

The Authority-Induced Escalating Compliance (AEC) Model: A Conceptual Framework for Understanding Influence and Compliance in Large Group Awareness Trainings (LGATs)

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ABSTRACT

Large Group Awareness Trainings (LGATs) are intensive, group-based personal development programmes designed to encourage self-reflection, behavioural change, and personal transformation. While many participants describe these programmes as meaningful and beneficial, concerns have also been raised about practices such as intense emotional disclosure, strong reliance on authority, financial pressure, and increasing demands for behavioural commitment. Although previous research has examined social influence, persuasion, commitment, and coercive control, these processes are often discussed separately. Less attention has been given to how they may interact and unfold over time within intensive group-training settings. This conceptual paper proposes the Authority-Induced Escalating Compliance (AEC) Model to provide an integrated framework for understanding how compliance may gradually develop under certain psychological, social, and organisational conditions. Drawing on research on cognitive dissonance, commitment and consistency, group influence, and coercive control, the model identifies five interconnected processes: (a) inferiority and emotional vulnerability induction, (b) self-concept transformation, (c) authority internalisation and initial compliance, (d) escalating commitment and compliance, and (e) psychological dependency formation. The model suggests that psychological discomfort, identification with the group, perceived legitimacy of authority, and previous behavioural investment may work together to increase participants' willingness to comply with subsequent demands. This process may become particularly noticeable when participants face pressures that make critical evaluation more difficult or withdrawal increasingly costly. The proposed model contributes to the literature by bringing together several established psychological and social influence processes within a dynamic framework that explains how compliance may develop and intensify over time. The paper concludes by highlighting directions for future empirical research, ethical practice, and public awareness, with particular attention to protecting participant autonomy, ensuring informed consent, and creating appropriate safeguards in intensive group-training environments.

Keywords: Large Group Awareness Trainings, Authority Influence, Compliance, Escalating Commitment, Cognitive Dissonance, Inferiority

INTRODUCTION

Large Group Awareness Trainings (LGATs) emerged in the United States during the early 1970s as intensive group-based programmes designed to promote personal development by encouraging individuals to reinterpret their experiences and perceptions of life circumstances (Klar et al., 1990). Early LGATs emphasised personal responsibility, interpersonal interaction, group participation, and the pursuit of individually defined goals. Participants typically engage in structured activities over several consecutive days and may progress through multiple levels of training involving increasing degrees of participation and commitment (Fisher et al., 1990). Although LGATs are generally presented as programmes for personal growth and self-development, concerns have been raised regarding participant autonomy, psychological influence, and potentially exploitative practices in some settings (Chiu, 2024). These concerns are particularly relevant when programme structures

involve intensive emotional disclosure, strong authority relationships, pressure to undertake additional activities, or substantial financial and behavioural commitments (Fisher et al., 1990).

Individuals can be introduced to LGATs through interpersonal recommendations, particularly from friends or existing participants who describe the programmes positively and emphasise perceived benefits for personal development and life improvement. Such recommendations may encourage individuals to participate even when they have limited prior knowledge of the programme's procedures, expectations, or potential risks. An illustrative contemporary example is provided by *The Guardian* (2025), which reported first-person accounts of participation in Mastery in Transformational Training (MITT), a personal-development programme involving intensive group exercises and multiple levels of training. The report described accounts of participants experiencing pressure surrounding continued participation and financial commitments. The report further described prolonged training sessions, delayed meal breaks, encouragement to "trust the process," restrictions on note-taking, and repeated participation in emotionally intense exercises. Although a single journalistic investigation cannot establish the prevalence or typicality of such practices across LGATs, it provides a concrete example through which questions concerning authority, escalating commitment, and participant autonomy can be examined. Such concerns are consistent with broader literature examining potentially harmful influence processes in high-demand groups, including the use of persuasive and controlling practices that may affect members' decision-making and relationships (Almendros et al., 2011).

Depending on their structure and objectives, LGAT activities may include self-disclosure, group discussions, interpersonal exercises, goal setting, behavioural assignments, feedback, and opportunities for participants to share their perceived progress (Fisher et al., 1990; Klar et al., 1990). Chiu (2024) discusses progressive involvement within personal-development training and highlights the importance of examining how participation and behavioural expectations may change across different stages of engagement. In this context, the same activity may have different effects depending on the conditions surrounding it, including participants' perceived freedom to refuse, the availability of alternative viewpoints, and the consequences associated with withdrawal. The potential for escalating involvement is particularly relevant to the study of compliance. Participants may initially agree to relatively limited requests, such as attending an introductory session, participating in a group exercise, or identifying personal goals. As participation continues, they may be asked to make greater investments of time, emotional energy, interpersonal disclosure, financial resources, or behavioural effort. These perspectives help explain how a series of manageable commitments may become more psychologically significant as they accumulate over time.

