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MANIPULATION FROM THE RECIPIENT'S PERSPECTIVE: THE EXPERIENCE OF HIDDEN INFLUENCE AND WAYS OF ITS DETECTION

Abstract. The article analyzes the subjective experiences of a person under manipulation before they become aware of the influence. It demonstrates that, prior to awareness, manipulation manifests as specific emotional states explained through the theory of set and automatic response patterns.

Keywords: Manipulation, hidden control, set (psychological), behavioral automatisms, psychological defense, self-observation.

Introduction

For the individual, manipulation exists primarily as a lived experience: "something feels off after the conversation," "I agreed, but I don't understand why." E. L. Dotsenko defines manipulation as "a type of psychological influence, the skillful application of which leads to the covert arousal in another person of intentions that do not coincide with their currently existing desires" [2, p. 59]. According to V. P. Sheinov's concept, the essence of hidden control lies in the initiator masking their goal so that the recipient does not experience internal resistance. As a result, the person arrives at the decision desired by the initiator seemingly on their own, without perceiving any external pressure [5]. This article specifically addresses how hidden control manifests in the recipient's subjective experience before they realize they are being influenced.

The State of Readiness Without Conscious Decision

According to D. N. Uznadze's theory of set, readiness for action is an unconscious set that precedes a conscious decision: "the emergence of conscious mental processes is preceded by a state that cannot in any way be considered non-mental or purely physiological. We call this state a set – a readiness for a certain activity" [3, p. 131]. The set is formed on the basis of experience and guides behavior without being consciously recognized. Subjectively, this is experienced as compulsion: the action is performed not as a choice but as the fulfillment of readiness – a person agrees "because it's awkward to refuse" and cannot identify their own motive. The very question "why did I do that?" indicates the occurrence of objectification, which frees the person from the influence of the set [3].

Affect and Automatism

The affective level of manipulative influence is oriented not toward rational arguments but toward the emotional sphere and established interpersonal relationships. In business communication, the authority factor acquires particular strength: a person tends to trust and obey those they perceive as experts or significant figures. At the level of personal experience, this manifests as a reaction disproportionately strong relative to the trigger: a minor request may evoke a sharp sense of obligation, while a slight remark may cause prolonged dissatisfaction. Moreover, with some people, agreement seems to occur naturally, whereas with others, substantial arguments are required.

The next level involves automatic responses: when a person lacks the time, energy, or motivation to think everything through carefully, they act according to habitual patterns. These tendencies are often exploited for influence. For example, an unsolicited favor may awaken a sense of debt, or an initially excessive demand may be followed by a "concession," creating the illusion that the recipient made the final decision independently. As a result, the natural pause for reflection seems to vanish: the person does not even have time to realize they are already saying "yes" [4].

Recognition and Defense

The cumulative signs by which manipulation is experienced by the recipient prior to any theoretical knowledge include: inability to identify the moment of decision; a sense of compulsion

without a discernible motive; a disproportionate reaction to the stimulus; spontaneous agreement contrary to a previous intention to refuse. Of particular importance is background discomfort – the operation of an internal "radar" that begins at the sensory level, prior to any rational analysis. The vague feeling "something isn't right" is a normal reaction of the psyche to action occurring bypassing its conscious mechanisms.

According to E. L. Dotsenko, defense against manipulation is largely a technique that is easier to master than learning to manipulate [2]. The first step is to treat internal discomfort as an alarm signal and not to dismiss it. To determine whether a decision was autonomous, it is helpful to ask oneself: "At what moment did I make it?" If such a moment cannot be identified, the action likely arose not as a conscious choice but under external influence [3]. A pause before responding helps to break free from the mode of automatic reactions. It provides an opportunity for conscious analysis of the situation – this is precisely the foundation of defense against manipulation [4].

Conclusion

Awareness of the mechanisms of manipulative influence is the foundation upon which psychological defense and an individual's own information-psychological security are built [1]. Hidden control is not perceived as direct influence; it reveals itself through a complex of internal experiences: a sense of compulsion without an understandable reason, excessively strong reactions to minor triggers, spontaneous impulses to agree, and background discomfort that cannot be logically explained. The skill of recognizing manipulation does not require special education – it requires attention to one's own experience.

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