

Chapter 1

A STUDY OF GROUP DEFENSIVE MECHANISMS

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ABSTRACT

The article discusses the issue of multilevel analysis of the psychological defense phenomenon at personal, interpersonal, group, and inter-group levels. It addresses the various aspects (topological, structural, dynamic) of the social group's integrity and attempts to map out ways to study group defensive mechanisms empirically and to explore the prospects of such research.

Key words: group integrity, group subject, psychological defense subject, group psychological defense, group defensive mechanisms.

INTRODUCTION

The group psychological defense phenomenon characterizes a group, on the one hand, as a systemic structure in the course of whose development conflicts between the two basic systemic tendencies – those of change and conservation - arise and are resolved and, on the other hand, as a cohesive social and psychological entity possessing a certain “internal” aspect of joint activity – exactly the aspect allowing one to speak of a distinctive *group reality* (reality as perceived by a group of people).

A review of the recent publications in the fields of social science and psychology in various ways dealing with, referring to, or implying the group (socio-) psychological defense mechanisms issue, reveals a growing interest in the subject among researchers. That has been caused, among other things, by attempts to clarify such a special property of the social group

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as its *subject quality* (ability to be the subject of an action), traditionally associated with the character and type of joint activity (G. Andreyeva, 1996; A. Dontsov, 1979a, 1979b, 1984; A. Zhuravlyov, 1988; A. Chernyshov, 1990), as well as with the properties of social intercourse and interrelationships (K. Gaidar, 1994; A. Zhuravlyov, 1988; A. Chernyshov, 1990). Thus, for example, it has been observed that in a class of students, towards the end of its 5th year in existence, the psychological distance established between the group and its individual members tends to shrink significantly. That happens against a background of subsiding (in the social-intercourse aspect) group activity. Which has led some researchers to suggest that "a defensive mechanism of sorts appears to be actuated preventing a rapid development of a social vacuum which would have resulted from the disruption of intra-group links" (Gaidar, 1994, p.17).

Earlier, I observed that a group may constitute the subject of activity directly aimed at maintaining and reproducing itself as a cohesive whole, in other words, as the subject of psychological defense (Stroh, 1996, 1998, 1999). This article strives to elaborate on that general premise on the basis of identifying specific group defensive mechanisms.

GROUP AS SUBJECT OF PSYCHOLOGICAL DEFENSE

Multiple Levels of the Psychological Defense Phenomenon

The very issue of multiple levels in the structure of psychological defense realization has already been raised in Russian professional literature. Thus, developing an approach that treats psychological defense as a system of means to uphold a positive self-image of the subject at the personal and interpersonal levels of analysis, Zakharova (1991) suggests that the issue may be studied at yet another level: that of inter-group interaction, with psychological defense functioning as an instrument to sustain a positive group-wide image of "we". The author concludes with proposing a broad model of defense functioning at the personal, interpersonal, and inter-group levels. "Internal" defense in that context is interpreted as the actuation of defensive mechanisms because of a threat to self-image (or self-identity) posed by the individual's own experience. "Defense staged to sustain the self-image in interpersonal interaction" is the actuation of defensive mechanisms in the case where the subject's self-identity is threatened by an "alien" (outsider). It is assumed that the interaction in question is fully determined by individual relationships and characteristics. As to defense striving to sustain the "we"-image, i.e. the self-image of the subject as a member of a certain social group, Zakharova interprets it as the actuation of defensive mechanisms against a threat to an individual's social identity arising in his/her interaction, as a member of a social group, with members of other groups. It is emphasized that interaction of that type will be largely determined by social inter-group perception stereotypes.

With those terminological qualifications made, it becomes obvious that, in this particular model, at any of the three analysis levels, it is *the individual who remains the subject of defense*. Consequently, the group defensive behavior strategies subsequently discussed by the author constitute, strictly speaking, strategies of defensive behavior of an individual as a group member *vis-à-vis* any representatives of another group.

With this reservation made, the idea itself definitely deserves our interest. It seems possible to further develop it in the following way. Firstly, conspicuous in Zakharova's model is the absence of yet another level of analysis, suggested by the logic of the model itself, to wit, the internal *group*-defense level. Secondly (and it is a matter of principle), what happens simultaneously is the replacement (substitution) of the protective-action subject and, therefore, a change in the armory of defense tools (mechanisms). Therefore, an "improved" model of psychological-defense level structure could be schematically represented as follows (see figure). At the first level, the defensive action subject is *Ego* as one of the "structural units" of the personality struggling for its integrity against unwelcome or traumatic contents of *Id* and *Super-Ego*: a phenomenon thoroughly exposed and investigated in psychoanalysis. At the second level, the personality puts up a defense to preserve its integrity and maintain a positive self-image in interpersonal interaction. The third level will describe the defensive activity of a group put up against an internal threat of disintegration. At the fourth level, the group defends itself from the inter-group interaction factors threatening its integrity. For individuals comprising the group, group psychological defense at the 3rd and 4th levels is made manifest through the mediation of mechanisms maintaining a positive image of "us" versus "them". When that happens, the traditionally known "personality-group" interaction type is in effect distributed between the 2nd and the 3rd levels of the model, revealing a particular aspect at each of those.