Problem Statement

Professional discussions have identified several practices that warrant closer examination. The Taiwan Counselling Psychologist Union, for example, has raised concerns regarding limited disclosure of programme content or instructor qualifications, pressure to disclose highly personal experiences, substantial financial commitments, recruitment expectations, boundary violations, and claims concerning rapid improvement in psychological or interpersonal difficulties (Lee, 2025). Firstly, they highlighted the red flags and warning signs of these courses, which include withholding information and non-disclosure, where the course remains secretive without explicitly explaining the course content or the instructors' professional backgrounds.

Secondly, participants may be pressured to reveal their personal pain and trauma despite their reluctance, which may create opportunities for instructors to take advantage of their vulnerability. Thirdly, participants may be required to pay large amounts of money for training courses, show strong commitment to the instructions or tasks given by instructors, help each other achieve their goals, and encourage others to join the group. Lastly, some training courses may involve unrealistic promises, violations of personal boundaries, and inappropriate interactions with participants. Some instructors may present these programmes as capable of helping participants address psychological difficulties, including family-related problems, depression, trauma, and anxiety within a relatively short period, even though there may be limited involvement of evidence-based therapeutic approaches or licensed mental health professionals (Lee, 2025).

During the training, instructors or facilitators may pressure participants to engage in physical contact, such as touching or hugging, during emotionally intense exercises, even when they are uncomfortable or unwilling to

participate (Lee, 2025). The TCPU has raised concerns about the potential risks of such training to the general population, particularly individuals with mental health conditions. Such practices are relevant to the present discussion because they may create conditions in which participants' decision-making autonomy becomes increasingly influenced by programme structures and authority figures. Importantly, these concerns relate to the conditions under which such activities are conducted, rather than the activities themselves. Emotional disclosure, group exercises, personal commitments, and instructor guidance may occur within ethical and voluntary programmes. However, concerns may arise when participants have limited opportunities to refuse, question, or withdraw from these activities.

Related issues have also been discussed in research concerning high-control organisations that use intensive self-development and transformational training. Raine (2021), for example, examined involvement in NXIVM and described how some individuals were initially attracted by its focus on self-improvement and personal transformation before becoming increasingly involved in the organisation. NXIVM is not treated in the present paper as representative of LGATs. Instead, it offers an example of how initially attractive goals such as personal growth, belonging, and transformation may interact with authority and commitment processes within high-demand environments. Similarly, concerns raised by Malaysia's National Security Council regarding the dissemination of certain New Age-related teachings through motivational, personal-development, family-development, and other programmes provide a broader context for understanding why some individuals may turn to alternative approaches when dealing with personal or psychological difficulties (*Majlis Keselamatan Negara*, 2026). The Council also noted that some programmes may promote excessive positive thinking, sometimes described as toxic positivity, which may contribute to further psychological difficulties among participants.

The existing body of literature has been mostly devoted to the consequences of involvement in LGATs such as wellbeing, behavioural changes, and negative experiences rather than investigating the antecedent psychological processes that contribute to participants' willingness to comply with escalating demands (Fisher et al., 1990; Klar et al., 1990; Lee, 2025; Peat et al., 2022). Consequently, the mechanisms underlying progressive behavioural engagement, emotional influence, and escalating compliance remain insufficiently understood. By identifying these underlying psychological processes, this study aims to contribute to the understanding of how individuals may become increasingly committed to high-demand training environments.

