure is designed to explore the participants' attitudes and ability to detect coercion. The Self-Report Measure asks for participants' own experiences with emotional coercion and is designed to simply measure the prevalence of emotional coercion among the sample population. It is the hope that the research gathered from this study will lead to a better understanding of emotional coercion and peoples' attitudes about it and the development of educational programs for students concerning emotional coercion and appropriate ways to engage in romantic relationships.

## Chapter III

### Research Design and Methods

#### *Sample*

The participants for this study were 180 undergraduate college students ages 18 to 25. The sample was drawn from the campus of the University of Maryland, College Park. Participation in this study was strictly voluntary. Participants were recruited from a large undergraduate class open to all students. The majority of the students in the class were graduating seniors. The instructor for the class gave permission for the student investigator to conduct this study within the classroom during the designated class time.

By recruiting from a large undergraduate class, the researcher was hopeful that the study would contain a mix of different racial and ethnic groups. Participants were not included or excluded from the study based upon racial or ethnic background or sexual orientation. The researcher is primarily interested in how men and women differ on the measures. This study excluded participants over the age of 25, as the researcher is interested only in students of traditional college age.

### *Measures*

This study utilizes two different measures that have been designed by the researcher. The first measure is scenarios vignettes and questions. The scenarios vary according to the condition (six conditions total) to which participants are randomly assigned (no coercion, mild coercion, strong coercion.) The study will utilize a 3 X 2 X 2 experimental design: 3 being equal to the levels of coercion (none, strong coercion, mild coercion), 2 being equal to the gender of the scenario character (male or female) and 2 being equal to the gender of the study participant (male or female.) Participants were randomly assigned to one of six conditions dealing with coercion.

The scenarios are provided in Appendixes 2-4. The scenarios describe a sexual situation between a couple, Mary and John. The scenarios are not graphic and do not specify what kind of sexual activity takes place. Participants are free to use their imaginations to fill in the blanks about what is meant by “sexual activity” and “being intimate.”

The no coercion condition describes the couple, Mary and John, as being in a good relationship in which they seldom fight. The story states that they have been sexually active for 5 months

during their 7-month relationship. After returning from a late movie, John and Mary go to Mary's room to spend the night. One of the couple initiates sexual contact and the other consents. Both members of the couple fall asleep immediately after the interaction.

The mild and strong coercion conditions describe the same couple as being in a good relationship even though they sometimes argue. The couple has been sexually active for 5 months of a 7-month relationship. On the walk home from a late movie, the couple argues about upcoming weekend plans but reach a compromise before they reach the dorm. Depending on the gender of the initiator, one member of the couple is still upset and does not want to spend the evening with the other. However, this person says nothing in order to avoid another argument. One member of the couple initiates sexual contact with the other (who is still upset) and the upset partner turns the initiator down.

At this point, the initiator complains that the upset partner is being petty (in strong coercion condition, the initiator also threatens to leave the upset partner) and the partner feels guilty and acquiesces. After the sexual interaction, the initiator immediately falls asleep while the partner tosses and turns for either 30 minutes (mild coercion condition) or 60 minutes (strong

coercion condition.) In half the scenarios, the woman initiated the sexual contact and in the other half the man initiates the contact.

The questionnaire that follows the scenarios asks questions about the story. Refer to Appendix 5. The questions are the same for every condition. Questions that pertain to the scenario are scaled questions on a five-point Likert scale. The scaled questions are used to give participants a range of response in order to account for gray areas. The questions ask the participants to rate each member of the couple on desire for the sexual interaction, perceived manipulation by each partner, the appropriateness of each partner's behavior, and how common the scenario is on a college campus.

The second measure for this study is a self-report inventory aimed at assessing the attitudes and experiences of the participants. Again the researcher developed this measure. Refer to Appendix 6. The questions in this inventory ask, for example, if study participants ever emotionally "pressured" a partner, if a partner had ever emotionally "pressured" participants, and if they had ever said "no" to a partner but really meant "yes" or "maybe". The word pressured in this measure is used as a substitute for coercion so as to decrease social desirability bias.

The majority of the questions in the self-report inventory are yes/no questions. The remaining questions offer possible responses to the question. For example, for the question “Whose responsibility is it to decide if a sexual interaction will take place?” the response set is “The Man, The Woman, Both.”

These measures are of the researcher’s own design. The questions in both the Scenario Measure questions and the Self-Report Measure were developed based on research about emotional coercion. The internal validity and reliability of these measures is of concern. The scenario descriptions did show good face validity when shown to traditional college aged students, in so much as the volunteer student readers asserted that the scenarios were accurate as to language and behavior of the characters and occurrence on a “typical” college campus.

The current study builds upon of a previous pilot study done by the researcher when she was an undergraduate student (Sternier, 2001.) The first study’s sample was small (60 participants) and yielded no significant results due primarily to the small sample size. As a result of the pilot test, the questions regarding acquiescence were added and the questions regarding drug and alcohol use were collapsed during analysis

### *Procedures*

Participants were given a consent form at the beginning of the study. The study took place at the beginning of the designated class period within the designated classroom. See Appendix 1 for a copy of the consent form. The consent form explained that the study was designed to assess their attitudes about dating relationships. Participants were advised both verbally by the student investigator and within the consent form that their answers are completely confidential. It was important to the study to assure complete confidentiality of the participants in order to foster more honest responses. The study was not mandatory and the students were informed of that by the student investigator and also by their instructor. Participants who wished to participate in the study were asked to sign the consent form. Those students who chose not to participate were asked to sit quietly in their seats until the end of the study (approximately 15 minutes).

The consent form was collected and kept separately from all data collected. The questionnaires (both the Scenario Measure and the Self-Report Measure) did not ask for any identifying information such as name or student ID number. The signed consent forms were not paired with the corresponding

questionnaires. After the study had been conducted, the signed consent forms were kept in a locked filing cabinet within the office of the Family Studies Department. The questionnaires remained with the student investigator for data analysis.