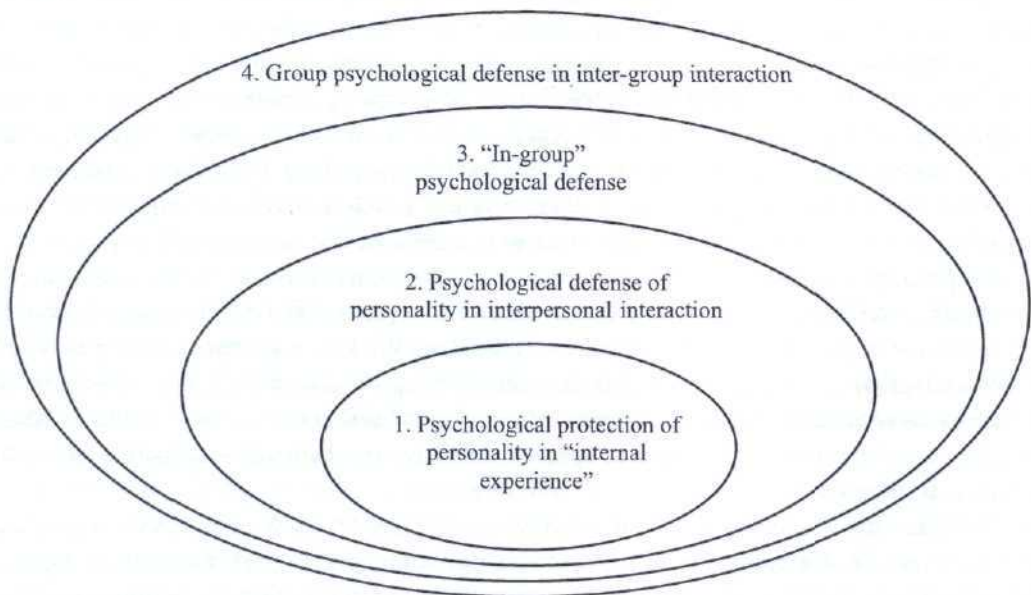


Figure. Psychological-Defense Levels Model.

Variety in Social Group Defense Activities

The idea being elaborated here - advocating the need to develop an integrated concept of group psychological defense, complete with special group-defense mechanisms - is based on

abundant research material as accumulated to date in professional publications. Testimony in favor of the line of argument sketched out here may be found, e.g., in the field of ethno-psychology, where the group is treated exactly as the subject of defensive activity in inter-group relations. Thus, V. Sosnin, when analyzing the socio-psychological dynamics of inter-ethnic conflicts in crisis situations, observes: "When the existence of a group as an integral and sovereign subject of inter-group interaction is threatened, then, at the psychological perception level, social identification becomes based on origin, on 'blood', *social and psychological defense mechanisms are triggered off* (italics by W.S.) in the form of group consolidation and ingroup favoritism, the unity of 'us' and the discrimination of outgroups are strengthened, with a further distancing from 'them', the 'aliens'. These procedures lead to the "drifting apart" and distortion of the outgroup images that, as conflicts escalate, will assume recognizable attributes and features well known to social psychology" (Sosnin, 1997, p.55).

Defining the system of psychological defense of an ethnic group as an adaptation mechanism vital in a critical situation, G. Soldatova describes its content as a sum total of psychological tools and methods of regulating inter-ethnic tensions by ethnic groups themselves as collective subjects of activity and interaction. "The actuation of an ethnic group's psychological-defense system results from the interaction of the conscious and unconscious contents of ethnicity in the face of a real or imaginary opposition from another ethnic group. Stirred up in critical social situations, as also whenever the ethnic group's integrity and stability and the habitual order of inter-ethnic relations are disturbed, the struggle by members of the group to preserve and enhance their positive ethnic identity will upset the established compensatory relationships between the conscious and the unconscious. A new level of compensation is made necessary and it is the ethnic group's psychological-defense system that starts to perform the function" (Soldatova, p.158). Such treatment of group-defense processes goes back to their original psychoanalytical interpretation as a special type of interaction between the conscious and unconscious contents of group identity.

Of primary interest to our analysis here is the emphasis made in the publications mentioned on a *threat to the integrity* of the ethnic entity (the subject of interethnic relations) as a condition of protective activity initiation. Therefore, the idea elaborated here – that, even at the inter-group interaction level, it is the group's integrity that is defended - conforms to the views advocated by other researchers. Moreover, it becomes possible to outline, albeit roughly, the phenomenological area of specific defensive mechanisms used by the group to preserve its integrity

One may cite a fair number of theoretical and applied research publications where the writers, although not using the exact terms as "group psychological defense" or "group defensive mechanism", did in various ways touch upon the issue that the notions embrace. Thus, while considering the functioning of social organizations, A. Prigozhin resorts to the term "organizational pathology" to describe and analyze the malfunctions that occur in organizational functioning due to some causes both very important and difficult to eradicate. Our interest in such phenomena lies in the fact that pathologies of this sort reflect the inertia of any organizational structure whenever it "*strives to reproduce its previous functions under any circumstances and conditions*" (Prigozhin, p. 139), i.e. to defend itself.

