

Chapter 28

Psychological Force in Sexual Offenses— Forensic and Treatment Implications

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Overview

Anyone who has worked with sexual perpetrators or their victims knows that psychological force always accompanies the physical force of a sexual assault (Johnson, 1992, 1993, 1995, 1998). Sexual assault refers to any forced sexual contact. Examples would include being forced/coerced to be fondled on the genitals; being forced to fondle another's genitals; any forced penetration, oral, anal, or vaginal; being forced to have your clothing removed; being forced to look at someone else nude; being forced to watch pornography together; or being forced to watch the perpetrator have sex with another person. Again, force may involve psychological and/or physical force.

This chapter presents data from two studies concerning the prevalence and types of psychological force used to gain sexual contact. The first study, an attitudinal survey, contains responses from high school students about situations in which they could justify using psychological or physical force to obtain sexual contact from their partner. The second study contains responses from sex offenders identifying the types of psychological and physical force they used when committing their sexual offense.

Types of Force

Physical Force. The two types of force discussed in this chapter are physical and psychological. Physical force is often easier to understand and prove, as there are often

bruises, scratches, or other types of physical evidence present. During date rapes, some common and often overlooked types of physical force occur. One example includes restraining a victim. Restraint may occur by physically holding the victim down or by immobilizing the victim's hands or feet, either with a rope or with the perpetrator's hands.

The body weight of the perpetrator may also serve to restrain the victim when the perpetrator uses a part of his body to pin down the victim. This may also include the perpetrator's leg being placed over the victim's leg or rolling onto the victim using the weight of one's body to restrain the victim. Any part of the body used to hold the victim down constitutes restraint that is a form of physical force.

When working with perpetrators who have used physical force to restrain their victim, I often get the impression that the criminal justice system overlooks and/or minimizes the impact of the physical restraint method uses. For example, it is rare to read a criminal complaint that expresses an accurate representation of the impact of the restraint used to subdue the victim. Further, the impression is often that the victim should have continued to fight back despite the perpetrator's strength and/or physical advantage. In addition, many perpetrators misinterpret the victim's lack of resistance as consent.

When the perpetrator begins to touch his victim against that person's will, this also constitutes physical force. The victim now has to deal with the fact that the perpetrator is unlikely to listen to her saying no. At this point, the victim may believe that any type of resistance may result in greater physical harm in addition to being sexually assaulted.

Another type of physical force that therapists often overlook is a kiss during which the victim is not able to refuse or to scream for help verbally because of the strength or duration of the kiss. The perpetrator's mouth becomes no different from the hand or gag that prevents the victim from sounding her plea for help. These forms of physical force are significant because they suggest that the perpetrator is aware that he is forcing the victim to be sexual and is also preventing the victim from vocally resisting the assault.

Psychological Force. The most overlooked force in sexual abuse is psychological force. Identifying the types of psychological force perpetrators used during their sexual offenses is important for the therapist. Constructing an offense cycle or reoffense prevention plan without understanding the types of force used by the perpetrator would be nearly impossible.

Psychological force occurs throughout sex offenses in many forms. However, this type of force is often difficult to prove because there may be no physical evidence that an individual was psychologically forced into sexual activity. In addition, it often comes down to the victim's word against the perpetrator's. Often, whoever has the better attorney or the more accepted reputation is likely to win the case. There are seven forms of psychological force, and I believe it is imperative for anyone who works with perpetrators or victims of any type of sexual abuse to be aware of and closely assess the type of psychological force that has occurred during the offense. The seven types are:

- Emotional blackmail
- Game playing

- Pressuring
- Boundary violations
- Lying
- Intimidation
- Threats

Emotional blackmail involves using emotions to pressure and trick the victim into being sexual. Common examples include, "If you love me, prove it"; "We have been dating so long and I spent so much money on you, now you owe me sex"; and "Show me how much you care for me." Emotional blackmail plays on the emotions of care, love, respect, and obligation. It also implies that unless sex is forthcoming, the relationship will be affected negatively.

Game playing involves manipulating situations that place the perpetrator at a distinct advantage. A common example is the initiation of a game, such as strip poker, tickling, or wrestling. When the time is right, the perpetrator takes advantage of the situation and begins to sexualize the touch or pressure the victim into being sexual. Game playing and manipulation can include misusing a hug or back rub or laying or sitting next to someone and taking advantage of the closeness to make unwanted sexual advances.