The study questionnaires were then handed out to the participants and they were asked to read a scenario, which detailed a story about a dating relationship. The scenarios were stapled to the corresponding questionnaires. This was done so the researchers could later identify which scenario the participant had read. The scenario packets (one scenario plus scenario questionnaires) were thoroughly shuffled before the study took place and then handed out in random order. This was done to ensure random assignment of the participants to one of the six conditions. See Appendices 2-5 for copies of the scenarios and the Scenario Measure.

Participants were asked to answer questions on a 5-point Likert scale about what they read based on their own opinions. Responses sets varied by item, please see Appendix 5. After the Scenario Measure was completed, the participants were given a Self-Report Measure designed to assess their personal experiences and the attitudes of the participants concerning emotional

coercion. Please see Appendix 6 for a copy of the Self-report Measure.

The Self-Report Measure was completely optional due to the sensitive nature of the questions. Participants were told that completing the Self-Report Measure was not mandatory but to do so would greatly help the student investigator's research. Participants who chose to fill out the Self-Report Measure were allowed to skip any question(s) they deemed too personal. The Self-Report Measure has not been linked to the scenario questionnaire. The researchers felt that to do so would compromise the participants' honesty on one or both of the measures. More specifically, the researchers believed that although the study was completely confidential, the participants might have given socially desirable answers on one or both of the measures if the participants thought that their answers on the measures would be compared. Participants were told that the two questionnaires would not be paired.

Once participants finished filling out both the measures, they were asked to fold them in half and pass them towards the center aisle one questionnaire at a time. The researcher and class instructor then collected the questionnaires and placed them in

two separate boxes. The Scenario Measures were placed into a box labeled 'Box A' and the Self-Report Measures were placed into a box labeled 'Box B'. This was done so the participants could see that their questionnaires would not be paired together.

Participants were asked to pass in their questionnaires regardless of whether they completed all the measures.

The student investigator sorted the boxes at a later time and separated out the incomplete/ineligible questionnaires (n=11 for the Scenario Measure and n= 9 for the Self-Report Measure).

Participants were provided with a debriefing form at the end of the class period which explained the study's hypotheses. The researcher was also available for any questions at this time as well as during the study. See Appendix 7 for a copy of the written explanation.

## Chapter IV

### Results

#### *Data Scoring*

Analyses were performed on the data gathered from the study. Separate analyses were performed for both the Scenario and the Self-Report Measures. Participants were encouraged to complete both measures; however, because the measures were not linked as a way to foster greater honesty in the responses, there will be some differences in the demographic characteristics of the participants.

The original six scenario groups of no coercion male, no coercion female, strong coercion male, strong coercion female, mild coercion male and mild coercion female were collapsed to three groups: no coercion, coercion- male initiator and coercion- female initiator. The Scenario Measure contained ten items that created the coercion scale. Though the response sets varied by question, all Likert scale questions (Q1, Q2, Q5, and Q6), were structured to have two answer options on the high end of the scale (i.e. 1 and 2), two answer options on the low end of the scale (i.e. 4 and 5) and one neutral answer option (i.e. 3). These five options were collapsed to three and assigned a score of optimal (1), neutral (2),

or non-optimal (3) depending on the assigned scenario of the participant. These categories were further collapsed and recoded to correct responses (1) and incorrect responses (0). Neutral responses were recoded as incorrect responses (0). Questions 3 and 4 were combined for purposes of analysis. As with the Likert Scale questions the response sets for questions 3, 4 and 7 were recoded to correct (1) and incorrect (0) responses based upon the assigned scenario of the participant. Participants received 1 point for each correct response. The number of correct responses was summed to form the participant's total score on the coercion scale. The scoring range was zero to ten with a higher score indicating more correct responses. Question 7 concerning consent and acquiescence was also examined separately in relation to Hypothesis 3.

For the Self-Report Measure, all items were examined item by item. For both the Scenario Measure and Self-Report Measure, gender differences and race differences were examined. Five participants declined to report their gender (two on the Scenario Measure and three on the Self-Report Measure). These participants were left out of the analysis of gender differences. Similarly, 20 participants did not report their race (10 on each of

the measures). These participants were not included on the analysis of race differences.

### *Statistical Procedures*

Descriptive statistics, frequencies, means and standard deviations were used to summarize the demographic information on the participants, using the SPSS statistical package. Nominal variables (all Self-Report Measure questions and the acquiescence question on the Scenario Measure) were examined using descriptive statistics, means, frequencies, and Chi-square tests. Scale variables were examined using independent  $t$ -tests. Pearson's correlations were run on paired items in the Scenario Measure.

The first hypothesis, that participants will view emotional coercion as appropriate based on their score on the coercion scale of the Scenario Measure, was tested by using a  $t$ -test to examine differences between coercion and non-coercion groups on the coercion scale. A  $t$ -test was also used to identify the differences among the groups' score on the measure.

The second hypothesis, which states that participants in the male coercer groups will score higher on the Scenario measure than participants in on the female coercer groups, was examined

on the coercion scale of the Scenario Measure. This hypothesis was examined using a  $t$ -test to look for differences in the coercion scale scores between groups.

The third hypothesis that participants will not be able to tell the difference between acquiescence and true consent in the Scenario Measure, was examined using Chi-square tests to test for differences between groups. This hypothesis was further explored in the Self-Report Measure by examining descriptive statistics, means and Chi-square tests on relevant variables.

For the first research question regarding race differences, the race categories were collapsed to White and Non-White due to the small numbers of participants in the non-White race categories. However, there were not enough Non-White participants to run any statistical analysis. The second research question, that the Self-Report Measure will show that participants engage in emotional coercion with their partners, and the third research question, that the Self-Report Measure will show that participants have been emotionally coerced by their partners, were both examined using Chi-Square tests.