In addition, it is worth to remind oneself that, even in the orthodox psychoanalysis tradition, the putting up of psychological defense was associated with resistance to therapy. Similarly, drawing an analogy with organizations, one may usually speak of resistance to

innovation. Generally speaking, innovation in an area of social practice involves the need to overcome resistance to change often referred to as economic, political, social, and psychological "barriers". The latter, i.e. psychological barriers, have been treated by V. Slastenin and L. Podymova as 1) manifestations of socio-psychological climate inside employee groups facing innovations in the form of negative mental states of the members caused by innovation; 2) a sum total of actions, judgements, notions, reasoning, expectations, and emotional experiences of employees in which the negative mental states, whether conscious or unconscious, are expressed, in a disguised way or explicitly, intentionally or unintentionally (Slastenin, Podymova, 1997).

A substantial contribution to our understanding of the nature of psychological defense at the group level has been made by research in family psychology and psycho-therapy. There are several reasons for that, the main being the fact that modern diagnostics and psychological correction of distressed family relationships are based on the perception of the family as an *integral entity*. It is, first of all, reflected in the language used to describe the various phenomena characteristic of the family as a social entity. One such phenomenon has often been referred to as the *family myth* (Ferreira, 1963; Byng-Hall, 1973; Bodalev, Stolin, 1989). A family myth is a set of coordinated but distorted roles played by the members of a family. It is never questioned or doubted about inside the family, serving as a good program for social contacts outside and, at the same time, restricting the flexibility of the family system itself. Its function is to enable each family member to put up his/her own psychological defense with the help of the other members and the entire intra-family relationship system. For as long as a family is propped up by its family myth, it constitutes, in fact, an "ailing" system. But the "ailment" will only become apparent when the family myth starts to crumble, i.e. when it is no longer able to maintain at least some, albeit temporary, homeostasis of family relations. A family myth is usually rooted in some unresolved crisis: a divorce, a death, a family secret. Ferreira believes that family myths come into being in families characterized with a split-up mentality and the rejection of something unwanted and traumatic. That is replaced by some phantom hoisted up to provide a more benign substitute for the missing thing. It should be noted that the mechanism thus described must be functionally attributed as "defensive", while definitely having a group, rather than individual, character. The need to regard a family as an integral whole is also emphasized within the "pathologizing roles" concept (Eidemiller, Ustitski, 1989; Richter, 1969) that looks upon derangements in families as causes of mental complaints of their members.

Classifying family systems, according to the nature of their contacts with the outside world, into open and closed ones, V. Satir (1988) remarks that closed family systems are characterized by covert, obsolete, strict, unchanging rules of family life. Members of such families have to do something about their wants and needs, changing those to adapt them to the established rules. This situation is aggravated by a prohibition imposed on discussing it. Rules as such are essential for the functioning of any social entity as these regulate interaction among group members striving for a common goal. However, the effects of rule enforcement may be very different and capable of bringing about both positive and negative consequences.

The covert character of some rules is a factor adversely affecting the personality. A new family member, whether it is an infant born into the family or a spouse of a daughter (son) who has joined the family of his/her in-laws, will find the family rules enacted and valid, i.e. a fact of objective reality, which one has to reckon with but on which no reliable information is available. As a result, one has to abide by such rules of the game of whose *existence* one

only becomes aware when punished for their violation, while the exact *contents* of the rules could only be guessed at. That, in turn, is characterized by P. Watzlawick et al. (1969) as pathology of communication. However, on the other hand, such rules do tend to preserve smaller groups, such as families, intact and, due to their covert nature, are scarcely ever discussed or changed, i.e. remain valid for a long time, perhaps for as long as the group will exist.

According to P. Skinner (1983), a British specialist in family psychotherapy, human emotions in almost every family will be clearly segregated into "good" and "bad" ones. Good emotions are rewarded and encouraged. Bad ones are concealed or chased out. A child who first starts to openly express his/her feelings will be trained to differentiate between the two by the parents' responses. Furthermore, a ban on *expressing* "bad" feelings will be extended to the feelings themselves, or, more precisely, to *experiencing* those. So the child has to pay for parental love by learning to *never experience* certain emotions; he/she will suppress those and oust them into his/her unconscious. But a family, as an entity, may also be characterized by the exact assortment of feelings branded "bad" by its members. Bad emotions are concealed and the whole family strikes a tacit but unbreakable covenant to deliberately ignore them. The whole family will pretend that these simply do not exist. In therapeutic light, a hidden photographic image of emotions denied will normally reveal itself. Skinner believes that a family will betray itself by the very fact that *all* of its members will *deny* the emotion that has been hidden. So, if they say: "We are not jealous in the family", one may rest assured that jealousy is a problem of that family and that it is *tabooed* there (Skinner, Kleese, 1983).