Compliance as a Dynamic and Escalating Process

Human behaviour is shaped by both social and environmental influences, and decision-making does not always reflect purely rational processes. Humans are inherently social and tend to form groups to facilitate cooperation, establish shared boundaries, and achieve common goals. Individuals may also respond to externally imposed rules, expectations, and training, which can shape compliant behaviour (Kuiper et al., 2023). Compliance is an important concept in organisational research because adherence to rules and expectations contributes to effective organisational functioning and the maintenance of favourable organisational cultures (Coglianese & Nash, 2021). From a deterrence perspective, individuals may be more likely to comply with rules when the perceived certainty and severity of sanctions are higher (Shavell, 1991). However, behavioural research indicates that compliance is not determined solely by rational calculations of costs and benefits, psychological and contextual factors within structured environments may also influence compliance behaviour (Peat et al., 2023). Similarly, organisational research suggests that behavioural intentions play an important role in shaping compliance within formal organisational settings (Alshammari & Al-Mamary, 2025). In light of the findings as a whole, these perspectives suggest that compliance can extend beyond an isolated behavioural response and may develop through repeated interactions between individuals and their social environments. Accordingly, the present paper conceptualises compliance as a dynamic and cumulative process that may intensify as psychological, social, and contextual influences interact over time.

One process relevant to escalating compliance is progressive influence, whereby behavioural demands increase gradually through a series of relatively small steps (Covert, 2019). Rather than beginning with highly demanding requests, influence may develop through actions that appear relatively minor when considered individually but become increasingly demanding over time. Repeated engagement in such behaviours may increase psychological investment and reduce individuals' willingness to critically evaluate subsequent

requests, particularly when they have become increasingly involved with the influencing person or group (Craigie, 2021). These processes may be particularly relevant in environments characterised by sustained psychological influence and control (Arriaga et al., 2026; Lohmann et al., 2024).

Within some LGAT contexts, participants may initially encounter relatively low-demand activities before being introduced to more substantial behavioural commitments (Klar et al., 1990). Examples reported in the literature and public accounts include goal setting, behavioural self-monitoring, participation in structured programme activities, explicit declarations of commitment, and recruitment of additional participants. When such demands progressively increase, continued participation may require greater investments of time, effort, emotional energy, and social involvement (Hassan, 2020). Research on high-control groups suggests that increasing investment can contribute to stronger psychological attachment and make it more difficult for individuals to disengage (Lalich, 2023). From this perspective, the AEC Model proposes that escalating compliance may be more likely when progressive behavioural demands occur alongside strong social influence, increasing personal investment, and fewer opportunities for independent evaluation. Individual characteristics such as psychological distress, identity uncertainty, low self-esteem, or significant life transitions may further influence how individuals respond to these processes by increasing their needs for certainty, belonging, guidance, or personal transformation. These characteristics are therefore considered potential vulnerability factors rather than direct causes of compliance.

Social Stigma and Receptiveness to Influence

Understanding why some individuals may choose LGATs over other forms of support is relevant because their initial participation may influence later engagement, commitment, and compliance. Individuals may be attracted to LGATs for different reasons, including self-improvement, personal transformation, social connection, finding meaning, dealing with uncertainty, or difficulties they feel unable to manage independently. These motivations do not suggest that participants are inherently vulnerable. In some cases, particular personal and social circumstances may make individuals more receptive to external guidance and interpersonal influence at certain points in their lives.

Social stigma may shape how individuals choose to seek support. Recent research has shown that stigma and concerns about negative social judgement remain relevant to professional psychological help-seeking, particularly among young adults and university students (Muda & Raphaie, 2025; Rodríguez-Rivas et al., 2025). Individuals who anticipate being judged may be less willing to seek professional psychological support and may instead consider informal or alternative forms of assistance (Ni et al., 2025; Lannin et al., 2022; Salaheddin & Mason, 2016). Self-development, motivational, and spiritual programmes may appear less stigmatising because they are commonly framed around growth, empowerment, and personal transformation. However, there is currently limited direct evidence linking stigma specifically to LGAT participation, and this proposed pathway therefore requires empirical investigation.

Beyond stigma, individuals experiencing uncertainty, perceived inadequacy, low confidence in their own judgement, or a strong desire for direction and personal change may be more receptive to programmes that provide clear explanations and structured guidance. From an Adlerian perspective, perceived inferiority may motivate individuals to seek greater competence, significance, and self-development (Adler, 1954; Adler, 1964). Such motivations are not inherently problematic. However, when combined with greater reliance on external validation or guidance, they may increase openness to authoritative influence.

