

Assessment of coercive persuasion: the Scale of Detection of Coercive Persuasion in Group Contexts (EDPC)

ÉVALUATION DE LA PERSUASION COERCITIVE : L'ÉCHELLE DE DÉTECTION DE LA PERSUASION COERCITIVE DANS DES CONTEXTES DE GROUPES (EDPC)

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1. INTRODUCTION

Here, we'll review the "dark side of the groups".... But usually, groups are good. Some benefits of the groups (Baumeister y Leary, 95; Fiske, 2010; Stangor, 2004):

- Survival
- Reduce anxiety
- Increase confidence and self-esteem
- Personal empowerment
- Understanding of reality, control
- Social identity
- Productivity
- Membership
- Social support

They're very important to satisfy the affiliative needs. People extremely strive to join groups.

Sometimes, the worst enemy

Sometimes groups are the source of relational abuse. Psychological abuse (Langone, 1992) would be those practices in which the person is treated as an object to be manipulated and used, rather than as a person. Respect for your mind, your autonomy, your identity and your dignity is necessary.

They offer to satisfy your needs and desires. Its objectives and statutes have little to do with its true purposes, closely linked to the desires and interests of its leaders. They show an attractive image, a "wonderful facade, that hides a dark back room full of secrets" (McDonald, 1988). There is a double rule, a double standard.

Group Psychological Abuse

It's better not to distinguish psychologically abusive groups based on the context: religious congregation, cult, business organization, couples, work context, etc. The phenomenon is common and analogous in its characteristics and development (Rodríguez-Carballeira et al., 2005)

The experts in legal context should not be involved in the terminological denomination of the agent; its better to focus on the practices and consequences that have generated (or intensified) in the valued persons (Alonso, 2010, Almendros et al., 2011, Cuevas, 2012)

Evolution of cultic groups “Old school”, communes in the 70’-80’, to “Personal growth”, business, coaching, new age, rural touristic places... in the XXI century.

New appearances: coercive coaching, pseudo-therapies, personal growth, humanitarian aid,; “from the robe to the suit”

Evolution of the Old School... “Personal Growth, communes, rural places, etc.”

The background, the consequences and manipulation do not seem to have changed

An attractive Hook of cults (Perlado, 2011; Cuevas, 2012)

- Support of academic and professionals (Status)
- Proselytism in classrooms at universities and public centers
- Healing and immersion in health contexts
- Dictatorships with a democratic appearance
- “Spirituality and magic” immersed in a discourse that denies its religious or esoteric nature
- Use of new media (ICTS) for the recruitment and control

Extreme Consequences

The most dramatic, horrible and visible for mass media (Cuevas, 2015):

- Criminal activities
- Terrorist attacks: Daesh (Hassan, 2015), Aum Shinrikyo, Osho, etc
- Suicides
- Sexual abuse

But... Usual consequences (Cuevas, 2012, 2016)

1. Damages to the vital journey and personal FREEDOM
2. Damages to mental health
3. Emotional problems
4. Blocks free choice of partner or breaking partners
5. Damages to the family structure
6. Damages to the social network
7. Social and work damages
8. No future outside the group
9. Economic, working and personal exploitation
10. Sexual exploitation

The damage is “EGOSINTONIC”.

The Victims

- Their characteristics have also changed , although there is no single profile (Singer y Lalich, 1997)

- Situational factors and stressful events prior to entry are more important: separations, deaths, unemployment, etc. (Singer, 1979; Swope, 1980; Carr, 1981; Clark, Langone, Schecter y Daly, 1981; Maron, 1988; Langone, 1996 Tobias y Lalich, 1997)

- Myth: only for mad people, “strange people” o incultivated people.

Research shows that they have a little better intelligence, from stable and good families contexts and have no history of mental illness (Lalich, 1997; Langone, 1993; Cuevas, 2012, 21016).