Let us now turn to research into group decision-making. Seeking an answer to the question why people who, if taken separately, are competent, intelligent and astute enough display, once they congregate into a group, the very reverse qualities and take foolish, ill-considered decisions, researchers came to define a rather special group phenomenon, the so-called "groupthink". The phenomenon was first described by the US researcher I. Janis (1983) when he analyzed erroneous political decisions that were made by the US government and brought about serious harmful consequences in the XX century. Groupthink is defined as "a mode of thinking that people engage in when they are deeply involved in a cohesive group, when the members' strivings for unanimity override their motivation to realistically appraise alternative courses of action" (Janis, 1983, p. 9). The theoretical model developed by Janis comprises a number of factors that tend to provoke the phenomenon mentioned. These include: a high level of cohesion inside the group, the group's isolation (lack of external expert judgment), directive leadership, flawed procedures of seeking and appraising alternative options, homogeneity of the group, a provocative situational context.

At the group level of analysis, groupthink symptoms will make themselves manifest in the illusion entertained by the group about its own perfection and impregnability, in the collective rationalization of events, in stereotypical perception of opponents as enemies, in the emphasis on member loyalty, in self-censorship leading to an illusory consensus of opinion, in the emergence of self-appointed guardians of fundamental principles. Faith in the "we are a good and wise group" kind of assertion will, in a situation of uncertainty and risk, activate the "a good group makes a good decision" stereotype. Subsequent multiple attempts, on the one hand, to elaborate on the Janis model and, on the other hand, to find empirical confirmation of the phenomenon and investigate its mechanisms have led to a broadly shared conclusion that it is not situational factors, but rather the consistent characteristics of the group itself that play the major role in the emergence of "groupthink". Those characteristics are primarily directive

leadership, group isolation, and group homogeneity (Bovina, 1996, 1998; Callaway, Esser, 1984; etc.).

Group phenomena observed in joint decision-making process and characterizing a group as one giving preference to conformity of opinion over the quality of decisions made are supplemented with distinctive structural features. In his study of closed criminal-type groups, M. Kondratiev observes that a status "mono-structure" of a group apparent in all of its vital functions does not only constitute one of the leading socio-psychological attributes of such a group, but will also generate a special type of "mono-activity" aimed at "preserving and reinforcing a rigid caste-type status hierarchy within the group" (Kondratiev, 1994, p. 27). Similar ideas about the rigidity of hierarchy-and-role structure in certain groups were articulated by A.B. Dobrovitch in a publication based on his socio-psychological analysis of the so-called primitive group (Dobrovitch, 1987).

We may therefore state that many of the studies dealing, in various ways, with problems of small groups have discovered a substantial number of group-life phenomena performing a protective/defensive function that helps to preserve the stability of group relations and the existing group structure, i.e. generally to maintain the group's integrity and a positive image of own group as perceived by its members. This should allow us to bring into correlation the defensive activities at the levels mentioned and in corresponding contexts (Table 1).

Table 1. Comparative characteristics of psychological defense at various levels of analysis

Analysis levels	Defense parameters				
	Defense subject	Defense object	Threat source	Defensive means	Examples
<i>Intra-personal</i>	Ego	Ego borders, self-esteem	Id, Super-ego	Defensive mechanisms & techniques	Described in psychoanalysis: repression, regression, isolation, etc.
<i>Interpersonal</i> <i>A. Dyad</i>	Personality as whole	Positive self-image or self-assessment	External (typically, a significant other)	Defensive forms of behavior	A. Defensive action in response to manipulative influences. B. Defensive behavior in T-group.
<i>B. Intra-group Group</i>	Group	Group integrity, Positive image of "we"	Internal (disintegrative processes)	Group-dynamics defensive mechanisms	Special norms or normative system.
<i>Inter-group</i>	Group	Group integrity, Positive image of "we"	External (another group)	Group-dynamics defensive mechanisms	Perceptive distortions of "alien" group image.

Integrity of Groups as an Object of Psychological Defense

However, the question on whether and to what extent it is appropriate to consider the group itself the subject of defensive activity remains open to this day. As observed above, this subject quality may be determined, on the one hand, by assuming a distinctively joint-group activity that cannot be carried out by either of the individuals comprising the group, or even

by the simple summing up of their individual efforts. That activity will have its own characteristics in terms of goal, process, and content. On the other hand, in exactly the same way as an individual subject may be described through his/her specific attributes, separate components may be isolated within the qualitative singularity of a group subject. An analysis of relevant literature shows that, within the total list of socio-psychological characteristics of the group, it is possible to single out a category of attributes that emphasize its integrity and systemic nature. In other words, we are speaking of certain specific properties of a system called the "social group" which cannot be directly derived from the properties of its composing elements (individuals). Moreover, one could say that those properties are "acquired" by the elements merely by virtue of their inclusion in the system. In this way, a whole number of personal psychological features and qualities of the member individuals will be largely determined by their involvement in the group reality, just as their interpersonal relations are determined by the character of group activities and the group's development level (Dontsov, 1979a, 1979b, 1984; Prigozhin, 1995; Petrovsky, 1979; et al.).