### *Demographic Characteristics: Scenario Measure Sample*

The demographic characteristics of participants who completed the Scenario Measure are presented by gender in Table 1. The sample consisted of a total of 153 participants, 51 were men and 100 were women; two participants declined to report their gender. The age of the participants ranged from 19 to 25 with the average age being 21.53. Though the sample consisted of a mixed undergraduate class, 86.9% of the participants were seniors (n=131). The other 20 participants were sophomores (n=4, 2.6%) and juniors (n=16, 10.5%). There were no freshmen participants. Of the participants, 107 were White (69.9%), ten were Black or African American (6.5%), 19 were Asian or of Asian descent (12.4%), four were Hispanic or Latino (2.6%), one was Pacific Islander (0.7%) and two others identified as other (1.3%). The average age of the participants who did not report their gender was 22 with no deviation. Both participants were seniors and one participant reported being White and the other Asian.

The participants were randomly assigned to a scenario group. The no coercion group contained 15 men and 34 women and one participant who did not give their gender; the coercion-male group contained 19 men and 35 women; and the coercion-

female group contained 17 men and 31 women and one participant who did not give their gender.

Table 1

Demographic Characteristics of the Scenario Measure Sample

Characteristic	Males (n=51)		Females (n=100)	
	<u>M</u>	S.D.	<u>M</u>	S.D.
Age	21.53	0.76	21.37	0.94
Nominal Data	<u>n</u>	%	<u>n</u>	%
Scenario				
No Coercion	15	29.4	34	34.0
Coercion- Male	19	37.3	35	35.0
Coercion- Female	17	33.3	31	31.0
Class				
Freshman	0	0.0	0	0.0
Sophomore	0	0.0	4	4.0
Junior	2	3.9	14	14.0
Senior	49	96.1	82	82.0
Race*				
White	39	79.6	67	72.8
Black/AA	0	0.0	10	10.9
Asian	8	16.3	10	10.9
Hispanic/Latino	2	4.1	2	2.2
Native American	0	0.0	0	0.0
Pacific Islander	0	0.0	1	1.1
Other	0	0.0	2	2.2

\* 10 participants did not report their race.

*Demographic Characteristics: Self-Report Measure Sample*

The demographic characteristics of participants who completed the Self-Report Measure are presented by gender in Table 2. The sample consisted of a total of 155 participants, 51 were men and 101 were women; three participants declined to report their gender. The age of the participants ranged from 19 to 25 with the average age being 21.47. Though the sample consisted of a mixed undergraduate class, 82.7% of the participants were seniors (n=130). The other 20 participants were sophomores (n=4, 4.1%) and juniors (n=14, 13.3%). There were no freshmen participants. Of the participants, 107 were White (69.9%), ten were Black or African American (6.5%), 19 were Asian or of Asian descent (12.4%), four were Hispanic or Latino (2.6%), one was Pacific Islander (0.7%) and two others identified as other (1.3%). The average age of the participants who did report their gender was 21.33 (SD = 0.58). One participant was a senior and two were juniors. All three participants reported being White.

Table 2

## Demographic Characteristics of Self-Report Measure Sample

Characteristic	Males (n=51)		Females (n=101)	
	<u>M</u>	S.D.	<u>M</u>	S.D.
Age	21.60	.78	21.42	.96
Nominal Data	<u>n</u>	%	<u>n</u>	%
Class				
Freshman	0	0.0	0	0.0
Sophomore	0	0.0	4	4.1
Junior	1	2.0	13	13.3
Senior	49	98.0	81	82.7
Race*				
White	41	82.0	66	67.3
Black/AA	0	0.0	7	7.1
Asian	6	4.1	11	11.2
Hispanic/Latino	2	1.4	2	2.0
Native American	0	0.0	0	0.0
Pacific Islander	0	0.0	1	1.0
Other	0	0.0	2	2.0

\* 10 participants did not report their race.

*Statistical Analyses by Hypothesis*Hypothesis 1.

This hypothesis predicted that participants in the coercion groups would score lower on the coercion scale of the Scenario Measure than participants in the no coercion group. Participants in the coercion groups (M = 5.14, SD = 1.59) had statistically

significantly lower scores than participants in the no coercion groups ( $M = 7.80$ ,  $SD = 2.06$ ),  $t(153) = 8.797$ ,  $p < .001$  (see Table 3). Thus, Hypothesis 1 is supported. There were no gender differences between groups for this hypothesis.

### Hypothesis 2.

This hypothesis predicted that participants in the coercion-male group would score higher (answer more questions correctly) on the Scenario measure than participants in the coercion-female group based upon their score on the coercion scale of the Scenario Measure. A higher score on the coercion scale indicates that the participant recognized that the character's behavior in the vignette was not appropriate. Participants in the coercion-male group ( $M = 4.65$ ,  $SD = 1.39$ ) scored statistically significantly lower on the Scenario Measure than participants in the coercion-female group ( $M = 5.67$ ,  $SD = 1.64$ ),  $t(103) = 3.436$ ,  $p < .001$  (see Table 3). These findings indicate that the participants in the coercion-female group answered more questions correctly on the coercion scale of the Scenario Measure. Therefore, although these findings are statistically significant, Hypothesis 2 is not supported. There were no gender differences between groups for this hypothesis.

### Hypothesis 3.

This hypothesis predicted that fewer participants in the coercion groups would answer the acquiescence question correctly when compared with the no coercion group. Participants in the coercion groups answered the acquiescence question incorrectly statistically significantly more often than participants in the no coercion group,  $\chi^2(1, N = 153) = 92.324, p < .001$  (see Table 3). Hence, statistical results support Hypothesis 3. A Chi-square test was conducted to examine differences between the coercion groups. There was no statistically significant difference between these groups.

The Self-Report Measure contained two questions to examine reports of acquiescence in participants. A majority of the participants (73.3%) reported acquiescing to their partners' sexual requests even though they did not feel like being intimate. There were no gender differences between participants on this item. Participants also reported saying no to a sexual interaction when they actually meant yes ( $n = 51$ ). Though there is no statistical difference between gender groups, it may be said that a trend

exists showing that more women than men report saying no when they mean yes to a sexual interaction.