Pressuring involves repeated demands or requests for sexual contact that the victim has already refused. As children, we were all experts at begging and pressuring. Repeating requests was common: "Oh, please, please can't I stay up late," or "Can I have just another cookie, just one." Pressuring in that type of situation was innocent enough. However, when pressuring and begging are used to get sexual contact from one's partner, it becomes abusive and dangerous. Often, the message heard by the victim is that the perpetrator is going to continue to make requests until the victim submits. Furthermore, the perpetrator may do whatever is necessary to isolate the victim, thereby decreasing the likelihood of escaping the situation without being sexual.

Boundary violation involves crossing into someone else's space, making unwanted physical advances, and/or taking advantage of situations to observe someone's body without his or her knowledge or consent. Common examples would include watching someone dress/undress through a window or open doorway and looking down someone's shirt or up their shorts or skirt and may include making repeated requests or gestures of a sexual nature that are unwanted. Boundary violations are typical of sexual harassment. Continuing to ask someone out on a date or for sex when they have already refused constitutes a boundary violation and/or sexual harassment. In addition, it may include being in the victim's bedroom or other personal space and not allowing the victim privacy. Boundary violations also include making requests for sexual contact from someone with whom sexual contact would be inappropriate, such as a friend or coworker, or someone over whom you exercise power or authority.

Lying involves not keeping one's word. It is often used in a date rape situation. Common examples include getting the victim to agree to limited sexual contact but then pressuring her into intercourse. Other forms of lying may include deliberately misrepresenting the degree of emotional commitment in the relationship. The perpetrator may promise a long-term association or even marriage. In the Victorian age, it was a common practice to bring a civil suit against another person for "alienation of affection."

The five types of psychological force discussed above are known as psychological strategies on the continuum of force. These are the most subtle forms of force and we easily overlook and underestimate their powerful effects. Perpetrators use the above five methods of psychological force because they are aware that proving that psychological force was used is difficult. In addition, the perpetrator is aware that the victim will experience confusion and be easily manipulated.

The last two types of psychological manipulation are much more invasive and more believable. The sixth type of psychological force is intimidation. The goal of intimidation is to cause the victim to experience fear; fear not only for her physical and sexual safety but also fear for her life. Examples of intimidation include making statements such as "You'll do this or else," or "If you don't do this, then you'll be sorry." Intimidation can be behavioral, such as clenching of fists, attempts to remove the victim's clothing, or gestures and/or comments that indicate that it will not be acceptable for the victim to refuse the perpetrator in any way. If the victim is aware that the perpetrator has a history of engaging in physically abusive or assaultive behavior or has seen the perpetrator become abusive, the intimidation alone may force the victim to submit.

The last type of psychological force is threat. Threats are direct statements of impending harm. Common examples would include: "If you don't give in, I will take it from you"; "If you don't do this for me, then I will do even more to you later or to your friend." Threats take intimidation one step further by giving an ultimatum. Both threats and intimidation suggest more severe violence; perpetrators who use intimidation and threats are more dangerous and pathological than those who do not. These perpetrators are more comfortable with causing physical and sexual pain and are more likely to become physically assaultive during the sexual assault especially if the victim does not meet their demands.

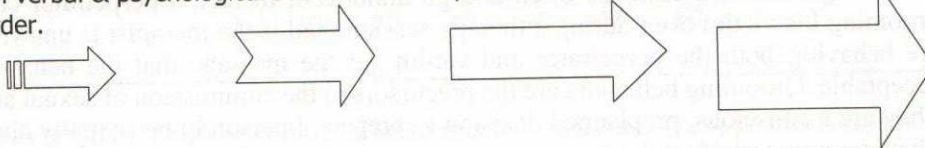
In evaluating the offender or the offense, therapists should understand the seven types of psychological force and address the consequences of each type. It is imperative that we not minimize force we cannot see, that we hold perpetrators accountable for any type of force whether it is physical or psychological. Most of the perpetrators I have worked with have denied using psychological force when initially questioned about their offense behaviors. However, through the treatment process, they could identify the specific types of psychological force they used in their offense. The perpetrators became sensitized to how they were using force in a variety of situations: in a harmless mode of force or coercion, such as talking friends or family into going to a movie other than the one they originally wanted, or a dangerous type of force, such as talking someone into going further sexually than she wishes. The role of pornography is also important to understand the role of psychological force. The use of pornography helps to sensitize the perpetrator of physical and sexual offenses to becoming comfortable and effective in the use of psychological force to gain sexual contact. For more information on the role of pornography, see Johnson (2007); Russell (1993, 1994a, 1994b, 1999); Zillman and Bryant (1986); and Bundy (1984).