The social context may further shape this receptiveness. Individuals with limited external social support, a strong need for belonging or validation, or fewer alternative sources of information may place greater reliance on programme instructors or group members. It is also important to recognise that spiritual, religious, or self-development approaches are not inherently problematic. Individuals may choose these forms of support because they are meaningful, culturally appropriate, or consistent with their personal beliefs. For some individuals, psychological difficulties may also be understood through religious or spiritual frameworks (Lloyd et al., 2022). Thus, the concern is not the choice of alternative help-seeking itself, but whether particular individual and contextual conditions increase receptiveness to subsequent influence.

The Process of Coercive Influence and Control in High-demand LGAT Contexts

Although most early research has focused specifically on cultic groups, these studies provide an understanding of coercive control tactics that can be adapted to the investigation of LGATs. Drawing on Feliciano's (2023) application of the Coercive Control Framework to cults, harmful high-control groups may maintain influence over members through a combination of restrictive, manipulative, and psychologically coercive practices. These practices include limiting members' communication and contact with family members and friends, reducing personal autonomy through continuous psychological pressure, and reshaping members' beliefs and identities through coercive persuasion processes. Recent empirical research has substantially advanced the understanding of coercive control in group contexts. La Gamma et al. (2024) conducted a transcultural study of psychological abuse across five sectarian cases involving cults and manipulative groups. Using court transcripts as secondary data sources, the researchers employed abductive content analysis and identified 26 psychological abuse strategies. Control of personal life was the most prevalent category (41.9%), followed by emotional abuse (14.9%) and control and manipulation of information (14.7%). The most frequently identified strategies involved control over sexual life and emotional relationships, control and weakening of the psychophysical state, and manipulation of information.

To achieve greater compliance and commitment, coercive strategies may sometimes involve techniques that challenge individuals' existing beliefs, self-concept, and relationships outside the group. Over time, these experiences may encourage individuals to adopt values or ways of understanding themselves that are more consistent with the group (Lifton, 1961; Lalich, 2023; Singer, 2003). Such strategies may include guilt induction, verbal degradation, sleep, food, or toileting deprivation, prioritising relationships within the group over external connections, and encouraging escalating commitment through progressive involvement. It illustrates how high-control environments may gradually weaken individual autonomy and strengthen dependence on the group or its authority figures. During this process, some participants may experience confusion and increasing self-doubt. They may internalise responsibility for their past mistakes and perceived failures, thereby coming to view themselves as personally responsible for their current circumstances. Repeated experiences of criticism or put-downs, together with subsequent reassurance and affirmation from instructors or leaders, may contribute to changes in participants' self-concept and greater reliance on the group or its authority figures for guidance and validation (Lalich, 2023; Singer, 2003).

Theoretical Framework

The AEC Model offers an integrative conceptual framework for examining how involvement LGAT environments may develop from voluntary initial participation into more intensive and persistent engagement. Rather than attributing such trajectories to a single mechanism or relying on contested concepts such as "brainwashing," the model conceptualises escalating compliance as a potential outcome of interacting psychological and social processes. It draws on four complementary perspectives: Adler's Individual Psychology, Milgram's theory of obedience to authority, Cialdini's Commitment and Consistency Principle, and Festinger's Cognitive Dissonance Theory. These perspectives address different aspects of the proposed process, including individual motives for engagement, responses to perceived authority, the cumulative influence of previous commitments, and psychological responses to inconsistency.

Adler's Individual Psychology provides a motivational foundation for the model. Adler emphasised social interest, interpersonal connectedness, and the individual's efforts to overcome feelings of inferiority and develop a sense of personal significance within the social environment (Adler, 1954; Adler, 1964). From this perspective, feelings of inferiority do not necessarily indicate psychological difficulties but may represent a normal part of human development that encourages individuals to pursue greater competence, belonging, and a sense of personal significance. Applied to LGAT participation, this perspective helps explain individuals' aspirations for self-improvement, interpersonal connection, purpose, and personal change. At the same time, periods of self-doubt, perceived inadequacy, or emotional vulnerability may make individuals more attentive to programmes that emphasise personal growth and transformation. Individuals who experience uncertainty about themselves or their circumstances may also place greater importance on messages related to personal growth, acceptance, and change. Early participation may further provide opportunities for social connection and validation, which may strengthen individuals' perceptions of the value of the programme. Importantly, this

perspective does not assume that LGAT participants have lasting psychological difficulties or that feelings of inferiority will necessarily lead to problematic involvement. Instead, feelings of inferiority and emotional vulnerability are viewed as factors that may influence how individuals respond to promises of personal transformation and positive feedback from others. However, Adler's perspective alone does not fully explain how initially voluntary participation may gradually develop into continued compliance with increasingly demanding expectations. Therefore, it is also important to consider the roles of acceptance of authority, behavioural commitment, and cognitive dissonance in this process.

