

The Manipulative Presentation Techniques of Controlling and Coercive Offenders

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Control and coercion

Controlling or Coercive Behaviour in an Intimate or Family Relationship

Statutory Guidance Framework

December 2015

12. The cross-Government definition of domestic violence and abuse¹ outlines controlling or coercive behaviour as follows:

- **Controlling behaviour is:** a range of acts designed to make a person subordinate and/or dependent by isolating them from sources of support, exploiting their resources and capacities for personal gain, depriving them of the means needed for independence, resistance and escape and regulating their everyday behaviour.
- **Coercive behaviour is:** a continuing act or a pattern of acts of assault, threats, humiliation and intimidation or other abuse that is used to harm, punish, or frighten their victim.”²

Project aims

- Identify the manipulative behaviours of coercive and controlling individuals
 - Develop a catalogue of suspect influence techniques
 - Identify any existing defences against influencing



Identifying the influencing behaviours of suspects

Stage 1: Qualitative analysis of transcripts testing (and refining) themes from the literature against the data

Process:

1. Identify potentially relevant frameworks
2. Identify commonalities and synthesise themes
3. Test themes against data, adjust where necessary

Stage 2: Quantitative analysis (proximity analysis) to determine which themes tend to co-occur

Literature review

- Review of existing literature:
 - Use of real interviews is very rare
 - Studies using observed interviews are usually old
 - Studies with students usually give limited utility (e.g. How does a strategy to try to appear decisive translate to actual behaviour?)

Identify potentially relevant frameworks

Identify existing frameworks of influencing behaviours from different contexts:

- 'Techniques of Neutralization' (Sykes & Matza, 1957) – Juvenile delinquency
- 'Impression management' (Bolino & Turnley, 1999)