On the continuum of force (see Table 28.1), we can see that perpetrators begin offending by using psychological force. The perpetrator gains power and control over his victim from the first six psychological strategies. However, when the psychological strategies no longer allow the perpetrator to feel empowered and satisfied, he will gradually move on to using threats, the seventh strategy. From there, it is a short step to using physical force. It does not matter whether the type of threat

Table 28.1
Continuum of Force

PSYCHOLOGICAL ABUSE	THREATS	PHYSICAL & SEXUAL ABUSE
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Yelling, swearing ➤ Name calling ➤ Put downs ➤ Using personal information to hurt or blackmail ➤ Objectifying ➤ Lying/omission of information ➤ Driving recklessly ➤ Not taking medication as directed ➤ Criticizing, belittling ➤ Harassment or Stalking ➤ Sarcasm ➤ Ordering, controlling, commanding ➤ Jealousy ➤ Explosive anger ➤ Interfering with calls ➤ Limiting friendships ➤ Misspending or withholding financial support 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ To harm self ➤ To harm partner ➤ To harm children ➤ To harm pets ➤ To divorce ➤ To spread rumors ➤ To withhold money ➤ To withhold visitation ➤ To assault others ➤ Displaying weapons ➤ Insinuating harm or use of weapons 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Any physical contact that can or does cause harm ➤ Hitting, slapping, or punching ➤ Choking, strangling, grabbing by neck ➤ Hair pulling ➤ Use of weapon or object ➤ Restraining or blocking ➤ Talking into sex ➤ Pressuring into sexual contact ➤ Coercing into sexual contact ➤ Taking advantage of intoxication for sex ➤ Using threatening statements to get sex ➤ Using sex to make up or calm down ➤ Physically forcing sex ➤ Refusing to accept "no's", hesitations, lack of response ➤ Expecting sex ➤ Exerting the "male privilege" to get own way or sex ➤ Tricking or being deceitful to get own way or sex

Over time, the intensity of the violence will increase . . .
from verbal & psychological abuse to threats, to sexual & physical abuse, even murder.



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was simply to spread rumors or to end the relationship or cause physical harm. A threat is a threat; no matter where it is placed on the continuum of threats, it is dangerous. It is my experience that perpetrators who use threats are far more likely to progress to using physical force. Physical force may be used when threats no longer give the perpetrator the sense of control, empowerment, and satisfaction he needs. This physical abuse may result in the victim's being hit, slapped or restrained, or forced into sexual contact.

Evaluating Grooming Patterns

Language, verbal connotations, certain phrases, gestures, and eye movements may all play a role in the grooming process or during the actual offense. Most offenders are not even aware of how they groomed their victim until they have thoroughly examined their precursor and offense behavior. Examining the grooming process in depth and the behaviors that occurred as part of the offense to identify the type of psychological force is therefore crucial. The data presented offers support that most sex offenders use psychological rather than physical force in the commission of their offense.

In examining grooming patterns, we find that psychological force plays a significant role. Perpetrators attempt to build both a trusting and fear-based relationship with their victim, with an end goal of being able to get sexual contact without significant resistance. For example, when examining incest situations in which the father has sex-

ually abused his daughter, it is common to find that the father increased physical activities with the daughter. Playing sports, tickling, wrestling, spending more time alone with and giving more attention to his daughter, giving hugs and kisses—all seem appropriate activities between father and daughter. However, the sex offender has another agenda: to establish a trusting relationship in which the victim will be accustomed to physical touch and he could easily explain the sexual behavior as an accident. For example, if a father is wrestling with his daughter and decides to slip his hand down her pants and fondle her vagina, he will already have an excuse to justify his actions. In his mind, it may appear easy to explain that while wrestling his hand went to push her off and his hand accidentally slipped down her pants. He did not mean to do it and says it will not happen again.