Table 3 Scenario Measure Results

Coercion Scale	No Coercion		Coercion Male		Coercion Female		t-test for differences between groups	t-test for gender differences between groups
	<u>M</u>	(SD)	<u>M</u>	(SD)	<u>M</u>	(SD)		
H1	7.8	(2.06)	4.65	(1.39)	5.67	(1.64)	$t(153) = 8.797, p < .001$	n.s.
H2	7.8	(2.06)	4.65	(1.39)	5.67	(1.64)	$t(103) = 3.436, p < .001$	n.s.
Acquiescence (Q7)	<u>n</u>	(%correct)	<u>n</u>	(%correct)	<u>n</u>	(%correct)	Chi-square test for coercion and no coercion groups	Chi-square test of gender differences between groups
H3	46	(92.00%)	5	(4.90%)	7	(6.80%)	$\chi^2 (1, N = 153) = 92.324, p < .001$	n.s.

\* no significance

### Research Question 1.

This research question asked whether there are statistically significant differences between the responses for White and Non-White participants. As discussed above, there were not enough participants in the Non-White category to run any statistical analyses.

### Research Question 2.

This research question predicted that participants will report having coerced their partners on the Self-Report Measure. The Self-Report Measure shows that 33.3% of participants ( $n = 49$ ) reported coercing their partner (Table 4). While both men ( $n = 27$ ) and women ( $n = 22$ ) reported emotionally coercing their partners, men were statistically significantly more likely to coerce their partners than women,  $\chi^2(1, N = 147) = 14.564, p < .001$ . Of those participants who reported emotionally coercing their partners ( $n = 49$ ), 92.6% of men ( $n = 25$ ) and 77.3% of women ( $n = 17$ ) reported that the sexual interaction took place. There were no statistically significant gender differences for participants reporting that the sexual interaction took place.

### Research Question 3.

This research question predicted that participants would report having been coerced by their partners on the Self-Report Measure. The Self-Report Measure shows that 53.1% of participants ( $n = 78$ ) reported being emotionally coerced. Both men ( $n = 24$ ) and women ( $n = 54$ ) reported being emotionally coerced, however there are no gender differences between those who reported being coerced,  $p > .05$ . Of those participants who reported being emotionally coerced ( $n = 78$ ), 100% of men ( $n = 24$ ) and 77.8% of women ( $n = 42$ ) reported that the sexual interaction took place. Women were statistically significantly more likely to report that the coercion resulted in the sexual interaction,  $\chi^2(1, N = 78) = 6.303, p < .01$ . For participants who reported a sexual interaction taking place as a result of coercing their partner or being coerced, 44.4% ( $n = 32$ ), reported that the interaction took place while either the participant and/or their partner were under the influence of drugs or alcohol. There were no statistically significant differences due to gender of the participant. See Table 4.

Table 4 Self-Report Measure Results

	Males			Females			Chi-square test
	<u>n</u>	(%total)	(%yes)	<u>n</u>	(%total)	(%yes)	
Q1 Coercer	27	(18.4%)	(55.1%)	22	(15.0%)	(44.9%)	$\chi^2 (1, N = 147) = 14.564,$ $p < .001$
Q2 Sexual Interaction	25	(51.1%)	(59.5%)	17	(34.7%)	(40.5%)	*n.s
Q3 Coerced	24	(16.3%)	(30.8%)	54	(36.7%)	(69.2%)	n.s.
Q4 Sexual Interaction	24	(30.8%)	(100.0%)	42	(53.8%)	(63.6%)	$\chi^2 (1, N = 78) = 6.303,$ $p < .01$
Q5 Under the Influence	11	(15.3%)	(34.4%)	21	(29.2%)	(65.6%)	n.s.
Q6 Said No, Meant Yes	13	(9.0%)	(25.5%)	38	(26.2%)	(74.5%)	n.s.
Q7 Acquiescence	34	(23.3%)	(31.8%)	73	(50.0%)	(68.2%)	n.s.

\*no significance

### *Correlation findings for the Scenario Measures*

It was expected that the paired questions in the Scenario Measure (questions 1, 2, 5 and 6) would correlate positively for the no coercion group, and negatively for both of the coercion groups. Pearson's correlation tests were run on each group to test for measure validity. The results are as follows. For the no coercion groups, all four question pairs are correlated positively as expected with three of the four pairs reaching significance ( $p > .01$ ). For the female coercer group, two of the four question pairs were negatively correlated (question 1 and 5); the others were positively correlated (questions 2 and 6). Finally, for the male coercer group, only one of the four question pairs were negatively correlated (question 6). Due to the lack of expected negative correlation for the coercion groups, the data results need to be treated cautiously.

## Chapter V

### Discussion

The analysis for this study revealed the following findings. Hypothesis One, that participants will view emotional coercion as appropriate based on their score on the coercion scale of the Scenario Measure was supported. Hypothesis Three, that participants will not be able to tell the difference between acquiescence and true consent in the Scenario Measure was also supported. Hypothesis Two, which states that participants in the male coercer groups will score higher on the Scenario measure than participants in the female coercer groups was not supported. The findings for all three hypotheses were statistically significant.

The first hypothesis stating that participants will view emotional coercion as appropriate as evidenced by their score on the coercion scale of the Scenario Measures was supported. Participants in the coercion groups, regardless of gender, did poorly on the coercion scale. Less than half the participants in the coercion groups got more than five answers correct. The fact that participants in the coercion groups did so poorly on the coercion scale of the Scenario Measures indicates that they found the use of coercion an appropriate means to a sexual end. However, does the

finding imply that participants found the behavior appropriate and condoned it? It is doubtful that if asked whether coercing their partners was acceptable, many of these same participants would say yes.

Rather, participants may have simply failed to see the behavior as *inappropriate*. Failure to see the behavior as inappropriate speaks more to an ignorance of what coercion is or the participants' inexperience with sexual dating relationships. While not present in the Scenario Measure vignettes, the use of drugs and alcohol can further decrease a person's ability to see coercive behavior as inappropriate. A majority of participants who reported on the Self-Report as having coerced or having been coerced also reported that the sexual interaction took place. Of these participants, nearly 45% (n = 32) reported that they or their partners were under the influence of drugs or alcohol at the time.