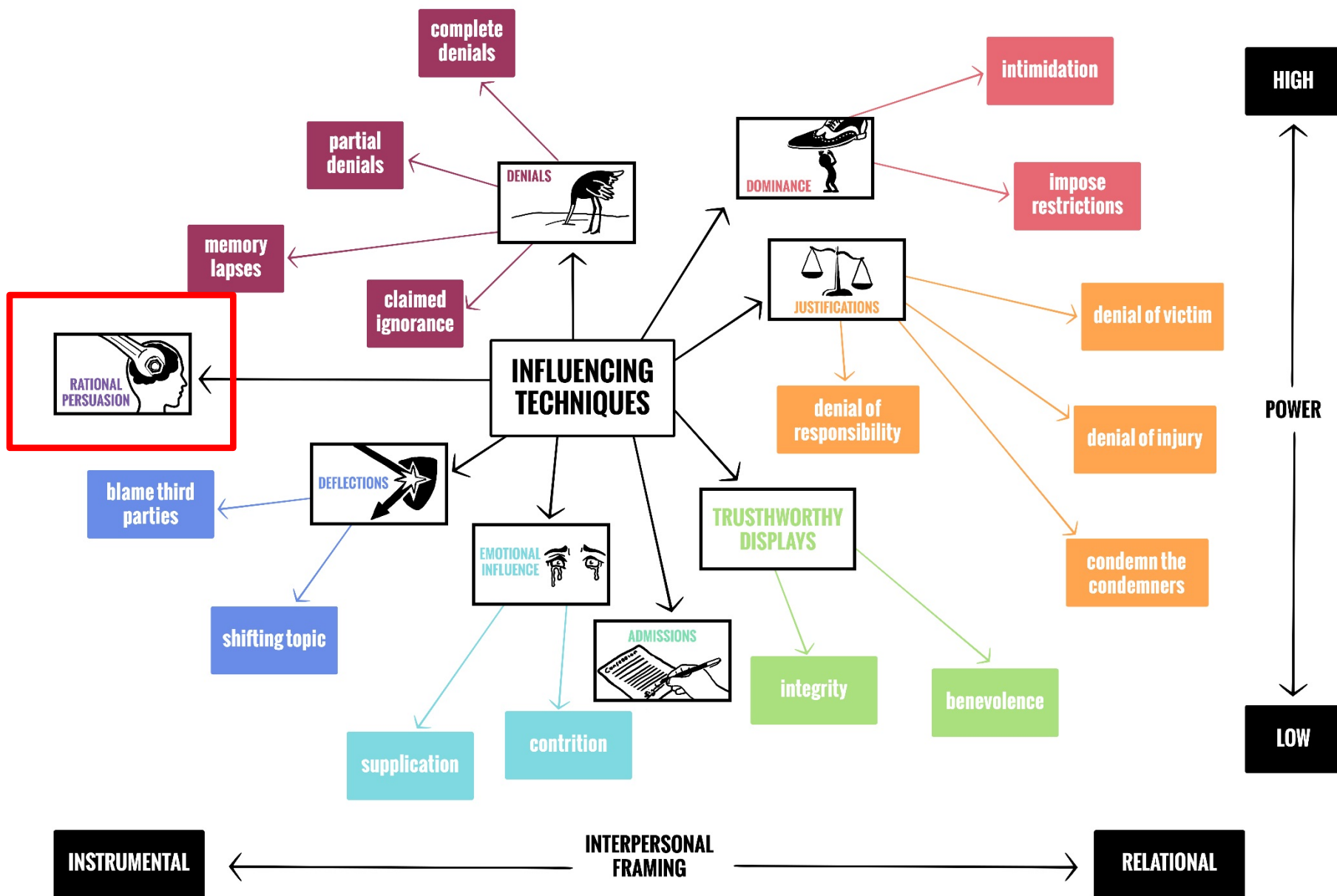
Data

Sample:

Transcripts of interviews with 25 suspects of control and coercion.