Another example is when the perpetrator of a date rape often begins by challenging the victim's boundaries until finally either the victim gives up to survive the impending rape or the perpetrator progresses to the use of overwhelming psychological force or the use of physical force. It is imperative that professionals are aware of the different types of psychological strategies involved in the grooming process. Otherwise, it would be next to impossible to hold a perpetrator accountable. Grooming behaviors occur so often and go unnoticed. In fact, a perpetrator can be grooming his victim even during a therapy session, and if the therapist is unaware of the behavior, both the perpetrator and victim get the message that the behavior is acceptable. Grooming behaviors are the precursors to the commission of sexual abuse. They are a conscious, preplanned decision to prepare a person to be sexually abused. They are never accidental.

Survey Results

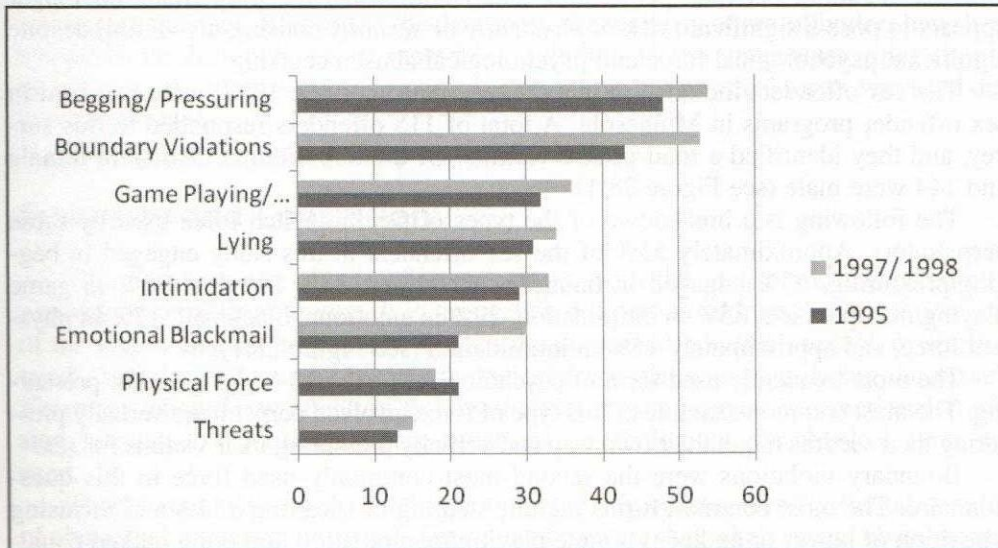
The first study (Johnson, 1995) involved gathering data from adolescents concerning their attitudes about using force to obtain sexual contact in certain situations. Several researchers (Makepeace, 1981; Koss, 1987; Miller & Marshall, 1987) have documented the prevalence of sexual assault within the adolescent population. The beliefs of adolescents concerning date and acquaintance rape affect not only on how sex offenders justify sexual assault but also the acceptance of sexual assault by victims. This survey requested that adolescents respond to statements about the appropriateness of a male using psychological or physical coercion/force to get sexual contact from a female. The primary question that prompted the collection of this data was to learn the attitudes and beliefs of high school students involving coerced and forced sexual activity. The researcher hypothesized that more males than females justify and condone the use of psychological and physical force to attain sexual behavior from their female partners.

Surveys were collected during the 1990–1991 school year. In this study, 13 high schools were included and 1,011 males and 1,062 females between the ages of 15 and 18 were surveyed. Six schools were urban and six were suburban.

The student's answers were then scored according to whether they believed that (1) no pressure/force was appropriate to use in the given situation, (2) the use of psychological pressure/force was appropriate, and (3) the use of physical force was appropriate in the given situation (see Figure 28.1).

Ninety-two percent of the males and females agreed that a woman does not owe

Figure 28.1
Average Percent of Violence



sex as a result of a male spending "a lot of money" on a date. These results were lower than expected. However, 28% of the males and 9% of the female students felt that using psychological force in this situation was appropriate for the male and 1% of both males and females agreed that physical force was appropriate as well.

Twenty-six percent to 58% of the males and 9% to 38% of the females endorsed the use of psychological force in certain situations. One percent to 4% of the males and 1% to 2% of the females endorsed the use of physical force in certain situations. Both males and females supported the use of psychological force in the following situations:

- A partner changes his or her mind after previously agreeing to have sex.
- A male feels that they are teasing him
- A husband wishes to have sex with his wife.