The implications of this hypothesis's finding, and specifically the idea that participants do not see the coercive behavior as inappropriate, can be linked to the findings of the third hypothesis. The third hypothesis states that participants will not be able to tell the difference between acquiescence and true consent on the Scenario Measures. Spitzberg (1998) wrote that true consent can

only exist when both knowledge and free choice are present. The majority of the participants in the coercion groups could not tell the difference between acquiescence and true consent. This finding is further supported by the analysis of the Self-Report Measure, which found 73.3% (n = 107) of participants reported acquiescing to their partner's sexual requests. Furthermore, more than one-third of participants (n = 51) also reported giving token resistance (saying no, when they meant yes or maybe). This could contribute to some of the confusion surrounding the issue of consent. In short, no does not always mean no, at least in the minds of these participants.

While we cannot discount the fact that some people readily and knowledgably utilize coercion in sexual situations (Russell & Oswald, 2002) ignorance may be at the center of coercion for most individuals (Hogben & Watermen, 2000; Spitzberg, 1998). One-third (n = 49) of participants reported coercing their partners on the Self-Report Measure. However, over one-half (n = 78) reported being coerced. It could be that this sample included a large number of people who have never coerced their partners; however a more likely scenario is that only one-third of participants *realized* they coerced their partners. This is supported by research by

Hogben and Waterman (2000) which found that participants may not identify their behavior as coercive. Therefore, the real number of participants in this study who have coerced their partners may be much higher.

Relating back to the Scenario Measure vignettes, the story states that the coerced partner did not want to be sexually intimate with their partner but did so anyway. Participants may have seen this exchange as token resistance (saying no but meaning yes or maybe). Compounding the issue is the fact that the story indicated that the coerced partner never verbally said no to the second overture by their partner. This lack of a definitive verbal statement may have led participants to view the coerced partner as consenting when, in fact, consent was not possible due to the presence of coercion (Spitzberg, 1998).

Again there appears to be a lack of understanding surrounding the issues of coercion, acquiescence and consent. It is important that education be given regarding these issues. Most people are aware of the blatant issues surrounding sexual relationships (consensual sex vs. forced sex or rape), but few people have a clear understanding of the gray areas where situations like coercion exist. Many may believe that coercion is a

normal part of the dating scene. They may not recognize coercion as inappropriate when it occurs or when it is presented in a story.

Finally, the second hypothesis actually turned out the complete opposite from what was expected. Hypothesis Two stated that the participants in the male coercer groups would score higher on the Scenario Measure than participants in the female coercer groups based on their scores on the coercion scale of the Scenario Measures. The original hypothesis was predicated on traditional American gender roles picturing men as the sexual aggressor. In this way, it was thought that the participants would view men more negatively simply because they are men. What was not expected was the overall acceptance of a male aggressor's behavior being seen as so ordinary as to not draw much notice, let alone outrage on the part of the participants. In other words, the old adage of "boys will be boys" seems to be relevant today.

The behavior of the female coercer stood out to the participants because it challenged the traditional gender role portraying a woman as conquest, as prey, as victim. Therefore, although both vignettes were identical in content, when a female is the coercer, the inappropriateness of the coercive behavior becomes more apparent and recognizable. Conversely, for the

male coercer, the behavior is seen as “normal” or what is expected from a man in a dating relationship. The fact that there were no genders differences for this finding shows that participants of both sexes found the female coercer vignette to be more abnormal when compared to the male coercer vignette.

It is possible that participants saw the male coercer as more appropriate or at least justifiable because the female character invited the male character up to her room. According to Cook (1995), displaying such sexually forward behavior creates a situation where coercion is appropriate or even expected in the eyes of the participant. Furthermore, the fact that the story characters are described as being sexually intimate for the five months prior, could influence whether participants saw the act as coercion at all. Rather, they may have seen the behavior as completely acceptable for a couple that has been sexually intimate in the past (Livingston, et. al., 2004; Lottes & Weinberg, 1997).

The implication of this finding points to the need for education not only concerning coercion but also education that challenges some of these traditional gender roles in dating relationships. If both men and women are seeing coercive behavior on the part of men as appropriate or normal, then the likelihood is

that each would grow up with distorted views on what constitutes a loving, healthy relationship. Though research shows that people tend to outgrow coercive behavior, this may not be before more permanent damage is done. Research also shows that coercion victims experience negative consequences as a result of their coercive experience (Abbey, et. al., 2004; Zweg & Barber, 1997).

A person who has been coerced carries that emotionally scarring experience into their future relationships. For some individuals coercion is rarely a one time occurrence, so chances are they will experience several instances of coercion in one or more relationships (Fisher, Cullen & Turner, 2002). This could continue unabated throughout a person's entire dating experience. Individuals could then take these unhealthy, damaging experiences and habits into their marriages.

#### *Theoretical Considerations*

The theoretical implications of the findings are more relatable to the Self-Report Measure due to the fact that the participants are reporting on their own behaviors. Within the sample population, there are participants who report being coercers and coerces (sometimes both). Of the one-third who reported coercing their partners, nearly all of the male participants

(n = 25) and three-quarters of the female participants (n = 17) reported that the sexual interaction took place. By simply admitting their culpability in the coercion, conflict theory may be utilized by the assertion that the participants position as superordinate provided what they wanted/needed sexually from the relationship. Furthermore, in looking at the finding regarding the female coercer being more easily recognized than their male counterpart, it appears as though the participants are more forgiving of a male superordinate than a female one when coercion is present.

In terms of social exchange theory, which assists in explaining the behaviors of the coerced's position, participants seemed to be in a dependent position with their partners. Of those who reported being coerced, all of the male participants (n = 24) and over 60% of the female participants (n = 42) reported that the sexual interaction took place. This finding is consistent with research by Muehlenhard and Cook (1988) which found that men were more likely to engage in unwanted sex. Though the question as to why the participant submitted to their partner's pressure is not asked, it can be assumed that the coerced partner felt that the detriment of being coerced was outweighed by some greater

benefit. If the coerced participant did not feel this was so, it is reasonable to assume that the sexual interaction would not have taken place. For those participants that reported drugs and alcohol were involved, it can be assumed that, for some coercees, this is the reason the participant submitted.