- Scared teenagers
- Career criminals
- Same sex couples
- Female offenders

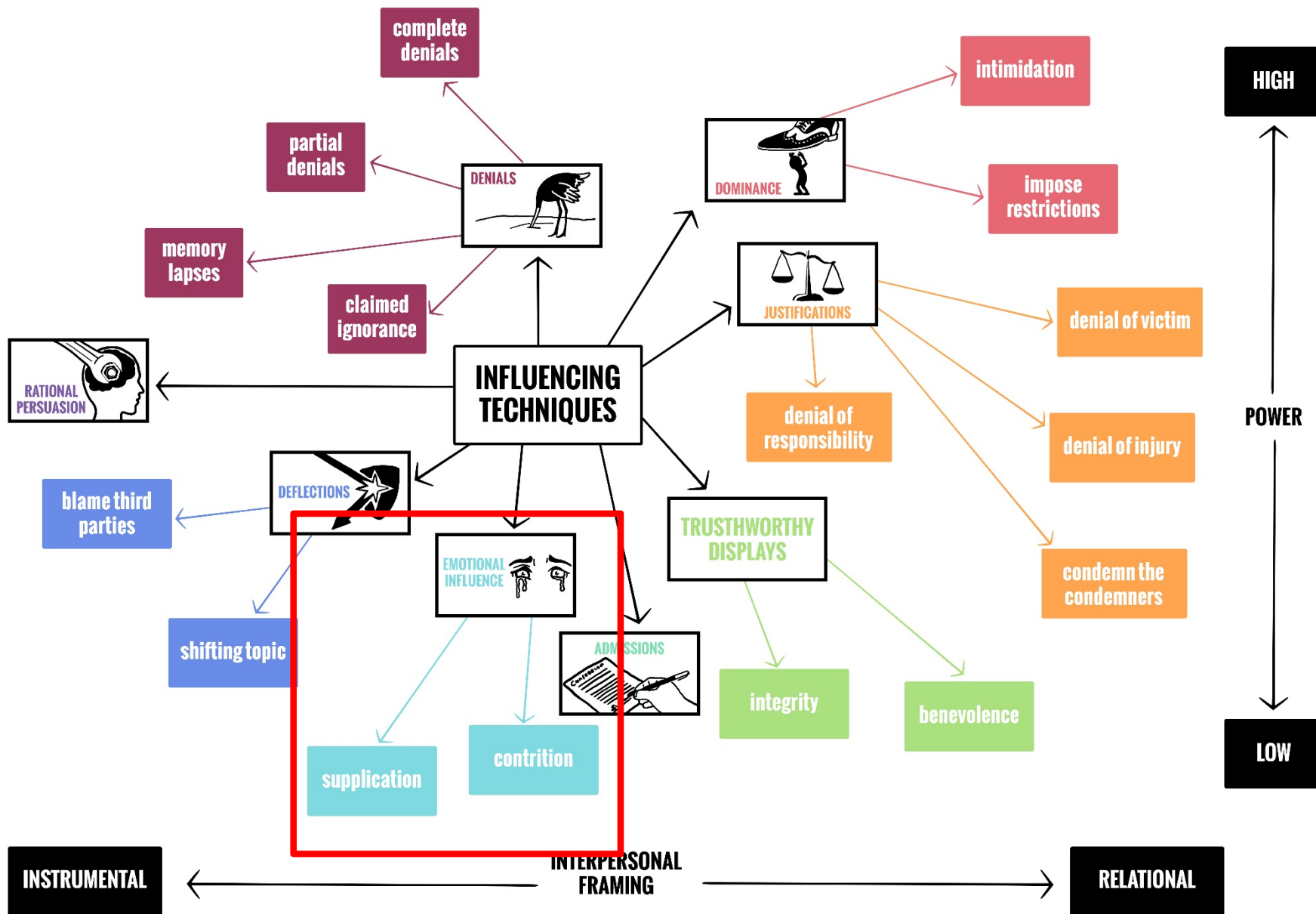




Key Suspect techniques: Rational Persuasion

- Deals directly with evidence
- 'Logical' arguments

