

Lesson 4

COERCION

Activity 2

Exercise and Discussion: Coercive Offers and Coercive Conditions

Consider the following questions:

Why might it be hard for a girl to say no to a boy?

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What does gender have to do with it?

Philosopher Alan Wertheimer (2003) gives some cases in which varying degrees of coercion are present. Below are some cases we would like you to think about. Keep in mind that some of these have a heterosexual bias to them. Please rewrite them so that you can consider them from a number of gender perspectives. **You decide if each situation is fair or unfair and discuss why you feel that way.**

1. A boy promises girl a diamond bracelet or pendant if she will have sex
2. A boy promises girl a diamond bracelet or pendant but knows that it will only be cubic zirconium
3. One person promises to love the other forever if she or he has sex
4. A boy threatens that he will end the relationship with his girlfriend if she doesn't have sex with him
5. A girl says to a boy that she'll break up with her boyfriend if this boy, not her boyfriend, spends the night with her – then she doesn't follow through with breaking up with her boyfriend when the other boy spends the night
6. A girl tells a boy who is not her boyfriend that she broke up with her boyfriend even though she didn't in order to have sex with him that night
7. A boy gets angry with his girlfriend when she says she won't have sex with him
8. A boy has spent a lot of money on a girl to take her to prom and a night out. Is there some coercion present for her to give back sexually?
9. A girl is really down in the dumps, with low self-esteem, has been crying all night, and hates herself. If a boy has sex with this girl, is he taking advantage of her?
10. A girl keeps "throwing herself at him," licking his ear, wearing tops that are tighter and tighter, sometimes hugging him without his asking, and wearing low cut shirts bending over purposely to give him a view. Is this an offer or a coercive offer? An offer he can't refuse? Why or why not?
11. A boy tells a boy to have sex with him or he'll tell the principal he cheated on the SAT test.

12. A boy threatens to “out” another boy unless he has sex with him.

Discussion:

What’s a **threat**?

What’s a **coercive offer**?

What is **fraud** or **concealment**?

What is an issue of **competence to consent**?

With regard to offers?

Is it still coercive if the person could only benefit by saying yes but is no worse off if he or she says no?

How coercive are each of these example? In each circumstance, if a person consents to sex, is it consensual, coercive, or somewhere in between? Why?

Take #1 and think now if the girl is from a rich family versus a poor one. Does that change your mind about whether there was coercion? What if the girl in #1 has plenty of jewelry but the girl in #2 has never had anyone ever buy her jewelry, works at the grocery store after school and all weekend, and gives her paycheck to her mom, buying nothing for herself?

What are the differences to you between #1 and #2?

Regarding #3: Many people say that by now everyone should know not to trust promises of love. Is that a fair expectation? Should a girl know better?

Regarding #6: Is it the guy’s responsibility to be suspicious that she might be lying? What if he never finds out that she was lying because the couple actually do break up a couple weeks later? Was she still wrong to have lied? Was it still coercive sex?

Regarding #8: Is seduction different from coercion? How? What do people do to seduce? What’s morally permissible in seduction? What’s not?

Let’s consider some other examples of unequal relationships or power:

1. Someone offers to give someone a million dollars for sex. Is that wrong?
2. The president comes on to an intern
3. A famous rock singer comes on to a groupie
4. A woman marries a man for his money, knowing she’ll have sex with him in exchange for the perks of being a trophy wife