For men, who reported higher rates of submission to the pressure from a partner, the submission could have occurred to help preserve their image as a “man’s man” not only to their partner but to their peers as well. Men are more greatly influenced by the pressure to maintain society’s standard of what a “real” man is (Muehlenhard & Cook, 1988). When coupled with the reality that women are more likely to coerce their partners by using manipulations, threats and name calling (Russell & Oswald, 2002; Struckman-Johnson & Struckman-Johnson, 1994), you have a recipe for humiliation that could easily be avoided by the man simply giving into the pressure rather than being branded as impotent, or worse, gay (Muehlenhard & Cook, 1995).

From the findings in the Self-Report Measure and, to a lesser extent, the Scenario Measure the participants in this study seem to fit into the presented conflict theory (coercer) and social exchange theory (coercee).

### *Limitations of the Current Study*

Although this research found few gender differences on the measures, this is not definitive. While it may be possible that many of the gender differences which used to exist, have simply faded away, one cannot say this with certainty. Further research should have a more equal distribution of participants by gender than the current project. Additionally, no statistics could be run on race due to the small numbers of non-White participants. Based on the research available, there does not seem to be a racial difference concerning coercion, however those studies are hardly expansive. Both the gender and race limitations could be addressed by purposely recruiting or setting up quotas for participants.

Aside from the sample concerns regarding the gender and racial make-up of the participants, the way in which the sample was obtained is also a limitation. The sample for this study was a convenience sample of university students that would most likely not generalize to the greater population or even, perhaps, to other university students. In order to find a truly representative sample, a general population study of randomly selected participants would be necessary.

The question concerning drug and alcohol use was not broken out enough and requires that the participant self-reports about their own behavior and their partner's behavior as well. This makes it impossible to determine how many participants were under the influence when the coercive act (either to them or by them) occurred and how many simply had partners who were under the influence. Research shows that drugs and alcohol is a factor in many coercive situations, so it may be assumed that at least some of the participants were self-reporting that they, and not their partners, were under the influence of drugs and/or alcohol.

The decision to not link the responses of the Self-Report Measure to the responses on the Scenario Measure did limit what could be gleaned from the data. To directly link these measures would have had a detrimental effect on the honesty of the participants and would have greatly increased the incidence of social desirability bias. However, in reviewing the limitations of not linking these measures, it seems a balance could be struck by linking only what coercion group the participant belonged to.

The measures create their own limitations. Since both measures were created by the researcher for the purposes of this

study and the previous undergraduate study, they do not have the benefit of a true pilot test or peer review. Therefore, the validity and the accuracy of the measures cannot be guaranteed. As previously mentioned, the vignettes for the Scenario Measure did show good face validity in terms of how closely they describe real dating situations. Unfortunately, preliminary validity testing using the Pearson's correlation test showed that some items in the coercion groups did not correlate as expected (negatively). For this reason, caution must be used when interpreting the data. Further testing on validity and reliability of the measures is needed.

A further limitation is a lack of research available on the topic of coercion. Though many studies cover certain aspects of coercion within a large sexuality study, very few cover only coercion. This had made a comparison of findings difficult. This limitation will be addressed in the next section.

#### *Recommendations for Future Research*

Though the findings of this study and other studies shed light on the issues surrounding emotional coercion in dating relationships, they are far from exhaustive or irrefutable. More research is needed on this topic not only in regards to heterosexual relationships but for homosexual relationships as well. It is

recommended that more studies be conducted with gay and lesbian populations to determine if the findings of previous studies will hold true for same-sex relationships. In researching this topic, not one article addressing coercion in same-sex dating relationships could be found. There are some articles available that discuss institutional or situational homosexuality and address coercion, however as those situations are not indicative of a normal gay or lesbian relationship, they can hardly be used to support the assertion that coercion occurs or does not occur in gay and lesbian relationships. More research with this population is needed.

In researching this study, it became evident that there is an obvious gap in the literature pertaining to emotional coercion in non-White relationships. While many researchers examined their data for differences between White and non-White participants, the number of non-White participants was often small so little information could be inferred from the data. Many researchers seemed to conduct race comparisons simply as an afterthought as opposed to purposefully recruiting equal numbers of White and non-White participants. As each race and ethnicity carries with it its own culture and identity, studies that examine more racial categories are needed.

## *Conclusions*

It is clear from this study that coercion not only exists but could be considered rampant among dating couples. No longer limited to men, women are also utilizing coercion to attain what they want in a sexual relationship, though “approval” for such behavior in women is somewhat lacking. It appears as though people utilize coercion without understanding either what it is or how it might hurt their partner. Too many people may lack an understanding as to what constitutes true consent to a sexual interaction. Participants in this study were not able to appropriately identify acquiescence in the vignettes and reported that they themselves have acquiesced as well as offered up token resistance to sexual overtures.

Research has found that adolescents experience coercion as young as secondary school age. Furthermore, coercion at this age may lead to sexual acts other than intercourse (Jackson, Cram & Seymour, 2000; Murray & Henjum, 1993). Because of this, it is suggested that awareness education begin earlier preferably before children would reach the age where they are engaging in dating activities. Given the delicate subject matter, education through

community-based programs may be a more practical venue than school-based programs and curricula.

Given the findings of this study, it seems that special attention should be paid to the breaking down the stereotypical gender roles and discouraging the use of token resistance. It is important for women to realize that being sexually active is not necessarily negative. It may be more appropriate to say yes to a sexual relationship, rather than offering up token resistance so that they can be “conquered”. Conversely, men should be taught that not having sex does not make them less manly. Women and men often do not seem to realize the damage that can occur with the use of token resistance. If you say no and mean yes, how is anyone ever to know when you really mean no? Given the rates of acquiescence occurring in this study, it is a source for concern.