Many members did not suffer any previous vulnerability: only 1/3 presented some difficulty or psychological problem (Sirkin y Grellong, 1988; Langone, 1993; Singer y Lalich, 1997)

- They look for active, productive, intelligent and energetic persons to help them raise funds, recruit more followers, run business or lead their seminars (Lalich, 1997)

Can be anyone as long as they:

1. have an ideological & affective connection
2. are on a vulnerable moment

Are in high risk if they:

- are unaware of manipulation practices, social influence, etc;

Members don't know there is a coordinated influence program

(Singer y Lalich, 1997; Almendros, Rodríguez-Carballeira, Carrobles y Gámez-Guadix, 2010).

- have a social network with a preference of risky contents: subcultural risks: New Age's lovers, esoteric contents, alternative therapies, magic solutions, extreme practices, etc.

- have a reduced social network

- are socially discontent

- are unemployed with too much free time

- have “Pre-cultic” characteristics (Rodríguez, 2000)

DEFINITIONS: COERCIVE PERSUASION & TYPES OF COERCIVE PERSUASION

Extreme and intentional influence.

This groups build a complex structured system of influence & manipulation.

Their techniques are the source and reason of the controversy generated by this groups (Almendros et al, 2011)

Any deliberate act of a person or group of influencing the attitudes or behavior of another people, relying on the use of force (whenever physical, psychic or social) (Rodríguez-Carballeira, 1994).

17 manipulative techniques in

4 types of coercion:

- A) ENVIRONMENTAL (4)
- B) EMOTIONAL (3)
- C) COGNITIVE (6)
- D) INDUCTION OF DISOCIATIVE STATES (4)

A. ENVIROMENTAL'S TECHNIQUES (4 techniques) Examples

A.1. Isolation

"The goal was to eliminate my family. I came to believe that my parents were "monsters", that my father sexually abused me, ... a whole nightmare created within the group.

"They manipulated my memories, I was convinced that my father wanted to kill me"

A.2. Control of information

"It was totally isolated from the outside, it is an example, I was from 80 to late 88, when I left I did not know that the Mecano group existed"

Note: "Mecano" was a top spanish group in the 80-90 decades

A.3. Creation of an Existencial Dependency State

Ex. Pseudohinduist religious cult: *Freedom?. On a sexual level, he decided I had to experiment with people of the same sex. After that I had to maintain relations with the leader and with other people of his choice ... He later forced me to make vows of chastity for years ... literally, you had to wipe your ass like they had been taught "*

M. Shortly before leaving I had accepted that I would marry with a complete stranger (from another country), someone with whom I would have to spend my whole life. Divorce is not allowed in the group (instead, the leader imarried several times).*

A.4. Physical & Psychological Weakening

Ex. Pseudohinduist religious cult .: We usually slept 3 or 4 hours a day. One day a week you did not sleep because you attended the leader's master classes all night. I remember we pulled the hair off our legs so we could stay awake (...)

B. TECHNIQUES BASED ON EMOTIONAL CONTROL (3 techniques) Examples

B. 5. Emotional Activation of Joy

Ex. coercive coaching

E.: Multiple emotional dynamics:

*"In a dark room you begin to **receive compliments**, for ten or fifteen minutes by each partner".*

Color choreography, happy music

Cradling: *"they catch you all, raise you and cradle you ... about 20 people pick you up, you are with your eyes closed. It's a wonderful feeling "*

Solidarity tests, etc.

B. 6. Emotional activation of fear, guilt and anxiety

Ex. Pseudotherapeutic cult.: Regarding his **girlfriend**, whom she wanted to take away from her *"what do you think of the idea that you're talking to her at home and going to the bathroom, you're still talking to her; you leave the bathroom and suddenly you see as it is not, you look out on the balcony and you see **she crashed** on the ground. Would you be **able to live with this risk and this responsibility?**"*

B.7. Selective application of awards and punishments

Ex. Pseudohinduist religious cult: *"They humiliated me in public, they spit on me several times and even accused me of having beaten some people (...). I was rewarded especially when I "loaned" six million pesetas (over 36.000 euros), it was a time praising me. In addition, it generated competitiveness and envy to see who served him best (...)*

Ex. Pseudohinduist religious cult: *I used to be deprived of food, sleep or speech, forcing you to have a vow of silence, not being able to talk to anyone, or the use of the public transport, forcing you to walk everywhere no matter how far you were, you could also be deprived of shelter in times of excessive cold weather, etc. But the worst thing was the emotional void.*

*D.T. *: "Lashes on the back ... you would fall and he went over you ... aggressions, insults, humiliations ... the worst is emotional punishment ... he knows that is what it really hurts"*

C. COGNITIVE CONTROL TECHNIQUES (6 techniques) **Examples**

C.8. Denigration of critical thinking

Invite not to think, repetitive mantras (1728 times mantras a day), prevent any option to criticism ...