In this connection, categorized as *subject-forming* should be exactly those group characteristics that reflect the integrity of the group. What particularly draws one's attention from that point of view is the fact that almost all of the possible psychological characteristics of groups will have their equivalents among the psychological characteristics of individuals, with the sole exception of behavior *norms*. Such norms not only have their social origin (which is equally true of all the other characteristics applicable to individual subjects), but also exist, i.e. are preserved, maintained, modified, and abolished, exclusively in social (group) context, while becoming totally irrelevant outside of it. It is known that endorsed as norm becomes such behavior (in a broad sense of the word) that, firstly, is practiced by a majority in a given social sector or stratum, secondly, is habitual, i.e. frequently enough encountered and, finally, such behavior attempts to abolish which will meet serious resistance from significant others.

At the same time, the very category of group integrity also needs to be further elaborated on. Many researchers dealing with the social group will take its integrity for granted as an immanent property. In my opinion, group integrity should be understood as a qualitative characteristic comprising at least three aspects: topological (spatial), structural, and procedural (dynamic).

The *topological* aspect of integrity assumes the existence and, importantly, intactness of *boundaries* that separate the object under study – the group – from its social environment. On that basis, an integral (well-integrated, whole and solid) group should be such whose boundaries are marked by any means or method that would allow one to segregate people into members and non-members, in other words, to tell an insider from an outsider. If the border becomes blurred or easy to trespass, the group will get eroded, losing its topological-aspect integrity. The topological aspect of creating and conserving group integrity has been fairly productively developed within the framework of the social identity theory (H. Tajfel, J. Turner).

The *structural* aspect focuses on internal, structural characteristics of groups. Structural integrity assumes the existence and sustainability of a certain structure of interconnected elements comprising a cohesive entity, such as a social group. The structure itself is defined by the character of relationships in which individuals engage in their role as members of the same group. Then one may be speaking of communicative, power, functional-role, etc. structures of a group.

A different answer to the question about the intra-group structure may be given on the basis of analyzing the joint activity of the group. In that case, a group's structure will be determined by the functional structure of the joint activity itself. But then we are faced with the need to separately identify another aspect of group integrity: one reflecting the social entity's *functioning process*. In the procedural or *dynamic* aspect, the integrity of a group translates as the whole complex of factors sustaining its functioning and, therefore, its very existence. These are, above all, characteristics of joint group activity, such as its content, character, goals, means, etc. Therefore, the integrity of a social group is understood as the procedural continuity of its existence, ensured by a relatively steady reproduction of the main structural components of the group activity system (Dontsov, 1979b).

The analysis of source publications, as well as the theoretical approach expounded in this article, allows me, at this stage, to draw some conclusions.

1. Maintaining (creating, strengthening and restoring) a positive state of group reality - a phenomenological reflection of group integrity - is a dynamic process inseparable from the entire vital activity of a group.
2. That process performs a stabilizing function providing for the existence of the system (group) both during its "calm" phases of reliably forecasted, regular, easily reproduced functioning and, especially, in critical, crisis situations involving a manifest threat to the group's integrity in the topological, structural, or dynamic aspect.
3. The process is implemented through a number of mechanisms that make the group as a whole adapt to its environment and circumstances. These circumstances can be internal or external relative to the group's boundaries, as also stable or dynamic.

THE PROBLEM OF EMPIRICAL RESEARCH INTO GROUP DEFENSIVE MECHANISMS

Conceptual Basis for Studying the Issue

Group reality provides, as observed above, an environment for the origination and functioning of psychological defense at the group level of analysis. It can only be described and studied with the help of a certain system of attributes. However, the attributes themselves are typically not present in sensory experience, with a few rare exception where these are represented in material form, e.g. when a group is symbolized by a physical object or a graphical image (as also an anthem, a motto, a special set of clothes, or elements of the latter), physical territorial borders, etc. It is only possible to study such attributes indirectly, through their representation in individuals' minds and behaviour. What therefore becomes obvious is the need to look for such mental or behavioral "neo-formations" that could only develop and persist owing to the individual's membership / involvement in a particular social entity.

As has already been shown above, even as the group and social realities do not coincide, certain inter-transitions and inter-relations between the two are still possible. Therefore, any group activities aiming to maintain and preserve group integrity constitute, at the same time, ways to influence objective and/or group reality. For the sake of clearer understanding of the

possible types of such influences, these may be classified on the basis of two criteria: 1) adequacy/inadequacy of a group's response to a threat to its integrity; 2) threat source localization: internal vs. external.