Clinicians and counselors should also be educated concerning coercion. They must know how to recognize coercion when they hear it described because, chances are, their client may not recognize it themselves or at the least their clients may not be able to label their experience as coercion. Prevention of coercion is preferred, however, treatment is equally important (though not completely necessary), if the individual who has been coerced is to

go on to healthy future relationships. Education and awareness about coercion and its ramifications is needed to help men and women make healthy sexual choices for the good of themselves and their partners.

## Appendix 1: Informed Consent Form

### Informed Consent Form: Emotional Attitudes in Sexual Dating Relationships

I state that I am over the age of 18 and wish to participate in this study on Emotional Attitudes in Sexual Dating Relationships that is being conducted by Dr. Roger Rubin and Amy Sterner in the Department of Family Studies at the University of Maryland, College Park.

The purpose of this study is to assess undergraduate college students' attitudes about sexual dating relationships both in scenario and personal experiences.

I will be asked to read a short scenario that describes a typical couple in a sexual dating relationship and then answer questions about what I read. I will then be asked to fill out a self-report questionnaire that asks about my personal experiences in dating relationships. I understand that the self-report questionnaire is optional and I will not be penalized if I choose not to complete it.

All information collected in this study is confidential to the extent permitted by law. I understand that the information I provide will be grouped with the information other participants provide for reporting and presentation. I understand that my name will not be used and that this signed consent form will not be paired with the completed questionnaires in any way. I further understand that

the data from the scenario questionnaire will not be paired with the data from the self-report questionnaire.

When reading the scenarios, the participants should experience no greater distress than they would if they would read about sexual dating relationships in a novel or textbook. I understand that I will be provided with the telephone number for the University's Counseling Center should I become upset about the scenario and questions I have read.

This study is not designed to help me personally but to help the investigators learn more about emotional attitudes in sexual dating relationships. I understand that I am free to ask questions and/or withdraw from participation in this study at any time without penalty.

Contact Information:

**Principal Investigator:** Dr. Roger Rubin, 301-405-4004

**Student Investigator:** Amy L. Sterner, 301-498-7478

**University Counseling Center:**

301-314-7651 (voice/TTY: 301-314-7682 or 301-314-7683)

8:30am to 9pm, Mon- Thurs. and 8:30am to 4:30pm on Fri.

Name of Subject \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of Subject \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix 2: No Coercion Condition

### *Male Initiates:*

Mary and John are both juniors at the university. They have been dating for 7 months. Mary and John have a good relationship even though they sometimes argue. They have been sexually active for 5 months. It's Saturday night and the couple has just gotten back from a late movie.

Mary has a single room in the dorm and both Mary and John decided together to sleep there tonight. After getting ready for bed, John initiates sexual contact and Mary agrees. Both John and Mary fall asleep right afterwards.

### *Female Initiates:*

Mary and John are both juniors at the university. They have been dating for 7-months. Mary and John have a good relationship even though they sometimes argue. They have been sexually active for 5 months. It's Saturday night and the couple has just gotten back from a late movie.

Mary has a single room in the dorm and both Mary and John decided together to sleep there tonight. After getting ready for bed, Mary initiates sexual contact and John agrees. Both Mary and John fall asleep right afterwards.

### Appendix 3: Mild Coercion Condition

#### *Male Initiates*

Mary and John are both juniors at the university. They have been dating for 7-months. Mary and John have a good relationship even though they sometimes argue. They have been sexually active for 5 months. It's Saturday night and the couple has just gotten back from a late movie.

On the walk home, Mary and John had an argument about what they were going to do the next weekend. Mary has a single room in the dorm and both John and Mary had decided together to sleep there before they left for the movie. Before they reached the dorm, the couple compromised about their plans for the weekend, although Mary is still a little upset with John. Mary wants to be by herself but rather than provoke another argument, she lets John come up to her room.

After getting ready for bed, John initiates sexual contact with Mary. Mary turns him down. At this point John says, "Geez, Mary! I can't believe you're going to punish me for that petty argument. That really hurts me!" Mary feels guilty and is sexually intimate with John even though she still doesn't feel like being so.

Afterwards, John goes right to sleep but Mary tosses and turns for about 30 minutes before she also falls asleep.

### *Female Initiates*

Mary and John are both juniors at the university. They have been dating for 7-months. Mary and John have a good relationship even though they sometimes argue. They have been sexually active for 5 months. It's Saturday night and the couple has just gotten back from a late movie.

On the walk home, Mary and John had an argument about what they were going to do the next weekend. Mary has a single room in the dorm and both John and Mary had decided together to sleep there before they left for the movie. Before they reached the dorm, the couple compromised about their plans for the weekend, although John is still a little upset with Mary. John wants to be by himself but rather than provoke another argument, he goes with Mary up to her room.

After getting ready for bed, Mary initiates sexual contact with John. John turns her down. At this point Mary says, "Geez, John! I can't believe you're going to punish me for that petty argument. That really hurts me!" John feels guilty and is sexually intimate with Mary even though he doesn't feel like being so. Afterwards,

Mary goes right to sleep but John tosses and turns for about 30 minutes before he also falls asleep.

#### Appendix 4: Strong Coercion Condition

##### *Male Initiates*

Mary and John are both juniors at the university. They have been dating for 7-months. Mary and John have a good relationship even though they sometimes argue. They have been sexually active for 5 months. It's Saturday night and the couple has just gotten back from a late movie.

On the walk home, Mary and John had an argument about what they were going to do the next weekend. Mary has a single room in the dorm and both John and Mary had decided together to sleep there before they left for the movie. Before they reached the dorm, the couple compromised about their plans for the weekend, although Mary is still a little upset with John. Mary wants to be by herself but rather than provoke another argument, she lets John come up to her room.

After getting ready for bed John initiates sexual contact with Mary. Mary turns him down. At this point John says, "Geez, Mary! I can't believe you're going to punish me for that petty argument. That really hurts me!" John gets out of bed and paces the room. "I don't know why you say you love me! If you loved me, you wouldn't make me beg." At this point John starts putting his

clothes back on and says, "If you don't love me enough to show it, maybe it's time I find someone who will!"