Blaming the victim was a common theme in the responses. Seventy-five percent of the males and 76% of the females responded that they feel pressure from their peer groups to be sexual when they do not want to be. This appears consistent with other research results (Koss, 1987; Muehlenhard, 1988).

The second survey (Johnson, 1997, 1998) gathered data on the specific types of force used by sex offenders. Most perpetrators of physical and sexual violence use psychological force prior to becoming physically and sexually violent, as well as continuing to be psychologically abusive after the abusive incident(s). When working with perpetrators of physical and sexual violence in therapy, therapists should postulate that it is imperative that perpetrators identify the types of psychological force they used and that they give specific examples of how each type of psychological force was used.

These data may be used to facilitate therapist, perpetrator, and court personnel to

develop specific guidelines for identifying the perpetrator's use of psychological force *before* allowing the perpetrator to have contact with his victim. Many therapists have allowed visitation between perpetrator and victim when the perpetrator no longer appears to pose a significant risk of *physically or sexually* abusing his victim, despite significant psychological force and psychological abuse occurring.

The sex offenders included in this study (Johnson, 1997, 1998) were involved in sex offender programs in Minnesota. A total of 115 offenders responded to this survey, and they identified a total of 530 victims. Of the 530 victims, 386 were female and 144 were male (see Figure 28.1).

The following is a breakdown of the types of psychological force used by these perpetrators. Approximately 53% of the sex offenders in this study engaged in begging/pressuring, 53% engaged in boundary violations, 34% in lying, 36% in game playing/manipulation, 35% in intimidation, 29% in emotional blackmail, 17% in physical force, and approximately 15% in intimidation (see Figure 28.1).

The most frequently used form of psychological force was begging and/or pressuring. The most common example of this type of force involved perpetrators verbally pressuring their victims to get their own way and verbally pressuring their victims for sex.

Boundary violations were the second most commonly used force in this questionnaire. The most common forms include stealing or sneaking a kiss and misusing a position of power or authority. Game playing/manipulation and lying ranked equally as the third and fourth most commonly used types of force.

The most frequently used forms of game playing/manipulation included perpetrators playing on victims' feelings to get what they wanted; giving a back rub or massage, then moving hands to genitals; taking advantage of the victim's emotional state (depressed, lonely, or hurting); and wrestling, tickling, or other playful activities before or during sexual contact.

The most frequently used forms of lying included perpetrators telling the victim that "it (abusive behavior) will never happen again," but it does; "I'm doing this because I love you"; "come on in and we'll only talk"; and agreeing to certain sexual behaviors and then going further than agreed.

The fifth type of force used was intimidation. The most frequently used forms included perpetrators placing their hands on their victim's genitals; raising their voice; and standing in their victim's way, preventing escape.

Emotional blackmail and physical force ranked equally fifth and sixth in this study. The most frequently used examples included perpetrators giving a sob story to gain sympathy and then asking for sex to feel better and using statements such as "don't you love me?"; "if you love me, prove it"; and "this means I love you."

The sixth type of force used was physical force. The most frequently used examples included holding down, using restraint, and hitting, slapping, or punching.

The least used type of force involved the use of threats. Specific examples of this type included statements such as, "If you tell, mom(dad) and I will get divorced"; "if you tell, I'll go to jail"; and threatening to end the relationship if the victim does not do as the perpetrator says.

Interestingly, the men who participated in this study would appear not to utilize threats but would engage in other forms of force.

The results of this study indicate that most sex offenders use psychological force rather than physical force in the commission of their crimes. Clinical data and data

from collateral sources such as criminal complaints and police reports appear to support this data.

The results support the premise that sex offenders use psychological force prior to and during their sex offense. As the data show, the majority of sex offenders have been known to be dishonest. Court materials, including victim statements, offer support that in most sex abuse offenses, psychological force, not physical force, was used during the offenses.

This appears to support the premise of this study.

Summary and Conclusion

To summarize the effects of sexual abuse, both the victim and the perpetrator experience significant trauma. It is imperative not only to address the initial concerns of the victim and the perpetrator, such as the emotional, physical, sexual, or spiritual needs, but also to focus on the psychological force that was used during the assault. Therapists should pay attention to how the victim was trapped by emotional confusion, because in most sexual abuse situations, psychological, not physical, force was used.