In this way, one would consider as adequate those forms and methods of group response that, firstly, are consistent with the locus of the threat, i.e. in the case of an external danger, activity is directed outside with the aim to make changes in the reality external to the group or to change the character of the group's interaction with its environment, while an internal danger will entail such a restructuring of the group reality as to preserve the integrity of the group as the activity subject. Secondly, the response will result in the deliverance from that particular threat for a long period of time and with no need to constantly reproduce defensive action, i.e. the crisis will be *resolved*. Correspondingly, inadequate must be such response action that is not consistent with the location of the threat source or else would have to be constantly reproduced, i.e. one that fails to resolve the threat crisis. A theoretical analysis allows one to identify two principal strategies of a group's response in situations where its integrity is threatened:

- *organizing-and-acting strategy*, involving a set of measures that lead to changes in the functional and operational/technical components of group activity (redistribution of functional roles among group members, co-optation, if need be, of new members, or else slimming down of inflated numbers, disciplining, etc.). That will bring about changes in the type and character of the group's interaction with its environment and the object of joint action, transforming the external profile of the group's vital activity;
- *strategy of cognitive/affective restructuring of the situation*; while not affecting objective situational characteristics, this will transform the perceptive (informational) and motivation/purport aspects of joint activity (the group myth, tabooing of certain spheres of group life, informational isolationism, ritualized intra-group behavior, etc.). The strategy will usually give rise to characteristic group-mind phantoms, adequate to a positive condition of group reality, but inadequate to the actual situation.

A strategy of the first type is energized by the dissatisfaction of group members with the current or forecasted state of affairs, while the energy charge for the second strategy type is the sense of fear experienced by group members. The triggering factor for the first type becomes a *mismatch* detected between the actual results of joint group activity and its goals/objectives, while the second strategy is born out of a *conflict* either between the group reality and the external (social) reality or between the different elements of the group reality itself. The correlation of factors generating one or the other strategy of response to a threat is shown in Diagram 1. In view of the above it should be possible to *regard the mechanisms of implementing cognitive/affective restructuring strategy as group defensive mechanisms and to treat a group implementing such a strategy as the subject of psychological defense*. One option for the implementation of defensive strategy in a group's behavior has been presented by Zakharova (1991).

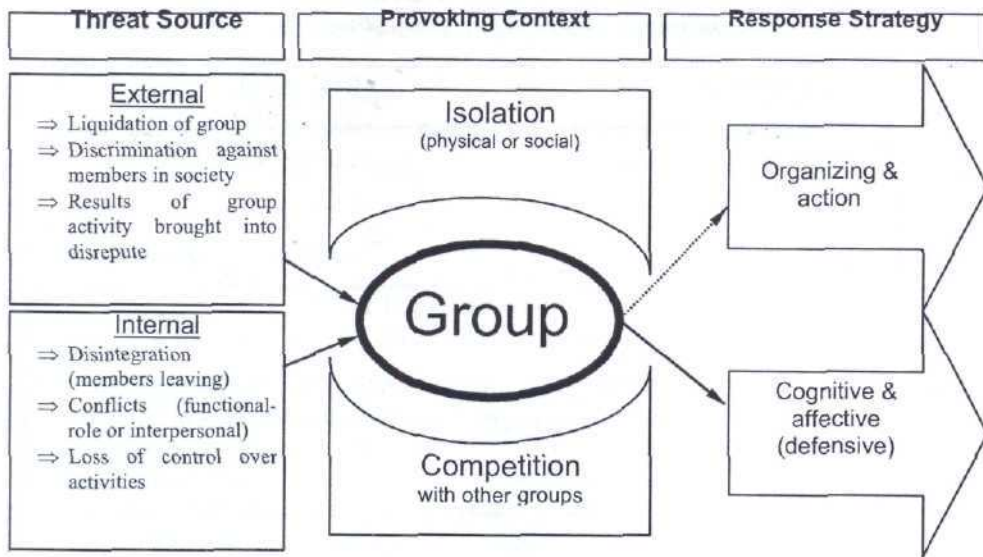


Diagram 1. Factors actuating group psychological defense

The approach outlined here permits one to draw a distinction between integrative processes proper developing within the intra-group activity system ((Dontsov, 1979a, 1979b, 1984; Petrovsky, 1979; et al.) and group psychological defense processes. The possibility of such "negative" transformation of integrative processes has been suggested by A.I. Dontsov: "Can integrative processes, while reflecting the sustainable functioning of the group-activity system and, at the same time, serving as a stabilizing factor, still come into conflict with the vital tasks the group must cope with? Apparently, they can" (Dontsov, 1979b, p. 32).

If one assumes that it is exactly the group activities implementing the cognitive/affective restructuring strategy that can be regarded as group defensive mechanisms, while the role of the phenomenological correlate of group integrity in its topological, structural and dynamic aspects is, in that case, played by a positive (consistent) condition of the group reality, one may obtain a basis for a typology of group-dynamics defensive mechanisms.