Mary says, "I do love you, John. Please come back to bed; you don't have to leave." John gets undressed again and gets back in bed. This time when John initiates sexual contact with Mary, she is sexually intimate with him even though she still doesn't feel like being so. Afterwards, John goes right to sleep but Mary tosses and turns for almost an hour before she also falls asleep.

#### *Female Initiates*

Mary and John are both juniors at the university. They have been dating for 7-months. Mary and John have a good relationship even though they sometimes argue. They have been sexually active for 5 months. It's Saturday night and the couple has just gotten back from a late movie.

On the walk home, Mary and John had an argument about what they were going to do the next weekend. Mary has a single room in the dorm and both John and Mary had decided together to sleep there before they left for the movie. Before they reached the dorm, the couple compromised about their plans for the weekend, although John is still a little upset with Mary. John wants to be by

himself but rather than provoke another argument, he goes with Mary up to her room.

After getting ready for bed Mary initiates sexual contact with John. John turns her down. At this point Mary says, "Geez, John! I can't believe you're going to punish me for that petty argument. That really hurts me!" Mary gets out of bed and paces the room. "I don't know why you say you love me! If you loved me, you wouldn't make me beg." At this point Mary starts putting her clothes back on and says, "If you don't love me enough to show it, then maybe it's time I find someone who will. I want you to leave!"

John says, "I do love you, Mary. Please come back to bed; I don't want to leave." Mary gets undressed again and gets back in bed. This time when Mary initiates sexual contact with John, he is sexually intimate with her even though he still doesn't feel like being so. Afterwards, Mary goes right to sleep but John tosses and turns for almost an hour before he also falls asleep.



7. Did both Mary and John consent to the sexual interaction?

YES

NO

I DON'T KNOW

8. How common is this type of scenario on this or any college campus?

Very Common  
1

2

Somewhat Common  
3

4

Not Common  
5

I Don't Know

Demographic Information

Age\_\_\_\_\_

Class rank      Fr                      So                      Jr                      Sr  
(please circle one)

Gender\_\_\_\_\_

Race (optional)

White                      Black/African-American                      Asian Descent

Hispanic/Latino                      Native American                      Pacific Islander

Other\_\_\_\_\_ (Please specify)

When you are finished with this questionnaire, please fold it in half along with the scenario you have read. If you wish to complete the self-report inventory, please do so now. When everyone is finished with his or her questionnaires, you will be asked to place this questionnaire in **Box A.**

## Appendix 6: Self-Report Measure

### Self Report Inventory

This is a self-report questionnaire designed to assess your own experiences. This questionnaire is completely optional. If you do not want to do the questionnaire you will not be penalized. If you choose to fill out this questionnaire, you may skip any question[s] you feel are too personal. However, it would be helpful to this research if you would complete as many items as possible.

1. Have you ever emotionally pressured a partner into a sexual interaction?  
YES NO
2. If YES, did the sexual interaction take place?  
YES NO
3. Have you ever been emotionally pressured by a partner during a sexual interaction?  
YES NO
4. If YES, did the sexual interaction take place?  
YES NO
5. If YES did the sexual interaction take place while you or your partner were under the influence of alcohol or drugs?  
Alcohol Drugs Both None
6. Have you ever said NO to a sexual interaction with your partner and meant YES or MAYBE?  
YES NO
7. Have you ever agreed to a sexual interaction with your partner when you did not feel like being sexually intimate?  
YES NO
8. If a man asks a woman on a date and pays for everything, is he entitled to any sexual interaction later?  
Absolutely not Maybe Yes, of course
9. If a woman asks a man on a date and pays for everything, is she entitled to any sexual interaction later?  
Absolutely not Maybe Yes, of course
10. Whose responsibility is it to decide if a sexual interaction will take place?  
The Man The Woman Both

11. If you “sleep over” at a partner’s home/dorm room, do you expect to have a sexual interaction with that partner?

Absolutely not            Maybe            Yes, of course

Demographic Information

Age \_\_\_\_\_

Class rank      Fr            So            Jr            Sr  
(please circle one)

Gender \_\_\_\_\_

Race (optional)

White            Black/African-American            Asian Descent

Hispanic/Latino            Native American            Pacific Islander

Other \_\_\_\_\_(Please Specify)

When you are finished with this self-report inventory, please fold it in half. If you have not completed the scenario questionnaire, please do so now. When everyone is finished with his or her questionnaires, you will be asked to place this questionnaire in **Box B.**

## Appendix 7: Written Explanation of Study's Purpose and Hypotheses

Thank you for participating in this study. As you were informed in the consent form, this study was about emotional attitudes in sexual dating relationships. More specifically this study was aimed at assessing the participants' attitudes about the use of emotional coercion within sexual dating relationships. Emotional coercion can include verbal manipulation, threats to leave an uncooperative partner and making the uncooperative partner feel guilty for their resistance.

The scenarios you read and questions that followed were designed to assess your attitudes about the use of emotional coercion in dating relationships. The optional self-report inventory that followed was designed to assess the prevalence and circumstances of the occurrence of emotional coercion on this campus.

While each participant only received one scenario to read, there were a total of six scenarios: no coercion-male initiates, no coercion-female initiates, mild coercion-male initiates, mild coercion-female initiates, strong coercion-male initiates and strong

coercion-female initiates. The scenarios were handed out to participants in random order.

The hypotheses for this study are as follows:

1. Traditional college aged students will view emotional coercion that leads to a sex act as an appropriate means to a sexual end.
2. Participants will view male initiators more negatively than female initiators when coercion is present.
3. White subjects will not differ significantly from non-White subjects on the two measures.
4. Participants will not be able to distinguish between true consent and acquiescence within the scenario measures.

It is possible that after your participation in today's study you may feel upset by some of the things you have read. If you become upset, please contact the University's Counseling Center at 301-314-7651, (voice/TTY at 301-314-7682 or 7683) from 8:30am-9pm, Monday through Thursday and 8:30am-4:30pm on Fridays.

Again, I would like to thank you for your participation. If you have any questions regarding this study, please call either the student investigator, Amy Sterner, at 301-498-7478 or the principal investigator, Dr. Roger Rubin, at 301-405-4004.

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