C.9. Use of lies and deception

Double moral order, utopian goals, inciting to make confessions, etc.

C. 10. Demand for condescension and identification with the group

Group elitism, group thinking, signs, dress, hymns, etc.

C.11. Attention control

Cancellation of free time, constant duties and routines, accompaniment, etc.

C.12. Control over language

Slogans, technicalities, reduction of thought through cliches, totalitarian language, etc.

C.13. Alterations of sources of authority

The hierarchy is the only authority, which boasts an absolutist power and without competition, above previous authorities, laws, etc.

D. TECHNIQUES OF INDUCTION OF DISSOCIATIVE STATES (4 techniques)

D.14. Drug's use

D.15. Denial of treatment / medical assistance

D.16. Songs, mantras, "speaking in tongues", meditation, prayer, not thinking

D.17. Other methods of dissociation: suggestion, hypnosis, trance, etc.

Ex. Pseudotherapeutic cult: *“I was about to go crazy really. Before the strong doubts arrived ... I was totally confused ... I said I do not understand and I put all my effort to understand it. Depending on what suited you what you thought, you were or was your disorder. It was as if I were two persons, and depending on what suits her, you were you, or you were another”*.

Therapist B.: *“It made me believe that my father and my uncle **abused** me continuously. She altered my memories with **hypnosis and regressions**. All the family behaviors becomes abuse”*.

COERCIVE PERSUASION IN OTHER CONTEXTS

- 1. In pseudo-therapies or thereapeutic contexts** (Perlado, 2011)
- 2. In organizations/companies (mobbing)** Leymann (1990); Olweus (1994); Fendrich, Woodward y Richman (2002)
- 3. In couples and other dyadic relationships** (Rodríguez-Carballeira, Almendros, Escartín, Porrúa, Martín-Peña, Javaloy y Carrobes, 2005)
- 4. Bullying , cyberbullying** (Cuevas y Perlado, 2011)
- 5. Grooming** (Cuevas y Perlado, 2011)
- 6. Trafficking of women**
- 7. Indoctrination – terrorist fanaticism** (Rodríguez-Carballeira et al, 2009; Trujillo, et al., 2009; Martín-Peña et al., 2010; Moyano & Trujillo, 2013; Hassan, 2015)
- 8. Prisoners of war and state terrorism** (Rodríguez-Carballeira, 1994; Cuevas y Canto, 2006; Cuevas, 2016)
- 9. Totalitarian regimes** (Rodríguez-Carballeira, 1994)
- 10. Within conventional religions** (Fernández, 1997; Velasco, et al.,2012;Esquivias, 2015)

ASSESSMENT OF COERCIVE PERSUASION

- Few assessment tools for abusive groups contexts
- They focus usually on psychological abusive practices.
- Group Psychological Abuse (GPA, Chambers, Lagone, Dole y Grice, 1994), is a good scale for individual experiences. It has been validated in several countries
- Other scales: Individual Cult Experience Index (ICE, Winocur, Withney, Sorensen, Vaughn, & Foy, 1997); Across Groups Psychological Abuse and Control Scale (AGPAC; Wolfson, 2002)
- Our study focus in coercive persuasion; we want to distinguish between manipulative and no manipulative groups, depending on the application of coercive persuasion

STUDY OBJECTIVES

The main objective is to elaborate an analyze new tools to assess the dynamics of coercive persuasion / psychological abuse, which may be useful in clinical and forensic contexts.