One of the typology parameters is the locus of threat: that may be external, i.e. coming from the group's social environment, or internal, i.e. rooted in the group itself, in the dynamics of group processes. Another parameter is the character of threat determined by the corresponding aspect of group integrity. In the topological aspect, a group will be threatened with liquidation (external threat) or disintegration (internal threat); structurally, the threat is that of a "change of power" resulting from outside intervention or a "minority revolt" from the inside, both in one way or another leading to the restructuring of group activity; in the dynamic aspect, the threats involve having the results of the group's activities discredited by outside social institutions or the discovery, by the group itself, of a mismatch between the contents and character of its activity, between its goals and means, between the operational/technical (functional-role) side of activity and the psychological climate inside the group, etc. (see Diagram 2).

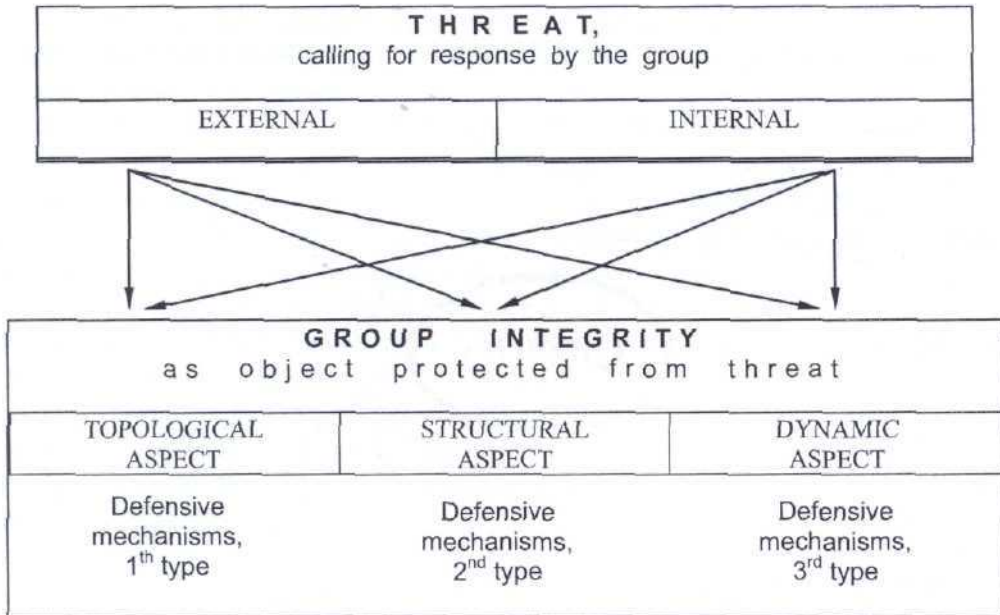


Diagram 2. Typology of group defensive mechanisms based on the locus of threat and the aspect of group integrity defended

Possible Typology of Group Defensive Mechanisms

It now becomes possible to systematically identify those of the group-dynamics phenomena previously described in publications that, on the basis of their attributes, may be defined as "group defensive mechanisms" and whose sum total will, therefore, allow one to delineate a certain phenomenological field for research. It is more convenient to present the results of such systemization in a table format (see Table 2).

The group defensive mechanisms are identified here by their names used in professional publications and arranged in alphabetical order, since, at this stage, it is hardly possible to speak of systemization in the true sense, even as the foundation required for such is already clearly discernable.

Six out of those ten mechanisms "defend" the integrity of a group from internal threats, another five are supposed to defend it from external ones. One mechanism – groupthink – defends for both sides, even though this may be explained by its multiple symptoms as described by Janis and his followers.

Table 2. Characteristics of Group Defensive Mechanisms as Described in Professional Publications

