



ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Criteria-Based Content Analysis (CBCA) reality criteria in adults: A meta-analytic review



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KEYWORDS

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Abstract *Background/Objective:* Criteria-Based Content Analysis (CBCA) is the tool most extensively used worldwide for evaluating the veracity of a testimony. CBCA, initially designed for evaluating the testimonies of victims of child sexual abuse, has been empirically validated. Moreover, CBCA has been generalized to adult populations and other contexts though this generalization has not been endorsed by the scientific literature. *Method:* Thus, a meta-analysis was performed to assess the Undeutsch Hypothesis and the CBCA checklist of criteria in discerning in adults between memories of self-experienced real-life events and fabricated or fictitious memories. *Results:* Though the results corroborated the Undeutsch Hypothesis, and CBCA as a valid technique, the results were not generalizable, and the *self-deprecation* and *pardonning the perpetrator* criteria failed to discriminate between both memories. The technique can be complemented with additional reality criteria. The study of moderators revealed discriminating efficacy was significantly higher in filed studies on sexual offences and intimate partner violence. *Conclusions:* The findings are discussed in terms of their implications as well as the limitations and conditions for applying these results to forensic settings.

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PALABRAS CLAVE

Criteria-Based
Content Analysis;
adultos;

Criterios de realidad del Criteria-Based Content Analysis (CBCA) en adultos: una revisión meta-analítica

Resumen *Antecedentes/Objetivo:* El *Criteria-Based Content Analysis* (CBCA) constituye la herramienta mundialmente más utilizada para la evaluación de la credibilidad del testimonio.

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declaraciones;
credibilidad;
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Originalmente fue creado para testimonios de menores víctimas de abuso sexual, gozando de amparo científico. Sin embargo, se ha generalizado su práctica a poblaciones de adultos y otros contextos sin un aval de la literatura para tal generalización. *Método:* Por ello, nos planteamos una revisión meta-analítica con el objetivo de contrastar la Hipótesis Undeutsch y los criterios de realidad del CBCA para conocer su potencial capacidad discriminativa entre memorias de eventos auto-experimentados y fabricados en adultos. *Resultados:* Los resultados confirman la hipótesis Undeutsch y validan el CBCA como técnica. No obstante, los resultados no son generalizables y los criterios *auto-desaprobación* y *perdón al autor del delito* no discriminan entre ambas memorias. Además, se encontró que la técnica puede ser complementada con criterios adicionales de realidad. El estudio de moderadores mostró que la eficacia discriminativa era significativamente superior en estudios de campo en casos de violencia sexual y de género. *Conclusiones:* Se discute la utilidad, así como las limitaciones y condiciones para la transferencia de estos resultados a la práctica forense.

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The credibility of a testimony, primarily the victim's and in particular in relation to crimes committed in private (e.g., sexual offenses, domestic violence), is the key element determining legal judgements (Novo & Seijo, 2010), affecting an estimated 85% of cases worldwide (Hans & Vidmar, 1986). Though an array of tools for evaluating credibility have been designed and tested (Vrij, 2008), Criteria-Based Content Analysis [CBCA] (Steller & Köhnken, 1989) remains the technique of choice, enjoys wide acceptance among the scientific community (Amado, Arce, & Fariña, 2015), and is admissible as valid evidence in the law courts of in several countries (Steller & Böhm, 2006; Vrij, 2008). Though the technique was initially designed to be applied to the testimony of victims of child abuse sexual, its application has been extended to adults, witnesses, offenders, and other case types by Forensic Psychology Institutes in judicial proceedings (Arce & Fariña, 2012). The meta-analysis of Amado et al. (2015) found that the technique underpinning the Undeutsch Hypothesis (Undeutsch, 1967) that contends that memories of self-experienced events differ in content and quality to memories of fabricated or fictitious accounts, was equally valid in other contexts and age ranges up to the age of 18 years. Prior to the present review, empirical studies had already contrasted the validity of the Hypothesis in adult populations and in different contexts (Vrij, 2005, 2008). Moreover, as the Hypothesis was grounded on memory content, it had been theoretically advanced that the Hypothesis would be equally applicable to adults and contexts different to sexual abuse (Berliner & Conte, 1993).

CBCA consists of 19 reality criteria which are grouped into two factors: cognitive (criteria 1 to 13), and motivational (criteria 14 to 18). According to the original formulation, both factors are underpinned by the Undeutsch Hypothesis, but Raskin, Esplin, and Horowitz (1991) have underscored that only 14 conform to the aforementioned Hypothesis (14-criteria version).

CBCA has encompassed additional categories, some applicable to all contexts (Table 1) (Höfer, Köhnken, Hanewinkel, & Bruhn, 1993), and others for specific cases

Table 1 Additional criteria.

- Reporting style (is long-winded when interviewee described irrelevant aspects that were not asked).
- Display insecurities (uncertainty about the description of an item).
- Providing reasons lack memory (express reasons for not being able to give a detailed description).
- Clichés (expressions or utterances that introduce delays into the report).
- Repetitions (elements already described were repeated without additional details).

(Arce & Fariña, 2009; Juárez, Mateu, & Sala, 2007; Volbert & Steller, 2014), which may be combined with other techniques with diverse theoretical underpinnings such as memory attributes (Vrij, 2008).

CBCA is extensively used in forensic practice as a tool for discriminating the memories of adults of self-experienced and fabricated events in different case types. However, due to the numerous inconsistencies in the literature (e.g., designs failing to meet the requirements for applying CBCA, conclusions of non-significant effects not substantiated by the data given the poor statistical power of the studies, $1-\beta < .80$), and the contradictory use of CBCA in adults, a meta-analysis was performed to assess the Undeutsch Hypothesis in an adult population; the discriminating efficacy of CBCA and additional reality criteria; and the effect of the context (case type), lie coaching effect, witness status, and the research paradigm.

Method

Literature search

An extensive scientific literature search was undertaken to identify empirical studies applying content analysis

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