We elaborated the Coercive Persuasion Detection Scale, based on the main questions of the interview questions of the EPC and in the classification of coercive techniques of Rodríguez – Carballeira (1994, 2001, 2004), Cuevas & Canto (2006), and we examined their psychometric properties.

SOURCE OF THE ITEMS

1. Environmental Control	1. Isolation 2. Informational control 3. Existential dependence 4. Psychophysical weakening	01, 02, 03, 04, 05 y 06 07, 08 y 09 10, 11, 12, 13 y 14 15, 16, 17, 18 y 19
2. Emotional Control	5. Activation of positive emotions 6. Activation of negative emotions 7. Application of fears and punishments	20, 21, 22 y 23 24, 25, 26, 27 y 28 29, 30, 31 y 32
3. Cognitive Control	8. Denigration of critical thinking 9. Use of lies and deception 10. Demand for condescension and identification with the group 11. Attentional control 12. Control over language 13. Alteration of sources of authority	33 y 34 35 y 36 37, 38 y 39 40 y 41 42 43 y 44
4. Dissociative Control	14. Drug's use 15. Denial of health care 16. Use of rituals 17. Other methods for obtaining dissociation	45 46 47 48, 49 y 50

2. METHOD

PARTICIPANTS

We select a sample of 134 Spanish participants who self-identified as having been abused or over-controlled by a group.

48,5% (n=65) were females and 51,5% (n=69) males, with a mean age of 48.85 years ($SD = 11,91$).

PROCEDURE

Participants accessed through <http://questionpro.com/t/ABwJQZSrPu> to the battery of assessment tools, through *Proquest*, from July to September 2015.

Self-identified persons as victims of psychological abuse by coercive groups.

Anonymous participation and informed consent prior to participation

DATA ANALYSIS

Data was analyzed using the SPSS. 20.0 (IBM Statistical Package for Social Sciences, 2011) & FACTOR 9.2 (Lorenzo-Seva y Ferrando, 2006), adapted for Windows® :

- Descriptive analysis of results: means, standard deviations and frequencies

- Parametric (T Student) & no parametric (U Mann Withney) tests: differences between sex and born (born vs. not born/bred in group)
- Psychometric characteristics of the EDPC scale: descriptive analysis of the items; Exploratory factor analysis based on the Hull Method, model adjustment indexes; internal consistency (Cronbach's Alpha)
- Correlations between EDPC & other variables of interest: GPA, MOSS-SSS, BSI, ICP, EDS

3. RESULTS

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SAMPLE

There are no differences between genders: $t(132) = 0,57$; $p = 0,57$. Except condition "Time in". Higher coercive punctuations in women when they stay some years in groups.

The majority live in a couple relation (57,5%; $n=77$), with university or technical studies (82%; $n=110$), currently working (71,6 %; $n=96$), with a perceived socioeconomic status mean (54,5 %; $n=73$) or mean-high (22,4%; $n=30$). Almost two thirds reported being believers (64,2%; $n=86$).

DESCRIPTIONS REGARDING GROUP EXPERIENCE

30,6% ($n=93$) was borned or raised in the group, no differences with respect to the unborn/bred in the group: $t(132) = -0,68$; $p = 0,49$.

The mean age at which they entered the group was 20,91 years ($SD = 10,67$), remaining on average for 14,39 years ($DT = 10,34$) & leaving, on average, 13,75 years ago ($DT = 11,94$).

DESCRIPTIONS REGARDING GROUP EXPERIENCE

First, linked to groups from Catholic Church, 67,91% ($n = 91$). 51,49% ($n = 69$) from Opus Dei and 12,68 % ($n = 17$) from Camino Neocatecomunal. 0,7 % ($n = 1$) Legionarios de Cristo and other 0,7 % ($n = 1$) to a non-specific catholic group. 2,23 % ($n = 3$) are from "Tradición Familia y Propiedad" (TFP Covadonga) and/or "Heraldos del Evangelio".

Pyramid+commercial (20,9%) and then, therapeutic group (10,4 %), coaching or personal growth & syncretic (9,7 %). 4,5 % each one: politic, philosophical, cultural & New Age groups.