Name used for group defensive mechanisms (with its brief description)	Threat locus	Object (aspect of group integrity) defended	Empirical research conducted
Group taboo Prohibition to discuss sensitive group-life issues (Satir, 1988; Skynner & Kleese, 1983; Watzlawick et al., 1969)	Internal	Structural and dynamic	Not known
Groupthink Quality of group decisions appraised on the basis of their value in preserving unanimity (Bovina, 1998; Callaway & Esser, 1984; Janis, 1983; etc.)	External and/or internal	Structural and dynamic	Yes
Group ritual Compulsory reproduction of some group procedure; imparting to it an independent (symbolic) significance (Volkov, 1996; Celikova, 1996; etc.)	Internal	All aspects	Not known
Ingroup favoritism Comparison between groups made in favor of one's own (Ageev, 1990; Tajfel, 1978; etc.)	External	Dynamic (?)	Yes
Self-isolation Restrictions (sometimes downright prohibition) on contacts with social environment (Volkov, 1996; Celikova, 1996; etc.)	External	All aspects	Not known
Family (group) myth Mutual coordination of distorted family roles (Bing-Hull, 1973; Bodalev & Stolin, 1989; Ferreira, 1963)	Internal	Structural and dynamic	Not known
Social stereotype of outgroup Content of outgroup's image and rules of perceiving members of alien group as different from one's own kind (Zakharova, 1991; Soldatova, 1998; Sosnin, 1997; Ageev, 1990; Tajfel, 1978; etc.)	External	Topological	Yes
Frozen status hierarchy inside group Establishment of and strict adherence to status inequality among group members in their interpersonal relations (Dobrovitch, 1987; Kondratjev, 1994; Satir, 1988; Volkov, 1996; Celikova, 1996; etc.)	Internal	Structural and dynamic	Yes
Formalized intra-group communication Communication flows inside group (organization) become multistage, i.e. direct contacts are discouraged. Content of communication is regulated ("Strictly on business, please!") (Prigozhin, 1995; Satir, 1988; Stroh, 1998; Wagner, 1995; Watzlawick et al., 1969)	Internal	Structural and dynamic	Not known
External attribution of failures Blaming external circumstances for failures of group (Ageev, 1991; Prigozhin, 1995; Wagner, 1995 etc.)	External	Dynamic	Yes

Associating a particular group-integrity aspect strictly with a specific defensive mechanism has proven much more difficult and, in certain cases, impossible. Nevertheless, a certain aspect orientation of defense mechanism action may be useful in the analysis of specific group-life situations. For instance, the *very existence* of group rituals as regularly repeated events involving all group members appears to contribute to protect the group's boundaries from trespassers ("Insiders only!"), i.e. to support the topological aspect of group integrity as it empirically denotes group identity to group members. The *content of a ritual*, considered as the product of ritualizing some sphere of the group's vital activity, i.e. of imparting to it a compulsory status in the absence of any tangible results, or of transferring a practical process onto a purely conventional, symbolic plane, may be closely linked with the dynamic aspect of integrity ("As long as we stick to this ritual, we preserve ourselves as a cohesive entity"). Rituals do rule and regulate the life of any group; however these also need to be regulated. For that reason, the requirement to remain faithful to the various rules and procedures of a ritual itself, expressed, among other things, in the *subordination among the participants* (in terms of who must be doing what in which manner as the ritual unfolds) will uphold the existing structure of relationships inside the group, protecting and defending it from change, thus involving the structural aspect of group integrity ("We have it all nicely ordered, so we are OK!").

CONCLUSIONS

We may now proceed to formulate several principal theoretical and applied propositions that would allow us to map out ways of empirical research into group defensive mechanisms: 1) a defensive mechanism manifests itself as a *method* of action in a situation where a threat (external or internal) is detected jeopardizing the integrity of the group, which is incompatible with a positive state of group reality; 2) the main systemic function of defensive mechanisms is that of stabilization; 3) the stabilization of a group-integrity aspect – whether topological, structural, or procedural – is achieved through an affective and cognitive restructuring of the threatening situation; 4) inside a group, such method of action manifests itself as a *behavioral norm* for its members, often impossible to become aware of unless one has breached it.

The *complicated nature of the issue* leaves unanswered the question on whether convincing empirical evidence could be found supporting the existence of defensive mechanisms in group dynamics as a distinctive socio-psychological phenomenon. This circumstance predetermines the difficulties that may well arise in the course of planning and organizing the collection of empirical data that should help to identify dedicated group-dynamics mechanisms performing the defense function, describe their content and conditions of occurrence. That goal should be achieved through undertaking the following tasks:

- develop such research procedures that would, in accordance with the theoretical analysis performed, provide for the maximum likelihood of having group defensive mechanisms actuated;
- sample trial groups with characteristics both similar and varying from one to another in order to obtain material both comparable and as diverse as possible;

- collect the empirical data in ways consistent with the nature of the phenomenon under study, bearing in mind that conscious awareness of the methods a group would use to respond to a "threatening" situation is expected to vary widely from group to group and from situation to situation.

In conclusion, it would be worthwhile to outline the circle of problems that, over short-term, sets a perspective for studying the defensive functions of group dynamics. Among others, the question remains open on the correlation of the two theoretically identified strategies of group response to threats to its integrity – that of organization / action and that of affective / cognitive restructuring of the situation. Do any factors of special significance exist, whether external or characterizing the intra-group environment, that will predetermine the group's choice in favor of one of those? Will the actuation of defense mechanisms within the chosen affective / cognitive restructuring strategy entail a refusal to use the organization-and-action way of defending the group's integrity because the latter is believed to be "objectively" impossible to implement? Or will the two strategies represent the two sides of a single process? The next question (that may offer yet another perspective for a follow-up on the present study) concerns the interrelation between the different specific varieties of group defensive mechanisms and different group-dynamics phases (levels of groups' development). These and related questions may only be answered by going more in-depth in the theoretical study of the group psychological defense phenomenon on the one hand and, on the other, by designing new programs to empirically test the theories put forward.

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