Milgram's (1974) work on obedience to authority provides a second perspective by drawing attention to the influence of perceived legitimate authority and situational context. In LGAT settings, facilitators may be regarded as knowledgeable, experienced, or particularly capable of facilitating personal transformation. Such perceptions may increase the weight participants give to facilitators' interpretations, recommendations, and expectations. Milgram's concept of the agentic state is relevant as a possible lens for examining circumstances in which individuals may experience their actions as guided by an authority figure rather than solely by their own independent judgment. However, the analogy has important limitations. LGAT environments differ substantially from the experimental and institutional contexts examined by Milgram, particularly in that participation is generally voluntary and does not involve the physical constraints characteristic of coercive authority structures. Authority-related influence within LGATs is therefore more appropriately considered in relation to perceived legitimacy, situational pressures, and voluntary deference, rather than assumed obedience.

The third component concerns the cumulative influence of previous actions. Cialdini's (2021) Commitment and Consistency Principle, together with the foot-in-the-door effect demonstrated by Freedman and Fraser (1966), suggests that previous commitments can influence subsequent behaviour. Within LGAT contexts, initial involvement may include relatively modest actions, such as attending introductory activities, agreeing to programme expectations, completing exercises, or making an initial financial commitment. Subsequent decisions are then made within the context established by these earlier actions. As involvement accumulates, consistency with previous choices may become one factor influencing willingness to accept additional expectations. This does not imply that small commitments inevitably produce larger ones. Rather, the principle identifies a mechanism through which successive decisions may acquire increasing psychological and interpersonal significance.

Festinger's (1957) Cognitive Dissonance Theory provides a further account of what may occur when continued involvement becomes difficult to reconcile with emerging doubts. Inconsistencies among previous decisions, investments, beliefs, and subsequent experiences can generate psychological discomfort, which individuals may attempt to reduce by changing their behaviour, modifying their attitudes, or developing interpretations that restore greater coherence (Festinger, 1957). For participants who have invested considerable time, financial resources, emotional energy, or personal disclosure, doubts about a programme may create tension between current evaluations and earlier decisions. One possible response is withdrawal, while another is to reinterpret the experience in ways that preserve the meaning attached to previous choices.

Escalation-of-commitment research provides a related perspective on the role of prior investment. Individuals may sometimes persist with a previously chosen course of action despite negative outcomes, particularly when psychological and situational factors make abandoning that course difficult (Brockner, 1992; Staw, 1976). In the AEC Model, such processes are not treated as evidence that dissonance necessarily produces deeper commitment. Instead, continued involvement represents one possible response to the tension created by accumulated investment and emerging doubts, alongside reassessment or withdrawal.

Conceptual Development of the Authority-Induced Escalating Compliance Model

The AEC Model describes compliance in LGATs as a process that may escalate and result in increasing levels of receptivity by the participants to the influence of the leader and programme requirements. The model comprises five interrelated stages: (1) inferiority and emotional vulnerability induction, (2) self-concept transformation, (3) authority internalisation and initial compliance, (4) escalation of commitment and compliance, and (5) psychological dependency formation. These stages represent a possible pathway rather



than an inevitable sequence. Individuals may discontinue their participation, resist influence, seek perspectives from outside the group, or experience personal growth without developing psychological dependence.

Stage 1: Inferiority and Emotional Vulnerability Induction

This stage involves participants becoming more aware of their perceived weaknesses, failures, or unresolved personal difficulties within the training context. This may occur through activities such as personal disclosure, openly discussing weaknesses, questioning how they have previously understood themselves, or viewing their difficulties as personal limitations. From the perspective of the theory, feelings of inadequacy or inferiority may motivate individuals to address perceived shortcomings and work towards a more positive and meaningful sense of self (Adler, 1964). The model assumes that greater exposure to practices emphasising personal inadequacy or vulnerability will be associated with greater receptiveness to programme-provided interpretations, particularly when opportunities for independent evaluation are limited. Within LGATs, this may increase receptiveness to programme-provided explanations of personal difficulties.