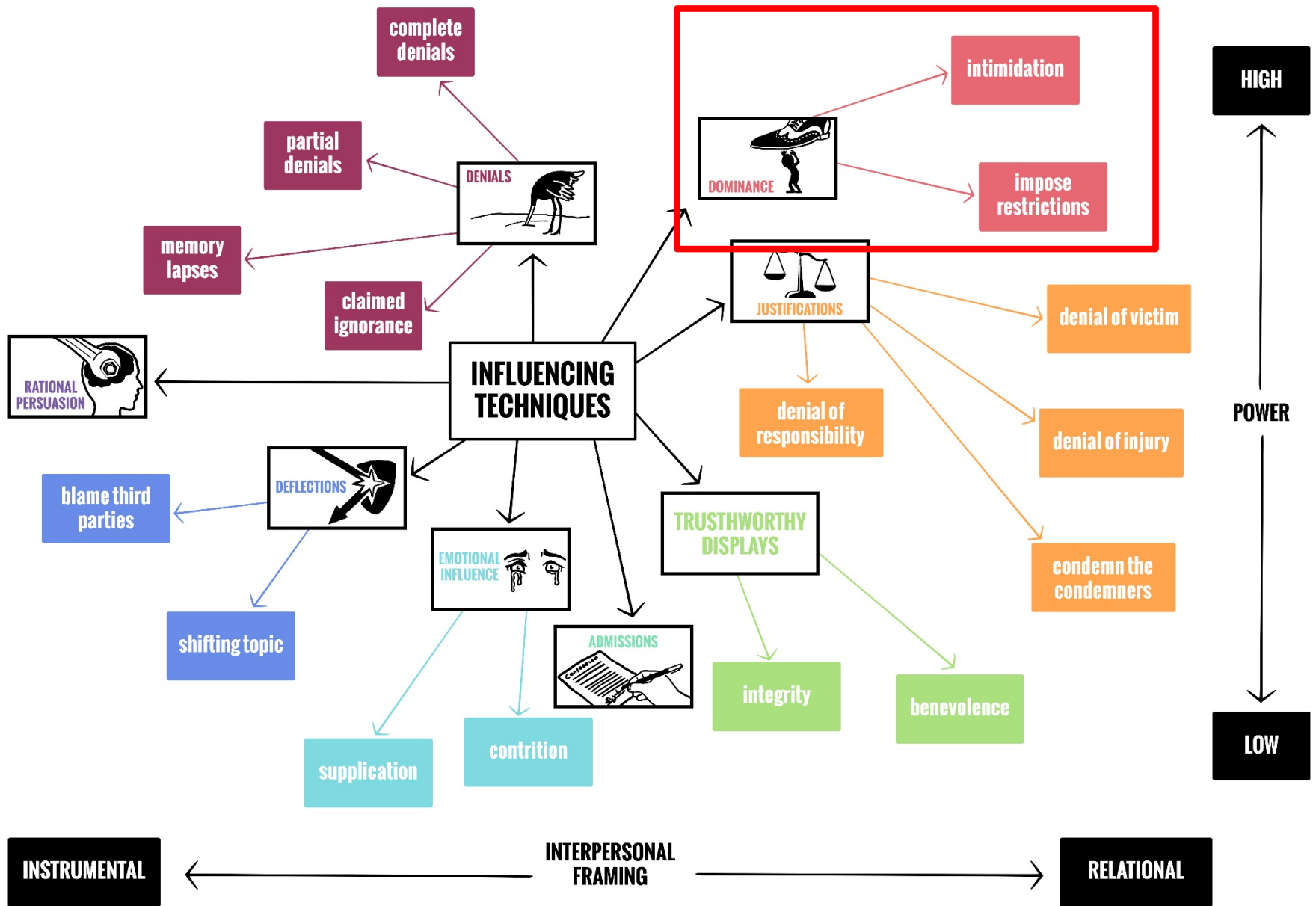




Key Suspect techniques: Emotional Influences

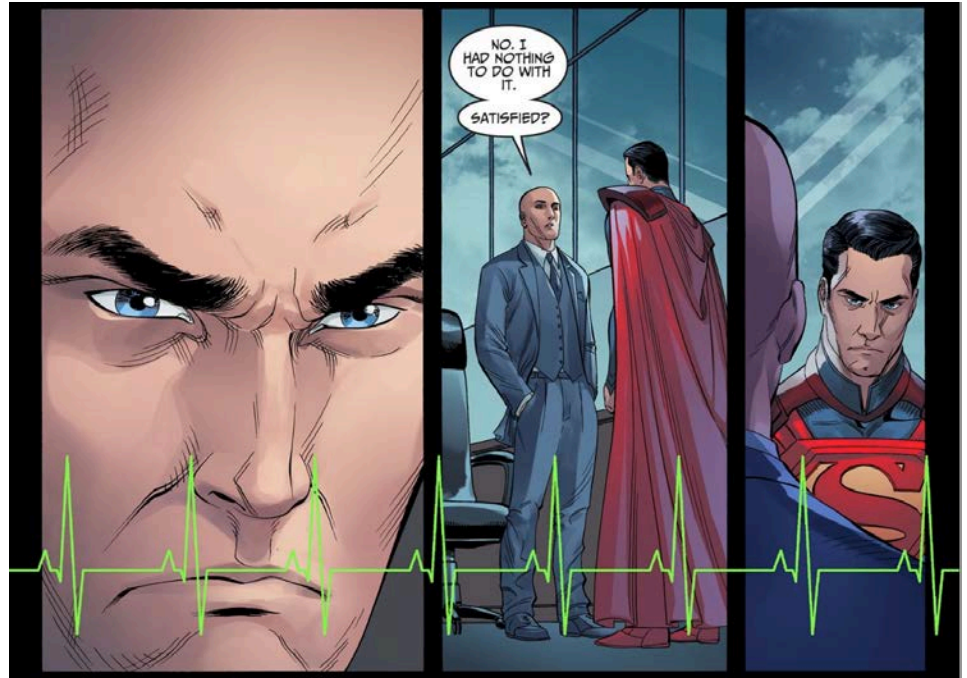
- Aim is to elicit a sympathetic response from police officer
 - Try to seem helpless
 - Appear as the true victim
 - Contrition