POURPUSES OF THE GROUP

- Obtain power and money.....33,33% ($n=37$)
- Proselytism18,91% ($n=21$)
- Control17,12% ($n=19$)
- Work.....10,81% ($n=14$)
- Sectarianism 6,30 % ($n=7$)
- Influence 5,40 % ($n=6$)

- Other: abuse, exploitation, obedience, dependence, fear...

DESCRIPTIVES WITH RESPECT TO THE GROUP EXIT

Type of perceived abuse

Psychological abuse: 93,3 % (n=125), at high levels (quite, very or continuously)

Physical Abuse: 20,8% (n=109)

Sexual Abuse: 18,7% (n=25)

Current attitude

Very negative attitude toward the Leader... 74,6% (n=100) (the highest on a 7-point Likert scale)

Very negative attitude toward the group60,4 % (n=81)

Very negative attitude toward the partners ..16,4% (n=22)

Current attitude: rejection, indifference, contempt, grief, anger, hatred, disgust, pity, pain, indignation, sadness, resentment and hopelessness.

How did you leave the group?

Personal Reflection... 67,9% (n=91)

Family or Friends help..... 14,2% (n=19)

Expulsion..... 18,7% (n=25)

Advised by experts..... 9,7% (n=13)

Deprogramming.... 15 % (n= 20)

Nearly 40 % of exits were facilitated by counselors, specialists, family or friends

Other reasons: dissolution of the group, falling in love, disagreement with the leader or superior, being near to death, psychological and physical exhaustion, change of residence, physical problems, observed manipulation of their child, mental problems, depression, receiving threats, forced to mistreat others, for abuses of the member's children, not being able to stand the group, for personal evolution...

Psychological assistance previous to entering the group

Only 9,7 % (n = 13) received any psychological attention before entering the group, vs 44 % (n = 59) with psychological attention after they leave the group.

Assistance after leaving the group

* **Psychological attention: 44% (n=59)**

- Psychological assistance linked directly to group experience: 35,8% (n=48)
- Medical assistance linked directly to group experience: 26 % (n=35)
- Psychiatric assistance: 17,7 % (n=22)
- **45% have been helped by cultic experts (n=24)**

Treatment duration: from a few consultations to 13 years, the majority a period longer to a month (82 %)

COERCIVE PERSUASION DETECTION SCALE EDPC - DISTRIBUTION OF THE SCORES

The **average was 5,29** (SD= 0,86) (scale Likert 1-7), in a rank among 2,88 – 6,90.

High scores are prevalent.

The kurtosis index obtained a little low value of 0.20, showing a mesocurtic distribution.

The distribution has a negative asymmetry (0.79), showing that the values tend to be concentrated in the right part of the mean, indicating that the scores do not follow a normal distribution.

Adjust to normal \diamond Kolmogorov-Smirnov (KS) test. It shows significant differences between our distribution and the normal distribution of contrast ($z = 0.89$, $p = 0.01$).

Concluding: **non-normality of our distribution.**

ANALYSIS OF ITEMS

Most items have a corrected item-total correlation higher than 0.4, minimum value established as appropriate, indicating the existence of **a high homogeneity** among what each item measures, and the rest of items of the scale.

The mean of the global scale-items correlation is 0.46.

Considering, among other reasons, the **low correlations** of some of the items, as well as the resulting **factorial structure**, 10 items were discarded, **proposing 40 items** for the definitive scale.

The **discarded items** were: 10, 15, 27, 28, 29, 34, 45, 47, 48 and 49.

FACTOR VALIDATION

Good sample adequacy for a factorial model:

- Bartlett sphericity test statistically significant ($p < 0.000$)
- Coefficient KMO = 0,91. Very favorable

An Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) was performed, **using the Hull method** to select the number of major factors. It suggests the convenience of retaining a single factor, establishing a one-dimensional model. **The solution explains 48.66% of the total variance.**

The **factorial weights** are generally high, above 0.40, except for three items (29, 39 and 40), which were maintained by increasing the content amplitude.