Therapists must help the victim, not just the perpetrator, identify the other forms of abuse that may have occurred. They must be aware that when sexual abuse occurs, physical, emotional, and psychological abuse occurred as well.

Never can a perpetrator sexually abuse someone without committing physical, psychological, and emotional abuse as well.

Psychological force is perhaps the most commonly type of force and abuse used against victims of battering and sexual offenses. Psychological abuse is also the most damaging type of abuse, and is frequently found to occur with physical and sexual abuse but also occurs as a free-standing form of abuse (Johnson, 1995, 1997, 1998). Interestingly, many male and female adolescents indicated that they condone males using physical or psychological force in certain situations to force sexual contact from a female. These findings were similar to what other researchers have found (e.g., Koss, 1987; Muehlenhard, 1988). Interestingly, even victims included in the Johnson studies (see 1995, 1997, 1998) condoned the use of force to gain sexual contact in certain situations. This acceptance of the use of force for adolescents certainly sets the stage for how these individuals will act as adults.

Johnson (1995, 1997, 1998) identified seven types of force used by abusers and sex offenders. These include emotional blackmail, game playing/manipulation, pressuring/begging, boundary violations, lying, intimidation, and threats. Although these are general categories they help differentiate specific types of verbal and psychological force. In my study (Johnson, 1997, 1998) I utilized a questionnaire with adult male sex offenders incarcerated in prisons in Minnesota: 53% of the offenders engaged in the use of begging/pressuring and boundary violations; 34% utilized lying; 36% engage in game playing/manipulation; 35% engaged in intimidation; 29% engaged in emotional blackmail; 17% engaged in the use of physical force; and 15% utilized threats to gain compliance of their victim(s). Collateral documentation verified the majority of the offender's claims, that most utilized psychological force to manipulate their victim into sexual contact versus the use of physical violence.

The importance of these findings is paramount. Clinicians, law enforcement,

supervising agents, and judges need to take into account that the more common type of force used by sex offenders and even by batterers is unseen, does not leave physical evidence, yet is more damaging than physical or sexual abuse directly.

Finally, intent is often referred to as the reason for why people do what they do, the deliberate behavior. Intent is the goal or reward that is expected as a result of the behavior.

When people make decisions, their behavior implies consent. When a sex offender rapes or an abuser abuses, he made a conscious decision to do so. No different than the person who makes a conscious decision to go to work everyday and pay his or her bills. Intent is a conscious process. Therefore, when a perpetrator commits a sexual assault, rape, or child molestation, he always intend to do so, with deliberate intention. The use of any psychological force, coercion, or physical force is always a conscious choice and the perpetrator is always aware of his use of any type of force. For more on this, see Johnson (2007a, 2007b, 2007c).

When I hear a criminal say "I didn't mean to do it", the hair on the back of my neck stands up. What a stupid, idiotic, delusional statement. Nothing we ever do is unintentional. We may not have wanted to hurt someone the way we did, but our actions were intentional. Even the use of sarcasm and humor are deliberate acts to make fun of and humiliate someone. Sarcasm depends on it. If you verbally abuse someone, you know damn well that the words are like a knife, that your words will hurt the other person.

Keeping the abuse and sex offense cycle in mind (both the same cycles), and understanding the decision making process, it becomes more evident that abusers and sexual offenders are never truly "out-of-control." Abusers invest a significant amount of energy to maintain and increase their escalation. Sex offenders focus their energy on obtaining power and control over their victim. One issue I often have to address in court is the issue of intent. Did someone actually "mean to" or "intend to" abuse, rape, or injure his victim? This is very easy to answer. Yes, abusers and sex offenders intend to abuse or rape and intend to hurt their victim. Every time they abuse, rape, molest, it is intentional.

Abusers and sex offenders are always aware that they are using aggression, force, pressure, or coercion against their victim, to make their victim comply with demands or to injure or put their victim down. Certainly abusers and sex offenders may not label their behavior "abusive," "forced," or in any way "violent" or "coerced," but they are aware that they themselves are in some way escalating and aware to some degree that their victim is fearful or unhappy or being injured, at least on some level. In addition, the offender is always aware that he is escalating and aware that by escalating the psychological and physical force use, increasing his psychological and sexual pleasure.

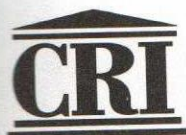
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HANDBOOK OF SEX OFFENDER TREATMENT

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