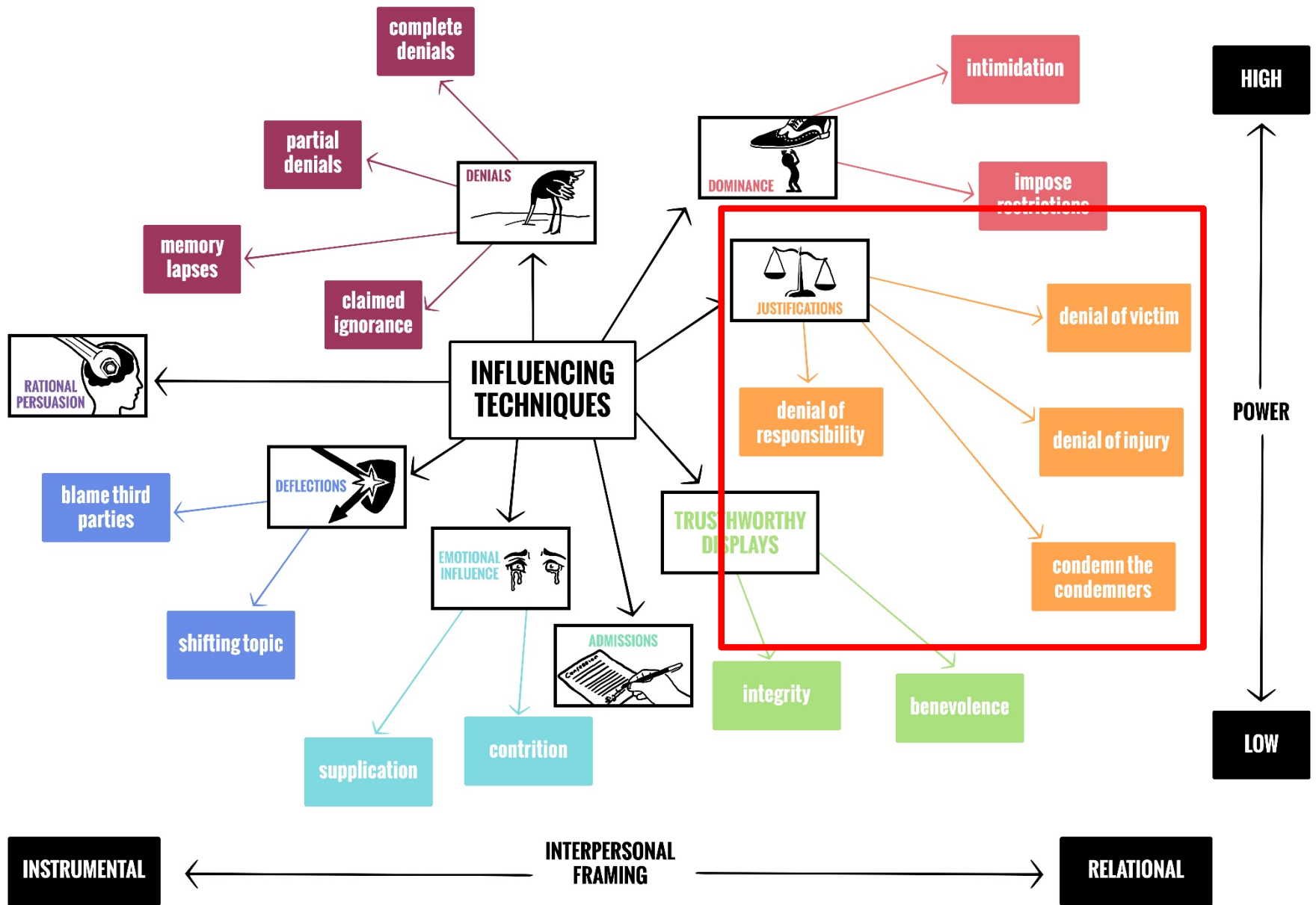




Key Suspect Techniques: Dominance

- Social dominance displays
 - Dismissive about process
 - Provide minimal information