The model showed an **adequate adjustment**, examining two adjustment indexes:

- Adjustment Goodness of Fit Index (AGFI): 0.98 (appropriate > 0.95)
- Standardized Root Mean Residual (SRMR): 0.063 (< 0.085 Kelley criterion)

OTHER EVIDENCE OF VALIDITY

The EDPC was examined with other variables of interest, calculating the Pearson Correlation coefficients between their scores and other instruments (and their subscales).

Convergent Validity: GPA

Criterion Validity: MOS-SSS, RSE, SLEQ, BSI, ICP y EDS

EDPC - CORRELATION TABLE

Instrument	Correlation with EDPC	Instrument	Correlation with EDPC
GPA Group Psychological Abuse Global puntuation GPA	0,77**	SLEQ (Stressful Life Events Questionnaire) Global	0,37**
GPAC Group Psychological Abuse Subscale Submission	0,64**	SLEQ Financial problems	0,24**
GPAE Group Psychological Abuse Subscale Exploitation	0,55**	SLEQ Problems in social relations	0,30**
GPA A Group Psychological Abuse Subscale Anxious Dependency	0,58**	SLEQ Personal conflicts	0,37**
GPAM Group Psychological Abuse Subscale Mind Control	0,52**	SLEQ Work problems	0,36**
Time In	0,18*	SLEQ Academic problems	0,27**
Brief Symptom Inventory IpBSI Suscale Paranoid Ideation	0,19*	SLEQ Job security	0,34**
MossAff Medical Outcomes Study Social Support Survey Subscale Affective	-0,19*	PCTI (Post-traumatic Cognitions Inventory) Global	0,30**
PCTI Subscale “Negative beliefs about self”	0,27**	PCTI Subscale “Negative beliefs about the world”	0,27**
ICP Self-blame	0,21*		

RELIABILITY ANALYSIS

To study the internal consistency of the EDPC, the standardized **Cronbach alpha coefficient** was calculated, which amounts to a value of **0.97**. This alpha value indicates **high reliability and high scale’s homogeneity**.

EDPC DESCRIPTIVE AND PERCENTAGE RESULTS

Resultados descriptivos y percentiles de la escala EDPC

Instrumento	M	Me	DT	Rango	P25	P50	P75
EDPC-40	5,63	5,80	0,93	2,73-6,98	5,19	5,80	6,37

Nota: M= Media; Me= Mediana; DT= Desviación Típica; P25= Percentil 25; P50= Percentil 50; P75 = Percentil 75

4. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Faced with an assessment deficit of a problematic, as relevant as complex, two new tools for measuring coercive persuasion have been developed and validated: first, the EPC interview, now, the EDPC scale

Different possible reasons for the lack of development in this area:

- The **deception silences the demands** of its victims. It is a "**hidden dependency**". What makes difficult the perception of the manipulation suffered, that does not occur until the egress. Victims are unconscious of the coordinated program
- **Social and legal normality**: many of these groups are **legally registered**, prevailing up to the moment the rights to religious freedom to the fulfillment of public order, the **right to freedom, security, personality development and physical and moral integrity** (Ortiz-Urculos, 2011).
- **Little scientific consensus** on the definition and delimitation of the phenomenon (Rodríguez Carballeira, Saldaña, Almendros, Martín-Peña, Escartín & Porrúa-García, 2015)

The poor visualization of such a serious social problem facilitates a stereotyped perception of the phenomenon; is denied or reduced. For example, victims are perceived to be "**free**" in their choice to have been abused.

Another mistake is to perceive that their entrance is generated by **previous personal problems**, family misadjustments or low cultural level. Our participants show a **similar adjustment to those described in other studies** (Singer and Lalich, 1997; Hunter, 1998; Schwart and Kaslow, 2001).

These stereotypes hinder prevention and reduce the perception of risk

Limitations of the study

Possible bias in the sample

- Overrepresented by former members of certain groups
- Group experience little updated, relating to experiences of people who, on average, entered their group 28 years ago and left it almost 14 years ago.

In short, we hope to have contributed with two new tools of coercive persuasion assessment, that may be useful in the forensic and clinical areas of group manipulation.

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