Stage 2: Self-Concept Transformation

Participants may begin to change how they understand and evaluate themselves as a result of their involvement in the programme. This may include interpreting past experiences through programme-based ideas, adopting concepts introduced during the training, or attributing personal changes to programme participation. Adler's framework suggests that developing a new self-concept may reflect an effort to overcome perceived inadequacy and develop a stronger sense of competence or significance (Adler, 1954; Adler, 1964). From the perspective of cognitive dissonance theory, adopting interpretations that are consistent with the programme may help reduce inconsistencies between participants' previous self-concepts, their desired identities, and their continued involvement (Festinger, 1957). These changes may be positive and meaningful for participants. However, concerns may arise when programme-based interpretations begin to replace alternative ways of understanding personal experiences or become necessary for continued participation.

Stage 3: Authority Internalisation and Initial Compliance

At this point, participants becoming more accepting of instructors as legitimate sources of guidance and beginning to follow programme expectations. This may be reflected in behaviours such as following instructions with little questioning, accepting corrective feedback, sharing personal information when asked, or taking part in activities that may initially feel unfamiliar or uncomfortable. Milgram's work on obedience helps explain how perceived authority may influence such behaviour. Individuals may be more willing to follow instructions when they view the person giving them as legitimate, knowledgeable, or appropriate to the situation (Milgram, 1974). In an LGAT setting, this acceptance of authority may mark an early shift from voluntary participation towards greater compliance with programme expectations.

Stage 4: Escalation of Commitment and Compliance

Following initial compliance, participants may become more invested in the programme in terms of their behaviour, emotions, time, and finances. Such involvement may include joining additional programmes, spending more money, devoting more time to programme activities, recruiting others, or accepting increasingly demanding expectations. Cialdini's Commitment and Consistency Principle provides one explanation for this process, as individuals may be more likely to behave consistently with commitments they have already made (Cialdini, 2021). The foot-in-the-door effect similarly suggests that agreeing to smaller requests may increase willingness to agree to larger requests later (Freedman & Fraser, 1966). Festinger's theory provides another explanation, as greater investment may create pressure to justify previous decisions and maintain consistency between beliefs and behaviour (Festinger, 1957; Cooper, 2007).

Stage 5: Psychological Dependency Formation

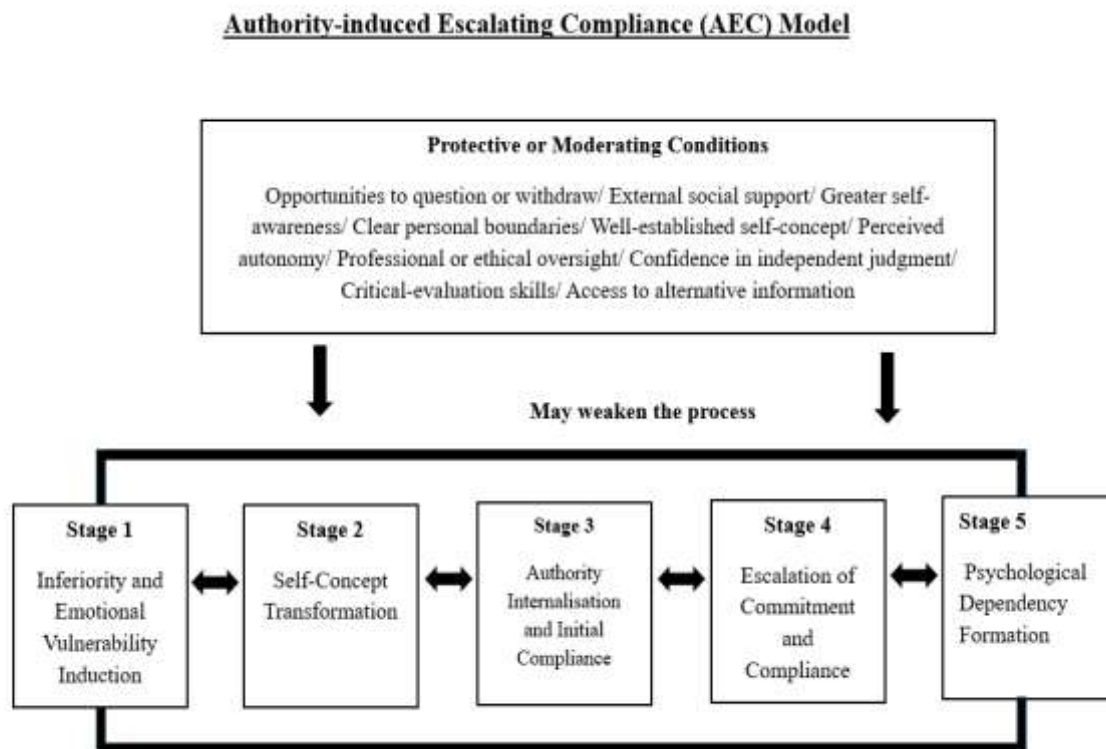
This stage refers to increasing reliance on instructors or the programme for validation, guidance, self-evaluation, and decision-making. This may be reflected in relying on instructors for important decisions,

