

Perfect Prey: Coercive Control and Subjugation, A Foundation for Dismissing the Truth

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Abstract : This study assesses the relationship between coercive control and subjugation. Coercive control is the foundation of most domestic violence and a serious public health problem, having significant legal and social justice ramifications. Beyond the physical, it oftentimes is preceded by or motivated by a need for control. Subjugation, as a personality trait and a maladaptive schema, leads individuals to minimize their own needs or wants and, thereby, often to a loss of autonomy, a dismissal of what one might know to be true. This includes a dismissal of the trademarks of an abusive relationship. Subjugation may contribute to a person engaging in or remaining in a coercively controlling relationship. One hundred fifty-four female survivors of domestic violence participated in this study, assessing their own level of subjugation. Participants were limited to individuals who experienced non-physical abuse in their relationships. Subjugation was attributed as a “concern” or greater in 137 of the 154 participants. 11 participants were interviewed to determine their personal experiences in this abusive relationship. Common themes emerged from interviews, including that the participants worked diligently to fix these abusive relationships by regulating their own behaviors and attempting to please the offender. The results indicate a continued need for advocacy and support of this vulnerable population. Further education is indicated for mental health professionals and for individuals in or having left an abusive relationship on how to identify signs of subjugation, thereby empowering individuals to avoid future experiences of abuse.

Keywords : coercive control, intimate partner violence, subjugation, schemas, gender oppression, autonomy, gaslighting

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