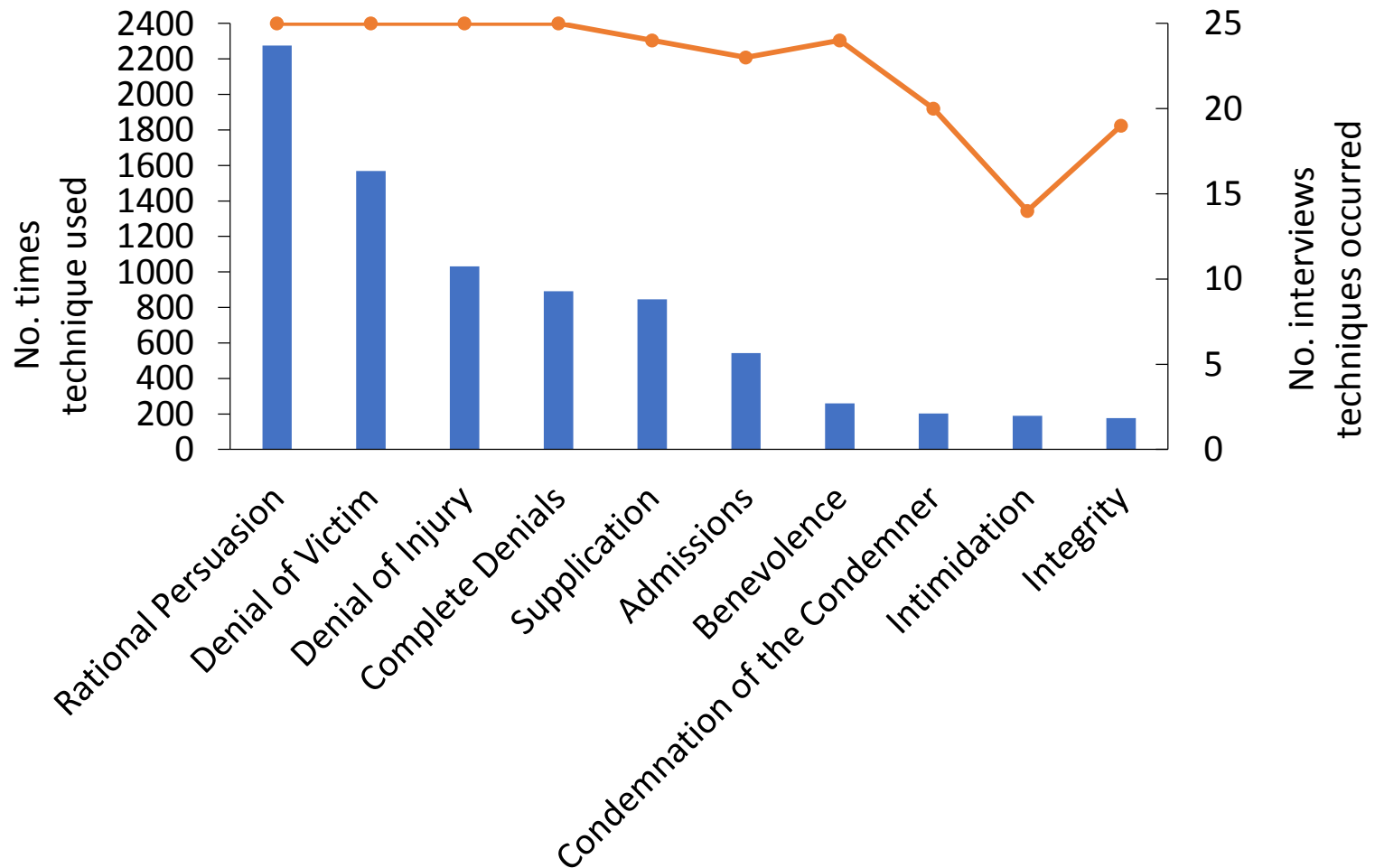




Suspect techniques – Justifications

- Main tactic of many C&C offenders
- Aim is to explain away acts:
 - Denial of victim – They deserved it
 - Denial of injury – It wasn't that bad
 - Condemn the condemners – They just want to keep the house/kids/dogs
 - Denial of responsibility – I had no other option

Technique frequency – Top 10 techniques



Defence against the dark arts?

- Bias is predominantly non-conscious and taints how evidence is appraised and gathered
- Inoculation theory
 - Persuasion can be limited by practiced exposure to these arguments and considering counter-arguments
 - Complication – here the ideal position is neutrality



Summary

- Most offenders used a wide range of techniques but a small number of core techniques accounted for most behaviours in the group and within individuals
- Aim is often not simply to lie
 - Bias the investigator in favour of the suspect
 - (Self) justifications and minimisations
- Inoculation theory may hold promise as a defence