becoming less confident in one's own judgment, feeling that continued participation is necessary for personal progress, or finding it difficult to leave despite negative consequences. Such reliance may become stronger as participants internalise the authority of instructors and accumulate greater emotional, social, behavioural, or financial commitment, particularly when access to alternative sources of support and independent perspectives is limited. This stage represents the possible cumulative outcome of the earlier processes, where their interaction may gradually increase dependence on the programme and reduce independent evaluation.

Non-Linear Pathways and Protective Factors

The AEC Model is conceptualised as a conditional and potentially non-linear pathway, rather than an inevitable progression. Participants may discontinue participation, resist influence, seek external perspectives, or experience personal development without progressing to later stages. Protective factors may include opportunities to question or withdraw, external social support, greater self-awareness, clear personal boundaries, well-established self-concept, perceived autonomy, professional or ethical oversight, confidence in independent judgment, critical-evaluation skills, and access to alternative information. These factors may interrupt transitions between stages by preserving participants' autonomy and opportunities for independent evaluation.

Figure 1: Authority-induced Escalating Compliance (AEC) Model



Implications and Future Directions

The AEC Model has several potential implications for understanding compliance within LGATs. If validated empirically, the model would highlight that compliance may develop gradually through the interaction of emotional vulnerability, self-concept transformation, authority influence, and escalating commitment, rather than occurring as a one-time behavioural response. This perspective may help researchers and practitioners identify psychological processes that could increase participants' susceptibility to influence at different stages of training. The model may also provide a theoretical basis for examining potentially problematic practices within LGATs, particularly those involving intensive emotional disclosure, criticism, authority-based influence, and increasing demands for commitment. Most importantly, the review, discussion, and development of the AEC Model may contribute to greater public awareness of the potential risks associated with LGATs.

The model highlights potentially harmful processes that may arise in certain training contexts and encourage individuals who experience distress or concerns related to their participation to seek appropriate support from qualified professionals such as counsellors. A further implication of the AEC Model is that it may help individuals identify signs of manipulation or undue pressure from authority figures, particularly when they are encouraged to make commitments or engage in behaviours that they would not otherwise consider. The AEC Model may also raise awareness of the potential harmful effects of questionable LGAT practices, including unresolved emotional difficulties or psychological distress that may persist or even worsen following participation in an LGAT.

The AEC Model is a conceptual framework that requires further empirical testing. Future research could begin by examining participants' experiences to determine whether their accounts reflect the five stages proposed by the model. Longitudinal studies could then explore how these processes change over time and whether participants move forward, move back, resist influence, or leave the programme at different stages. Research could also examine individual differences and protective factors to understand why some people may be more open to influence while others are able to maintain their autonomy or resist increasing demands. Until these relationships are tested empirically, the AEC Model should be viewed as a conceptual framework for generating testable propositions rather than as an established empirical model. For potential participants, several practical precautions may be helpful. These include seeking independent information about the programme and its reported outcomes, discussing the decision to participate with trusted friends, family members, or professionals, and continuing to evaluate the experience throughout the training. If participation causes significant distress or raises concerns about personal safety or autonomy, seeking support from an appropriate professional may be advisable. For regulators and professional organisations, the model may provide a basis for considering standards and safeguards for intensive group-training programmes.

CONCLUSION

This paper has proposed the AEC Model as a conceptual framework for understanding how compliance may develop progressively within LGATs. The model is presented as a set of testable propositions rather than an empirically validated pathway. It identifies potentially concerning practices that may warrant scholarly and public attention when demonstrably present, including coercive disclosure, escalating demands, restricted information, and authority-based pressure. The model's purpose is to stimulate empirical research on the psychological processes underlying escalating compliance and to inform ethical practice guidelines for intensive group training.

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